

Lunar Year of the Tiger

The Tiger, aside from being called a “big cat”, is also known by several other names such as, Weasel (wutu 於菟), Great Worm (da chong 大蟲), Dawn Visitor (yin ke 寅客), Dawn Beast (yin shou 寅獸), Philosopher Li Er (li er 李耳) and Suspect of Midnight (ban zi 斑子). In the oldest dictionary of the Chinese language *Shuo Wen - Hu Bu* (說文·虎部), the definition of Tiger is: “Tiger, the king of the mountain beasts”.

The tiger is very important in the Chinese Zodiac, in which it ranks third and is known as “Tiger Yin”. The tiger has been revered and adored in China since ancient times. The seven western constellations of the twenty-eight constellations are also known as the “Seven Constellations of the White Tiger”. One of the four gods is known as the “White Tiger”, the protector god of the West. The chapter on ceremonies and rituals of the Encyclopedia of Ancient China *Feng Su Tong Yi* (風俗通義), states that “The tiger is the leader of several hundred animals. It can fight with ghosts and even eat them”. According to the tradition, people believe that tigers can ward off the three great catastrophes from families: fire, theft and evil. So people draw a tiger on the front door of their home or hang a picture of a tiger on the wall in front of the door, and pray that it protects the safety and peace of the family. Older people like to give children “tiger head” hats and shoes to make them look like they have “tiger head and brain” so that monsters and demons can stay away. Also many people like to sleep with “tiger head” pillows, hoping to get stronger.

Being able to protect the places where it is present, the tiger exudes bravery and power so impressive that it causes people to talk enthusiastically about this feline. In one of the most important books of Confucius *Zhou Yi Qian Gua Wen* (周易·乾卦文), there is a saying that goes “The dragon follows the clouds and the tiger follows the wind”, to express that the tiger is mighty and majestic. In ancient China, courageous generals were known as “Tiger Generals”, for example, the “Nine Tiger Generals”, under the command of Wang Mang; Xu Chu, the “Foolish Tiger”; under the leadership of Cao Cao, and the “Five Famous Tiger Generals of the Kingdom of Shu”. The tiger-shaped medal was a symbol of military power in ancient times. The sentence “The tiger-shaped medal is placed around his waist and the hero protects the whole world” expresses the extraordinary status that the officials had at that time. The word “tiger” appears frequently in Chinese vocabulary. “Tiger Soldier”, which is very often used these days, means “warrior”. There are also many expressions related to the tiger, such as “Go on with the tiger’s vigor and vitality” (meaning people who are strong and vigorous like the tiger); “Strong as a bear on the hips and with a supple back like a tiger” (meaning that someone is strong); “Crouching Tigers and Hidden Dragons” (meaning there are many talented people in a location); “The Fox Fakes the Tiger’s Threat” (meaning to frighten or oppress someone with someone else’s influence) and “Art of dragon warfare and tiger strategy” (meaning courage in troops’ strategy). In these examples, the tiger is majestic. But there are other cases where the tiger is not portrayed in the same way, such as “Blocking Tiger” (meaning the criminal who blocked the road to rob), “Autumn Tiger” (meaning the hot autumn days) and “Female Tiger” (meaning a violent woman).

Even though tiger was held in awe in ancient China, people today have developed a strong affection for tiger beyond their fear and respect. Tigers are often portrayed in numerous beautiful images and can be seen in many different places. Today, tigers have become so scarce that natural reserves have been created for them in China and captive breeding of tigers is carried out in some zoos.

On the Chinese lunar calendar, 2022 is the Year of the Tiger, I wish you all as strong and powerful as the tiger!

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