

DRAGON MOTIF IN COLLECTION - CHINESE & VIET CERAMICS

Dragon in Chinese Culture - the Dragon has long been revered in China and may be considered the most important symbol in Chinese art and culture. Historically the Dragon has been used as a symbol to represent the power of the Emperor. The Dragon is one of the 12 animals, with corresponding personality features, in the Chinese zodiac which are used to designate years in the Chinese calendar. Each year has an animal sign according to a cycle of 12 years. Recent Dragon years include 2012, 2000, 1988, 1976, 1964, 1952, and 1940.

Representations of the Dragon appear on virtually all Chinese art forms including metal work such as bronzes, textiles, laquerware, jades, bamboo and ivory carvings, stone and wood carvings, and paintings - as well as on ceramics and porcelain. This Paper provides only very cursory information on the Dragon, primarily as relates to Chinese porcelain. Details of the long and rich history of the Dragon may be referred to in the various references listed at the end of this Paper. Additionally, many more sources for references on the Dragon also exist; for instance one website (www.shutterstock.com) reportedly provides 197,035 photos and illustrations of Chinese dragons.

DRAGON FORMS REPRESENTED ON CHINESE PORCELAIN

(include the following)

5-clawed Dragon - it was during the Xuande period of the Ming Dynasty that the 5-clawed Dragon was formally established as the the official standard for the royal dragon of the emperor.

4-clawed Dragon and 3-clawed Dragon - uses included imperial gifts for dignitaries and members of the Court.

Chilong (hornless dragon) - Dragon without horns; has been referred to as both a mountain demon as well as a deity of water. This motif is occasionally found on ceramics of the Ming Dynasty and to a lesser extent the Qing Dynasty.

Chilong (hornless dragon)



M-349 (2 of 3)
M-349 (2 of 3)

M-490 (1 of 4 - Cover)
M-490 (1 of 4)

M-231
M-231

Feiyu - flying-fish dragon; typically has webbed bat-like wings, scales, fins, and fishes' tails. This rather rare and distinctive motif apparently was used on ceramics rather briefly only during the middle Ming Dynasty.

Feiyu - flying-fish dragon



M-017

M-349 (1 of 3)

Dynasties represented in the Catalogue with Dragon motif ceramics include the Song through the Qing, as well as the Republic Period. The Vietnamese examples date from the 13th century to the 19th century. Representation of the Dragon on Chinese porcelain decorated in underglaze blue is first seen in the Yuan Dynasty, with the highly acclaimed and well known “David” vases the most important example. Dragons represented in the Catalogue are 5-clawed Dragon, 4-clawed Dragon, 3-clawed Dragon, *Chilong* (hornless dragon), *Feiyu* (flying-fish dragon), and Water Dragon emerging from waves. The Vietnamese examples with claws discernable are all of the 4-clawed Dragon variant.

The Dragon motif appears in the Collection on 39 Chinese ceramics (C-005 to C-266, M-017 to M-522, Y-009 to Y-137 and S-016) and 7 Vietnamese ceramics (M-247 and V-186 to V-267) as follows:

CHINESE CERAMICS

C-005 (1 & 2 of 2) - 5-clawed Dragon
C-006 (1 & 2 of 2) - 5-clawed Dragon
C-012 - 4 clawed Dragon
C-056 (3 & 4 of 4) - 3-clawed Dragon
C-262 - 3-clawed Dragon?
C-266 - *Chilong* (hornless dragon)
M-017 - *Feiyu* (flying-fish dragon)
M-049 - 4-clawed Dragon
M-106 - *Chilong* (hornless dragon)
M-138 - 3-clawed Dragon
M-231 - *Chilong* (hornless dragon)
M-236 - 4-clawed Dragon
M-273 (No. 4 of 4) - 5-clawed Water Dragon emerging from waves
M-296 (1 & 2 of 2) - *Chilong* (hornless dragon)
M-349 (1 & 2 of 3) - No. 1 - *Feiyu* (flying-fish dragon),
No.2 - *Chilong* (hornless dragon)
M-352 - 4-clawed Dragon
M-424 (65 of 69) - Molded Dragon Scales
M-458 - 4-clawed Dragon
M-490 (1 & 2 of 4) - *Chilong* (hornless dragon)
M-508 (5 of 15) - *Chilong* (hornless dragon)
M-522 - 4-clawed Dragon
Y-009 - 4-clawed Dragon
Y-029 - 3-clawed Dragon
Y-042 (No. 2 of 2) - 4-clawed Dragon
Y-095 (No. 2 of 2) - 3-clawed Dragon
Y-102 - 3-clawed Dragon
Y-136 (No. 3 of 42) - unknown, but probably 3 claws on basis of related material
Y-136 (15 to 17 of 42) (15 of 42) - 3 clawed Dragon?, (16 of 42) 3-clawed Dragon, (17 of 42) - 3-clawed Dragon
Y-137 (1 & 3 of 13) (1 of 13) - 3-clawed Dragon, (3 of 13) - unknown, but probably 3 claws on basis of related material
S-016 - 4-clawed Dragon

VIETNAMESE CERAMICS

M-247 - 4-clawed Dragon
V-186 - 4-clawed Dragon

V-187 (1 to 3 of 3) - are Dragon heads only, claws are not visible

V-262 - 4-clawed Dragon

V-267 - 4-clawed Dragon

Additional information for each of the above ceramics is also available in the corresponding **Ceramics Catalogue Description Documents and Photos Folders** with a detailed description including date, size, location and cost of acquisition; and with Photos of each including the base.

David Vases - these two large temple vases are of an imposing height which is variously reported to be between 63.5 cm to 63.8 cm. The main decoration includes an underglaze blue scrolling 4-clawed dragon amid clouds and a lengthy dedicatory inscription, which includes the date equivalent to 1351. They were collected by Sir Percival David in the 1920's from Mountstuart W. Elphinstone (cost is not known, there do not appear to be any existing cost records in the collection history), and from the Charles E. Russell collection at Sotheby's London in 1935 at a cost of GBP 360 (*Stacey Pierson, 2007*). The vases were presented to the University of London in 1950, and have been displayed prominently in a special gallery in the British Museum since 2009.

Pig Dragon - the Hongshan culture sites in present-day Inner Mongolia (dated from about 4700 to 2900 BC) produced jade dragon objects in the form of pig dragons, which are thought to be the first three dimensional representations of Chinese dragons. The pig dragon is a creature with a coiled and elongated body with a head resembling that of a boar. Incidentally, there is a dark green jade Hongshan pig dragon included in the Collection of this writer. It was acquired from Christie's New York in the mid 1980's.



M-236 (Side - Dragon)

M-236 - 4-clawed Dragon



Y-095 (2) - 3-clawed Dragon



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