


Traditional New Year painting - White tiger (Bạch hổ)

Southeast Asian Collection

Accession Nr.:	59.7.1 
Type:	print
Date of production:	1956-1957
Place of production:	Hanoi, Vietnam, Southeast Asia
Materials/Techniques:	paper, silk, woodblock print, hand coloured
Dimensions:	height: 83.5 cm width: 65.4 cm

The painting, currently framed in a silk brocade passe-partout, was made in the Hàng Trống workshop, which is also based in Hanoi and has an equally important and long tradition. Among the differences between the two workshops, it is common to find that the latter used less deep engravings and that they used hand-colouring instead of coloured blocks, presumably for a more elegant clientele. Furthermore, the underlying themes of the engravings differed.

This depiction dates back to the 17th century, but in most of the surviving woodcuts the tiger is white, hence the title of the engraving. The central tiger is the central figure of the well-known 'Five Tigers', which is the god of the middle heavens (the Chinese tradition holds that there is a middle heavens in addition to the four heavens) and the god of war, and is accompanied by a sword and a battle flag. In front of the tiger's front paws, the inscription on the plaque reads: 'Fearsome [guardian] spirit of order (or Buddhism)' (法大威灵). The white tiger is also revered as the Buddha's helper, which is why it often appears in shrines alongside the Buddha.

In addition, the tiger is one of the animals of the zodiac, and in many places it is also regarded as a local protective deity. The image brings good luck to those born in the year of the tiger, and is also displayed on the walls of houses as a charm on New Year's Eve. A rarely seen woodcut.

