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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the traditional Chinese folk story "Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea" and its related works, aiming to identify strategies for the preserving and advancing this folk-art form. The initial focus of this thesis is to analyze the folktale "The Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea," which involves a description of each of the Immortals, their distinct personalities, and their individual magical objects. Through the analysis of artistic works associated with this folk tale, this thesis reveals the potential of integrating them with modern technologies and reimagining the characters, resulting in consistently generating engaging artworks. This approach effectively facilitates the preservation and perpetuation of this folk story. Furthermore, this thesis elaborates on the rationale behind selecting the subject matter and describes how I have innovated my style to resonate with contemporary audiences. This thesis work also aims to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of traditional Chinese culture, revitalizing the narrative of the Eight Immortals.

INNOVATING CHINESE FOLKLORE: THE MODERNIZATION OF THE EIGHT
IMMORTALS THROUGH ILLUSTRATION AND LICENSING

by

Xiaodi Zhang

B.A.A., Central Michigan University, 2020

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Illustration.

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INTRODUCTION

As a Chinese individual studying in the United States, I often miss my hometown, especially since the loss of my grandfather, who passed away from cancer two years ago. I am constantly reminded of the time I used to spend with him. During my childhood, I had the privilege of living with my grandparents, who possessed an extraordinary passion for traditional Chinese culture and art. It was my grandfather, in particular, whose deep affection for traditional Chinese culture profoundly influenced me. He often recounted Chinese myths and folklore, with a particular emphasis on mythology originating from my hometown, Penglai, in Shandong province. Among these tales, *The Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea*, a captivating narrative from traditional Chinese folklore, had an incredibly lasting effect on me.

Over time, the story of *The Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea* has lost its appeal and freshness. The younger generation has been longing for an updated rendition of the Eight Immortals' tale for quite some time. In recent years, China has vigorously promoted its traditional culture, striving to appeal to the contemporary generation by updating it. However, I believe that promoting this cultural heritage overseas, not just in China, is equally important. My experience studying abroad has made me acutely aware of the unfortunate lack of awareness about Chinese cultural heritage in other countries, which can be quite frustrating. After years of studying art, I have discovered that illustration is my preferred medium for expressing ideas and conveying emotions related to my heritage. Therefore, as one of the representatives of my hometown, I find it deeply meaningful to innovate and promote the story of the Eight Immortals through illustrations. And through

this artistic endeavor, I feel a profound connection with my late grandfather, as if our earthly and spiritual bonds continue through this revitalized series of the Eight Immortals.

In my thesis, I examine the origins of the Eight Immortals, explore the intricacies of their characterization, and propose methods for retelling the tale to captivate a modern audience across the globe. Finally, my objective is to combine traditional Chinese elements with modern forms, reimagining the characters in a way that deeply resonates with contemporary people. And through this creative endeavor, I am attempting to breathe new life into this ancient tale while retaining its essence and cultural values. This creative approach to reimagining these characters aims to attract more people to become interested in Chinese Folklore and, in turn, gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of my cultural roots.

PART I: THE EIGHT IMMORTALS AND ME

My grandfather possessed remarkable talent in Chinese painting and calligraphy, and he had a profound passion for collecting picture books. When I was young, one of the most cherished experiences was visiting my grandfather's house on weekends to look through his collection of picture books and listen intently to the stories he shared with me. Among his treasures, I once stumbled upon an old picture of the Eight Immortals that my grandfather had found a long time ago. These eight figures, who were heroic in their appearance, were my first impression of the Eight Immortals. There is always a song, a movie, a story, or an object that becomes an iconic childhood memory for a generation. For many Chinese people, *The Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea* serves as precious childhood memory.

I would first like to explain the significance this story holds in Chinese culture, as it has a long history. The legend of the Eight Immortals has complex origins that span centuries. While stories about the individual members of the group appeared in books during the Tang (618-907AD) and Song (960-1279 AD) dynasties, the concept of the Eight Immortals as a cohesive group did not emerge at that time. The first person to appear in historical texts and be identified as one of the Eight Immortals was Zhang Guo, a Taoist priest from the early Tang Dynasty who later became known as Zhang Guolao.¹ The earliest known record of the complete story of the Eight Immortals is found in the *Taiping Guangji* of the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD). Since the Song Dynasty, people have continued to add folk legends to the Eight Immortals, becoming symbols of gods and heroes in people's minds. The story of the Eight Immortals crossing the sea originated during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368 AD) in the Zaju(杂剧) "The Eight Immortals Cross the Sea (争玉板八仙过海)".²

One of the most popular stories and images of the Eight Immortals is from the novel *Journey to the East* by Wu Yuntai, a writer in the Ming Dynasty (1271-1368 AD).³ In his book, Wu Yuntai depicted each immortal's origins and historical background. This book provided essential material for later generations to understand the Eight Immortals. It has been retold and rewritten many times throughout history and later influenced the popular television show, *The Legend of the Eight Immortals*, which first aired in 1998. The historic texts of Wu Yuntai and the more modernized television series profoundly influenced me

¹ Shen, Hong. *Classic Chinese Fairy New Year Paintings (Zhongguo Shen Xian Nian Hua Jing Dian)*. Haitian press, 2015.

² Gao, Congyi. *Wind Chasing the Flourishing Tang Dynasty: The Taoist Arts of the Eight Immortals*. Northwest University press, 2013.

³ Gao, Congyi. *Wind Chasing the Flourishing Tang Dynasty: The Taoist Arts of the Eight Immortals*. Northwest University press, 2013.

from a young age.



Figure 1: *The Eight Immortals Picture Book*, Qing dynasty

The story of the Eight Immortals that my grandfather shared with me during my childhood aligned with the narrative depicted in Yuantai's work. The story of *The Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea* is that the eight characters, each with a magical tool symbolizing their powers, which I will detail later, traveled to the birthday banquet of the powerful goddess Xi Wangmu in the goddess's domain. Although they could all fly, they decided to cross the sea with the power of their magic tools to show their respective talents and the power of their magical devices. Finally, the Eight Immortals overcame various obstacles and challenges through teamwork and extraordinary magical items to cross the sea.

Being set in my hometown of Penglai City, Shandong, *The Legend of the Eight Immortals* held a special place in my heart since childhood. I felt a sense of pride in our local heritage. My grandfather and I spent numerous hours watching *The Legend of the Eight*

Immortals, which was extremely popular in Chinese television history. Renowned for its exceptional production quality and enchanting costumes, this television series had a profound impression on me. I was amazed at how the producers transformed a story that I knew and loved and turn it into such a visual masterpiece. This in turn inspired me to later create my thesis artwork, which also updates and modernizes this traditional Chinese story.

It is a fond memory in my childhood and something my grandfather and I bonded over. As I grew up, my communication with my grandfather slowly diminished. I used to visit my grandparents' house every weekend, but later, I would go longer times without seeing them. Our conversation no longer revolved around traditional culture as they did during my childhood. The rapid development of society and the impact of social media introduced me to a multitude of new experiences. Unfortunately, this progressively led me to lose connection with my traditional culture. Following my grandfather's passing, I found an Atlas of the Eight Immortals in his desk drawer while sorting through his belongings, and my mind time-traveled to my childhood days with him.

I did not want to forget the wonderful time I had spent with my grandfather, and I wanted to create a new Eight Immortals series in my illustration work to honor his memory and the cherished moments of my childhood. Although my grandfather and I had different cultural backgrounds, we share the same passion for this myth of the Eight Immortals, which resonates with us across time and space. Although my grandfather has passed away, this bond ties us together, not only in blood but also in spirit.

PART II: THE EIGHT IMMORTALS AND THEIR INDIVIDUAL TRAITS

The Eight Immortals are a group of Taoist deities who play an essential role in Chinese religion. Taoism (also spelled Daoism) is a religion and a philosophy from ancient China that has influenced folk and national belief.⁴ One of the main ideas of Taoism is the belief in balancing forces, or yin and yang. Taoism emphasizes personal cultivation, demanding that Taoists cultivate strong willpower, serve their masters, and adhere to discipline. It sets lofty standards for individual self-awareness and self-control. Moreover, Taoism highlights the essentiality of enduring long-term training in pursuing the immortality. Taoists believe in spiritual immortality, where the spirit of the body joins the universe after death.⁵

The Eight Immortals comprise Zhongli Quan (钟离权), He Xiangu (何仙姑), Lü Dongbin (吕洞宾), Li Tieguai (李铁拐), Zhang Guolao (张果老), Lan Caihe (蓝采和), Han Xiangzi (韩湘子), and Cao Guojiu (曹国舅).⁶ Each of them possesses a divine tool symbolizing their powers. Those unique magical tools are referred to as "the Eight Treasures of Taoism." Because this story is a folk legend passed down through word of mouth, portrayals of the Eight Immortals vary widely regionally allowing for plenty of creative flexibility. I was able to take advantage of this aspect of the story in interpreting it into my own artwork.

⁴"Taoism." Education, January 30, 2023. <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/taoism/>.

⁵ "Taoism." Education, January 30, 2023. <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/taoism/>

⁶ Gao, Congyi. *Wind Chasing the Flourishing Tang Dynasty: The Taoist Arts of the Eight Immortals*. Northwest University press, 2013.

Lü Dongbin/Sword/Gold

The stories about Lü Dongbin portray him as always holding a sword in his hand and protecting the people by eradicating demons and ghosts. Legend has it that Lü Dongbin had a significant and revered place in Chinese Taoism and folk beliefs.⁷ Depictions of Lü Dongbin often showcase his remarkable intelligence, dashing demeanor, and a lighthearted sense of humor. His magic tool is a sword, considered in Chinese folklore to have divine powers to exorcise demons and calm evil spirits.

Li Tieguai/Gourd/Metal or Gold

The typical image of Li Tieguai is that of a thin, bony, ragged, and disabled beggar. Li Tieguai was a robust and handsome man in his youth. One day, his soul left his body, and he instructed his disciple, Yang, to cremate his body if he did not return within seven days. However, on the sixth day, Yang had to go home to deal with an urgent matter and had to burn Li Tieguai's body early. When Tieguai's soul returned, he found that his body had disappeared. He had no choice but to possess the body of a beggar with a crippled leg to be reborn. Li Tieguai's magic tool is a gourd, which contains the medicine to save all those who suffer from disease.

Zhongli Quan/Fan/Fire

According to ancient legend, Zhongli Quan was said to have been born as big as a three-year-old child, and his appearance is described to be round-headed, with a broad forehead, large earlobes, long eyebrows, and broad cheeks.⁸ These facial features are seen in

⁷ Duan, Huaiqing. *China in Folklore (Nine Legends)*. Shanghai Literature & Art Publishing House, 2019.

⁸ Shen, Hong. *Classic Chinese Fairy New Year Paintings (Zhongguo Shen Xian Nian Hua Jing Dian)*. Haitian press, 2015.

Chinese culture as the face of a person who is blessed with good fortune. Zhongli Quan's magical tool is a fan, which possesses extraordinary abilities to produce a raging fire with just a single wave as well as resurrect the deceased. Zhongli Quan is usually depicted as a bold man holding a fan in his hand with a smile on his face.

Lan Caihe/flower basket/Wood

Lan Caihe is another captivating figure who is commonly portrayed as a non-gendered, androgynous youth. Lan is often depicted as wearing a ragged blue shirt, one foot in a boot and the other bare. Lan's demeanor and personality can be described as being eccentric. For example, the character would wear a coat in the sweltering summer season or dress in summer attire during the winter season. Lan's magic tool is a flower basket that can communicate and connect to the gods.

Zhang Guolao/bamboo fish drum/Wood

Zhang Guolao was the oldest of the Eight Immortals. Before people began to respect him for his age, he was known as Zhang Guo.⁹ Zhang Guolao's magic tool is a bamboo fish drum, a long bamboo tube. With his instrument¹⁰, he can make quite a racket. Zhang Guolao is genial, humorous, and lively. He is depicted riding a donkey with a fish drum on his back.

Han Xiangzi/flute/Water

Han Xiangzi is renowned for his exceptional proficiency in playing the flute, which also serves as his mystical weapon. The magic of the flute is that it possesses the power to nurture the growth to all living things. Han Xiangzi has a gentle personality and handsome

⁹ "Lao" means old in Chinese.

¹⁰ Meegama, Sujatha. *This family self-guide to Taoism and the Arts*, 2000.
<https://archive.artic.edu/taoism/images/FamilySelfGuide.pdf>.

appearance, and it is said that Lü Dongbin was his master.

He Xiang/Lotus Flower/Earth

He Xiang is the only woman in the original story of the Eight Immortals. There are many versions of her life story; the most famous legend is that she met a fairy on a mountain when she was 13 years old and gained magical powers after eating a peach given to her by the fairy. When she ate this peach, she no longer felt hunger or thirst, her weight became as light as a feather, and she could predict how things would develop in the future. He Xiang's mystical tool is a lotus flower, which represents the cultivation of inner nature.¹¹ The lotus flower symbolizes purity and incorruptibility in Chinese culture. He Xiang is usually depicted as a beautiful woman holding a lotus flower.

Cao Guojiu/Jade Tablet/Earth

The immortal figure of Cao Guojiu is based on an actual historical figure, the younger brother of Empress Cao, who lived in the Song Dynasty from 1016 to 1079AD. According to the *History of Song*, a historical text written in 1343AD Cao Guojiu was the younger brother of Empress Cao and represented power and nobility. He was described as easygoing and musically talented, and he enjoyed writing poetry. Although Cao was born into a wealthy family, he was not keen on seeking wealth or influence. He became an apprentice to Lü Dongbin and eventually became immortal after a long practice of Taoist thought. Cao's magic tool was a jade tablet¹². The jade tablet could purify the environment, which refers to the importance of cleanliness and harmony in Chinese Taoism.

¹¹ It is a concept in Chinese culture that emphasizes the importance of developing one's moral and spiritual qualities, as well as maintaining a healthy mind and body.

¹² A jade tablet is an object found only in ancient China; it was used to shield the eyes. In ancient times, ministers were not allowed to stare at the emperor as a sign of respect.

My grandfather, deeply influenced by traditional Chinese culture significantly possessed extensive knowledge about its various facets, particularly the concept of the five elements. Whenever he recounted the tale of the Eight Immortals to me, he would consistently incorporate discussions about the Five Elements. The Five Elements are believed to be the fundamental forces of everything in the universe between which all the interactions occur. The Five Elements are Metal or Gold, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth, corresponding to the five colors of white, cyan, black, red, and yellow, respectively.¹³ I still recall my grandfather once sharing the belief that every individual belongs to one of the five elements. Each of the Eight Immortals also has one. Unfortunately, modern people no longer understand this concept. Drawing inspirations from the five elements, I created the Eight Immortals color palette to share the knowledge that my grandfather taught me in an approach that is both contemporary and respectful of my background in illustration studies.

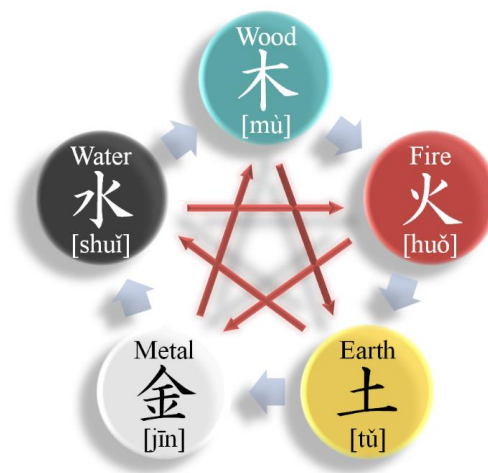


Figure 2: Five Elements Chart

¹³ “Wuxing (Chinese Philosophy).” Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, May 3, 2023. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wuxing_\(Chinese_philosophy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wuxing_(Chinese_philosophy)).

The five colors associated with the Five Elements hold an important place in Chinese painting and are considered one of the most crucial consistent elements in this art form. Many Chinese-style pictures from antiquity to modern times include these five colors. I am inspired by the works of FeiFei Ruan and Victo Ngai, who use a similar color palette to reflect The Five Elements. As individuals with a background in traditional Chinese painting, they both strive to incorporate its elements into their artwork. Their goal is to hit a balance between Eastern and Western art, as well as between innovation and tradition. That also represents my style as a person with a traditional Chinese cultural heritage exposed to Western painting techniques.



Figure 3: Victo Ngai, *Mixc Spring Festival*, September 2017

PART III: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EIGHT IMMORTALS IN MODERN

DAY

Nowadays, I hardly ever hear Chinese people mention the story of the Eight Immortals. People are more international now in their entertainment and the content they consume. Few people use this old story, which is sometimes seen as outdated, making me slightly disappointed and frustrated. However, in my research on this folklore, I found that some people are also trying to publicize and promote the culture of the Eight Immortals. Shandong Province, a prominent location in Chinese folklore, is actively involved in preserving, inheriting, innovating, and promoting this cultural heritage to the public through various forms to stimulate interest and understanding. From the earliest Eight Immortals TV series- *The Legend of the Eight Immortals* (1998), to today's video games, illustrations, and licensed products, attempts have been made to create more exciting works by following the changing media and technologies of the times.

One example is that the rise in popularity of the gaming industry after the turn of the millennium inspired game companies to explore ways to introduce traditional Chinese stories to younger players. Recognizing this potential in this medium, China's Tencent Games company partnered with the Shandong Arts Research Institute to develop a mobile game called *Free Fantasy*. This game is specially designed to promote the rich cultural heritage of the Eight Immortals to a broader audience. I felt inspired by this attempt to breathe new life into the genre and considered how to use this idea in my work.



Figure 4: *Free Fantasy*, mobile game poster

There is also a company in Shandong that was specifically created with the Eight Immortals in mind: The Immortal Shows the Way company (仙人指路文化传播有限公司). The company aims to promote the culture of the story by digging deeper into the historical background of it, its characters, and its core values, then creating characters that align with contemporary aesthetic trends. The company has designed two sets of different styles of the Eight Immortals to update their image to suit a wider audience.



Figure 5: Cao Lin, *The Eight Immortals Is Back*, 2022



Figure 6: *The Eight Immortals Is Back, 2022* (The Immortal Shows the Way company)

The company also makes licensed products dealing with these characters by converting 2D illustrations of the Eight Immortals into 3D visual objects, which is an effective way to attract young people to this genre. Creating licensed products allows culture to be integrated physically into people's lives. Commercial products such as toys, clothing, and common trinkets are used daily in people's lives. Therefore, these products can help to promote culture. Combined with the times, it makes the story of the Eight Immortals and even Chinese culture more widely known and understood by modern people.

PART IV: DEVELOPMENT OF THE VISUAL THESIS

When I started to choose a theme for my works in graduate school, I did not hesitate to select the story of the Eight Immortals. I saw the innovative theme as a potential connection between me and my grandfather, which I wanted to communicate in my work. While studying the evolution of the modern Eight Immortals, I found that most were always dressed in ancient costumes, so why not create a new group of Eight Immortals in modern

outfits?

For my visual thesis, I aimed to redesign the image of the Eight Immortals and show them as they cross the sea. As a classic symbol in traditional Chinese culture, these characters can be combined with contemporary cultural elements to create a more modern and fashionable illustrated image. However, it is essential to maintain each of their unique identity and character traits, when dressing them in modern clothing and accessories that reflect their contemporary character and style. This design approach allows the Eight Immortals to be portrayed in a way that retains their traditional characteristics while incorporating modern culture, thus making them more appealing to young people. For the medium, I chose my current digital painting method, that I have learned over the past few years instead, of traditional Chinese ink painting.

The Eight Immortals characters are the core of this work. I considered the aesthetics of composition, character personalities, and pose pairings to make them more relatable. To personalize each character, I designed different dynamic poses for them to highlight their unique personalities and characteristics. In addition, although their looks are modern, I added traditional Chinese patterns to their costumes to emphasize their cultural background and identity. In terms of color combinations, I was inspired by the five elements to which they each belong.

After this, I created miniature sculptures based on my inventive characters. I made a figurine of He Xiangu and the heads of eight people, which can be used as refrigerator magnets. These items were created from clay and afterward painted with acrylic colors. Both three-dimensional works are based on my illustrations. I especially enjoyed bringing my two-

dimensional creations into a three-dimensional world. These 3D artworks can be categorized as licensed products, entering people's lives and serving as an additional aspect that captivates them to explore and develop an affinity for this story.



Figure 7: Xiaodi Zhang, *Heads of The Eight Immortals*, 2023, Clay



Figure 8: Xiaodi Zhang, *The Eight Immortals- He Xiang*, 2023, Clay

Lü Dongbin



Figure 9: Xiaodi Zhang, *The Eight Immortals- Lü Dongbin*, 2023, Digital

In my illustration of Lü Dongbin, the contrast between the ebony tree trunk and the vivid yellow hue in the background was inspired by the yin-yang. To better depict Lü

Dongbin's status as one of the most influential members of Taoism, I have adopted an upward perspective to accentuate his holiness and grandeur.

I portrayed Lü Dongbin's suave, comical, and witty characteristics through his facial expressions. A sword is Lü Dongbin's magic implement. When redesigning this sword, I was inspired by the umbrella. The umbrella resembles a sword when it is closed; When Lü Dongbin lifts the umbrella, it emits a million rays of light and possesses the magical ability to ward off demons and ghosts.

Li Tieguai



Figure 10: Xiaodi Zhang, *The Eight Immortals- Li Tieguai*, 2023, Digital

This portrait of Li Tieguai includes several traditional and modern elements. I created one of Li Tieguai's legs as a prosthetic leg in order to effectively convey the visual aspects of

his disabled appearance in a modern way. The element of gold, to which Li Tieguai belongs, served as inspiration for the primary color scheme of the figure, which is primarily white and gold. As one of the significant symbols of Li Tieguai, I have designed this artwork showcasing Li Tieguai sitting on a colossal gourd, traversing the sea. Also, as part of Li Tieguai's gourd, which has a miraculous all-purpose medicine that can heal illnesses and rescue individuals, I utilized many herbal elements in my artwork. I imbued a historical significance in my work by incorporating these herbs, which are all plants used in traditional Chinese medicine.

Zhongli Quan



Figure 11: Xiaodi Zhang, *The Eight Immortals- Zhongli Quan*, 2023, Digital

I designed Zhongli Quan's fan as a fan-patterned necklace. In addition to preserving the original, this design incorporates contemporary fashion elements that better suit the

aesthetic preferences of modern people in general. Following the original character's description, I depicted Zhongli Quan with a round cranium, broad forehead, and heavy earlobes.

Zhongli Quan is categorized into Fire, of the five elements. In this work, I chose red as my inspiration color and incorporated fire-related elements to accentuate this characteristic. To further accentuate the fervor and magnificence of Zhongli Quan, I placed a sun on the left side of my work as a symbol of strength and passion.

Lan Caihe



Figure 12: Xiaodi Zhang, *The Eight Immortals- Lan Caihe*, 2023, Digital

In depicting the character of Lan Caihe, I strived to characterize the essence of their youthful and childlike nature. To match Lan's energy, I posed Lan's in a joyous, leaping

position. I gave Lan a unisex hair-style in keeping with the fact that Lan is androgynous in appearance and non-gendered. Lan Caihe's magical flower basket became a cluster of flowers blooming from the sea to provide aesthetic flair. I also made Lan Caihe a floral necklace to further the floral theme in the work.

In terms of color, I selected cyan and green because Lan Caihe's element is wood. To emphasize the wood, I placed branches in the background. The above design aims to better represent Lan Caihe's characteristics and make this work vibrant, beautiful, and aesthetically appealing.

Zhang Guolao



Figure 13: Xiaodi Zhang, *The Eight Immortals- Zhang Guolao*, 2023, Digital

Zhang Guolao is also associated with Wood, and the colors used in this piece are predominantly green and blue. I created an image of Zhang Guolao that portrays him as a vibrant and lively older man. To convey his humorous personality, I incorporated a smiling

facial expression. I added numerous flowers and plants into the background to reflect the dynamic. I drew inspiration from various technologically advanced cars to create a modern wheelchair for Zhang to replace his previous mode of transportation, a donkey.

Han Xiangzi

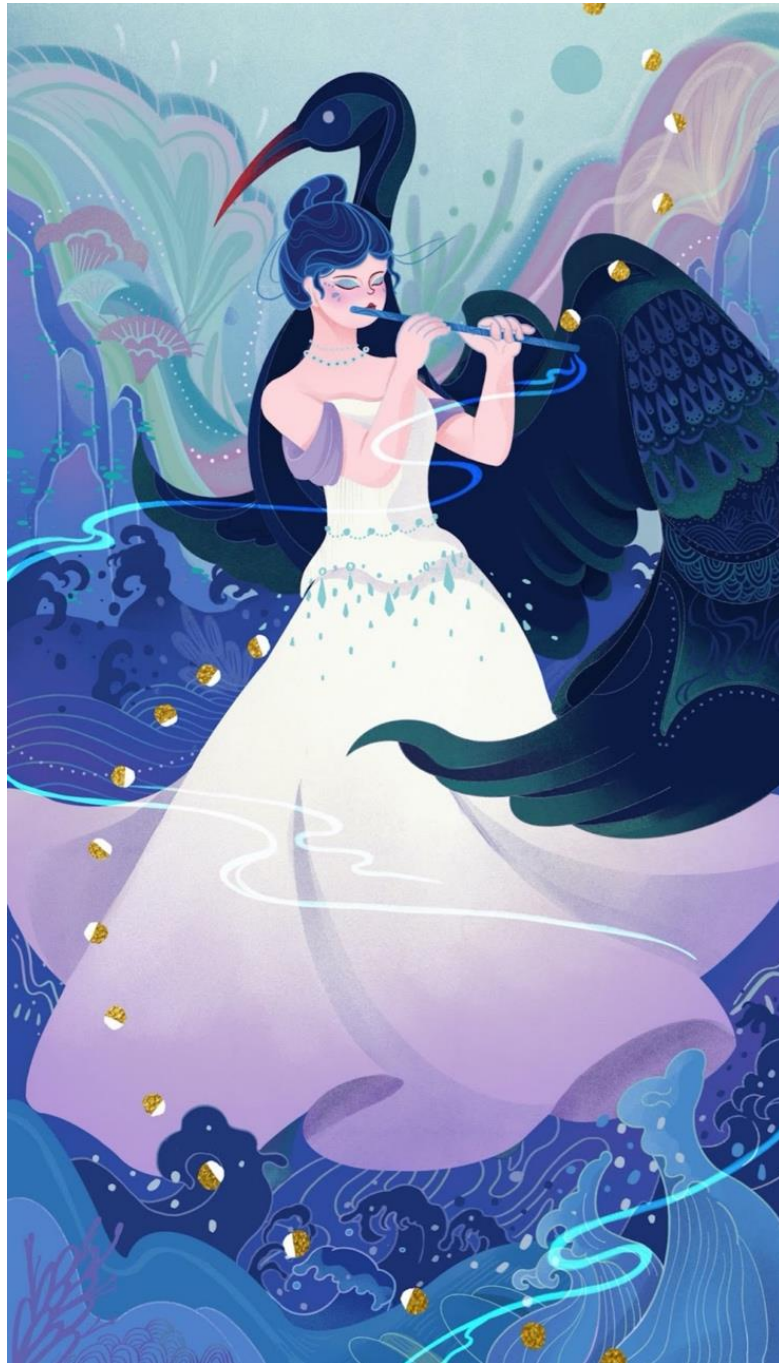


Figure 14: Xiaodi Zhang, *The Eight Immortals- Han Xiangzi*, 2023, Digital

I altered Han Xiangzi's gender from male to female in order to balance the gender ratio of the Eight Immortals characters to reflect current social values, and I decided that portraying Han Xiangzi as a female character would better showcase her gentle and delicate personality. To elevate the noble and elegant depiction of Han Xiangzi, I decided to integrate cranes into the background. In Chinese painting, cranes are often depicted as graceful creatures, an appropriate symbol of Han Xiangzi.

Han Xiangzi is associated with the element of Water, so I mainly integrated cool tones into the color scheme to reflect this, such as navy blue and deep purple. The image features a set of white and gold spheres referencing the moon, often associated with Han Xiangzi in Chinese folklore.

He Xiang



Figure 15: Xiaodi Zhang, *The Eight Immortals- He Xiang*, 2023, Digital

While designing this image of He Xiang, my intention was to create a graceful and stunning portrayal. Drawing inspiration from the original story, I envisioned He Xiang

standing atop a lotus flower while she was crossing the sea. In order to emphasize the connection between He Xiangyu and the lotus flower, I incorporated elements such as lotus flowers and leaves into the background. I also introduced a translucent crystal ball to He Xiangyu's hand, symbolizing her renowned ability to glimpse into the future. This addition aims to enhance the sense of mystery in the work, as she is known for her ability to foretell the future. To ensure consistency with He Xiangyu's elemental Earth attributes, I utilized yellow and green as the primary color in this work. In addition, to echo the portrayal of He Xiangyu, I used soft lines and tones to portray the plants in the background.

Cao Guojiu



Figure 16: Xiaodi Zhang, *The Eight Immortals- Cao Guojiu*, 2023, Digital

Cao Guojiu is classified as an Earth attribute, so the color palette selected for this painting consists of yellow and green tones, reflecting the essence and characteristics of the Earth element. In contrast to the gentle image of He Xiangu, Cao Guojiu is depicted as a

strong man with a masculine presence. I chose deeper tones and rougher lines to depict the background branches and tree trunks as an echo of Cao. In the original story, Cao Guojiu traversed the sea by stepping on a colossal jade tablet. I noticed that the enlarged form of the jade tablet resembles a surfboard. Without entirely changing the original magic tool, the surfboard aligns with the modernized transformation of ancient objects. Therefore, I incorporated this concept into the artwork. Cao Guojiu is also linked with the aristocracy in the original tale. I emphasized his nobility through his attire and dazzling jewelry. I created complex patterns for his outfit by referencing the clothing worn by ancient Chinese officials.

CONCLUSION

Delving into the timeless tale of the Eight Immortals has deepened my understanding and appreciation for my grandfather's unwavering love for Chinese literature and culture. In those days when there was no television or Internet, my grandpa devoted himself wholeheartedly to the realms of Chinese art and culture. In today's age of information technology, myself and many of us find lacking the patience and enthusiasm required to focus on this type of inward cultural exploration as my grandfather did. However, I am determined to defy the prevailing trends and never stop exploring my Chinese heritage and background.

My appreciation for the story of the Eight immortals stems from my childhood and relationship with my late grandfather. However, my connection to this tale has transcended mere nostalgia and evolved into a lifelong passion, shaping my growth as an artist and individual. I am committed to exploring and preserving Chinese culture for future

generations in my life and work.

As an illustrator, I find immense meaning in exploring my strengths to create and explore traditional culture fully. Through my artwork, which features a fresh interpretation of the Eight Immortals, I aspire to deepen people's understanding and appreciation of traditional Chinese culture while infusing new vitality into the timeless tale of The Eight Immortals. In addition, I am eager to share this fascinating story with people worldwide, showcasing the beauty and charm of this Chinese tale, and providing a cultural gateway into the larger realm of Chinese culture. Though I am still determining how my life and future work will unfold, I am confident that themes of Chinese culture will be a consistent element in my work. I hope my work will reach and inspire a wider audience.

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