



Ancient Chinese Wisdom : Dragons

生肖成語：神龍活現

Written by Xue Lin and illustrated by ARU

文：林 雪 / 圖：周佳偉

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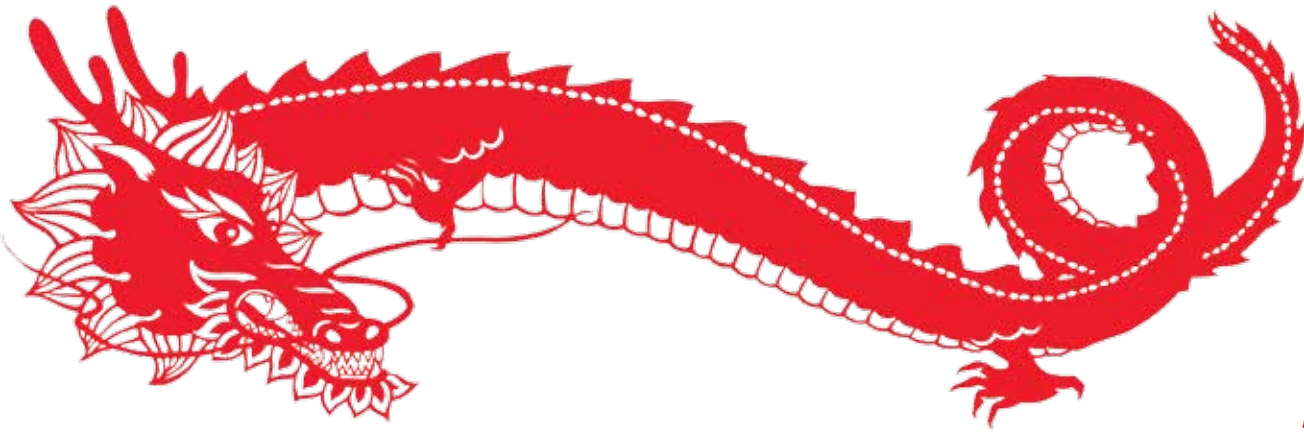
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山不在高，有仙則名，水不在深，有龍則靈。
- 唐 劉禹錫 (772-842)

It doesn't matter whether or not the mountain is high; the mountain will become famous if it is the home of an immortal being. It doesn't matter whether or not the water is deep; the water will be magical if a dragon makes his home there.

Yu Xi Liu (772-842), Tang Dynasty

The Chinese Dragons

The Chinese people have always thought of dragons as friendly and familiar animals, though in fact dragons cannot be seen in real life. A dragon is an imaginary or mythical animal, the only imaginary creature among the twelve animal year signs of the Chinese calendar. Dragons are miraculous beings with boundless magical powers. They are like gods, but they also have human characteristics. However, they are highly respected by Chinese people who feel that dragons are always close to them in their daily lives.

龍的象徵

龍，在中國人的感覺裏是既熟悉又親切的動物，是十二生肖中唯一在現實生活裡見不到的神祕屬肖，是一種虛幻神奇、法力無邊的靈物，不僅具有神性，也具有人性，一直被當作神獸受到人們的尊崇，始終與人們的生活息息相關。

龙

龍 是古人對一些具有鱗、爪、角、鬚、尾、鱗等特徵的動物，以及雲霧、雷電、虹霓等某些自然天象，組合而產生的神物，於是，龍在人們的想像中，擁有各式各樣超凡的神力。在傳說中，龍能顯、能隱、能短、能長、能大、能小、能飛、能游、能潛、能走，在天上則騰雲駕霧、下海則追波逐浪、在人間則呼風喚雨，無所不能，人們因此對龍產生崇拜和敬畏。

古代帝王就利用人們對龍崇拜和敬畏的心理，刻意將「皇帝」與「龍」連結，認為自己是「授命於天」，是代表上天管理人間的，是百分之百的「真龍天子」，因而「龍」成為「帝王皇權」的象徵。元世祖忽必烈，甚至限定五爪龍為皇帝專用，其他大臣及皇族，只能用四爪的龍。在臺灣，許多廟宇裡的龍柱、雕像或畫像，所刻或畫的龍，都是四爪或三爪的龍。

從此，人們不僅把龍當神物崇拜，而「龍」也因此成為中國傳統文化中，權勢、高貴、尊榮的象徵，至今更是幸運和成功的標誌。

A dragon's body would have the features of many animals, such as horns, claws and scales, and so a dragon could do many things as well. It could fly, swim, dive and run and change its size. It could even become invisible. Dragons could make thunder, lightning and rain and cause floods. They could fly between clouds and fog in the sky, move with waves in the sea, and command winds and rain on the earth. Therefore people greatly admired and respected the all-powerful dragons.

Because people held the dragons in such great awe, the emperors identified themselves with dragons and claimed to have been appointed by the Heaven and to be the true 'Dragons' to rule the world as 'Sons of the Heavens'. Dragons became symbols of the power of Chinese emperors. In the Yuan Dynasty a law was made that only the emperor could use an image of a dragon with five claws. Everyone else was allowed to use only images with four claws. In Taiwanese temples most carvings and paintings of dragons have only three or four claws.

People worshipped dragons both as supernatural beings and as symbols of power, dignity and glory. Today, however, dragons have become signs of good fortune and success.

古 人認為龍是雷雨之神，掌管興雲佈雨的工作，能普賜甘霖，造福大地，也能氾濫成災，危害生靈，這種能降災和賜福的特性，讓科學文明不發達時代中的老祖先們，又敬又畏，因而「龍王治水」成了古代民間普遍的信仰，到處都有供奉龍王的廟宇。每逢風雨失調，久旱不雨或久雨不停時，民眾都要到龍王廟燒香祈願，以求風調雨順。而在祈雨祭神的過程中，人們除了將人間美食敬獻給神靈，讓其享用，也會模擬龍騰躍、翻滾、盤迴、聳立等的各種姿態舞動，既彰顯龍的力量，也表示自己具備了龍的神性，進一步能夠「神龍活現」。

演變到後來，每逢節日慶典活動中，經常可看到「舞龍」的表演，給節慶增添了許多熱鬧、歡欣的氣氛，呈現普天同慶、國泰民安的祥瑞景象。

In ancient times people thought dragons were gods who controlled the weather and so could bring either blessings or disasters. Therefore people not only respected dragons, but feared them too. There was a belief that the **Dragon King Tames the Water**. Temples for the Dragon Kings were built in many places so that people could pray and offer food to the Dragon Kings at times when the weather was either too dry or too wet. The worshippers also imitated the dragons' movements: prancing, rolling, weaving and strutting to show that the people had acquired the characteristics of dragons in order to **Bring the Magical Dragons Alive**.

Today this practice has become the Chinese Dragon Dance, performed at various festivals to add more joy and happiness to the festive atmosphere. Dragons are now seen just as good luck signs to take us into a secure and happy world.





The dragon boat festival may have developed from dragon worship too. Ancient people believed that a grand race of dragon boats would send the good wishes of the people to the dragons in the heaven and in the sea. Then, when **Great Satisfaction Fills the Dragon's Heart**, fine weather was sure to come to bring good harvests. The dragon boat race made the people feel happy also because they had the 'spirit of the dragon' and were **Agile as a Roaming Dragon**.

In later years, the dragon boat race was mistakenly said to be in memory of an honest poet who drowned himself two thousand years ago; this may be because people thought that the poet's outstanding goodness was as holy as that of a dragon.

另外，端午節的「龍舟競渡」，可能是由遠古時候的祭龍儀式演變來的，人們相信，通過聲勢浩大的龍舟競賽，能使天上、水中的神龍心神感應而「龍心大悅」，保佑風調雨順，五穀豐收，同時，也使人們覺得自身具有「龍性」，能「矯若游龍」。

但後來被附會傳說成是為了紀念投汨羅江而死的屈原，大概人們感覺身為「人傑」的屈原，和龍的「神性」有相通一致的地方吧。





中國古人，把認為神聖、尊貴、威武等氣勢非凡的事物，都用「龍」來表示，像漢代名將李廣，被稱為「龍城飛將」；金陵的地勢險要，被形容為「龍蟠虎踞」。

另外，凡是良好美善的事物，也用「龍」來稱讚它，像張旭的草書被比喻為「龍飛鳳舞」；《世說新語》中形容風采出眾、儀表不凡的嵇（ㄐㄧ）康為「龍章鳳姿」。總之，在龍的身上，匯集了人們美好的願望，所以也常把世間的傑出人物稱為「人中之龍」，在史籍上，被稱為「龍」的高士賢人很多，像三國時代的諸葛亮，世稱「臥龍」。

Ancient Chinese used the word 'dragon' to describe anything divine, noble, and brave and having extraordinary power. A famous general in the Tang Dynasty was called **Dragon Castle Flying General**. The invincible landscape of the ancient city of Nan Jing in China was described as **Dragon Keeping Tiger Guarding**.

Good and beautiful things are connected with dragons too. A free style of writing invented by a Tang Dynasty scholar is said to be like **Dragon Flies Phoenix Dances**. In a famous ancient Chinese book, an exceptionally intelligent and handsome young man was described as having **Dragon Talents Phoenix Looks**. Chinese attribute all good characters and outstanding abilities to the dragons, so Chinese often refer to an extraordinary person as **A Dragon among Men**. In old records, righteous and learned people were called 'Dragon'. A famous prime minister in the Period of Three Kingdoms was known as 'Mr. Sleeping Dragon' when he exiled himself and took up farming.



成語中的龍、鳳、虎

在 和龍有關的成語中，我們發現有很多「龍、鳳」、「龍、虎」並列的情形。

龍和鳳

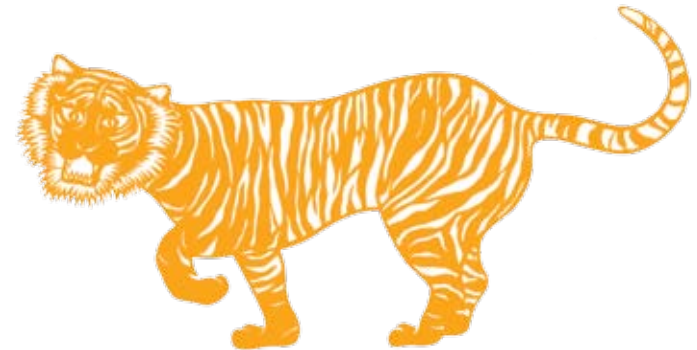
龍和鳳都是傳說中富貴吉祥的動物，所以古人常將「龍」、「鳳」並列，作為吉祥、美好的徵兆。通常在結婚證書或宴客的喜帖上，都會印有「龍鳳呈祥」這四個字的圖案，象徵吉祥。才華出眾、儀表英俊、氣度不凡，用則用「龍章鳳姿」、「龍躍鳳鳴」、「龍駒鳳雛」來比喻。

Dragons and Other Animals

In sayings about dragons we often find that dragons are mentioned together with phoenixes or tigers in 'dragon-phoenix' and 'dragon-tiger' sayings.

Dragons and Phoenixes

Dragons and phoenixes are legendary animals representing wealth and fortune, so ancient Chinese people used images of dragons and phoenixes together as signs of beauty and blessing. Today, images of a dragon and a phoenix are shown with the four Chinese characters **Dragon Phoenix Give Prosperity** on marriage certificates and wedding invitations to wish the newlyweds long life and happiness. Extraordinarily capable and good looking young men with charming characters are described as **Dragon Talents Phoenix Looks, Dragon Princes Phoenix Sings** or **Dragon Colt Phoenix Chick**.



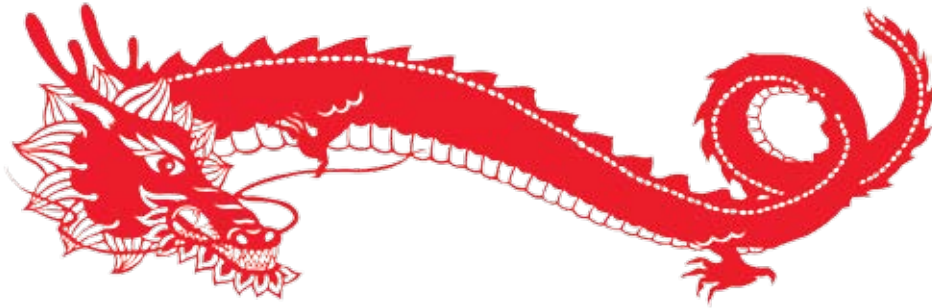
Powerful emperors lived in a grand palace called **Dragon Mansion Phoenix Chamber** and ate rare food called **Dragon Liver Phoenix Marrow**.

Dragon Keeps Phoenix Holds is a reminder that precious things are difficult to get or that fine pieces of work are created by great dedication.

帝王居住的華麗的宮闕叫「龍樓鳳閣」。帝王吃的極難得的珍奇佳餚美食叫「龍肝鳳髓」。

「龍含鳳吐」比喻珍貴難得的東西，或用盡心血寫出來或做出來的作品。





龍和虎

中國成語中也常將「龍」、「虎」並列，比喻勇士猛將，英雄豪傑；或比喻品格高尚，出類拔萃的人。像：「龍爭虎鬥」比喻兩強爭鬥激烈，雙方勢均力敵，不相上下。「龍虎風雲」比喻各地英雄好漢聚會在一起。「龍騰虎躍」形容活潑矯健生氣勃勃的樣子。「龍潭虎穴」比喻極危險的地方。

「降龍伏虎」比喻能力超強，再兇惡的人也能制服，再困難的事也能克服。

🌿 Dragons and Tigers

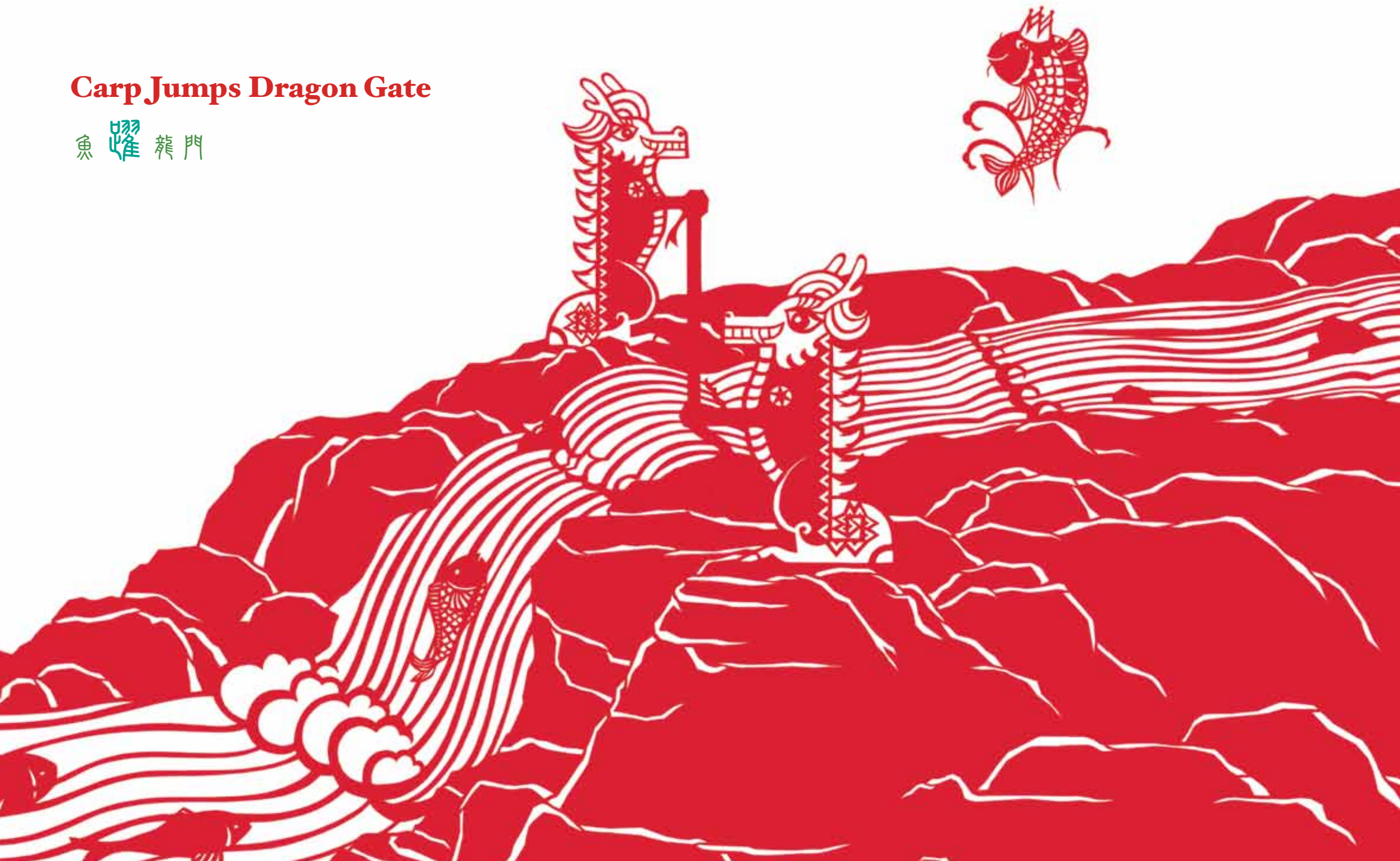
Ancient Chinese sayings often use the words dragon and tiger together to praise brave generals, soldiers and heroes or to describe honest and outstanding people. **Dragon Con-tends Tiger Fights** is used to describe two equally powerful people or nations when neither one can win. **Dragon Tiger Wind Cloud** expresses a grand meeting of heroes from all over the world. **Dragon Rises Tiger Jumps** describes people who are full of life. **Dragon's Pool Tiger's Den** would be a place full of scheming and danger.

Taming Dragon Catching Tiger is an encouragement to people to stand up against powerful opponents and to overcome extreme difficulties.



Carp Jumps Dragon Gate

魚躍龍門





成語典故

魚躍龍門

黃河上游有一個深谷叫龍門，黃河奔流到這裡的時候，水流很急，逆流而上的大魚也不能越過，據說鯉魚如果能躍過龍門，就能變成龍，所以「魚躍龍門」代表成功、有成就；如果躍不過，就會被水流沖破兩鰓而死亡，這就是「暴（ㄅㄠˋ、）鰓龍門」，代表失敗、沒有成就。

Wise Sayings and Dragon Stories

Carp Jumps Dragon Gate

On the Yellow River there is a deep valley called Dragon Gate where the water flows so fast that even big fish can't swim upstream into the valley. Legend says that a carp which leaps over the Dragon Gate will become a dragon, so **Carp Jumps Dragon Gate** is a saying which implies achievement and success. However, if the carp fails to leap right over, it will be crushed by the rapidly flowing water and die from broken gills. So **Broken Gill Dragon Gate** describes failure and disaster.

另外，《爾雅》是中國第一部，也是世界最早的一部解釋詞義的詞典，書中描述一種大魚，每年三月就往上游，準備要渡過龍門，能夠渡過就變成龍了，否則頭額觸破敗退而返，這就是「龍門點額」，也代表失敗。

總之，「龍門」是成功的關鍵，因此，後世就把參加科舉考試能功名及第，叫「魚躍龍門」；相反地，科舉考試名落孫山，就是「暴鯰龍門」或「龍門點額」。

至今，每次到了龍年，很多人都希望生個「龍子」，還有大人「望子成龍」，期望小孩讀書功課好，將來能「魚躍龍門」出人頭地。



An ancient book called *Er Ya* provides explanations of Chinese sayings. This book describes how, in March every year, one big fish swam upstream in the Yellow River and tried to leap the Dragon Gate, hoping to become a dragon. The fish never could do this and each time its forehead was wounded. This story was summed up by the saying **Dragon Gate Broken Forehead** which also implies failure.

In all the stories Dragon Gate is the key to success. In later years scholars who passed the Imperial Examinations for official posts were said to be **Carp Jumps Dragon Gate** while those who did not qualify would be **Broken Gill Dragon Gate** or **Dragon Gate Broken Forehead**.

Today, couples hope to have 'Dragon Babies' in dragon years. By **Hoping Children Become Dragons**, children are expected to study hard to be successful as in **Carp Jumps Dragon Gate**.

Climb Dragon Heel Phoenix

攀龍附鳳



攀龍附鳳

古時候以龍、鳳比喻英明的君主，而身為大臣及部下的，能追隨英明君主，施展所長，建立功業，叫「攀龍附鳳」。

《漢書·敘傳下》有段話：「攀龍附鳳，並乘天衢（く口ノ）。」意思是說：樊噲（弓义丂、ノ），原本是殺狗賣狗肉的屠夫，夏侯嬰原是縣衙裡管飼養牛馬及駕車的馬夫，灌嬰本是販賣絲綢的小商人，酈（ノ一、ノ）商，原是個平凡人，樊噲、夏侯嬰、灌嬰、酈商這些人都出生低賤，但因為追隨依附劉邦，為建立漢朝帝業，立下不少汗馬功勞，最後都受到封賞，一個個都飛黃騰達，所以後世用「攀龍附鳳」來形容他們。

後世也用龍、鳳比喻有權勢地位的人，「攀龍附鳳」這時則用來諷刺那些專門巴結、依靠權勢地位，以求升官發財，出人頭地的人。

Climb Dragon Heel Phoenix

Successful Chinese kings in ancient times were often said to be dragons or phoenixes. The followers of those kings, such as the ministers and close servants, were said to **Climb Dragon Heel Phoenix**, where 'heel' means to follow closely behind someone's footsteps.

The Book of Han History contains a very short summary, '**Climb Dragon Heel Phoenix, Ride Together to Heaven**', of a long story. Fan Kuai was a butcher; Xia Hou Ying was a herdsman; Guan Ying was a silk salesman; and Li Shang was an ordinary man. All were born very low in society, but they help Liu Pang to build the Han Empire and to become the first Emperor of the Han Dynasty. They were rewarded abundantly for their services and became high officials. Later people used the saying **Climb Dragon Heel Phoenix** to describe how these four men became important people, though starting from a low beginning.

In time the terms dragon and phoenix came to be used to describe any very powerful persons, not only kings and emperors. However, the same saying may now be used to mock people who seek the favours of powerful people by flattering them excessively.

