

A Study of the Bionic Imagery of Dragon Totem Jade Carving and Its Aesthetic Connotations

Ke Xu¹, Yajuan Liu^{1*}

¹ Liaoning University of Science and Technology, Liaoning, China

Email Address

414633286@qq.com (Xu Ke), 316765290@qq.com (Yajuan Liu)

*Correspondence: 316765290@qq.com

Received: 4 July 2023; Accepted: 23 July 2023; Published: 16 October 2023

Abstract:

Totems are words symbols, and carriers of the soul, and the dragon totem, as a symbol of the Chinese nation, has a unique cultural connotation and represents the deepest cultural heritage of the Chinese nation. The primitive ancestors extracted natural elements from figurative or abstract perspectives, and through artistic processing and re-creation, gave the objects a special artistic culture, i.e. breathing life into jade carving through bionic design techniques. The dragon totem not only carries the traditional Chinese symbolic aesthetic but also expresses a unique pictorial aesthetic, with a very strong and vivid aesthetic connotation, which is a strong expression of Chinese aesthetic emotion.

Keywords:

Dragon Totems, Jade Art, Totem Worship, Bionic Imagery

1. Totem Worship and the Origin of Dragon Totems

The term totem was introduced into China only a hundred years ago, but the phenomenon of totemic culture has existed in the Chinese nation for thousands of years. Ancient peoples believed themselves to be sons of nature, like all things, and the worship of nature led to the creation of totems. In the early days of totemism, the patterns were a representation of the worship of specific animals and plants in the natural world, the core of which was the totemic concept of the ancestors, a concrete expression of their imagination and creativity. Believing in the supernatural power of totems, they were carved into jade in the hope of gaining the protection of their ancestors and the gods they believed in. From archaeological excavations it is believed that totems began in matrilineal societies, i.e. in the middle and late Palaeolithic, up to patrilineal clan societies, when, through constant work and efforts to improve productivity, the ancestors gradually developed an increasingly independent consciousness in the progress of society, and with this independent consciousness, in their daily work and ordinary life, the ancestors gradually discovered that they were not related to these plants and animals. The first humans gradually realised that they were not related to these plants and animals. The cult of

totemism began to wane but did not disappear, and patterns were formed throughout history and culture, the most representative of which is the long-standing ‘dragon totem’ pattern. As a product of ancestor worship, the dragon totem was given as a symbol of divinity or divine power and represents the deepest cultural heritage of the Chinese people with its unique cultural connotations, as well as the harmony and symbiosis of a multi-ethnic totem culture.

Wen Yiduo was the first to propose the ‘dragon totem theory’, saying in his *Fuxi Kao* that the dragon is a virtual creature that only exists in totems and not in the biological world and that the dragon totem is a synthesis of many weak units that merge and assimilate [1], so we also think of it as a bionic form of artistic design made of images. As a carrier of the dragon totem motif, jade inherits cultural elements on the one hand, and as a symbolic element on the other, it has unique consciousness properties. The shape of dragon jade wares first changed from simple abstract lines to complex imagery bionic forms such as hooked cloud wares and toothed animal-faced wares, and then gradually developed into a more national and aesthetic totemic culture. “The motives for imitating natural forms, in terms of the essential attributes of human life, are generally of two kinds: those based on religious motives, such as faith and worship, and those aimed at expressing a certain meaning, as well as those based on hobbies and aesthetic positions”. [2] Image-imitation design is meant to satisfy the human desire to imitate nature and express the beauty of objects in jade. Digging deeper into its connotations, the imagery of the dragon totem is mainly expressed in cultural thinking and behavior.

Cultural thinking requires us to explore our understanding of national cultures and beliefs on the basis of religious beliefs and nature worship. The well-structured character for ‘dragon’ in the oracle bone inscriptions of the Yin ruins dates back to a distant prehistoric culture when in ancient times the dragon was born from the ‘feeling of the sky’ and used by the Fuxi clan as a chronicle of events. As a product of the fusion of the Chinese clans during the time of war, the dragon form not only contains figurative imitations but also gradually emerges as an imaginary imitation. As the totem of the ancient clans, the dragon is not only the essence of culture but also a national symbol. It is a manifestation of the power of tolerance in the process of cultural integration. The various elements of different clan cultures are combined to form the overall symbol of the dragon totem. The *Shanhaijing* also records the gods with “dragon bodies and human faces”, or “the yellow descendants of Yan”. The dragon totem is a cultural symbol, a national totem image, born out of national culture and beliefs. The Dragon Totem has changed over the millennia of history, dynastic changes, and frequent wars, but it is the existence of the Dragon Totem that has kept civilization alive, and it is the power of the totem that has the power to rally and unite the Chinese nation. The Dragon Totem is a symbol of national culture, a spiritual blend of agrarian civilization, and a spiritual belief rooted in the Chinese people.

The carved jade dragon totem was originally worn by shamans as a religious ritual object but was transformed into a tool to imbue the spirit of the nation and control its thoughts. In ancient times, ethics and class status were valued, and the different shapes of the ornaments were used to divide people into classes, which was the actual purpose of making the objects. The carved jade dragon totem gradually became a powerful tool to indicate social hierarchy and the concept of power, and the implications of kingship became more profound. The form and subject matter of carved jade dragon totems also diversified, with carvings of dragons giving birth to nine sons, dragons, and phoenixes, symbols of fertility and vitality, representing not

only a symbol of kingship but also a sacred beast that brought good fortune to the public. The ‘True Dragon Son of Heaven’ was established during the Han Dynasty and has been worshipped by many dynasties since, and the idea of the dragon has been part of Chinese culture for thousands of years. The dragon totem is not just a totem of ancient clans, it is the essence of Chinese culture and a national symbol. Over time, the bionic jade carving forms of the dragon totem has been refined, demonstrating the power of tolerance in the process of national cultural integration. The various elements of different clan cultures are combined to form an overall cultural symbol. The Dragon Totem has changed over the millennia of history, dynastic changes, and frequent wars, and it is because of the Dragon Totem that national civilizations have been sustained, and it is because of the power of the totem as a rallying and cohesive force that it has been able to unite the Chinese nation. It is because of the power of the totem that it is able to unite the Chinese people. It is, therefore, a symbol of national culture, a spiritual blend of agrarian civilization rooted in the spiritual beliefs of the Chinese people.

2. An Analysis of the Art form of Dragon Totems Carved in Jade

‘Form’ and ‘attitude’ are the common components of the jade form of the dragon totem, where ‘form’ refers to the outline and external characteristics of the dragon totem in a particular visual perspective, time, and environment. The ‘form’ refers to the outline and external characteristics of the carved dragon in a particular visual angle, time, and environment. The ‘form’ is the sum of the ‘form’ of the jade dragon at the same level and angle, and is the grasp of the jade dragon totem as a whole, the form subject to change by subjective consciousness, that is, by time, culture and meaning. Artistic forms follow the requirements and laws of beauty. The characteristics of living creatures are not invariable, and there are individual differences in their forms; biological behavior can also be composed of different forms, so it is important to recognize their regularity and summarise their most characteristic and regular artistic forms in the dragon totem model.

The most representative of dragon totem jade carvings is the jade dragon of the Hongshan culture, which has a curved shape, a long-closed snout, a protruding nose, an upturned rib, a flattened end, two side-by-side nostrils, long hairs on the neck, and a pointed and curling tail. [3] Morphologically, the long-closed snout resembles the long hyena of a wild boar, and the protruding snout and side-by-side nostrils are also a figurative imitation of the wild boar. The worship of the wild boar during the Xinglongwa period had certain totemic meanings, and the scholar Guo Dashun has argued that there was a “Jade Dragon” or “Jade Pig Dragon”, and that the long hyena on the neck of the Jade Dragon was also recorded in the Book of Rites as a “rite of passage to the ancestral temple”. The most characteristic feature of the wild boar image is the pig’s bristle, which is carried over into the shape of the dragon totem. The ‘shape’ of the cult also shifted from the solidity of the boar to an abstract form, during which the Jade Dragon was born, the gestation period of the Dragon Totem culture. (Figure 1)

As a product of the fusion of Chinese clans during the Warring States period, the dragon differs from the earliest jade dragon forms in its single, simple form, as the imaginary organism ‘jade pig dragon’ no longer satisfied the ancients’ aspirations for divine power and strength. The changes in the dragon totem form also depended on the ancient ancestors’ perception of the structure of the creature, which existed universally in living things, like the perception of the fish, which was thought to have

scales so that it could swim, and the claws of a bird so that it could soar like an eagle. Thus the structure of the Dragon Totem gradually changed from a single creature to one that combined the characteristics of many creatures. The ancestors wanted the dragon totem to have the divine power of wind, rain, thunder and lightning; the claws of an eagle so that it could fly in the clouds; and scales so that it could swim. This combination is what Mr Wen Yiduo believes in his article "Fuxi Kao": The dragon is the snake, and the snake is the little dragon. After the Snake Clan annexed other clans, it absorbed many other totem clans of various shapes and sizes, and only then did the snake get the four legs of the beast, the head of the horse, the tail of the hyena, the horns of the deer, the claws of the dog, and the scales and whiskers of the fish. [3] "Thus the dragon totem gradually became an open and constantly new form, changing under the influence of different times and cultures.



Figure 1. Red Mountain Culture Jade Dragon.

The perception of dragon totem art forms is an inside-out, surface-to-surface process that involves the learning of form awareness, biological cognition, and the recognition of biological structure and beauty. Under the influence of various creatures, the primitive ancestors became more and more profound in their understanding of bionic change, and the resulting bionic Dragon Totem designs gradually diversified.

3. Conclusions

The bionic imagery of dragon totem jade carving is mainly based on the aesthetic direction of exploring various biological forms to express one's pursuit and worship on the basis of exploring natural beauty. With the progress of human society and the continuous development of civilisation, the dragon totem has created different bionic artistic languages with different pictorial characteristics at different times, and combined with the needs of society at that time, thus expressing different cultural characteristics and aesthetic emotions. This paper focuses on the aesthetic connotations of dragon totem jade carvings.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

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