

Chinese Astrology

According to Chinese legend, the twelve animals quarreled one day as to who was to head the cycle of years. The gods were asked to decide and they held a contest: whoever was to reach the opposite bank of the river would be first, and the rest of the animals would receive their years according to their finish. All the twelve animals gathered at the river bank and jumped in. Unknown to the ox, the rat had jumped upon his back. As the ox was about to jump ashore, the rat jumped off the ox's back, and won the race. The pig, who was very lazy, ended up last. That is why the rat is the first year of the animal cycle, the ox second, and the pig last.

The Chinese animal signs are a 12-year cycle used for dating the years. They represent a cyclical concept of time, rather than the Western linear concept of time. In the Chinese calendar, the beginning of the year falls somewhere between late January and early February. The Chinese have adopted the Western calendar since 1911, but the lunar calendar is still used for festive occasions such as the Chinese New Year. Many Chinese calendars will print both the solar dates and the Chinese lunar dates.

A cultural sidelight of the animal signs in Chinese folklore is that horoscopes have developed around the animal signs, much like monthly horoscopes in the West have been developed for the different moon signs, Pisces, Aries, etc. For example, a Chinese horoscope may predict that a person born in the Year of the Horse would be, cheerful, popular, and loves to compliment others. These horoscopes are amusing, but not regarded seriously by the Chinese people.