

Unit 1

Reading C

The Chinese Dragon vs. The Western Dragon 《中国龙与西方龙》

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1 The Chinese dragon is a far different beast from its Western counterpart. Smaug from J. R. R. Tolkien's "The Hobbit" is perhaps the most widely known dragon from recent Western fiction, a cruel, avaricious and bloodthirsty creature whose lair under the Lonely Mountain identifies him as a creature of the earth. Tolkien drew much of his inspiration for Smaug from the dragon in the Old English epic of "Beowulf", penned more than a thousand years earlier, which gives some indication of the depth of the European tradition of portraying dragons as bad news.

中国龙与西方的龙大不相同。在近代西方小说中，J.R.R.托尔金的《霍比特人》中的史矛革也许是最广为人知的龙，它是一个残忍、贪婪且嗜血的生物。它在孤山下的巢穴表明它是一种土生生物。托尔金对史矛革的很多灵感都来自于一千多年前创作的古英语史诗《贝奥武夫》中的龙，这在一定程度上表明了欧洲将龙描绘成坏消息的传统由来已久。

2 By contrast, the Chinese dragon is an auspicious creature, symbolizing strength, wisdom, good luck and power over the elements of wind and water. As such, Chinese people proudly claim they are the descendants of the dragon, a story that is firmly rooted in national folklore and history. For example, an anecdote in the "Records of the Grand Historian" (Shiji) traces the birth of Liu Bang, the first emperor of the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-25 AD): One day, his mother falls asleep at a riverside and dreams of a dragon lying on her body, only to wake up and find herself pregnant. Traces of the anecdote survived in the belief that a dragon appearing in a pregnant mother's dream was an auspicious sign indicating she would give birth to a future emperor.

相比之下，中国龙是一种吉祥的生物，象征着力量、智慧、好运以及对风和水元素的掌控力。因此，中国人自豪地宣称自己是龙的传人，这个说法深深扎根于民族民间传说和历史之中。例如，《史记》中有一则轶事记载了西汉（公元前 206 年—公元 25 年）开国皇帝刘邦的出生：一天，他的母亲在河边睡着，梦到一条龙趴在她身上，醒来后发现自己怀孕了。这则轶事的痕迹留存下来，人们相信孕妇梦见龙是一种吉祥的征兆，预示着她将生下未来的皇帝。

3 Indeed, China's feudal rulers did everything they could to maintain this mythic association, surrounding themselves with dragon-related ornamentation, ruling from a Dragon Throne and waging war under a dragon flag. Pretty much everything related to the emperor would be tagged with the character "龙", for example, "龙袍" (imperial robes embroidered with curling dragons), "龙椅" (the emperor's seat), "龙床" (the emperor's bed) and "龙颜" (the look of an emperor).

的确，中国的封建统治者竭尽全力维持这种神话般的联系，他们用与龙有关的装饰环绕自己，坐在龙椅上统治国家，在龙旗之下发动战争。几乎所有与皇帝有关的东西都会贴上“龙”字，例如，“龙袍”（绣有盘旋之龙的皇袍）、“龙椅”（皇帝的座位）、“龙床”（皇帝的床）和“龙颜”（皇帝的容貌）。

4 While Smaug and other European dragons have a solid, serpentine connection to the earth, Chinese dragons are indisputably rulers of the sky. The dragon was worshiped as the God of Rain, and in times of drought or flooding, locals would visit a dragon-king temple (龙王庙) and burn

incense to pray for more favorable conditions. It is also said that natural disasters such as floods or tornados (龙卷风, literally, the dragon rolls up the wind) indicate the dragon king is in bad temper. 史矛革和其他欧洲的龙与大地有着坚实的、如蛇般的联系，而中国龙无疑是天空的统治者。龙被尊为雨神，在干旱或洪水时期，当地人会去龙王庙烧香，祈求更有利的条件。据说洪水或龙卷风（字面意思为“龙卷起风”）等自然灾害表明龙王心情不好。

5 Dragons' association with thunder, lightning and rain may have prompted the widespread belief that there are more likely to be a flurry of natural disasters in a Dragon year, and Chinese New Year celebrations the world over will include ceremonies and prayers dedicated to warding off the possibility of such a calamity striking people's homes.

龙与雷电和雨水的联系可能促使人们普遍认为龙年更有可能发生一连串的自然灾害，世界各地的中国新年庆祝活动将包括仪式和祈祷，以避免这种灾难袭击人们的家园。

6 The dragon's power to control rain and waves is also closely related to its rank in the pantheon of 12 zodiac animals (rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, cock, dog and pig). Various tales describe the race of these 12 animals to secure their place on the list, but the sequence is determined by the time of day the animal is most active, at least in the eyes of the ancient Chinese. The dragon corresponds to 7 am to 9 am, when it is most likely to be foggy, allowing the dragon to ride atop clouds and mist. However, parts of the dragon are usually hidden in the heavy fog, giving rise to the phrase “神龙见首不见尾” (you see the head of the mystical dragon but not its tail), which now refers to someone who has no fixed whereabouts and is difficult for others to trace.

龙控制雨水和波浪的能力也与其在十二生肖（鼠、牛、虎、兔、龙、蛇、马、羊、猴、鸡、狗、猪）神谱中的地位密切相关。各种故事描述了这十二种动物为在名单上获得一席之地而进行的竞赛，但顺序是由动物一天中最活跃的时间决定的，至少在古代中国人的眼中是这样。龙对应的时间是早上 7 点到 9 点，这个时候最有可能有雾，让龙可以乘云驾雾。然而，龙的部分身体通常隐藏在浓雾中，由此产生了“神龙见首不见尾”这句话，现在用来形容某人没有固定的行踪，很难被别人追踪到。

7 In Chinese folk art paper-cuts, a typical pattern shows the dragon riding on clouds. Another depicts two dragons playing with a pearl (双龙戏珠), which is often inlaid with a dark, comma-like symbol running through the middle, thought to represent the unification of yin and yang. In Chinese calligraphy, the flying dragon is an aesthetically appealing analogy for cursive and elegant handwriting known as “龙飞凤舞”, literally, “dragons flying and phoenixes dancing.” Given all the positive associations of “龙”, it's no wonder the character is a top choice for people's names, including martial arts superstars Jackie Chan (成龙) and Bruce Lee (李小龙). There is also the Chinese idiom, “望子成龙” (literally, hoping one's son will become a dragon), which roughly means parents have high expectations of their children.

在中国民间艺术剪纸中，一种典型的图案是龙驾云。另一种图案是双龙戏珠，珠子中间通常镶嵌着一个黑色的、逗号状的符号，被认为代表着阴阳的统一。在中国书法中，飞龙是对草书和优美书法的一种富有美感的比喻，即“龙飞凤舞”，字面意思是“龙在飞、凤在舞”。鉴于“龙”的所有积极联想，难怪这个字是人们起名的首选，包括武术巨星成龙（Jackie Chan）和李小龙（Bruce Lee）。还有一个中国成语“望子成龙”，字面意思是希望自己的儿子成为一条龙，大致意思是父母对孩子寄予厚望。

8 However, few parents would want their children to be aggressive leaders involved in violence. Unfortunately, this is the image that struck many Chinese upon seeing the new dragon stamp issued by China Post in early January, 2012. “Evil and frightening” (凶神恶煞), “baring fangs and brandishing paws” (张牙舞爪) and “bristling with anger” (怒发冲冠) were just a few of the phrases people responded with when being asked for their first impression of the new stamp. The design has also triggered heated debates among micro bloggers on Sina Weibo, one of whom even compares the image to “China’s notorious city inspectors, who are sometimes caught on camera beating up street vendors, ” according to The Wall Street Journal’s China Real Time Report.

然而，很少有父母希望自己的孩子成为好斗且涉及暴力的领导者。不幸的是，这就是 2012 年 1 月初中国邮政发行新龙票时许多中国人的印象。“凶神恶煞”“张牙舞爪”和“怒发冲冠”只是人们被问及对邮票的第一印象时给出的几个表述。据《华尔街日报》“中国实时报”报道，这一设计也在新浪微博上引发了微博用户的激烈争论，其中一人甚至将这一形象比作“中国臭名昭著的城管，他们有时被拍到殴打街头小贩”。

9 People born in the year of the dragon are said to be natural leaders — charismatic, innovative, free-spirited, and flamboyant, and as such Dragon years are notorious for coinciding with spikes in the birth rate. It remains to be seen whether modern Chinese remain as much in the thrall of dragon worship as their ancestors, and if the phenomenon holds true in the 21st century.

据说龙年出生的人是天生的领导者——有魅力、有创新精神、自由奔放且引人注目，因此龙年以出生率飙升而闻名。现代中国人是否仍像他们的祖先一样热衷于崇拜龙，以及这种现象在 21 世纪是否仍然适用，还有待观察。