

An Artifact Speaks • Artifact Information Sheet

Artifact Name: Chinese Chop Set

Time Period: 2014

Culture/Religion Group: Chinese

Material: Chop: Stone

Reproduction? No



Background Information:

Chops are stamps used to sign documents and artworks. They are traditionally made out of stone, though wood, ivory, metal, and plastic are used today. The “handle” of the chop is a figure; the other end of the chop is carved with calligraphy in an ancient script. Most chops are carved with the name of the owner. Chops used by government officials often are carved with the title of the office and not the name of the one who holds the office. Large companies may have a chop for each department. Artist’s stamps may contain the artist’s name or the name of the studio. In addition to the stamps of the artist, artworks may show the stamped impressions of those who have collected that artwork over the years. The use of chops goes back to at least the Shang Dynasty (traditional dates 1766–1122 BCE).

Chops are used in conjunction with a red paste made from cinnabar, a bright red mineral that is the principal ore of mercury. Three different methods of carving are used in creating the signature end of the stamp, resulting in three different looks to the resulting red impression. In *zhuwen* stamps, the writing is raised from the background, resulting in a white impression with red writing. In *baiwen* stamps, the writing is carved into the chop, resulting in a red impression with white lettering. A *zhubaiwen xiangjianyin* stamp combines the two techniques. Note: the stamp end of the chop example included in this lesson has not been carved.

The handle of the chop included in this lesson is carved into the shape of the Chinese god of longevity, Shouxing. The god is easily recognizable by his bald, elongated head, the staff he holds in one hand, and the peach he holds in the other. The peach of longevity is “the fruit from the fabulous tree,” which blooms every 3000 years and bears fruit 3000 years later. He is associated with the gods of happiness and wealth. He is often seen in the company of deer, turtles, storks, and cranes; animals of longevity.

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Sources for Chinese Chops and the God of Longevity:

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- Wertz, Richard. “The Cultural Heritage of China :: The Arts :: Painting :: Seals.” *The Cultural Heritage of China :: The Arts :: Painting :: Seal*. Richard Wertz, 1 Jan. 2011. Web. 24 Mar. 2015. <http://www.ibiblio.org/chineseculture/contents/arts/p-arts-c01s04.html>

Date Notes:

BCE (Before Current Era) = B.C.

CE (Current Era) = A.D.