

Finding the Ox  
from View of Chinese

# WHAT IS THE OX



人民美術出版社  
PEOPLE'S FINE ARTS PUBLISHING HOUSE



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Writer: Writing Group of the *Happy New Year Series*

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*THE SPRING FESTIVAL*





# THE SPRING FESTIVAL



The Spring Festival is the first day of the first lunar month, also known as Nian, literally meaning the New Year of lunar calendar in Chinese and commonly referred to as “Guo Nian (Celebrating the Lunar New Year)”. It is about in January or February on the Gregorian calendar. Chinese people regard it as one of the most important traditional festivals. The Spring Festival has a long history, originat-

## Happiness, Wealth and Longevity

New Year painting from Beijing the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)

This picture symbolizes lunar New Year sacrifices. The bat is a symbol of happiness. The deer symbolizes wealth, and the peach symbolizes longevity. The fairy child with a peach branch and the red bat and deer symbolize heartfelt wishes for the family.







ing in the activities of worshipping Gods and ancestors in the beginning of new years in Yin and Shang periods (1600BC—1046BC). In the past, the Chinese called the first day of the first lunar month Yuan Dan (the first sunrise), or Yuan Ri (the first day) or San Zhao (three beginnings: the beginning of the year, of the month and of the day. Zhao means beginning.). Before the reign of Hanwudi (Emperor Wu



The Fortune-Enhancing God

The Image of Ox  
In Traditional Chinese Culture





of the Han Dynasty, comprising the years 140 to 87 BC), the time of the Spring Festival was not regular, so Wu Emperor of Han ordered to use the first day of the first lunar month as the beginning of a year. This has lasted to the present. After 1911, China adopted the Gregorian calendar and renamed the lunar Yuan Dan as the Spring Festival. In the Gregorian calendar, January 1 is taken as Yuan Dan (the New Year's Day). The time of the Spring Festival was fixed from then on.

Among all festivals in the year, the Spring Festival has the merriest atmosphere. On this day, people in ancient times held morning

### The Kitchen God and the Kitchen Goddess

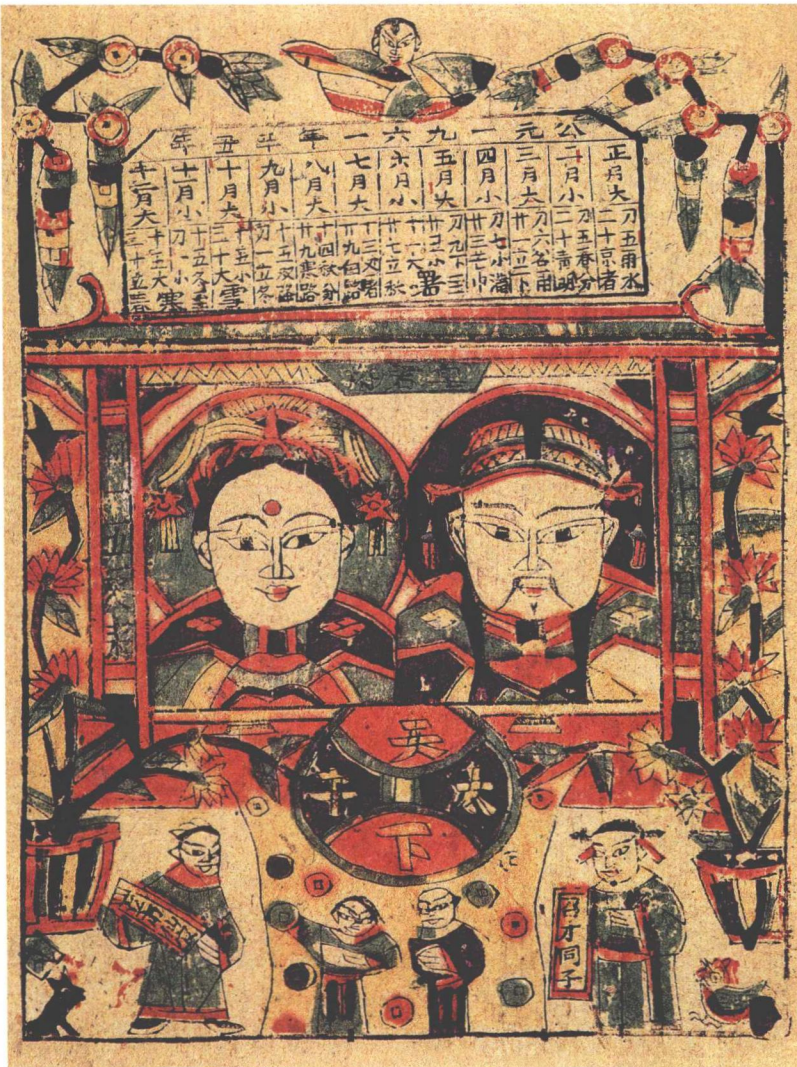
It was said that the Kitchen God had a wife named Gao Lanying, commonly known as the "Kitchen Goddess." There is another saying that the Kitchen God had two wives: Wang Haitang and Guo Dingxiang. These two were often jealous and locked in a fierce fight. Correspondingly, there were three kinds of the picture of the Kitchen God: the first one has a single Kitchen God enshrined usually in shops and workshops, only males worked in these shops in the old time. The second one has the Kitchen God and Kitchen Goddess. The third one has the Kitchen God and two Kitchen Goddesses. Rich people in the old days had more than one wife and concubines. So they enshrined three Kitchen Deities.





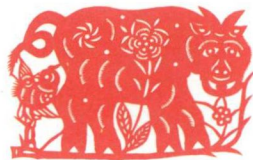


celebrations to greet gods, worship ancestors, divine the weather, pray for good harvests and participate in a variety of recreational activities. As time passed, the period of the festivities extended both forward and backward, and the celebration became richer and richer in content. Finally, it became a traditional festival containing the innermost aspects of Chinese culture. Over several thousand years, some regular celebrating activities, which are commonly called Nian Su (Spring Festival Customs), have been established by Chinese people. With the progress of the times and economy, the celebrating ways has also



The Kitchen God and the Kitchen Goddess





been changed. Nowadays, Chinese people are more willing to select those happy, auspicious and brand-new forms to celebrate the Spring Festival, which are seen as “New Spring Festival Customs”. Now, let’s have a look at the traditional and new Spring Festival customs.

### Offering Sacrifices to the Kitchen God

As the old Chinese saying goes, “When the 23rd day of La Month comes, the Kitchen God will go to the Western Heaven”, the 23rd day of La Month of each year (the twelfth lunar month) is commonly referred to as “Small Nian” by Chinese people. On that day the



The Kitchen God and the Kitchen Goddesses







custom of “Offering sacrifices to the Kitchen God” will be performed. According to the traditional custom, every household, rich or poor, posts a picture of the Kitchen God on the wall of the kitchen on this day to see the Kitchen God off. In the past, nearly every household had a shrine for the Kitchen God, who was worshiped as the protective god of the family. Legend has it that the Kitchen God was a deity empowered by the Jade Emperor to take charge of kitchen affairs of the human world. His official title is “Nine-Sky Dongchu Siming Kitchen Magistrate.” “Dongchu Siming” (fortune keeper of the eastern kitchens) is also called “Zao Shen (Kitchen God),” “Zao Jun (Kitchen Magistrate),” “Zao Ye (Kitchen Lord)” or “Lao Zao Ye (Old Kitchen Lord).” The shrine is mostly set on the northern or



The Kitchen God and the Kitchen Goddesses





eastern sides of the kitchen. In the middle of the shrine is a picture of the Kitchen God. Sometimes the picture includes only the Kitchen God, but it can also include a goddess, who is called the “Kitchen Goddess.” In most cases, a calendar is printed on the picture with such words as “Dongchu Siming Lord,” “God Supervising the Human World” and “Lord of the Family,” which indicates the status of the Kitchen God. The picture is usually flanked by couplets such as “going to Heaven to report good deeds and returning to Earth to protect the family,” “going to Heaven to report good deeds and



The Kitchen God







returning to the palace with luck” or “Lord determining the fortunes of the human world, officially reporting human merits to Heaven.” These are meant to ensure safety for the whole family.

It is said that the Jade Emperor, after hearing reports from the Kitchen God, hands all the families’ fortunes of the coming year to the Kitchen God. Therefore, every household offers maltose (sometimes sesame sugar) when worshiping the Kitchen God so that he could have a sweet feeling to say good words to the Jade Emperor, which may bring the Emperor into a happy mood to give fortunes to each



The Kitchen God and the Kitchen Goddess