

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

The
YEAR
of the
HORSE
生肖马

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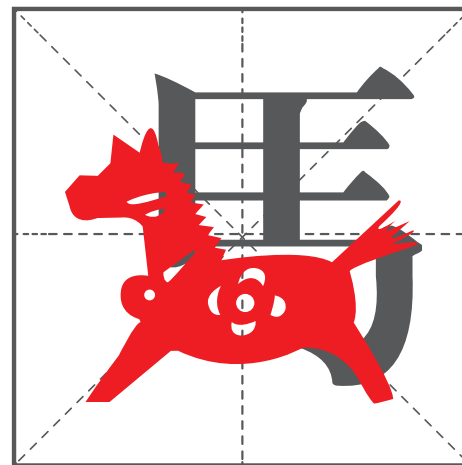
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Introduction



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.

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.

For example, 2002 corresponded with the Year of the Horse, according to the Chinese lunar calendar. For those who were born in 2002, the horse is their zodiac animal as well as their mascot and the protector of their lives. Premier Zhou was born in 1898, the Year of the Dog, while Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka was born in 1918, the Year of the Horse. The year in which they met, 1972, was the Year of the Rat.

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 of the New Year pictures, couplets, and greetings will feature the zodiac animal which corresponds with the lunar year.

“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 all 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 instead you were to utter something ominous, it is said that this utterance will come true. In addition, Chinese people often use different felicitations in different years. If the year happens to be a year of a zodiac animal that has a noble status based on traditional Chinese culture, a good image, or a name that shares a similar pronunciation with words portending good fortune, Chinese people will use the zodiac animal name in their New Year greetings. These zodiac animals are the Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Horse, Goat, Monkey, and Rooster. As for the other zodiac animals, which are the Rat, Snake, Dog and Pig, they do not appear in New Year greetings. The horse is one of Chinese people’s favorite zodiac animals. According to traditional Chinese culture, it symbolizes progress, success, and speed. Therefore, during

🐎 Eminent Figures Born in the Year of the Horse

According to the Chinese zodiac, many eminent people throughout Chinese history were born in the Year of the Horse, for example:



Zhang Daoling

Born in 34 AD, the founder of Daoism, a Chinese indigenous religion.



Li Daoyuan

Born in 466 AD, a geographer and essayist of the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534) and the author of *Commentary to the River Classic*, a Chinese geography masterpiece.



Liu Gongquan

Born in 778 AD, a Chinese calligrapher of the Tang Dynasty.



Song Ci

Born in 1186, a forensic scientist of the Song Dynasty (960-1279) and the author of *Collected Cases of Injustice Rectified*, the earliest forensic monograph in the world.



Emperor Kangxi

Born in 1654, the fourth emperor of the Qing Dynasty, who reigned longest in Chinese history.



Kang Youwei

Born in 1858, a famous modern Chinese thinker, statesman, and educator as well as one of the main advocates of the Hundred Days' Reform^① in the late Qing Dynasty.



Emperor Xuantong

Born in 1906, the last emperor of China.

① A failed 103-day national reform movement from June 11 to September 21, 1898 in the late Qing Dynasty. It was initiated by Emperor Guangxu and his reform-minded supporters to revive China. However, it was quelled by conservative opponents led by Empress Dowager Cixi.