

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

The
YEAR
of the
GOAT
生肖羊

Compiled by Zhang Lizhang (张立章)

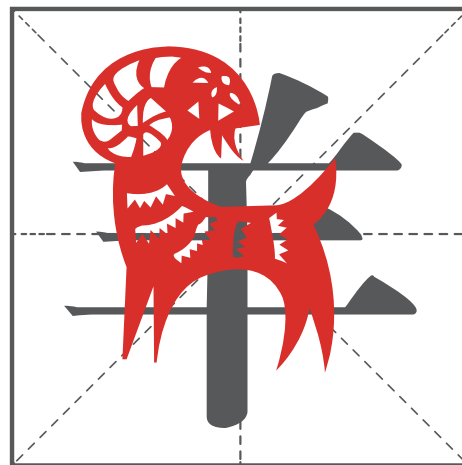
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Introduction



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.

Chinese history.



Cao Cao

Born in 155, a statesman, military strategist and poet who founded the Kingdom of Wei during the Three Kingdoms Period (220-280).



Yue Fei

Born in 1103, a famous national hero during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279).



Li Shimin

Born in 599, the second emperor and founder of the Tang Dynasty (618-907).



Cao Xueqin

Born in 1715, a renowned novelist of the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912), the author of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, one of China's four great classical novels.



Sima Guang

Born in 1019, a famous statesman and historian of the Song Dynasty (960-1279), author of the historical masterpiece *Zizhi Tongjian* (Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance).



Li Hongzhang

Born in 1823, Prime Minister of the late Qing Dynasty, representative of the Westernization Movement.



Shen Kuo

Born in 1031, a famous scientist and statesman of the Song Dynasty, author of the scientific masterpiece *Meng Xi Bi Tan* (Brush Talks from Dream Brook).



Empress Dowager Cixi

Born in 1835, ruler of the late Qing Dynasty.