



## Chinese New Year Couplets (Talismans) & the Kitchen God.

**A great school Chinese New Year project for the year of the Snake 2013.**

©Originally written by Michael Hanna and Revised by Daniel Hanna 2013

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Chinese New Year Talismans Couplets and the Kitchen God are very traditional festive items that are used all over Asia as wall decoration because of their auspicious nature. They are typically printed in black ink on bright red paper; you would normally hang these Chinese couplets around your home or on your main doors, or you can present them as gifts to send good wishes to your friends and family.

These Talisman Couplets and the Kitchen God are a lovely gift to print and give as a present unconditionally to a friend, relative or co-worker on or around Chinese New Year 2013 although they can be given and placed at any time of the year in the year of the Snake.

These two assignments below are a great activity for people of all ages; these projects are great for schools as children will especially find this interesting as it teaches them the cultures of another country. If you are a school teacher please feel free to download this file and use it in your classroom. You can download the printer friendly version using the banners at the top and bottom of the page. This can also be saved to your computer hard drive so you can email this to friends and family or you can use the share buttons at the bottom of the page. The more people you share this information with the better.

The Couplets/Talismans are usually used by most Chinese families and businesses. Whether they are in Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, USA, Australia or the UK, they are very powerful and are said to discourage all evil and bring peace, harmony, happiness and good fortunes to the occupants of the building they are being used in if they are displayed in the

correct way as shown below. These are particularly good to use in the year of the yin water Snake 2013.

Red is a very auspicious colour for the Chinese, it is said to frighten off the New Year monster "Nian" who arrives and destroys crops and homes. "Nian" has three weaknesses: noise, sunshine and the colour red. The Villagers used to build huge fires and would paint their doors to their houses red with red couplets behind the doors; they would set off firecrackers to scare the "Nian" monster away. Red also represents good fortune, fame and riches to the Chinese.

These Couplets/Talismans can be hung outside your home, flat or office beside the main door and also inside in important rooms like the kitchen, bedroom and lounge. They are also hung either side of the cooker or hob. They are normally hung for two months after the New Year (10<sup>th</sup> February 2013) although a large majority of people including me leave them all year round for continued good luck.

## **Printing Instructions**

I have copied two versions below. One you can print straight from your colour printer and the other you can colour in yourself or print onto red paper, this is a nice project to give to children and if you are a school teacher please feel free to print this out and use in your class, all we ask is you do not alter or change any of the text on there.

### **Black & white version:**

If you have red card or paper (A4 size) you can print straight onto this or if you wish to make it a family affair you can get your children or yourself to colour it in. It is very common for the family to get involved and usually the head of the household is given the job of placing the couplets.

Make sure the paper/card or colour you use to colour-in is the same bright red as shown below.

### **Colour version:**

you can print this version straight from your printer in full colour format.

### **Hanging Instructions:**

Cut the couplets in half from top to bottom and place either side of your main doors, you should also place on either side of your cooker or hob.

If you have access to a laminate machine it would be wise to laminate them or at least wrap them in a clear protective cover, this is more important for outside rather than the ones you hang by the cooker as they can become weathered very quickly.

These very effective Couplets/Talismans are traditionally left on the door or cooker area for two months after Chinese New Year although many families leave them all year round for continued good luck but they must be renewed each year so save this document for every year and pass onto as many friends and families as you can as it is considered very auspicious to receive a couplet especially without charge. Do not worry if you lose this document as we post a revised version on the website every year for you all.



## Red Envelopes (Ang Pow)

**Red envelopes** also known as "red packets" "Ang Pow" "laisee" or "Hung-Bao" are also an important part of a traditional Chinese New Year. I have written an interesting article on this and also made another project should you wish to make your own. If you follow this link you will find more details. <http://www.fengshuiweb.co.uk/advice/angpow2013.htm>

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and safety in all seasons

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## Kitchen God

In Chinese mythology, the Kitchen god, named Zao Jun which literally translates "stove master" or Zao Shen which translates "stove god or stove spirit", is the most important of all of the Chinese domestic Gods that protect the hearth and family. In addition he is distinguished in Vietnamese culture as well.

The Kitchen God is seen as the guardian of the family hearth (cooker). He was regarded as the inventor of fire, which was necessary for cooking and was also the God of household morals.

Traditionally, the Kitchen God left the house on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of the last month to report to heaven on the behaviours of the family. The family would do everything in their power to impress the Kitchen God so that he reported to heaven with good comments. On the evening of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, the family would give the Kitchen God a ritualistic goodbye dinner with sweet sticky foods and honey. Some would say that this was to bribe him; others would say that the sticky sweets and honey would seal his mouth from saying bad things about them.

Once they were free from the ever-watchful eyes of the Kitchen God, who was supposed to return on the first day of the New Year, the family now prepared for the upcoming celebrations.

Chinese New Year presents are similar in spirit to Christmas presents, although the Chinese tended more often to give food items, such as fruits and tea. The last days of the old year were also the time to settle accumulated debts.

Though there are so many stories on how Zao Jun became the Kitchen god, the most popular dates back to around the 2nd Century BC. Zao Jun was originally a mortal being living on earth whose name was Zhang Lang. He eventually became married to a honourable woman, but ended up falling in love with a younger woman. He left his wife to be with this younger woman and, as punishment for this adulterous act; the heavens afflicted him with ill-fortune. He became blind, and his young lover abandoned him, leaving him to resort to begging to support himself.

One day, while begging, he came across the house of his former wife. Being blind, he did not recognise her. Despite his shoddy treatment of her, she took pity on him, and invited him in. She cooked him a fabulous meal and tended to him lovingly; he then related his story to her. As he shared his story, Zhang Lang became overwhelmed with unhappiness and the pain of his error and began to cry.

Upon hearing him apologise, Zhang's ex-wife told him to open his eyes and his vision was returned to him. Recognising the wife he had abandoned, Zhang Lang felt so such shame that he threw himself into the kitchen hearth, not realising that it was lit. His former wife attempted to save him, but all she managed to salvage was one of his legs.

The devoted woman then created a shrine to her former husband above the fireplace, which began Zao Jun's association with the stove in Chinese homes. To this day, a fire poker is sometimes referred to as "Zhang Lang's Leg".

The image below is the kitchen God with his Consort. It should be printed and placed above the oven or hob whichever is used most. You must renew the image every Chinese New Year.



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