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## THE YEAR OF THE OX

The Year of the Ox begins on January 26, 2009, and runs until February 13, 2010. It is calculated according to the Chinese Lunar Calendar that is based on the phases of the moon. This calendar dated from 2600 BC, when the Emperor Huang Ti introduced the first cycle of the zodiac. There are 12 years in each cycle of the zodiac, with each year named after an animal. Preceded by the rat, the ox is followed by the tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, ram, monkey, rooster, dog and boar.

In Chinese ancient legends, the ox is the second animal in the Chinese zodiac. There are many versions of the legends: the Buddha invited the animals to celebrate his departure from this world; the Jade Emperor invited the animals to attend a birthday celebration; the race of the animals in which the rat arrived first as it crossed the river on the back of the ox, and jumped ahead once the river is crossed.

The Chinese zodiac animals symbolize twelve types of personality. People born in the Year of the Ox are reliable, diligent, tenacious, conscientious, with strong and sound judgment, though they may also be obstinate and stubborn. People born in 2009, the year of the *Earth Ox*, are successful, diligent, reliable, modest and sincere. Previous Years of the Ox include 1889, 1901, 1913, 1925, 1937, 1949, 1961, 1973, 1985 and 1997. Famous Oxen: Charlie Chaplin (1889) and Walt Disney (1901).

## CHINESE NEW YEAR

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In Chinese, “New Year” is literally “*xin nian*”, with “*xin*” meaning “new” and “*nian*” meaning “year”. However, “*nian*” has quite a terrifying origin. According to Chinese mythology, long ago in ancient China, there was a beast from the mountains (some versions say under the sea) coming out every twelve months near winter to eat human beings. People soon realized that this beast could be scared away by loud noises, such as the sound of firecrackers and fireworks, the drums and gongs heralding a lion dance, as well as the red color.

These ways used to drive away the beast called “*nian*” also became essential features in Chinese New Year celebrations, in which new year decorations are usually in red, and married couples and elders give red packets to children and juniors. It is also common to decorate homes with auspicious words and phrases written in Chinese calligraphy on red paper, such as “*fu*” meaning “auspiciousness”. People visit their relatives and friends to greet one another a Happy New Year. While people from different regions of China may prepare different kinds of food to celebrate Chinese New Year, such as eating dumpling in Northern China, the names of the food are meant to be synonymous with auspicious wishes, such as “*yu*” meaning “fish” sounds like “*yu*” meaning abundance and surpluses.

### **Auspicious phrases:**

*Top Right: Gongxi Facai: May you be prosperous*

*Bottom Left: Nian Nian You Yu: May there be surpluses every year*