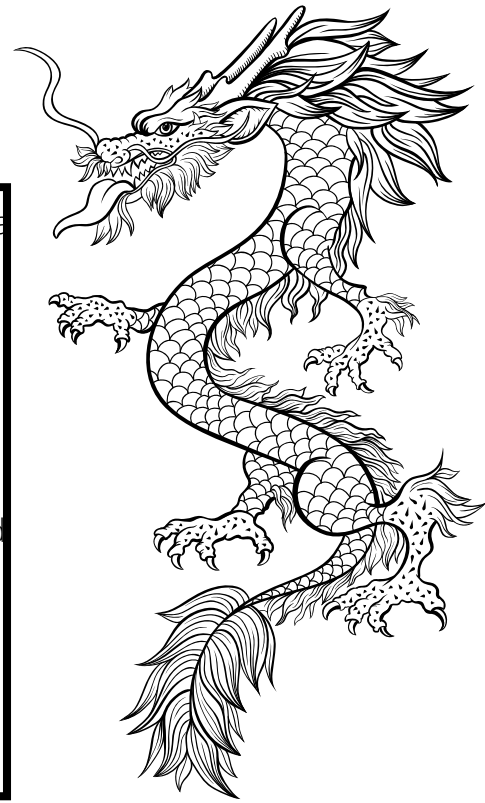


Dragons: A History



"None of the animals is so wise as the dragon. His blessing power is not a false one. He can be smaller than small, bigger than big, higher than high and lower than low."

--Chinese scholar Lu Dian (AD 1042-1102)

The dragons of East Asian legend have sweeping powers. They breathe clouds, move the seasons, and control the waters of rivers, lakes, and seas. They are linked with yang, the masculine principle of heat, light, and action, and opposed to yin, the feminine principle of coolness, darkness, and repose. Dragons have been part of East Asian culture for more than 4,000 years. In the religious traditions of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, they have been honored as sources of power and bringers of rain.

Dragons in Many Lands

Vietnam

According to Vietnamese legend, the rocky islands of Ha Long Bay were spat out by a dragon that guarded the country in ancient times. The name of the bay means "descending dragon."

China

One of China's most subtle delicacies is Longjing (Dragon Well) tea, named for a tea-growing region near Hangzhou, in Zhejiang Province. It is said that centuries ago, people believed that a rain-bringing dragon lived in the area at the bottom of a clear-running spring.

Korea

A long, low mountain in the shape of a blue dragon lies to the east of the old city center of Seoul, South Korea. A higher one called the white tiger stands to the west. The Korean capital was founded some 600 years ago below these peaks, an auspicious spot according to the principles of spatial planning known in Korea as p'ungsu (feng shui).

Japan

A dragon king was once said to live in a pond at Shinzen'en, the imperial garden of Kyoto, Japan. During times of drought, Buddhist monks held ceremonies there to persuade the dragon king to rise and bring rain.

Borneo

In a folktale from Borneo, a dragon guards a precious jewel on the top of Mount Kinabalu.