

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

The
YEAR
of the
ROOSTER
生肖鸡

Compiled by Zhang Lizhang (张立章)

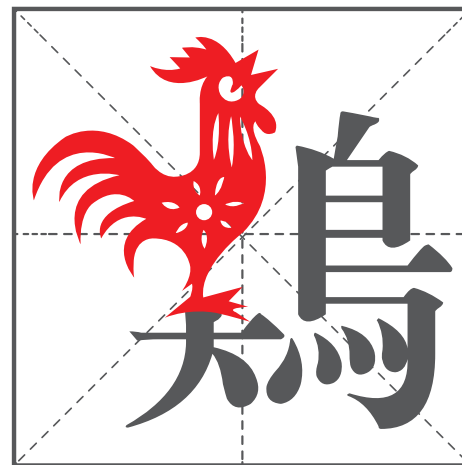
Translated by Xu Tingting (徐汀汀)

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 24 Baiwanzhuang Street, Beijing 100037, China
 Tel: (86) 10-68320585 68997826
 Fax: (86) 10-68997826 68326333
<http://www.sinolingua.com.cn>
 E-mail: hyjx@sinolingua.com.cn
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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,

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.

Rooster, Dog and Pig. People thus use them to number the years in a 12-year cycle.

For example, 2005 corresponded with the Year of the Rooster, according to the Chinese lunar calendar. For those who were born in 2005, the rooster 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 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

great number of tragic marriages during the long period of feudalism in China. However, young people today no longer cling to zodiac animal matches when choosing boyfriends or girlfriends. At any rate, this remains an indispensable topic for chitchat among Chinese people.

🐓 Eminent Figures Born in the Year of the Rooster

According to Chinese zodiacs, many great personages in China were born in the Year of the Rooster, for example:



Mencius

Born in 372 BC, a philosopher, educator, and representative figure of Confucianism during the Warring States Period (475-221 BC).



Liu Che

Born in 156 BC, Emperor Wudi of Han, the sixth emperor of the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) who initiated the ancient Silk Road.



Xie Lingyun

Born in 385, a poet in the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420-589) and pioneer of the “landscape poetry”, a genre of ancient Chinese poetry.



Yang Jian

Born in 541, Emperor Wendi of Sui, the founder of the Sui Dynasty (581-618).



Li Longji

Born in 685, Emperor Xuanzong of Tang, who inaugurated the golden age of the Kaiyuan era (713-741).



Wang Anshi

Born in 1021, a statesman, thinker, and poet in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127).



Huang Tingjian

Born in 1045, a poet, calligrapher, and painter in the Northern Song Dynasty.