

The Great Race for the 12 Creatures of the Zodiac



It is told that the Buddha, *or in some stories*, the Jade Emperor of *Taoist divinity*, sent forth Invitation to the Great Event. It was the invitation to the ultimate competition for Animals that might be named to the Zodiac for All Time. It would be the **Great Race** across all terrains and climax in the crossing of a Mighty River.

Until then, **Cat** and **Rat** had been Friends.

As **Cat** and **Rat** were the very worst swimmers, they devised a clever plan to ride the back of the strongest of the Animals - **Ox** - across the swift currents of the mighty river. Just as they were in sight of the shore, **Rat** shoved **Cat** into the river! Then, **Rat** jumped to shore ahead of **Ox**.

Thus, **Rat** ensured his 1st Place in the Chinese Zodiac! And, this is why, for all Eternity, **Cat** will hate the water and be the sworn enemy of **Rat**!

The 3rd animal to cross the river was **Tiger**. Though ferociously powerful, even **Tiger** was challenged by the river's swirling undercurrents. After **Tiger** came **Rabbit**.

Rabbit explained he was blown ashore on a log he climbed upon after finding no more river stones to hop along to cross. This 4th animal of the Zodiac is recognized as very fortunate, indeed.

It was **Dragon** who blew the giant puff of air to push Rabbit's log to shore. **Dragon** told Buddha that, as a flying creature, he *could* have arrived first. But, he had to stop to make rain for the people and creatures of earth. Thus, Dragon became the Fifth Animal in the Zodiac.

While **Horse** appeared next, it would be **Snake**, hiding in Horse's hoof that would be the 6th Animal. Snake's sudden appearance startled **Horse**, giving **Snake** the advantage in the Great Race. And, in this way, **Horse** became the 7th Animal of Chinese Zodiac.

Some time did pass before **Ram**, **Monkey** and **Rooster** reached the shore. They had all joined to work together to find a raft and clear the water reeds to cross the river. Thus, **Ram** became the 8th, **Monkey** the 9th and **Rooster** the 10th Animals in the Zodiac.

Dog, the best swimmer of all, came in 11th. He'd gotten quite dirty racing the grueling terrain and felt in need of a good bath before he presented himself. After all, no one likes a dirty dog!

Just before the closing of the Great Race, a huge squealing burst forth from the river. **Pig** had gotten hungry and stopped for snack and a little nap.

Pig's appetite had made him late, but he *did* arrive before the close of competition. So, **Pig** became the 12th Animal of the Chinese Zodiac.

It is told that **Cat** was the last animal to reach the shore, but it was too late. There could not be 13 Animals in the Chinese Zodiac!

There is another Folk Story that tells us, long, long ago, Lord Buddha summoned all the Animals together to assign each of them a Year. When **Cat** heard the news, *he* told friend **Rat** about it and the two animals decided to go together. That day **Rat** did not wake **Cat** who, loving his catnap, slept through the morning. Thus, **Cat** did not arrive in time. This is why there is no Chinese **Year of the Cat**.

How the Cat Comes to the Vietnamese Zodiac!

Cat *does* make it into the Vietnamese Zodiac!

In this story, **Cat** takes the fortunate Rabbit's 4th place in the race.

The Vietnamese story has a different ending for **Cat**.

[Jade Emperor](#) (in Vietnamese Ngọc Hoàng) held a race to Heaven to choose the 12 Animals for the Zodiac. **Cat** and **Rat** were such good friends they decided to go together.

They rode the back of **Water Buffalo** across the river and were nearly to the shore. Suddenly, **Rat** pushed **Cat** off and down the river.

Then, wonder of wonders, this **Cat of Vietnam** could swim!

Thus, **Cat** arrived just after **Tiger**, and so became the Very Fortunate

4th Animal of the Venerable Vietnamese Zodiac!

BY: Glenda Joe

September 28, 2010

Writer's Note:

Composed with 'Bedtime Stories' in mind for children.