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### Front cover:

**Plate 1.** *The God of the Stove*. Woodblock print with overprint colours. Paper, aniline dye, gouache, 25.0×40.0 cm. China, beginning of the 20th century. Collection of B. I. Pilsudskii, 1907. MAE RAS, call No. 1090-13. Courtesy of the Museum.

### Back cover:

**Plate 2.** Iwasaki Tsunemasa. *Potentilla stolonifera* Lehm. Japanese paper, colour, sumi; page size — 26.8×17.7 cm, frame size — 20.8×14.4 cm. *Horzo zufu*, il (1831—1842). The Komarov Botanical Library. Courtesy of the Library.

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# PRESENTING THE COLLECTION

Yu. Yang

## CHINESE *ZHIMA* PRINTS HELD IN RUSSIAN COLLECTIONS. PART I

The Chinese term *nianhua* refers to the woodblock prints used on festive occasions to decorate home or serve as ritual icons or exorcism talismans. They are designed and carved by craftsmen in woodblock print shops, with rustic, sometimes crude paintings and vibrant colours. From these prints, one can piece together almost all the important festivities of the calendar cycle, as well as a complete pantheon of folk religion. When Russian travellers to China first saw *nianhua*, the affinity to Russian *lubok* drew their attention. Those prints were colourful, of curious design, cheap, and light in weight. Over time, Russian travellers and scholars brought a considerable quantity of *nianhua* back to Russia. No doubt few would have anticipated that they would help preserve a precious element of Chinese folk religion.

Due to the writings of the late Professor Boris Riffin (1932—2012) [1], the world came to realize the impressive quantity and quality of the *nianhua* collection in Russia. A portion of the *nianhua* from the State Hermitage Museum came to Taiwan for an exhibition at the Museum of National History in 1994 [2]. There are also a handful of catalogues published in China in recent years. Many of these selected to be exhibited or published are of the finest, most sophisticated style and craftsmanship. Some are difficult to find even in China [3].

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to visit St. Petersburg in 2010 and browse through the Chinese *nianhua* collections. Thanks to the staff at the Hermitage Museum, *Kunstkamera*, and the Museum of History of Religion, I was able to study the prints I was most interested in. Due to my own research background, I paid more attention to the types of prints used for festive and ritual purposes. Termed *zhima*, *shenma*, or *jiama* (meaning “paper horse”, “deity horse”, and “armour horse”, respectively), these prints feature a horse, the beast that transports deities back to heaven after the conclusion of an offering. In time, the simple design of *zhima* evolved and diversified. Horses lost their position as the domi-

nant theme. Instead, a portrait of the deity in question occupies a large portion of the print, while the horse, shrunk to miniature, perches on the offering table at the very bottom of the picture. In the series of articles, I intend to introduce a few prints at a time, drawing examples from the collections of the *Kunstkamera* and the Museum of History of Religion.

The first image is called the “White-horsed Vanguard” (白馬先鋒) (*fig. 1*) [4]. The picture shows a man in Manchurian officer attire astride a white horse galloping. In old Beijing, when someone is journeying afar, the traveller would burn a piece of the White-horsed Vanguard to pray for a safe trip. Sometimes, when a child is ill, it is believed that the child's soul is missing. The parents would then purchase a piece of the “White-horsed Vanguard” and place it on the child's bedside table, along with a plate of buns, a plate of forage grass, and a bowl of water. The bun was a refreshment offered to the Vanguard, while the water and grass were meant for his horse. At midnight, the *zhima* is burned on the floor next to the child's bedside and the Vanguard thus sent off to search for the child's soul. The next morning, if the child's condition improves, it means the White-horsed Vanguard found and restored the child's soul.

The *Shuicao Ma Mingwang*, literally “Bright King of Water, Grass, and Horse” (*fig. 2*), is a deity in charge of livestock farming. Allegedly an exemplary official of the Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty (156—ca. 87 BC), the Bright King was appointed the position of Chief of the Imperial Stable. Because of his expertise in horse grooming, after his death he underwent deification and became the God of Horses. However, the current image of the Bright King of Water, Grass, and Horse is an integration of both the Horse King and Cattle King. He is largely worshipped among horse grooms, horse carters, and donkey merchants. His birthday is the 23rd day of the sixth lunar month. On this day, people who rely on such livestock for a living must prepare a piece of this *zhima*, along with offerings of food and sacrifices to the Bright King. In this picture, the Bright

King with a flaming red face is sitting in the centre, accompanied by four subordinate officials (a standard portrayal of *zhima*). With a fierce demeanour, the Bright King has three eyes (indicating his omniscience) and four hands, two of which are holding swords crossing overhead. Below him, a farmer is feeding cattle and horses with grass, a pictorial clue of his function.

“The Celestial Couple of the Bed” (*fig. 3*) are the god and goddess who protect infants and small children. The couple is commonly identified as the Emperor and Empress Wen of the Zhou Dynasty. According to the legend, they are deified because the imperial couple had one hundred children between themselves, hence an apt icon for children. The god and goddess of the Bed are worshipped inside the child's room from the time of the birth until the child turns 15. The offering occurs at various intervals, ranging from annual events to events held every half a (lunar) month. Sometimes, when a child is infected with a rash or measles, additional sacrifices would be offered to ensure a speedy recovery.

In addition to a pair of servants, a boy and a girl that attend the couple, the picture is adorned with many small children. Some are holding *yuanbao* (silver or gold ingots), while others are scantily dressed, purposely displaying their male genital. Together they allude to the traditional notion that male offspring are equivalent to wealth.

“The God of the Stove” (*plate 1*) is a deity of ancient origin. He resides in the kitchen of every household and monitors the family's behaviour. At the end of the year, he ascends to heaven to report on the good or evil behaviour of the individuals in the household. The Jade Emperor of Heaven hears his verdict and decides to add to or deduct from an individual's life span accordingly. This function earns him another title, the

Overseer of Destiny. Although people worship the God of the Stove on a regular basis, much like they do the Earth God, the final year-end sacrifice is the most crucial one. For fear that the God of the Stove would report negatively to the Jade Emperor, earthly families offer him glutinous rice cake, chewy candies, or even wine. The intention is to seal up his mouth or intoxicate him so that he will not be able to speak evil at the Jade Emperor's court. The God of the Stove is often worshipped alone, although there are many regions in China that place images of both the God and his wife on the domestic shrine. Occasionally, the God of Stove also serves as a kind of god of wealth.

“The Keeper of Spirits, Marshal Wang”, with flaming-red hair (and usually three eyes) as his distinct feature (*fig. 4*), is a Daoist guardian god. Marshal Wang hails from an infamous background. Originally an “evil god”, he devoured living children as sacrifices. When the Daoist Immortal Sa heard of this atrocity, he burned up Marshal Wan's temple (hence his flaming hair and glaring eyes), vanquished him, and turned Marshal Wang into his subordinate. Later, the Jade Emperor appointed Marshal Wang the chief of all 36 heavenly generals. Often seen guarding the front hall of a Daoist temple, Marshal Wang is also considered the patrolling god who maintains order both on earth and in heaven. When a grand Daoist *jiao* ritual is taking place, Marshal Wang has to be invoked to guard the ritual altar from wandering demons and evil spirits. Marshal Wang uses a *bian*, a sectioned iron staff as his weapon. He is reputedly very loyal, as is indicated by the streamer across his chest that reads “utterly devoted”. There is a saying describing Marshal Wang, “With three eyes he sees everything under heaven, when he strikes his staff he startles everybody on earth”.

## Notes

1. Professor B. Riftin had written “Chinese Nianhua and Their Russian Collectors” as a preface to *Redkie kitaïskie narodnye kartiny iz sovetskikh sobraniï* (Treasures of Chinese Popular Nianhua Held Collections in Soviet Union) (Beijing, 1990). In 2008, he added more materials and written “Kitaïskie narodnye kartiny iz rossiïskikh sobraniï” (“Chinese Woodblock Prints in Russia”), as a postscript for *Kitaïskie ksilograficheskie narodnye kartiny* (*Chinese Woodblock Prints Anthology*) (Beijing, 2009).

2. The exhibition was on display from 31.12.1994 to 28.2.1995. The dates are arranged to coincide with lunar Chinese New Year, which normally falls on late January to early February. Included in the exhibition are three prints from Southern Song Dynasty (1127—1279). Woodblock prints that dated back to the Song Dynasty are extremely rare, even in China.

3. For example, those mentioned in note 1.

4. I am indebted to Polina Rud' (Kunstkamera Museum) for her kind help in checking details of the plates description.

## Illustrations

### Front cover:

**Plate. 1.** *The God of the Stove.* Woodblock print with overprint colours. Paper, aniline dye, gouache, 25.0×40.0 cm. China, beginning of the 20th century. Collection of B. I. Pilsudskii, 1907. MAE RAS, call No. 1090-13. Courtesy of the Museum.

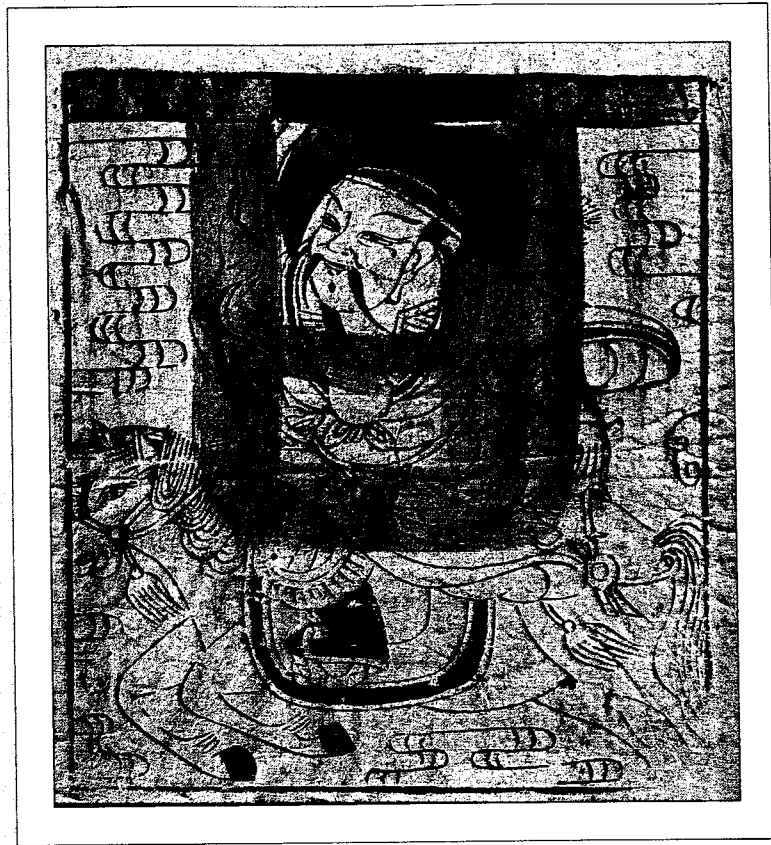


Fig. 1

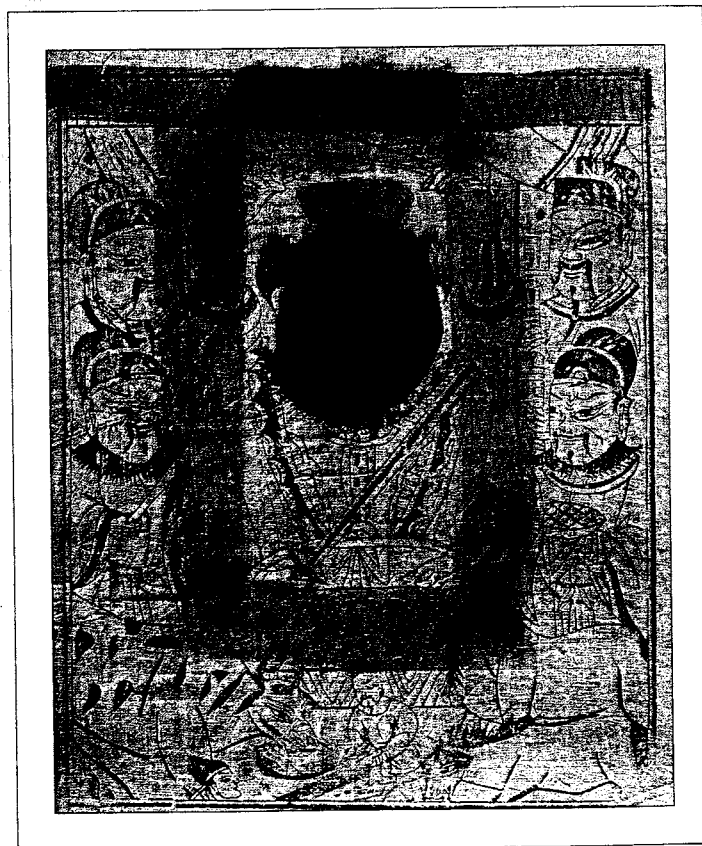
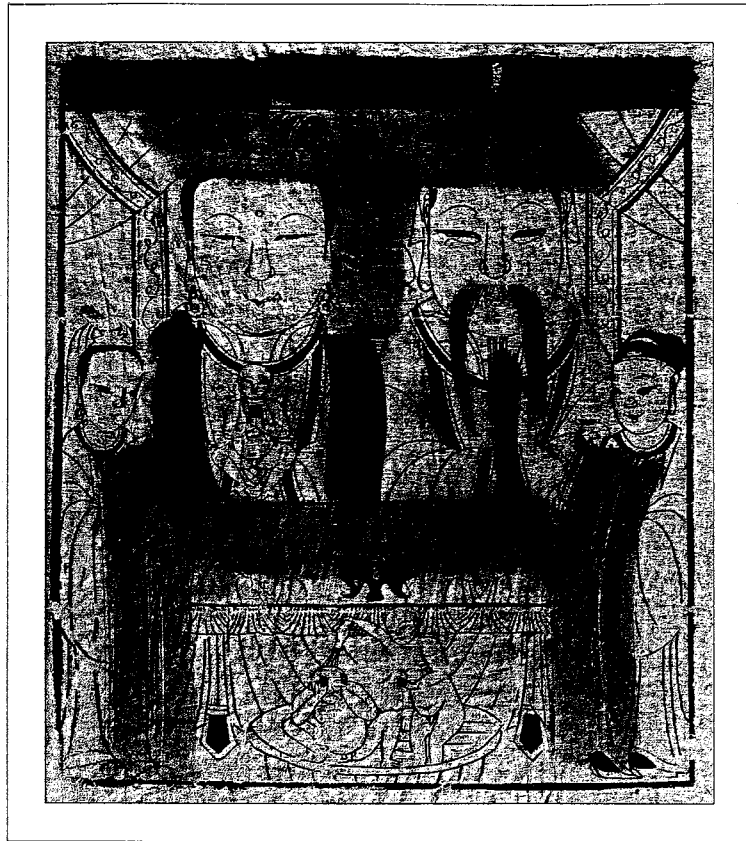


Fig. 2



*Fig. 3*



*Fig. 4*

*Inside the Text:*

- Fig. 1.** *The White-horsed Vanguard.* Woodblock print with hand-painted colour. Paper, aniline dye, gouache, 27.1×30.8 cm. Beijing, beginning of the 20th century. Collection of Yu. M. Vasil'iev, 1908. MAE RAS, call No. 1221-3. Courtesy of the Museum.
- Fig. 2.** *The Bright King of Water, Grass, and Horse.* Woodblock print with hand-painted colour. Paper, aniline dye, gouache, 26.0×35.5 cm. Beijing, beginning of the 20th century. Collection of Iu. M. Vasil'iev, 1908. MAE RAS, call No. 1221-9. Courtesy of the Museum.
- Fig. 3.** *The Celestial Couple of the Bed.* Woodblock print with hand-painted colour. Paper, aniline dye, gouache, 40.0×47.5 cm. China, beginning of the 20th century. Collection of A. I. Ivanov, 1915. MAE RAS, call No. 2469-6. Courtesy of the Museum.
- Fig. 4.** *The Keeper of Spirits, Marshal Wang.* Woodblock print with hand-painted colour. Paper, aniline dye, gouache, 53.2×56.0 cm. China, beginning of the 20th century. Collection of A. I. Ivanov, 1915. MAE RAS, call No. 2469-10. Courtesy of the Museum.
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## Notes to Contributors

Manuscripts must be written in English.

Manuscripts must be clearly typewritten with numbered pages, double linespacing and wide margins throughout. The title should be as brief and informative as possible. The institute at which the work has been done should be indicated at the head of each paper. Authors are requested to include their e-mail address if one is available.

## Submissions

Manuscripts should be sent in duplicate to the Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Efim A. Rezvan, Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Sciences, 3 Universitetskaya nab., 199034, St. Petersburg, Russia, e-mail: rezvan@kunstkamera.ru.

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