# The Coat of Arms

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# THE COAT OF ARMS

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# THE CHINESE DRAGON: HISTORY AND MANIFESTATIONS

MIGUEL PINTO-CORREIA, M.Sc.

**Abstract**

*The dragon has captivated the imagination of individuals across many cultures and geographical regions. This paper explores the symbolism and significance of the dragon in Chinese society, considers its incorporation into modern Western heraldry, and proposes an improved nomenclature of blazoning.*

## The dragon in Chinese culture

An archetypal monster of folklore and mythology, in Chinese culture the dragon, *Lóng* (龍), assumes a prominent and diverse position. In contrast to its winged Western counterparts, malicious beings which are capable of spewing fire, non-winged Chinese dragons are much more complex and intricate. Commonly symbolic of attributes such as strength, wisdom, benevolence, auspiciousness, and harmoniousness, they also represent, at times, the concepts of destruction, creation, and transience.[1] They are closely associated with natural elements, notably water, as entities responsible for regulating precipitation, rivers, lakes, oceans, and atmospheric phenomena such as clouds.[2]

The dragon's strong association with the elemental forces of nature and water sources establish it as a symbol of nourishment, exerting a direct influence on agriculture and, consequently, on the essence of existence.[3] The concept of evil-tempered dragons was introduced by Buddhists, and such dragons were said to be responsible for floods and storms. Thus the "Chinese people did not take the wrath of the dragon lightly and would try and appease the animal through sacrifices."[4] Ultimately the dragon became a symbol of political power.[5] Its use to represent imperial dominance is traditionally traced back to the mythical reign of Huáng Dì (黃帝), the Yellow Emperor, supposed to have reigned some 25000 years B.C. A historically documented correlation between the dragon and the emperor can only be substantiated from the reign of Emperor Hàn Gāozǔ (漢高祖), who ruled 206-195 B.C., and who founded the Han Dynasty. The Han Chinese adopted the term "sons of the dragon" as a significant component of their national and ethnic identity.[6]

With the consolidation of imperial political power, the dragon assumed the role of a symbol of the emperor's power and of his *Tiānmìng* (天命, which refers to the belief in a divine mandate to govern), thus becoming an essential element in the artistic

[1] Evan Tueller, Taking Flight on the Dragon 's Back: An Analysis of the Chinese Dragon as Monster and *Symbol of Unattainable Power* (Thesis, University of Colorado, Boulder 2013), p. 4.
[2] Lihui Yang and Deming An, *Handbook of Chinese Mythology* (Oxford, 2008), p. 104.
[3] Marinus Willem de Visser, *The Dragon in China and Japan* (Amsterdam,1913), p. 36.
[4] Tueller, op. cit., pp. 15-19.
[5] Quiquang Zhao, *A study of dragons, east and west* (New York, 1993), p. 96.
[6] Frank Dikötter, *The construction of racial identities in China and Japan: Historical and contemporary perspectives* (Hong Kong, 1997), pp. 76–77.

*Figure 1*, left, 1a: the five-clawed imperial emblem, the 'dragon a la cour' on a Qing Dynasty costume, Musée Guimet; right, 1b, plain yellow banner of the Qing Dynasty, the source of both is Wikimedia Commons.

and architectural expressions connected with the Imperial court.[7] The dragon gradually evolved into a distinctive emblem of imperial authority, conferring upon the Emperor the exclusive privilege of donning robes embellished with dragon motifs. This association strengthened the Emperor's role as the divine intermediary connecting Heaven and Earth. Throughout the span of Chinese civilisation, the dragon has assumed a significant part in religion, festivals and cultural gatherings, one which continues to have significance in rural areas of China.[8] Under the Chinese zodiac, individuals born in the year of the dragon are commonly believed to possess inherent power, confidence, and the ability to create wealth.

## Physical attributes

Based on the *Shuōwén* (說文), a historical document originating from A.D. 200, a comprehensive classification of scaly reptiles is presented, encompassing 369 distinct species, which contain various aquatic creatures, serpents, and reptiles of the lizard family. The dragon is presented as the most prominent among these. Chinese culture recognises many kinds of dragons, with distinct physical characteristics based on their habitats, and over one hundred different 'species' of dragons have been recognised.[9] These can be divided into three distinct categories: the powerful and instantly recognised *lóng*, inhabiting the sky, earth and water; the *Jiāo,* which inhabits the marshes and shallow bodies of water and is similar to the *lóng*, but hornless; and the primordial *kuí*

[7] Charles Alfred Speed Williams, *Outlines of Chinese Symbolism and Art Motives: An alphabetical compendium of antique legends and beliefs, as reflected in the Manners and Customs of the Chinese* (Shanghai, 1941), p. 139.

[8] Yang & An, op. cit., pp. 108-109.

[9] M. Carr, Chinese Dragon Names. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area*, *13*.2 (1990), pp. 87–189.

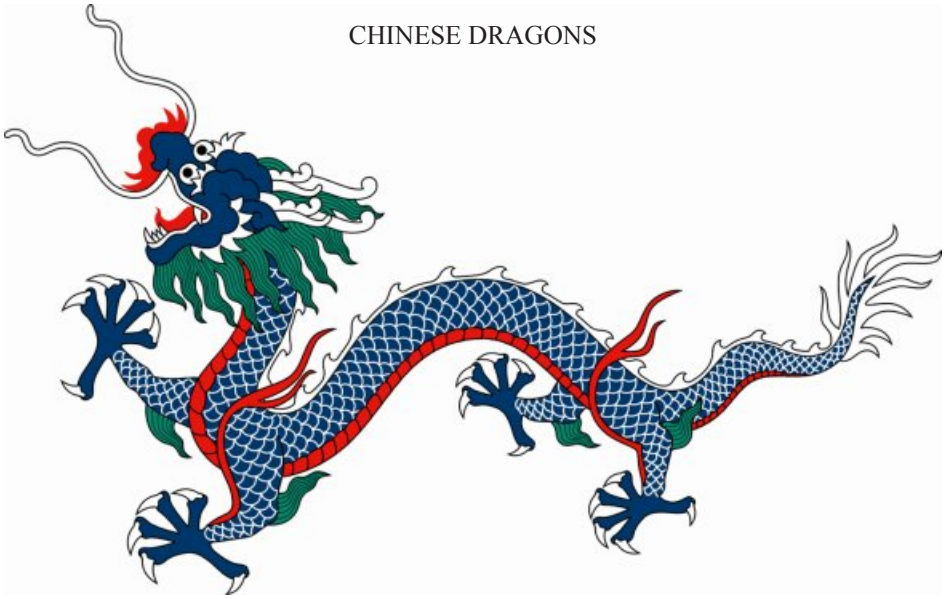

*Figure 2*: a blue Chinese dragon passant. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

(夔), which has only one leg.[10]

This study will focus on the *lóng,* since it corresponds to the heraldic charge known as the 'Chinese dragon' (also known as the Oriental or Asian dragon). The consensus attributes of this monster are that it has a head resembling that of a camel, antlers like those of a deer, eyes reminiscent of a rabbit, the ears of a cow, the neck of a snake, the belly of a frog, scales similar to those of a carp, the claws of a hawk, and the palms of a tiger.[11] The *lóng* is always represented with four legs. A distinction is made between male and female dragons: the horn of the male is undulating, concave, and steep; while the female dragon has a distinctive nasal structure, has rounded pointed horns, and may carry a fan in her tail.[12]

The dragon was depicted during the *Han* Dynasty (206 B.C. to 220 A.D.) with three-clawed feet, and this form of the dragon is first recorded on imperial robes during the *Tang* Dynasty (618-906 A.D.), when it became introduced into Japan, a country which continues to favour this early variant.[13] It was not until the time of the *Yuán* Dynasty (1279-1368) that the Son of Heaven (or Emperor) adopted the dragon with five-clawed feet as his imperial emblem.[14] The number five is commonly linked to the mastery of traditional Chinese elements, namely wood, fire, earth, metal, and water, symbolising the world and, therefore, the universe. It became a crime punishable by death during the *Míng* Dynasty (1368-1644) for anyone other than a member of the immediate imperial family to use the five-clawed dragon.[15] Highly favoured officials and lesser members of

[10] Roy Bates, *All about Chinese dragons* (Morrisville NC, 2007), p. 2.
[11] Williams, 1976, p. 133.
[12] Bates, op. cit., p. 95.
[13] Valery Garrett, *Chinese dress from the Qing Dynasty to the present* (North Clarendon VT, 2007).
[14] Linda Komaroff, *Beyond the legacy of Genghis Khan* (Los Angeles, 2019), pp. 303–324.
[15] C. Ripley, 'The Dragon of China', *The Open Court*, (*1913*), pp. 461–466, on p. 461.

the imperial family could be gifted with the *măng* (蟒) or python robe, which featured a four-clawed dragon. Those who wore the python robe without entitlement, in accordance with the Great Ming Code of 1397, were to be punished with one hundred lashes and three years of penal servitude, while those caught making such a garment illegally were to be beheaded.[16]

During the *Qīng* Dynasty (1644-1912) the use of the five-clawed dragon was extended to princes of the second order, while princes and princesses of the third and fourth order and their consorts wore the four-clawed dragon.[17] Meanwhile, the *măng* came to be worn by an ever-expanding group of courtiers. It was designated for ministers of the first to third rank in 1538, but by the later *Qīng* Dynasty was worn by both civil and military officials down to the ninth rank.[18] Although the garment continued to be called the *mangfu* (mang robe), by the later *Qīng* Dynasty the greater proportion of the imperial court, its eunuchs and mandarins, were wearing the five-clawed dragon (the *lóng).*This came about because the emperor could confer it on anybody he wished, and he gave it to so many individuals that it became difficult to know who was entitled to wear it, and so effective control broke down.[19] The emperor's personal robe, of course, had many other features which marked it out. Beyond the confines of the court, the wider world of the merchant class was permitted to wear the three-clawed dragon.

Notwithstanding the above, the number of claws is also a matter of geography, especially when considering Korea and Japan. Upon the establishment of Buddhism in Korea, the Koreans embraced a four-clawed 'Chinese' dragon. The Koreans and the Japanese subsequently developed a belief that theirs were the original dragons, as characterised by their specific number of claws.[20] During the *Míng* period the Korean kings imitated the practice of the Chinese emperors in adopting the five-clawed dragon.

The end of the monarchy in China soon brought to an end the usage of the dragon as an emblem of authority, but not the profound significance of the dragon to the people of China. We will consider below how the symbolic number of claws might be utilised in the modern world. The Chinese dragon has seen a comparatively late incorporation into heraldry, being first granted to persons and territories associated with or originating from the Far East.[21]

## The Chinese Dragon in Heraldry

Examples have been sought of grants containing the Chinese dragon which have been made by modern heraldic authorities, with a focus on England and Canada. The findings suggest that a better terminology and an enhanced understanding of the Chinese concept of the dragon could be beneficial. Let us take first the College of Arms in London.

[16] BuYun Chen, "Wearing the hat of loyalty: Imperial power and dress reform in Ming Dynasty China", in *The right to dress: sumptuary laws in a global perspective, c.1200–1800* (Cambridge, 2019), pp. 416-434.

[17] Alan Priest and Pauline Simmons, *Chinese textiles* (New York, 1934), pp. 60-61.

[18] Sophie Volpp, 'The gift of a python robe: the circulation of objects in "Jin Ping Mei"', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies,* vol. 65, no. 1 (2005), pp. 133-158.

[19] Garrett, op. cit, pp. 16-17; Chen, op. cit., p. 432.

[20] Bates, op. cit., pp. 94–95.

[21] Henry Bedingfeld & Peter Gwynn-Jones, *Heraldry* (London, 1993), p. 81.


*Figure 3*: arms of Viscount Gough of Goojerat. Source: Wikimedia Commons. The chief of the second and third quarters is an augmentation of honour showing the breached walls of Tarifa in Spain (he was there in 1811) with the badge of the Spanish Order of Charles III suspended therefrom.

## College of Arms grants

According to College records there have been 24 grants of arms, 38 crests, and 24 badges incorporating a Chinese Dragon motif since this charge was first categorised in the 1980s.[22] These are not the earliest instances of the use of the charge in British heraldry. The first such usage known to the author is that of Field Marshal Viscount Hugh Gough of Goojerat (1779-1869), and dates to the 1840s. Gough, who was raised to the peerage as a baron in 1846, and made a viscount in 1849, distinguished himself as a military commander in the Napoleonic Wars before going on to command the British forces in both China and India. He was commander-in-chief in China during the First Opium War (4 September 1839 – 29 August 1842).

His most notable victories are represented by the two supporters of his arms, the lion to the dexter being chained with an eastern crown bearing the word '*Punjab*', while

[22] The author is grateful to Thomas Johnston, Rouge Croix Pursuivant, for extracting this information.


*Figure 4*: arms of the crown colony of Hong Kong 1959-1997.
Source: Wikimedia Commons.

the sinister supporter of the Chinese dragon (said[23] to have been taken from the Chinese imperial flag, **Figure 1b**) is gorged and chained with a mural crown sable, inscribed with the word '*China*' (**Figure 3**). The documented blazon does not mention the number of the dragon's claws, but four claws are shown on the drawing of the achievement reproduced in both Burke and Debrett.

Arguably the most prominent and notable instance of the usage of the Chinese dragon in British heraldry before the 1980s occurs with the coat of arms granted to the crown colony of Hong Kong in 1959, according to a design by Mr. G.C. Hamilton (**Figure 4**).[24] These are blazoned as follows: the arms: *Argent on water barry wavy azure and argent in base two three-masted Chinese junks in full sail bows inwards also proper on a chief embattled gules a naval crown or*; the crest: *On a wreath argent and azure a demi lion or royally crowned proper holding between the paws a pearl also proper*; the supporters: *On the dexter side a lion or royally crowned proper and on the sinister side a Chinese dragon gold*; the motto: "*Hong Kong*."[25]

Although the Chinese dragon artistically depicted in the royal warrant greatly resembles those found in temples across Hong Kong, the grant omits to mention the number of claws, which, as per the design accompanying the grant, are again four

[23] *Burke PB* 1866.
[24] G. C. Hamilton, *Flag badges, seals, and arms of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong, 1963), pp. 37–38.
[25] All official depictions of the armorial achievement have a compartment of grass vert with waves barry wavy azure in base, but this is not mentioned in the blazon of the royal warrant.

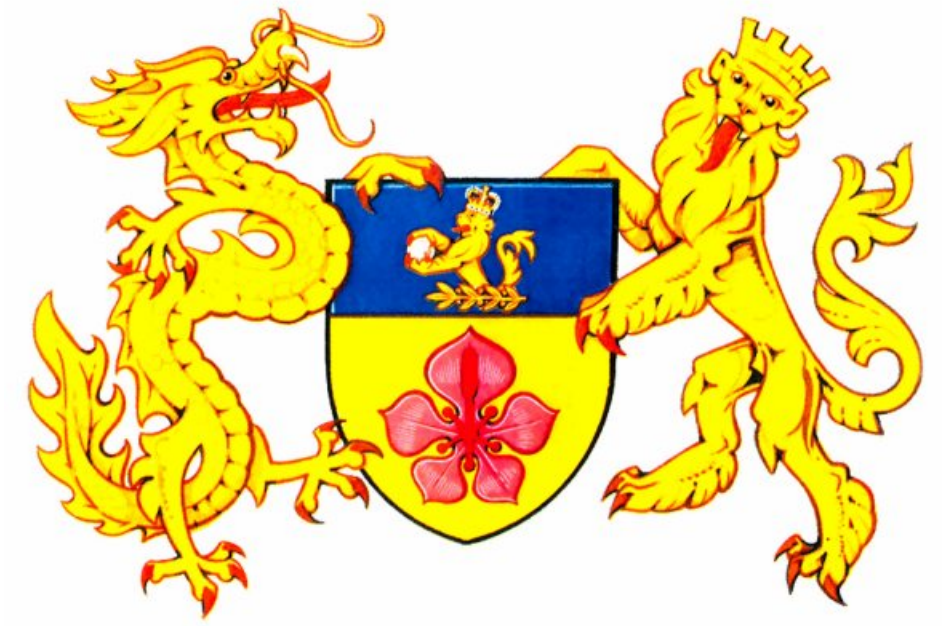

*Figure 5*: arms of the Urban Council of Hong Kong, 1979.
Source: Wikimedia Commons.

in number. The pearl on the crest is an allusion to the fact that Hong Kong was then known as 'The Pearl of the Orient', although it has been suggested that the lion crest has appropriated the pearl from the Chinese dragon and is preferring it to the British lion supporter. Any such impression was avoided in 1979 when the Urban Council of Hong Kong petitioned for arms from the College of Arms (**Figure 5**). In this instance the lion on the chief offers the pearl to the Chinese dragon supporter. Once again the dragon has four claws, the designer being the local educator and artist Kan Tai-Keung (靳埭強).

With three exceptions all College of Arms grants surveyed which feature Chinese dragons have the monster painted with four claws, but without the number of claws being specified in the blazon. Further examples of dragon supporters are those granted to the University of Hong Kong in 1981, and to the Sino-British Fellowship Trust in 1955. In the latter example the dragon is blazoned "proper" and is painted with multiple colours. One must ask what was understood by this instruction, given that the Chinese tradition allocated different tinctures to the dragon depending on the ruling dynasty. There are five possible colour options, as will be detailed below. These refer to the traditional Chinese cardinal points: North, South, East, West and Centre. To complicate matters the dragon might also change its appearance depending on the circumstances in which it finds itself.

One individual who appears to have been granted as a supporter a five-clawed imperial dragon (as was drawn, but not so specified in the blazon) was Sir Robert Hart, Bart., G.C.M.G. (1835-1911). As inspector general of the Chinese Imperial Customs he came to be highly valued by the imperial family, and was awarded various honours, including the 'double dragon', and the ancestral rank of First Class for three generations,

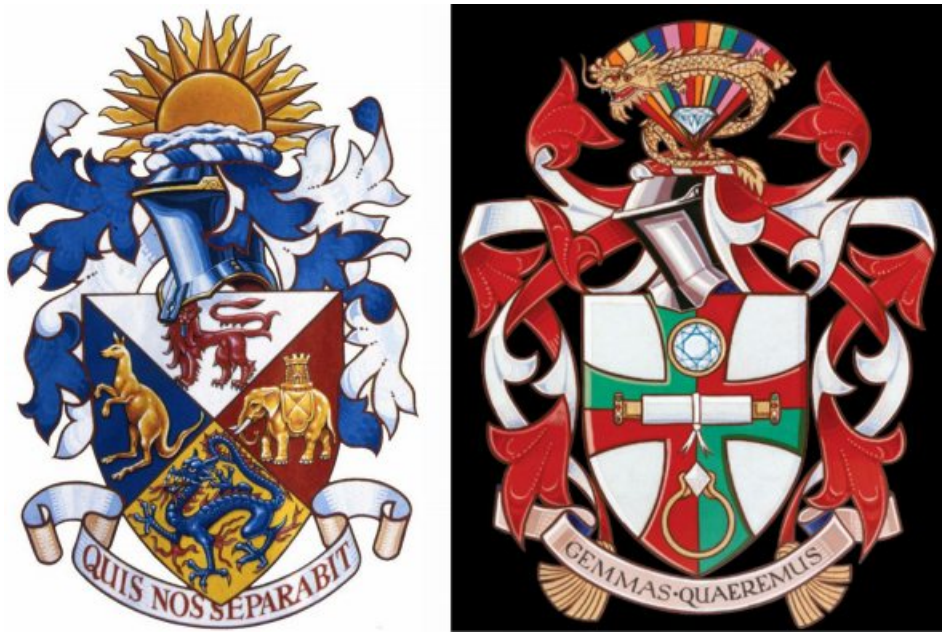


*Figure 6*, left, 6a: arms of the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company; right, 6b: arms of the Gemmological Association of Hong Kong. Both from heraldry-wiki.com

by the Chinese emperor.[26] He thus had the usage of the five-clawed dragon, and it was natural for this to be used as one of his supporters after he became entitled to use them in 1889 on becoming G.C.M.G. He was made a baronet in 1893.[27]

A fine example of the use of a dragon as a charge on the shield is that of the Peninsular and Oriental (P & O) Steam Navigation Company, granted in 1937, and having in base a four-clawed Chinese dragon azure (**Figure 6a**). There is a second example of a five-clawed Imperial Chinese dragon granted on a crest, being that of the *Gemmological Association of Hong Kong*, granted on April 18, 1990 (**Figure 6b**). The crest is blazoned: *An Imperial Chinese dragon rampant and undulant or supporting with both foreclaws and enfiled on a fan of fourteen segments respectively gules tenne or vert azure purpure gules tenne or vert azure purpure gules and sable thereon in base a diamond brilliant cut in profile proper.* As for the reason as to why an Imperial Chinese dragon was assigned to an association, the author was not able to find a reason. As to whether the attitude of undulant is the most appropriate, given that Chinese dragons are by default represented as undulant, the author shall address this matter further in this paper.

Of five other non-corporate grants surveyed, one of the dragons has three visible

[26] *Burke PB* 1915.

[27] His letters patent are now Queens University Belfast MS 15/8, and date to 1901.

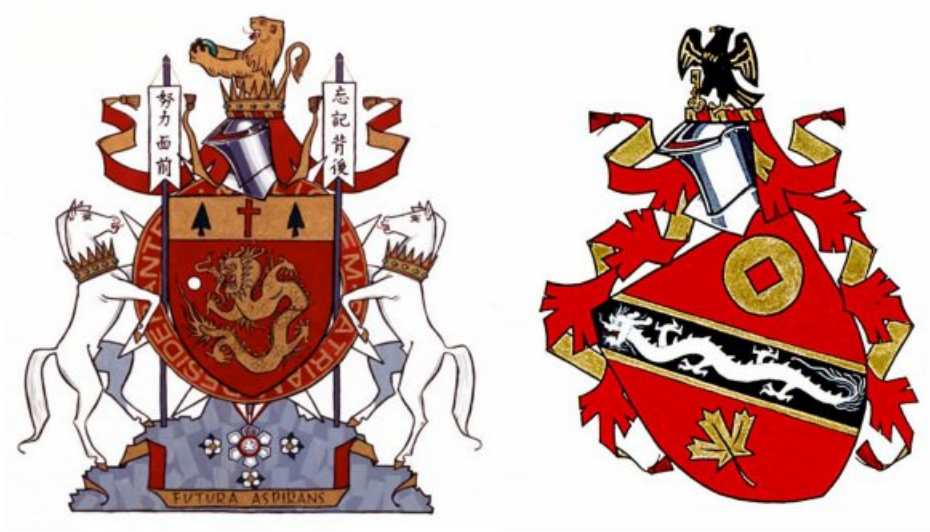


*Figure 7*, left:7a: arms of David See-Chai Lam; right, 7b: arms of Derwin James Kah Wai Mak. Both by gracious permission of the Canadian Heraldic Authority.

claws, and the remainder have four.[28] In general the College of Arms has avoided using five claws, this being a sign of imperial authority, while adhering to a customary approach of refraining from explicitly describing the number of claws in a Chinese dragon. This effectively means that it becomes a matter for the herald painter's discretion.

## Canadian Heraldic Authority Grants

Canada has a tradition of embracing emblems from other cultures, and the Chinese dragon is to be found in the *Public Register of Arms, Flags, and Badges of Canada* in all the main heraldic contexts, as a charge, a crest, a supporter, and as a badge.[29] It has been confirmed to the author by Alix Chartrand, Saguenay Herald, that as with the College of Arms there exists no official position on the number of claws the Chinese dragon can have.

The earliest entry alluding to a Chinese dragon in the *Public Register* is that of the Honourable David See-Chai Lam, 25th Governor of British Columbia, dated August 28, 1989 (**Figure 7a**). His shield is blazoned as follows: *Gules a Chinese dragon or reaching for a pearl argent on a chief or a Latin cross gules between two pine trees vert*. No mention is made of the Chinese dragon's attitude nor the number of its claws, although the dragon depicted in the letters patent possesses five claws, in a possible reference to the vice-regal office of the armiger.

[28] Those with four claws are Geoff Kingman-Sugars (March 25, 1981, and also Bureau of Heraldry (South Africa), certificate 3442, July 30, 2004); Jonathan Frederick Moon (29 April 2019, Grants 182/77); Baron West of Spithead (demi-dragon crest); and Nicholas Marnit Schaerf (5 February 2021, Grants 183/146). The example with three claws is to John Terry (12 November 2019, Grants 182/200). The author is grateful to Rouge Croix Pursuivant for these examples.

[29] The Register may be seen online at www.gg.ca/en/heraldry/public-register.

| The Chinese Dragon in Canadian Heraldry | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Armiger** | **Device Type** | **Number of Claws Depicted** | **Attitude** | **Notes on Blazon** |
| David See-chai Lam 1989 | Charge | 5 | Reaching for an object | Blazon does not mention the number of claws |
| Derwin James Kah Wai Mak 1990 | Charge | 3 | Passant | Blazon mentions the number of claws |
| Fung Fai Lam 1998 | Charge | 3 | (Not blazoned) | Blazon mentions the number of claws and legs |
| Royal Roads University 1998 | Supporter | 4 | (Not blazoned) | Blazon does not mention the number of claws |
| Kwantlen Polytechnic University 1999 | Charge | 3 | Rampant respectant all | Blazon does not mention the number of claws |
| Neville George Poy 2004 | Crest | 4 | (Not blazoned) | Blazon does not mention the number of claws |
| Norman Lim Kwong 2007 | Upper half of the supporters (Lim dragons) | 4 | (Not blazoned) | Blazon does not mention the number of claws |
| John Francis Archibald Pyke 2010 | Crest and badge | 4 | (Not blazoned) | Blazon does not mention the number of claws |
| Wong's Benevolent Association 2011 | Charge | 4 | Naiant | Blazon does not mention the number of claws |
| Jonathan Morissette 2014 | Charge and badge | 4 | (Not blazoned) | Blazon does not mention the number of claws or the dragon type (Western vs. Chinese). |
| Brandt Channing Louie 2022 | Charge and badge | 3 | Combatant (rampant) | Blazon does not mention the number of claws |

*Table 1*: grants of Chinese dragons made by the Canadian Heraldic Authority.

Of subsequent grants, only two have specified the number of claws, in both cases with respect to three-clawed dragons. The first of these was a grant dated March 20, 1990 (**Figure 7b**) to chartered accountant and author, Mr.Derwin James Kah Wai Mak, whose shield was blazoned: *Gules on a bend sable fimbriated or between in chief a bezant pierced square and in base a maple leaf or a three-clawed Chinese dragon passant argent langued gules*. The grantee recalls the specificity of this matter on his website: "The Chief Herald of Canada did not let my imperial pretensions get too far… [he] explicitly blazoned the dragon to have three claws (that is, three toes per paw)."


*Figure 8*, left, 8a: Dragon rampant from the Chinese Dragon Banner, source: Wikimedia Commons; right, 8b: the badge of H.M.S./M Scorcher with dragon passant ©Royal Navy Research Archive.

The second three-clawed grant was made eight years later, on March 9, 1998, to Mr Fung Fai Lam, with differenced versions to Sann Grace Lam and Kakay Lam. The shield was blazoned: *Gules a four-legged Chinese dragon, each leg with three claws grasping between the foreclaws a film sprocket or pierced of the field charged with a television picture tube or*. On no subsequent grants were the number of claws (drawn as either three or four) specified in the blazon, as detailed on **Table 1**.

## A Proposal for the harmonization of the number of claws

In the grants that we have seen there has been a lack of consistency in the number of dragon claws specified. The number of claws officially granted ought to accurately reflect the status of the armiger, and might subsequently be modified to reflect any change of status.

**Five Claws**

Just as the five-clawed dragon was reserved for the imperial court in China, it would be fitting for the highest echelons of societal hierarchy to bear this charge. It should thus appertain to royal families, to high-ranking representatives of the Crown: Regents, Counsellors of State, Governors-General, Lieutenant Governors, Lord Lieutenants; and by extension, to bodies corporate established under a Royal Charter.

**Four Claws**

Although the usage of the four-clawed dragon almost disappeared in the later Chinese imperial court, the legal basis which designated who should wear the *măng* dragon remained in force. It should appertain to high-ranking armigers not directly representing


*Figure 9*, left, 9a: arms of Wong's Benevolent Association, by gracious permission of the Canadian Heraldic Authority; right, 9b: bronze lion sejant of the Jīn Dynasty (1115-1235) in the Saint Louis Art Museum, source: Wikimedia Commons.

the crown, where deemed appropriate by the competent heraldic authority. This group would include those with noble descents, knights or dames of officially recognised orders of chivalry; members of the Cabinet/ Privy Council; ambassadors; and judges.

**Three Claws**

A three-clawed dragon, accessible and widespread in its Chinese representation, would be ideal for the broader base of armigers, denoting their honour without the specific distinctions of royalty, peerage, or other high rank in society.

## A Proposed scheme for the blazoning of the Chinese Dragon

Certain positions of the Chinese dragon have equivalence to those of the Western heraldic dragon, but since the Chinese variety is so long and sinuous it can adopt attitudes which are unique to itself, and it would be helpful to have recognised blazons for these. A possible scheme is proposed below, beginning with the terms which are already in existence.

**Chinese dragon rampant (Figure 8a)**

This has been the attitude generally employed when the dragon is used as a supporter, and should probably be regarded as the default representation wherever the attitude has not been specified in the blazon.

**Chinese dragon passant** (**Figure 2**)

Being a water creature the Chinese dragon is as likely to be swimming as it is to be walking (passant), but the two attitudes are almost interchangeable in the context of a heraldic depiction. It is proposed that a Chinese dragon passant should be depicted in a way that conveys the idea of walking with the dexter paw raised, similar to that of a lion or a talbot passant. A Chinese dragon passant occurs in British naval heraldry as the H.M.S./M Scorcher's heraldic insignia (**Figure 8b**).

*Figure 10*, top left, 10a: Dragon globular on the banner of Neil Thompson, source, Chinese-armorial.com. The remaining images are from the Nine Dragons Screen in front of the Palace of Tranquil Longevity in Beijing, source: Wikimedia Commons. Top right, 10b: *dragon à la cour*; bottom left, 10c: *dragon à la cour atteindre queue inferieure*; bottom right, 10d: *dragon à la cour atteindre queue superieure*.

**Chinese dragon naiant**

This blazon is found on the Canadian grant to Wong's Benevolent Association (**Figure 9a**) in which the swimming dragon can be seen to be embowed. There would be no distinction between a dragon naiant and volant given the nature of its movement in both air and water.

**Chinese dragon sejant**

A suitable model for a sitting dragon would be the Jīn Dynasty bronze shown in **Figure 9b.**

**Chinese dragon globular**

This blazon was introduced by Michael O'Comain, the Irish Herald of Arms in 2018 for the arms of Neil Thomson (**Figure 10a** [30]) to describe a Chinese dragon passant whose body is embowed almost in a circular shape.

[30] Office of the Chief Herald of Ireland, July 17, 2018. Volume Aa Folio 91.

*Figure 11*, dragons descending from Heaven, left, 7a: a bronze of the Tang dynasty; right, 11b: a nineteenth century wood block engraving, both from Wikimedia Commons.

**Chinese dragon à la cour**

This is how the dragon is most commonly depicted in Chinese imperial artwork i.e. 'in the court', notably on the front of the court robe (**Figure 10b**). The head is affronté, the limbs splayed, and the body curved into a reversed C-shape, either circling a (flaming) pearl or not. The tail and its tip are somewhere in the dexter flank of the shield.

**Chinese dragon à la cour atteindre**

Variations of the standard imperial court dragon have the monster facing to sinister or dexter and reaching (atteindre) for a pearl. There are two sub-variants of these, queue superieure (tail uppermost) and queue inferieure (tail lowermost) as seen in **Figure 10 c and d**. The latter posture is seen on the shield of David See-Chai Lam (Figure 7a).

**Chinese dragon cadent**

Another common depiction of the Chinese dragon in traditional artwork is that of the animal descending (cadent means falling) from Heaven. Examples are provided in Figure of an ancient bronze example, and of a nineteenth century engraving.

**Chinese dragon glissant**

The dragon gliding in the manner of a snake would be an appropriate description when the monster is compressed in fess, in bend or in pale, as in the arms of Derwin James Kah Wai Mak (**Figure 7b**).

## Metals, tinctures and the Chinese dragon

Usually, Canadian heraldry depicts the Chinese dragon in Or, while British heraldry also makes use of azure and gules, or of multiple tinctures. In Chinese thought, as at the imperial court, there are five cardinal colours of Chinese dragons based on the Five Elements of Earth (Or), Fire (gules), Wood (azure/vert[31]), Metal (argent) and Water (sable), in accordance with the principles of Yin and Yang. There are also links with the seasons, and with particular emotions which are complex and beyond the scope of this paper. Some of the associations of the five colours of dragons are as follows:[32]

1. The Azure Dragon, also known as the Blue-Green Dragon (青龍-*Qīnglóng*) or Green Dragon (蒼龍-*Cānglóng*), is revered as the deity representing the eastern direction and symbolising the essence of spring. This dragon is perhaps one of the most revered dragons, as it is part of the Four Auspicious Beasts (四象-*Sìxiàng*), along with the north's Black Tortoise, the south's Vermillion Bird, and the west's White Tiger. The Four Auspicious Beasts are mentioned as heraldic animals on war flags in the Book of Rites (禮記-*Lǐjì*), a collection of texts describing the social forms, administration, and ceremonial rites of the *Zhōu* Dynasty. The Azure dragon was the national heraldic animal featured in the national flag (1889-1912) during the *Qīng* Dynasty and was later integrated as one of the symbols featuring the Twelve Symbols national emblem (**Figure 12**) that represented the Republic of China and the Empire of China from 1913 to 1928.

2. The Red Dragon, also known as *Chìlóng* (赤龍) or *Zhūlóng* (朱龍) in Chinese, is associated with the southern region and is regarded as the embodiment of the summer season. Emperors of the *Míng* Dynasty favoured the red dragon as their heraldic device.[33]

3. The White Dragon, known as *Báilóng* (白龍) in Chinese, represents the western direction and symbolises the spirit of autumn.

4. The Yellow Dragon, known as *Huánglóng* (黃龍) in Chinese, stands for both earth and the centre of all things. Emperors of the *Qīng* Dynasty favoured the yellow, or golden, dragon as their heraldic device.

5. The Black Dragon, known as *Hēilóng* (黑龍) in Chinese, is linked to the northern region and symbolises the essence of winter.

[31] Blue and green share the same symbolism since the first is often considered, in China, as a shade of the latter.

[32] K.S.Tom, *Echoes from old China: Life, legends, and lore of the middle kingdom* (Honolulu, 1989), p. 55.

[33] L. N. Hayes, *The Chinese Dragon* (Shanghai, 1922), p. 51.

*Figure 12*: The Twelve Symbols national emblem which depicts the Azure dragon and the pheasant-phoenix. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

## Conclusion

In the context of medieval European origins, we find the dragon in British heraldry as emblematic of authority, courage, and safeguarding, and also as a formidable opponent to be vanquished. The Chinese dragon is associated with a whole realm of quite different cultural meanings which must be explored sensitively in order to avoid conveying unwanted messages; but notwithstanding, its addition to the heraldic milieu opens up exciting opportunities.[34]

[34] The author would like to acknowledge the input and guidance of Dr Paul Fox in the writing of this paper.