

Meet Your Chinese Zodiac Animal
中國生肖文化解讀系列

The
YEAR
of the
RAT

生肖鼠

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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, if you were born in 2008, the Year of the Rat, you will have the rat as your zodiac animal and the rat will be your lifelong mascot and guardian angel. Japanese Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka met Premier Zhou in 1972, which happens to be 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 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 Chinese traditional 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. So when the Spring Festival for the Year of the Rat comes, how do Chinese people offer their greetings? Actually, they replace 鼠年 (the Year of the Rat) with 新年 (New Year) or 新春 (New Year Spring Festival) in their greetings.

1. Happy New Year!

(祝您) 新年快乐! (Zhù nín Xīnnián kuàilè!

2. I wish you every luck in the New Year!

祝您新年大吉! Zhù nín Xīnnián dàjí!

3. I wish you great fortune in the New Year!

祝您新年发大财, 行大运!

Zhù nín Xīnnián fā dà cái, xíng dà yùn!

4. I wish you all the best in the New Year!

祝您新年万事如意! Zhù nín Xīnnián wànshì - rúyì!

引言

亲爱的朋友, 您对中国传统文化是否了解?

请您先猜个谜语。谜面是: 共有 12 个, 每人占一个, 东洋西洋都没有, 请问是什么?

如果你猜出了正确答案, 说明你对中国文化有一定的了解。这个谜语是 1972 年 9 月日本前首相田中角荣先生访华时, 为活跃气氛给时任中国总理的周恩来先生猜的一个谜语。谜底就是: “十二生肖”。

这个谜语没能难住周恩来总理, 因为每个中国人都熟知十二生肖。那么, 什么是中国人的“生肖”呢?

“生肖”的“生”就是“出生”的意思, “肖”是“相似”的意思。也就是说, 在中国古人的观念里, 作为自然界的普通一员, 不同时间出生的人, 就会与某一种动物相对应, 其性格也会与该动物的特征相似。这些动物分别是鼠、牛、虎、兔、龙、蛇、马、羊、猴、鸡、狗、猪, 共 12 种。中国人就用这 12 种动物来纪年, 12 年一个循环, 周而复始。

如果你出生在 2008 年，那一年正是鼠年，那么你的属相就是鼠。鼠便成为你一生的吉祥物和保护神。开篇故事中的两位主角会面的 1972 年恰巧是中国的鼠年。

中国人以自己的传统节日——春节为一年之始，而每一年的春节都以当年对应的生肖动物作为节日图腾。春节张贴的年画、春联和新年祝福语都会以此为主题。

“鼠年运来，牛年身壮，虎年勇猛，兔年机巧，龙年飞腾，蛇年安康，马年奔致，羊年开泰，猴年高升，鸡年中奖，狗年兴旺，猪年响当当！”这就是一句以 12 生肖为主题的新年祝福语，寓意是“年年你都会有好运气”。

中国人有一个流传千百年的文化传统，就是在春节前后，无人要多说吉利话。传说如果在这个佳节期间说不吉利的话会应验成真。但是，不同生肖年的春节，中国人常用的吉利话也有所不同：在中国文化传统中地位高、形象好，或者谐音吉利的生肖动物就会直接出现在吉祥话中，比如牛、虎、兔、龙、马、羊、猴、鸡；另外一些生肖动物并不适宜出现在吉利话中，如鼠、蛇、狗、猪等。那么，在鼠年

春节，中国人会怎么说这些吉利话呢？一般会用“新年、新春”代替“鼠年”。

1. (祝您) 新年快乐!
2. 祝您新年大吉!
3. 祝您新年发大财，行大运!
4. 祝您新年万事如意!

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Chapter One

Zodiac Culture in
Everyday
Chinese Life

<https://www.purpleculture.net>

The long-cherished Chinese zodiac tradition has been passed down from generation to generation and has become deep-rooted in people's minds. It is widely recognized among the Chinese people that the 12 zodiac animal signs are closely linked with people's personalities, destinies, lives and careers. Just as British people might talk about the weather when they first meet, Chinese people often ask what zodiac animal a person is when they meet for the first time. This can be explained for the following reasons:

First, it is a good way to deduce the age of a person. Since it's not very polite to ask another person's age directly, their zodiac animal coupled with their appearance can help one deduce a person's age.

Second, it serves as an ice-breaker and makes people feel at ease. Asking about zodiac animals is considered a common communication skill by Chinese people. When two people find they share the same zodiac animal, they will have a natural



affinity and be eager to talk with each other.

Chinese people tend to group themselves according to their zodiac animal signs out of the belief that those with the same sign possess similar personalities and characteristics. Hence, they like discussing in which zodiac animal year a prominent figure was born in their spare time. They even consider it a great honor if they find that they happen to share the same zodiac sign with a renowned historical figure or contemporary celebrity, such as Genghis Khan (born in the Year of the Horse), founder

of the Mongol Empire; Zhuge Liang (born in the Year of the Rooster), a statesman during the period of the Three Kingdoms (220-280) and a paradigm of wisdom and good virtue; Li Shimin (born in the Year of the Goat), the co-founder of the Tang Dynasty (618-907), a golden age in Chinese history; Deng Xiaoping (born in the Year of the Dragon), the late Chinese leader regarded as the chief architect of China's reform and opening-up; and Xi Jinping (born in the Year of the Snake), the current Chinese President.

Third, it can help people extrapolate other people's personalities. According to zodiac animal culture, people born in the same zodiac animal year often share similar personality traits, luck for wealth, professional achievements and marriage patterns. Some Chinese people even get to know and choose their spouses, co-workers or business partners by talking about their zodiac animals. This topic seems simple, but it has rich connotations to the Chinese people.

If you are born in the Year of the Rat, what kind of character, luck and marriage will you have according to the Chinese zodiac? Please read the following introduction and see if it is true for you.



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☉ Characteristics of "Rats"

In China, it is believed that people born in the Year of the Rat are diligent and are prudent in dealing with financial matters; blessed with good fortune, they seldom have to worry about money; they often have successful careers.

People born in the Year of the Rat are known for their agility, energy and vitality. They are able to easily adapt to the changing circumstances. Being kind-hearted, quick-witted and sensible, they are also resourceful, considerate and versatile. They often enjoy great popularity among people thanks to their lively and optimistic character.

However, people born in the Year of the Rat often lack courage and resolve. They are not good at innovation or pioneering jobs. They are adept at speculating, known for being hypercritical and are also narrow-minded.

☉ Marriages for "Rats"

Chinese people often believe that if the zodiac animals of a couple are a good match, they will enjoy a loving relationship and a happy life; if they are not a good match,



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a marriage may not be satisfactory. For instance, if a person is born in the Years of the Rat, the best match for him or her is a person born in the years of the ox, dragon, monkey and pig. However, if he or she marries a person born in the Year of the Goat, they may be prone to bickering.



You may have never realized that this notion has exerted great influence on people's attitudes towards marriage for nearly two thousand years. During the Qing Dynasty (1616-1911) and dynasties before that, marriages were arranged by parents, while people themselves had no freedom to choose their spouses. People often considered the match of zodiac animals as one of the important factors in determining a marriage. This resulted in a great number of tragic marriages during the long period of feudalism in China. However, young people today no longer cling to the match of zodiac animals when they choose



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

🐭 Eminent Figures Born in the Year of the Rat

According to the Chinese zodiac, many outstanding historical figures were born in the Year of the Rat, for example:



Zhuangzi

Born in 369 BC, a philosopher and thinker during the Warring States Period (475-221 BC).



Du Fu

Born in 712, known as the poet-sage of the Tang Dynasty.



Li Qingzhao

Born in 1084, a famous poetess of the Song Dynasty (960-1279).



Zhu Di

Born in 1368, an emperor who seized power and established Beijing as the capital during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).



Kong Shangren

Born in 1648, the 64th-generation descendant of Confucius and a Ming Dynasty dramatist best known for his play *The Peach Blossom Fan*.



Qigong

Born in 1912, a contemporary calligrapher, painter and connoisseur of cultural relics.

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



Ferdinand Magellan

Born in 1480, the famous Portuguese navigator who was the first explorer in history to accomplish a circumnavigation of the globe.



William Shakespeare

Born in 1564, the greatest English playwright and poet.



Galileo Galilei

Born in 1564, the renowned Italian astronomer who is hailed as the "father of modern science".



Peter the Great

Born in 1672, the first emperor of the Russian Empire.



George Washington

Born in 1732, the first President of the United States.



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Born in 1756, an Austrian musician.



Ludwig Feuerbach

Born in 1804, the renowned German philosopher.



Leo Tolstoy

Born in 1828, one of the most celebrated Russian writers of the 19th century.



Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Born in 1800, a Russian composer.



Auguste Rodin

Born in 1800, a renowned French sculptor.



Claude Monet

Born in 1840, one of the founders of the French Impressionist school.



Mutsuhito

Born in 1852, the Emperor of Japan, known as Emperor Meiji, who launched the Meiji Restoration here in 1868.

第一章 中国人生活中的生育文化

生育文化在中国历史悠久，世代相传。家户户晚，早已深深根植于中国人的血液之中。它与每个中国人的性格、命运、生活和事业紧密联系在一起，并得到中国人的普遍认同。直到今天，人们初次见面时，询问对方的生育也是常事，如同英国人见面谈论天气一样普通。这主要有以下几方面的原因：

一是通过询问生育来推测对方的实际年龄。因为直接询问对方的年龄不太礼貌，所以可以通过间接询问对方的生育后，再根据外貌特征显示的年龄范围基本可以确定对方的实际年龄。

二是谈论生育可迅速打破尴尬，拉近双方的心理距离。这也是中国人常见的一种见面沟通技巧，尤其是当生育相同时，两人就有了天然的亲近感，话题自然打开。

在工作、生活中，中国人会不自觉地按照同一个生育划分出了小群体，以显得亲近。闲暇时人们还喜欢聊聊中国某一番名人物的生育，还会以与历史伟人或当代名人的生育相同而沾沾自喜。比如：蒙古帝国的缔造者——成吉思汗属马；被中国人公认为智慧与品德典范的三国时期政治

家——诸葛亮属鸡；中国古代最繁荣的王朝“大唐盛世”的开创者——李世民属羊；被誉为当代“中国社会主义现代化建设和改革开放总设计师”的前国家领导人——邓小平属龙；现任中国国家领导人——习近平属蛇；等等。

三是根据生育来推测对方的性格类型及特点。中国人认为，相同生育的人往往具有类似的性格、财运、事业成就和婚姻状况等。一些中国人就是在谈论生育的过程中了解、选择自己的婚恋对象、同事搭档和创业伙伴的。这个看似简单的生育话题，却被中国人赋予了如此丰富多样的内涵。

按照中国生育文化的观念，属鼠人有着特定的性格、运气和婚姻状况。假如你是属鼠的，你可以对照一下自己，看看哪些特点与你相契合。

一、属鼠人的性格特点

中国人认为，属鼠人一般较为勤劳，能够谨慎处理金钱，财运也好，一生中很少会遇到金钱上的困扰，事业上颇有成就。

在性格方面，属鼠人感觉敏锐、反应快捷，精力充沛，活力十足，有很强的环境适应力和应变能力；属鼠人本性善良，机智，主意多，识时

务，多才多艺且善解人意，爽利活泼，讨人喜欢，多数属于乐天派性格。

此外，属鼠人存在做事缺少胆识，魄力不够的缺点，创新性和开拓性不足，易投机取巧，爱挑剔，心胸不够宽大。

二、属鼠人的姻缘

在恋爱、婚姻观念方面，中国生育匹配观念十分奇特：如果生肖匹配，夫妻二人就会感情深厚，婚姻幸福；否则，就不如人意。属鼠的人，最适宜寻求生肖为牛、龙、猴和猪的人作为结婚对象；如果与属羊的人搭配就容易发生争吵。

或许你没有想到，这种传统的婚姻选择观念已经影响了中国人近两千年。在以前的封建王朝时代，婚姻双方当事人没有自由选择的权利，父母是儿女婚姻的绝对决定者，而男女双方的生肖是否匹配是能否结婚的重要依据之一。没有人知道，在中国漫长的封建时代里，非自由选择婚姻模式到底酿成了多少婚姻悲剧！当然，这些早已成为了历史。今天的年轻人已不再执着于生肖相配的恋爱观。可这些仍旧是中国人茶余饭后交流沟通中必不可少的内容。

三、属鼠的中外名人

按照中国人的生肖算法，中国历史上鼠年出生的杰出人物非常多。例如：

战国时代哲学家、思想家——庄子（公元前369年出生）；

被誉为“诗圣”的唐代诗人——杜甫（712年出生）；

宋代著名女词人——李清照（1084年出生）；

明代以武力夺取皇位、建都北京的明成祖——朱棣（1360年出生）；

明代戏曲作家、孔子第64代孙、戏曲名作《桃花扇》作者——孔尚任（1648年出生）；

当代书法家、画家、文物鉴定家——启功（1912年出生）；

中国以外，鼠年出生的各国杰出人物也不少。下面列举一些世界名人，你可以研究一下他们是否有生肖鼠的性格特点。

第一次实现环球航行的葡萄牙航海家——麦哲伦（1480年出生）；

英国最伟大的戏剧家——莎士比亚（1564年出生）；

被誉为“近代科学之父”的意大利天文学家——伽利略（1564年出生）；

沙俄首位皇帝——彼得大帝（1672年出生）；

美国第一任总统——华盛顿（1732年出生）；

奥地利著名音乐家——莫扎特（1756年出生）；

德国唯物主义哲学家——费尔巴哈（1804年出生）；

俄国19世纪伟大的作家——托尔斯泰（1828年出生）；

俄国著名作曲家——柴可夫斯基（1840年出生）；

法国著名雕塑家——罗丹（1840年出生）；

法国印象画派创始人之一——莫奈（1840年
出生）；

实施“明治维新”的日本明治天皇——睦仁
（1852年出生）。



Chapter Two

The Origin and Cultural
Significance of the
Chinese Zodiac
Animals