


## Lunar Year of the Snake

When talking about the Lunar Year of the Snake, some people may ask, “Isn’t the snake a cold-blooded, evil and treacherous animal? Why is it one of the animals of the Chinese Zodiac?” It’s a long story, we might as well look at the order of the twelve beasts of the Chinese Zodiac: Rat and Ox, Tiger and Rabbit, Dragon and Snake, Horse and Goat, Monkey and Rooster, Dog and Pig. There is a certain mutual advantage between each pair. Regarding the dragon and the snake, the strength and power of the former are complemented by the serenity and flexibility of the latter. The spirit of tolerance and dialectical thinking of traditional Chinese culture can be gleaned from this.

In fact, snakes and human beings used to have a very close relationship. The word “snake” in the oracle bones appears written in the form of the pictogram “”, with the upper part representing the head of a snake and the lower part its body. In the ancient times, when people lived in caves, snakes were basically their neighbours. When meeting in the morning, they would always greet each other by saying, “Have you seen snakes?”. Over long years of cohabitation, human have discovered many treasures hidden in the body of this reptile. Its gallbladder can help “clear internal heat” and treat wounds, even relieving pain and helping with problems like insomnia, coughing, and arthritis. Its venom can be used to staunch bleeding and, if turned into a serum, serves as a special medication for venomous snakebites. Even the shed skin of a snake can be used as a pharmaceutical substance for the treatment of spasms, convulsions and epilepsy. Furthermore, anaconda skin can be used to make musical instruments such as the *huqin*, which emits beautiful sounds from the soundbox and further enhances the expressive power of national instrumental music.

Our ancestors not only emphasized the practical value of snakes, but also inspired by its agility, which in turn transformed into creation and wonderful self-realisation. The body of a snake, with its varied movements and ever-changing intensities, combined with brush and ink to create the slender and delicate “snake-style calligraphy”. Applied in the martial arts, snakes make way for the flexible and curvilinear movements of “Snake Kung Fu”. In the battlefield, snakes provoked the “long snake formation” strategy, which involves confronting the enemy from “head to tail”, in other words, surrounding him. In terms of melody, it gives rise to the rhythmic and exciting “Golden Snake Dance” by composer Nie Er...

As such, rich wisdom and imagination have been deployed by people to work on the personification, and even deification, of snakes. Countless popular stories about “repaying kindness” contain mystical and moving chapters about this reptile, like the following, “one day, when Sui Hou, a king of Handong County, was travelling, he saw a large snake, seriously injured, on the side of a path. He took it upon himself to attempt to save it by applying medicine and compressing on the wound. Not long after, Sui Hou was travelling along a riverbank, and suddenly that same snake jumped out of the water with a large river pearl in its mouth as a requital, which was the so-called moon-bright pearl. In the myths and legends of Chinese poetry, (see “*Huainanzi·Lan Ming Xun*”), the snake even becomes the goddess of the Yellow River, which appeared as a human face in a snake’s body and gave valuable advice and suggestions to Dayu to help him control the floods and “pacify the water and the soil”. There is also a touching love story between a white snake and Xu Xian (see “Memoirs Xia Yu”).

The snake is a symbol of the beautiful wishes of the Chinese people, which are embodied into a universal feeling of equality and harmonious coexistence. The importance of the snake becomes increasingly evident at a time when the world is undergoing dramatic changes that have not been seen for a century. On the occasion of the Lunar Year of the Snake, the Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau would like to wish for world peace with this exquisite philatelic issue, as well as extend its wishes of peace and happiness to Chinese people all over the world!

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