

The Eight Infernal Generals: The Relationship Between Religious Practices and Health in Taiwan

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Taiwan
THE HEART OF ASIA



BACKGROUND

Religion plays a vital role in peoples' perception of health, illness and life process including death. Religious factors, therefore, have similar impact on health as ethnic and cultural heritage. Practicing religious activities (*prayer and attending religious services*) that help alleviate health problems are a common social norm in Taiwan. In Taiwan, religious faith is polytheistic and is expressed and manifested by many forms and type of temple activities. One such activity is the **"Eight Infernal Generals"**, which is a popular religious practice and a major temple activity in Taiwan.

The Great Emperors of the Five Blessings

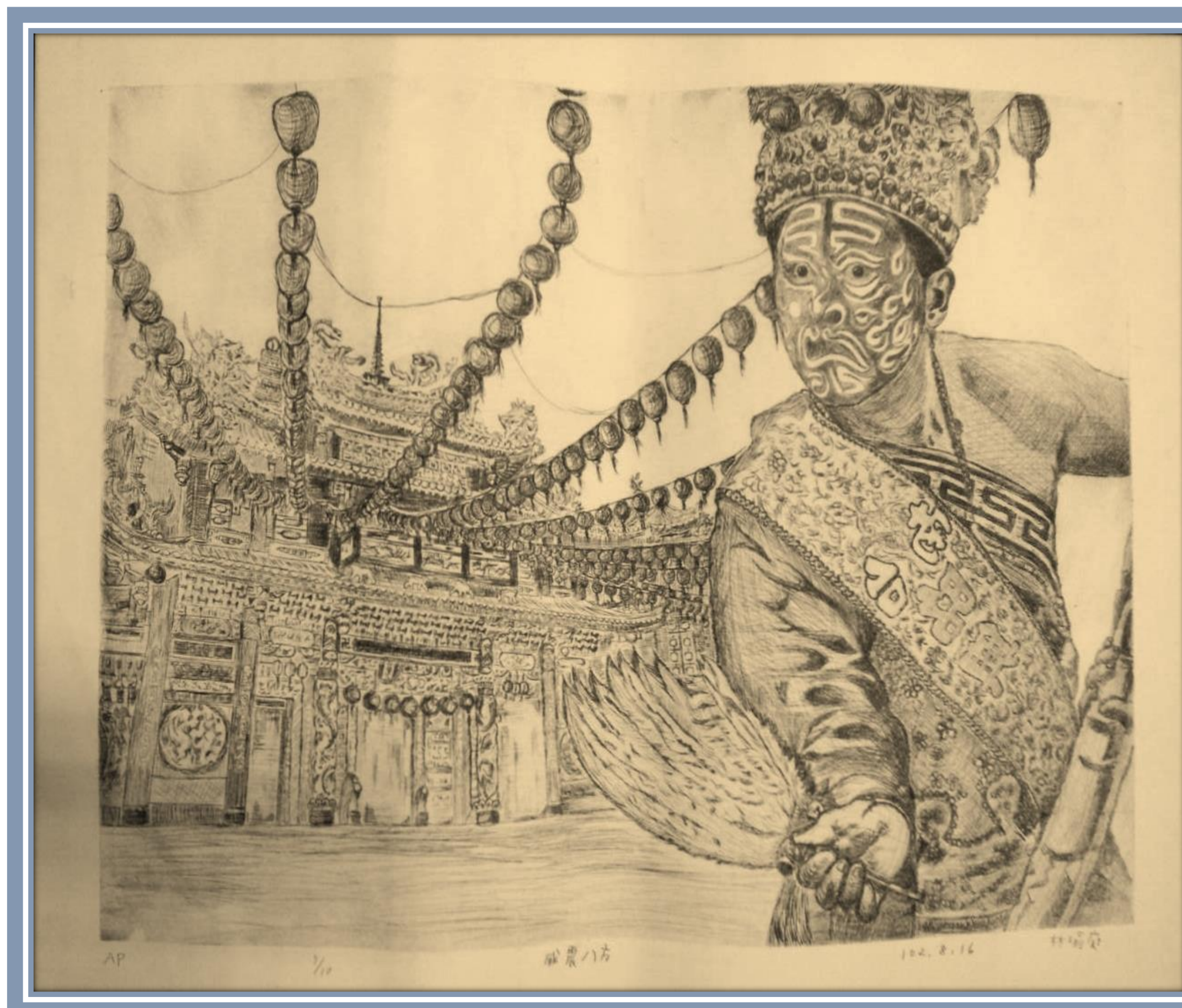
In folk tales it is said that five scholars saw in a dream that the **Jade Emperor** had sent down the Plague Gods to poison people at the only local well in order to punish their misbehavior. The scholars decided to throw themselves in the well to warn people not to drink water from the well. The Jade Emperor forgave them and bestowed on them the name **The Great Emperors of Five Blessings** to symbolize their devotion for protecting people from plague.



*Jade Emperor and
The Great
Emperors of
Five Blessings*

The Eight Infernal Generals

The **Eight Infernal Generals** were the eight bodyguards of the **Great Emperors of the Five Blessings** who are responsible for people's health. Taiwanese people believe that the **Great Emperors of the Five Blessings** have a strong power to clean and eradicate diseases from the Earth. Therefore, it is a common practice for people to hold temple activities and bring sculptures of the **Great Emperors of the Five Blessings** to each part of their hometown. A troupe would also pilgrim to other cities and towns in order to expel disease.



This original wooden engraving work, which was awarded with a second-place in the "engraving" category in county held exhibition and was promoted to participate in the annual national art competition in Taiwan in 2014.



Followers

Followers of the folk belief paint the faces with the symbols of the Eight Infernal Generals



Pilgrim troupe

Each troupe consists of 13 members at most. **Generals Fan, Xie, Gan and Liao and the Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter** gods are the main body of the eight general troupes, which is why they are called the **"Eight Infernal General Troupe."**

While the **Great Emperor of the Five Blessings** is responsible for expelling the disease from people's hometowns, the **Eight Infernal Generals** have the responsibility of protecting the **Great Emperors of the Five Blessings** and for arresting the evil ones on the streets.

The **White Dragon Shrine** in Tainan (located in southwestern Taiwan) is the origin of **the Eight Infernal Generals**. People hold an activity in the temple called the **Burning of the King Boat** in June of the lunar calendar every year. People believe that the **Great Emperors of the Five Blessings** will collect the diseases from their hometown and put them in the **King Boat, which is then** burned to get rid of the diseases.

