

Proposal

I am interested in myths in China and how those myths can be seen to have affected and shaped its culture and society. I am going to look at the ritual practices people have adopted as a result of hearing or reading these myths and how much of their lives have a connection to myth and these rituals.

The dragon being mythical animal of great significance in Chinese culture and the connection to Chinese national identity, so I will be exploring that connection and seeing how people have been affected by the dragon throughout history, leading up until modern day.

My aim for this project is to explore the way Chinese people treat myths from hundreds, and how they have been translated to fit into their lives today, rather than a critical evaluation of the myths and rituals themselves. I am going to look into the ritual cultural practices and opinions of myths in China interests me as a topic so I thought I would delve deeper into what connections the

I am going to see how far reaching are the influences of myths in China, and how far you can go to say that myths are at the basis and can be labelled the origins of Chinese culture as we know it, and how do people respond to the influences of myths.

Using written tales of myths, academic journals, questionnaires, and depictions in art I am going to attempt to answer these questions.

Myth in Contemporary China

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2.1 Symbolism of the Chinese dragon

Dragons can be seen throughout Chinese history being linked to the monarchy through its representation in royal architecture, artwork depicting the royal family, and on their clothes. 'its portrait appears in houses and temples, and serves even more than the grotesque lion as an ornament in architecture, art designs, and fabrics. It has, however, been less used for ornamental purposes since the overthrow of the monarchy.'¹**(can insert pictures taken in the Forbidden City of dragons seen in art, architecture and clothing, and any pictures of modern clothing or artwork that have images of dragons)** The significance of the dragon in China is known worldwide, but as time goes on, as much as Chinese people are in favour of keeping up with their traditions, the cultural significance of the dragon does not appear to hold as much value for people as it once did.

"The dragon is said to be the emblem of vigilance and safeguard. The ancients and the moderns have both spoken of this fabulous being. Consecrated by the religion of the earliest people, and particularly the Chinese nation; having become the object of their mythology, the minister of the will of their gods, the guardian of their treasure."²

The use of the image of the dragon is becoming more popular as an advertising tool, as well as a popular image in general in Chinese popular culture. It can be seen on clothing, advertisements, in music videos, and on the surface does not appear to have any of the connection to royalty as it once did. The dragon is a symbol of China and of Chinese national pride, as can be seen in sports competitions, national celebrations and important political events, in households as guardians of the family.

3.2 Ritual and Cultural Practices

There are examples of people creating rituals from what they hear or read about in myths, one example being the story of Qi Xianu. She was the seventh daughter of the Jade Emperor, who fell in love and married a Cowherd but when her father found out they were only permitted to meet one

¹ C.A.S. Williams. (1976) *Outlines of Chinese symbolism and Art Motives* (New York: Dover Publication) p.136.

² C.A.S. Williams. (1976) *Outlines of Chinese symbolism and Art Motives* (New York: Dover Publication) p.138.

day every year. Young women have celebrated this day by showing off their skills in embroidery in the hopes of finding a good husband.³

The story of Chang'E and her isolation on the moon brought on a still very popular holiday, the Mid-Autumn festival. With the moon being the main focus, its rituals revolve around the moon, admiring the moon, making and eating moon cakes, gathering together with friends and family to celebrate.

³ Keith G. Stevens. (2001) *Chinese Mythological Gods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) p.52.