

## Lunar Year of the Monkey

In the Chinese lunar calendar, 2016 is Year of the Monkey. Monkey is the closest extant relative to human in nature, and Darwinism has made human have a special sense of intimacy to monkeys. As investigated by Guo Moruo, a scholar of Chinese literature, the Chinese mythical character, Emperor Ku, is the animal God of monkey, which thus deduced that monkey was once used as primitive totem. Moreover, he further considered that monkey was initially the totem of the Yin people, one of the first settlements in China. The Chinese character of “monkey” is generally believed that these are the hieroglyphs that depict the appearance of apes. In the *Old Tales Retold* by Lu Xun, an important writer of modern Chinese literature, the Emperor Yu the Great, the Chinese character “Yu” of his name, is also derived from the image of monkey. The assertion of both scholars implicitly coincide with the viewpoint of the theory of evolution. In Huaiyang county of Henan Province, a toy with half body of human and half body of monkey, called human ancestral monkey, is for sale in the temple fairs where the ancestor Fuxi and Nuwa (two mythological figures with snake’s body and human head) are worshipped, and it is said that the appearance of human which were formed by Fuxi and Nuwa with mud were like this. These folklores seem to verify the process of human evolution.

Monkey is energetic and good at climbing, the expression “Teaching monkeys to climb trees” in the *Shi Jing* (Classic of Poetry) indicates that the ancients already had detailed observation on monkeys long time ago. These characteristics have developed a rich culture about monkey. For example, the long established ‘Monkey show’ and ‘Monkey boxing’; as well as legend, poetry and idiom that are related to monkeys. It is worth mentioning that, in the poetry and idiom concerning monkey, there are a great deal of personification of monkeys and human being made as monkey-like. For example, “A monkey with clothes and hat on” (a worthless person in imposing attire); “Monkey jumping and horse running” (being anxious and agitated), “Apes and storks among sand and worms” (soldiers and other people who die in battle) and “A pointy mouth and a cheek of monkey” (an ugly person), etc. There are also some phrases like to describe a child being naughty, the expression is “trickster as monkey”; to say that a person is quick witted, it is “It becomes smarter than monkey once the hair grows”; to advice people not to be a teacher, it is “With five dekalitres of rice at home, there is no need to teach monkeys”; to ridicule a person being parsimonious, it is “There will not be any dry dates slip through a monkey’s hand”, etc. Just a word “monkey”, a noun can be used as a verb, how vivid it is! As for the Monkey King who causes havoc in the Heavenly Palace, the personified monkey who is well known by everyone, it has posed significant impact around the world.

Since the Chinese characters “monkey” and “marquis” are homophone, monkeys had long become a mascot that symbolizes official promotion among the people, thus many auspicious patterns were created. For instance, the image of a monkey hanging a seal onto a tree means a person gets promoted to a high position with an official seal; a monkey riding on a horseback, symbolizes a person gets quick promotion; two monkeys sitting on a pine tree, or one monkey riding on the back of another monkey, it means maintaining a high official standing from one generation to another, etc. These patterns are often seen on the screens and walls of ancient authorities, as well as sketches, stationaries, various kinds of everyday utensils and jade carvings. Moreover, these images also integrate into modern art. For example, the stamp issues over the years also embodied the features of monkey, which are propitious, wealthy, intelligent and resourceful.

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