


RURAL CHINESE APOSTOLATE, 7TH MILE PENRISSEN ROAD, KUCHING

The Chinese New Year: The year of the Horse, 2026

In this New Year 2026, we have the horse as the symbol. Last year, it is the year of the **snake**. Let us have a glance of the horse in the Chinese tradition.

The Horse in the Chinese Tradition

(1) The HORSE is reckoned as the 7th of the 12 terrestrial branches.

It is written in ancient classical script as a pictorial symbol of the actual horse in this manner  pronounced as mǎ. It is now written in a simpler form: 馬 mǎ.

The horse is classed under the element of FIRE(火= fǔo) and has its place in the SOUTH(南= nǎm). In the trigrams, the symbol 三 CHIEN(乾)represents the male element (陽= yang) and it symbolizes HEAVEN, HORSE, TIRELESS STRENGTH AND SOUTH. Let us see a little of what has been written about the horse.

(2) The Great Chinese materia medica : "Pen Tsao"(本草)

The Great Chinese materia medica: "Pen Tsao" which has 24 sections, describes the history and uses of the horse. By the way, to think of it, the horse is even considered a delicacy even in our own country. I have heard of fine "satay" being barbecued from horse meat! Believe it or not! And horse meat fetches a very good price, unofficially priced, of course. I have never personally tasted it myself, but it must be very tasty and delicious as I gathered from those who have eaten it!

A section of the "Pen Tsao" (本草)deals with the horse as food or medicine.

- A pure, white horse is very good for **medicine**.
- The liver is said to be **poisonous**.
- The heart, dried and powdered and mixed with wine is good for **forgetfulness**.
- The warts of the horse above the knees, which are called the "night eyes" to go by at night, are useful for **toothache**.
- The ashes of the skull mingled with water and the head of the skull used for a pillow is a cure for **restlessness and hysteria**.

The above few examples suffice. Let us turn to the "**Horse classic**".

(3) The Mǎ Ching(馬經) or Horse Classic

This **Horse Classic** was written in the 17th century A.D. It describes vividly the 32 distinguishing marks of a horse. all dealing with certain symbolic meaning for the human soul to learn from the horse to be a better human being. Chinese seem to put meaning to nearly everything in a symbolic way which is generally very educative and moral uplifting in spite of a few superstitious traits here and there.

- The Chinese consider the eye of a horse as a **pearl**.
- The nose looks like the Chinese character (公)pronounced as kung meaning male, and (火)pronounced as fǔo meaning fire.
- The mane is soft with 10,000 delicate hairs.
- The neck is like a phoenix or cock when crowing.
- The horse's tail standing on end is considered as a good sign of things to come.

The Manchus pigtails in the Ching Dynasty are said to be adopted from the tail of horses as an act of "grateful tribute" to the horse to which they owed so much in their invasions, battles and victories.

(4) The king of horses deity : "The Mǎ Wang"(馬王)

The king of the horse deity has three eyes and four hands bearing various weapons of warfare. It is at times found in wayside shrines of temples. He is said to protect cattle from evil spirits and diseases and is worshipped by horse bearers. It is usually accompanied by a similar figure of king of cows (牛王 niǔ wang), invoked by cow-herders.

(5) Horse, the beloved of the Painters (Chinese Painters)

Painters, particularly, the Chinese painters throughout the centuries, have tried to put on canvas, the spiritousness, the dexterity, the masculinity and the fiery speed of the horse (fully alive, eternally moving to behold!).

(i)The eight Steeds(八駿)of Mu Wang (穆王)1001-746B.C. ,

The 5th Sovereign of the Chou Dynasty, are renowned in legend and story. It is very often used as an art motif. The charioteer, Tsao Fu(造父) with these 8 steeds (horses) drove King Mu on his journeys through his whole empire.

(ii) Painters Han Kan(韓幹) 750 A.D.and Chao Meng-Fu(趙孟頫)1254A.D.

Great painters like Han Kan and Chao Meng-Fu did great service to the horse as illustrious painters of great renown. They are many others of course, even today and to the end of time who will take up the horse as a subject for their painting.

(6) The Emblem of a horse.

The emblem of a horse is speed and perseverance. A quick-witted youth is a times, called a thousand-li-colt(千里駒).

What should we Christians think about the horse in this Chinese New Year : some reflections

First and foremost, all real superstitions must be deleted from our minds and heart, if there is any, concerning the horse. However, every good symbol and positive mark concerning the horse can help us to come nearer to our Creator and Lord. This must be exploited to the fullest for our use towards educating man to great heights of glory, sanctity and happiness.

(1) With masculinity, tireless, strength to pursue our goal

The masculinity of the horse should make us realize that we must not be like jelly fish and remain passive but in our constant endeavors, we must have tireless strength to pursue towards our goal in life, that is to fight to the last, to obtain the eternal crown of victory which our Lord God has prepared for us.

(2) Medicinal cure

The horse is used as a medicinal cure for bodily and spiritual sickness. This reminds us that the cure for our soul is in the Great Physician Jesus Christ, our Lord who not only cures but strengthens us through His living Word and Sacraments making us children of our Heavenly Father and his brothers and sisters, giving us even new life, new strength and new vigor.

(3) Liver and nose

Let us never be 'liverish' and poisonous in our minds and hearts but let us have the significance of the nose, fire (火) of the horse to be consumed by the fire and love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to love and serve others joyfully.

(4) Heart and wine

Do you remember that the dried and powdered heart of the horse mixed with wine is able to cure forgetfulness! Yes, let us never forget in our hearts to obey God's commandments. May the wine of gladness (*vinum laetificat cor hominum* means wine makes the heart of men joyful and happy), make us joyful in serving the Lord.

(5) "Night eyes"

Let us have the "night eyes" of the horse to see in the darkness of our suffering, pain and tribulation, the inner meaning of God's Holy will for us in all situations in life, to travel perseveringly to the end of our destiny that is heaven.

(6) Restlessness

Let us realize that we are restless and our sickness of restlessness will continue until we rest in the Lord by having faith and confidence in Him.

(7) From the creature to the Creator

Painters throughout the centuries, past and present alike have admired the wonderful creation of God, the horse. Yes, we can come to our Creator through admiring and recognizing God's hands in all of them and kneel to adore Him.

(8) Worship: Mǎ Wang(馬王)

We will not invoke or worship the Mǎ Wang (馬王) but we will certainly worship and invoke the King of horses and of all creation. God, our Lord and universal King. Jesus Christ.

Biblical Tradition

(1) Pharaoh's army with his horses and chariots

Let us turn to the Bible andWhen I read the Bible, I came across Pharaoh's chariots and horses (a powerful army) chasing after the God's people. I cannot

help but praise God in drowning Pharaoh's army, horses and chariots. in the Red Sea while God's people crossed the Red Sea dry shod, safe and sound, through the powerful intervention of God in saving His People who called for His help. Has He stopped helping us now? NO. far from it!

(2) God's coming riding on the cloud to help His People

I too, remember God's coming riding on the cloud in describing God's coming down from heaven speedily to help His people in their great distress and peril. It is said in so many places in the Bible, that God comes riding on the cloud to save the just, the poor and the oppressed against their enemies.

(3) Use God's creation for good not for evil

Nations go to battle to grab for more power. People use force against force, just or unjust, depending on the intentions of the people. Horses are used for battle, for wars, for spying, for killing like those gunslingers who are trigger-happy to kill, to murder, to rape, to destroy or they are used to save, to bring justice and peace to the people, to bring law and order to the tribe, community or nation. Let us never abuse God's creation for a bad purpose or for a malicious intent to destroy others or to satisfy our revengeful spirit but rather always to use God's created things, living or inanimate, for the greater glory of God and for the benefit of mankind.

The most beautiful thought that comes to my mind, I think, is this: Jesus is riding humbly on an ass (donkey, colt, pony).

(3) Jesus is riding humbly on a pony

This shows how humble Jesus is - riding humbly on an ass (donkey, colt. pony). What a great and vivid contrast to the rulers and conquerors of the world who wield power and who wish one and all to know, see and feel the power exuding from them : the power to kill anyone or destroy at will. everything that we possess

Yet Jesus, humbly riding on a stupid donkey is the sign of God's power: God coming down to us riding on the cloud to help us.

Jesus was acclaimed as King of the Jews in his riding up to Jerusalem on a silly ass (donkey). The people made Him their King, who has power over death. (They saw the raising of Lazarus from the dead). Yes remember: Still water runs deep; using the Chinese Chi Kung of inner strength as a lame comparison, Jesus rides quietly

with inner strength on a humble donkey up to Jerusalem to receive glory and triumph that is properly His. Yes, this is a wonderful thought that we can cherish all the days of our life.

Conclusion

(1) Yes, in this Chinese New Year, let us with courage and strength, with warmth, love and passion signified by the nose of the horse (火= fire) fight perseveringly as champions and heroes of truth, justice, honesty and love.

(2) Let us be speedy messengers of God by bringing speedily and perseveringly God's message of salvation to the world. Have courage, for God comes speedily riding on the cloud to help us in our endeavors.

(3) God gives us medicine for our body and soul in His Creation: in the horse and the grasses (herbs) of the field which have healing properties. May we thank God for these wonderful gifts of Creation.

(4)"Lord, you are so good! Thank-you Lord. In this Chinese New Year, please come riding on the clouds to help us in all our needs and may You bless all of us especially our Chinese brothers and sisters during this festive Chinese New Year of the horse(马). May the sight of wonderful spring with horses running in the fields, lead us closer to You day by day in this Chinese New Year of the Horse, 2026

WISHING ALL OF YOU A HAPPY AND PROSPEROUS CHINESE NEW YEAR

&

MAY THE LORD OUR GOD BLESS YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

AMEN

Dated: 5th Nov, 2025

(Fr. Stephen Chin)