

# 八仙 The Eight Immortals

INTRIGUED BY THE VIVID IMAGERY OF JORGE PEREZ RUBIO'S DRAWINGS, REDSTAR SET OUT TO DISCOVER MORE ABOUT SHANDONG'S BAND OF LEGENDS.

受 Jorge Perez Rubio 所画的生动图像的启发，红星深入探索这一山东传说。

For people all over the world, stories have helped explain the world to the people living in it. For millennia, until modernity interceded with its fabulous machines and systems of knowledge, the story has been the means by which the world has been understood. In Australasia, The Dream Time was the Aboriginal telling of their world, and the Maoris in New Zealand have their own Folk History that explained a world that was unique to them. In Europe, there were Pagan Druids and mysticism and the ancient gods of Greece and Rome, and in what is now the Americas, Shamans explained their world in terms of their relationship with the natural world. Some of these stories were of gods, but many placed everyday people in the centre of the narrative, extolling the virtues of harmonious coexistence as the means to further their societies. Over time, these stories change as the world they describe changes also; they fall in and out of favour and some are lost forever.

China too is awash with fabulous stories. Whether it is the kind of ghost stories that grandparents tell to children rapt with excited fear, or the

epic histories told of dynastic upheaval, it is little wonder that in a country where so many souls, over so much time, have lived and marvelled at diversity of their topography and its disparate peoples that it has some pretty good tales to tell.

One such set of stories are told about the Eight Immortals. Dating back to the Tang Dynasty, they tell the story of eight individuals who were assumed to have special skills for managing to escape the prison island of Penglai Shan off the coast of the province of Shandong, near the Bohai Sea.

The story goes that the emperor decreed that maximum capacity of the prison was 300, and that when that number was surpassed, any excess of prisoners would be executed. Thus, being sentenced to imprisonment there was tantamount to a death penalty. Because it was as an island gaol, it was widely held that escape was impossible but stories soon emerged of eight souls had managed just that, and each in peculiar circumstances. The story holds that, whilst they escaped at the same time they acted alone, only coming together in the

final crossing to the mainland. Once ashore, they disappeared into the three sacred mountains never to be seen or heard of again.

It is a classic myth creation. An apparently impossible feat achieved by apparently ordinary people so as to attribute them with mythical powers; they disappear and the stories are embellished in their stead, becoming more vivid, but more real too, as time merges the facts with fantasy.

Such is the nature of stories that in each telling details are lost or added according to the whim of the teller. The legend of the Eight Immortals is no different and accounts vary as to the truth of what really happened, the character's history and the events that led them to being considered one of the group. For example, in one telling of the story, the island was not a prison but a paradise, accessible only to the immortals because the sea was made of 'weak water' unable to support the weight of ships. It also probably doesn't help that these amazing stories have barely been translated into English and, as such, much may have been lost in translation. What follows is what we

could find out from Professor Qu of Qingdao University and various other sources.

对于世界各地的人来说，故事可以更好地诠释人类的生活。几千年来，在科技机器和知识体系繁荣发展之前，故事一直是世人了解世界的途径。在澳大拉西亚，原著居民通过 The Dream Time 讲述他们的世界；新西兰毛利人也有他们自己的民间传说，解释他们独一无二的世界；在欧洲，有异教德鲁伊、神秘主义、希腊和罗马的古代众神；在美洲，巫师解释他们的世界与自然界的联系。这些故事有些是关于众神的，但更多的是以普通人为叙事中心，颂扬他们和社会和谐共处的美德。斗转星移，他们的故事随着社会的变化而变化，有些故事永久的保留了下来，有些则渐渐被人们所遗忘。

中国也是神话故事众多的国度。无论是祖父母们用来恐吓小孩的鬼故事，还是改朝换代的史诗历史故事，都使人不禁感叹在中国上下五千年的历史中，涌现出了如此众多的灵魂人物，讲述着各种各样的故事传说。

八仙过海就是其中之一。故事发生在唐朝，历史原型是八个人（被世人认为有神力

的)成功逃出关押犯人的蓬莱山(位于山东海岸渤海附近)的故事。

据说, 朝廷每年只拨给全岛三百人的口粮, 但年复一年, 岛上犯人越来越多。当犯人超过三百时, 便将其中一些捆住手脚, 扔进海里淹死。因为监狱位于小岛上, 为

了活命, 犯人们经常跳海凫水逃命, 但绝大部分都被激浪吞没。另一次的出逃中, 八名身怀武功、体格健壮的七男一女八位善游者, 各自借着水流和轻浮的物体游到了岸边, 一上岸就消失在圣山中。

此故事是一个典型的神话创作。一个普通百姓看似无可

企及的壮举, 因此富于完成这个壮举的人以神话色彩; 他们最终的消失使神话色彩更加生动形象, 也增进了现实感。事实和幻想渐渐融合。

讲故事的人一时心血来潮会对故事细节有些增减。八仙过海传说的历史原型也有很多版本。例如, 其中一个版本就

是, 岛上并非是一所监狱, 而是一个只有神仙可以到达的海上天堂, 因为那里的海水不能承受任何船的重量。这也是此传说几乎没有被翻译成英文的原因, 因为翻译可能会丢失很多细节。有幸的是我们可以从青岛大学的曲教授和其他地方那里得到很多有用信息。



## Cao Guo Ju

This nobleman worked in the empress' court, but found it difficult to fit in with court life and the charlatans he perceived there. Like so many in Chinese stories, he went wandering and somehow fell foul of the system. Little is known about the circumstances of his escape - nor what he did to make such a feat necessary - but he is said to carry a jade tablet with which he can purify his environment and castanets with which he calms his foes. He is considered the patron of actors.

## 曹国舅

曹国舅, 地位很高, 被封为国舅, 且天资聪明, 但是他并不喜欢享受富贵的生活, 不喜欢利用特权, 而是喜好道教的修行。如很多中国故事一般, 曹国舅莫名其妙的触犯了天颜。关于曹国舅过海和为世人所做的壮举的情况知之甚少, 据说是手持玉板渡海的。被认为是演员的守护神。

## Chang Kuo Lao

It is said that this immortal folded a white donkey or mule from paper and kept it in his pocket, ready to be taken out and ridden away on. He is usually depicted seated facing backwards, and his mule is said to have had the ability to fly and walk on water. He carries a drum and a phoenix feather or a peach, representing immortality and, since he represents old age, in the Feng Shui tradition his picture or statue can be placed in the home or bedroom of an elderly person to help bring them a long life and a good, natural death.

## 张果老

据说, 张果老出入常乘一匹白驴, 每倒骑之, 日行万里, 休息时, 便把这驴像纸一样折叠起来, 置于巾箱中, 乘则以水喷之, 便又成了真驴。传说此驴即可飞行又可涉水。张果老随身携带渔鼓筒板和寿桃, 代表着长寿。所以在风水传统中, 可以在老年人的房间或者卧室中悬挂张果老的图像或雕像, 为老人的健康长寿祈福。



## Han Xiang Zi

A student of magic, this Immortal is usually depicted with a flute, which is said to give life. It is thought that he was able to escape by subduing his captors with his artful melodies. As a result, he is now considered to be the protector of flutists and musicians everywhere.

## 韩湘子

拜吕洞宾为师学道, 执笛, 据说此笛能使万物滋生。据说, 韩湘子靠美妙的笛声旋律渡海。因此, 韩湘子被认为是演奏家和音乐家的保护者。

LU DONG BIN



This Immortal is depicted as being a scholarly, clever man with a genuine desire to help people obtain wisdom and enlightenment. He is often bearing a sword on his back that dispels evil spirits. Perhaps because of the concreteness of his historical identity, he is considered the group's de facto leader. His character however is not without flaws; he is said to have been a ladies' man and is portrayed as having bouts of drunkenness and a strong temper.

## 吕洞宾

吕洞宾自幼熟读经史，为人聪明，愿意帮助他人习得知识，启迪他人。背上常背一把剑，以去除邪灵。也许因为吕洞宾的历史身份的缘故，他常被认为是八仙中的领袖。然而，吕洞宾的性格并非没有缺陷，据说有点娘娘腔，酗酒，还是个暴脾气。

TIE GUAN LI



This is one of the most popular of the Immortals, and is depicted as a man leaning on crutch and holding a gourd. Some say that in the myth the gourd had spirals of smoke ascend from it, denoting his power of setting his spirit free from his body. Others say that the gourd was full of medicine which he dispensed to the poor and needy.

## 铁拐李

八仙中，铁拐李是年代最久，资历最深者，也是最受欢迎的一个人物。拄着拐杖，随身携带着葫芦。据说，葫芦里面盘旋而生的烟雾，可以使他的精神和肉体分离。也有说法是，葫芦里装满了分发给穷人的药物。



## Lan Cai He

## 蓝采和

One of the least defined of the Eight Immortals, this Immortal's age and sex are unknown and is usually depicted in sexually ambiguous clothing and carrying a bamboo flower basket. Lan also has castanets with which he and the other Immortals would clap, making a beat whilst singing to a group of onlookers. It is said that these onlookers would follow them anywhere, bestowing them with money which the Immortals would then string together. As they walked the coins would fall off to be collected by the poor and needy.

八仙之一，因其通常穿着中性服饰并挎一竹花篮，年龄和性别未知。手持大拍板长三尺馀，常和其他仙人一起向旁观者边拍响板边唱歌自娱自乐。据说，这些旁观者会一直追随他们，并赠予仙人钱币。仙人则把钱币穿起来，路遇穷人和需要帮助的人时，钱串会自动掉落。







# He Xian Gu 何仙姑

The only female among the Immortals, her lotus flower is said to improve one's mental and physical health. Some legends also have it that she escaped the gaol floating atop the lotus as the ferry man that would carry the men to safety would not carry a woman. Legend has it that as an adolescent, a divine apparition appeared to her in a dream and instructed her to eat powdered mica, in order that her body might become etherealised and immune from death. So she swallowed it, and vowed to remain a virgin. Later on, mica is all she would eat.

八仙中唯一一位女性，据说她手持的莲花可以改善人的身心健康。传言说，因为渡船只载男性，何仙姑是依靠漂浮在莲花上逃离监狱的。也有相传年青少年时期的何仙姑梦见仙人教她：「吃云母粉，可以轻身而且长生不死。」于是她照仙人的指示，吃云母，发誓不嫁，经常来往山谷之中，健行如飞。每天的早上出去，晚上带回一些山果给她的母亲吃。后逐渐不吃五谷。

# Han Zhong Li 汉钟离

Known variously as the True-Yang Ancestor-Master or Master of the Cloud-Chamber, this Immortal is another contender for being the group's leader. According to legend, bright beams of light filled the room during his birth and afterward he did not stop crying until seven full days had passed. He is depicted with a bare belly, something familiar to anyone that has summered in Qingdao, and carrying a fan. This fan was probably in fact a leaf and he used this to escape the island by floating away on top of it.

全真道教奉为正阳祖师，被认为是八仙领袖的另一位有力竞争者。据传，汉钟离诞生时，顿见异光数丈如烈火，昼夜啼哭不止一连七日。他的形象是裸露大肚腩（青岛夏天常见），手摇棕扇。他就是凭扇子逃离监狱的。



# The Artist 画家

Jorge Perez Rubio is a Cuban American artist and art teacher at Qingdao No.1 International School of Shandong (QISS) who became interested in The Eight Immortals after stumbling across them whilst living in the city. "I was intrigued at first, then excited. These stories may be old, but they seemed to be speaking some undeniable truths. I vaguely recognised parts of them from stories I knew from other parts of the world and I wondered if they might be born of the same collective unconscious knowledge. Excited as I was by the ancient stories, I thought it would be interesting to bring them up-to-date. That's why, in these pictures, you'll see many of the totems of the modern world enmeshed in the traditional depictions. I was attempting to make these figures relevant to a new generation." For more information on the artist please visit [www.Perez-Rubio.com](http://www.Perez-Rubio.com).

Jorge Perez Rubio 美籍古巴艺术家、山东省青岛第一国际学校美术教师。因为生活的城市而对八仙产生了浓厚的兴趣。“起先我只是感到好奇，之后就觉得很兴奋。这些故事看起来很老，但是也在诉说着一些不容忽视的真理。我承认这类传说在全球各地都可以找到类似的，我想这与无意识的知识偶然性有关吧。我对这些古老的故事很感兴趣，也想让他们与时俱进起来。我试图让他们更符合现代人的理念，这也是在我所做的绘画中，你会看到很多现代元素的缘故。”更多画家信息，请登录 [www.Perez-Rubio.com](http://www.Perez-Rubio.com)

# The Professor 教授

Professor Qu Jiangchuan works at Qingdao University, teaching Chinese language and culture. He told REDSTAR: "Whilst the source of Eight Immortals' stories can be found in Taoism, they are being re-energised by a new generation looking to rediscover Chinese identity. Over the past few decades, many people have realised that simply adopting the stance of western culture is not ultimately fulfilling and are turning instead to our history and heritage. These stories are part of that, entwining history, fantasy and learning into one colourful tale. They are not moralistic, nor truly religious; instead, they tell of individuals overcoming adversity and celebrate the diverse nature of our individuality."

曲江川教授任职于青岛大学，教授中文和中国文化。他告诉红星笔者：“虽然八仙故事源于道教，但是也被新一代用不同的视觉去重新定位。过去几十年里，很多人意识到单纯简单的接纳西方文化来是不可行的，应该放更多地精力在我们自己的文化和历史遗产中。这些故事就是我们文化历史的一部分，综合历史、想象、学习而成的一个丰富多彩的传说。这不是说教，也非真正的宗教，而是告诉人们应该克服困境，张扬每个人不同的性格。”

