

***One of the strengths of the United States is its diversity which extends to appreciating a variety of religious and social customs. Just as Nature thrives in multiplicity, we too are enriched by diversity.***

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## **Year of the Persistent Dog**

**By Liz Fisher**

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366 Shares

The New Moon today marks the beginning of Chinese New Year. Known as the Spring Festival, the celebration of this holiday extends until the Full Moon at the beginning of March. Because of the way the Chinese lunar calendar works, each year this holiday falls on different days in the second half of January or the first half of February.



### **What is Animism?**

Indigenous cultures and pagan groups which maintain practices that are more closely aligned with pre-industrial outlooks often believe in a worldview called *animism*. In an animistic tradition, the Goddess or Spirit is immanent in all creation: animals, plants, rocks, humans. To know the Goddess we are called to know all creation. There is a sense of unity in the organic world. This animistic attitude helps us to tap the power and influence of the symbolism of the Chinese Astrological Calendar.

Western societies and large cities around the world are frequently called modern. They rely on technology, machinery and the built environment for organization and meaning. In some respects, in China and in Asian communities around the world modern and animistic sensibilities seem to coexist.

## Earth Dog — 1958, 2018

The Chinese Lunar New Year dates back to 2637 B.C. and is observed by one-fifth of the world's population today. The Chinese Calendar focuses on twelve animals—including both domestic and mythical. Even though each animal appears every twelve years, because there are five different elements associated with each animal—metal, water, wood, fire, and earth—2018 will be the first Year of the *Earth* Dog since 1958. It is said that the Earth Dog Year will be communicative, serious, and responsible. Working cooperatively with those we feel affinity for is a good goal to pursue.



Here are a few tidbits I have picked up from commentators. During this Dog year there will be opportunities for sound advice and justice as well as efficient and constructive thinking. Persistence and holding to a set of values that appreciates diversity are supported. It is a sensitive time when we can intuit how to inspire others to high moral standards and unfailing idealism.

Avoid exhaustion due to over-performing as well as demanding excessive dedication and loyalty from others. Good advice in any year but especially front and center now. Further, we will value our individualism and self-respect, and will feel more comfortable speaking, without reserve, straight from our hearts. Do not abuse powers bestowed on us and delegate duties with a keen eye for other people's potentials. Never be totally crushed by defeat or overconfident in victory.

## The Power of Multiculturalism

One of the strengths of the United States is its diversity which extends to appreciating a variety of religious and social customs. Just as Nature thrives in multiplicity, we too are enriched by diversity.

This stamp, issued for the 1994 Year of the Dog, is part of a series representing all the animals of the Chinese zodiac, an indication of our desire, as a nation,



to honor those who immigrated here. While we have not always had the right attitudes as national policy we have also corrected prejudice and injustice. The Chinese Exclusion Act was in effect for decades but ultimately was seen to be unjust and repealed.

I have lived in the San Francisco Bay Area for decades where one of the largest Chinese communities exists outside China. I have always been drawn to Asian cultures and philosophies and have an appreciation of folk traditions. As communication and knowledge about this earth-honoring worldview continues to cross the artificial constructs between cultures, these beliefs are flowing into the Western post-industrial culture at a rapid rate. Multiculturalism is a gift I treasure. For me, the Chinese Astrological Calendar and various styles of Asian art are examples of folk beliefs that are still available to modern society. Here are two examples.



These mystical animal images appear in upper class ornamentation as well as in folk art. When I attended the United Nations Fourth World Conference of Women in a town outside Beijing, I purchased this ancient embroidery sold at a modest price by a street vendor. I was told it was part of a ceremonial robe and that it is perhaps a dog, or a lion placed there for protection.

I also found in Beijing this lithograph by a famous Chinese artist featuring the ever present Dragon Parade staged in a village. These stylized scenes are very popular among the Chinese in China as well as visitors. Animals, flowers, fruits and lanterns on poles, speak to the connection with all beings.





## Chinese-American Communities

Chinese communities exist in many cities in the United States and around the world. The Chinese New Year celebration in San Francisco is one of the largest in the world. It first began in the mid-1800s, when immigrants from China came to the U.S. looking for work because they had heard of the Gold Rush in California. Many decided to stay in San Francisco.

This small good-luck Chinese lion is one of the many souvenirs available here. Its bright colors and animated expression capture the energy of the festival itself which lasts for several weeks. For me these community revelries are animism incarnate.

The main draw is the Grand Parade, one of the largest nighttime pageants, which will be held on Saturday, February 24 starting at 6:00 pm PST. More than three million people watch the parade every year. You can view it at: [San Francisco Chinese New Year Parade broadcast](#)

When planning the first full scale New Year's festivities in the 1800s, both Chinese and American traditions were incorporated. The planners loved the idea of having a large, colorful parade, though that was not done in China at that time. Today there are more than 100 parade entries which include participants marching down the street with flags, lanterns, drums, floats accompanied by dancers. Most popular is the 28-foot-long Golden Dragon. A team of more than 100 people moves this amazing creature through the streets of San Francisco.



## Contemporary Interpretations of the Year of the Dog



Here are two lighter renditions of dogs that reflect the charm and pride that canines often exhibit as well as their happy and cuddly presence. Remember these qualities during this year as well.



In the West, dogs are often seen as auspicious and used metaphorically to evoke good fortune. They are used in the English language to describe human characters. “Lucky dog” is a lucky person; “top dog” a powerful person; “sea dog” an experienced sailor. “Every dog has its days” means to wait for your chance.

## **Influence of this Eclipse**

The new moon that eclipses the sun establishes this holiday as special this year. Because it is the second eclipse this month, it is part of an eclipse season. Its position in the zodiac calls for us to feel more freedom of expression and individuality. These qualities are quite compatible with the mythology related to the expressive capabilities this Year of the Earth Dog promises.



It also relates to the eclipse last August that was called the Great American Eclipse which was visible across the United States. We are now at another turning point politically and culturally. Keeping a persistent focus on our values and beliefs will help us to decide what actions to take throughout the coming months that will serve up multiple challenges. The next eclipse season is six months from now.



Being aware that this is the Year of the Earth Dog can influence how we take advantage of the unseen energy present. Is this just a fun game, or a superstition, or an indicator of old ways of knowing that relate to our current endeavors? For me this lore provides a rich set of metaphors and psychological opportunities that embolden me to seek to expand my possibilities. I hope this gourd shaped, brass vase featuring the auspicious Chinese lions will bring to you a year of patience, perseverance and yes, luck.

In closing, I want to honor another taste of Asian culture. From February 8-25, the 2018 Winter Olympics are being held in South Korea bringing together participants from 92 countries, and through the power of technology, draws an estimated five billion viewers. While the cultures of Asia vary markedly they also have common traits. One is honoring Nature in an animistic way.



The opening ceremony was quite relevant to this discussion. Since we are just leaving the Year of the Phoenix (Rooster) I was struck by the interpretation the commentator provided when an artful depiction of a Phoenix came onto the stage. She reminded those listening that this is a chance to reflect on the difference between Western and Eastern cultures. She pointed out that images can have diverse meanings across cultures making it important to acquire cross-cultural literacy. I would add that by valuing knowledge of varied cultural traditions, we can learn from and enrich one another.

She noted westerners might look at the Phoenix and think it was a symbol of the Koreans rising from the ashes after the end of the Korean War. But actually in Korean culture Phoenixes are not what rises from ashes but what appears at points of great hope. The Phoenix appears at moments of material prosperity and spiritual peace. While this past year has been a mix of many emotions, remembering this interpretation can give us a lift for our future endeavors. The shows of unity at these revered sporting contests remind us we can have another vision which includes all beings living in harmony while respecting one another.

### **Art credits:**

Happy Chinese New Year greeting in public domain

Chinese Dog Paper Cut by tee's work

United States Postal Service, Happy New Year Stamp, Year of the Dog

Chinese embroidery from ceremonial robe, in the collection of Liz and Bob Fisher

Dragon Parade, Chinese folk art lithograph, in the collection of Liz and Bob Fisher

Chinese Lion, collectible souvenir, in the collection of Liz and Bob Fisher

*Blue Dog*, Original Artwork © by Michael Wertz, Oakland California

Original Brush Painting entitled *Play Ball* by Nan Rae, [www.nanrae.com](http://www.nanrae.com)

Image of Solar Eclipse in the public domain

Gourd-shaped, brass vase featuring auspicious Chinese lions, collection of author

Olympics art Courtesy of Behance, <https://www.behance.net/gallery/13653457/2018-Winter-Olympics>

Photos by Bob Fisher.