

Shaolan_The_Chinese_Zodiac_Explained

https://www.ted.com/talks/shaolan_the_chinese_zodiac_explained?language=zh-tw

Have you ever been asked by your Chinese friend, "What is your **zodiac sign**¹?" Don't think they are making **small talk**². If you say, "I'm a Monkey," they immediately know you are either 24, 36, 48 or 60 years old.

Asking a zodiac sign is a polite way of asking your age.

By revealing your zodiac sign, you are also being evaluated. Judgments are being made about your **fortune**³ or **misfortune**⁴, your personality, **career prospects**⁵ and how you will do in a **given year**⁶. If you share you and your partner's animal signs, they will paint a picture in their mind about your private life. Maybe you don't believe in the Chinese zodiac. As **a quarter**⁷ of the world population is influenced by it, you'd be wise to do something about that.

So what is the Chinese zodiac, exactly? Most Westerners think of **Greco-Roman zodiac**⁸, the signs divided into 12 months. The Chinese zodiac is different. It's a **12-year cycle labeled with animals**⁹, starting with a Rat and ending with a Pig, and has no association with constellations. For example, if you were born in 1975, you are a Rabbit. Can you see your zodiac sign there? Our Chinese ancestors constructed a very complicated **theoretical framework**¹⁰ based on **yin and yang**¹¹, the **five elements**¹² and the 12 zodiac animals. Over thousands of years, this popular culture has affected people's major decisions, such as naming, marriage, giving birth and attitude towards each other. And some of the **implications**¹³ are quite amazing.

¹ 星座

² 寒暄、閒聊、開場白

³ 運氣、命運

⁴ 不幸

⁵ 事業前景

⁶ 特定一年

⁷ 四分之一

⁸ 希臘羅馬生肖

⁹ 十二年一輪，每年有一個動物代表

¹⁰ 理論框架

¹¹ 陰和陽

¹² 金、木、水、火、土

¹³ 啟示、含意

The Chinese believe certain animals **get on**¹⁴ better than the others. So parents choose specific years to give birth to babies, because they believe the team effort by the right combination of animals can give **prosperity**¹⁵ to families. We even refer to the zodiac when entering into romantic relations. I'm a Pig; I should have perfect romance with Tigers, Goats and Rabbits. Chinese people believe some animals are natural enemies. As a Pig, I need to be careful with a Snake. Raise your hand if you are a Snake. Let's have a chat later.

We believe some animals are luckier than the others, such as the Dragon. Unlike the Western tradition, the Chinese Dragon is a symbol for power, strength and wealth. It's everyone's dream to have a Dragon baby. Jack Ma's parents must have been very proud. And they are not the only ones. In 2012, the Year of the Dragon, the birthrate in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan increased by five percent. That means another one million more babies. With a traditional preference to baby boys, the boy-girl **ratio**¹⁶ that year was 120 to 100. When those Dragon boys grow up, they will face much more severe competition in love and job markets.

According to the BBC and the Chinese government's **press release**¹⁷, January 2015 saw a **peak**¹⁸ of **Cesarean sections**¹⁹. Why? That was the last month for the Year of the Horse. It's not because they like horses so much, it's because they try to avoid having unlucky Goat babies.

If you are a Goat, please don't feel bad. Those are Goat babies. They don't look like losers to me.

Tiger is another **undesirable**²⁰ animal, due to its **volatile**²¹ **temperament**²². Many Chinese regions saw a sharp decline of birthrate during those years. Perhaps one should consider zodiac **in reverse**²³, as those Tiger and Goat babies will face much less competition. Maybe they are the lucky ones. I went through **the Forbes**²⁴ top

¹⁴ 處得好

¹⁵ 繁榮星盛

¹⁶ 比率

¹⁷ 新聞稿

¹⁸ 頂峰

¹⁹ 剖腹產

²⁰ 不想要的

²¹ 揮發性的, 可變的, 不穩定的,

²² 氣質

²³ 反面思考

²⁴ 富比士

300 richest people in the world, and it's interesting to see the most undesirable two animals, the Goat and Tiger, are at the top of the chart, even higher than the Dragon.

So maybe we should consider, maybe it's much better to have less competition.

One last but interesting point: many Chinese people make their investment decisions based on the zodiac sign **index**²⁵. Although the belief and tradition of the zodiac sign has been over thousands of years, the **trend**²⁶ of using it in making major decisions did not really happen until the past few decades. Our ancestors were very busy **surviving**²⁷ poverty, **drought**²⁸, **famine**²⁹, **riot**³⁰, disease and **civil war**³¹. And finally, Chinese people have the time, wealth and technology to create an ideal life they've always wanted. The **collective**³² decision made by 1.3 billion people has caused the **fluctuation**³³ in **economics**³⁴ and **demand**³⁵ on everything, from health care and education to property and **consumer goods**³⁶. As China plays such an important role in the global economy and **geopolitics**³⁷, the decisions made based on the zodiac and other Chinese traditions end up impacting everyone around the world.

Are there any Monkeys here? 2016 is the Year of the Monkey. Monkeys are clever, curious, creative and **mischievous**³⁸.

Thank you.

Comprehension questions:

1. What is Chinese Zodiac Sign?
2. What do you know if someone tells you his/her zodiac sign?
3. What are other implications of the zodiac sign?
4. What do Chinese people think of the Dragon?

²⁵ 指標

²⁶ 趨勢

²⁷ 存活

²⁸ 旱災

²⁹ 飢荒

³⁰ 暴亂

³¹ 內亂

³² 集體的

³³ 波動

³⁴ 經濟

³⁵ 需求

³⁶ 消費品

³⁷ 地緣政治

³⁸ 喜歡惡作劇的

5. Why was there a peak of Cesarean sections in January 2015?
6. Why was tiger undesirable?
7. Why does the speaker suggest that people consider zodiac in reverse?
8. Why do the decisions made based on the zodiac and other Chinese traditions end up impacting everyone around the world?

Discussion questions

1. What is the main topic of this talk?
2. What is the main idea of this talk?
3. What did you learn from this talk?
4. What is your zodiac sign? What do you know about people of this sign?