



## The Folklore and Symbolism of Dragons

by Kathleen Karlsen

More than any other image, the dragon is associated with the Orient. A symbol of the emperor himself, the dragon was master of all of the elements of nature. The sinuous dragon can take many forms and can be victorious in any circumstance. The dragon is often used in corporate logos and can be either male or female.

A pregnant dragon is particularly auspicious as a symbol of future growth and expansion. The dragon is most useful in connection with fame, reputation and career. When the dragon symbol is applied in feng shui, the most effective placement is in the fame area of a home or in connection with a home office. An impressive representation of a dragon can be of tremendous positive benefit.

In addition to Chinese dragons, there are nearly limitless tales of dragons in European mythology. Interestingly, the word dragon derives from two separate Greek words. One word means “a huge serpent or snake” and the other means “I see clearly”. Dragons in European traditions have wings, allowing them to soar freely above, resulting in a perspective that encompasses a huge panorama below. In this context, dragons can be thought to symbolize the ability to see the “big picture” as well as the ability to see far off danger or future circumstances.

In many cultures dragons are viewed as representing the primal forces in nature and the universe. They can alternately breathe fire, poison or ice. These abilities demonstrate that they are both creators and destroyers. Fire gives life (and sometimes death); ice and poison mete out death. Early muskets were named “dragons” due to their fire-spitting ability. Likewise, muskets can serve either to procure food and preserve life or to dole out death in battle.

Dragons in the Orient are associated with wisdom and longevity. They usually possess some form of magic or supernatural power. Chinese dragons tend to be benevolent; European dragons are often malevolent.

Asian dragons are usually associated with water in some way. Japanese dragons, in particular, are often depicted as huge water serpents. In early Jewish religious texts, dragons are seen as sea-monsters. In contrast with this, the early Vedic dragons were representations of lack of water or drought.

Dragons have captured the imagination of man for millennia. Some theorists believe that dragon myths originated from primitive peoples finding large skeletons of dinosaurs and postulating how they appeared during life. Others believe that forms of dragons still exist on earth today. The Loch Ness Monster is the primary modern example of a potential “water dragon”.

Some anthropologists believe that fire-spitting creatures are a real possibility. Animals with chambers for gases such as methane and a way to rub stones together in a large gizzard could conceivably breathe fire. Bombardier beetles, for example, spit vaporized acid out of their abdomens.

Dragons are one of the most complex and universal symbols on earth. Their popularity in contemporary literature and films seems to assure their ongoing place in literature and in the imagination of mankind.