



A dragon carved from dark green Xiuyan jade has the reputation of “China’s No. 1 dragon.” Regarding the prototype of the Chinese dragon, researchers have put forward various hypotheses such as snakes, crocodiles, pigs, deer, clouds and lightning. — National Museum of China



Visconti’s Year of the Dragon fountain pen



Various folk experts and historians point out that the modern-day Chinese dragon appeared after the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). Prior to that, the mythical creature was depicted in various guises — some of them quite different from current common imagery.

For example, a unique type of jade artifact from the Hongshan Culture, dating back 5,000 to 6,500 years, sparked a lot of debate among archeologists due to its pig-like shape. It was coined a “jade pig-dragon” and was regarded as the earliest prototype of the symbolic animal.

The loong as we know it today became a major form about 2,000 years ago, sporting three, four or five claws. In the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the five-clawed loong became the official imperial symbol to be used only by the emperor, while the four-clawed python version usually could be used by the emperor’s brothers or close relatives.

French fashion house Louis Vuitton got a thumbs-up from Chinese consumers for “having done its homework” by placing giant azure dragon decorations outside some of its Chinese outlets and resisting the typical red or golden dragon images used by so many brands.

The Chinese New Year not only rotates through 12 animal zodiacs, but each zodiac rotates by the five elements of wood, fire, earth, metal and water. The year of 2024 is the wood dragon, which is greenish blue in color.

In ancient Chinese astrology, the azure dragon is one of four symbols that are guardians of the four cardinal directions — the azure dragon of the east, the vermilion bird of the south, the white tiger of the west and the black

tortoise of the north.

Thus, many people consider the Azure Dragon Year, which occurs every 60 years, especially lucky.

The Oxford English Dictionary has updated its online site by creating “Chinese dragon” as a separate listing. Previously, it was often listed as a sub-item under “dragon” in major dictionaries.

The revised entry in the Oxford English Dictionary explains the meaning of “Chinese dragon” as such: “A mythological creature or god associated with China, depicted in a variety of different animal forms but typically as a serpent with four limbs, and symbolizing wisdom, fortune and power. Also: such a creature viewed as a personification of China or its former empire.”

Hugo T.Y. Tseng, a Shanghai-based professor and translation expert, welcomed the new entry in the dictionary, writing that it “reflects the current status of a language, so that means the difference between Chinese and Western dragons is widely recognized in the English-speaking world.”

However, Tseng concluded that it doesn’t matter whether one uses “loong” or “Chinese dragon” to describe it.

Huang Ji, a retired professor from East China Normal University in Shanghai, disagrees. He told Shanghai Daily that the new entry is late in coming and it should be “loong” instead of “Chinese dragon.”

Almost 20 years ago, Huang was among the earliest Chinese scholars to promote the use of loong as the English translation of the mythical beast.

In 2005, he set up the loong.cn website and has kept track of the distribution and use of the word since then.

He contends that loong and dragon are entirely different mythical creatures, and the evil image of the dragon in Western culture could adversely impact the image of the Chinese dragon and China.



Apple’s Year of the Dragon iPhone case



DaDaLoong, a virtual IP image created for the Badaling section of the Great Wall