

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

The
YEAR
of the
MONKEY
生肖猴

Compiled by Zhang Lizhang (张立章)

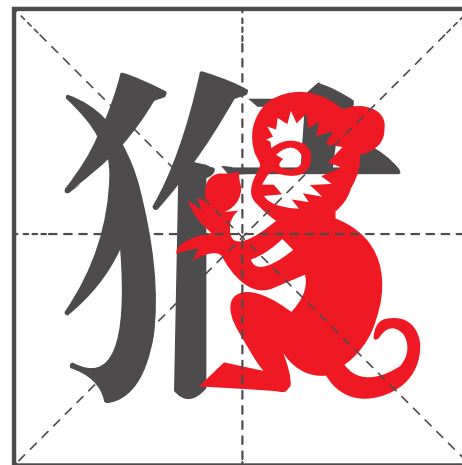
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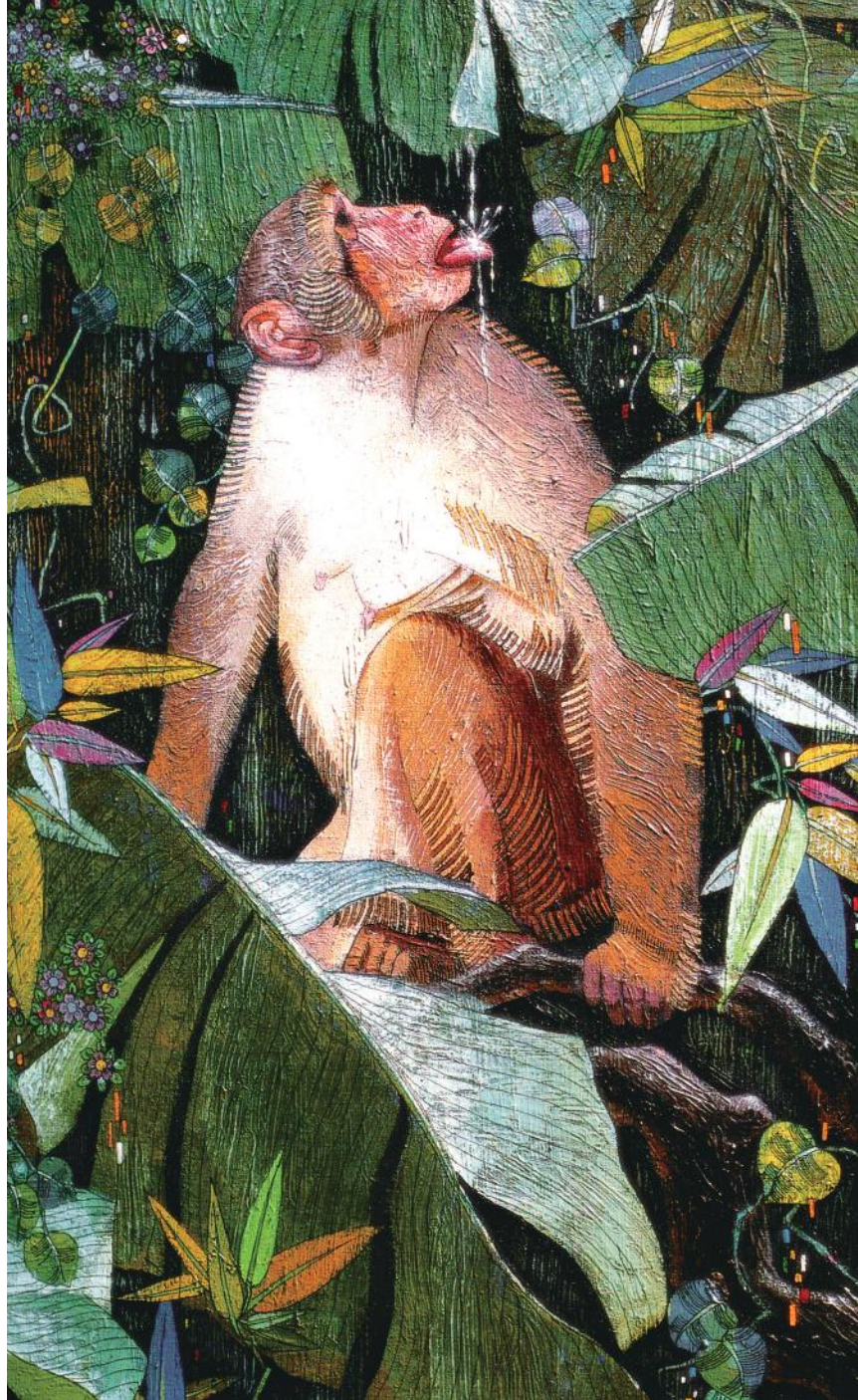
Introduction



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 “to 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, most of the calendar year 2016 corresponded with the Year of the Monkey according to the Chinese lunar calendar. As such, a person who was born in 2016 has the monkey as their zodiac animal, and the monkey would also be their lifelong mascot and guardian angel.

The Chinese people mark the beginning of a year with the Spring Festival, which is the most important festival in the country. Each lunar year corresponds with one of the 12 zodiac animals, which will in turn become the auspicious

^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.

image of the festival. Many new year pictures, couplets and greetings are also based on these zodiac animals.



“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



Chapter One

Zodiac Culture in
Everyday Chinese
Life

indispensable topic for chitchat for Chinese people.

🐵 Eminent Figures Born in the Year of the Monkey



According to the Chinese zodiac, many notable historical figures were born in the Year of the Monkey, e.g., Sima Qian (born in 145 BC), one of the most distinguished historians from the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 25); and Wu Zetian (born in 624), the renowned empress regnant. Moreover, we have also noticed an interesting fact that the mythological novel *Journey to the West*, which is deemed one of the most influential literature masterpieces in Chinese history, is closely associated

with the monkey: The book's leading figure is none other than the Monkey King; the author Wu Cheng'en was born in 1500, which was the Year of the Monkey; and the renowned Buddhist monk Xuanzang of the Tang Dynasty, who was another leading character in the novel, was also born in the Year of the Monkey (AD 600).



Portrait of Monk Xuanzang, a renowned Buddhist monk during the Tang Dynasty

In contemporary China, there are also many sports stars and famous performers who were born in the Year of the Monkey, among whom is the renowned basketball player, Yao Ming. As a household name, he has not only made remarkable achievements in basketball, but also distinguished himself as a successful businessman after retirement. He has been engaged in such industries as sports, catering and wine.

In other countries, there are also many distinguished figures who were born in the Year of the Monkey. Some of them are pictured below. Look into whether or not they share the hallmark characteristics of the “Monkey”.



Leonardo Da Vinci

Born in 1452, a renowned painter during the Renaissance.



René Descartes

Born in 1596, a great French mathematician, and founder of analytic geometry.



Charles Dickens

Born in 1812, a renowned British writer of the 19th century.



Pope Saint John Paul II

Born in 1920, served as the Pope from 1978 until his death in 2005.



Jacques René Chirac

Born in 1932, former French President (1995-2007).



Roh Tae-Woo

Born in 1932, former President of South Korea (1988-1993).