

THE YEAR OF THE TIGER

By George Constantourakis

On January 8, 1998 Canada Post issued a stamp—and a diamond shaped souvenir sheet—to celebrate the Year of the Tiger. The design of the stamp features the head and shoulders of a tiger. The dominant color of the stamp is red, synonymous with Chinese celebrations. For the Chinese, the color represents joy and happiness. Gold is color used for the stamp's denomination, and Chinese characters that sign "Year of the Tiger". Gold represents prosperity, happiness, and good fortune. (See *Figures 1, 2 and 3.*)

On January 28, 1998, at sunset began the lunisolar Year of the Tiger. It is also called Chinese New Year, based on the orbiting periods of both the sun and the moon. The Chinese New Year is based on a 12-year cycle, with every year represented by an animal. The twelve animals used were thought to have been loyal to Buddha.



Fig. 1. Tiger. This M.C. shows a close-up of a tiger in its natural habitat. The Canadian stamp for the Year of the Tiger shows in gold the Chinese characters for the Year of the Tiger. Color Postcard: Pub. by Benedikt Taschen, 1993. Cancel (which also illustrates the Chinese characters of the Year of the Tiger): Toronto, Canada, January 8, 1998, FDOI. Realized by the author.

Lunar New Year celebrations have existed for 2,500 years, since the time of Confucius. Today, they continue to be an important element of the Chinese culture. The celebrations last for 15 days, focusing on family gatherings, paying respect to deceased ancestors, reveling in old traditions, and wishing for future prosperity.

Individuals born in a certain year, it is said, possess the characteristics particular to its animal sign. Those individuals born under the sign of the tiger, in the years 1902, 1914, 1926, 1938, 1950, 1962, 1974, 1986, and 1998, in this century, are sensitive, emotional, and capable of great love. However, they have a tendency to be stubborn about what they think is right.

According to *The Handbook of Chinese Horoscopes* by Theodora Lau, the Year of the Tiger is a year earmarked for war, disagreement, and disaster, a year when fortunes will be won and lost. The forecast for 1998 is not that dismal, though; Lau informs us that "the forceful and vigorous Tiger year can also be used to inject new life and vitality into causes, sinking ventures, and drab or failing industries. It will likewise be a time for massive change, [and] for new and bold, especially highly controversial ideas".

Today, about one million people of Chinese origin live in Canada. For Chinese-Canadians, Chinese New Year festivities are an opportunity to renew their sense of cultural and ethnic identity.

George Constantourakis is the Secretary-Treasurer of MACSU and a long time collector and exhibitor of maximum cards.



Fig. 2. Tiger. This M.C. shows a tiger resting in a zoo setting. Color Postcard: Pub. by The Chicago Zoological Society. Nr. 11487. Cancel: Toronto, Canada, January 8, 1998, FDOI. Realized by the author.

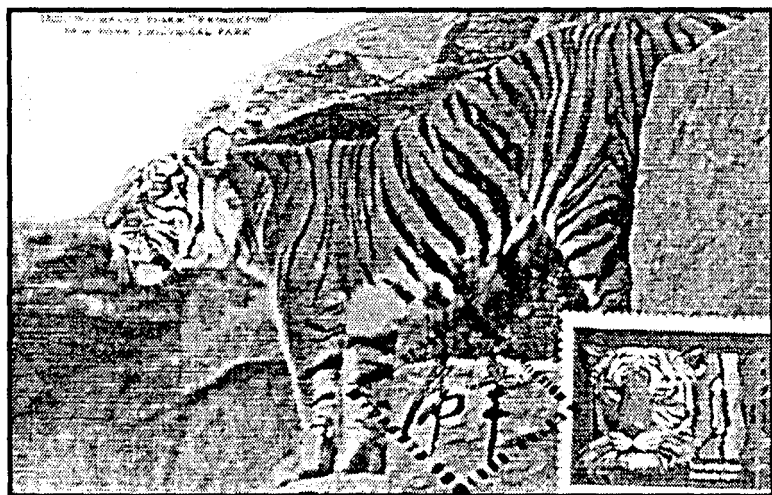


Fig. 3. Tiger. This M.C. shows a tiger on a look-out. Color Postcard: Pub. by The New York Zoological Park, Nr. 1422. Cancel : Toronto, Canada, January 8, 1998, FDOI. Realized by the author.

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