

The Chinese Dragon: A Lasting Evolution

by the Dragon team

December 14, 2020

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Note to Readers

We are very pleased to present this collection of ten works featuring the Chinese Dragon across dynasties and across different mediums. Some of the works in this collection have known artists, which allowed us to delved deeper into the artist technique or motivation. However, most works do not have known authors, but are still included because they are central to our narrative.

Our goal was to curate a few dragon artwork(s) from the following time periods to offer a wholistic timeline of how the meaning and usage of dragon artworks changed and evolved through time:

1. Ancient China
2. Zhou and Han Dynasties
3. Tang Dynasty
4. Song and Yuan Dynasties
5. Ming and Qing Dynasties

Logistically, this online exhibition ran from Novemeber 20, 2020 to December 31, 2020 on the platform, artspaces.kunmatrix.com. This booklet is meant to serve as an exhibition pamphlet for the accompany online exhibition. Lastly, everyone on the team would like thank Professor Lala Zuo for her support and resource recommendations.

Sincerely,
The Dragon Team

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Introduction

Dragon Art in Ancient China

Discovered at Sanguan Dianzi in Liaoning province, from the Neolithic Hongshan Culture this jade “Pig-Dragon” ornament is one of the first representations of the Dragon figure that we see in Chinese art culture. Neolithic cultures usually derived their art inspiration from nature itself, they still did not have a concrete sense of religion, nor the concept of longevity attached to the dragon. This type of artifact was found buried in stone ritual structures, giving them a ritualistic meaning (Ebrey).

It is called a “Pig-Dragon” because the form of the snout is similar to that of a pig. This Dragon also has a long body characterized by a Chinese Dragon, yet it is in a ring shape. To give this piece of jade this ring dragon shape neolithic villagers most had used sand and days to polish.



(c. 3500 BC., Hongshan Culture, Neolithic period). Pig-Dragon Ring; Jade. The National Museum of China, Beijing, China.

This small bronze applique in the form of a dragon is a small representation of the big detailed bronze artifacts common to the Shang Dynasty. Yet this 6.8 cm in length applique itself has many details. The first detail will be the similarity