

# Tigers in Asian Folklore

by GREG BALAGIAN

Tigers play a powerful symbolic role in Asia similar to that of lions in Africa and Western Europe. These large predators hold a sense of mysticism and intrigue due to their ferocity, courage and solitary life, and they feature prominently in Asian art and literature.

Macao, Mongolia and Thailand issued stamps with a folktale tiger during 2016.

## Macao

Macao Post issued a set of eight stamps and a souvenir sheet commemorating the *Strange Tales of Liao Zhai* written by the famous Qing dynasty writer Pu Songling (1640-1715). The collection of more than 490 short stories cover a wide range of subject areas. The stories are mainly about nature, both in reality and in a fantasy world, indirectly reflecting people's daily life in late Ming and early Qing dynasties (ca. mid-17th century).



One of the stamps designed by the famous Chinese artist Chen Quanshen, depicts a scene from a story about Zhang Cheng from Henan province. Zhang's first wife was taken away by Qing soldiers during the chaos of war in the late Ming dynasty. He later has two sons, Zhang Na from his second wife and Zhang Cheng from his third wife. This third wife hates her stepson and forces him to chop trees for firewood every single day. Zhang Cheng has a good heart and secretly helps his stepbrother with the work until one day he is taken away by a fierce tiger.

Zhang Na kills himself out of sadness and his spirit searches for Zhang Cheng, eventually reuniting with him in Jinling.

## Mongolia

Mongolian Post issued a set of four stamps depicting important episodes from Mongolian-

Tibetan Buddhist mythology.

Dugar Jaisang is one of the most important Buddhist heroes of Tibet who "cleanses" the country of corrupt practices and is famous for his enormous physical strength, and most importantly, for his magic powers and ability to recognize true and evil monks.

Dugar Jaisang's image is a popular motif in Mongolian folk art. He is always centrally located in a landscape, fully armed with bow and arrows, and a sword for killing the tiger.

The stamp from Mongolia depicts Jaisang strangling a tiger that is probably the one sent to kill him by the sect of Nyingma monks (Scott 2854).



Mongolia 2854 (2016)

## Thailand

Originating in India, the Songkran Festival is celebrated by Thai people every April for three days in observance of the New Year.

A Buddhist legend associated with this festival tells a story of a four-faced Brahman god, Tao Kabilaprom, who had seven daughters who were angels that became goddesses identified with the days of the week and various animals. Ko-raka Dhevi, goddess of Monday, is associated with the tiger and customarily depicted lying atop one.



Thailand 2912c (2016)

The goddess and the tiger are on a 2016 sheet of eight stamps issued by Thailand for the festival. Two varieties exist, with and without inscriptions of the goddesses. See also page 119. 🐾