

# YOUR TSAO CHUN CHARMS

*It's thought Santa Claus is derived from the Chinese kitchen god, who observes your affairs throughout the year and rewards good behaviour!*

## SSU-MING

Tsao Chun, the 'Lord of Fate', was preceded by Ssu-ming in Chinese folk religion, a character who appeared as early as 800BC. Ssu-ming was an intermediary between heaven and Earth. Every New Year's Day he presented a record of an individual's deeds for the past year to the chief deity, Taiyi. Good deeds were rewarded with long life and bad deeds might result in a death!


**Leaving special food may help atone for some of your misdeeds.**

 Tsao Chun may have replaced Ssu-ming with a friendlier face, but he still acts as a moral force. In art, he and his wife are often flanked by servants carrying jars, filled with punishments or with rewards.




## COOKERY MAGIC

Traditionally, Tsao Chun acts on behalf of the family once a year on New Year's Day, but using his symbols you may call upon his benevolence at other times as well.

 Bake a cake, such as a Chinese Moon cake (see *Sheet 23/36*), or whatever you prefer, for a friend's birthday. While it's baking, make an offering of honey on the kitchen god's altar and light a red candle. Ask Tsao Chun to bless the

**Bake a Moon cake for your friends.**


cake and bestow good fortune on all who eat it.

 When your cake has been eaten, collect a few of the crumbs and burn them on a charcoal dish next to Tsao Chun's altar, to thank him for his kind generosity.




## THE HEARTH

The household gods are often placed around the hearth and watch over the family, just as Tsao Chun does. Many hearth gods serve as intermediaries, sending messages to heaven through burnt offerings.

 The Japanese call their gods of the



hearth Kamado-gami, while in Vedic traditions Agni, the messenger god and god of fire, is thought to live in everyone's hearth.

 The Roman goddess of the hearth is Vesta and her cult was popular in ancient times. Roman households also had patron gods of the storeroom called Penates. These spirits were worshipped at the hearth, and offered a share in all meals.

**Since prehistory the hearth has been considered a sacred place in the home.**


## JADE GOD

Known as Yu-huang, Yu-di and Shang-di, the Jade Emperor is one of the most important mythical beings of Taoism. He governs heaven and Earth and commands many subordinates, such as Tsao Chun. In antiquity he is one of the 'pure ones' and his palace is the highest in heaven.

 Yu-huang is portrayed as a stern-looking, dignified emperor in traditional

**The Jade Emperor rules as far as the eye can see.**

robes embroidered with dragons and he wears a royal headdress adorned with 13 strings of pearls. He holds a ceremonial plaque.

 More of his Earthly administrators are the Cheng-huang (city gods), Tu-di (local deities) and Tai-yue da-di (a deity of Mount Tai).

