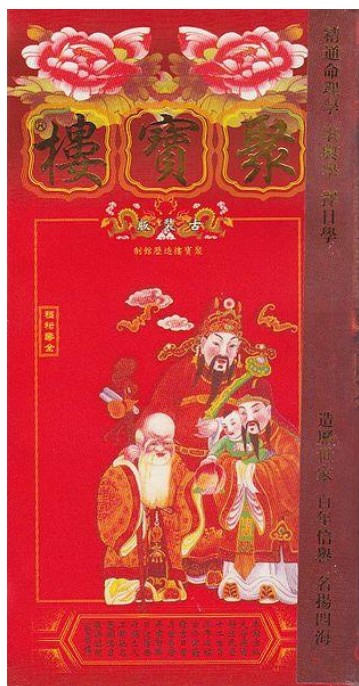


The Chinese Calendar

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In modern practice, Chinese Astrology requires little study of the stars and skies (see previous article by the author entitled 'Traditional Chinese Astronomy'). It does however require a basic familiarity with the Chinese Almanac. Furthermore, having a broader knowledge of the Chinese Calendar - its development, construction, correspondences and applications, is likely essential to achieving greater depth of understanding in the popular methods of fate calculation and divination available today.

The Chinese Calendar has had many incarnations throughout its long life of somewhere between of 3,500 - 5,000 years. It has been known variously as the 夏历 *Xiàlì* '1st Dynasty Calendar', the 农历 *Nónglì* 'Farmer's Calendar', 星历 *Xīnglì* 'Astral Calendar', 阴阳历 *Yīnyánglì* 'Luni-solar Calendar', 万年书 *Wànniánshū* '10,000 Year Book' and as a vital component of the Chinese Almanacs - 皇历 *Huánglì* 'Emperor's Calendar' and the 通书 *Tōngshū* 'Know-all Book'.



Incorporating the Chinese Calendar, the *Tongshu* is the longest continually printed book in history. Often rewritten, reformed and recalculated by succeeding dynasties and emperors, its release each year was a symbol of power and right of rulership. Over the centuries it absorbed Daoist, Confucian, Buddhist, Muslim and even Christian influences. Every home has one and because of this it has become a talisman, often hung on red ribbon behind the door and burned at the end of year.

Its use in Chinese Metaphysics is chiefly temporal rather than spatial - ie. time over space. The calendar shows the mathematical rhythm of the cycles of nature through observation of the heavens. It is important to recognise though, that predictions made from the calendar are based on arithmetic procedures, not the geometry of celestial bodies. It is inherently problematic to rely solely on examination of the stars in the present to foretell future events, we are simply too 'out of sink' with nature to fully understand its ways. Early Chinese astronomers only needed to be seen not to be wrong (eg. as long as the full moon appeared roughly when forecast), some degree of approximation based on averages is always necessary in any calendar construction. The figures generated by these

computations are, after a certain point, affected significantly by cosmographic change. Similar our own modern Gregorian Calendar, the Chinese Calendar is of the 四分 *sìfēn* 'quarter remainder' type, measuring 365 ¼ days between solstices.

The solar calendar, reflecting the cycle of the sun and its seasons, had its origins in farming, but is now utilised in the majority of astrological calculations. It numbers the days, months and years. The lunar calendar, predicting the phases of the moon, is almost exclusively used nowadays in the determining of the various Chinese festivals throughout the year. In both cases there are exceptions. The 紫微斗数 *Zǐwēi Dǒushù* 'Purple Star Astrology' practitioners often use the lunar calendar for their chart calculation. This anomaly is perhaps owing to the fact that the method seems to be an early amalgam of eastern and western astrology, bearing traces of Hellenistic, Hindu and Persian influence. One exception from the solar calendar is the 清明 *Qīngmíng* Festival where many Chinese visit the graves of their ancestors to pay respects. Its date is fixed on April 5th yearly. Every year it causes as much confusion in a traditional culture (that determines events based on the lunar calendar) with regard to the date, as finding Chinese New Year's day does to us.

From these basic units of measurement, the sun and the moon, came the building blocks of the calendar. Of course their cycles are not entirely predictable in any usable manner, so at times the calendar will merely effect a compromise of man-made theory and the actual positions of heavenly influences - like our leap year.

The primary solar indicators on the calendar are the 节气 *jiéqì* 'Seasonal nodes' (also known as 'Solar terms'). These are twenty four seasonal markers traditionally used to assist with the planting of crops. They occur around the same date each year in the solar calendar and include the solstices and equinoxes. There are both minor (also called *jieqi*) and major (中气 *zhōngqì*) terms which are odd and evenly numbered. The summer periods are longer as the ecliptic causes the sun/earth to move more slowly when further apart. They are determined by equally spaced intervals of 15° along the horizon, measuring the path of the sun.

+/-1	Chinese	English	Interpretation	Deg
Feb 4	立春 <i>Lìchūn</i>	beginning spring	According to the Chinese seasonal definition, new year festival	315°
Feb 19	雨水 <i>Yǔshuǐ</i>	rain water	Temperatures increase making rain more likely than snow	330°

Mar 6	惊蛰 <i>jīngzhé</i> (启蛰 <i>qǐzhé</i>)	awaken insects	Hibernating creatures rise	345°
Mar 21	春分 <i>chūnfēn</i>	spring divide	Spring Equinox	0°
Apr 5	清明 <i>qīngmíng</i>	clear bright	Skies are clear and sun is strong, Ancestral offerings festival	15°
Apr 20	谷雨 <i>gǔyǔ</i>	grain rains	Rains assist in grain crop growth	30°
May 6	立夏 <i>lìxià</i>	beginning summer	According to the Chinese seasonal definition	45°
May 21	小满 <i>xiǎomǎn</i>	small fulfilment	Grain crops begin to 'bear fruit'	60°
Jun 6	芒种 <i>mángzhòng</i>	awns grow	Beards of grains grow, grain ears	75°
Jun 22	夏至 <i>xiàzhì</i>	summer extreme	Summer solstice	90°
Jul 7	小暑 <i>xiǎoshǔ</i>	minor heat	Heat starts to rise	105°
Jul 23	大暑 <i>dàshǔ</i>	major heat	Hottest days of the year	120°
Aug 8	立秋 <i>lìqiū</i>	beginning autumn	According to the Chinese seasonal definition	135°
Aug 23	处暑 <i>chùshǔ</i>	dwelt heat	Limit of hot weather	150°
Sep 8	白露 <i>báilù</i>	white dew	Condensed moisture changes colour	165°
Sep 23	秋分 <i>qiūfēn</i>	autumn divide	Autumn equinox	180°
Oct 8	寒露 <i>hánlù</i>	cold dew	Frosts begin to form	195°
Oct 24	霜降 <i>shuāngjiàng</i>	frost falls	Temperature drops	210°
Nov 8	立冬 <i>lìdōng</i>	beginning winter	According to the Chinese seasonal definition	225°
Nov 22	小雪 <i>xiǎoxuě</i>	minor snow	Light snow starts falling in colder regions	240°
Dec 7	大雪 <i>dàxuě</i>	major snow	Snow falls more heavily everywhere	255°
Dec 22	冬至 <i>dōngzhì</i>	winter extreme	Winter solstice	270°

Jan 6	小寒 <i>xiǎohán</i>	minor cold	Cold starts to increase	285°
Jan 20	大寒 <i>dàhán</i>	major cold	Coldest days of the year	300°

Table 1. THE 24 JIEQI SEASONAL NODES

Chinese new year currently starts at the second new moon after *dongzhi* winter solstice – usually after *dahan* and during *lichun*.

The primary lunar indicators are the lunar months. They begin at begin at midnight of the full moon, 14-17 days after the new moon. The moon does not have a set cyclical time but due to intricate variations in its orbit (making it actually move faster and slower at certain times) ranges from 29 ¼ - 29 ¾ days, with a mean average is 29.53 days. The Chinese lunar month measures 29-30 days in length, each year is made up of roughly six 小月 *xiǎoyuè* 'small months' of 29 days, and six 大月 *dàyuè* 'big months' of 30 days (this will be out of time with the actual phases of the moon by 1 day every 30 months, therefore an extra big month added at this point). The short/long months are not alternating due to the complex nature of the moon itself.

#	Chinese	English	Longitude
11	十一月 <i>shíyīyuè</i>	eleventh month	270°
12	十二月 <i>shíèryuè</i>	twelfth month	300°
1	正月 <i>zhèngyuè</i>	first month	330°
2	二月 <i>èryuè</i>	second month	0°
3	三月 <i>sānyuè</i>	third month	30°
4	四月 <i>sìyuè</i>	fourth month	60°
5	五月 <i>wǔyuè</i>	fifth month	90°
6	六月 <i>liùyuè</i>	sixth month	120°
7	七月 <i>qīyuè</i>	seventh month	150°
8	八月 <i>bāyuè</i>	eighth month	180°
9	九月 <i>jiǔyuè</i>	ninth month	210°
10	十月 <i>shíyuè</i>	tenth month	240°

Table 2. THE LUNAR MONTHS

The 12 lunar months total 354 days, which is short of a full solar year. To compensate, every 2-3 years a leap month called a 闰月 *rùnyuè* 'Intercalary month' is inserted, carrying the same designations as the preceding month. Seven of these occur every nineteen years (19x12+7 = 235 months = 1 章 *zhāng* 'rule' cycle of 19 years). The addition is made whenever the sun remains in one *jieqi* 'seasonal node' throughout the entire month, hence not entering into a new sign or containing a *zhongqi*. This commonly occurs in the 2nd to 9th months, never the 1st, 11th or 12th.

The complex nature of this process and subsequent difficulty in their understanding has lead to an inaccurate superstition of these being labelled 'bad luck months'.

By far the most important indicator to the Chinese Astrologer though, is the 干支 *Gānzhī* 'Stem branch' cycle. The 甲子 *jiǎzǐ* 'sixty combinations' of the twelve 地支 *dìzhī* 'earthly branches' and the ten 天干 *tiāngān* 'heavenly stems' are utilized in continuous cycles to specify years, months, days and hours. The founding of the cycle and therefore beginning of the calendar is

attributed to the legendary semi-mythical sage-emperor 皇帝 *Huángdì* 'Yellow Emperor' in the 61st year of his reign - 2637 BCE. Each stem or branch is associated with one of the 五行 *Wǔxíng* 'five elements' and also assigned a 阴阳 *Yīn yáng* 'polarity', allowing a myriad of interpretations based on their significance and interactions. Only *yang* stems combine with *yang* branches and *yin* stems with *yin* branches, hence 60 possible combinations.

甲	Jiǎ	Yang	Wood
乙	Yǐ	Yin	Wood
丙	Bǐng	Yang	Fire
丁	Dīng	Yin	Fire
戊	Wù	Yang	Earth
己	Jǐ	Yin	Earth
庚	Gēng	Yang	Metal
辛	Xīn	Yin	Metal
壬	Rén	Yang	Water
癸	Guǐ	Yin	Water

The stems originally represent gods and also days of an ancient decimal week 旬 *xún*.

They correspond to the *yin yang* aspects of the 5 planets, Jupiter, Mars, Saturn, Venus, Mercury.

Table 3. THE HEAVENLY STEMS

子	Zǐ	Rat	Yang	Water
丑	Chǒu	Ox	Yin	Earth
寅	Yín	Tiger	Yang	Wood
卯	Mǎo	Rabbit	Yin	Wood
辰	Chén	Dragon	Yang	Earth
巳	Sì	Snake	Yin	Fire
午	Wǔ	Horse	Yang	Fire
未	Wèi	Goat	Yin	Earth
申	Shēn	Monkey	Yang	Metal
酉	Yǒu	Rooster	Yin	Metal
戌	Xū	Dog	Yang	Earth
亥	Hài	Pig	Yin	Water

The branches are best known for the animals. The Chinese names are not the same words as the related beasts though. They associate with 宿 *Xiù* 'lunar lodges'.

Table 4. EARTHLY BRANCHES

The stems and branches apply exclusively to the solar calendar - their calculation is based on the position of the sun. The rise and fall of sun determines days, however the rise and fall of moon does not determine nights. Lunar calendar months and days are merely numbered, they are not represented by *ganzhi* of their own. This is why the lunar calendar months (or days) cannot be used in calculating 四柱八字 *Sìzhù Bāzì* 'Four pillars, Eight characters' astrology.

Most Chinese calendars and almanacs show the stem branch combinations for the year, month and days, with tables provided for calculating the hours. Every cycle of sixty years is called a 元 *yuán* 'era' and as all 玄空飞星 *Xuánkōng Fēixīng* '(Mysterious Void) Flying Star' practitioners know, each of these is divided into three 匀 *yún* 'age' of 20 years each. Calendrical studies also incorporates a number of greater cycles including -

部 *Bù* 'obscuration' cycle of 76 years, equalling 4 *zhang* 'rule' cycles (19 years, see above). This indicates the time taken for winter solstice and the new moon to fall together at midnight.

纪 *jì* 'Era' cycle of 1520 years, equalling 20 *bu* 'obscuration' cycles (or 80 *zhang* 'rule' cycles). Indicative of the time taken for winter solstice, the new moon and the 1st day of the *jiazi* to all fall together at midnight.

元 *yuán* 'Epoch' cycle of 4560 years, equalling 3 *ji* 'era' cycles (or 60 *bu* 'obscuration' cycles or 240 *zhang* 'rule' cycles). This is the time taken for winter solstice, new the moon, the 1st day and the 1st year of *jiazi* to all fall together at midnight.

上元 *shàngyuán* 'Great epoch' of 9120 years or 2 *yuán* 'Epoch' cycles. Largely theoretical this suggests all the above plus an alignment of five planets. It is however numerically based, exact conjunctions are much rarer.

Whilst these seem of little significance to the reading of an astrology chart, they do clearly display the intense research and formulation that went in to the current calendar used today.

The next layers to the calendar are the hundreds of different systems of auspicious and inauspicious portents for the individual days, known commonly as 'stars'. There are over 350 of these imaginary stars, good and bad. Encyclopaedic entries on almanacs (which comprise of uncalculated formulas good for any year) give directions for their application and functions. Some are named after real stars, while many others are given 'personalities', named for heroes from popular novels. Two of the major groups are 天罡 *tiāngāng* 'heavenly gods' (numbering 36) and 地煞 *dìshà* 'earthly demons' (numbering 72). The number of activities associated with them has increased over time, up to almost one hundred. They signify predictable regularly recurring forces that substantially encourage or interfere with specific human actions and activities.

Firstly the 紫白 *Zǐbái* 'Purple-white' system. Based on the famous nine stars of the 北斗 *Běi dǒu* 'Northern dipper' the cycle repeats in an anticlockwise manner for years and a clockwise manner for months and days.

#	Chinese	English	Portent
1	白 <i>Bái</i>	White	favourable
2	黑 <i>Hēi</i>	Black	unfavourable
3	碧 <i>Bì</i>	Blue	unfavourable
4	绿 <i>Lǜ</i>	Green	unfavourable
5	黄 <i>Huáng</i>	Yellow	unfavourable
6	白 <i>Bái</i>	White	favourable
7	赤 <i>Chì</i>	Red	unfavourable
8	白 <i>Bái</i>	White	favourable
9	紫 <i>Zǐ</i>	Purple	favourable

Table 5. THE ZIBAI PURPLE WHITE STARS

The 建除十二神 *Jiànchú shíèrshén* 'Twelve spirits repeating portents' is a second commonly found example. Its cycle begins with the 月建 *Yuèjiàn* 'Establishing month' on the 1st day *dizhi* 'earthly branch' matching that of the given month. Once a month (on odd numbered *jieqi* 'seasonal node' days) one portent is repeated on two consecutive days to shift the sequence by a day. Each has lucky and unlucky implications dependant upon choice of deed.

Chin.	English	Auspicious	Inauspicious
建 <i>Jiàn</i>	'Establish' 10,000 things are generated	Cut out garment, pay bills, barter & trade, travel, set up posts	Digging, travel by boat, open stores and treasuries
除 <i>Chú</i>	'Removal' sweep away evil	Cleansing, wash & bathe, take purgatives	Wedding ceremonies, travel, open wells
满 <i>Mǎn</i>	'Fulfil' treasuries full to the brim	Wedding receptions, go on journeys, move house	Planting, cutting, unstopping water courses
平 <i>Píng</i>	'Balance' official gathering & equal divide	Wedding ceremonies, move house, cultivating the way, whitewash walls	Planting, excavating ditches, cutting, open sluices
定 <i>Dìng</i>	'Stability' five grains are in abundance	Cut, plant, organise weddings, yoke the ox & horse, dig the ground, open wells	Accusations
执 <i>Zhí</i>	'Manage' administering heaven's blessing	Wedding ceremonies, planting, cutting, opening wells	Moving house, travel, open storehouses
破 <i>Pò</i>	'Broken' the stars indicate conflict	Face to face arguments, quarrelling	Going fishing, punishing criminals
危 <i>Wēi</i>	'Danger' winds blow fiercely	Great peril	Be joyous, drink wine
成 <i>Chéng</i>	'Accomplish' recording the lives of 10,000 things	Wedding receptions, long journeys, dig earth	Casting aspersions
收 <i>Shōu</i>	'Receive' precious treasuries received	Open granaries, trade, enter college, arrange weddings, be active, digging the earth	Travel, arranging funerals, acupuncture and moxibustion

开 <i>Kāi</i>	'Opening' messenger out of danger	Study crafts, complete business deals, arrange wedding ceremonies, travel	Funerals & burials
闭 <i>Bì</i>	'Closing' burial and concealment	Set up placards	Most events

Table 6. THE TWELVE JIANCHU SPIRITS

There are many other systems for the addition of these fantastic 'stars' to days of the year, but most follow a similar system of associating a known sequential cycle with benevolent and malevolent energies. By virtue of this, suitable and unsuitable uses of the day can be determined therein.

The importance of the Chinese calendars to the culture of China and its people is displayed in their long history. It is this significance placed on understanding the cycles of the universe as plotted by the orbits, seasons, duodenal and various other cycles, that most probably led to the birth and development of Fate Calculation in the middle kingdom. The existence of the calendar makes this wisdom accessible.

However, without a sound knowledge of the main factors that influence the calendar system, the solar and lunar components, the complexities and differences can be misunderstood and lead to errors in interpretation. Without this, predicting the recurring archetypal forces represented by the 'stars' of Chinese Astrology, is all but pointless and without meaning.

Appendix

万年书 Wànniánsū '10,000 Year Calendar' translation

小月六	大月五	小月四	大月四	大月	小月二	大月正	朔月	1
未丁	午丙		巳乙	辰甲	卯癸	寅壬	庚壬	2
紫九	白一		黑二	碧	黄四	青五	墨九	3
十二	四初	九三	六十	十三	五十	十三	四十	八廿
11立	18大	1小	7夏	14芒	23小	10立	0穀	17清
26秋	21時	21時	21時	43芒	25小	25小	25小	20未
51時	51時	45時	45時	43芒	16酉	16酉	16酉	28未
分時	分時	分時	分時	分時	分時	分時	分時	分時
曆國支干	曆國支干	曆國支干	曆國支干	曆國支干	曆國支干	曆國支干	曆國支干	曆國支干
7 19巳辛	6 19亥辛	5 21午壬	4 21子壬	3 22午壬	2 22丑癸	1 23未癸	1 23未癸	1 初
7 20午壬	6 20子壬	5 22未癸	4 22丑癸	3 23未癸	2 23寅甲	1 24申甲	1 24申甲	2 初
7 21未癸	6 21丑癸	5 23申甲	4 23寅甲	3 24申甲	2 24卯乙	1 25酉乙	1 25酉乙	3 初
7 22申甲	6 22寅甲	5 24酉乙	4 24卯乙	3 25酉乙	2 25辰丙	1 26戌丙	1 26戌丙	4 初
7 23酉乙	6 23卯乙	5 25戌丙	4 25辰丙	3 26戌丙	2 26巳丁	1 27亥丁	1 27亥丁	5 初
7 24戌丙	6 24辰丙	5 26亥丁	4 26巳丁	3 27亥丁	2 27午戊	1 28子戊	1 28子戊	6 初
7 25亥丁	6 25巳丁	5 27子戊	4 27午戊	3 28子戊	2 28未己	1 29丑己	1 29丑己	7 初
7 26子戊	6 26午戊	5 28丑己	4 28未己	3 29丑己	2 29申庚	1 30寅庚	1 30寅庚	8 初
7 27丑己	6 27未己	5 29寅庚	4 29申庚	3 30寅庚	2 30辛酉	1 31卯辛	1 31卯辛	9 初
7 28寅庚	6 28申庚	5 30卯辛	4 30酉辛	3 31卯辛	2 戌壬	2 1辰壬	2 1辰壬	10 初
7 29卯辛	6 29酉辛	5 31辰壬	4 1戌壬	3 1辰壬	2 3亥癸	1 2巳癸	1 2巳癸	11 初
7 30辰壬	6 30戌壬	6 1巳癸	5 2亥癸	4 2巳癸	3 4子甲	2 3午甲	2 3午甲	20 初
7 31巳癸	7 1亥癸	6 2午甲	5 3子甲	4 3午甲	3 5卯乙	2 4未乙	2 4未乙	30 初
8 1午甲	7 1子甲	6 3未乙	5 4丑乙	4 4未乙	3 6寅丙	2 5申丙	2 5申丙	40 初
8 2未乙	7 3丑乙	6 4申丙	5 5酉丙	4 5申丙	3 7卯丁	2 6酉丁	2 6酉丁	50 初
8 3申丙	7 4寅丙	6 5酉丙	5 6卯丁	4 6酉丁	3 8辰戊	2 7戌戊	2 7戌戊	60 初
8 4酉丁	7 5卯丁	6 6戌戊	5 7辰戊	4 7戌戊	3 9巳己	2 8亥己	2 8亥己	70 初
8 5戌戊	7 6辰戊	6 7亥己	5 8巳己	4 8亥己	3 10午庚	2 9子庚	2 9子庚	80 初
8 6亥己	7 7辰己	6 8子庚	5 9午庚	4 9子庚	3 11未辛	2 10丑辛	2 10丑辛	90 初
8 7子庚	7 8午庚	6 9丑辛	5 10未辛	4 10丑辛	3 12申壬	2 11寅壬	2 11寅壬	100 初
8 8丑辛	7 9未辛	6 10寅壬	5 11申壬	4 11寅壬	3 13卯癸	2 12卯癸	2 12卯癸	110 初
8 9寅壬	7 10申壬	6 11卯癸	5 12酉癸	4 12卯癸	3 14辰甲	2 13辰甲	2 13辰甲	120 初
8 10卯癸	7 11酉癸	6 12辰甲	5 13戌甲	4 13辰甲	3 15亥乙	2 14巳乙	2 14巳乙	130 初
8 11辰甲	7 12戌甲	6 13巳乙	5 14亥乙	4 14巳乙	3 16子丙	2 15午丙	2 15午丙	140 初
8 12巳乙	7 13亥乙	6 14午丙	5 15子丙	4 15午丙	3 17丑丁	2 16未丁	2 16未丁	150 初
8 13午丙	7 14子丙	6 15未丁	5 16丑丁	4 16未丁	3 18寅戊	2 17申戊	2 17申戊	160 初
8 14未丁	7 15丑丁	6 16申戊	5 17寅戊	4 17申戊	3 19卯己	2 18酉己	2 18酉己	170 初
8 15申戊	7 16寅戊	6 17酉己	5 18卯己	4 18酉己	3 20辰庚	2 19戌庚	2 19戌庚	180 初
8 16酉己	7 17卯己	6 18辰庚	5 19戌庚	4 19戌庚	3 21巳辛	2 20亥辛	2 20亥辛	190 初
8 17戌庚	7 18卯庚	6 19巳辛	5 20亥辛	4 20亥辛	3 21子壬	2 21子壬	2 21子壬	200 初

1. 月别 Yuèbié 'Lunar months' (see table 2), the forth month in this example is followed by a 闰 (閏) rùn 'intercalary' month (see discussion above).
2. 干支 Gānzhī 'Stem branch' of the months.
3. 九星 Jiǔxīng 'Nine Star' (see table 5) of each month.
4. 民国 (民國) Mínguó 'Peoples Republic' (#101) 年 nián 'year' - the year of the current 'dynasty'.
5. 节气 (節氣) Jiéqì 'Seasonal Nodes' (see table 1), including the 时 (時) shí 'time' of the 朔 shuò 'dark' or 'new moon'. Black boxes highlight their dates, start and midpoint of the month, within the calendar body.
6. 农历 (農曆) Nónglì 'Farmer's calendar', numbering the lunar days.
7. 干支 Gānzhī 'Stem branch' of the day and the 国历 (國歷) Guólì 'National calendar' dates according the international standard Gregorian calendar.
8. 岁次 (歲次) Suìcì 'Year order', the year stem branch.
9. 西历 (西歷) Xīlì 'Western calendar' (#2012) 年 nián 'year' - the year according to the international standard Gregorian calendar.
10. 太岁 (太歲) Tàisui translated variously as 'Great year', 'God of year', 'Year Master', 'Counter Jupiter' or 'Grand Duke', the 姓名 xìngmíng 'Surname & given name' of the specific god residing for the year. Each of the 甲子 jiǎzǐ 'sixty combinations' is associated with a different deity.
11. 肖 xiào 'Resembles' 龙 (龍) lóng 'dragon', which animal of the 十二生肖 shìèr shēngxiào 'Twelve birth emblems' is associated with the branch of the year.

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