

Bell ringer 11/5/15

Get out your China map.

Identify some of the natural barriers in China.

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After reading about dragons, identify the meaning of the symbol of the dragon in ancient China.

The Chinese Dragon: a Symbol of Strength and Power

Unlike castle-burning dragons of Western stories, Chinese Dragons are a benevolent symbol in Chinese culture. From celebrations to the Zodiac, to historical rulers, the dragon has played a large part in China's rich history.

In Chinese lore, **the dragon was a benevolent creature.** According to legends, the Chinese dragon is able to breathe fire, summon wind and call for rain, fly into the clouds and hide at the bottom of the sea; it's also capable of becoming as large as the sky or disguising itself by being as tiny as a pinhead. Along with these abilities, the dragon signified power, strength, and good luck.

In the Shang Dynasty (1600 BC-1046 BC), the dragon existed as a supernatural power in the mind of ancient people, and it was worshipped owing to its ferociousness and mysteriousness.

Starting in the Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD), Emperors took on the symbolism of the Dragon as they hoped to bring good fortune to their lands.

The number 9 is considered lucky in Chinese culture, and this fact is reflected in the depiction of the Chinese Dragon. Nine different animal resemblances make up the appearance of the Chinese dragon. Imagined as having the paws of the tiger, the claws of the eagle, the ears of the cow, the head of a crocodile, the antlers of a deer, the beard of the goat, the scales of the carp and the belly of the snake.

Origin of the Dragon

A number of legends concerning the origin of the dragon emerged in the course of Chinese history, of which the Totem-Worship Theory is more popular than the others. A totem is an object (such as an animal or a plant) that serves as an emblem or protector of a tribe, reminding them of their ancestry, and the tribe firmly believes that they are related by blood to a certain animal. Almost every tribe had its own unique totem in ancient times. It was said that the pre-dynasty ruler Huangdi fought with Yandi for the throne after the demise of Chi You, which ended up with the victory of Huangdi who adopted an imaginary dragon for his coat of arms. Later, Huangdi launched a series of wars against the nine tribes on the Yellow River Valley, and incorporated the other tribes' totems into his own after defeating them (thus explaining why the dragon has attributes of nine other creatures), claiming himself to be monarch of the central plains of China after his great unification. The dragon totem has been popular throughout China ever since.

