

Culture Highlights

- 1 Potluck dinner parties are not as popular in China as they are in the United States. The Chinese host or hostess will usually prepare everything for the dinner and not count on the guests for any contributions. But a visitor can still bring something as a token of his or her appreciation, like a fruit basket, a bottle of wine, or a bouquet of flowers.
- 2 Nowadays, when Chinese people sing for fun, they usually sing karaoke (卡拉 OK, kālā'ōukēi) style. Many people in mainland China and Taiwan regularly go to karaoke bars to have a good time or celebrate someone's birthday. They can order food and beverages and reserve private rooms for their parties. Some people even have karaoke equipment at home.
- 3 The Chinese usually express their appreciation of a gift profusely, typically by saying “你太客气了!” (Nǐ tài kèqi le, You're really too kind!). However, most Chinese people would refrain from opening the present immediately in front of the gift giver lest they appear too greedy. Flowers make good gifts, but for happy occasions one should avoid bouquets of white flowers, which are typically for funerals. Another taboo is giving a clock to an elderly person as a present, because the phrase 送钟 (sòng zhōng, to give a clock as a present) is ominously homophonous with 送终 (sòng zhōng), which means to attend someone's burial.
- 4 There are twelve animal signs in the Chinese zodiac, each representing one year in a twelve-year cycle. According to a popular but unscientific theory, one's personality and temperament have much to do with the animal that represents the year of one's birth. It might be surprising that the twelve-year cycle should start with the year of the rat, the smallest and perhaps the least likable of the twelve animals. At the beginning, as the story goes, there was a bitter quarrel among the animals as to who should represent the first year of the cycle. Finally, they decided to settle the dispute with a race. The robust ox was in the lead all the way, but he did not notice that the tiny rat was taking a ride on his back. As the ox was approaching the end, the rat jumped down