The Eight Generals

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Introduction

For my final exhibition, I have chosen “The Eight Generals”, which is an old mythological story in Taiwan. The legend of The Eight Generals still exists, but it is unlike the original story. Today, a parade is held based on the spirit of The Eight Generals. It is a Buddhist story, and Buddhism is the major religion of Taiwan. There are many temples in Taiwan which have The Eight Generals parade in August of every year. It is a wonderful gathering for those people who want to join this significant event.

Basically, there are eight different characters in The Eight Generals. All characters perform ritual dancing and demonstrations of Buddhist ceremonies during the parade. They dance like the eight trigram shape and switch each general’s position. The dance and ceremonies in the BA JIA JIANG parade are to intimidate not only demons but also the living. The BA JIA JIANG parade is a warning parade, to tell people to not do anything bad even when they become ghosts. According to the story of The Eight Generals, their appearance is due to the city god’s need to control the chaos, which happens in August. This particular month is called the month of ghosts and is similar to Halloween in western culture. In Buddhism, we believe the gate of the underworld is opened in August so spirits may return briefly to see their families. During this time, some evil spirits may take the opportunity to sneak back to jeopardize the living. The Eight Generals are needed to escort those demons back to the underworld.

I am interested in the visual patterns on the faces of The Eight Generals. They resemble Chinese opera masks, but the meaning of the faces is totally different. Commonly, Chinese opera mask designs are based on the romance of the three kingdoms. On the other hand, the patterns on the faces of The Eight Generals are based on their own stories. Although their appearance is intended to make people feel
frightened, they are truly beautiful.

The culture of The Eight Generals in Taiwan is deteriorating. In order to hold The Eight Generals parade, religious practices must be known. It takes time and energy to learn how to do religious dancing and draw patterns of the faces. Unfortunately, it is not a paying occupation.

Most Taiwanese parents want their kids to be outstanding at schools, and they need their children to study to succeed. The environment is full of pressure. Some children resist what their parents want them to do. They ditch classes and go out for fun, then become bad kids. They might take drugs because they were tricked by gangsters outside. In this case, some parents may request their children to learn The Eight Generals. Therefore, they will learn to do The Eight Generals parade for a living because their parents will no longer support them. The kids are supposed learn and should behave themselves, but some of them will still do bad things. It impacts on the reputation of The Eight Generals performance seriously. I would like to facilitate a comeback for The Eight Generals' story through my designs.

The third reason for me to do this project is that I want to recall Taiwan’s old culture. The teenagers of this generation refuse to learn about the culture of Taiwan. They blindly pursue foreign cultures such as those of Korea, Japan, America or England; they pursue whatever is the current technology, like iPhone5, Xbox, PS3, etc. However, they should also learn their own culture and pay attention to the local beauty of Taiwan because the beauty and spirit of our culture has almost been replaced by exotic cultures. There are so many cultural narrations in Taiwan, but we seldom appreciate them. The Eight Generals is one of them; it is unique and special and can only be seen in Taiwan. Furthermore, the BA JIA JIANG parade can only be performed by Taiwanese.

I was a Taiwanese student until I finished my undergraduate study. After that I
came to America for further study. I am interested in western art; some inspirations are amazing and fantastic. In my design, I try to combine the beauty of both Eastern culture and Western culture. They have various differences in ways of expressing arts, attitudes, and spirit. The aspects of eastern culture emphasize inner meaning, and the spirit of the arts. On the other hand, western culture focuses on demonstrating in a refined and realistic manner. It is a different point of view for me to define beauty in my mind. It is hard to balance good things in order to create my unique work. In the design of The Eight Generals, I keep the traditional pattern of their faces and compose with some fancy décor. It’s a difficult lesson for me to represent the old culture with modern designs. In my work, I have created new features for The Eight Generals by a fusion of different styles of the East and West. I want everyone to remember those patterns after they see my works and to impress everyone, including people who don’t even know where Taiwan is. Hopefully, it will create interest for people who might come to our country. Currently, I have created T-shirt designs that are plain and simple, expressing my message clearly and easily based on my topic. Also, I have an animation for story-telling to help people understand the story.

Background Information

The story of the Eight Generals originated with folk religion and mythology. According to the stories, the eight generals are the generals who work for Emperor WU FU. They are gods of the underworld whose their job is to intimidate evil and pursue demons. They are also the attendants of the City God. They appear in every temple which is a shrine of the City God. The City god and WU FU emperor are both part of Buddhism. Believers play the Eight Generals in the BA JIA JIANG parade. It has becomes a folk activity in Taiwan. Some scholars believe the eight generals imitate the governmental system of the Ch’ing Dynasty. Therefore, the eight generals
have individual characters and each of characters has a different job.
Furthermore, the outfits of the eight generals are really similar to the official outfits of
the Ch’ing dynasty. The first occurrence of the BA JIA JIANG parade was held in
Tainan during the 19th century. The number of characters in the BA JIA JIANG
parade may vary by different locations, but we generally call them The Eight
Generals.

The significant characteristics of the eight generals are the visual patterns on
their faces, the costumes, and the weapons. When the generals do the parade,
participants have to paint their faces first; this can only be executed by specific
persons who know how to draw in the temple. The painting process is called
“face-opening”. After the face-painting process and dress up, the persons represent the
character of the Eight Generals. Each character has a different personality, visual
pattern on face, costume and weapon. Some visual patterns on the faces may be a bit
different because the location is different, but they basically have a uniform mode.

Characteristics of Each Role

First I want to introduce General Gan, One of the main characters of the BA JIA
JIANG parade, whom we usually call by his nickname, YING YANG FACE. The
significant characteristic of his face is the perfect symmetry of the black and red
design. He usually stands in front of the whole group with general Liou when walking
in the BA JIA JIANG parade. He normally wears cyan cloth and reveals one bare arm.
The major job of general Gan is punishing demons and devils. He holds a bamboo
stick as his weapon. (fig.1)

The second one I want to introduce is General Liou. General Liou is also a main
character of the BA JIA JIANG parade. He always stands with General Gan during
the BA JIA JIANG parade. His face pattern is easy to recognize, as it is like an
octopus tentacle. According to the story, the eye of General Liou is not straight and
his mouth is oblique. To show this characteristic, normally they will paint on eyes with an asymmetric triangle and paint his mouth an irregular size. Therefore, most of the time, he is called "The Triangle." The costume of General Liou is similar to General Gan. The major job of general Liou is punishing demons and devils, like general Gan does, so he also holds a stick as his weapon. (fig.2)

The third one is General Shie, one of the most famous generals. He is known as the 7th Lord, or Qi Ye. The face of General Shie is based on the appearance of a white bat with a black pen. A bat-shaped pattern is drawn around his eyes and the Chinese word “Chung” is painted on his forehead. It means that General Shie is very important in the group. He will always wear white headgear. General Shie is tall and thin. He usually stands next to General Fan. Because General Fan is short and chubby and his face is black, it is quite funny when they stand next to each other. Both of them are also famous for what they do. We call them the messengers of hell. They pursue
devils and punish them. He usually has cuffs in his hand. When you see them in the BA JIA JIANG parade, you will absolutely be attracted by them. (fig.3)

Next is General Fan, who is also one of the most famous Generals. He is named after the 8th Lord, or Ba Ye. Some call him the black monkey. His face pattern is based on a black monkey's appearance; it is black and usually has a red-oval or red-flame shape around his cheek. He always wears black headgear. He stands next to General Shie all the time. He usually holds a board with a tiger head pattern on it in his hand. The board is engraved with four Chinese words, “Shang Shan Fa E”, which means he punishes the bad and admires the good. (fig.4)

![Fig.3 - General Shie](image1)
![Fig.4 - General Fan (the closest one)](image2)

The generals introduced before are The Front-Four Crew. The Eight Generals also includes The Four Seasons Generals. The face pattern of the four seasons generals vary by different locations or temples. The introductions below are the most common example.

General Spring represents the East Cyan Dragon, which is why his face is painted with a lotus pattern. We usually call him “The Lotus”. The Lotus in Chinese tradition also means having good luck and steering clear of misfortune. The duty of
The Four Seasons Generals is to interrogate demons. General Spring uses a bucket as his weapon. He uses it to splash criminals in case they pass out during interrogation. (fig.5)

General Summer represents the North Black Turtle, and his face is painted with a calabash pattern. We usually call him “The Calabash”. Calabash also means luck and happiness in our tradition. General Summer uses a torch as his weapon. It is used to sear criminals in case they don’t confess during interrogation. (fig.6)

General Fall represents the South Red Phoenix, so his face is painted with the phoenix pattern. His mouth is painted like a bird's beak. We usually call him “The Beak”. The phoenix represents wisdom in our tradition. The general’s face is very gorgeous like the phoenix. General Fall holds a hammer as his weapon, which is shaped like a pumpkin at the top. It is used to beat criminals in case they resist during interrogation. (fig.7)

General Winter represents the West White Tiger, so his face is painted with a tiger pattern. We usually call him “The Tiger”. The tiger face effectively intimidates
evil in our tradition. General Winter holds a Cobra as his weapon. It is used to threaten criminals during interrogation. Some people who played General Winter in the early period used real cobras during the BA JIA JIANG parade, but it is rare to see that now. Now people who play General Winter usually hold a wooden snake-shaped stick. (fig.8)

Because the BA JIA JIANG parade is a holy ceremony in Taiwan, it has the purpose to help people to banish demons and to escort people. It is full of the atmosphere of religion. So there are some forbidden behaviors before the parade. The first one is to diet; they have to become vegetarian for a week, although some of the eight generals group will only restrict some specific meat. The second one is restrictive action; they have to stay away from females, even though some of them are married. If some of them have a funeral at home, they should not attend the BA JIA JIANG parade. They cannot enter the room in which a pregnant woman lives.
During the parade, due to the face that has paint; they should not chat or laugh. They cannot smoke or drink any alcohol. After their face is painted, they represent the character they play. They will have some incense and symbols to emphasize their character. If they need to go to the bathroom, they have to take the incense and symbols off. When the parade is proceeding, no one should walk through the parade. Furthermore, when the parade stops at the temple, they will keep dancing like the eight trigram shape, and no one should stand in front of them. According to the tradition, only males can play the Eight Generals, but there are more females show up in parade recently. It probably because they want to create an attraction, therefore, they decided to break the rule.

In addition to the eight generals I introduced above, there are two more that will be in the BA JIA JIANG parade. If we consider the Eight Generals as the police of the underworld, then Generals Tzeng and Suen are the sheriffs.

According to the story, Generals Tzeng and Suen were evil spirits before. But they were touched by the City God’s mercy and became willing to help him lead the eight generals. General Tzeng and Suen are more powerful than the eight generals; their appearance is due to the chaos that is getting worse in the month of ghost. Basically, to play Generals Tzeng and Suen, they have to follow the same restriction as those who play the eight generals. We call them “GUAN JIANG SHOU” in Chinese. Both of them will dance differently in the BA JIA JIANG parade and their costumes are totally different than the eight generals. They will also add fake eyebrows and hair to make their looks fierce and violent.

General Tzeng paints his face in blue or cyan with a simple pattern, but he has fangs to identify himself in the Ba Jia Jiang group. He will paint some golden patterns on his face to make himself mighty. He has a trident as his weapon and to lead the
way for the Eight Generals. The costume of General Tzeng is more beautiful than the Eight Generals. Unlike the eight generals, his costume will not reveal his arm to present his manhood. Moreover, both General Tzeng and Suen dance more wildly than the Eight Generals when doing the parade. (fig.9)

General Suen always paints his face in red with a simple pattern. He also has fangs to identify himself to the Ba Jia Jiang group. He has golden patterns on his forehead to make himself mighty. He holds the scepter as his weapon. The scepter has a flame-shape pattern on it. It means that pursuit of demons for the City God is very urgent. The costume of General Suen is also gorgeous and splendid and it will not reveal his arm. (fig.10)
Method

I used computer programs to create this project, particularly Adobe Photoshop. The reason why I chose Photoshop is because I am familiar with it. Using Photoshop is a basic and necessary computer skill for a graphic designer. It is easy to draw on the computer when I want to digitize the eight generals. I created the T-shirt designs and toy figures for this project because both of them are decent products that will be acceptable for everyone. I not only designed the image on the front of the T-shirts, but also various logos individually. When viewers see my work, I would like them to appreciate the beauty of the eight generals and enjoy the new designs that I combined with the geometric patterns. In addition to the the t-shirts and toy figures I created, I also created an animation to introduce the eight generals. For the animation, I chose Flash as the program because Flash can present my animation with childlike style. Moreover, I set up some interactive buttons in my animation to help my viewers watch the animation easily.

The great thing I love about graphic design is that images can represent a thousand words. It helps me convey the message I want to send. By using the computer, I can accomplish some effects that I could not do when just drawing by hand. Being a graphic designer, the computer has always appealed to me because the world is being digitized. Digitalizing an old culture so that it will never disappear is the primary reason I chose to do this project.

It is always difficult to present an old culture with a new design, because there are some traditional constraints that must be followed. The first difficulty encountered when I began this project is the story itself. Although I searched all the background information on the internet, the truth is that I could not be sure which version was the correct one or the oldest one. Fortunately, I have a relative who knows the story since he played one of characters before. From the content that I learned from him, I
learned the whole story and got interested in this project more than before.

I decided to make the story simple and adorable, since I try to convince not only the youths but also educate younger children. The original story is realistic and spooky, it probably become one of the reasons that no one wants to understand about the Eight Generals. In my animation, I created the story of the Eight Generals broadly; it will be too long if I included the whole detailed story. With the background I created in my animation, it still gives the viewer the scary quality of the story, but using a cartoon style. The story of The Eight Generals is about pursuing demons and catching them in the end, therefore, I gave the story a quick pace to feel like a pursuit. I also shrink the Eight Generals into tiny and cute characters in my animation to overthrow the images of frightening generals. In the end of my animation, I created an introduction to each character, so the viewers could understand the generals as well as watch the story.

In my t-shirt design, I created the different appearances of the Eight Generals. As I mentioned above, I try to combine western art with eastern art, so I blend part of the faces into geometric shapes. About the faces of the Eight Generals, I kept the original looks and just made them in vector file. I used the baroque style as a reference for all the geometric shapes I created with the faces of the Eight Generals. Basically, I have five different styles to combine with the faces, because the Eight Generals do the parade with two characters in one group. When I began this project, my idea was a t-shirt design with part of the face of the Eight Generals, and then the geometric design is perfect to fit. On the back of my t-shirts, I also created individual logos for each character. To design the logos, I simplified the visual pattern of the faces, and kept some significant parts to identify each character. I chose a skull logo as my basic shape, because the meaning of the Eight Generals is intimidation, besides, it will help the t-shirts looks like a fashion brand.
For Generals Gan and Liou, I combined the original looks with exotic backgrounds. My idea of this design is about the sense of Chinese art; I drew cloud-shape patterns and wave-shape patterns to make the faces looks mystic. The logos of General Gan and Liou, have their weapons as the cross of skull logo. (Fig.11, Fig.12, Fig.13, Fig.14, Fig.15, Fig.16)

Fig.11 – General Gan original looks

Fig.12 – General Gan T-shirt Design

Fig.13 – General Gan individual logo

Fig.14 – General Liou original looks

Fig.15 – General Liou T-shirt Design

Fig.16 – General Liou individual logo
For Generals Fan and Shie, I combined the original looks with playing cards backgrounds. My thought of these designs is because both General Fan and Shie are more famous than the others, therefore, I made them looks like the spade King. I draw some flower-shape patterns to make it looks exotic. I also included “General” by using Chinese characters in this design and their famous nickname in this design. I try to make them looks obvious than the others. For the logos of General Fan and Shie, I used their weapons as the cross of skull logo as well. (Fig.17, Fig.18, Fig.19, Fig.20, Fig.21, Fig.22)
For the Generals Spring and Summer, I combined their original looks with a totem-like background. My concept of this design is about Indian totem. I think the season spring and summer are very suitable for the Indian totem and it is a fusion of western and eastern beauty. As the title of Generals Spring and Summer, I chose a font which is really nice to match with whole totem design. I also have made their weapons as the cross of skull logo. (Fig.23, Fig.24, Fig.25, Fig.26, Fig.27, Fig.28)
For the Generals Fall and Winter, I combined their faces with Buddhistic-pattern backgrounds. My idea for these designs comes from Buddhism, so I decided to draw some lotus leaves around the circle. The lotus leaf is often used for Buddhistic images in Taiwan. With baroque style decoration around the whole design, it is another fusion of western and eastern design. Again, I made their weapons as the cross of skull logo. (Fig.29, Fig.30, Fig.31, Fig.32, Fig.33, Fig.34)
For the last two generals, Tzeng and Suen, since they dress differently and look much more frightening than the Eight Generals and their faces remind me of the samurai in Japan, I created the background with a samurai influence. One of their
significant characteristic is their fangs, so I included them in the design.

I also drew cloud-like patterns to increase the eastern feeling of mystery. In their individual logos, I also have their weapons as the cross of skull logo. (Fig.35, Fig.36, Fig.37, Fig.38, Fig.39, Fig.40)

Fig.35 – General Tzeng original looks
Fig.36 – General Tzeng T-shirt Design

Fig.37 – General Tzeng individual logo

Fig.38 – General Suen original looks

Fig.39 – General Suen T-shirt Design

Fig.40 – General Suen individual logo
In addition to the T-shirt design and animation, I painted toy figures of each general. As mentioned before, the Eight Generals are meant to be frightening, so most people are probably afraid of them, especially children. In using toy figures, I hope to change this impression. It was difficult to draw on the three dimensional objects particularly keeping the visual pattern of the Eight Generals symmetric. Although I simplified the pattern, it is still a painful process. The other difficult part was to determine how to depict their individual weapon and costume. Of all the toy figures, I love the General Tzeng and Suen, because I finally figured out how to represent them with detailed results. I used cotton to create their fake eyebrows, which makes them look similar to their real appearance. In the end, all of them look cute and charming; the children will not feel fear about them anymore. (Fig.41, Fig.42)

Fig.41 – Toy figures of the Eight Generals

Fig.42 – Toy figures of General Tzeng and Suen
Because the Eight Generals are holy and untouchable for normal people, the visual face patterns cannot be painted on everyone’s faces. So, I decided to put their visual face patterns on the mirrors. As a result, everyone can see what they will look like after their faces have been painted. They can also try different designs randomly if they want to. I cut out the eye area of each visual face patterns, so viewers can actually imagine the result easily if they were to play one of the Eight Generals. The mirrors use a transparent decal paper, so viewers can see their reflections. I hope this interactive design can help the viewers have some fun while learning about an exotic culture. (Fig.43)

Fig.43 – Reflective mirror of General summer.
Conclusion

In summary, I am proud to give the old traditional culture a new face. Since I came to America, I have thought about how best to represent Taiwan to everyone. Once I finished so many different kinds of works for my project, including ten T-shirt designs, the animation, three-dimensional toy figures, and face images in the mirrors, the last thing I had to consider was how to display them. I needed a bright place to display my mirror designs, T-shirt designs and the toy figure designs; on the other hand, I need a dark place to show my animation. The media room of the gallery is my space to display all the works I have. Fortunately, my animation provides enough brightness to help viewers still can view other works. The spot light of the media room also help me to focus the toy figures. I was able to hang my t-shirts in media room, so that viewers can see the designs on both front and back. The most important thing I wanted to create is the atmosphere of the Eight Generals; I hope viewers will see the joy in their story and the characters, rather than be fearful.

If I could have more time to do this project, I would like to present more stories of each character. Some of the stories are quite touching and educational. All the works I created for this exhibition are meant to help the Eight Generals to shine and to be remembered, furthermore, I want to introduce them to those who never come to Taiwan. There are lots of beautiful cultures in Taiwan. Using graphic designing, I can reinterpret them. A picture can express a thousand words. A graphic designer can help the traditional beauty to break the cultural gap without any explanation.