

Chinese New Year: The dragon stamp draws fire for 'scaring' the world



Chinese have reacted angrily to a special edition stamp to celebrate the Year of the Dragon that depicts the iconic creature as a fearsome creature. The special edition stamp to celebrate the Year of the Dragon Scores of collectors and social commentators have complained about the ferocious-looking 2012 dragon.

Some have sarcastically claimed it should be adopted as the motto of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, which has recently been accused of bullying China's neighbours and unnerving the wider international community.

"Will the Foreign Ministry be sending this stamp on its gifts to its old friends or to old rivals? Does the dragon stamp suggest a peaceful 2012?" asked Hong Kong TV presenter, Chen Yang.

"This shocking creature on the stamp could well be the emblem of the Foreign Ministry," posted antiques collector, Wu Yue on Weibo, China's version of Twitter.

Peking University student Huang Song posted: "I suggest we use this dragon stamp as the Foreign Ministry's mascot." "The moment I saw the design, I was almost scared to death," chimed in popular writer Zhang Yihe.

Officials from China Post and the artist commissioned to design the stamp, Chen Shaohua, rebuffed the criticism, telling the state media the threatening, attacking pose of the mythical dragon should be interpreted as China's new found confidence.

"The dragon is one of the 12 animals that make up the Chinese Zodiac and is used to exorcise evil spirits and offer blessings, so we needed a tough image," said Chen, who designed the bid emblem for Beijing's 2008 Olympic Games.

A popular myth claiming the Chinese people are descendants of the legendary creature endures - and many still believe the dragon symbolizes auspicious power despite strong Government discouragement of superstition.

The fire-breathing creatures were used as totems by Chinese emperors to signal their imperial power.

But its 21st century use as an emblem to represent modern China divides opinion and stirs emotions.

The authoritarian Government prefers the docile, cuddly panda as the national insignia, and uses the iconic endangered species as highly successful soft power diplomatic gifts, with the most recent pair sent to Edinburgh Zoo.

The president of the Chinese Philatelic Research Society, Zhou Zhihua, said the Chinese are used to seeing "milder animals" on their annual New Zodiac Year postage stamps.

"Their reaction to the Dragon stamp is understandable," he said.

However, sellers at a philatelic market in Beijing were reporting bumper pre-sale orders, with eager collectors paying up to £18 for a commemorative pack of the 12 penny stamps which go on sale on Thursday.

Peter Simpson - Telegraph