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

The
YEAR
of the
RABBIT

生肖兔

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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,³ Monkey, Rooster, Dog and Pig. People thus use them to number the years in a 12-year cycle. For example, if you were born in 2011, the Year of the Rabbit according to the Chinese lunar calendar, you will have the rabbit as your zodiac animal, and the rabbit will also be your lifelong mascot and guardian angel.

Everyone claims one zodiac animal. Zhou Enlai was born in 1898, the Year of the Dog. Kakuei Tanaka was born in 1918, the Year of the Horse. They met with each other in 1972, 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

³ 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.

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. The rabbit is adored as a zodiac animal by the Chinese. This is because in Chinese culture the rabbit symbolizes kindness, purity and auspiciousness. During the Spring Festival in the Year of the Rabbit, Chinese people exchange greetings and best wishes such as:

1. Happy Rabbit Year!

(祝您)兔年快乐! (Zhù nín tùnián kuàilè!)

2. Good luck and great fortune in the Year of the Rabbit!

祝兔年行大运，发大财!

Zhù tùnián xíng dà yùn fā dà cái!

3. I wish you an auspicious Year of the Rabbit!

祝您兔年吉祥如意! Zhù nín tùnián jíxiáng-rúyì!

引 言

朋友，您对中国传统文化是否了解?

请您先猜个谜语。谜面是：“共有十二个，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”。

这个谜语当然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，在古代中国人的观念里，人是自然界的普通一员，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。人们就用这12种动物来纪年，12年一个循环，周而复始。如果一个

人出生在2011年，这一年在 中国 历法中是兔年，那么 这个人的属相就是兔，兔就是你一生的吉祥物和保护神。

每个人都有自己的生肖，开篇故事中的主角之一周恩来总理生于1898年，属狗。日本田中角荣先生生于1918年，应该属马。他们两人会见的1972年是中国的鼠年。

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。

“鼠年进来，牛年身壮，虎年孺猛，兔年款巧，龙年飞腾，蛇年安康，马年奔收，羊年开泰，猴年高升，鸡年中美，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，在春节前后，见人要多说吉利话。传说如果在这个佳节期间说不吉利的话会应验成真。但是，不同生肖年度的春节，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、猪、狗等。兔是中国人喜欢的生肖动物，而且在中国传统文化观念中，兔是善良、纯洁和吉祥的形象。因此，在兔年春节来临时，中国人见面会以兔年好运为主题说些吉利话：

1. (祝愿)兔年快乐!
2. 祝兔年行大运，发大财!
3. 祝愿兔年吉祥如意!

Contents

目录

Chapter One

Zodiac Culture in Everyday Chinese Life	001
Characteristics of "Rabbits"	004
Marriages for "Rabbits"	008
Eminent Figures Born in the Year of the Rabbit	010
第一章 中国人生活中的生肖文化	017
一、属兔人的性格特点	018
二、属兔人的称谓	019
三、属兔的中外名人	020

Chapter Two

The Origin and Cultural Significance of the Chinese Zodiac Animals	025
Methods of Year Designation in Ancient China	028
Origin of the Chinese Zodiac Animals	032
The Wisdom Behind the Chinese Zodiac Culture	040
The Actual Needs Underlying Zodiac Culture	050
第二章 中国12生肖文化起源与内涵	061
一、中国古代纪年法	061
二、中国以生肖的起源传说	062
三、中国生肖文化的内涵与智慧	066
四、中国生肖文化诞生的现实需求	070

Chapter Three

A Kaleidoscope of Rabbit References	075
Evolution of the Chinese Character 兔 (Rabbit)	078
Rabbit-related Idioms, Proverbs and Allegorical Sayings	082
第三章 生肖兔趣谈	093

一、“兔”的字形演变	093
二、与兔相关的成语、谚语、歇后语	095

Chapter Four

Folk Literature Featuring the Rabbit	105
Rabbit-themed Nursery Rhymes	108
A Chinese Fable — "The Race Between the Tortoise and the Hare"	110
A Chinese Classic — "The Little Bunnies and the Big Bad Wolf"	112
A Chinese Fairy Tale — "Chung'e Flying to the Moon"	118
第四章 关于生肖兔的民间文学作品	121
一、关于兔子的儿歌作品	121
二、经典寓言故事——龟兔赛跑	122
三、经典童话故事——小白兔智斗大灰狼	124
四、经典神话故事——嫦娥奔月	127

Chapter Five

The Rabbit in Chinese Indigenous Art	131
Rabbit-themed Chinese Paintings	132
Rabbit-themed Sculptures and Porcelain	137
Rabbit-themed Paper-cuts	141
Rabbit-themed Stamps and Commemorative Coins	143
第五章 关于兔的中国本土艺术表现形式	147
一、关于兔的中国绘画	147
二、关于兔的雕塑、陶瓷等艺术品	149
三、关于兔的剪纸	152
四、生肖兔邮票和纪念币	153



Chapter One

Zodiac Culture in
Everyday Chinese
Life

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.

☯ Characteristics of “Rabbits”

If you are born in the Year of the Rabbit, what kind of character,



十二生肖

luck and marriage will you have according to the Chinese zodiac? Please read the following introduction and see if it is true for you.

In the eyes of the Chinese, the rabbit is a lovable and sensitive animal. People born in the Year of the Rabbit are said to have something similar to the rabbit. They generally have good marriages and close family relations, and get on well with other people. They are artists by nature, and often show high artistic aptitude and potential. They are said to be blessed by luck, fortune and a long life.

Such people boast many good qualities. They are meticulous, gentle, considerate, and adept at the use of language, which explains their eloquence and wide popularity. They are friendly, communicative, polite, and helpful; they are empathetic, cautious in whatever they do, and hate conflict because they want to make friends instead of enemies.

But never judge a rabbit too quickly. They may appear to be a "yes man", but they can actually be quite snobbish and stuck in their ways. Indecision does them no good, and other qualities ascribed to them—such as a propensity for keeping to themselves, escaping reality or being conservative—can



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sometimes cost them valuable opportunities.

☺ Marriages for “Rabbits”

Matchmaking related to the Chinese zodiac is as unique as it is intriguing. If a couple's zodiac signs are said to match well, it's thought that they will have a loving and successful marriage. On the other hand, if a couple's zodiac signs do not match well, it's thought that their marriage may be less than satisfactory. A man born in the Year of the Rabbit should seek a woman born in the years of the goat, the dog, or the pig; while a woman born in the Year of the Rabbit should seek a man born in the years of the tiger, the horse, or the dog.

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 Rabbit

According to Chinese zodiac, many great personages in ancient China were born in the Year of the Rabbit, for example:



Liu Xiu

Born in 5 BC, founder of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220).



Mi Fu

Born in 1051, calligrapher and painter of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127).



Guo Shoujing

Born in 1231, hydrologist of the Yuan Dynasty (1206-1368); inventor of the Shoushi Calendar, the longest-running calendar in ancient China.



Aisin-Gioro Hongli

Born in 1711, Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty, the longest-reigning and longest-living ruler in Chinese history.

In the sports world of present-day China, many well-known names share the zodiac sign of the rabbit:

Li Ning

Born in 1963, China's "Prince of Gymnastics" with recognition from the International Federation of Gymnastics by naming his signature rings, pommel horse and parallel bars poses after him.

Kong Linghui

Born in 1975, table tennis world champion.

Xian Dongmei

Born in 1975, Olympic judo champion.

Dong Junhui

Born in 1987, professional billiards player, the first Chinese player inducted into the Snooker's Hall of Fame.



Yi Jianlian

Born in 1987, famous basketball player.

There are also two Chinese Kung Fu stars born in the Year of the Rabbit: Jet Li and Donnie Yen, both born in 1963.

Jet Li is a household name among the Chinese. He became known in China by playing the leading roles in such movies as *Shaolin Temple*, the *Once Upon a Time in China* series, and *Fearless*. In 1997 he ventured to Hollywood and played

leading parts in *Romeo Must Die*, *Kiss of the Dragon* and *The Expendables*, which earned him worldwide recognition.

Jet Li embodies the qualities of people born in the Year of the Rabbit. With his ambition and high self-esteem, Jet Li seeks perfection in life. He is gentle and resilient, and he also values privacy in life and takes things as they are.



Outside China there are also famous people born in the Year of the Rabbit:



Giotto

Born in 1267, 14th-century Italian painter and architect, pioneer of Italian arts.



Albrecht Dürer

Born in 1471, the most notable painter, printmaker, designer and theorist of the German Renaissance.



Martin Luther

Born in 1483, initiator of the Protestant Reformation in 16th-century Europe and founder of Protestantism.



Adam Smith

Born in 1723, British economist and author of *The Wealth of Nations*, a treatise of political economics.



Friedrich Schiller

Born in 1759, German poet, playwright, and literary theorist.



Stendhal

Born in 1783, a representative of realism in 19th-century French literature, and author of *The Red and the Black*.



Walter Scott

Born in 1771, British historical novelist, poet and writer.



Walt Whitman

Born in 1819, one of the greatest poets in American history.



Albert Einstein

Born in 1879, German scientist and founder of the Theory of Relativity.

In summary, people born in the Year of the Rabbit usually have a gentle disposition and ambitious goals, and they are also highly savvy and are likely to excel in the sciences and arts.



第一章 中国人生活中的生肖文化

生肖文化在中国历史悠久，世代相传，家喻户晓，早已深深根植于中国人血液之中。它与每个中国人的性格、命运、生活和事业紧密联系在一起，并得到了中国人的普遍认同。直到今天，人们初次见面时，问询对方的生肖也是常事。如同英国人见面时谈论天气一样普遍。这主要有以下几方面的原因：

一是通过询问生肖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肖后，再根据外貌特征显示的年龄范围来确定对方的实际年龄。

二是谈论生肖可迅速打破尴尬，拉近心理距离，这也是中国人常见的一种见面沟通技巧。尤其是当生肖相同时，两个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肖划分出小群体，以显得亲近。闲暇时人们也喜欢聊聊中国某一著名人物的生肖，还会以与历史伟人或当代名人的生肖相同而沾沾自喜。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“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；现任的中国国家领导人习近平属蛇，等等。

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

一、属兔人的性格特点

按照中国生肖文化观念，属兔人有着特定的性格、运气和婚姻状况。假如你是属兔的，你可以对照一下自己，看看哪些特点与你相契合。

中国人认为，兔是一种温顺可爱、机警敏捷的动物，因此兔年出生的人与兔的特点相似。属兔人往往具有和谐的婚姻关系、家庭关系及良好的人际关系。他们往往是天生的艺术家，具有较高的艺术天赋。而且较为长寿，财运好，是有福

气的人。

在性格方面，属兔的人具有很多优点：心思细腻敏感，温柔体贴，有一定的语言天赋和极好的口才，颇受人们的欢迎。他们生性好客，善于交际，富有同情心，礼数周到，乐于助人，处事谨慎，为人和气，厌恶与人争执，常常能化敌为友。

属兔人的性格也有两面性，表面随和，内心却不易改变。他们做事有时缺乏决断力，也不轻易向人吐露心事，有逃避现实的倾向，常因过于保守而失去机会。

二、属兔人的姻缘

在恋爱、婚姻观念方面，中国生肖匹配观念十分奇特：如果生肖匹配，夫妻二人就会感情深厚，婚姻幸福；否则，就有可能不如人意。比如：属兔的男人适宜寻求生肖为羊、狗和猪的女人作为结婚对象；属兔的女人则适宜嫁给生肖为虎、马、狗的男人为妻。

这种传统的婚姻选择观念已经影响了中国人长达近两千年。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，中国漫长的封建时代里，非自由选择的婚姻模式到底造成了多少婚姻悲剧！当然，这些早已成为了历史，今天的年轻人不再执着于生肖相配的恋爱观，可生肖是否匹配仍旧是中国人茶余饭后津津乐道的谈资。

三、属兔的中外名人

按照中国人生肖纪年的算法，中国历史上兔年出生的杰出人物非常多。例如：

东汉王朝建立者——刘秀（公元前5年出生）；

北宋书法家、画家——米芾（1051年出生）；

元朝水利学家，实行时间最长的历法《授时历》的编订者——郭守敬（1231年出生）；

中国历史上实际执政时间最长、最长寿的皇帝，清朝乾隆皇帝——爱新觉罗·弘历（1711年出生）。

在当今中国体坛，属兔的明星可谓熠熠生辉：

国球创体操动作被国际体联以他的名字命名的“中国体操王子”——李宁（1963年出生）；

乒乓球世界冠军——孔令辉（1975年出生）；

奥运会柔道冠军——沈东妹（1975年出生）；

首位入选世界斯诺克名人堂的中国台球运动员——丁俊晖（1987年出生）；

著名篮球运动员——易建联（1987年出生）。

此外，中国还有两位属兔的功夫明星是李连杰和甄子丹，他们均出生在1963年。

中国功夫明星李连杰在当今华人圈内是家喻户晓的人物。早年在国内他凭借功夫电影《少林寺》《霍元甲》《黄飞鸿》等声名鹊起。1997年后闯入好莱坞发展，先后主演了《致命罗密欧》《龙之吻》《敢死队》等多部大片，被国际影坛认可。

出生在兔年的李连杰具有典型的属兔人的特点：他志向很高，自尊心强，追求完美；他性格温和，

却具有坚强的韧性；他不愿意被人打搅，能够随遇而安。

中国以外，元年出生的各国各界杰出人物主要有：

14世纪意大利画家、建筑师，被尊奉为意大利艺术开拓者的乔托（1267年出生）；

文艺复兴时期德国最重要的油画家、版画家、装饰设计家和理论家——丢勒（1471年出生）；

16世纪欧洲宗教改革运动发起者，基督教新教创始人——马丁·路德（1483年出生）；

英国著名经济学家、政治经济学巨著《国富论》作者——亚当·斯密（1723年出生）；

德国伟大的戏剧家、诗人、文学理论家——席勒（1759年出生）；

法国19世纪现实主义文学代表人物之一，著《红与黑》作者——司汤达（1783年出生）；

英国19世纪著名历史小说家、诗人、作家——司各特（1771年出生）；

美国历史上最伟大诗人之一——惠特曼（1819年出生）；

德国著名科学家，广义相对论创立者——爱因斯坦（1879年出生）；

总之，元年出生的人大部分性格温和，悟性很高，个人目标高远，从事科学或艺术工作往往会取得令人瞩目的成就。



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Chapter Two

The Origin and
Cultural Significance
of the Chinese
Zodiac Animals