



China, Mongolia, and Taiwan

CULTURE

How Dragon Pond Got Its Name

Dragons appear frequently in Chinese folktales. Early Chinese believed that dragons lived in the water and the sky. Dances involving humans dressed in dragon costumes remain an important part of traditional Chinese culture today. So may some of the beliefs about dragons. According to the storyteller, the following event happened “several decades ago” near Dashiqiao, a town in Liaoning province in far northeast China.

It was summer and the peasants were working in the fields. Furious, dark clouds suddenly covered the sky, like wild horses running on the plain. The wind blew very hard, and branches swung from side to side. The peasants hurried home to shut their doors tightly.

It was so inky black that nothing could be seen. People looked out their windows in surprise. It rained heavily. Thunder sounded as if it would deafen their ears; lightning flashed as though it would blind them. To the peasants’ surprise, they saw something enormous fall down to the ground from the heavens as the lightning flashed, then they heard a loud thud as it landed. It rained hard for another hour, then gradually the sky began to clear. Eventually the rain stopped. A beautiful rainbow appeared, and the sun came out from behind the clouds. Everything looked fresh, and men, women, and children went outdoors again.

The peasants were very surprised to find a big new pond near the road with a very large animal lying in it. It had long, thick hair on either side of its mouth and a head like a horse’s, but much bigger. It also had a pair of huge antlers. Its body was more than one hundred meters (nearly 100 yards) long, covered with thousands of fishlike scales, each more than one meter in diameter. The creature had four large talons shaped like a rooster’s, as well as a long tail.

An old man recognized the creature as a dragon who was in charge of rain. There are many kinds of dragons, and they all have different jobs. Some are in charge of fire, some of rain, some of wind, some of sand, and so on. They are all ruled by the Emperor of Heaven and live in the seas, rivers, lakes, and even wells. At times they fly above the clouds, or even change form into people or other animals. Of course, dragons have magnificent palaces in the water. In ancient times, emperors of China regarded themselves as descendants of dragons. This was a sign of absolute power. Many temples were built to honor the dragon, and when it was dry people would pray to dragons for rain.

This dragon was dying. The people realized that he must have committed a serious crime against the Emperor of Heaven and had been punished by being hurled down to earth by the Emperor’s troops. That is to say, the Emperor had taken back the dragon’s supernatural powers. The people

pitied the dragon from the bottom of their hearts. They felt that they must help him get back to heaven. Wasting no time, they knit a big mat of dried reeds and covered the dragon with it to prevent the sun from burning him. Then they went back to the village. Two men were left to take care of the dragon. One of the old men told the villagers to make preparations to send the dragon off, so they beat drums, blew horns, burned spices, and prayed to the Emperor of Heaven to allow the dragon to go back.

The villagers did this for nearly three days. On the third day a thick fog filled the village. As the day passed, the fog became thicker and thicker, so thick that people could not see each other. When the fog finally disappeared, several villagers ran to see the dragon but found that it had vanished. All of the townspeople gathered around the pond in astonishment. The new pond remained but the dragon was gone. It was a real miracle, and the people cheered.

As the years went by, the villagers found that the pond was never dry, even when the rains did not come. Moreover, the pond was rich in fish, shrimp, and crab. To memorialize this strange event, the villagers of Dashiqiao call this place Dragon Pond.

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Understanding What You Read After you have finished reading the selection, answer the following questions.

1. According to this folktale, how do dragons influence everyday life?

2. Why did the dragon fall to earth? How did the villagers help it?

3. How does the story suggest that the dragon rewarded the villagers for their help?

Activity

Draw a color picture of the Dashiqiao dragon, using the description in this folktale as a guide. Color your dragon in traditional Chinese colors.