

这是一个向英文读者介绍中国文化的连载专栏，内容出自饶逸生博士所著的《中国文化面面观》。我们将这个专栏看作是一种交流，由会馆的一位长者会员，写给那些由于种种客观原因而对中文和中国文化失去传承的其他会员。当你们需要了解更多中国文化的时候，这里有一条寻根之路……

In search of cultural identity and heritage

寻根问祖

This is a column written for the English speaking readers, introducing various aspects of Chinese culture, partly based from the book "The Chinese Dimensions, their roots, mindset and psyche", written by Dr. Yit-Seng YOW. We perceive this column as a form of "cultural infusion"; dedicated to those who, through no fault of their own, did not have the opportunity to be exposed to the Chinese language and culture. When you need to know more about Chinese culture, here lies a path to your cultural roots...

Part 3: Understanding Chinese Zodiacs

What does it mean when you are told that you are a wood-tiger, a metal-rat or an earth-dragon? How does the Chinese zodiac compare with Western system?

The Chinese zodiac is based on time and space. If you find it hard to understand think in terms of seasons. We know that spring turns to summer, summer to autumn, autumn to winter and winter to spring again. This concept of continuous time cycle is represented in Chinese psyche as "wood" 木 (spring), turning to "fire" 火 (summer), then to "metal" 金 (autumn), and "water" 水 (winter). Think about it! Wood represents growth and regeneration in spring after winter hibernation, heat or fire is dominant in summer, metal is used in autumn for harvesting or chopping down wood, and water in its various forms including snow, ice, hail dominates winter; it is also the opposite of fire in summer.

We need to add the space dimension to time. As we live on earth, adding the "earth" 土 dimension we would have the five determinant elements "wu xing" 五行 of metal, wood, water, fire, and earth, 金木水火土. Together with the concept of yin-yang 阴阳, it forms the basis of Chinese zodiac. The concept of "yin-yang and five determinant elements" 阴阳五行 permeates virtually all aspects of Chinese culture. It is applicable from Chinese medicine to feng shui, from "life destiny analysis" 算命 to divination or forecasting 卜卦.

There are 12 Chinese zodiac signs, which can be divided into 4 groups, the "spring" group, represented by "wood", the "summer" group, represented by "fire", the "autumn" group, represented by "metal" and the "winter" group, represented by water. Each of the group would

have a yin and a yang element, followed by “earth” during the transition to the next group. It is important to realise that the same concept applies to the time dimensions of years, months, days, and hours.

The arrangement is as follows (the months refer to Chinese calendar month)

| | | | |
|----------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Spring - wood | January “yang wood” | February “yin wood” | March “wood-earth” |
| Summer - fire | April “yin fire” | May “yang fire” | June “fire-earth” |
| Autumn - metal | July “yang metal” | August “yin metal” | September “metal-earth” |
| Winter - water | October “yin water” | November “yang water” | December “water-earth” |

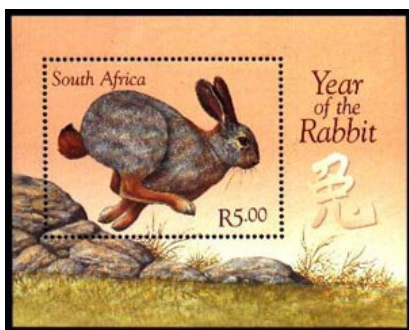
To make it easier for the common folks to understand, a suitable animal is selected to represent the properties of the five determinants of metal, fire, water, wood and earth, together with their yin-yang attributes. In this article we will look at the “spring group”.

As we have seen, “wood” is the dominant element in spring; it represents growth and expansion after winter. To survive and grow amongst millions that sprout together one has to be steadfast, organised, practical and innovative; be prepared to face challenges. Three animals, the tiger, rabbit and dragon are chosen to represent the “spring period of yang-wood, yin-wood and earth-wood”.



The month of January (equivalent to February in practical terms), known in Chinese as “yin” 寅, is designated as yang-wood, represented by the tiger 虎. In nature the tiger is King of the jungle, it is ferocious, acts alone, and needs a space to roam. It does not get along well with others in the same territory. It creates an environment for others to take into account. It is self-confident, bold, and ready to take challenges. People with tiger traits have big ambitions, strong willed, active and optimistic, they pursue something right till the end.

For the month of February “mao” 卯 (March in Western calendar) the highly prolific rabbit 兔 is



chosen. In nature the rabbit is always on the alert of any potential enemy, highly instinctive, quick to response and react fast to the environment. They are mild mannered, lovable, friendly and not regarded as an enemy by other animals. People with “rabbit” traits are not aggressive, easy to get along with, known for its strong survival and adaptability skills. They grow and develop without being aggressive. True as a “wood” person, the rabbit could at times be moody, and

keep their inner thoughts and feelings to themselves.

The month of March “chen” 辰 (April in Western calendar) is a transition between “wood” and “fire”. This transitional month is represented by the “earth-

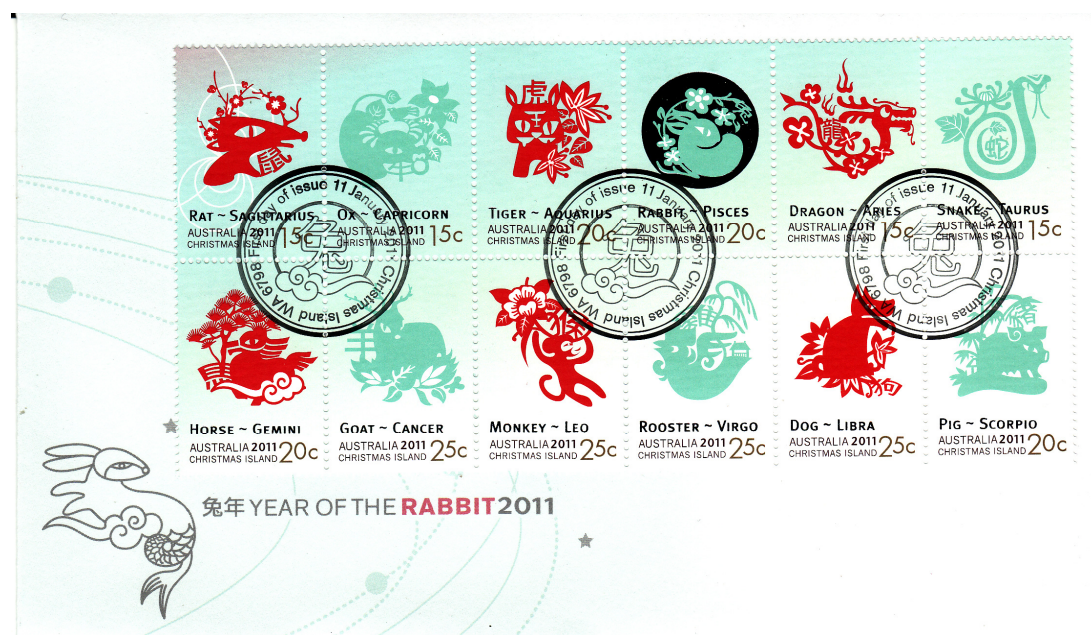


wood” zodiac, the dragon 龙. This is a legendary animal in Chinese mythology, considered as an icon in China, hugely popular throughout Asia. The dragon is imperial, associated with kings, benevolent and kind. People with dragon trait tend to command a certain degree of respect, charisma and leadership. They are peace loving, outstanding in their own ways, energetic and enthusiastic, with a strong sense of principles, conviction and practical realities. They are decisive, not deceiving. They do not like being supervised. (Picture shows a New Caledonia stamp was issued to mark the year of the dragon).

The 12 Chinese zodiacs are as follows; including the correspondent Western zodiac and time.

| Chinese Month | Chinese name | Animal Represented | Properties | Season | Western Zodiac | Time |
|---------------|--------------|--------------------|-------------|--------|----------------|-------------|
| November | “zi” 子 | Rat 鼠 | Yang-water | Winter | Sagittarius | 11pm – 1 am |
| December | “chou” 丑 | Ox 牛 | Earth-water | Winter | Capricorn | 1am – 3am |
| January | “yin” 寅 | Tiger 虎 | Yang-wood | Spring | Aquarius | 3am – 5am |
| February | “mao” 卯 | Rabbit 兔 | Yin-wood | Spring | Pisces | 5am – 7am |
| March | “chen” 辰 | Dragon 龙 | Eath-wood | Spring | Aries | 7am – 9am |
| April | “si” 巳 | Snake 蛇 | Yin-fire | Summer | Taurus | 9am – 11am |
| May | “wu” 午 | Horse 马 | Yang-fire | Summer | Gemini | 11am – 1pm |
| June | “wei” 未 | Goat 羊 | Earth-fire | Summer | Cancer | 1pm – 3pm |
| July | “shen” 申 | Monkey 猴 | Yang-metal | Autumn | Leo | 3pm – 5pm |
| August | “you” 酉 | Rooster 鸡 | Yin-metal | Autumn | Virgo | 5pm – 7pm |
| September | “xu” 戌 | Dog 狗 | Earth-metal | Autumn | Libra | 7pm – 9pm |
| October | “hai” 亥 | Pig 猪 | Yin-water | Winter | Scorpio | 9pm – 11pm |

Most people would know their zodiac by year, and they tend to associate their personality traits with it. However the same zodiac cycle is also found every year as months. As the 2011 Australian stamp shows, there is a nexus between the two zodiac systems. If you are born in the year of the dragon and the month of September, you would have a Dragon year and Rooster month, and you would have traits from these two zodiacs. Note that the corresponding dates for the two systems are approximate.



The same cycle applies from day to day. As an example 1st January 2012 in Western calendar is a day of rooster 酉, the 2nd January a day of dog 戌, the 3rd a day of pig 亥, etc. Finally the same

system applies on a daily basis as two hour segments. You would be born on hour of the dragon if you are born between 7 to 9 am on any day.

A person could be born in the year of the tiger, the month of the dragon, the day of the rat and the hour of the snake. It is only logical that he would have a combination of the traits of these zodiac signs. Furthermore the zodiac elements interact with one another. Some of these elements might reinforce, merge to form more powerful alliances. For example if your birth data has all the “wood” elements of tiger, rabbit and dragon; they merge together to form a very power “wood” force 寅卯辰三会. The elements might also antagonise or oppose or neutralise one another.

The discussion is not complete without mentioning the modifiers. As we have discussed there exist the five determinant elements, which modify a zodiac sign, whether it occurs in the year, month, day or hour. What we have discussed thus far refers to the “terrestrial branches” (di zhi) 地支. The five determinant elements, know as the “Celestial stems” (tian gan) 天干 modifies the properties of the zodiac. For the dragons there would be wood-dragon 甲辰, fire-dragon 丙辰, earth-dragon 戊辰, metal-dragon 庚辰, and water-dragon 壬辰. Note that it should not be translated as golden dragon, metallic dragon or wooden dragon; it actually refers to metal-dragon or wood-dragon combinations. This Chinese stamp was issued in 1988, in the year of earth-dragon 戊辰.



In the Chinese system of life destiny analysis 算命, once your birth data, i.e. year, month, day and hour of birth (known as the 4 pillars of life 四柱) is known, together with the gender and place of birth, it is possible to work out a personality profile, intelligence, habits, compatibility with other people. Someone skilled in the art could also work out the destiny 命, the “cycle of ups and downs” 运 on a 10 years, 5 years or yearly basis, focusing on issues such as power, status, wealth, sickness, accidents or misfortunes, etc. Invariably some years are more favourable while others are not.



The picture on the left shows the commemorative coin issued in Australia for the year of the dragon, 2012.

A very happy Chinese New Year of the Water-Dragon to all our readers from the executive committee of Chung Wah Association. See you in part 4.

Reference:

- Y. S. Yow: *“Chinese Dimensions: Their Roots, Mindset and Psyche”*, Pelanduk Publications (Malaysia) 2006, ISBN 967-978-927-6
- Y. S. Yow: *“Interpreting Chinese Zodiac”*: Public talk as part of the 2008 Chinese New Year Festival Celebration, City of Sydney 2008.

Y. S. Yow: *"The Chinese Zodiac"*: Radio broadcast by Australian Broadcasting Corporation, March 2010.