

## Lunar Year of the Pig

In the Chinese calendar, the Year of the Pig celebrated this year is at the intersection of the “Ji” Heavenly Stem and the “Hai” Earthly Branch. The pig, being the principal of the six domestic animals (horse, ox, goat, cock, dog and pig), is also among the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac and protects people from all evils. The importance of the Pig in the tradition of domestic rituals, where it is sacrificed indoors, dates back to the Neolithic Period. Thus, the Chinese character “home” is composed of the elements “pig” and “roof”. Nowadays, the pig is still an essential offering in the rituals of the Han people, and the head of the animal is considered the most important object of sacrifice. In the book “Xin Nian Za Yong” by Wu Guren, an author of the Qing Dynasty, it says that people preferred the pig with creases on its head as an end of year offering because it resembled the character “longevity”, and thus it was called the “head of longevity”. During the 12<sup>th</sup> month of the lunar calendar, in the region between Jiangsu and Zhejiang, the head of the dead animal is cleaned and stored, to be sold during Chinese New Year. During Ching Ming Festival, Chinese people from the Canton region offer roast pork to their ancestors and share the meat of the animal among family members after the offering ceremony. In the Shaanxi region, it is part of the wedding tradition that the bridegroom is to deliver 4 catties of pork and two pig’s trotters to the bride on the eve of the ceremony, and the bride returns him the front trotter. The next day following the ceremony, the couple takes two skeins of dry pasta and the back trotter of the pig to the bride’s family, which is also returned, symbolizing that the contact between the two families will be permanent. In Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, the bride and groom’s families carry pork on a bamboo stick and distribute it to their neighbors during Bulang marriages to show their love for their children.

It is popular belief that pigs can predict rain. The book “Shijing Xiaoya” says that it will rain when a herd of white-hoofed pigs crosses a river, and the book “Toufangzalu” says that the “Lord of Thunder” has a pig’s head and a body covered with scales. In the novel “Journey to the West”, the character Zhu Bajie (literal translation “Pig of Eight Precepts”) would have been a Taoist deity of water, “Marshal of the Milky Way and Commander of the Naval Forces”, one of the four generals of the Emperor of the North Star, which justifies the connection of the pig cult with rain. In Chinese culture, the pig is also seen as an example of gluttony and laziness. The character Zhu Bajie (half pig and half human), a man-pig-deity trinity, is widely known thanks to his very dynamic and popular personality.

In the West, although the symbolic meaning of the pig is similar, there are places that view it differently from the East. For example, in the past, in Germany, the pig was represented by a flute, meaning lust, and it was considered that dreaming of a pig was related to sex. In the folklore of Scotland, pigs were used to pull carts, and there are countries that use pigs to find pinecones, blow mines or even detect drugs.

Author: Gong Gang  
Translation: NextVector Consultants Ltd.