



Different Vectors, Same Destination

Zodiacs of the World

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Introduction

Zodiacs of various formats are a worldwide phenomenon dating back at least to the earliest days of written human history. Many formats, but not all, are based on constellations. In the West these constellations determined which “sign” a person was born under. Most, but not all, are based, at least in part, on the number 12. (Blame the astrologers of the early Egyptians and Chinese for this commonality.) Most formats involve reference to the earthly impact of the Sun, Moon, planets, stars, meteors, and comets, usually in their guises as gods or spirits. All formats claim to have predictive powers about both the future of individuals and of terrestrial events. China’s Zodiac uniquely relies on twelve animals as the predictive element, each animal representing different human characteristics.

All Zodiacs were created by prescientific cultures to answer the universal questions of *Why are we here* and *Where are we going*...with the often overlooked subtext of *Why am I here* and *Where am I going*. The text and subtext are two entirely different questions asked by every human culture of which we have a record. Every culture has reached its own answers from different directions. Every culture has reached a similar destination.

If taken together and plastered randomly on a single page, Zodiacs visually form a revealing montage of a Common Humanity, one that is shared by each and every living human on this planet and also by each person formerly alive on this planet over the last, unbroken 200-millennia.

Why Our Ancient Ancestors Found Wonder and Guidance in the Heavens

In the beginning, there was probably no mystery about the heavens in the minds of early primates. However, when our inquisitive species finally evolved, there just wasn’t anything much to do at night back then except to observe the slow interactions between the Moon, stars, and planets. Typical of our species, we took an interest in what we were observing over time.

Second, unlike our ancestors’ brutal terrestrial reality, there was a comforting order, peace, and predictability in the heavens, except when the gods dispensed their anger/conflicts with lightning, meteors, or a once-in-a-generation comet or when the gods occasionally scared the hell out of almost everyone on the planet by temporarily blotting out the Sun or Moon.

The third factor is that the heavens were not far away. They were believed to be very close, just out of reach. Icarus thought he could fly to the Sun. Furthermore, over time, humans learned, surmised, or

guessed that the nearby, rounded heavens actually could and did influence everyday-but-important things on our flat Earth:

- a) Ancient people everywhere understood that the oceans' tides were Moon cycles. They did not know that this interconnection was a simple result of the gravitational pull of the Moon. To them it was a manifestation of how the heavens mysteriously impacted life on Earth.
- b) A full moon meant one could walk about at night. An absent moon meant another night in the cave or hut.
- c) To Ancients everywhere, the seasons depended on how relatively high in the sky the Sun was at midday, another mysterious heavenly impact. The seasons meant everything to our survival...when to plant, when to bring the livestock down from the hills, when to prepare for the long, cold winter. The shifting locations and timing of the constellations foretold when the Sun's arc would start changing.
- d) Clouds, the closest part of the heavens, brought life giving rain.
- e) As humans took to the sea, navigation depended on the North Star...a "never changing, fixed" star...or at least so it seemed to the pre-science generations. Starting about 900 BC, the earliest long-distance sailors, the Phoenicians on the easternmost shore of the Mediterranean, departed for Greece, Italy, North Africa, and Spain by heading west. The North Star was therefore always on the right side of their ships, and so we call this side "starboard". On their return voyages to homeport, the North Star would be on the left side of the ship, and so we call this side "port". Our languages are replete with hundreds of words and phrases like this based on our early skygazing. For example, the word "lunatic" is based on the Latin word for the Moon. It was believed that insanity was related to the cycles of the Moon. And, after all, *Time and Tide wait for no man*.

Finally on this point, humans are the only species that we know of that asks the *Why Questions*. All members of the Class Mammalia ask the Who, What, Where, When, and How questions. Only Homo sapiens ask *Why*. Why are we here? Why me? Why do some people prosper and others not? Why do some people die young while others live long? The problem with pre-science people is that they had no means to really distinguish the *How* questions/answers from the *Why* questions/answers. So they applied a form of speculative logic/desperate speculation that resulted in the various Zodiac formats.

Today we can answer most of the basic *How* Questions, but we're still unable to reach a scientific answer to many of the *Why* questions. Why do people get sick? Easy. Disease. Why are we here? Not yet answerable satisfactorily by science...and probably never will be. Which explains the continued human reliance on the Zodiac. (More on the topic of contemporary use of astrology and the Zodiac in a later section. But first, we'll explore a suitable sampling of the formats.)

Zodiacs of the World

So what exactly is a Zodiac?

The New Oxford American Dictionary definition: *Astrological: a belt of the heavens about 8° either side of the ecliptic, including all apparent positions of the sun, moon, and most familiar planets. It is divided into twelve equal divisions or signs. Also, a representation of the signs of the zodiac or similar astrological systems* (emphasis added).

My definition: *An intriguing and colorful artifact of our species' inquisitive and fearful minds/cultures.*

There are dozens of Zodiacs from around the world. Here are a few representative examples. (Detailing all of them would exhaust both the reader and the writer of this article.)

The Chinese Zodiac

There are several stories describing the ancient origin of the Chinese Zodiac, variously tracing its origin back into the distant past to either the mythical Jade Emperor (well over 10,000-years-ago) or the Yellow Emperor (circa 2697 BC). The common thread is that “one day long ago” the Emperor decided to conduct a race between twelve animals. The first to cross the finish line was the Rat, followed by the Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and Pig. The surprising Rat triumph is ascribed to the fact that he was the cleverest of the animals...plus he cheated by riding on the back of the favored winner, the Ox. The Pig arrived last because he stopped for a snack and siesta.

Each year in the Chinese calendar is ascribed to one of these twelve animals. In turn, each of these animals is ascribed with human personality characteristics which apply to each person born in that animal’s year. In addition, each year has a celestial energy attached to it from one of the Five Elements (not the material, but rather the essence): Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water. Thus, the Chinese Zodiacal cycle is sixty years ($12 \times 5 = 60$). For example, 2022 is a *Water Tiger* year. Chinese star gazers established the twelve-year cycle based on their observation that Jupiter orbits the Sun approximately every twelve years, its variable position in the sky as seen from Earth neatly dividing the heavens, which not coincidentally corresponds with the Western determination of a twelve-month cycle.

Compare the Western Zodiac’s cycle of only twelve months versus the Chinese Zodiac’s cycle of sixty years. This difference is based on how the East and West perceive time. In the West, we’re always in a hurry and rarely look far back or far forward. In the East, the past is revered, and the distant future is always kept in mind when planning. One example of the Chinese perception of time is that China built an entire COVID hospital in Wuhan in only ten days. This reveals that the Chinese see the present as just a split-second, inconvenient interruption between the long ago past (building the hospital following ancient *feng shui* guidelines based on variations of the Five Elements and the far away future (with an eye to keeping the virus from spreading, thus avoiding long term social and economic chaos).

Originally, the Zodiac functioned only as a predictor of collective future events, not individuals. It was not until the introduction of Buddhism to China (circa 150 CE, the Han Dynasty) that the myth morphed to include the search for celestial influences on individual humans. This path from group to individual concern is similar in other Zodiac formats...with divination first being reserved for the ruling classes (collective), only later becoming available to ordinary people (individual).

Contrary to many people’s expectations, the year of your animal sign (your *Ben Ming Nian* or 本命年) is not an auspicious one. You need to be cautious and make no important decisions or take decisive actions during your year. This is because people living in their zodiac year offend the specific *Guardian God of the (that)Year* or *Tai Sui* (太歲). There are sixty potential Tai Sui, which are astrologically a group of gods/constellations ...thus bringing the stars into the Chinese zodiacal format. Not coincidentally, the Tai Sui god of any particular year is on the exact opposite side of the heavens as is Jupiter, thus connecting them all with the twelve-year and sixty-year cycles of the zodiac.

In order to predict your future and ascertain your true nature using the Chinese zodiacal format one must analyze both the Animal and the Element assigned to your year. That is, you meld your Animal’s general personality with the Element of the Year. The melding part is best left to experts. But to start with, here are the very basic-but-incomplete descriptions (links to details are provided further below, including how to find out the characteristics attached to your year of birth.)

ANIMALS

Rat: ambitious, talkative, resourceful; Ox: diligent, reliable, patient; Tiger: confident, brave, idealistic; Rabbit: kind, artistic, romantic; Dragon: intelligent, generous, impatient; Snake: curious, wise, jealous; Horse: amusing, independent, moody; Goat: easygoing, creative, disorganized; Monkey: optimistic, sociable, unpredictable; Rooster: adventurous, funny, loyal; Dog: honest, unselfish, timid; Pig: generous, smart, materialistic.

ELEMENTS

Wood: imagination and creativity; Fire: passion, bursts of dynamic energy; Earth: focus and commitment to achieving goals; Metal: solidity and willpower; Water: responsiveness and persuasion. Thus, for example, a Water Tiger person should be responsive as well as brave and idealistic.

There are numerous differences between the Chinese Zodiac and those of the Western world. Perhaps the most intriguing is that the Dragon in China is viewed as wise and benevolent whereas in the West a Dragon is violent and sociopathically dangerous. This immensely contrasting difference is highlighted by examining the names in Chinese and English for that large reptile living on an island in Indonesia named Komodo. The Chinese call it “the Komodo lizard” whereas native English-speakers call it the “Komodo Dragon”. The Komodo creature is not seen as a dragon in China because it’s a violent and dangerous animal. Amusingly, in modern China there’s a newly created, satirical, mythical animal, the *Yax Lizard* or *Yakexi* which resembles what Westerners call a Komodo dragon. The Chinese name is taken from the Uyghur adjective “yaxshi”, meaning *great*. The play-on-words behind this contemporary cultural satire is that in Chinese *xi* means *lizard*.

Other Far Eastern Zodiacs

As the dominant culture in the Far East, China’s zodiacal format is copied by South Korea, North Korea, Singapore, and Cambodia. Japan’s only alteration is the substitution of the Boar for the Pig. Vietnam substitutes the Water Buffalo for the Ox and the Cat for the Rabbit. Thailand substitutes the Naga for the Dragon. The Naga is a mythical monster resembling a giant snake and is associated with fertility and wealth.



The Naga

But ancient Chinese culture did not dominate all its neighbors. For example, due to geographical reasons and others lost in history, Burma was economically and culturally influenced more by India than China, as demonstrated by the fact that the Burmese Zodiac is completely different from China’s. There are eight signs named after the eight directions and is based on “eight” days of the week. There are eight

corresponding animals starting with Monday and including a Wednesday a.m. and Wednesday p.m.: Sunday: the mythical bird, Garuda, kind, optimistic); Monday: Tiger, intelligent, alert; Tuesday: Lion, noble, strong willed; Wednesday a.m.: tusked Elephant, unpredictable, passionate); Wednesday: no-tusk Elephant, private, successful); Thursday: Rat, clever, introverted; Friday: Guinea Pig, artistic, loving; and Saturday: Dragon, philosophical, understanding. To determine your animal and ruling direction, you need to know only the day of the week you were born on. Note that the system also includes calculating into your horoscope the Eight Planetary Energies...which includes the invisible or theoretical planet called *Rahu*. There is no image available for Rahu.



The Garuda

The equally ancient Zodiac of India is fascinating and deeply engrained in Hinduism, thus not really a *stand-alone* system. It's also not susceptible to facile summary. Its horoscopic aspect (predictions for individuals) was a late arriver and was probably based on Hellenistic influences, thanks to Alexander the Great and his successors. You may explore further at:

<https://www.hinduscriptures.in/vedic-knowledge/astrology/astrology-in-ancient-india>

The Ancient Egyptian Zodiac

The Egyptians were fascinated by celestial mechanics and were experts in the movements of the Sun, Moon, the planets, and the stars. Their main contribution to this story is that they divided the sky into *decans*, being 36 groups of small constellations that rose in order over the horizons every day, which they calculated at 24 hours. They also divided the year into 12 (lunar) months and further into 365 days. (Because that pesky, Earth-altering Moon has been slowing down the rotation of the Earth via tidal action by on average 1.7-milliseconds-per-day for the last 3.8-billion years...thus increasing the length of the day...all our globally variable calendars and zodiacs have gotten a little out of whack over the millennia.) There is some evidence that an actual zodiac for purposes of individual horoscoping was not introduced into Egypt until Roman times.

The twelve Egyptian signs are gods and completely unrelated to the Chinese signs:

The Nile: passionate for life, always seeking change; Amon Ra: leadership and confidence; Mut: motherhood and practical thinking; Geb: intuitive and caring; Osiris: strong yet vulnerable; Isis: protective and playful; Thoth: wise and romantic; Horus: courageous and optimistic; Anubis: solitary and calm; Seth: perfectionists and attention seeking; Bastet: balanced and thoughtful; Sekhmet: just and intelligent. As with most zodiacs, each sign is compatible with only a few of the others.

The Mayan Zodiac

Starting between 2,000 and 3,000-years ago, the Mayan culture was framed deeply in mathematics and celestial “calendaring” of four varieties dealing with such activities as daily life, religious ritual, and predictive mathematics. Of all the formats, the Mayan zodiac was the most scientific and by far the most complex in its design. They devised a year based on 13 months of 28 days each. The individual horoscope was a feature of their zodiac from the beginning, unlike most others. Their system also did the usual of attempting to predict earthquakes and hurricanes, plus organizing daily life and governance. As in China, they divided up the eons of life on Earth into five elements: Air, Water, Earth, Fire, and Gold (a close match), but these elements were not directly involved with altering the characters of the 13 signs. Their scientific expertise is proved by the fact that one of the few remaining works, the ones that were not destroyed by the conquering Spanish as Satanic, predicted the total solar eclipse on August 11, 1999. Because their records were largely destroyed, there is a great deal of controversy and wild speculation about what shape/type of signs were used by the Mayans. (Details linked below.) Prepare to be confused if you venture deeper into the underpinnings of the Mayan Zodiac.

The Greek Zodiac

This is the one with which Westerners are most familiar. Twelve constellation signs for twelve months, representing gods or their stories, with spicing of meaning/characteristics provided by the Four Elements of Earth, Fire, Water, and Air, plus the relative movement of the planets. The only crossovers with the Chinese Zodiac are the sign of the Goat (Capricorn) and of the Bull/Ox (Taurus).

The twelve Greek signs are:

Aries-Ram: beginnings; Taurus-Bull: fertility; Gemini-Twin Brothers: duality; Cancer-Crab: family; Leo-Lion’s Mane: the force of life; Virgo-Goddess: labor/loyalty; Libra-Scales of Justice: harmony; Scorpio-Scorpion: destruction/rebirth; Sagittarius-Archer’s Bow: higher consciousness; Capricorn-Goat: wisdom; Aquarius-Water Bearer: revolution and wisdom; Pisces: Two Fish moving in the opposite direction: division.

In Our Modern Day

In today’s world, space and the heavens are no longer comforting, just-out-of-reach places of order, peace, and predictability inhabited by gods and spirits. Rather the internationally competitive space race, military satellite race, supersonic missile race, colonizing the Moon/Mars race, plus the anxious search for Earth-busting comets coming at us from trillions of miles away in a crowded and distant universe have brought the heavens all too close to the brutal surface of our planet.

Yet over thousands of years, as astrology streamed into astronomy, as alchemy morphed into chemistry, and as fantasy faded into physics...human nature and human cultures simply took absolutely no notice. For example, because of the Earth’s 25,772-year *precession cycle* (aka: “very slow and steady axis wobbling”), none of the constellations assigned to each sign are currently within their original sign. Yet horoscopes and psychics are still consulted globally by many people, regardless of how sophisticated and scientifically educated these people may be.

True, there’s less of a feverish devotion to and understanding of the heavens than in the ancient days of old. Why? Because most of us, at least in the developed world, have lost contact with the night sky, as well as having lost contact with our knowledge that we’re all human beings. The moon still shines bright as day, but to no avail. High-intensity streetlights, blinking neon billboards, headlights, house

lights, and screen glare from televisions/devices all blot out the Milky Way entirely and turn the vast array of sparkling constellations into dull, indistinct glimmers, at best.

The mysteries are vanishing, yet the myths remain. And so they shall remain until science comes up with a more satisfactory answer to *Why are we here* than “Everything is a result of a predetermined causal chain starting with the Big Bang some 13.7-billion-years-ago.” While this is probably scientifically correct, it’s hardly a stimulating or even a useful basis for conducting one’s life. It lacks all utility for living.

There are many belief systems that have proven useful over the years, Zodiacs being one of them for many people. While no belief system has survived scientific inquiry, the fact is that “all belief systems are the result of a predetermined causal chain starting with the Big Bang some 13.7-billion-years-ago.” Thus, the issue is not validity, but rather utility. The question is: “Do different-yet-similar cultural beliefs help us get through life better or worse?” The answer is “Yes”. These shared and ancient beliefs conclusively demonstrate that we are all of one fundamental genetic, evolutionary stock.

The most common scientific proof that we are just one species and that we all evolved from one source is that humans everywhere carry the same parasites, and these parasites attach themselves only to humans. However, there’s also the less squirmy fact that every ancient culture believed that there were evil spirits in the jungle or forest. In many current cultures these beliefs survive intact. In the West this scientifically untenable belief is still alive and well...but hidden in our language. Today we say “knock wood” when we want to express a hope that our good luck will continue. Why? Because our very distant ancestors struck a tree trunk with a club or branch on the edge of the forest before entering deeper. The sound would alert the spirits that a man was coming; thus, the spirits would not be startled and do something unlucky in retaliation. So also today, many people consult their horoscope. They may know that such is scientifically unsupportable, but they also know that it is a comforting ritual.

The only hope for our world is through our collective imaginations and dreams, the essential parts of creativity and joy. We have children to thank for the few remnants of imagination and awe that have been retained in our cultures. Children who have the good fortune to catch a glimpse of the night sky do so without any knowledge that the stars are multiple trillions of miles away, that the planets and the Moon are simply dead hunks of rock and gasses, and that comets are simply cold clumps of ice. During the day they certainly do not know that the Sun is a dangerous, immense fusion bomb generating lethal cosmic rays, but rather perceive it as a source of warmth and a welcome playmate at the beach.

Children these days still believe in Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, the Jade Rabbit, the Monkey King, the Grootslang, Djinnns, or the Ah-Muzen-Cab ...depending on where they grow up. So also do they believe in the majesty of the night sky, of the waxing and waning of the Moon, of ancient gods and dragons moving slowly across the heavens in their celestial forms. When children learn that “there is no Santa Claus” they don’t suddenly turn into unempathetic sociopaths. Rather, they simply transfer the mystery of the myth into the reality of life.

Most adults have a favorite childhood memory of gazing at the night sky. Mine is the first time as a very young lad that I saw and recognized Orion in the densely star-sprinkled, deeply rural, southeastern sky late one clear winter’s eve as I trudged wearily home after finishing my barn chores. Unlike primitive humans, at age eight I knew that the stars were far away and that the Moon was made of rock, but the heavens were still as fresh and fascinating to me as they had been to my ancestors. Over the decades and the dozens of different homes around the world I’ve lived in since then, Orion and I have become close friends. We’ve stayed in touch. He’s been a point of continuity in my life. We did lose touch for the four

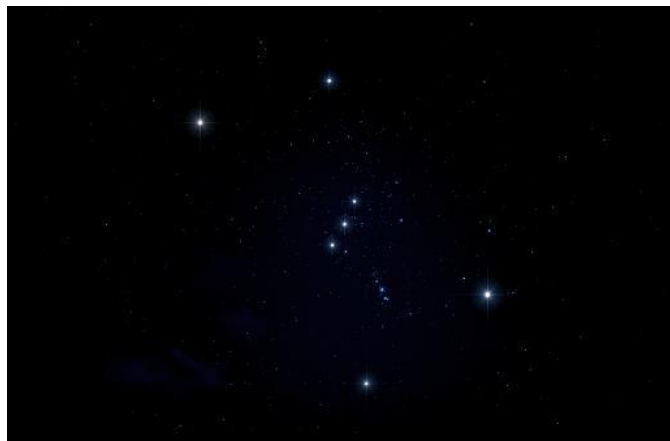
years I lived as a young adult in the always illuminated concrete canyons of New York City, but otherwise we've gazed up or down at each other (respectively) every winter for over seventy years.

As Carl Sagan said, "We are a way for the universe to know itself. Some part of our being knows this is where we came from. We long to return. And we can, because the cosmos is also within us. We're made of star stuff." This statement is neither hyperbole nor metaphor. All life on Earth exists because billions of years ago carbon, nitrogen, and oxygen atoms, plus all the heavy metals, created by the stars were sent hurtling our way across the great divide as space debris by supernova explosions.

What Evolution has joined together, let no miscreant put asunder.

OBT

(Onward to a Better Tomorrow)



Further reading for details:

<https://www.oprahdaily.com/life/a35119928/chinese-zodiac-signs/>

<https://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/chinese-zodiac/china-five-elements-philosophy.htm>

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maya_calendar

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https://www.greece.com/info/general/greek_zodiac/

<https://greekreporter.com/2021/08/27/greek-origin-zodiac-signs-astrology/>

<https://www.newscientist.com/gallery/mg20327161300-enemy-within-human-parasites/>

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259168834_The_origins_of_human_parasites_Exploring_the_evidence_for_endoparasitism_throughout_human_evolution

<http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150623001109>

About the Author

James Luce was a member of The 1990 Institute Executive Committee from 1990 to 2012 and has continued to informally contribute research and assistance ever since. He retired from the practice of civil trial law in 2003 after moving to a small village in Spain. Writer of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. Author of *Chasing Davis, an Atheist's Guide to Morality Using Logic and Science*. Raised on a sheep ranch in rural California. Graduated from Yale University in psychology in 1966, Federal Agent in the USAF Office of Special Investigations (1967-71), graduated from the Santa Clara University Law School (1974). Lifelong interest in history and geopolitics (especially Western Civilization and East Asia) and travel (27 countries, five continents).