

Lunar Year of the Ox

People just witness out the old year of the Rat and welcome in the new year of the Ox. At the beginning of the Chinese Lunar New Year of the Ox, the topic of “Year” is naturally Niu (in Chinese: 牛).

As early as the primitive period, our ancestors had established a close relationship with the ox, which often appeared in the ancient legends of the empire building and the territory expanding. The cattle domestication, firstly invented by Fuxi (伏羲氏), a Chinese legendary hero, and the inclusion of the ox in “Tailao” sacrifice (Chinese: 太牢, Three-livestock sacrifice: cattle, sheep, and pigs) in worshipping the gods of heaven and earth made him so famous that his name was added with a character component of “Niu (牛)”. The “cattle plowing” invented by the Yan Emperor (炎帝) and Chiyou (蚩尤) respectively, has greatly promoted the development of agricultural production, leading human society out of ignorance and towards civilization. Therefore, their mythical ox-headed images have become a totem to receive public adoration. The above stories show the sacred and solemn image of the ox in the eyes of our ancestors.

Archaeological findings have shown that oxen were domesticated as a kind of livestock in ancient China at least five thousand years ago. Dating back to the Shang Dynasty, the ox was developed as a power resource for pulling plows and carts, which made it possible for human beings to continuously expand their arable land by deep plowing and careful cultivation. Ying Shao, a scholar in Han Dynasty praised the ox in the book “Fengsu Tongyi” (Customs, in Chinese: 《風俗通義》) as: “the foundation of farming, the dependence of the people, the most useful livestock, and the embodiment of national prosperity.” Just as he said, in terms of the micro-effects on a family, oxen were the main labor force and associated with the life and survival of the family. In terms of the macro-effects on a society, they were the important productive force and the invention of “cattle plowing” greatly improved the production level of the whole society and successfully realized an important leap in the mankind's history.

Just because of this, the ox, or “Niu” (牛) has become a commonly used word in Chinese culture, profoundly affecting people's life and thinking. For example, as a character component, Niu (牛) has formed many important Chinese characters, such as: Te (特, bull), Pin (牝, cow), Wu (物, colored cattle), Xi (犧, pure-color cattle for sacrifice), Li (犁, a tool powered by cattle for plowing the land), Kao (犒, rewarding feast with beef and wine), Mu (牧, feeding cattle) and so on; It also has extended meanings derived from the use of the word Niu (牛), such as: “Niu Xing” (牛性, stubborn), “Niu Jin” (牛勁, strength), “Niu Mao” (牛毛, numerous), “Niu Qi” (牛氣, magnificent), “Bull market” (牛市, soaring stock market), etc., which could display the strong logical thinking and the rich imagination of the Chinese language.

The so-called “Chou Ox” (丑牛), denoted by the Earthly Branch symbol “Chou”(丑), is related to the animal's physiological habits of rumination. Because at the time of Chou (1:00 am to 3:00 am), when people are still asleep, oxen are already chewing quietly, accumulating sufficient energy for a new day. That is why they have always been good helpers and partners in the long history of China. Moreover, their temperament and contribution to mankind have gradually become personified to

become a cultural and spiritual symbol of the Chinese nation. Oxen are portrayed as the calm and tractable animals: “Grass is eaten and milk is squeezed out”. They are diligent and hard-working throughout the year. Mr. Lu Xun's famous sentence: “Fierce-browed, I throw my contemptuous glare at the enemies; Head-bowed, I stand a willing ox serving the public”, which reflects the spirit of selfless dedication in the nature of the ox. And its great state of willingness to serve has inspired millions of people in every era to work hard for the mankind's well-beings.

On the arrival of the Chinese New Year, Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau has issued a special set of stamps for the Lunar Year of the Ox as the holiday gift to wish that we could give full play to the “Oxen spirit” in the future by integrating it into the community and people's minds.

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