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

The
YEAR
of the
DRAGON

生肖龙

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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 十二生肖 (shíèrxiānwù), 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 2000, the Year of the Dragon, the dragon is your zodiac animal and is considered your lifelong mascot and guardian angel. Former Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai was born in 1898, the Year of the Dog. Kakuei Tanaka, former Japanese Prime Minister, 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 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 in New Year greetings. The dragon is a zodiac animal revered by the Chinese as it symbolizes divinity, authority, and invincibility based on traditional Chinese culture. Naturally, when the Chinese usher in the Spring Festival in the Year of the Dragon,

they greet each other with lucky words for great fortune for the year:

1. Good luck in the Year of the Dragon!

(祝您) 龙年大吉!

(Zhù nín Lóngnián dàjí!)

2. I hope all your wishes are fulfilled and that you have good luck in the Year of the Dragon!

祝您龙年事随心愿，吉祥如意!

(Zhù nín lóngnián shìsuǐ-xīyuàn, jíxiáng-rúyì!)

3. Good luck and great fortune in the Year of the Dragon!

祝您龙年行大运，财源滚滚!

(Zhù nín lóngnián xíng dà yùn,cáiyuán-gǔngǔn!)

4. Success in your career and promotion to a higher position in the Year of the Dragon!

祝您龙年官运亨通，步步高升!

(Zhù nín lóngnián guānyùn-hèngtōng, búbù-gāoshēng!)

引 言

亲爱的朋友，你对中国传统文化是否了解?

请你先猜个谜语。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。

假如你出生在公元2000年，这一年在中国历法中正是龙年，那么你的属相就是龙，龙便成为你一生的吉祥物和保护神。开篇故事中的主角之一周恩来总理生于1898年，属狗。另一主角田中角荣首相生于1918年，应该属马。他们两人会见的1972年则是中国的鼠年。

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，兔年技巧，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：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。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的，如鼠、蛇、猪等。龙是中国人非常尊崇的生肖动物，而且在中国传统文化观念中，龙是神圣、权威和无敌的象征。因此，在龙年春节来临时，中国人见面会相互以龙年好运为主题说一些吉利话。

1. (祝您) 龙年大吉!
2. 祝您龙年事随心愿，吉祥如意!
3. 祝您龙年行大运，财源滚滚! (多祝贺商人)
4. 祝您龙年官运亨通，步步高升! (多祝贺政府公务人员或管理人员)



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Chapter One

Zodiac Culture in
Everyday Chinese Life

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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 space 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 Dragon, please read the following introduction and see if it is true for you.



十二生肖

☯ Characteristics of “Dragons”

Chinese people regard the dragon as a noble and omnipotent deity. Like the dragon, people born in the Year of the Dragon are strong-willed and confident. They tend to be natural born leaders.

With regard to their personality, people born in the Year of the Dragon are generally energetic with lofty aspirations and strong self-awareness. They never give up, exhibiting a candid individuality in doing things. They are disdainful of gossip and are romantic perfectionists.

Women born in the Year of the Dragon tend to be enthusiastic, generous, considerate and likable.

However, people born in the Year of the Dragon are prone to be emotional and indulge in fantasy. They are arrogant, narrow-minded and cannot tolerate others' ways of working or others' inability to perform their tasks. They are not resilient when faced with setbacks.

☯ Marriages for “Dragons”

Matchmaking related to the Chinese zodiac is as unique



十
二
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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 will be less than satisfactory. A man born in the Year of the Dragon should seek a woman born in the Year of the Rat, the Rabbit, the Goat, or the Monkey; while a woman born in the Year of the Dragon should seek a man born in the Year of the Rat, the Tiger, or the Rooster. It is ill-advised for dragons, male or female, to marry rabbits or dogs.



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

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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 Dragon

According to the Chinese zodiac, many outstanding figures in Chinese history were born in the Year of the Dragon. Here are a few of them:



Xun Kuang

Born in 313 BC, representative of Confucianism and philosopher of the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 25). He is also known as Xunzi.



Sima Qian

Born in 145 BC, a historian in ancient China and author of the historical masterpiece *Records of the Grand Historian*.



Ban Chao

Born in 32, famous military strategist, diplomat of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220) and a pioneer of the Silk Road.



Zhu Yuanzhang

Born in 1328, founding emperor of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).



Cai Yuanpei

Born in 1868, former president of Peking University and one of the major torchbearers of the May 4th Movement.⁽¹⁾



Guo Moruo

Born in 1892, eminent modern writer, poet, historian, archaeologist, and expert in paleography.

(1) An anti-imperialist, cultural, and political movement growing out of student demonstrations in Beijing on May 4, 1919, the May 4th Movement protested against the Chinese government's weak response to the Treaty of Versailles, especially allowing Japan to receive territories in Shandong which had been surrendered by Germany. These demonstrations sparked national protests by students, industrial workers and businessmen, and marked the course of Chinese nationalism.

More to all these, there was a kung fu star of Chinese origin born in the Year of the Dragon. His name was Bruce Lee. His films made people all over the world know Chinese kung fu for the first time and thus he became a Chinese kung fu film star well-known across the world. In addition, he was an innovative master of martial arts and he invented a pragmatic form of Chinese kung fu — Jeet Kune Do (JKD).



In other countries, there are also many distinguished figures born in the Year of the Dragon. Here are a few of them!



Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Born in 1712, Swiss-born philosopher, writer, and political theorist whose treatises and novels inspired the leaders of the French Revolution and the Romantic generation.



James Watt

Born in 1736, a famous figure of the Industrial Revolution of Great Britain, and inventor of the world's first steam engine.



Friedrich Engels

Born in 1820, German thinker, philosopher, revolutionary, and co-founder of modern communism.



Alexandre Gustave Eiffel

Born in 1832, French civil engineer who built the Eiffel Tower in Paris.



George Bernard Shaw

Born in 1856, great Irish playwright.



Maxim Gorky

Born in 1868, famous writer of the former Soviet Union, and founder of the socialist realistic literature.



Douglas MacArthur

Born in 1880, eminent American military strategist, five-star general, and the only American general to have served in both world wars and the Korean War.

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，并得到了中国人的普遍认同。直到今天，人们初次见面时，询问对方的生肖也是常事，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，所以通过询问对方的生肖后，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。

二是谈论生肖可迅速打破尴尬，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名人的生肖，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；现任中国国家领导人习近平属蛇；等等。

三是中国人还习惯将生肖与个人命运、性格、婚姻情感联系在一起。中国人认为，相同生肖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。

假如你是属龙的，可以对照以下属龙人的诸多特点，看看有哪些特点与你相契合。

一、属龙人的性格特点

中国人认为，龙是一种尊贵、本领强大的神祇，因此龙年出生的人与龙的特点相似，坚强而自信，是天生的领导者。

在性格方面，属龙人一般精力充沛，自我意识强烈，有高远志向，凡事不服输；个性坦率，不愿拐弯抹角，更不喜欢搬弄是非；有浪漫气质，追求尽善尽美。

属龙的女性大多热情、慷慨，善解人意，受人欢迎。

尽管属龙人优点很多，但也有一些缺点，比如：情绪不稳定、喜欢幻想；傲慢自大，缺乏宽阔心胸，常常无法容忍他人的做事方式与办事能力；经受挫折能力较差。

二、属龙人的姻缘

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：属龙的男人适宜寻求生肖为鼠、兔、羊和猴的女人作为结婚对象；属龙的女人则适宜嫁给生肖为鼠、虎和鸡的男人作为妻。属龙人一般不适宜与属兔和属狗的人成为伴侣。

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，非自由选择的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。今天的年轻人不再执着于生肖相配的恋爱观，可生肖是否相配仍旧是中

国人茶余饭后津津乐道的谈资。

三、属龙的中外名人

按照中国人生肖纪年的算法，中国历史上龙年出生的杰出人物非常多。例如：

西汉时期儒家代表人物、思想家——荀子（公元前313年出生）；

中国古代史学家、文学巨匠《史记》的作者——司马迁（公元前145年出生）；

重新打通“丝绸之路”的东汉著名军事家、外交家——班超（32年出生）；

明王朝建立者明太祖——朱元璋（1328年出生）；

“五四”运动重要启蒙者之一、时任北京大学校长的蔡元培（1868年出生）；

现代著名作家、诗人、历史学家、考古学家、古文字学家——郭沫若（1892年出生）；

此外，华人世界还有一位属龙的功夫明星，

他就是李小龙。由他出演的电影最早让世界认识了中国功夫，也让他成为享誉世界的中国功夫电影明星。他还是一位极具创新精神的武术家，自创了一门实用搏击功夫——截拳道。

中国以外，龙年出生的各国各界杰出人物主要有：

18世纪法国大革命思想先驱、启蒙运动卓越代表人物、思想家、哲学家、作家——卢梭（1712年出生）；

英国工业革命时期著名人物，世界上第一台蒸汽机发明者——詹姆斯·瓦特（1736年出生）；

德国思想家、哲学家、革命家、近代共产主义的奠基人——恩格斯（1820年出生）；

法国巴黎埃菲尔铁塔设计建造者——亚历山大·居斯塔夫·埃菲尔（1832年出生）；

英国伟大的现实主义戏剧作家——萧伯纳（1856年出生）；

前苏联著名作家，社会主义现实主义文学奠基人——高尔基（1868年出生）；

美国著名军事家、五星上将，美国唯一一位参加过两次世界大战和朝鲜战争的人——道格拉斯·麦克阿瑟（1880年出生）。



Chapter Two

The Origin and Cultural
Significance of the
Chinese Zodiac Animals

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