

The Animal World in China: A Cross Cultural Perspective

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Abstract:

The Chinese have over a 10,000 year history of agriculture. Neolithic village settlements were established by about 5,000 BCE in several regions of China. In these areas, people fished, grew rice and had domesticated pigs, dogs and cattle. This closeness to the land is still relevant today with approximately 68% of the population living in rural areas, impacting their relationship both to the land and animals. To exemplify this, the Chinese ideogram for family, or home 家 (*jiā*) consists of two radicals, 宀 (*miān*) or roof and 豕 (*shǐ*) meaning a pig below.

The relationship of the Chinese twelve zodiac animals that attributes animal characteristics to the individual will be examined and compared to perspectives in the West. Native Americans, indigenous to North America, also have a close relationship to the natural world, similar to that of the Chinese. Legends, myths, aspects of totemism and value systems will be explored in the relationship between humans and animals.

China has a long history with over 10,000 years of strong ties to the land. Ancient rice grains discovered in Li County, Hunan Province in central China were grown during the Neolithic age about 8,000 years ago, so agriculture then was quite advanced. Agricultural development was also aided by utilizing animal power. In about 5,000 BC, rice and millet were grown in the north and northwest and in Central China along the lower Yangtze River. Domesticated animals such as pigs, cattle and dogs were prevalent. Later in about 3,000 BC, sheep appeared in the north on the wind-blown loess soils and water buffalo in the south. Chinese myths tell of the Divine Farmer, Shen Nong who lived nearly five thousand years ago (2737 BC to 2697 BC) and was credited with bringing the practice of tea drinking to the Chinese and teaching them how to farm the land. This closeness to the land is still relevant today with approximately 68% of the population living in rural areas. This long history of agriculture, the close connection to the land and the animals is exemplified by the Chinese character for home (*hui jiā*). The Chinese character *jiā* is composed of two radicals, *shǐ* which is pig and *miān* for roof. Home in China reverts to its agricultural roots, a pig under a roof.

When I was teaching English one summer in Changsha, all the students were asked to say something about themselves – anything in English. One rather large student smilingly announced to his class that he looked like a pig – huge roars of laughter as indeed there was a similarity. However, pigs are viewed differently in China. There is the famous, well loved pig (*Zhu Bajie*), the half pig, half human character in Arthur Waley's classic **Journey to the West**, now a popular TV series. The pig with the Monkey King, Sun Wukong and other companions escorts the monk, Tang Seng, on his pilgrimage to India to retrieve the Buddhist scriptures. Although Zhu Bajie has qualities of greed, laziness and lechery, in reality this pig is extremely kindhearted, honest and greatly loved by the Chinese people.

Pigs were regarded as intelligent animals in ancient China and they were noted for their courage. Northeastern China has an old folk rhyme that proclaims pigs to be the bravest of animals, even braver than tigers or bears. An old Chinese proverb states that it takes a lot of courage and bravery to hunt a tiger, but to hunt a wild pig a coffin may be needed. Your life is at risk. Unlike a hunted tiger or a bear, a hunted wild pig won't try to escape but will instead turn around and attack the hunter.

Pigs were also protectors. There was an old Chinese custom where young male children were dressed with hats and shoes in the shape of a pig to prevent any misfortune. Chinese parents believed the evil spirits would be fooled into thinking the child was actually a pig and steer clear.

The Chinese folk saying, "A fat pig at the door" associates the pig with the arrival of good luck and happiness. Prosperity and money are also frequently associated with pigs as it used to be that only rich families could afford pork to eat. Although this is not a problem in modern day China.

In the West, pigs are viewed as rather dirty animals as they do like to bathe in mud, in actuality this is a cooling device as they have ineffective sweat glands. Jews and Muslims regard pigs as unclean and forbid the eating of pork. The Old Testament prohibits the consumption of pork:

"Of their flesh shall ye not eat, and their carcass shall ye not touch, they are unclean to you."
(Leviticus 11:7-8)

"And the swine, because it divideth the hoof, yet cheweth not the cud, it is unclean unto you. Ye shall not eat of their flesh, nor touch their dead carcass."
(Deuteronomy 14:8).

The Qur'an also prohibits pork consumption.

Pigs can also have negative connotations in literature, as in for example British author George Orwell's allegorical novel **Animal Farm**, a political fable, where the central characters who represent different Soviet leaders are pigs. Despite the West's negative views on pigs, physiologically pigs are closer to humans than any other animal and although they would be excellent models for biomedical research, the smaller cheaper rats and mice have precedence.

The Chinese calendar has a twelve year cycle and each year in the Chinese calendar is named after a particular animal. Chinese zodiac signs are determined by the lunar year of birth. The date varies, but it usually falls on the first day of the first moon and the Chinese believe the particular animal ruling the year of birth has a strong influence on personality and potential destiny. There is a saying: *"This animal hides in your heart."*

Western astrology looks to the planets, or heavenly constellations to predict personal destiny. Also the Western calendar is linear compared to the cyclical Chinese calendar that repeats every sixty years. Chinese calendars have two cycles that interact with each other - the Chinese zodiac with 12 animals, the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog, and pig and *wuxing*, the five elements. These five elements of metal, water, wood, fire and earth are assigned to each of the twelve animals providing a different characteristic that creates 60 different combinations resulting in a 60-year cycle. For example, the Year of the Golden Pig, especially auspicious, was in 2007 and on the 60-year cycle will next occur in 2031. The concept of Yin and Yang also affects the Chinese Zodiac by assigning opposing forces to each animal sign - odd years are Yin years and even years are Yang years. Yin is of the earth, female, dark and passive, while Yang is regarded as male, heaven, light and active.

"Expect a son to be a dragon, a daughter to be a phoenix" -*Wang zi cheng long, wang nu cheng feng*)
In China, sons are born to be dragons and daughters, phoenixes. What does this mean? The dragon is one of the twelve zodiac signs, the only mythological animal. The other animals are the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog and pig. Half of these zodiac animals are domesticated and have played an important part in everyday people's lives.

The dragon is a powerful symbol in China and represents the Emperor. The Chinese believe that they are descendents of the dragon and people whose last name is *Long* meaning dragon, are very proud of

such a name. Legends tell of the dragon that hibernates in the ocean during autumn but travels up to the sky in spring, bringing beneficial rains to cultivate the crops. Dragons carved on the eaves of houses and temples are also water bearers to put out any fires. Thus a dragon is considered an auspicious creature that brings forth blessings, festivity and happiness, to benefit everything on earth.

Visser (1913) states,

“The Classics have taught us that the dragon is thunder, and at the same time that he is a water animal akin to the snake, sleeping in pools during winter and arising in spring. When autumn comes with its dry weather, the dragon descends and dives into the water to remain there till spring arrives again.”

Traditional Dragon Boat Festivals occur in June in memory of the patriotic poet, Qu Yuan and that time of year -the fifth day of the fifth month (double fifth) there are always abundant *zhongzi* available, sticky rice with meat or vegetables wrapped in bamboo leaves and tied with string. The Chinese graduate students would laugh at me for eating *zhongzi* all the time for my breakfast.

“Chris, do you know the story of *zhongzi*?” asked Fast Girl (her selection of an English name) with her big brown eyes, grinning at me, swinging her long black hair.

“Once upon a time there was a famous poet from the town of Zigui, much loved by all the people. His name was Qu Yuan (340-278 BC) and he lived over 2,000 years ago during the troubled period of the Warring States (475-221 BC). This was a time of great turmoil in China with seven states fighting each other. Qu Yuan was a minister to the King of the southern state of Chu and he would give advice to the King on how to protect the Chu kingdom. However, other corrupt, jealous ministers maligned and slandered Qu Yuan's integrity and loyalty and his advice to the King was ignored. He was then cruelly banished.

*“Long did I sigh and wipe away my tears,
To see my people bowed by grieves and fears.
The people's sufferings move my heart,
Our land I cannot leave.”*

In exile far, far away, Qu Yuan produced some of the greatest poetry where he wrote about his deep love for his state and concern for its future. In 278 BC, he learnt of the invasion of Chu by the Qin state. The news left him heartbroken and he wrote one of China's most famous elegies, “*Li Sao*,” (“Lament on Encountering Sorrow”).

*Many a heavy sigh I have in my despair,
Grieving that I was born in such an unlucky time.
I yoked a team of jade dragons to a phoenix chariot,
And waited for the wind to come, to soar up on my journey.*

Qu Yuan

In despair and sorrow, he threw himself into the Miluo River in today's Hunan Province. The people were devastated on hearing of the death of their beloved poet, so they threw rice into the river for the fish to eat, so they wouldn't feed on his body. They rushed out onto the river in boats, beat the drums and splashed the water with their paddles to keep away the fish and evil spirits.”

The Dragon Boat Festival is also called the Festival of the Poets. When the Japanese invaded China and the entire nation was mobilized in this fight during 1941. Chinese literary figures, particularly Guo Moruo, suggested that the Dragon Boat Festival should also be called Poets' Day as Qu Yuan was very patriotic, but the Dragon Boat festival has its origins in ancient fertility rites long before Qu Yuan's death. The rites were performed to ensure good rainfall for the crops, particularly the staple, rice. The

Dragon God produced the rain and the rivers, essential elements of life.

Chinese weddings bear many images of the dragon and phoenix indicating a marriage blessed with greatness and children. The dragon is the male symbol of authority and dignity, while the phoenix, the female symbol, represents love and beauty. *Lóng fèng chéng xiáng* – means "happy and fortunate combination of the dragon with the phoenix" – basically, sincere wishes for a good life together. At the end of their lives, together in the graveyard, tomb stones are laid out in pairs, one with a dragon elegantly carved on the flat grey-white stone and the other with a phoenix.

In contrast, ferocious dragons in the West breathe fire and are predators and enemies. We call on our knights to slay the dragon and rescue the maiden in distress. In England, St. George, the dragon slayer, is the patron saint.

I arrived in China during the Year of the Dog, stayed during the Year of the Pig and left during the Year of the Rat. People born in each of these years are said to have certain characteristics of that animal. For example, 2008 was the Year of the Rat, an animal viewed not so positively in the West. However, the rat in China is regarded as hard working, creative, charming and sociable and during the Year of the Rat it is said that one can expect many opportunities and good prospects. People born during the Year of the Rat are said to have similar qualities to the rat, such as being smart and savvy, intelligent, charming, adaptable and able to take care of themselves. Rats are said to have brought three valuable gifts, they stole sunlight to give light to humanity, created the universe and stole seeds of grain to feed the people.

The Year of the Ox started on January 26, 2009 (year 4707 on the Chinese calendar). People born in the Year of the Ox are said to be dependable, patient, methodical and calm, hardworking, materialistic, and ambitious. Ox people are born to lead, the horoscopes tell us. They are self-assured, able to inspire confidence in others, use their concise words well and possess a strong physical stamina. U.S. President Barack Obama was born in the Year of the Ox. In the West, the ox is viewed as an ancient beast of burden, used on the farm as the dominant work animal for ploughing and hauling, to be eventually replaced by the much faster horse. 2010 was the Year of the Tiger, 2011 the Year of the Rabbit and 2012 the year of the Dragon – expect an increase in marriages and births for that auspicious year. 2013 is the Year of the Snake, the black water snake, the 6th animal in the Chinese horoscope order sequence.

Snakes in the West are of the Judeo-Christian perspective and regarded as representatives of the devil and evil. In Genesis in the Bible, it was Satan, disguised as a snake or serpent that tempted Eve with the forbidden fruit, an apple and brought about the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. The patron saint of Ireland, St. Patrick, banned all snakes from Ireland after they attacked him while he was fasting. To this day, there are no snakes in Ireland. Greek mythology tells of the Medusa, a Gorgon and a monster with a head of venomous writhing snakes for her hair. Anyone who gazed on the face of the Medusa would turn into stone.

Native Americans, however, regard snakes in a more positive manner. Rattlesnakes are highly revered and addressed as "grandfather". In Ohio, USA there are many Indian mounds that were burial sites for the Hopewell and Adena tribes. The tribes lived there from about 3,000BC to the 16th century. The most dramatic and the largest effigy mound in existence (1370 feet long and 3 feet in height) is of an undulating prehistoric serpent or snake, carrying an egg in its mouth. However, this is not a burial mound but has astronomical significance. Researchers report that the serpent's head is in alignment to the summer solstice sunset and the body coils to the winter solstice sunrise and to the equinox sunrise. The mound is thought to be designed to both lunar and solar arrays and possibly may have had a ceremonial purpose. However, like the Chinese, Native Americans also use a lunar calendar.

The modern day symbol for medicine is that of a staff with a snake entwined, known as “The Rod of Asclepius”. Its roots go back to the ancient Greeks. The snake was noted for its venomous bite and difficult to cure but Asclepius had the power to heal, even a lethal snake bite. In Epidaurus in Greece, there is the Temple of Asclepius, the god of Medicine, where people would go to be healed. They would spend the night in the temple to have dreams with snakes writhing on the floor. Today, inside the Temple are crutches and sticks hanging on the walls from people who have been cured of their illnesses. Symbolically the snake is one of transformation with the ability to slough off its skin for growth and rebirth.

There are various legends that tell the origin of the twelve animal signs used in the Chinese zodiac that include the Buddha. However, there is some evidence to suggest that the Chinese zodiac may even predate Buddhism. Pottery artifacts in the Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.) indicate that the animals of the zodiac were popular, but they were also seen much earlier from artifacts from the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.). This was a period of disunity in ancient Chinese history, a period of dramatic social and political change as differing factions fought for control. It has also been suggested that the animals of the zodiac were brought to China along the ancient trading route, the Silk Road, and where Buddhism was brought to China from India (late 2nd or 1st century B.C.) Other scholars have presented the case that nomadic tribes in ancient China developed a calendar of animals based on the animals they were familiar with, those used in hunting and gathering. The doctrine of the twelve zodiac signs of the zodiac emerged during the Han dynasty which makes it more than 2000 years old.

Legends tell us that once upon a time, the Buddha invited all the animals to say goodbye to him before he departed from the Earth. The first twelve animals to arrive would receive a place of honour in the lunar calendar and so the animals fought over where they would be placed. To resolve this, the gods told them they would have to race across a river.

The rat was the first animal to arrive on the river bank, but cleverly the rat jumped on the back of the ox and rode across the river. Just before reaching shore, the rat hopped off and touched the ground to be first. The ox was second. Third was the tiger, a strong swimmer, followed by the rabbit who jumped across the river and was helped by the dragon, who was fifth. The horse swam across, but carried the snake curled around his hoof. Just as they reached the opposite shore, the snake slid out, scaring the horse into seventh place. The sheep, monkey and rooster helped each other swim across. The dog decided to bathe and play in the river, otherwise he could have been up near the front. Finally, the pig reached the shore, but he took a long rest halfway across. The order of the animals on the calendar reflects their completion of the race—the rat placing first and the pig finishing last.

Interestingly, certain animal qualities have been suggested as ideal models for the business world. The Chinese dragon can be utilized to exemplify critical strategic leadership (Kim Cheng Low, P. 2010). Lessons of leadership can also be obtained from certain animals such as the tiger, the snake, the horse, etc. (Kim Cheng Low, P. and Sik-Liong Ang 2010).

This approach can be compared to the Native Americans' totemism where there is a connection or kinship to an animal. The Plains Indians have a close connection to the animal world as shown in their myths and stories. The animals provided necessities: food, shelter, medicines and when an animal was killed for food, the Indians would ask for forgiveness and thank the spirit of that animal.

Every seed is awakened and so is all animal life. It is through this mysterious power that we too have our being and we therefore yield to our animal neighbours the same right as ourselves, to inhabit this land.

Sitting Bull, Tatanka Yotanka, Sioux Warrior

The Cherokees have a Bear Clan as do the Ojibwe. Seven original clans existed in the Ojibwe that included the crane, catfish, loon, marten and wolf. Bear clan people tend to protect the tribe and are policemen and legal guardians. The Pawnee, warriors of the Plains, have a strong affiliation with the wolf, a common clan animal but highly respected for its hunting skills, courage, strength and endurance. The Cherokee also have a large wolf clan known as the warrior clan. The wolf's devotion to family and nurturing care of members of the pack are positive characteristics, highly regarded by the Native Americans.

In comparison, the wolf is viewed in the West as the big bad wolf, devourer of children and something to be feared. Our fairy stories and nursery rhymes depict this negative image in "Little Red Riding Hood" where the wolf swallowed her grandmother and "The Three Little Pigs."

The bat is viewed quite differently in China as compared to the West. The word for bat (蝠) *biānfú*, is pronounced the same way as luck (福). They are regarded as auspicious and associated with several deities, including demon-killers and longevity gods. The origin is tied to the fact that the word for good fortune - "Fu" - is a homophone for the word for bat. (The sound is the same though the inflection is different.) Accordingly, the bat is a representation of luck and good fortune. The nickname for the young son of a Chinese friend is *Fu-Fu*.

Of course bats also hang upside down in real life and are beneficial animals with 70% feeding on insects including mosquitoes, that can transmit many diseases. Voracious in their nocturnal feeding habits they consume roughly 500 insects in an hour. Bats (Chiroptera) are the only mammals capable of true flight and there are approximately 1000 species globally. There are many kinds of bats, fruit-eating bats, nectar drinking bats, carnivorous bats and the infamous blood sucking vampire bats in South America.

In China, bats, often in groups of five, symbolize five aspects: health, wealth, happiness, longevity and a peaceful death. *Wu fu peng shou* which means 'longevity held up by 5 blessings,' features a rounded character for "longevity" surrounded by five bats. Ancient Chinese regarded humans as the most essential part of nature, so top priority was given to longevity. Bats are frequently used as motifs in carved wooden shutters, wooden doorways and inlaid into pebbled pathways of the peaceful classical Suzhou gardens. Although one day when I was trying to squeeze past one of the numerous tour groups in the Garden of the Humble Administrator in Suzhou, a large American woman draped in floral reds and greens and what looked like numerous face-lifts, exclaimed in a loud tone of disdain, "A bat! Why on earth would anyone put in a bat? Nasty dirty creature!"

Faint Reminders of "**The Ugly American**," the 1958 political best selling novel by Eugene Burdick and William Lederer. A remark by a journalist epitomizes this phrase,

"For some reason, the people I meet in my country are not the same as the ones I knew in the United States. A mysterious change seems to come over Americans when they go to a foreign land. They isolate themselves socially. They live pretentiously. They're loud and ostentatious."

Bats are thus regarded in the West with horror and fear. Fear of bats flying into your hair and getting entangled and lacking that cuddly, cute aspect, places them in a different category from pandas, koala bears, etc.

The dog is another animal viewed differently in China. One day in Hunan Province, I was with some friends who were taking me out to dinner. We arrived at a large restaurant in town, but all the tables

were packed. Eight big tables, all over small coal fires as the weather was still cool, were full of Kung Fu soccer teams, all boys in identical T-shirts and sweat shirts, shouting and laughing and making a din. While we were waiting for a table, my Chinese friends told me that this restaurant served dog dishes (*gǒu ròu*) and was famous for its fine quality. Black dogs are especially favoured. I recoiled in horror. “But I can never eat dog,” I cried. “I will eat anything else, insects, snakes, snails, turtles, ducks' blood, but dog is too much – dogs are our best friends. We have a dog at home – he’s our pet and family friend.”

“But dog is so delicious.” They smilingly told me as my face contorted.

“No way,” I exclaimed, but breathed a huge sigh of relief when we learned that the wait would be too long.

My Chinese friends told me that dog should only be eaten in winter, as it is a warming food. If you eat dog during the summer months, it overheats the body and causes heavy nose bleeds. Dog has been eaten in China at least since the time of Confucius or even prior to that time, possibly 7,000 years. There were “*three beasts*” mentioned in ancient writings from the Zhou Dynasty (11th Century–221 BC) that were bred for food, the pig, the goat and the dog. Mencius, the second sage, strongly recommended dog meat for its wonderful flavour. Dog-meat has medicinal qualities so it is told, in that it regulates blood circulation and increases the positive energy of the body, the yang. Supposedly, 300,000 dogs per year are killed for food in China. Dog-meat is usually cooked in a casserole or stew and sometimes, creamy milk is poured over the meat.

“Delicious flavour,” my friends expostulate with wide grins.

The new Soochow University campus has many stray dogs, usually large dogs, usually female and frequently pregnant. Feral cats also slink around in the undergrowth and bushes around the waterways or hang around the student dining halls to be fed by students, but not so many cats as dogs. At night, the unearthly yowling of mating cats would sometimes keep me awake. Later, I found out that near the university campus in Suzhou city there is a restaurant famous for its dog dishes. Perhaps our campus is a breeding ground for such “*delicacies*”? However, I noticed during my last semester on campus, there were no dogs, they had all disappeared, only the mating cats remained.

“Cats are never eaten,” Ms. Li told me. “They taste awful – not good at all!”

The Chinese are very ecological – everything is utilized. On the University campus, outside the student dining halls, small carts with big metal containers would drive up to be filled with all the leftover food that would be given to local farmers to feed their pigs.

Insects are also a wonderful, organic food source instead of the spray-jockey approach in the West. Wandering around ancient Fenghuang or Phoenix Town with some friends we found a restaurant next to the river. To my great delight we had an insect dish (*fengyong*) of wasp larvae, *Vespula vulgaris*, – really good. We ate these spicy, crunchy insect adults, larvae and pupae served on a plate with red peppers and spring onions. My friend was quite poor growing up and as a boy he would often collect insects by smoking them out and collecting them to give to his mother to cook delicious crispy dishes. Much better to eat them than to spray with pesticides. Mr. Chen’s family was also being very ecological.

In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, we'd bought a large 100 year old house near the university and rented a room to a visiting Chinese scholar. “Hey Yonggang, what do you know about insects as food?” I asked as I showed him my photos of Fenghuang and dishes of delicious crunchy insects.

He told me this story:

“A long time ago in China during the Qing Dynasty, there was an invasion of locusts, (*Huang*

Chong), who ate all the crops. It was a disaster and the people were faced with starvation and death. So, the Emperor in his wisdom, told the people to eat the locusts. 'They are very rich and very good,' the Emperor claimed. The locusts were washed in water and then fried in oil with a little salt. Delicious and the people were saved."

Insects eaten in China also include caterpillars, crickets, grasshoppers, often eaten roasted on sticks, bees, silkworms, mealworms and even scorpions, etc. The house cricket for example, has been shown to have a better amino acid source than soy protein. As the Chinese would say, "*It is good for your health.*" In Nepal, a very poor country, the Nepalese often raise crickets to feed to their chickens, much cheaper than the high cost of grain. You can buy cricket cages in China, made out of bamboo, to rear your singing food supply. There is also a long history of local people eating wasps and bees in Yunnan Province in southern China. They eat different kinds of wasps and bees commonly from Families Vespidae, Scoliidae and Apidae.

Insects are utilized in traditional Chinese medicine. An ant species found in China, *Polyrhachis vicina*, is regarded as a tonic to boost the immune system and helps with arthritis. It is made into wine or beer, has been imbibed for centuries and was highly regarded by Chinese Emperors. This ant species has a high level of zinc. Zinc has antioxidant properties and is also an immune system booster or stimulant. Research indicated that this Chinese ant species increases the life of rats.

In the West, those interesting birds, magpies (*Pica pica* or *P. caudata*) have a negative connotation. They are often viewed as thieves in Europe, possibly because they are attracted to bright shiny objects. In Scotland, a single magpie near a house window is thought to be a prediction of death. It is said they carry a drop of blood from the devil under their tongue and are thought to be cursed, as supposedly the magpie was the only bird not to sing to provide solace for Christ when He was on the cross.

China views these birds very differently. There is a famous love story about magpies from the Jin Dynasty (256-420 AD). Once upon a time, Zhi Nu (Weaving Girl) fell in love with a poor young orphan cowherd called Niu Lang. Zhi Nu was an immortal and the youngest of seven daughters of the Queen of Heaven. Her job and that of her sisters was to weave the clouds together in the sky.

On earth, a young cowherd, Niu Lang, a mortal, was lonely and wanted a wife. One evening, with instructions from his magical cow, he went to the river where the seven immortal daughters of the Queen of Heaven left their palace in the sky to bathe. While the beautiful immortals were bathing in the river, Niu Lang took one of the silk dresses left behind on the riverbank. After their bath, the youngest of the seven sisters couldn't find her clothes, so she was left behind, while her sisters returned to the heavens. The cowherd, Niu Lang emerged with her silken dress and he and Zhi Nu fell madly in love and married, although the law forbids any relationship between mortals and immortals. Time is of a different dimension on earth and they had two children before the Queen of Heaven discovered what had happened. She was furious when she discovered this liaison and forced Zhi Nu to return to heaven, never to see her lover again.

Niu Lang was desperate. Not to be thwarted, again with the help of his magical cow who offered him a special cowhide, he flew up into the sky to meet his beloved Zhi Nu. The Immortal Queen saw what was happening and with her hairpin quickly drew the Milky Way across the night sky.

The lovers could not meet, so there they remain separated by the Milky Way. Touched by their devotion, the Queen of Heaven did eventually take pity on them. They are separated for 364 days, but on the 365th day, Chinese Valentine's Day, the Queen sends a flock of magpies to construct a bridge

with their black and white wings, so the lovers can be reunited for a moment in time. Valentine's Day (*Qixin Jie*) in China occurs on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month (August) known as double seven.

In the night sky on Valentine's night, the Cowherd, a bright star in the constellation Aquila, west of the Milky Way and Weaving Girl, the star Vega, east of the Milky Way, are closer together than any other time of the year. Also, no magpies can be seen on earth on that particular day as they are up in the evening sky busy forming a bridge so the lovers can meet. On this night, the Chinese will often contemplate the heavens to look for the cowherd and weaving girl on the magpie bridge.

One of the lyrical Song Dynasty poets, Qin Guan (1049-1100), wrote a famous poem about the lovers:

Immortals at the Magpie Bridge

*"Clouds float like works of art;
Stars shoot with grief at heart,
Across the Milky Way the Cowherd meets the Maid
When Autumn's Golden Wind embraces Dew of Jade,
All the love scenes on earth, however many, fade.*

*Their tender love flows like a stream;
This happy date seems but a dream.
How can they bear a separate homeward way?
If love between both sides can last for aye,
Why need they stay together night and day?"*

300 Song Lyrics (1992)

The Manchu's regard the magpie as a sacred bird and the Mandarin word for magpie (*xique*) also means happiness.

The Chinese belief that every human and every animal has a role to play in society is also based on Confucianism. It has been suggested from The Analects to Mencius, the second sage and through Neo-Confucianism, that the Confucian tradition describes the goal of becoming humane (*ren*) as not only involving respect for other human beings, but also respect for the animals (Blakeley, 2003). Native Americans with their close connections to the land, also respect the natural world and animal life. The Western approach however, is more of a conquest of the natural world, clearing the land, felling trees, killing the bison and other animals for sport whether they need them for food or not.

Appendix:

Years Corresponding to Chinese Zodiac Signs:

Rat	1900	1912	1924	1936	1948	1960	1972	1984	1996	2008	2020
Ox	1901	1913	1925	1937	1949	1961	1973	1985	1997	2009	2021
Tiger	1902	1914	1926	1938	1950	1962	1974	1986	1998	2010	2022
Rabbit	1903	1915	1927	1939	1951	1963	1975	1987	1999	2011	2023
Dragon	1904	1916	1928	1940	1952	1964	1976	1988	2000	2012	2024
Snake	1905	1917	1929	1941	1953	1965	1977	1989	2001	2013	2025
Horse	1906	1918	1930	1942	1954	1966	1978	1990	2002	2014	2026
Sheep	1907	1919	1931	1943	1955	1967	1979	1991	2003	2015	2027
Monkey	1908	1920	1932	1944	1956	1968	1980	1992	2004	2016	2028
Rooster	1909	1921	1933	1945	1957	1969	1981	1993	2005	2017	2029
Dog	1910	1922	1934	1946	1958	1970	1982	1994	2006	2018	2030
Pig/Boar	1911	1923	1935	1947	1959	1971	1983	1995	2007	2019	2031

Animal Personality Traits

Rat: Intelligent, adaptable, quick-witted, smart, charming, persuasive, artistic and sociable

Element: Water

Ox: Loyal, reliable, strong, patient, thorough, kind, steady and determined

Element: Earth

Tiger: Leadership, authoritative, ambitious, courageous, confident and enthusiastic

Element: Wood

Rabbit: Sociable, trustworthy, popular, compassionate, caretakers, diplomatic, and sincere

Element: Wood

Dragon: Lucky, energetic, fearless, warm-hearted, and charismatic, artistic, spiritual

Element: Earth

Snake: Philosophical, intelligent, charming, intuitive, gregarious, generous and decisive

Element: Fire

Horse: Loyal, adaptable, energetic, courageous, independent, adventurous and strong

Element: Fire

Sheep: Mild-mannered, elegant, charming, shy, kind, sensitive, calm and peace-loving

Element: Earth

Monkey: Quick-witted, charming, fun, lucky, energetic, bright, lively, smart and versatile

Element: Metal

Rooster: Honest, energetic, intelligent, independent, practical, hard-working, and observant

Element: Metal

Dog: Loyal, sociable, courageous, patient, diligent, smart, adaptable, generous, faithful, lively and kind

Element: Earth

Pig: Honorable, loving, tolerant, honest, sociable, optimistic, sincere and appreciative of luxury

Element: Water

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