

# 2024 Year of the Wood Dragon

by Fred Pritchard

Similar to Christmas stamps, countries have created philatelic products for use on greeting cards and holiday mail celebrating the Chinese Lunar New Year which occurs on the second New Moon after the Winter Solstice. A topical collection reflects interesting aspects of Eastern culture and fine art. Of the animals named by the Buddha to represent each of the 12 years in the Chinese calendar cycle, the mystical dragon is considered to be the most powerful.

## Early Issues

Viet Nam issued 4 airmail stamps depicting a dragon in 1952, a dragon year but not specifically a Lunar New Year stamp. It was 1964 when the first stamps appeared in Japan and Ryukyu Islands for use on domestic mail celebrating the Year of the Dragon holiday.



Viet Nam 1952



## Born a Dragon

“Dragon babies” are considered to be extremely lucky. Birth rates are highest in Eastern Buddhist countries during Years of the Dragon. “Dragons” are ambitious, strong, energetic, self-confident, intelligent, determined, impatient and critical.

## Philatelic Dragon Art

Images of dragons invite exceptional artistry in design and innovation in printing.



Canada 2000 souvenir sheet

Created by Canadians Ken Fung and Samuel Tseng the classical Chinese dragon design was embroidered by artists at the Punchline Embroidery Center in Vancouver, photographed by Clinton Hussey and printed by Ashton-Potter Canada using 10 colour lithography.

## The Five Elements

A second cycle of 5 items critical to life and reflecting additional qualities overlays each of the 12 Chinese zodiac signs to create 60 unique Lunar New Year horoscopes. Shown below are examples of stamps issued during each Year of the Dragon element.

### Wood

1964, 2024  
bold  
enthusiastic  
imaginative



Viet Nam 2023

### Fire

1976  
expressive  
warm-hearted  
generous



Hong Kong 1976

### Earth

1988  
practical  
reliable  
honest



Hong Kong 1988

### Metal

2000  
strong  
intense  
hard-working



China 2000

### Water

1952, 2012  
creative  
sensitive  
reflective



China Taiwan 2012

## The Eastern Dragon Image

Eastern dragons are usually depicted as snake-like with four legs and large camel-shaped head, often holding a pearl from which it derives power including flight. Normally friendly to humans, if irritated they are believed to cause destructive storms.



China 1988  
Friendly Dragon



Singapore 2000  
Fire, Flight and Pearls



United States 2012  
Large Colorful Head

## European Dragons Differ

Chinese dragons are wise, generous and powerful creatures who are good luck symbols often worshipped as gods. In contrast dragons of European legends from Beowulf to St. George are beasts to be feared. As such they are depicted as dinosaur-like fire-breathing monsters with scaly bodies, two or four legs, beards or manes, a spiked tail and often wings.



Serbia 2012  
Dinosaur with Wings

## The Dragon's Evolving Image

As more countries issue stamps celebrating the Year of the Dragon some of the recent images appear more aggressive. In addition, legendary monsters from other cultures are now appearing on stamps celebration the Year of the Dragon. Are friendly dragons no longer a valued image for such a culturally auspicious lunar year?



Japan 1988  
Origami and Toy Dragon



Philippines 1999  
Bakunawa - Giant Sea Serpent



China 2012  
Fierce Dragon



New Zealand 2000 souvenir sheet