ILLUSTRATION: COURTESY OF HO HUI-CHE

# The Tale of the Chinese Zodiac (part I)
# 十二生肖的傳說（一）

A long, long time ago, the Jade Emperor was celebrating his birthday. Unfortunately, at that time there was no way of counting the years so he couldn't be sure how old he was. It was then that he decided to come up with a method for counting the years.

很久很久以前，玉皇大帝想為自己慶生，可惜當時還沒有計算歲數的方法，所以祂也不確定自己到底是幾歲。因此，他決定要制定一套計算年紀的方法。

He sent his servant into the forest to announce that there would be a race amongst the animals with a special prize for the 12 winners. When the animals heard the news they all wondered what the prize would be.

玉皇大帝派手下到森林裡向動物們宣佈，祂將舉辦一場賽跑，獲得前十二名的動物將得到特殊的獎賞。動物們聽到這個消息都很好奇獎賞是什麼。

On the day of the race, the emperor arrived on a golden chariot. As he cleared his voice to speak, the animals fell silent. "There will be a race across the river. The first 12 animals to reach the opposite bank will have a year named after them. The first year will be named after the first animal across, and so on," said the emperor.

比賽那天，玉帝乘坐一輛金色馬車來到現場。祂清了清喉嚨準備說話，眾動物都安靜下來。玉帝說：「這是一場渡河比賽，最先抵達對岸的十二種動物，名字就會拿來命名年份。第一年用第一名抵達的動物命名，依此類推。」

On the day of the race all the animals lined up on the starting line. With the drop of a flag the race began and the animals sprinted toward the river. The first to arrive were the cat and the rat, but they soon realized that it was further than they had thought. In fact, it looked pretty dangerous. They sat around wondering what to do, when the ox arrived. Suddenly the rat had an idea. "Hey ox, do you mind carrying us across the river?" he asked. The ox was a kind animal, so he readily agreed.

(JOHN PHILLIPS, STAFF WRITER)

比賽當天，所有動物都在起跑線上列隊準備。旗子往下一揮，比賽開始，動物們無不卯足全力衝向河邊。首先跑到河邊的是貓和老鼠，但牠們很快就發現這條河比想像中寬多了。事實上，這河看起來相當危險。牠們坐在河邊不知道要怎麼辦時，牛也到了。老鼠忽然想到一個主意，牠問說：「嘿，牛啊，你可以載我們渡河嗎？」牛因為個性溫和，於是一口答應了。

(翻譯：袁星塵)