The Chinese Dragon
By Eric Woods

Many western cultures view dragons as destructive, evil, breathing creatures. Chinese Dragons conversely are largely benevolent and are an essential part of Chinese mythology. Being one of the Four Divine Creatures, Dragons are the masters of lakes, rivers, and most importantly rainfall. For this reason, pleasing the Dragons was incredibly vital in ancient China, as a satisfied Dragon would bring a good season of rain but an angered Dragon could ensue terrible drought or destructive floods. Although Dragons have catastrophic potential, they are not feared in Chinese culture. They are instead revered and are symbols for greatness, good fortune, and wisdom.

Rather than being reptiles similar to European dragons, Chinese Dragons are an intricate combination of many animals. The Dragon possesses the head of a camel, a cow’s ears, fiery eyes of a dragon, a man’s horns, a lion’s tail, the paws of a tiger, and the teeth of a fish. The scales of a carp, 81 of the yang aurora, and 36 of the yin essence. This distribution of yin and yang accounts for the Dragon’s usual kindness to humans and its occasional wrath.

The Chinese Dragon is an interesting combination of the caring bringer of life and a powerful destructive force. It is honored in many aspects of Chinese culture, especially in art and festivals. The golden Dragon is a symbol of wealth and power, and thus was an imperial emblem for many dynasties. Dragons, especially red ones, also represent luck and are common sights at celebrations.

Chinese Dragons are an intricate combination of many animals. The Chinese Dragon combines the scales of a carp, 81 of the yang aurora, and 36 of the yin essence. This distribution of yin and yang accounts for the Dragon’s usual kindness to humans and its occasional wrath.

The famed Chinese Dragon Dance displays the power and grace of Dragons through elaborate costumed dance. From their rain bringing powers to their symbolism of luck and greatness, Dragons are an important part of Chinese culture, especially in art and festivals.

Since China was hit by a shortage of resources, chefs have developed complex customs about the use of knives at the home, stating that, “The honorable and upright man allows no knives on his table.” The combination of bite-sized food for meals. When China was hit by a shortage of resources, chefs discovered that food cooks much more efficiently when chopped into small pieces. During the same time, Confucius denounced the use of knives at the home, stating that, “The honorable and upright man keeps well away from both the slaughterhouse and the kitchen. And he allows no knives on his table.”

With its extensive use, chopsticks have developed complex customs and many superstitions. For example, you should never hit the side of your bowl with your chopsticks, dropping your chopsticks is said to bring bad luck, and pointing at another person with your chopsticks is considered a symbolic threat. Many Chinese locals even believe that the higher you hold your chopsticks, the farther away you will live once you grow up. Even though difficult to learn, the skill of using chopsticks is a fun and rewarding ability to have. Some studies have shown that using chopsticks improve memory and dexterity. From its humble beginnings as simple twigs, to carefully crafted utensils used by billions of people, chopsticks are truly remarkable pieces of Asian culture.

Recipe
Recipes
The Chinese Dragon
Fun Facts of Chopsticks

FUN FACTS OF CHOPSTICKS
A common symbol of Asian culture, chopsticks have been the staples of choice for much of Asia for nearly two and a half millennia. Although many westerners find chopsticks near impossible to maneuver, they are perfect for the Chinese diet’s mainstay of rice and stir-fry. The origins of the chopsticks date back to ancient China, where people found that using long sticks as tweezers was handy when retrieving food from deep cooking pots. It wasn’t until about 400 B.C. however that chopsticks became the primary utensil for meals. When China was hit by a shortage of resources, chefs discovered that food cooks much more efficiently when chopped into small pieces. During the same time, Confucius denounced the use of knives at the home, stating that, “The honorable and upright man keeps well away from both the slaughterhouse and the kitchen. And he allows no knives on his table.”

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A Look at the Denver Dragon Boat Festival
By Eric Woods

During the Warring States Period in China around 300 B.C. the Chu dynasty was stricken with civil war throughout the country. Qu Yuan, a wise and virtuous poet, served as an adviser to the royal court. Seeing the growing power of the new Qin dynasty, Qu Yuan suggested the Han dynasty to ally itself with the neighboring Qi State. This suggestion however was seen as disloyalty to the emperor and Qu Yuan was banished into the wilderness where later wrote some of the most important ancient Chinese texts. However, when the Chu fell to the new Qin dynasty, Qu Yuan was dismayed that his beloved motherland had been destroyed and drowned himself in the Miluo River. After his death, Qu Yuan became a water spirit, and his supporters cast rice into the river to appease him. However, the rice was always intercepted by the Water Dragon of the river, and after centuries of hindrance, Qu Yuan’s spirit enlightened his supporters to wrap their offerings in bamboo leaves so the Dragon could not steal the food.

This tale of tragedy is how one central tradition of the Dragon Boat Festival came to be. These leaf-wrapped rice balls, called zongzi, are popular snacks that are widely sold around the festival. Zongzi today are delicacies with fillings including fruits, meats, eggs, and sweet red bean paste accompanying the sticky rice inside fresh bamboo leaves. Also with these delicious snacks, this year’s Dragon Boat Festival in Denver on July 27 will have so many more fun activities and events. Large Dragon Dances will awe spectators with their perfect harmony and grace. Dozens of street vendors will sell the traditional Chinese buying snacks, desserts, and tasty cuisine.

The most important and exciting part of the Dragon Boat Festival is undoubtedly the spectacle of the boat races. All day, amateur and professional teams will compete on Sloan’s Lake through a multitude of exciting boat races. However, these boats are not just regular rowing canoes, the Dragon Boats are beautifully crafted ships with as many as twenty rowers. At the back of the boat, one athlete uses a drum to rhythmically keep the rowers in boat, and at the front, one competitor stretches precariously over the dragon-sculpted bow, holding on solely with their legs, reaching for the flag that signals the end of the race.

Join us for the First CSCCI Excursion!
By Herman Tiemens, Vice Chairman

Colorado Dragon Boat Festival: Sat, July 27th, 2013

Starting in 2013 we will connect you to one of the best Summer Festivals held in the State of Colorado: the Denver Dragon Boat Festival. This annual event has been the chartering coach at one of our convenient pickup points in Colorado Springs for a fun and comfortable ride to the Colorado Dragon Boat Festival held at Sloan’s Lake in Denver. At the Festival, now in its 13th Year, cheer on the Dragon Boat Racers, watch entertainers from throughout Asia Pacific, enjoy delicious food from the region and check out dozens of vendor booths.

Tickets are only $25 for members and $30 for non-members, which includes transportation, snacks, entrance to the Festival and the chance to make new friends with a common love for Asian culture. Buses will pick us up at the South Circle Depot (2184 South Circle Drive Colorado Springs) at 9:45 a.m. at the Woodmen Park & Ride (Woodmen & I25) at 8:15 a.m. After a full exciting day at the festival, we will arrive back in Colorado Springs around 7:00pm.

Availability is limited, so please reserve your spot today at www.cscci.org. Alternatively you can contact Jerry Hsu on 719-577-5575 or via email at Jerry.Hsu@wellsfargo.com. We hope you will join us!
Film Review: Life of Pi
By Jerry Hsu, CSCCI Board of Director

The Taiwan-born Ang Lee rapidly established himself in the 1990s as one of the world’s most versatile film-makers, moving on from the trilogy of movies about Chinese families that made his name, to Jane Austen’s England (Sense and Sensibility), Richard Nixon’s America (The Ice Storm), and a western about a gay relationship in present-day Wyoming (Brokeback Mountain) that bestowed his first Oscar.

His brilliant new film is a version of Yann Martel’s Booker prize-winning novel, Life of Pi, adapted by an American writer, David Magee. From its opening scene of animals and birds strutting and preening themselves in a sunlit zoo to the final credits of fish and nautical objects shimmering beneath the sea, the movie has a sense of the mysterious, the magical. This effect is compounded by the hallucinatory 3D, and in tone the film suggests Robinson Crusoe rewritten by Laurence Sterne.

The form is a story within a story within a story. An unnamed Canadian author, whom we assume to be Yann Martel himself (Raffe Spaull), is told by an Indian he meets that there is a man in Montreal called Pi who has a story that will make you believe in God. He is Piscine Molitor Patel (Irrfan Khan), a philosophy teacher, and he tells the curious reader story of his extraordinary life, beginning as the son of a zookeeper in Pondicherry, the French enclave in India that wasn’t ceded until 1948.

Growing up, the ever-curious Pi becomes attracted to religion and the meaning of life, a spiritual journey that the film treats with a respectful wit as the boy rejects his father’s religion and the meaning of life, a spiritual journey that the movie concludes with a fascinating open-endedness.

This is a grand adventure on an epic scale. Pi confronts a female orangutan and the gigantic Bengal tiger, Richard Parker, survivor and captain of a lifeboat with only a zebra, a hyena, and a crocodile. The Patel family takes the animals to be sold in Canada. As fate intervenes when his father is forced to give up the family zoo, where Pi was raised, and realize he’s been as much a captive as the animals themselves.

The screenplay, written by David Magee, is based on Yann Martel’s novel that won the Booker Prize. The movie is directed by Ang Lee, who has won an Oscar for Brokeback Mountain. He is a grand master of the epic, and here he makes a movie that is both a big screen adventure and a deeply personal story about the human condition.

The story is about the relationship between Pi and his father, a zoo owner, and the Indian man who tells him the story. The movie is a visual feast, with stunning shots of the ocean and the Bengal tiger. The acting is excellent, especially by Irrfan Khan, who plays a young man who has been through so much.

The film is a masterpiece, and a must-see for anyone who loves movies. It is a work of art that will be remembered for years to come.