

Animals of the Chinese Zodiac and You

Yvonne Wolf gives a short background on the Chinese Zodiac Animals and how they impact Chinese/ East Asian identity and social relationships.

The questions this workshop answer:

1. What is the Chinese Zodiac?
 - a) 12 animals, one animal corresponds to one year according to the Asian Lunar Year calendar, not to the Gregorian/Western calendar
 - b) The 12 animals start with the Rat/Mouse, and ends with the Boar/Pig.
 - c) The animals were chosen from a Daoist tradition, a philosophy based on the observation of the Natural world thousands of years old. Based on Daoist observations, animals behave through rules and “morals”. The selected animals all possess some admirable characteristics for our imitation.
 - d) *Cat and Rat: The Legend of the Chinese Zodiac* (An Owlet Book) Paperback – Picture Book, November 15, 1998 by Ed Young
 - e) The Chinese Zodiac is a simplified way of counting for an ancient culture.
2. How does the Chinese Zodiac differ?
 - a) The basis of an ancient calendar: Each animal cycles 5 times, according to the 5 Chinese ancient elements: Earth, Fire, Water, Metal/Gold, and Wood. For example, 2026 is the year of the Fire Horse. There is a Metal Horse, an Earth Horse, a Wood Horse and a Water Horse.
 - b) The Year of the Horse arrives on February 17th, 2026, with the last day of the Year of the Snake ending on February 16th, 2026 having started on February 11th, 2025. The Year of the Snake ends on February 5th, 2027.
 - c) Annually change, not monthly. May have celestial origins.
 - d) Much stronger power in creating cultural and personal identity. Talismans, bibs, clothing for infants; backpacks for children; zodiac animals are HUGE collection items in Chinese speaking countries and about a dozen East Asian countries.
 - e) Much stronger power in creating and connecting social relationships. Ages of family members are calculated; affinity among strangers/co-workers are established; and family dynamics might be explained through zodiac animals.
 - f) Before the first quarter of the 20th century, unrequited love was common. It was often determined by incompatible Zodiac animal signs. Matchmakers preselected couples by matching compatible zodiac animal signs.
 - g) Social expectations can lead to self fulfilling prophecy. In the majority of cases, this is good for society, self-esteem, and social and personal well-



being. The shy bunny rabbit is an example where parents may increase social interaction to overcome the shy bunny attribute. There are cases where disappointment leads to lower self-esteem.

3. Is there a bad zodiac animal?

- a) There is no bad zodiac animal
- b) There are more preferable ones than some. This is measurable by birthrate.
 - Contrary to Western thought, Snakes, Rats, and Pigs have many desirable traits.
 - Horses, Tigers have traditionally been more desirable for their aggressive/competitive nature for military and leadership purposes
 - In the past, Tigresses are as undesirable as male tigers are desirable. In the last 30 years, this past unfairness is far less emphasized now.
 - Oxen are considered hardworking, which is very desirable in agrarian societies.
 - The most desirable is the Dragon. For more reading, please check Dubner, Stephen. *Freakonomics: How to Train Your Dragon Child*. <https://freakonomics.com/podcast/dragon-child/>
 - The Year of the Dragon has repeatedly caused serious social problems for its birth spike as evidenced in overcrowding in hospital care, school enrollment, college entrance, marriage rates, career options, family housing, and eventually retirement housing.
 - Governments in Chinese speaking countries have pushed PSA campaigns months ahead to dissuade people from doing this, with no avail.
 - To offset some births to the following year, the Snake is considered the Little Dragon, as it is also reptilian. the Snake is a good zodiac animal who quietly does good without boasting. There are far more non-poisonous snakes than the poisonous ilk.
 - The Snake is a shy, humble creature who removes rodents in our world. Without the snake, we will have more problems on our hands.
 - The Year of the Horse is a year we change from the quiet, wise thinker to the active, competitive doer.
 - Also, the Horse is naturally competitive, self-motivated, and accomplished. It is not a lazy animal; it doesn't grow fat. In olden days, it is a beast of burden giving plenty of horsepower, and absolutely necessary in fighting a winning war, as war steeds. Horses are also considered noble creatures as they are not predatory.
- c) Please do not plan pregnancies around any Zodiac animals.
- d) Chineasy.com clip on the Chinese Zodiac reiterates some points so afar: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kxg0_EpOcWs&t=113s



4. How does my Chinese Zodiac animal impact my life?
 - a) Use this link to find your sign:
<https://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/chinese-zodiac/chinese-zodiac-calculator.htm>
 - b) Use this link to find your compatibility:
<https://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/chinese-zodiac/compatibility.htm>
 - c) Determine what you want out of life, not what your Zodiac animal determines.
 - d) Use your Zodiac traits to make you a better person, don't let your Zodiac limit who you are.

Disclaimer:

This workshop is intended as an introduction to a different cultural perspective of seeing the world. The level of strong identification and connection for social relationships may not apply to you personally. However, this presentation gives you a peek into of how many East Asians of Chinese heritage may see the Chinese zodiac animals. This training is designed to bring an alternative for your consideration. It is not a critique of other philosophies, religions, nor faiths.

About Yvonne:

Intercultural consultant and educator Yvonne Wolf specializes in bringing an element of Chinese culture to a relatable, accessible understanding. She has given talks at libraries, museums, and community centers.

Yvonne shares the knowledge and skills she has acquired having lived in four countries where she became fluent in three languages: Chinese- Mandarin, English, and Danish. She has studied Japanese, Spanish, and Greek. Between work and personal travel, she has visited more than 25 countries and well-traveled within the U.S. and Canada. She has worked with organizations and business executives focusing on communication strategies working with Chinese and East Asian partners. Among her many skills is mediating across cultural misunderstandings. Yvonne was born in Taiwan and educated in the U.S. and Europe.

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