

Children's Book: The Dragon's Robe

By Deborah Nourse Lattimore

ISBN 0-06-443321-8

FANTASTIC illustrations

Easily adapted for all ages

Animals in Art theme


Chinese Throne Room (Highlight dragon throne, scholars' tools, Forbidden Palace tiles, robes, badges, even Jade Pagoda)

**Note from Author:**

**" In China for many centuries the dragon was believed to be the king of the heavens and ruler of fortune on earth. People stopped at small shrines that dotted the countryside and made offerings to the dragon in exchange for good luck. Even the emperor had a dragon crown, a dragon throne, and a dragon robe called a Chi Fu. Whenever he wore his Chi Fu, the emperor and the dragon became one power. Together they were responsible for the safety of China and its entire people...this folktale is based on Hui Tsung, the last ruler of the Sung dynasty who loved painting and poetry but neglected his other duties. During his reign it was said that he stayed in his palace but sent his dishonest nobles to pay the Tartar warriors in order to keep them out of his country. "**

Once upon a time, in ancient China around the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD during the Northern Sung dynasty, the great spirit of the rain dragon is particularly angry. The old keeper of the royal dragon shrine has been too ill to perform his duties.

Two of these greedy lords have dishonored the dragon shrine, keeping for himself or herself the precious offerings meant for the rain dragon. A golden rice and a golden dagger. Now great evil begins to plague the land. Drought and fire ruin the rice crops and there are sounds of invading armies at the Great Wall of China.

The only hope of peace rests in the hands of Kwan Yin. Floods come in the shape of a powerful dragon that wash the Tatars in the form of the evil Khan ~~and~~ .

The only hope of peace rests in the hands of Kwan Yin (named after the goddess of mercy and who appears in every dynasty of Chinese art.) She is a humble but skilled weaver who appears to be about your age. Her parents had died when she was young, leaving her nothing but a

small loom. She traveled from village to village, weaving in exchange for her meager food and a place to lay her sleeping mat.

One day she meets the old man keeper of the dragon shrine and says,

"I cannot sow new rice fields, and I cannot fight the Tartars. But I can weave a robe fit for the Emperor himself and lay it before the shrine of the rain dragon."

"Then go," said the old man. "Perhaps a humble weaver can undo the insults of the Overseer and the General. Let nothing stop you. The dragon spirit will help."

She began weaving a most beautiful robe. No matter what danger or pain she faced, she continued weaving the Chi Fu with mighty powers.

(Dependent on time show pictures from book illustrating how Kwan Yin continues to weave through all the trials until the five-clawed dragon floods the valley where not a single enemy warrior remains. The old man <sup>(the Emperor)</sup> appears in a dazzling golden robe with his arms outstretched to Kwan Yin who finds herself arrayed in the finest silk. She, a poor weaver, has taught him that true honor and goodness can come only from honesty and hard work, not flattery and lies. He had trusted his rich nobles while he stayed contentedly in his palace, but he had been wrong.

"Will you come and live in my palace, Kwan Yin, and help me remember what I have learned?"

"Kwan Yin smiled. The gift of the rain dragon shone in her eyes."

Ahhh, who is the dragon in the story? The old man? The girl? Can we be dragons? What was the gift of the rain dragon? Are dragons real?

Submitted by Lura Pierce