

Chinese Dragon Names

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Borrowings/loans of Asian dragon names are an unsolved "Chinese puzzle" in comparative linguistics. Despite consensus that 'dragon' loanwords are widespread, debate continues over transfer dates and directions. Chinese is crucially important because it has one of the oldest and largest 'dragon' lexical fields in any language. The purpose of this paper is collating Chinese dragon names in order to create a data base for future etymological studies.

1 INTRODUCTION

This section introduces the scope §1.1, sources §1.2, and linguistics §1.3 of the present study.² The major part analyzes over one hundred Chinese draconyms divided into seven sections: Rain-Dragons §2, Flying-Dragons §3, Snake-

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2. N.B.: The following abbreviations are used: '' = semantic meanings, "" = literal meanings (or quotes), → and ← = semantic changes, > and < = phonological changes, ~ = alternate names, pronunciations, or graphs. Two special terms are employed: the neologism *draconym* 'dragon name' and Brown's (1979) portmanteau *wug* (< *worm* + *bug*) meaning the class of 'insects, worms, spiders, and smaller reptiles'. *Wug* is used as the English name for the Chinese logographic radical 虫 (Carr 1983) found in many 'dragon' (e.g., 蛟 § 6.1) graphs.

Dragons §4, Wug-Dragons §5, Crocodile-Dragons §6, Hill-Dragons §7, and Miscellaneous Dragons §8. These arbitrary groupings were made for presentational reasons, and other taxonomies (cf. Diény 1987) are possible; for instance, *zhūpólóng* 豬婆龍 "pig woman dragon" 'gavial' §6.4 is listed as a crocodile-dragon zoologically, but is considered a rain-dragon mythologically. Subsections are organized by similarities, e.g., §3.5-.7 have 飛 'flying' names; and some, e.g., §8.9, include several synonyms or related words. Section 9 summarizes the Chinese 'dragon' lexical field, discusses universalities of draconym borrowings, and gives examples for utilizing the Sinitic data.

§1.1 Scope has been narrowed to draconyms attested in Han dynasty texts (v. §1.2) dating from the beginning of the Common Era. The original intent was to compile an exhaustive wordlist of Chinese dragon names that would be useful for comparativists; something on the order of the INDEX. However, an unexpectedly large semantic field was discovered, and the paper grew to more than twice its present length. "There are numerous dragons," Ball (1903:220) warned, "too numerous to enter even into a succinct account of them in the space of a short article."

For purposes of brevity, the range of this study generally excludes three sets: descriptive compounds not referring to mythic creatures (e.g., *qiánlóng* 潛龍 "submerged/hidden dragon" → 'concealed talent'), names for different colored dragons (e.g., *qīnglóng* 青龍 "blue-green dragon," *cānglóng* 蒼龍 "green dragon," etc.), and later foreign importations.³ Even though such figurative,

3. For instance, the (c. AD 1590) *Wuzazu* 五雜俎 (Visser 1913:101) lists nine ornamental dragons peculiar to Buddhist art:

The [*púláo* 蒲牢 "cattail pen"], dragons which like to cry, are represented on the tops of bells, serving as handles. The [*sìniú* 四牛 "four cows"], which like music, are used to adorn musical instruments. The [*chīwěn* 蚩吻 "sneer lips"], which like swallowing, are placed on both ends of the ridgepoles of roofs (to swallow all evil influences). The [*zhāofēng* 嘲風 "ridiculous wind"], lion-like beasts which like precipices [cf. §5.4], are placed on the four corners of roofs. The [*yáhuā* 睺σ "corner of eye movement"],

chromatic, and imported draconyms are subsumed within the Chinese 'dragon' lexical field; for present purposes, they are excluded.

Finding Chinese dragon etymons involved several steps. First, the literature in the field (esp. works by Li, Yan, Hino, Mori, de Visser, Schiffeler, and Diény) was surveyed for prominent names. These draconyms were researched in dictionaries (e.g., Table 1), which led to additional synonyms. And when *loci classici* were checked, their indexes and commentaries revealed even more dragon names.

Yan (1988) divides previous studies into five fields, Chinese dragons as: foreign loanwords, dinosaurs, spirits, water gods, and totems. This paper will facilitate the first, presenting a linguistic digest of names. It presumes no knowledge of Chinese, explains terms, cites translations (including the contextual *terminus a quo* for each draconym), and notes additional references. For those who can read Chinese, logographs and original sources are given.⁴

 which like to kill, serve as ornaments of sword-grips. The [bìxì 螭屨], which have the shape of the [chīlóng 螭龍 §7.1], and are fond of literature, are represented on the sides of grave-monuments. The [bīhān 卮], which like litigation, are placed over prison gates (in order to keep guard). The [suānni 窠], which like to sit down, are represented upon the bases of Buddhist idols (under the Buddhas' or Bodhisattvas' feet). The [bàxià 霸下 "hegemon below"], finally, big tortoises which like to carry heavy objects, are placed under grave-monuments.

A few salient draconyms from these excepted groups are listed, e.g., hēilóng 黑龍 "black dragon" §2.2 or *Nagā* §4.7.

4. The initial citation of a Chinese text gives dates, logographs, and edition used (chosen in correspondence with standard sinological indexes). Classical sources are cited by title, and depending upon the edition, either page or *juàn* 卷 "chapter; section" (A = 上 1st and B = 下 2nd parts) and page (a = recto and b = verso) or line. Reference to a commentary is cited by author, *juàn*, and page. Modern sources (listed under REFERENCES) are cited by author, year, and page.

§1.2 Sources for early Chinese dragon names are primarily Han dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) texts rather than Zhou dynasty (1050?-221 BC) classics. This is true not only for dragons, but for mythical creatures in general. Pre-Han sources mention a few draconyms (e.g., 龍 §2.1), but for most early Chinese mythology, "All that we have are casual references and tantalizing fragments," explains Bodde (1961:376), "widely scattered among texts of diverse date and ideological orientation." The following three Han sources are especially relevant to dragons.

The *Chuci* 楚辭 "Elegies [from the State] of Chu" is an anthology of southern poems, the oldest of which are attributed to ("the father of Chinese poetry" Liu 1966:24) Qu Yuan (340?-278? BC). Liu Xiang (77-6 BC) edited this text and Wang Yi (AD 89?-158) wrote its first commentary. Many *Chuci* dragon descriptions are fabulously poetic, e.g.: They lined [T (cf. §7.1) 蟲象] water monsters up to join them in the dance: How their bodies [Ψ λ §8.2] coiled and writhed in undulating motion! Gracefully the [雌 P §2.2] woman-rainbow made circles round them; Phoenixes soared up and hovered overhead. (四部備要 ed. 5/10a, Hawkes 1985:198)

The *Huainanzi* 淮南子 is a philosophical miscellany compiled by Liu An (179?-122 BC), Prince of Huainan.⁵ Xu Shen (AD 55-144, also the editor of the *Shuowenjiezi*, v. Table 1) and Gao Yu (fl. AD 205) wrote the earliest extant *Huainanzi* commentaries. The *Huainanzi* frequently mentions several draconyms together, e.g., Fuxi and Nügua §8.9:

...rode the [雷車 cf. §2.4] thunder chariot, using [應龍 §2.4] winged dragons as the inner pair and [青δ §8.2] green dragons as the outer pair. ... preceded by [白 T §7.1] white serpents and followed by [奔蛇 §3.1] speeding snakes. (四部叢刊 ed. 6/7a, Le Blanc 1985:161-2)

5. Since the southern state of Chu 楚 is associated with the *Chuci* and *Huainanzi*, it would be worthwhile to study the linguistic/cultural geo-history of dragon borrowings (cf. Chamberlain's work on Tai reptilian names); e.g., crocodiles §6.3 are native to South China.