

LEGEND AND FOLKLORE SYMBOLS: TSAO CHUN

This elderly Chinese kitchen deity is shown as having a kindly disposition but still reports on the domestic affairs of your household to the Jade Emperor.

Tsao Chun is a popular household god in China. He is the kitchen god and his temple is usually located above the cooking stove in a small niche in the wall. The family also keep a picture of Tsao Chun hanging here, so that he may watch over their affairs all year round.

A week before New Year, Tsao Chun's portrait is taken down and burned and sweets are offered to him. Sometimes his mouth is smeared with malt sugar or honey before the image is burned, to 'sweeten' his words.

Domestic records

It is believed that the kitchen god makes an annual report on the deeds of the household, whether good or bad, to the Jade Emperor. A favourable report ensures you will have good fortune in the coming year.


Tsao Chun is often depicted as a kindly old gentleman either seated next to his matronly-looking wife or surrounded by lots of children.

Tsao Chun may let a gift of sweets sway his favour, but not away from his wife!




THE SYMBOLISM OF TSAO CHUN


Like many cultures, the Chinese are passionate about cookery; any items connected to the kitchen may be used to represent Tsao Chun.

 The most famous Chinese cooking utensil is the wok and most Chinese

You can call upon Tsao Chun's guidance if you are experimenting with Chinese cooking.

households use it every day. Traditionally, it was used on a wood- or charcoal-fuelled stove made of mud or clay. Another well-used item is the bamboo steamer, used to lightly steam vegetables or fish. When you cook traditional Chinese dishes, hang an image of Tsao Chun above the stove so that the kitchen god can enjoy the aromas.

 Tsao Chun is loved by children because he has a sweet tooth. Sugar and honey are two of his symbols, and his favour may be petitioned by confectionery, cakes and pastries.

 As a god of the hearth, Tsao Chun may be represented by the element of fire or by red and yellow correspondences.