

Kiukiang, China, Jan. 30, 1934.

Dear Friends, -

We are nearing the China New Year season and people are busy with preparations. The official year begins Jan. 1st but in so many places large numbers of people hold to the old custom of the real play time of the land which is the Chinese New Year. The house has to be all cleaned before that time and new gods put up, debts all paid, new clothes made if one can afford it and with the poor it is often just a coarse cotton garment worn over the old padded ones. Food is purchased ahead and cooking done for days before. No one works any more than they have to at China New Year and all stores are closed.

"At the time of the New Year festivities the ancestors are invited to return and enjoy the feasting and merry making. Their pictures and tablets are brought out and put in their proper places. Before the evening meal on the 30th, the front doors are opened, paper money and incense are burned, firecrackers set off while the head of the family goes thru the ceremony of ushering in the guests. They are invited to partake of the feast and after they are supposed to have eaten, the rest of the family enjoy what is left." This is not done in all homes.

In many homes the first thing on New Year's Day they hang up the Tsai Shen idol, God of Wealth, light the candles, incense and fire-crackers and worship Tsai Shen for wealth during the new year. The God of Wealth is invited to their homes and doors are left open the entire day for fear he might pass while they are closed and not bring wealth.

"The door gods are also important. They are drawn in full armor with battle axes. They must be so placed that the axes point away from each other, in order to guard in both directions. To fasten them the wrong way would bring misfortune. It would bring them into opposition with each other and make their efforts fruitless. The demons would then be able to slip past into the house and produce endless trouble. There is need of powerful door gods always on duty, defending the home."

In a country where there is so much superstition, things taboo are found on every hand. Some words at certain times would cause misfortune. One should never speak of death at China New Year or mention the loss of money or any bad luck that has come upon the home. After beginning to eat, one should never change the dishes, some one might die. On the 7th or 8th of the first month one should not thread a needle. You might become blind. One should not start on a journey on any day that has a 7 in it and so it goes, there are many of them.

This with the story of the Kitchen god will give you a little glimpse into Chinese life where Christ is not honored and while the old is giving way to new ideas, the great mass of the population cling to the old and know little or nothing of what it means to make Christ the center of the home.

Cordially yours

*Edith Fredericks*

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The idol most universally worshipped thruout China, is the little Kitchen God, or God of the Hearth, Tsao Wang Yeh. He is found in a little niche in the chimney over the stove. From this throne he rules and manages the affairs of the family. Every bride upon coming into her new home, first worships Heaven and Earth, then the Ancesters and she then must bow before the shrine of the Kitchen God.

He is supposed to help those with whom he dwells. He is even appealed to for healing in cases of sickness. In China this little image is truly king, for being placed where he is, he sees the daily life of the household, hears what its inmates say, understands their quarrels and difficulties as well as the good acts of each, and so necessarily knows their dispositions and habits.

On the 1st and 15th of each month, they light candles and offer incense, while in some places he has a small lamp burning continually before his shrine. His birthday is celebrated on the 3rd of the 8th month. On the 24th of the 12th month, he is supposed to return to heaven and report everything that has happened during the year. Then a record is made to be used with the future dealings of the individuals of the home.

The ceremony of starting him on his journey is one of the most important of the year. Three sticks of lighted incense, together with a small cup of malt syrup, are placed before him. Then a pile of straw is prepared in front of the door; on this is placed a paper horse or a sedan chair, together with provisions and necessary equipment for his trip to the heavenly world. He is taken down from his shelf, with proper rights, and the syrup is rubbed over his mouth. As he is supposed to have the same feelings as man, when he tastes the sweet paste he will forget one's evil deeds and will not report any of the bitter things to the heavenly world. When his lips have thus been sealed, he is taken out, placed on his horse or in his sedan chair, the straw set on fire and he starts on his long journey.

They take advantage of his absence to thoroughly clean the house. During the year they have been unable to do so, as it would get dust in his eyes. On New Year's Eve he arrives back home and is received with appropriate ceremonies. A new picture is pasted in his niche over the stove, and incense is burned to welcome him back. The fact that this little idol has such an intimate knowledge of all one does, and such an influence in reporting the deeds for which one will receive reward or punishment, has the effect of keeping harmony within the home, which might not otherwise prevail. Also as he is the mediator between heaven and man, it is best that he should be one's friend. He is the best known God in China.

On the thirtieth of the twelfth month the front doors of every house are cleaned of the old gods and new ones are pasted in their stead, with age they lose their power and efficacy. So in preparing for the new year they are replaced.

Taken from

"Chinese Religion as Seen Through the Proverb"  
by C.H. Plopper, Wuhu, China.