



The Chinese zodiac consists of twelve animals that first appeared in the Zhan Guo period (5th century B.C.). No one knows the exact date as of when the zodiac was essentially created, but they were officially identified during the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. – 9 A.D.), which was over 2000 years ago. The zodiac became a popular way to determine a person's birth year during the North Zhou Dynasty (557-581 A.D.) and is still very commonly used today.

History of Lunar Calendar

The lunar calendar paved the sequence of the Chinese zodiac animals. This calendar can be traced back to the 14th century B.C. Myths say that Emperor Huangdi, the first Chinese emperor, in 2637 B.C. invented the Chinese lunar calendar, which follows the cycles of the moon. Based on this system, this year is year 4657.

Analysis of surviving astronomical records inscribed on oracle bones reveals a Chinese lunisolar calendar, with intercalation of lunar months, dating back to the Shang dynasty of the fourteenth century B.C.

From the earliest records, the beginning of the year occurred at a New Moon near the winter solstice. The choice of month for beginning the civil year varied with time and place, however. In the late second century B.C., a calendar reform established the practice, which continues today, of requiring the winter solstice to occur in month 11. This reform also introduced the intercalation system in which dates of New Moons are compared with the 24 solar terms. However, calculations were based on the mean motions resulting from the cyclic relationships. Inequalities in the Moon's motions were incorporated as early as the seventh century A.D., but the Sun's mean longitude was used for calculating the solar terms until 1644.

Although the lunar calendar has been continuously employed by the Chinese, foreign calendars were introduced to the Chinese, the Hindu calendar, for instance, during the Tang dynasty (618-907), and were once used concurrently with the native calendar. This situation also held true for the Muslim calendar, which was introduced during the Yüan dynasty (1206-1368). The Gregorian calendar was taken to China by Jesuit missionaries in 1582, the very year that it was first used by Europeans, but it hasn't officially adopted until 1912 after revolution.

Chinese Zodiac in the Calendar

The zodiac was based on Chinese astrology and was used as a way to count years, months, days, and hours in the calendar. It was formed from two components: the ten Heavenly Stems and the twelve Earthly Branches.



Each of the 12 animals stands for a year in a 12-year cycle, a month in a 12-month cycle, and for every two hours in a 24-hour day.

Lunar Month	Zodiac Sign
January	Tiger
February	Rabbit
March	Dragon
April	Snake
May	Horse
June	Sheep
July	Monkey
August	Rooster
September	Dog
October	Pig
November	Rat
December	Ox

	Earthly Branch	Chinese zodiac	Hours in a day
1	子 (Zǐ)	Rat	11pm-1am
2	丑 (Chǒu)	Ox	1am-3am
3	寅 (Yín)	Tiger	3am-5am
4	卯 (Mǎo)	Rabbit	5am-7am
5	辰 (Chén)	Dragon	7am-9am
6	巳 (Sì)	Snake	9am-11am
7	午 (Wǔ)	Horse	11am-1pm
8	未 (Wèi)	Sheep	1pm-3pm
9	申 (Shēn)	Monkey	3pm-5pm
10	酉 (Yǒu)	Rooster	5pm-7pm
11	戌 (Xū)	Dog	7pm-9pm
12	亥 (Hài)	Pig	9pm-11pm