

A LEGEND OF THE CHINESE DRAGON*

A very long, long time ago in China, the men, women and children fished, hunted, planted and lived together in tribes. Some lived near the oceans and rivers, some in the tall mountains, and some in valleys and plains. Each tribe was protected by a kind and caring spirit.

These spirits looked like the animals the tribes knew best. Those that lived near the oceans or rivers were protected by a fish or a frog spirit. Tribes in the mountains were protected by the tiger or eagle spirit, those living in the plains by the camel, horse, deer or the swift serpent, and those who lived near the rice fields were protected by the helpful ox spirit.

So this is how it was a long, long time ago in China: the people of the tribes working and living under the protection of their special animal spirit.

But all was not well. Sadly, the tribes were jealous of each other. Often one tribe would wage war against another tribe in the name of their spirit. There was much fighting.

One day all the children in China grew tired of all the fighting and they decided to declare a war on war. After much thought, they knew what they needed to do. They would make a new animal spirit, one that would be more powerful than all the other animal spirits and would be able to protect ALL the people of China.

So they did just that. They created a new animal. They used the neck and body of the swift moving serpent, but covered it with the scales of a fish and gave it the belly of a frog. For feet they used powerful tiger paws with the strong, clutching claws of an eagle. For a head they started with one that resembled the camel or horse of the plains, but added the horns of a deer and the ears of the ox. And because it needed to be able to protect ALL the people, they made it able to fly in the sky, swim in the sea and walk on land. They called their new animal DRAGON!

When the men and women of all the tribes in China saw the animal their children had created, they thought it so beautiful, so magnificent, that they vowed to stop their fighting and they made peace with one another.

Of course, they were not always successful, and over the years there were wars, but the children's powerful dragon remains a beloved symbol of peace in China today.

*A retelling of "*Legend of the Chinese Dragon*" by Marie Sellier, Catherine Louis and Wang Fei, NorthSouth Books, New York, 2006.