

THE DANCE OF NATURE'S AWAKENING

In traditional celebrations, regulated by the lunar calendar and grounded in the cyclical conception of time characteristic of classical Chinese culture, the dragon occupies a central place as a symbol of auspiciousness, prosperity, growth, and the connection between natural cycles and social order.

It is the principal figure of the resounding collective rituals of 春節 / 春节 *Chūnjié* (the 'spring node', the first of the '24 *Qì* periods' 二十四節氣 / 二十四节气 *Èrshísì jiéqì*, which mark the rhythm of natural movements throughout the passing of the seasons), symbolically intended to 'awaken' the 陽 / 阳 *Yáng* principle of nature at the beginning of the new annual cycle.

Depicted on objects, garments, banners, and flags.

Called forth into active manifestation through fireworks, musical parades, and street dances (舞龍 / 舞龙 *Wǔlóng*) performed with large *papier-mâché* and fabric dragon figures animated by multiple dancers to the rhythm of drums and cymbals.

An emblem of growth and renewal, symbol of nature returning to form after the period of winter withdrawal.

Invoked during the celebrations of the 'first night' 元宵節 / 元宵节 *Yuánxiāojié* in the 'lantern festival', which marks, on the fifteenth day of the first month, the end of the first seasonal movement of 陽 / 阳 *Yáng* and the beginning of the first seasonal movement of 陰 / 阴 *Yīn* of nature.

Represented in all its forms as a mediator between heaven and earth, between cosmic order and everyday life.

Explicitly invoked in the rituals marking the beginning of the third 'Qì period' (驚蟄 / 惊蛰 *Jīngzhé* 'the awakening from the insects' hibernation') on the occasion of the festival 龍抬頭 / 龙抬头 *Lóngtáitóu* ('raising the dragon's head'), also called 春龍節 / 春龙节 *Chūnlóngjié* ('the spring dragon node'), to 'consolidate' the 陽 / 阳 *Yáng* movement of spring awakening, to propitiate nourishing rain, good harvests for agricultural communities, and abundant fishing for coastal communities.

Celebrated on the fifth day of the ninth 'Qì period' (芒種 / 芒种 *Mángzhòng*), on the eve of the summer solstice, during the 'festival of extreme *Yáng*' 端陽節 / 端午节 *Duānyángjié*, when the rising force of 陽 / 阳 *Yáng* has reached its peak and spring is about to open into summer.

A celebration that, in popular tradition, takes the form of the 'dragon boat festival' 龍船節 / 龙船节 *Lóngchuánjié* or 龍舟節 / 龙舟节 *Lóngzhōujié*, in which boats decorated with dragon heads (whose eyes are ritually 'opened' for the occasion) compete to the beat of drums in powerful upstream races, symbolically renewing the bond with the energy of growth and with the sense of community.