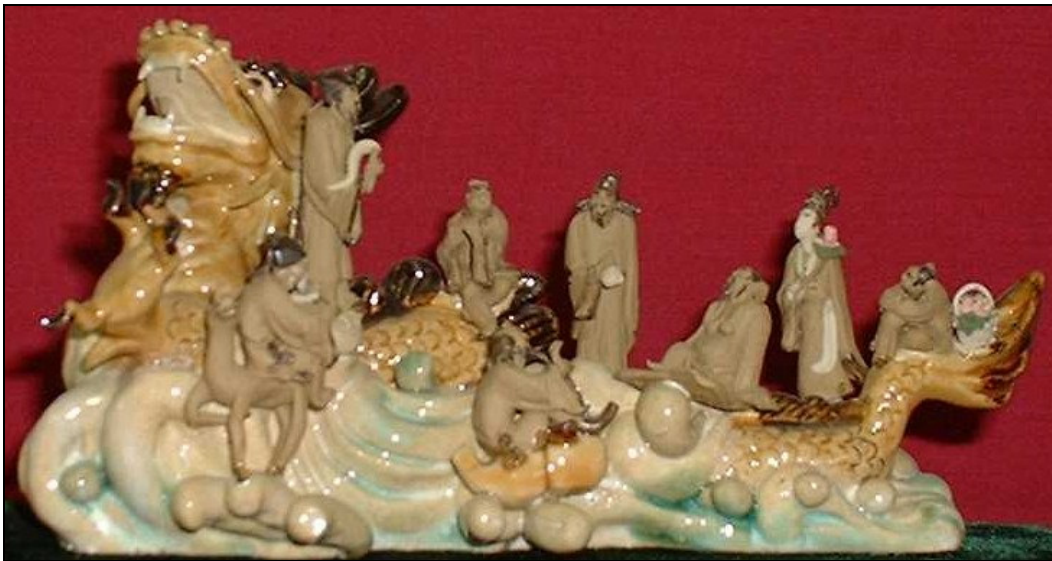


# The Eight Immortals

A Depiction of the Daoist Concept



Adapted from the writings of Dao

## The Origin of the Eight Immortals

The Eight Immortals referred have been popularised by the Dao (or Tao) religion. The eight characters are popularly worshipped by Daoists and ordinary people alike.

The Eight Immortals of Daoism should not be confused with other similar callings such as the Han dynasty's Eight Gentlemen of Huainan, the Tang dynasty's Eight Drunken Immortals and the Eight Immortals of Ancient Sichuan. The Daoist version of the Eight Immortals came into being during the Song and Yuan dynasties.

Yuan dynasty dramas such as *The Yueyang Pavilion* by Ma Zhiyan, *The Bamboo Raft* by Fan Zi'an and the *Willow Tree in the South of the City* by Gu Zijing depicted the Eight Immortals, whose characteristics were very close to what we see today.

After the middle period of the Ming dynasty when Wu Yuantai published his novel *The Journey to the East, Where the Eight Immortals Came From*<sup>2</sup>, the depiction of the Eight Immortals was completed.

The eight characters include; Zhong Liquan, Zhang Guolao, Lu Dongbin, Li Tieguai, He Xiang, Nan Caihe, Han Xiangzi and Chao Guojiu.



## Han Zhongli - the Bun-haired Daoist

Born Quan Zhongli in Yantai, in later times, was to be known as Jue. A self-styled priest in the Jidao style known as Heguzi or Zhenyangzi, he was worshiped as Patriarch Zhenyang, and was counted among the Five Northern Patriarchs.

It is said that he was born on the fifteenth day of the fourth month, when brilliant rays rose just like flames. In the first days after his birth, he neither cried nor ate. On the seventh day, he suddenly jumped up and said: I am going to ascend to the heavenly world someday.

As an adult he was designated as Imperial Counselor. Receiving the emperor's order, he commanded troops to attack enemies in the North. However, he lost the war as well as his troops and fled the battlefield alone. He travelled to Gumi Path where he met Wang Xuanpu who taught him a formula for longevity, knowledge of divine elixirs and Green Dragon Swordsmanship. His later travels took him to Mt. Hua, then to Mt. Kongtong where he met the Venerable Ruler of the Supreme Concourse and was granted the title Yunfang.

During the Tang dynasty, after saving Lu Chunyang, he received an order from the Jade Emperor and ascended to heaven where he was designated as 'Perfect Man of the Left Chamber of the Supreme Ultimate. In the first Qinkang year of the Song dynasty emperor Qing, he was granted the title of 'Perfect Man Zhenyang'. in the sixth Zhiyuan year of the Tang dynasty (1269 AD) he received the title of 'Perfect Man Zhenyang who Enlightens and Transmits Dao'.

On the basis of his discussions with Lu Dongbin on the Dao of the Divine Immortals, a Daoist book entitled *The Transmission of Dao by Zhongli Quan and Lu Dongbin* was published.

Although he referred to himself as 'Zhongli, the Freest Tramp under Heaven', this was mistakenly interpreted as Han Zhongli, which referred to a man named Zhong Li living in the Han dynasty, a name that is used today. It is said that when teaching Dao, Zhongli Quan normally wore his hair in two buns, with a big fan in his hand, and exposing a big belly. He was popularly known as the Free Perfect man. It is this depiction that is most often used for the immortal referred to as Han Zongli.

## Zhang Guolao - Who Rode A Donkey Sitting Backward

Born Zhang Guo, Zhang Guolao was a Daoist who lived in the Tang dynasty. He was also known as 'Gentleman of Pervasive Mystery'. Thought to have been born on the 23rd day of the eleventh lunar month, he claimed that he was born during the Yao era, so he was too old to know his real age.

He would cultivate his Dao as a hermit on Mt. Zhongtiao, although he is refuted to have travelled tens of thousands of miles on a donkey, sitting backwards. When he had a rest, he would change his donkey into a piece of paper and fold it up so he could place it in a box. When he needed it, he spat some water at it and his white donkey would appear again.

Although he declined appointments by the Tang dynasty emperors Tai and Gao, in the 23rd Kaiyuan year of Tang dynasty, emperor Xuan (735 AD) granted him the title of 'Senior Official of the Silver Seal and Blue Ribbon in Charge of the Emperor's Diet'.



## Han Xiangzi - Who Saved His Uncle at Lan Pass

His personal name was Xiang, and he styled himself Qingfu. It was said that he was Han Yu's grandnephew and that he was born on the ninth day of the eleventh lunar month. Even in his childhood, Han Xiangzi began to follow Lu Dongbin and learn Dao. He was to eventually fall from a peach tree and die, an act thought to be a case of deliverance from the corpse.

When Han Yu was designated as Minister of Justice, guests thronged his home, inviting him to banquets in his honor. Han Xiangzi tried to persuade him to give up his political career and pursue Dao. Han Yu, however, suggested to Han Xiangzi to give up his pursuit for Dao and engage himself in a political career.

Han Xiangzi drank to all the guests with his calabash, which remained full of wine no matter how much he had drunk. As a parting gift he planted two flowers in a basin filled with soil, on which had been inscribed an antithetical couplet. It said: 'Where was your home when you stood before Mt. Qing as high as the clouds, where the horse refused to go further than Lan Pass torn by a terrible storm'.

It came to pass that because he was opposed to the emperor's enthusiasm over the so-called Buddha's bones, Han Yu was demoted from his original position to a minor post in Chaozhou. When he and his family came to Lan Pass, the bad weather made travel perilous. They were stranded by the terrible storm as even the horses refused to advance. When Han Xiangzi emerged in heavy snow. Han Yu asked him where they were. When he was told it was Lan Pass, Han Yu became astonished over Han Xiangzi's previous prediction.

Han Xiangzi escorted Han Yu and his family to safety and on to his destination. Having both transferred to Yuanzhou together, Han Xiangzi was able to successfully lead his uncle to Dao.



## **Iron Stick Li - Who Attaches his Soul to the Body of Others**

Iron Stick Li surname was Li, and his personal name was thought to have been born Li Ningyang or Li Hongshui on the tenth day of the seventh lunar month. In childhood, his nickname was Crippled Kid. As an adult he referred to himself as Minor Official Li.

According to the *Original Chaos Chart of Immortals' Lineages*, Li was Lu Dongbin's disciple. It is said that, at the invitation of the Supreme Venerable Sovereign and Gentleman Wanqiu, Li Ningyang's soul would visit Mt. Hua.

Prior to his departure, he would order his disciple to take care of his body during his absence. Unfortunately, on the sixth day of one such 7 day trip, because his mother was terribly sick, the disciple had to go home. In a hurry, he burned the master's body.

When Li's soul came back next day, he could not find his body. His soul was homeless. So he had to attach his soul to the body of a man who had died of hunger, which explained why his depiction looked so ugly and had a crippled right leg.

In later times, he was granted the title of 'Imperial Sovereign Donghua Who Reaches the Sun and Reveals the Origin'.

## **Chao - the Emperor's Brother-in-Law, Who Lives in Mountains as a Hermit**

Chao Jingxiu came from the Xu district, born on the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month. He was the younger brother of Queen Chao, the wife of Song dynasty emperor Ren, and was known as the Emperor's Brother-in-Law.

He became so ashamed that his younger brother Jingzhi was executed for murdering, that he decided to live in the mountains as a hermit. Dressing as a peasant and, devoting himself to the Refinement of Dao.

After receiving teachings from Lu Dongbin and Zhongli Quan, he got the secret formula for refinement, and ultimately attained Dao, becoming a Perfect Man. He was led to the Heavenly World by Zhongli Quan and Lu Dongbin.

### **Lan Caihe, Who Went Begging with Castanets In his Hands**

Lan was a hermit in the Tang dynasty. According to the *Supplement to the Biographies of the Immortals* and the *Extensive Records of the Taiping Era*, he normally wore blue rags, and had only one shoe.

In summer, he used to wrap himself in a quilt. In winter, however, he was seen lying naked on snow, and his whole body was steaming. He used to emerge in cities, singing and begging, with a pair of three-chi-long castanets in his hands. It is hard to judge whether or not he was drunk when he sang.

His favourite lyrics were, 'In singer Lan Caihe's eyes, how long can your life last? Good-looking faces are just like the green trees in spring, how could they keep this unchanged forever?'

Through his songs, he urged people to go away from the secular world and pursue Dao. It is said that he was led by Zhongli Quan to Dao and ultimately ascended to the clouds.

### **Female Immortal He - Who Flew to Feed Her Mother**

She was the only female among the Eight Immortals. It was said that her name was He Qiong and that she came from Ninling, in the district of Yong, and that she was born on the tenth day of the fourth lunar month.

When she was thirteen, she went into mountains to pick tea. There she met Lu Dongbin. After that, she dreamed that a spirit taught her how to eat mica powder. Sworn not to marry, she used to be seen flying to and fro in the deep mountains. At sunrise, she brought some fruits to her mother.

She ultimately Delivered herself from the Corpse and became a Female Immortal.

## Lu Dongbin, Who Dreamt an Evanescent Dream

Lu Yan's literary name was Dongbin. He styled himself Chunyangzi, which implied that he enjoyed a body of pure Yang. It is said that after his repeated failures in the imperial examination, he happened to meet Zhongli Quan, who was cooking a pot of millet.

He gave Lu a pillow to rest his head on. During his sleep, Lu dreamed that he succeeded in the imperial examination and became a government official. After a series of promotions, he was designated as an important official in the imperial court and got married. At last, he became prime minister. But then, bad luck came. He was framed and put in jail for crimes he didn't commit. Because of that, his family was ruined and lived a terribly poor life.

After having experienced all this in his dream, he awoke to find that Zhongli Quan hadn't even finished cooking millet. He came to realize that a man should not pay too much attention to transient glory and success, and that a man's life was nothing but a dream. So he left his family and followed Zhongli Quan, starting to cultivate Dao on Mt. Zhongnan.

