

The Four Dragons

Many thousands of years ago, the great country of China had no rivers or lakes – just the sea on one side and the rain that fell from the sky.

In that precious sea lived four mighty dragons called Long Dragon, Yellow Dragon, Pearl Dragon and Black Dragon. They all served the Jade Emperor, who lived in the heavens above, and it was their job to look after the people of China as they sailed and fished in the sea.



All was well until the Jade Emperor fell in love with a fairy enchantress. The Emperor became so bewitched by her that he quite forgot his duties – including making the rain fall on the crops below. Harvests quickly withered and died, and the people of China started to go hungry. They prayed to the Jade Emperor for help.

"Dear Emperor!" they begged, on their hands and knees. "We have not a grain of rice to eat! Please send us some rain before we all starve!" But the Emperor didn't hear them.

It pained the four dragons to see the people suffer so much, so they flew to the Jade Emperor's heavenly palace. When they entered his court, they found him being entertained by the fairy. He looked almost in a trance.

When he saw the dragons, he cried, "What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be guarding the sea?"

"Dear Emperor," bowed Long Dragon, "the crops are dying and the people are hungry. We beg you to send some rain before everyone starves!" →



"Very well," sighed the Jade Emperor and he waved them away. "Go back to your watery home and I will send some rain tomorrow."

The dragons thanked him and he went back to listening to his fairy music, with a faraway look in his eyes.

The next day came and not a drop of rain fell from the sky. The same happened the following day, and the day after that. The people became truly desperate and the four dragons couldn't bear to hear their cries.

"The Jade Emperor will surely punish us for doing his job," said Pearl Dragon, "but we must save these people before it is too late!"

"Aren't we the dragons of the sea?" cried Black Dragon. "Let us carry as much water as we can and fill the clouds with it!"

"We must hurry," urged Yellow Dragon. "We don't have much time!"

And so the four dragons dived into the sea and swallowed as much water as they could hold in their jaws. Then they flew into the sky and sprayed the sea water into the clouds. They kept on doing this until the clouds were fit to burst and rain began to pour down heavily on the land below.

The people of China rejoiced to see the rain and cheered so loudly that they awoke the Jade Emperor from his

fairy entertainment. He looked down from his palace and, when he saw what the four dragons were doing, he flew into a fearsome rage.

"How dare the dragons make it rain without my permission!" he shouted.

The Jade Emperor sent his strongest guards to capture the four dragons, and they were dragged to his palace for punishment.

Though the dragons pleaded and explained how desperate the people

had been, the Jade Emperor was so angered and insulted by their actions, he refused to listen to them and threw them into prison.

That night, the Emperor called for the God of Mountains and asked him to bring his four largest mountains.

"When you have them," demanded the Emperor, "place one mountain on top of each dragon so that they may never escape or disobey me again!" →



The God of Mountains used his powers to make four giant mountains appear in mid-air and he placed one on top of each of the four dragons, trapping them there for eternity.

When the Emperor was satisfied, the God of Mountains sent the peaks back to where they belonged, with the dragons imprisoned inside them.

But the four dragons were determined to protect the people, so they changed themselves into rivers, rushing down from their mountain prisons, filling the dry gorges, watering the fields and flowing out to the sea. And this is how China's four greatest rivers came to be.

In the far south, the Pearl Dragon flowed out to the sea as the Zhujiang (Pearl River); in the south, the Long Dragon became the Yangtze (Long River); in central China, the Yellow Dragon turned into the Huanghe (Yellow River); and further north, the

Black Dragon transformed itself into the Heilongjiang (Black River).

From that day on, whenever the Jade Emperor lost interest in the people he was supposed to care for, nobody had to suffer because the four dragon rivers were always there to provide water for them. 6

Did You Know?

In the East, dragons are considered to be friendly, helpful and wise – and masters of the rain, rivers and seas. Across China, there are many temples and shrines named after dragons, where people can light incense and pray to them.

