

Traditional New Year painting - The old toad teaches how to read (Lão oa giảng độc)

Southeast Asian Collection

Accession Nr.:	86.30.8 
Type:	woodblock print
Date of production:	second half of 20th century
Place of production:	Bắc Ninh province, Đông Hồ village, Vietnam, Southeast Asia
Materials/Techniques:	paper, coloured woodblock print
Dimensions:	height: 18.5 cm width: 31 cm

This satirical woodcut, made in the Đông Hồ workshop in Vietnam, parodies traditional schools. To obtain a lucrative government post, candidates had to pass an examination, which required a thorough knowledge of classical Chinese texts. For this reason, traditional Vietnamese schools already taught students to read and write Chinese characters and prepared them for the civil service examinations.

Frogs are considered by Asian folklore to be rain-bearers, and thus a fertility symbol promising abundant crops and many children. So, for all its satirical content, the image also served as a New Year's image of fertility and good luck.

