

Lunar Year of the Dragon

The jade rabbit was given a good send-off on a beautiful day of gentle winds and sunshine, the divine dragon was received by the land of clear waters and green mountains. With the arrival of the Lunar Year of the Dragon, the hope and vitality that this auspicious animal carries become common themes among people.

In ancient times, the dragon was a totem whose initial form resembled a serpent. In the long historical process of the great migrations and integrations of the Chinese people, the different ethnic groups contributed to the development of the dragon figure by adding, complementing, modifying and enriching, finally coming to a peculiar consensual totemic form. Wang Fu, a scholar of the Eastern Han Dynasty, described the dragon in his book, “Qian Fu Lun”, as follows: “The head is like that of a camel; the horns are like those of a deer; the eyes are like those of a rabbit; the ears are like those of a cow; the neck is like that of a snake; the belly is like that of a ‘shen’; the scales are like those of a carp; the claws are like those of an eagle; the paws are like those of a tiger...” The shape of the dragon resulted from the combination of the merits of various types of animals, symbolizing the Chinese people's community of common destiny and the harmony of diversity. At this time of “Great Changes” in the world, the beauty and vigour of the harmonious union of diversity are especially precious.

The image of the dragon is the historical result of the wisdom and imagination of the Chinese people. The dragon has natural and supernatural, human and superhuman powers. Thus, Xu Shen, author of the ancient Chinese dictionary, “Shuowen Jiezi”, states in this work that “The dragon, the head of the reptiles, can be dark or bright, tiny or giant, short or long. It rises into the heavens in the spring equinox and submerges to the abyss in the autumn equinox.” The dragon, having great powers, can command clouds and rain on difficult days of drought, reveal itself when appeals are made for peace, carry the virtuous on their ascent to heaven and be with them when they are born to protect them. Even in the war between the Yellow Emperor and Chiyou, the dragon made a strong contribution to the Emperor's victory by forming winds and rain on his adversary. With the continuous increase of different divine powers, the dragon has become a deity.

Thus, there are expressions such as “dragon's court”, “dragon's pillars”, “dragon's robes” and “dragon scepters”, which reveal the authority of the imperial court over the dignity of the temples. There are also dragon festivals, dragon worship ceremonies, dragon boats and dragon

lanterns. As a unique factor of cultural cohesion and the result of the evolution of the Chinese nation, the dragon is part of every aspect of life, rooted in people's subconsciousness and has created a perspective that connects earth and heaven. The Chinese have developed an extraordinary culture related to the dragon, and will continue to demonstrate, through constant progress and success, that they are its descendants.

It is said that “the dragon brings prosperity to China, and the swallows dance with the spring.” On the joyous arrival of the Lunar Year of the Dragon, the Macau Post and Telecommunications Bureau issues the well designed commemorative stamps to wish everyone “Vigorous as Dragon and Horse.”

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