

Lunar New Year Stamps (1992-2004) by Clarence Lee



Observed throughout the world by people of Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Tibetan and Mongolian heritage, the Lunar New Year is a time of modern festivity and ancient tradition. As the celebration became widespread in America, the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) responded with stamps that illustrate some of its most notable symbols and signs. The Lunar New Year Collection is one of the most successful issues in the history of the USPS.

The lunar cycle is based on a twelve-year repeating cycle. According to legend, the signs of the zodiac were determined when Buddha invited all the animals of the kingdom for a meeting. Only twelve animals showed up: the rooster, dog, boar, rat, ox, tiger, hare, dragon, snake, horse, ram and monkey. Buddha gave each animal its own year; thus, it is believed that people will possess the nature and characteristics of the animal that represents the year in which they are born.

Born in Honolulu, Hawaii, artist Clarence Lee was selected to design the first Chinese lunar stamp, the "Year of the Rooster." Issued in 1992, the stamp met with such success that he continued to design the stamps for the rest of the twelve-year series. When designing the first stamp of the series, Lee created a distinctively modern and Chinese design; hence the paper-cut two dimensional look. On each stamp of the series, a professional calligrapher wrote Kanji characters to state the name of each stamp. Kanji is a Japanese adaptation to Chinese characters and can be read by a variety of Asian groups from several countries and cultures.