

Lunar Year of the Rabbit

The rabbit is docile and gentle in appearance but it is also lively, charming, free and active. The saying “Quiet as a maiden and energetic as a rabbit” describes how calm a person or an army is when stationary but is as fast and agile as a rabbit when in action. In the twelve Earthly Branches, the rabbit represents “Mao shi” (卯時), which is the period between five and seven in the morning when the day breaks and the sun rises. At that time, energy emerges from the Earth and all plants come to life; the Sun is beaming so gloriously that everything becomes prosperous and vigorous. Therefore, people born in the Year of the Rabbit are said to have the following admirable characteristics: kind and generous, meticulous and patient, humble and courteous, intelligent, agile and dashing, exuding a great sense of hope and responsibility like the rising Sun.

The rabbit also plays an important role in the Moon myth. Zhang Heng of the Eastern Han Dynasty wrote in his astronomical book *Lingxian* (The Spiritual Constitution of the Universe): “Chang’e ran to the Moon and was turned into a toad.” Chang’e stole the elixir, and as a punishment she was transformed into a toad, eternally grinding medicinal herbs. However, people were reluctant to condemn the beautiful fairy to live and work alone in the stone-cold Moon Palace. Therefore, a gentle and charming rabbit was made Chang’e’s companion to help her grind medicinal herbs. A book by Fu Xuan, a well-known poet and writer of the Jin Dynasty, reads: “What is on the Moon? The white rabbit grinding medicinal herbs.” Since then, the charming white rabbit has become the closest companion of Chang’e, the Goddess of the Moon. Several ancient expressions associated with the rabbit on the Moon sprout from this legend, such as “radiant rabbit” (radiant moon), “rabbit light” (moonlight) and “rabbit palace” (moon palace). Besides a full moon, there is a crescent moon known as the “rabbit’s lip” (hare lip), meaning “incomplete” but also symbolising the inseparable bond of imperfection between the Moon and the rabbit.

Despite this imperfection, the rabbit is considered an auspicious animal. The old book *Ruiying Tu* records: “White rabbit is a symbol of luck while red rabbit is a symbol of great luck”. Du Fu’s poem “Moon” includes a verse “The toad swims in the river and does not drown. The rabbit pounds the bitter herbs and has an eternal life.” In this way, the rabbit also represents the genuine wish for longevity, reunion and companionship.

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