What is Chinese Couplets?

Chinese antithetical couplets called dui lián (in Pinyin) are considered an important Chinese cultural heritage.

Typically, an antithetical couplet includes two phrases or sentences written as calligraphy on vertical red banners, typically placed on either side of a door or in a large hall.

Such couplets are often displayed during special occasions such as weddings or during the Spring Festival, i.e. Chinese New Year. Other types of couplets include birthday couplets, elegiac couplets, decoration couplets, professional or other human association couplets, and the like.

Couplets can also be accompanied with horizontal streamers, typically placed above a door between the vertical banners. A streamer generally includes the general topic of the associated couplet.

Chinese antithetical couplets use condensed language, but have deep and sometimes ambivalent or double meaning. The two sentences making up the couplet can be called the "first scroll sentence" and the "second scroll sentence", or "head" and "tail", or "upper" and "lower".

An example of a Chinese couplet, the correspondence between individual words of the first and second sentences is shown as follows:

海 (sea) 天 (sky)
阔 (wide) 高 (high)
凭 (allows) 任 (enable)
鱼 (fish) 鸟 (bird)
跃 (jump) 飞 (fly)

Antithetical couplets can be of different length. A short couplet can include one or two characters while a longer couplet can reach several hundred characters. The antithetical couplets can also have diverse forms or relative meanings. For instance, one form can include first and second scroll sentences having the same meaning. Another form can include scroll sentences having the opposite meaning.

However, no matter which form, Chinese couplets generally conform to the following rules or principles:

Principle 1: The two sentences of the couplet generally have the same number of words and total number of Chinese characters. Each Chinese character has one syllable when spoken. A Chinese
word can have one, two or more characters, and consequently, be pronounced with one, two or more syllables. Each word of a first scroll sentence should have the same number of Chinese characters as the corresponding word in the second scroll sentence.

Principle 2: Tones (e.g. "Ping" and "Ze") in Chinese are generally coinciding and harmonious. The traditional custom is that the character at the end of first scroll sentence should be tone "Ze". This tone is pronounced in a sharp downward tone just simply non-level tone. The character at the end of the second scroll sentence should be tone "Ping" which is pronounced with a level tone.

Principle 3: The parts of speech of words in the second sentence should be identical to the corresponding words in the first scroll sentence. In other words, a noun in the first scroll sentence should correspond to a noun in the second scroll sentence. The same would be true for a verb, adjective, number-classifier, adverb, and so on. Moreover, the corresponding words must be in the same position in the first scroll sentence and the second scroll sentence.

Principle 4: The contents of the second scroll sentence should be mutually inter-related with the first scroll sentence and the contents cannot be duplicated in the first and second scroll sentences.

Chinese-speaking people often engage in creating new couplets as a form of entertainment. One form of recreation is one person makes up a first scroll sentence and challenges others to create on the spot an appropriate second scroll sentence. Thus, creating second scroll sentences challenges participants' linguistic, creative, and other intellectual capabilities.

The teaching of antithetical couplets was an important method of teaching traditional Chinese for thousands of years.
Couplets in Chinese culture

Chinese couplets known as duilian or "antithetical couplets" may be seen on doorways in Chinese communities worldwide. Couplets displayed as part of the Chinese New Year festival, on the first morning of the New Year, are called chunlian. These are usually purchased at a market a few days before and glued to the doorframe. The text of the couplets is often traditional and contains hopes for prosperity. Other chunlian reflect more recent concerns. For example, the CCTV New Year's Gala usually promotes couplets reflecting current political themes in mainland China.

Eight is considered a lucky number in Chinese tradition, so some Chinese couplets consists of two lines of four characters each. Couplets are often written vertically from top to bottom to add formality.
What is Chinese Chun Lian (New Year's Couplet)?

Chun lian is a special type of Duilian, or couplet. It is used only during the Chinese New Year as part of its celebration. While duilian is permanent, chunliian is a temporary decoration to be placed on the entrance of the house, somewhat akin to Halloween and Christmas decorations.

Duilian comprises of a couplet written on vertical strips of red paper in the best calligraphic style one can muster. The first (called upper) line is posted on the right side of the front door. The second (called lower) line is posted on the left side of the front door. In addition, a third horizontal piece may be posted across and on top the door.

Look at this picture or this for a general idea.
Look at this painting depicting the scene of writing couplets.
Typically, the chun lian writes an happy, hopeful, uplifting message about a better New Year to come, like this one:

![Chun Lian Example](image)

Word-for-word translation of above:

Top (Horizontal across) : Whole Earth Returns Spring

Left (Vertical) line : winter gone mountain clear water sparkles

Right (Vertical) line: Spring comes bird sings flower fragrant

Note that word for word, the upper and lower lines are antithetical, yet the meanings are complementary and content of the message is hopeful and uplifting. The words in the horizontal are written from left to right.
Some Couplets with English translation

好年好景好运气 good year good condition good fortune
多财多福多吉利 more wealth more happiness more lucky
心想事成百业兴 heart wish business success hundred industries flourishing
时来运到家昌盛 Chance come fortune arrive home prosperous

天增岁月人增寿 Heaven add years people gain ages
春满乾坤福满门 spring full universe happiness full house

宏图大展万事兴 grand prospect widely unfold millions things prosperous
富贵吉祥财源旺 rich honour lucky auspicious financial resource flourishing

人兴财旺平安宅 family growing finance flourishing peaceful house
福寿双全家常贵 happiness longevity both possessed house always honourable

旺犬旺财旺新年 vigorous dog florishing finance prosperous new year
好年好景好运气 good year good condition good fortune

开工大吉 commencing work auspicious
出入平安 travel safe and sound

满 full
福 happy
一帆风顺 plain sailing (one sail wind favourable)
大吉大利 big auspicious
年年有余 year yea have remaining
如意吉祥 prospitious as one wishes
金玉满堂 gold jade full house
迎春接福 welcome spring receive happy
心想事成 heart desire thing success
学业进步 academy progress
福星高照 fortune star shine high
瑞气临门 auspicious wind descend (upon the) house
花开富贵 flower blooming rich honour
竹报平安 bamboo announce safe and sound
万事如意 millions thins as wishes
财源广进 finance resouce widely come
生意兴隆 business prosperous
骏业腾飞 steed enterprise soar flying
恭喜发财

新年快乐
恭 喜 發 財
新 年 快 樂
Chinese New Year Couplets (Talismans) & the Kitchen God

Written by Michael Hanna

Chinese New Year Couplets (Chun Lian) are traditional festive items that are used as wall décor due to their auspicious nature. They are usually printed in black ink on red paper; you can hang these Chinese couplets around your house or on your main doors, or present them as gifts to send good wishes to others.

The two projects below make a lovely job for the young and old, especially for children as it also teaches the cultures of other countries. So if you are a school teacher please feel free to download and use in your classroom. You can download the printer friendly version by clicking this link. This can also be saved to your computer hard drive so you can email onto friends and family.

The Couplets are used by most Chinese families and business, whether in Hong Kong Kuala Lumps, Singapore, USA or the UK, they are very powerful and are said to ward off all evil and bring peace, happiness and good fortunes to the occupants if displayed in the correct way.

Red is a very lucky colour for the Chinese, it frightens off the New Year monster 'Nian' who arrives at this time of year and destroys crops and homes. “Nian” has three weaknesses: it was frightened by noise, sunshine, and the colour red. So villagers built fires, set off firecrackers, and painted the doors to their houses red and placed red couplets beside the doors. Red to the Chinese also represents good fortune, fame and riches.

These couplets can be hung outside beside the main door and also inside in important rooms like the kitchen, bedroom and lounge. They are also hung either side of the cooker or hob. They are normally hung for two months after the New Year although many people leave them all year round for continued good luck.

Printing Instructions
I have copied below two versions, one you can print straight from your colour printer and the other you can colour in yourself or print onto red paper, this is a nice project to give to children and if you are a school teacher please feel free to print this out and use in your class, all we ask is you do not alter or change any of the text on there.

**Black & white version:**

If you have red card or paper (A4 size) you can print straight onto this or if you wish to make it a family affair you can get your children or yourself to colour it in. It is very common for the family to get involved and usually the head of the household is given the job of placing the couplets.

Make sure the paper/card or colour you use to colour-in is the same bright red as shown below.

**Colour version:**

This can be printed straight from your printer ensuring you keep the correct colour red.

**Hanging Instructions:**

Cut the couplets in half from top to bottom and place either side of your main doors, you should also place on either side of your cooker or hob.

If you have access to a laminate machine it would be wise to laminate them or at least wrap them in a clear protective cover, this is more important for outside rather than the ones you hang by the cooker.

These are traditionally left on the door or cooker area for two months after Chinese New Year although many families leave them all year round for continued good luck but they must be renewed each year so save this document for every year and pass onto as many friends and families as you can as it is considered very auspicious to receive a couplet especially without charge.
Red Envelopes (Ang Pow)

Red envelopes also known as "red packets" “Ang Pow” "laisee" or “Hung-Bao” are also an important part of a traditional Chinese New Year. I have written an interesting article on this and also made another project should you wish to make your own. If you follow this link you will find more details. [http://www.fengshuiweb.co.uk/advice/angpow](http://www.fengshuiweb.co.uk/advice/angpow)

SEE BELOW FOR COUPLETS AND KITCHEN GOD TEMPLATES

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最好的祝賀，莫過於寫副對聯，紅紙兩幅，張貼門上，洋洋喜氣，溢於門庭，其樂大哉！

大家公認我國第一副對聯是五代後蜀國主孟昶所作，他寫的就是賀春喜的對聯：“新年納余慶，佳節號長春。”孟昶之後，出現了許多喜慶佳對。

四言聯

春風送福  喜氣臨門
百花齊放  萬木爭榮
千門大喜  萬戶高歌
風光勝舊  歲序更新
春光滿面  瑞氣盈門
開門納福  舉步迎春
鶴傳喜報  風送佳音

五言聯

春色滿燕園  襄光催早花
雪數山川秀  春來天地新
春風開玉宇  紫燕築新巢
雪影催年至  春光映歲歸
春醒三冬草  雪開萬里晴
陽光凝大地  春色滿人間
豐年飛瑞雪  好景舞春風
萬里春光照  九州瑞氣濃
旭日祥去燦　春風化雨新

六言聯
人壽國強家富　年豐花好月圓
祖國河山似錦　神州大地皆春
瑞雪嬌梅飄柳　新春美酒佳聯
冬去山明水秀　春來鳥語花香
傲骨高風亮節　紅梅翠竹青松
歡炮聲聲報喜　紅聯對對迎春
春暖風和日麗　年豐物阜民歡
春種千山綠玉　秋收萬頃黃金

七言聯
遍地祥光臨福宅　滿天喜氣入華堂
喜迎春景花千樹　笑飲豐年酒一杯
物阜年豐民富裕　龍騰虎躍國興隆
雲山呈秀千般美　大地更新萬戶春
春風南國來新燕　旭日東方起大鵬
人有笑顏春不老　室存和氣福無邊
康泰一家生百福　祥和二字重千金
叱紫嫣紅春燦燦　千村萬戶喜洋洋
天增歲月人增壽　春滿乾坤福滿門
爆竹花開燈結綵
春江柳發歲更新

舊歲已嬴十度好
新春更上一層樓

春信方傳南國草
東風又染北江梅

春運洽融天日永
陽和發育物華新

八言聯

雲涌吉祥風吹和
花開如意竹報平安

大地回春九州煥
銀騏獻瑞四季呈祥

笑舞東風松梅競秀
喜沾春雨桃李爭妍

溢彩流金河山似錦
穿紅著綠歲月如花

瑞氣盈庭一門興旺
甘霖沃野五穀豐登

瑞日暖融山河似錦
醉瑞風絕煙華諧景

赤幟拂天日新月異
青松拔地人壽年豐

辭舊歲共飲幸福酒
迎新春齊繼吉祥圖

玉宇無塵一輪皓月
銀花有色萬點春燈

玉宇氣清騰沖霄漢
神州春暖鯤躍龍門

蓓蕾初綻一年伊始
芳草新萌四季長春

九言聯

萬里春潮溶八方錦繡
九天曉日流五色雲霞

瑞雪千家江山銀萬里
春風一樹物野綠千層

人間傳喜訊一元復始
大地發春華萬木爭榮
聯對更新正氣驅邪氣  春光伊始今年勝去年

十言聯

瑞雪無心抹去五顏六色  春風有意送來萬紫千紅
春花奪艷更新青山不老  時序年年除舊換新景長存
九州大地皆春春風惠我  萬里河山造景景色宜人
憶往昔滄桑含雪千花墜  看今朝寰宇綻春百鳥飛