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Chinese Zodiac Signs

徐刚◎编著



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十二生肖是由鼠、牛、虎、兔、龙、蛇、马、羊、猴、鸡、狗、猪12种动物构成。中华民族的子孙在出生时都有一个属于自己的生肖，生肖成为每个人的出生符号和相伴一生的吉祥物。十二生肖并不仅仅指12种动物，而且是一种文化的象征。十二生肖是先民们在长期的生产和生活中与



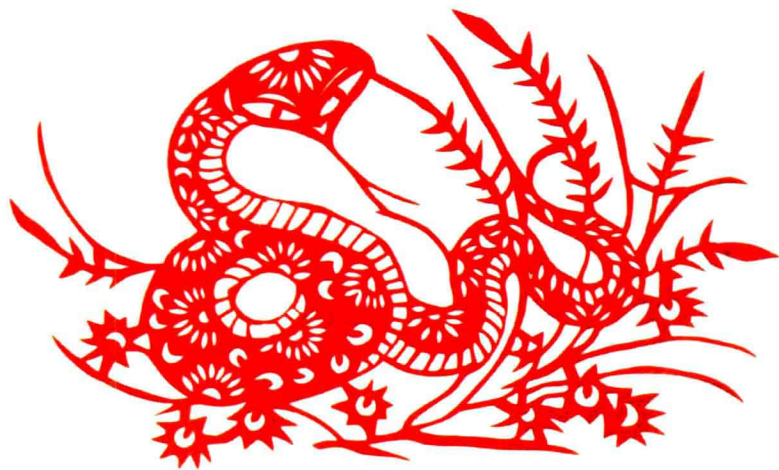
The Chinese zodiac known as Sheng Xiao, is based on a twelve year cycle, each year in that cycle related to an animal signs. They are the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog and pig. Every Chinese is born with an animal sign, and the sign then becomes one's birthmark as well as a life-long mascot. However, more than the twelve animals, Chinese zodiac signs also serve as a cultural symbol. Chinese zodiac signs are the results of people's long-period experience in production, in their life, as well as in their competition with the nature to survive. It is also an integrated system followed by ancient Chinese people to name, count and mark their birthdays and years with well-known animals. Throughout the five-thousand-year development of Chinese culture, many different symbolic meanings have been imbued into the twelve animal signs to express people's great wishes as well

自然争夺生存权利的产物，也是先民们借用自己熟识的动物来命名、计时和标记出生年日的综合性的民俗事项。在华夏五千年的文明中，人们赋予十二生肖不同的象征意义，来表达美好的祝愿和求吉纳福的愿望，使十二生肖成为中国传统文化的重要组成部分。如今，十二生肖在文学、艺术、风俗等各个方面表现出来，已然形成了包罗万象的生肖文化，并在世界范围内产生了广泛的影响，成为中国传统文化的独特标志之一。

本书立足于汉族的十二生肖来探寻生肖文化的起源和发展，并结合中国少数民族的十二生肖，向海内外读者全面介绍十二生肖的传统文化和民俗寓意，希望能够引领读者了解中国的十二生肖，并且从中品味有关生肖艺术中的诗情画意。

as their hopes for good luck and fortune. As an important component of Chinese culture, the Chinese zodiac signs are ubiquitous in all aspects including literary and artistic works as well as folk customs. The all-inclusive blooming culture of Chinese zodiac signs, considered as a unique tradition of the Chinese culture, has a great influence in the world.

This book explores the origin and development of Chinese zodiac culture, mostly based on the twelve animal signs of the Han nationality, combined with the study of zodiac culture of Chinese minority groups, in order to give readers a comprehensive introduction of the traditions and folk customs displayed by zodiac culture. It also aims to help the readers understand the Chinese zodiac culture and appreciate the artistic works of zodiac signs.



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十二生肖概述

General Introduction of Twelve Zodiac Signs

十二生肖由12种自然界的动物，即鼠、牛、虎、兔、龙、蛇、马、羊、猴、鸡、狗、猪组成，它们与中国传统文化中的十二地支，即子、丑、寅、卯、辰、巳、午、未、申、酉、戌、亥，共同构成了一种用于属相和纪年的命名方式，并与人们的日常生活产生了极为密切的关联。

The Chinese zodiac signs were inspired from common or legendary animals closely related to people's daily life, i.e. rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, ram, monkey, rooster, dog and pig. Along with the twelve terrestrial branches (i.e. *Zi, Chou, Yin, Mao, Chen, Si, Wu, Wei, Shen, You, Xu, Hai*), together they constitute an exclusive naming system of Chinese zodiac and a dating method, which exerts great influence upon Chinese people's everyday life.



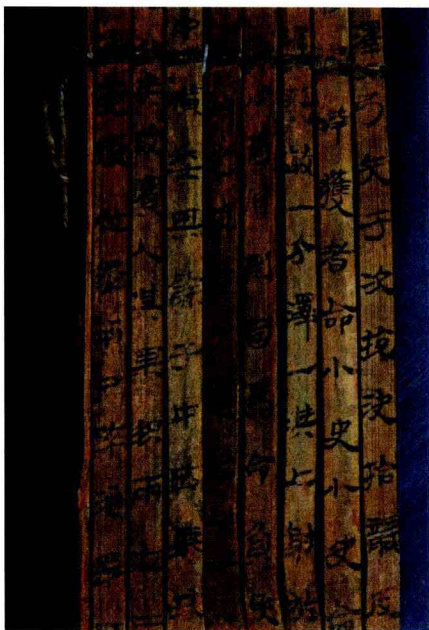


> 十二生肖的起源

关于十二生肖的文字记载，在现有的资料文献中以《诗经》为最早。《诗经》是中国最早的诗歌总集，其中的一篇《小雅·吉日》载有“吉日庚午，既差我马”，意思是庚午是良辰吉日，是骑马出去打猎的好日子，这是将“午”与“马”相对应的例子。由此可见，早在春秋前后（前770—前476），地支与12种动物的对应关系可能已经得到确立并开始流传。1975年，湖北省云梦县睡虎地十一号墓曾出土了一批秦朝（前221—前206）的竹简，其中有一篇描述了占卜盗者相貌特征的文章《盗者》，文中便有关于十二生肖的系统记载。专家学者们认为，这是迄今为止，在中国发现的关于十二生肖的最早而又

> Origin of Twelve Zodiac Signs

The existing earliest written document on Chinese zodiac signs is the *Classic of Poetry (Shi Jing)*, which is the earliest anthology of Chinese poems and songs. In its *Lesser Court Hymns·Lucky Day (Xiaoya·Jiri)*, it was documented that “*Geng Wu (Geng means age, ranking the seventh in the ten Heavenly Stems; Wu means midday, ranking the seventh in the twelve Earthly Branches.) is a lucky day to drive my horse (for hunting)*”, which means that *Geng Wu* is the best time to hunt on horseback. This is a typical example that people did relate an Earthly Branch, *Wu*, with a Chinese zodiac sign, the horse. One can therefore tell that the relationship between the Earthly Branches and Chinese zodiac signs probably has already been prevailing early around the Spring and Autumn Period (770 B.C.-476 A.D.). There was a batch of bamboo



• 睡虎地秦简

睡虎地秦墓出土的竹简共1155枚，残片80枚，内文为墨书秦篆，写于战国（前475—前221）晚期及秦始皇时期。其内容分类整理为十部分，包括《秦律十八种》，《为吏之道》，《日书》甲、乙种等。记载十二生肖内容的《盗者》便出自《日书》甲种。

Qin's Bamboo Slips from the Tombs of Land of Sleeping Tiger

There were 1,155 inscribed bamboo slips including 80 broken pieces unearthed from the tombs of Land of Sleeping Tiger. Inscribed in the formal script of State Qin with ink, the bamboo slips were produced from the late Warring States Period (475 B.C.-221 B.C.) to the reign of Qin Shi Huang (221 B.C.-210 B.C.) Its content is categorized into ten parts, including *Qin's Eighteen Laws*, *Be a Good Government Official*, *Book of Days I* (*Rishu*, a reference for ancient Chinese to select lucky days for special events. *Ri* means day, and *Shu* means book), *Book of Days II*, etc. The article *Thief* that covers the description of Chinese Zodiac actually comes from *Book of Days I*.

较系统的记载。

对于十二生肖的来源，流传着各种不同的说法。第一种说法与传说有关。相传华夏始祖之一的黄帝要选拔12种动物在天上轮流值班，最后通过竞赛的形式选拔出了鼠、牛、虎、兔等12种动物。第二种传说认为十二生肖可能是从天竺引进的，或者来源于亚洲的其他地区。第三种说法认为十二生肖来源于原始社会一些氏族的图腾崇拜，并按照某次集会时各部落的强弱划分而

slips produced in the Qin Dynasty (221 B.C.-206 B.C.) unearthed from Tomb Eleven of the Land of Sleeping Tiger in Yunmeng County, Hubei Province in 1975. An article titled *Thief* inscribed on the slips has introduced how to tell a thief on his appearance and has given a systematical introduction of Chinese zodiac signs. Experts and scholars believe that this article is the earliest systematical introduction of Chinese zodiac signs in China.

The origin of Chinese Zodiac signs





• 黄帝像

黄帝为华夏始祖之一，是中国远古时期的部落联盟首领，以统一中华民族的伟绩载入史册。其统治时期，播百谷草木，大力发展生产，始制衣冠，建舟车，发明指南车，制音律，创医学，并创制文字等。

Portrait of Yellow Emperor

The Yellow Emperor, one of the ancestors of Chinese civilization, led a union of tribes in China during ancient times. He unified China and was therefore documented in the Chinese history. During his reign, he greatly promoted the agricultural productivity by teaching people to grow cereals and many other plants. Moreover, he was also credited with many inventions including Chinese diadem, boat, cart, south pointing chariot, code of sound laws, etc. He also launched traditional Chinese medicine and Chinese character writing system.

成。第四种说法与中国古代的星宿分布有关，古人以动物命名星宿，并从中挑选一些常见的动物作为一年的代称。其中，图腾崇拜说和星宿说较为流行。

has several different versions of stories. The first version comes from a legend: Yellow Emperor, one of the initiators of Chinese civilization, needed to send twelve animals to heaven to take shifts and the twelve winners including rat, ox, tiger, and rabbit were finally selected through competition. The second version suggests that the twelve animals were introduced from India or some other Asian countries. The third version believes that Chinese Zodiac came from totem worship of some primitive clans in ancient China, and it was therefore arranged in an order based on the strength of those clans at one meeting. The fourth version is related to ancient Chinese constellations: ancient Chinese named stars after animals, among which they picked twelve animals that were better known to represent a year. The third and the fourth one are more accepted among all four versions.

Chinese zodiac signs are closely related to animal worship and totemism in ancient times. Many nationalities across the world have their own totems and taboos, mostly related to animals (e.g. animal totems), and the Chinese zodiac signs are considered by many scholars as a symbol of totem worship in ancient

生肖文化与原始时代的动物崇拜和图腾现象有着密切的关系。世界上的许多民族都有属于自己的图腾和禁忌，其中大多与动物有关，即把某种动物当做本民族的图腾。中国的十二生肖，就被许多学者认为是中国图腾崇拜的象征。在原始

China. In the primitive society with a very low productivity, people had very limited knowledge about the nature. Therefore, people felt close to domesticated animals, such as horse, ram, ox, rooster and dog, while they also felt threatened by dangerous beasts, such as tiger and snake. At the same time, animals with much



• 岩画上的动物

岩画是一种石刻文化，被称为是“刻在石头上的史书”。其图案题材丰富多彩，记录了原始社会的人类生活动与民俗文化，包括民族迁移、经济盛衰、祖先崇拜、祭祀仪式、哲学思想、宗教信仰等。在岩画发现了大量的动物，这是古人动物崇拜的一种表现。

Animals in Cliff Painting

Cliff painting, a kind of stone inscription culture, is also called the history carved on stones. The colorful patterns reflect people's various activities and folk culture in the primitive society, such as ethnic migration, economic ups and downs, ancestral worship, sacrificial ceremony, philosophical thought, and religion beliefs, etc. A large quantity of animals are depicted in cliff painting, which shows that they were worshiped by the ancestors.





社会，人类的生产力低下，人们认识自然的能力也极其有限。在这种情况下，人类对那些和自己的生活息息相关的动物们，比如马、羊、牛、鸡、狗等，产生了一种依赖感；而对危害自身安全的动物，比如虎、蛇等，则产生了一种恐惧感。与此同时，人们还对一些超过人类感官能力的动物，比如拥有超强嗅觉的狗等产生了崇敬感。由此，便导致了一系列对于动物的崇拜之情。12种生肖动物便是人们在动物图腾崇拜的原始信仰影响下，而产生的用来纪年、纪月的兽历方式，并随着人类的生产生活一起繁荣发展。

sharper senses than human beings were also worshiped, for example, dogs with a much more sensitive sense of smell. As a result, the Chinese zodiac signs were born out of people's primitive belief in animal totems and then were employed as the beast calendar to designate years and months. As the production and living styles of mankind have progressed, the culture of Chinese zodiac signs has also developed and prospered.

One cannot say Chinese zodiac signs without saying the Celestial Stems and the Earthly Branches. The Celestial Stems and Earthly Branches, together called Stem-Branch for short, provide one Chinese system for reckoning time in ancient times. In the Chinese traditional

图腾崇拜

图腾是人类历史上最早出现的一种文化现象，是原始人类保护神的象征。在原始人类的信仰中，本氏族人都源于某种动物或植物，于是，图腾信仰便与祖先崇拜发生了关系。中国古人崇拜的动物图腾有鱼、鸟、壁虎、蛙、猪、羊、龙等。其中，关于十二生肖的图腾崇拜表现得非常明显。如远古时代的不少氏族、部落都认为自己的始祖是老鼠，并为自己是老鼠的后代而自豪。他们描绘、雕刻老鼠的形象，在仪式上或节日期间隆重祭祀，祈求老鼠祖先的保护。而对龙的崇拜在中国历史上是一种绵延了数千年的特殊现象。龙是古人出于对美好生活的向往，幻想出的一种神异动物，它呼风唤雨，无所不能。

Totem Worship

Totem, the earliest cultural phenomenon in the history of mankind, served as the patron saint of primitive people. In the primitive beliefs, every human clan stemmed from a certain kind of animal or plant. This is how totem belief was related to ancestral worship. The totem worship of ancient Chinese were many included fish, bird, gecko, frog, pig, ram, dragon, etc. among which the twelve animals of Chinese zodiac signs were worshiped by most people. For example, many clans in ancient times believed proudly that they were the offspring of rats. They depicted and sculptured rats, or hosted grand sacrifice ceremonies to pray for their rat ancestor's blessing. The worship of dragon is a particular phenomenon which has lasted for thousands of years in China. Dragon is a legendary creature created out of people's pursuit of better life. It can command the nature and has the omnipotent power.



- 故宫九龙壁

九龙壁上面有九条龙，龙的形体有正龙、升龙、降龙之分，每条龙都神态各异。

Nine-dragon Screen in the Imperial Palace

The Nine-dragon Screen in the Imperial Palace, just as its name implies, has nine dragons, including full-faced dragons, ascending dragons and descending dragons, all different.





提起十二生肖，则必然会谈到“天干地支”。“天干地支”简称“干支”，是中国古代的一种纪时方式。在中国古代的历法中，甲、乙、丙、丁、戊、己、庚、辛、壬、癸被称为“十天干”，子、丑、寅、卯、辰、巳、午、未、申、酉、戌、亥叫做“十二地支”。十天干和十二地支依次相配，两两组合，可以组成60个基本单位，并按固定的顺序排列，便组成了干支纪日法。近代在河南安阳殷墟出土的中国现存年代最久远的

calendar, *Jia, Yi, Bing, Ding, Wu, Ji, Geng, Xin, Ren, Gui* are called the ten Celestial Stems; while *Zi, Chou, Yin, Mao, Chen, Si, Wu, Wei, Shen, You, Xu, Hai* are called the twelve Earthly Branches. The two systems are used in sixty sequential combined pairs and put in a fixed order for naming a compound cycle of sixty days, which is known as the Stem-Branch Dating System. The existing oldest table of Stem-Branch Dating System, unearthed from the Shang Dynasty ruins in Anyang in Henan Province in the Modern Times, shows

天干	十	一	二	三	四	五	六	七	八	九
	甲	乙	丙	丁	戊	己	庚	辛	壬	癸
事物	虎	马	鹿	牛	兕	羊	象	鱼	鹏	蚕
	雷	雨	水	虹	日	月	夕	车	土	王
行为	并	闻	伐	获	降	射	身	渔	坠	易

• 甲骨文天干表

Table of Celestial Stems in Oracle Bone Inscriptions



• 刻干支表的牛骨 (图片提供: FOTOE)

此牛骨出土于河南安阳殷墟，上面整整齐齐地刻着六十干支表。因其表面不像其他甲骨那样有灼痕，不是占卜用的，后人推测它们主要在殷商时期起着日历的作用，是专门用来纪时的。

Stem-Branch Table on an Ox Bone

This ox bone, unearthed from the Shang Dynasty's ruins in Anyang, Henan Province, was neatly inscribed with a table of the sixty Stem-Branch pairs. The surface of this bone, not like other bones, has no burn mark as this bone was not used in divination activities. Thus it is inferred that this bone was used exclusively as a calendar to record time in the Shang Dynasty (1600 B.C.-1046 B.C.).

干支表，说明早在商代（前1600—前1046），干支纪日法就已经被古人娴熟自如地加以运用了。随着时间的推移，干支的功能逐渐多样化。其作为充当时间单位的符号，在纪日之外，又开始用于纪时，即纪录一日中的12个时辰。根据历史记载，中国从汉代（前206—公元220）开始，便采用十二地支记录一天的12个时辰，每个时辰相当于两个小时。此外，干支还用来纪月、

that early in the Shang Dynasty (1600 B.C.-1046 B.C.) the Stem-Branch Dating System was already skillfully used by ancient Chinese. Subsequently, the Stem-Branch system has been used in various ways as the time unit: in addition to its function as dating units, it was then used to reckon time in the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.), that is to say, to mark the twelve Chinese hours (each two hours long) of the day, and it was also used to count months and years. Chinese zodiac signs appeared after the Stem-Branch system had been used in year numbering. Each of the twelve animals associates with an Earthly Branch and therefore symbolizes its associated branch. People born in a certain year will have the Earthly-Branch symbol, namely the





纪年等。十二生肖是继干支纪年法创立后才出现的，12种动物与十二地支是一一对应的，并以动物作为地支的标志。某一年出生的人就与这一年的地支所属的动物相匹配，由此以12种动物用来纪年、纪日和计算每一个人的属相。尽管人们不能确定十二生肖的确切来历，但由于其具有通俗方便、趣味性强的特征，所以一直沿用至今，成为古人留下的一种极为实用而又富有文化价值的宝贵遗产。

associated animal, as their animal sign to mark the year of birth. As a consequence, the Chinese zodiac signs are now used to number years and days, as well as one's year of birth. Although the origin of Chinese zodiac signs remains uncertain, this system is still in use today as it is both convenient and interesting. Being practical and of abundant cultural value, the Chinese zodiac signs is a precious cultural heritage that has come down through the years.

1894—2013年天干地支纪年与公元纪年对照表
1894-2013 Marked with the Stem-Branch Cycle
and the Gregorian Calendar

天干纪年 Stem-Branch Cycle	公元纪年 Gregorian Calendar	
甲午 <i>Jia-Wu</i>	1894	1954
乙未 <i>Yi-Wei</i>	1895	1955
丙申 <i>Bing-Shen</i>	1896	1956
丁酉 <i>Ding-You</i>	1897	1957
戊戌 <i>Wu-Xu</i>	1898	1958