

Meet Your Chinese Zodiac Animal
中国生肖文化解读系列

The
YEAR
of the
RABBIT

生肖兔

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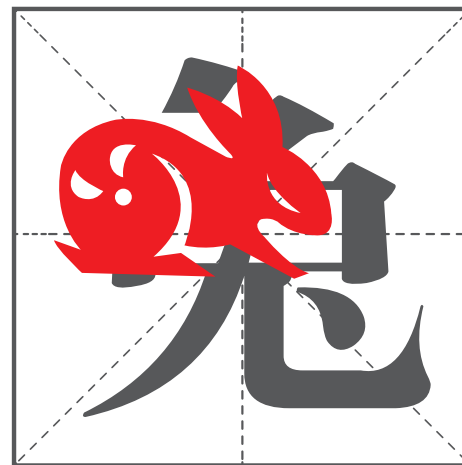
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Introduction



Dear friend, how much do you know about traditional Chinese culture?

Let's try a riddle to start: "There are 12 of them, each person claims but one of them; they can only be found in China. What are they"?

If you can figure it out, it shows that you know something about Chinese culture. In fact, former Japanese Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka put this riddle to Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai during his visit to China in September 1972 to enliven their meeting. The key to the riddle is "the 12-year cycle of animals in the Chinese zodiac", or simply "the 12 zodiac animals".



The riddle was a piece of cake for Premier Zhou, as the 12 zodiac animals are familiar to everyone in China. But what is the Chinese zodiac?

In Chinese, it is called 生肖 (shēngxiào). 生 means "be born", while 肖 means "resemble". In the eyes of the ancient Chinese, human beings are part of nature. People born in different lunar years correspond to specific animals. A person's character resembles that of his or her animal. The 12 animals are the Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake,

Horse, Goat,^① Monkey, Rooster, Dog and Pig. People thus use them to number the years in a 12-year cycle. For example, if you were born in 2011, the Year of the Rabbit according to the Chinese lunar calendar, you will have the rabbit as your zodiac animal, and the rabbit will also be your lifelong mascot and guardian angel.

Everyone claims one zodiac animal. Zhou Enlai was born in 1898, the Year of the Dog. Kakuei Tanaka was born in 1918, the Year of the Horse. They met with each other in 1972, the Year of the Rat.

The Chinese people often mark the beginning of a year with the Spring Festival, which is the most important festival in the country. It corresponds with one of the 12 zodiac animals, which will in turn become the auspicious image of the festival. Most New Year pictures, couplets, and greetings will feature the zodiac animal.

“In the Year of the Rat, you will have good luck; in the Year of the Ox, you will grow stronger; in the Year of the Tiger, you will behave more bravely; in the Year of the Rabbit,



you will become smarter; in the Year of the Dragon, you will have a promising career; in the Year of the Snake, you will be safe and sound; in the Year of the Horse, you will live a brilliant life; in the Year of the Goat, you will enjoy prosperity; in the Year of the Monkey, you will get a promotion; in the Year of the Rooster, you will win a prize; in the Year of the Dog, you will flourish; in the Year of the Pig, you will become more prominent.” This is a Chinese New Year greeting related to the 12 zodiac animals used to wish everyone the best every year.

In China, there is a tradition associated with the Spring Festival that has been handed down for over a thousand years. When meeting with people during the festival, one should offer felicitations to others as often as possible. If

① The Chinese character 羊 (yáng) refers to both the goat and the sheep. Therefore, the eighth zodiac animal can be named goat or sheep. In this book, goat is used for the sake of convenience.

girlfriends. At any rate, this remains an indispensable topic for chitchat among Chinese people.

🐰 Eminent Figures Born in the Year of the Rabbit

According to Chinese zodiac, many great personages in ancient China were born in the Year of the Rabbit, for example:



Liu Xiu

Born in 5 BC, founder of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220).



Mi Fu

Born in 1051, calligrapher and painter of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127).



Guo Shoujing

Born in 1231, hydrologist of the Yuan Dynasty (1206-1368); inventor of the *Shoushi* Calendar, the longest-running calendar in ancient China.



Aisin-Gioro Hongli

Born in 1711, Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty, the longest-reigning and longest-living ruler in Chinese history.

In the sports world of present-day China, many well-known names share the zodiac sign of the rabbit:

Li Ning

Born in 1963, China's "Prince of Gymnastics" with recognition from the International Federation of Gymnastics by naming his signature rings, pommel horse and parallel bars poses after him.

Kong Linghui

Born in 1975, table tennis world champion.

Xian Dongmei

Born in 1975, Olympic judo champion.

Ding Junhui

Born in 1987, professional billiards player, the first Chinese player inducted into the Snooker's Hall of Fame.