



# History of Fireworks

Fireworks, or rather gunpowder, are most likely to have originated in China some 2,000 years ago. Some say that fireworks were discovered by accident by a Chinese cook who happened to mix charcoal, sulfur and saltpeter.

The Chinese named this black powder "huo yao" ("Fire Chemical") and developed it further. When the mixture was inserted into the hollow of a bamboo stick and thrown into a fire, the gases produced a bang. The basic fire cracker was born.

From that point forward, fire crackers played an essential part in Chinese festivities -weddings, religious rituals -any cause for celebration heard their bang due to the belief that they were thought to be powerful enough to scare off evil spirits. Chinese New Year is a particularly popular event that is celebrated with firecrackers to usher in the New Year free of the evil spirits. To this day, the simple firecracker is still the most common type of firework in China.

Some sources suggest that fireworks may have originated in India, but there is sufficient published evidence to strongly suggest otherwise. Visit the Chinese city of Liu Yang in Hunan Province, and you will see a museum and temple built in the Song Dynasty dedicated to a Chinese monk named Li Tian. He is credited with the invention of firecrackers about 1,000 years ago. The Chinese people celebrate the invention of the firecracker every April 18 by offering sacrifices to Li Tian.

Liu Yang City and the surrounding area of Hunan Province remains the main fireworks producing region in the world. Recent trends towards capitalism in China have created a "explosion" of growth in the fireworks industry in Liuyang. The region is proud of its fireworks heritage and links the growth to the critical mass of having a workforce skilled in fireworks production, a humid climate and a hilly topography that all promote the efficiency and safety of the production of fireworks.

Often detractors of the fireworks industry say that fireworks are produced in China to take advantage of cheap labor. But the reality is that the fireworks industry existed in China long before the advent of the modern era and long before the disparity in east-west wage rates, and hopefully the fireworks industry will exist long after the Chinese economy grows to the point the wages are the same or higher than the west.

The knowledge of fireworks began to spread to the west. It is believed that Marco Polo on one of his trips to China transported this invention to the Middle East where European Crusaders brought it to England. The English Scholar Roger Bacon (1214-1294) was one of the first Europeans to study gunpowder and write about it. Black powder was first used for military purposes. But these same experts began to put on elaborate displays to celebrate military victory and important state events.

The English were also fascinated with fireworks. Fireworks became very popular in Great Britain during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. William Shakespeare mentions fireworks in his works and fireworks were so much enjoyed by the Queen herself that she created the position of "Fire Master of England." King James II was so pleased with the fireworks display that celebrated his coronation that he knighted his Fire Master.

For the most part, these early fireworks displays consisted of mostly simple aerial effects. Their real impact was in the use of elaborate ground displays. Giant "machines" that consisted of rotating and moving parts "driven" by many small rocket motors with sparking tails. Elaborate "fire pictures" or "set pieces" made paintings of fire with thousands of individual "lance" much like a modern TV set uses pixels to create an image. Each "lance" providing an individual pixel of light.

However it was the Italians and Japanese that are credited for developing the aerial shells that are most popular in today's fireworks displays.

The Italian tradition developed a unique method of shell construction that allows the production of extremely large and heavy "shells" that are cylindrical in shape and can have many sequential breaks. These some examples of these shells are the "Hammer Shell" which has a sound similar to a blacksmith's hammer coming down on an anvil or a "Timed Salute" where the shell breaks with many smaller reports, each exploding in perfect sequential timing.

The shells of the Japanese Tradition are the one most often seen in modern fireworks displays. These shells are characterized by spherical construction and their effect is to create a perfect fire "flower" in the sky. Hence, in Japan, they are described as "Hanabi" and given such names as Chrysanthemum and Peony.

Modern day Chinese manufactures have perfected shells of the Japanese tradition and can mass produce excellent performing shells at a reasonable cost. Traditional Italian style shells are not practical for mass production and thus have not found much use in commercial fireworks.

The tradition of Italian style fireworks lives on in the small country of Malta and also in USA enthusiast organizations such as the PGI "Pyrotechnics Guild International". The modern era of Chinese manufacturers began in the early 1970s. Prior to that time, business was being done between the outside and Chinese companies through Hong Kong brokers with little or no direct contact with mainland manufacturers.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the flow of Chinese fireworks consisted of state owned factories producing fireworks that were then exported through government owned provincial export corporations. Products produced in Hunan went through the Hunan Export Corporation, and products produced in Jiangxi went through the Jiangxi Export Corporation, and so on. During this period, factories were not required to make a profit, but rather their goal was to keep people working. The Chinese government subsidized factories to keep production going.

The Provincial Export Corporation in turn sold to Hong Kong brokers who were the link between Mainland China and the foreign business entities. Their one main skill was that they spoke both "English" and "Chinese". For this they were able to earn a substantial wage. The Hong Kong brokers also procured orders, arranged logistics, and helped finance shipments to the U.S. distributors.

During this time period that the first formally educated leader of China, Chairman Deng Xiaoping, saw that Communism simply did not work economically. Chairman Deng began a policy of economic reform that basically set China on the road toward capitalism.

In the 1990s, economic reform continued under Chairman Jiang Zemin as Chinese factories were privatized. They were sold and forced to turn a profit for the first time. Often the once government employee managers of the factories, scrounged and borrowed enough money to purchase their employer from the government. Hence the private fireworks factory was born.

At the same time, the employees of the Provincial Export Corporations left the government owned companies and were permitted to start their own trading companies. Providing not manufacturing services but trading services.

Hence, there are two main types of companies in Chinese Fireworks. Manufactures and Trading Companies. All together there are more than 1,500 registered companies and many more that operate with-out registration. In order to survive, Hong Kong brokers invested money into massive marketing campaigns. Producing private labels with elaborate colorful labels. Chinese Trading companies have now followed this lead and are producing their own private labels.

With this info in mind **Thunderdog Fireworks** strives to give you the "Best Selection and Quality" that China can offer. To help accomplish this, we Carry 13 Different Brands and are adding new ones every year.

