The basic wishes for blessings, numerous offspring, wealth, and longevity are represented by the mythological figures and auspicious symbols shown in the decorative arts of China. By surrounding themselves with auspicious symbols, the Chinese believe that their wishes will come true. Chinese auspicious sayings often come in four-character phrases. They can be written out in full, or can be represented by a group of seemingly unrelated objects, such as bats and peaches to represent blessings and longevity. Such grouping are known as rebus or pictorial puns. They are a combination of well known symbols and of objects having the same sound as those in the auspicious sayings. The Chinese language is conducive to punning; there are many words that share the same sounds as well as tones. As a result, there is much play on words, in daily speech as well as in the decorative art of the Ming (1368 - 1644) and Qing (1644 - 1911) dynasties.

Outline

**FU 福** Blessings
1. Symbols for Blessings
2. Symbols for a Happy Marriage
3. Symbols for Sons

**LU 禄** Official Salary and Rank
1. Symbols for Passing the Civil Service Examinations
2. Symbols for Official Rank
3. Symbols for Wealth

**SHOU 壽** Longevity
1. Symbols for Longevity

**PING’AN 平安** Peace
1. Symbols for Peace

**RUYI 如意** As you wish
9. Wish - granting symbols

Suggested reading:
Bartholomew, Terese

Myths and Rebus in Chinese Art (Brochure of the exhibition of July 20th, 1988 at the Asian Art Museum)


“Imperial Rebus of the Ch‘ing Court.” The Society for Asian Art Newsletter, Fall, 1996. vol. 36, Number 1. pp. 4-5.


