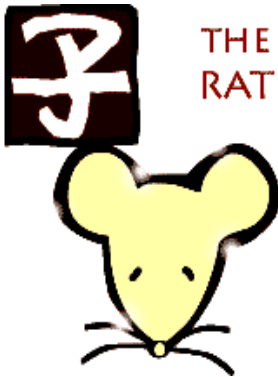


## 2008 THE YEAR OF THE RAT



Legend has it that the long ago, the Chinese Emperor invited all the animals to a party. The first 12 to arrive were the Rat followed by the Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Rooster, Dog and lastly the Boar. These 12

animals were named for the 12 year cycle that governs Chinese lives thereafter. The story explains that towards the end of the journey, the animals had to cross a celestial river, and the Rat asked the Ox to ferry him across. When they arrived on the other side, the Rat jumped down off the Ox's head and that is how he gained first spot in the order of the Chinese zodiac. The legend reveals something about the Rat's character. Those born in the year of the Rat are clever, ambitious, creative, hard-working, fastidious, charming and sociable, but a bit stingy when it comes to sharing their wealth or possession.

The Japanese adopted the animal zodiac but adopted the western year instead of the moon calendar used by the Chinese. So, the Japanese animal zodiac year begins on January 1 and ends on December 31.

A Rat Year is a time of hard work, activity and renewal. This is a good year to begin a new job, get married, launch a product or make a fresh start. Ventures began now may not yield fast returns, but opportunities will come for people who are well prepared and resourceful. The best way for you to succeed is to be patient, let things develop slowly, and make the most of every opening you can find. People born in a Rat Year (of the Earth Phase-2008) are said to be logical realists, shrewd, charming, ambitious, and inventive. Of course, the entire horoscope must be considered when making any personality assessment.

Cunning and thrifty, Rats have a knack with money and are apt to save for many days. When capable, the Rat is a good money saver, and in strapped times he knows how to make something out of nothing or how to make things advantageous for himself.

Generally friendly and sociable, the Rat is an extrovert and have a special gift for easing the minds of others. It is not surprising that Rats have a lot of friends. To the people they love, Rats can be amazingly charitable, popular and supportive. Although Rats like to be in the driver's seat, they do need partners who can keep up with their lifestyles. Rat people are romantic and always happier to have someone to share with.

Some famous Rat people are: Charlotte Bronte, Gwyneth Paltrow, Lauren Bacall, Lucrezia Borgia, Margaret Mitchell, Mata Hari, and Olivia Newton-John.

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now reaching the 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> generations, have lost their family ties with the old country. And while we all want to think we come from a long line of samurai, many of us don't know our own family histories or even how to write our names in kanji.

But as a community, JAs need to maintain a cultural identity, one that is linked to Japan. For one thing, we are a minority in the U.S. As people of Asian descent, our claims as Americans will always be challenged no matter how "Americanized" we become. Rather than shed our cultural identity, it should be embraced because it is through diversity and tolerance that we can truly be part of the American fabric. However, this does not mean that we need to become more Japanese, I am only saying that we need to know where we come from and strive to maintain some key traditions.

Historically, JAs on the West Coast faced a tough task after WWII to form an identity. The JAs were placed in camps because of blood ties and the color of our skin even though they were citizens by birth. So holding on to Japanese customs and traditions did not bear merit in an anti-Japanese post-war atmosphere.

But some traditions did persevere within the Nikkei community like the Nisei Week parade and festival in Little Tokyo in LA. For years after the war, Nisei Week flourished because the community was strong and people were connected to each other through family and personal relationships, business ties, churches, schools and other organizations. The most important aspect of this yearly community celebration was that traditions were reinforced and passed on.

But as time passed on, the community waned. People moved away, ties were stretched and eventually broken. New traditions replaced the old. Year by year, Nisei Week held less and less significance and the crowds became smaller and families stopped coming to Little Tokyo. Without tradition, JA cultural identity is endangered and Nisei Week is quickly fading into a memory.

Without the new generation of Japanese immigrants, customs and traditions might be completely lost to many Nikkei. The sense of the traditional arts like Ikebana and kendo arte typically from Japan. Japanese immigrants have opened grocery stores and restaurants to eat the dishes that they grew up with. And, when it comes to language retention, just as the original Issei started newspapers in Japanese to keep up with events back home, the new generation has Japanese television programming via satellite for up-to-the-minute sports scores and the latest political scandals. These "Shin-Issei" not only bridge Japan and America, they can also be the bridge for us Nikkei and our own cultural identity.

The involvement of the Shin-Issei community is important to the future of Nisei Week. Perhaps the Japan Expo, an event that is not a festival, could join forces with Nisei Week to create dynamic tradition that everyone can enjoy. By forging stronger ties with the Japanese community, Nikkei can reclaim their heritage. Now that is something worth celebrating.

written by Bobby Okanaka editor of Discover Nikkei)