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

The  
YEAR  
of the  
OX  
生肖牛

Compiled by Zhang Lihong (張立榮)

Translated by Wu Aijun (吳麗俊) & Xue Yawei (薛悅威)

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24 Baizwanzhang Road, Beijing 100037, China

Tel: (86) 10-68020585/68997826

Fax: (86) 10-68997826/68326333

<http://www.sinolingua.com.cn>

E-mail: [bjyx@sinolingua.com.cn](mailto:bjyx@sinolingua.com.cn)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/sinolingua](http://www.facebook.com/sinolingua)

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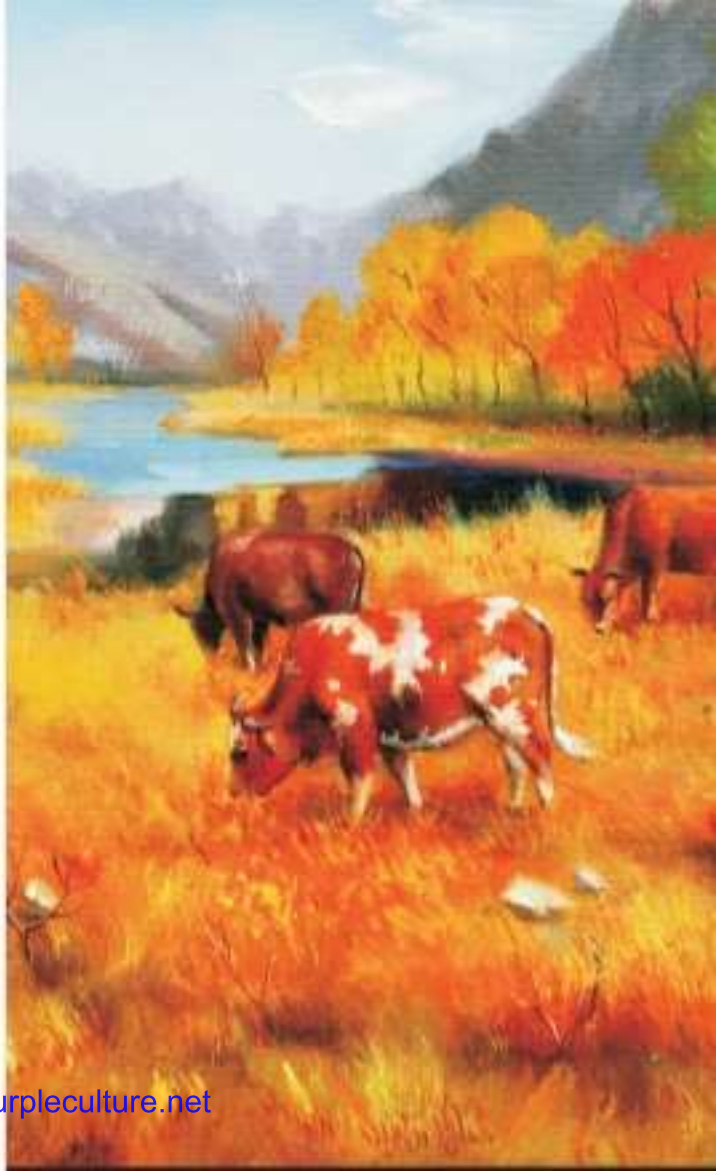
# Introduction



**D**ear 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,<sup>①</sup> 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 1987, the Year of the Ox, the ox 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 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

<sup>①</sup>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 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 1,000 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, they 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.

During the Spring Festival of the Year of the Ox, how do Chinese people greet each other? They often use the following felicitations when they meet or correspond with their friends, colleagues or family members during the festival:

#### 1. Happy Year of the Ox!

(祝您) 牛年快乐! (Zhù nín) Niúnián kuàilè!

#### 2. I wish you a good Year of the Ox!

祝您牛年大吉! Zhù nín niúnián dàjí!

#### 3. I wish you great fortune in the Year of the Ox!

祝您牛年发大财, 牛气冲天!

Zhù nín niúnián fādàcái, niúqì chōngtiān!

#### 4. I wish you all the best in the Year of the Ox!

祝您牛年万事如意! Zhù nín niúnián 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: “共有十二个, 每人占一个, 东洋西洋都没有, 请问是什么?”

如果您猜出了正确答案, 说明您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”。

这个谜语并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。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 1997 年, 这一年在 中国 历 法 中 属 于 牛

牛。那么你的属相就是牛，牛就是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公元1898年，生肖属狗；日本首相田中角荣先生生于公元1918年，应该属马。他们会见的公元1972年应该中国的鼠年。

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题材。

“鼠年运来，牛年身壮，虎年勇猛，兔年机巧，龙年飞腾，蛇年安康，马年奔放，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生肖为主题的春节祝福语，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语会应验成真。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

在吉利话中的，如鼠、蛇、狗、猪等。



那么，在牛年春节，中国人会怎么说这些吉利话呢？中国人在春节见面或短信问候一般会讲以下吉利话：

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



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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 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 Ox, 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



十  
二  
生  
肖

true for you.

## ☉ Characteristics of "Oxen"

Chinese believe that people born in the Year of the Ox strive for perfection and are often preoccupied with their jobs. They are not particularly adept at accumulating fortune; they usually lead a normal life with solid family ties.

In terms of personality, they are full of confidence and tenacity, and they work hard to achieve their goals. They are steady-going, patient, broad-minded and treat everything with care and conscientiousness. They have a strong sense of responsibility and are very practical.

Generally speaking, people born in the Year of the Ox are eloquent speakers. They are calm, mild, prudent and focused.



十  
二  
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However, they are often stubborn, inflexible, unapproachable and unwilling to accept others' opinions. In addition, stoicism is one of their prominent features, but only up to a point. If irritated enough, they can fly into a rage, which may cause serious consequences.

## ☉ Marriages for "Oxen"

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. Otherwise, their marriage might not be satisfactory. For instance, for a man born in the Year of the Ox, his best match is a woman born in the Year of the Ox, Rooster or Pig. But for a woman born in the Year of the Ox, her best match is a man born in the Year of the Ox, Snake or Rooster.

This notion has exerted great influence on people's attitudes towards marriage for nearly 2,000 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 Ox

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



### Gu Kaizhi

Born in 348, a celebrated painter during the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420).



### Liu Bei

Born in 161, the first ruler of the Kingdom of Shu during the period of the Three Kingdoms.



### Tao Yuanming

Born in 365, a well-known poet at the end of the Eastern Jin Dynasty and the foremost representative of fields and gardens poetry.<sup>①</sup>



### Sun Simiao

Born in 581, a pharmacologist of the Tang Dynasty and hailed as "China's King of Medicine".



### Li Bai

Born in 701, the greatest romantic poet in Chinese history and hailed as the "Immortal Poet".



### Fan Zhongyan

Born in 989, a prominent statesman, writer, military strategist and the author of the classic *Memorial for Deyang Tower*.

① A type of poetry focused on describing the natural world, rural landscapes and the tranquil life. It was a form typically used by poets who had a reclusive life and those who strove to live a peaceful life.





### Su Shi

Born in 1037, a great writer, calligrapher and painter during the Song Dynasty (960-1279).



### Tan Sitong

Born in 1865, a statesman who helped launch the Hundred Days' Reform<sup>①</sup> to build China into a republic, but was eventually killed.

In other countries, there are many distinguished figures who were born in the Year of the Ox. Some of them are featured below. You may check whether or not they share the hallmark characteristics of "Oxen".



### Richard I

Born in 1157, monarch of Great Britain who fought in many battles throughout his lifetime.

① A failed 104-day national, cultural, political, and educational reform movement in China that went from June 11 to September 22, 1898 (the late Qing Dynasty). It was undertaken by the young Emperor Guangxu and his reform-minded supporters. Following the issuance of the reformative edicts, a coup d'état was perpetrated by powerful conservative opponents led by Empress Dowager Cixi.



### Dante Alighieri

Born in 1265, literary giant during the Renaissance period in Italy.



### Sandro Botticelli

Born in 1445, representative of the Florentine School and well-known for his painting "Maddonna and Child" during the Renaissance period.



### Napoléon Bonaparte

Born in 1769, military strategist, statesman, and emperor of the First French Empire.



### Hans Christian Andersen

Born in 1805, a 19th-century Danish author known for his fairy tales.



### Jawaharlal Nehru

Born in 1889, the first Prime Minister of India after India gained independence.





### Margaret Thatcher

Born in 1925, the first female leader of the Conservative Party and former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.





## 第一章 中国人生活中的生肖文化

生肖文化在中国历史悠远，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，询问对方的生肖也是常事，如同英国人见面而谈论天气一样普遍。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，再根据外位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，中国人会习惯性地按照同一个生肖划分小群体，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——李世民属牛；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。

按照中国生肖文化的观念，属牛人可能有着以下性格、运气和婚姻状况。假如你是属牛的，你可以对照一下自己，看看哪些特点与你契合。

## 一、属牛人的性格特点

中国人认为，属牛人是典型的完美主义者，事业上多忙碌，金钱观念不强，财运平平，但婚姻及家庭较为稳固。

在性格方面，属牛人有强大的自信心和坚强的

毅力，是勤奋、努力、不达目的决不罢休的人。属牛人性格稳重、有耐心，具有宽容大度和认真严谨的作风，行事理智、注重实际，往往具有很强的责任感。

一般而言，属牛人常拥有较好的口才，能言善辩，为人处事较为冷静、温和、谨慎、专一。

属牛人性格中的不足主要在于：一般不肯接纳别人的意见，思想比较顽固，不善随机应变；虽然具有隐忍的特点，但是一旦被激怒，脾气很大，后果会比较严重。

## 二、属牛人的姻缘

在恋爱、婚姻观念方面，中国的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，属牛的男人适宜寻求生肖为牛、鸡和猪的女人作为结婚对象；属牛的女人则适宜嫁给生肖为牛、蛇、鸡的男人为妻。

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、属牛的中外名人

按照中国人生肖纪年的算法，中国历史上牛年出生的杰出人物非常多。例如：

东晋时代伟大画家——顾恺之（348年出生）；

三国时期蜀国的开国皇帝——刘备（161年出生）；

东晋末期著名的文学家、中国田园诗派代表人物——陶渊明（365年出生）；

被誉为“药王”（中草药）的唐朝医药学家——孙思邈（581年出生）；

被誉为“诗仙”的中国历史上最伟大的浪漫主

义诗人——李白（701年出生）；

宋代杰出的政治家、文学家、军事家、文学著作《岳阳楼记》作者——范仲淹（989年出生）；

宋代最杰出的文学家、书法家、画家——苏轼（1037年出生）；

清代末年因主张维新变法、建立共和政体而遭杀害的政治家——谭嗣同（1865年出生）。

中国以外，牛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牛的性格特点。

一生征战的英国国王——理查一世（1157年出生）；

意大利文艺复兴时期文学巨匠——但丁（1265年出生）；

意大利文艺复兴时期以圣母子像闻名于世的佛罗伦萨画派代表人物——波提切利（1445年出生）；

法国近代军事家、政治家，法兰西第一帝国皇帝——拿破仑·波拿巴（1769年出生）；

丹麦19世纪著名童话作家——安徒生（1805年出生）；

印度独立后首任总理——尼赫鲁（1889年出生）；

英国保守党第一位女党首，英国前首相——撒切尔夫人（1925年出生）。





## Chapter Two

The Origin and Cultural  
Significance of the  
Chinese Zodiac Animals

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