

INTERNACIONAL
STUDIO

CHINESE DRAGON SYMBOL

THE DRAGON is an old astronomical symbol in China, emblematic of the eastern quadrant of the heavens and connected with Spring. It typifies both flood and rain and, because of their power, became the sign of supreme power. The emperor was accepted as the highest ruler on earth and therefore the dragon was considered to be the only symbol adequate to express his authority. Thus it became the imperial emblem.

The etiquette of the Chinese court designated a five-clawed dragon for the exclusive use of the emperor and his sons, princes of the first and second ranks. The four-clawed dragon was used by princes of the third and fourth ranks and the three-clawed by the nobility. This three-clawed dragon later became the Japanese imperial insignia. In the Chinese

This symbol which, to Western minds is significant of terror, is one of benevolence to the Chinese

G. GLEN GOULD

for the emperor's household. To the majority of Americans any of these forms is recognizable merely as the Chinese dragon

counts for very little, we may find the five-clawed dragon used indiscriminately, but if it is found on an object antedating 1911 we can be sure that the piece it adorns was made

but to the Chinese this emblem of their country and their fathers for more than one hundred and twenty generations represents a vast field of legend and history. To miss its significance is to lose one of the most delightful and fascinating stories in the history of mankind.

Some form of dragon is found on many of the things which we import from China. You will find one on your box of tea, there appropriately, for the word

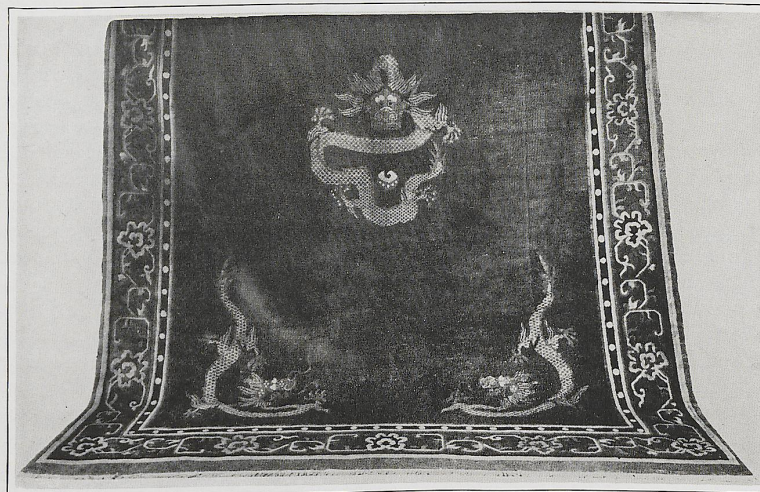
“oolong” is derived from *long* or *ling*, the Chinese for dragon. *Wu ling* or *oolong* means black dragon.



SACRIFICIAL VESSEL, JADE, DECORATED WITH KUEI LUNG MOTIVES

In the Metropolitan Museum of Art

THE MODERN FORM OF DRAGON USED ON A CHINESE RUG
Courtesy of B. Altman & Company



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