

Dragons as the Primary Creatures of the Chinese Zodiac

The dragon is the primary creature of the twelve animals in the Chinese zodiac, which is used to designate years in the lunar calendar. In order, these animals are: rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog, and pig. People came to believe that their character

and destiny were related to the animal associated with the year of their birth. The grouping emerged in literature as early as the 3rd century BCE, with the earliest known set dating to the 5th century CE. At first, the animals were either in naturalistic forms, or hybrids depicted as robed human bodies with animal heads. Later, another form emerged in the early 6th century, though rare, in which each animal appears as a miniature sculpture on the hat of a court official.