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SHOOTING FOR THE HEAVENS: EXAMINING THE
ACCESSIBILITY OF SPIRITUAL RENEWAL IN *JOURNEY*
TO THE WEST

by

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Introduction

The Journey to the West (hereafter *Journey*) is an odyssey of history, religious teachings, and readerly endurance. This story, first printed in 1592 during the late years of the Ming dynasty, draws on the historical pilgrimage of Xuanzang, a Buddhist monk who traveled west from China to India to retrieve Buddhist scriptures in the year 617 A.D. at the beginning of the Tang Dynasty of China. In 645, he returned to the Tang capital of Chang'an with 657 items of Buddhist scriptures, which he spent the remainder of his life translating and interpreting. Xuanzang's task was in part motivated by his desire to answer the question of the attainability of Buddhist enlightenment: his biographers, including Anthony Yu, note that he was "deeply vexed by the question of whether all men, or only part of humanity, could attain Buddhahood" (Yu 3). *Journey* draws on these historical circumstances to create a fictionalized narrative of Xuanzang's journey that explores precisely this question of the universality of spiritual progress. Many scholars hold that *Journey* functions primarily as a religious allegory that conveys the potentiality for enlightenment through self-discipline and study of scripture, though there is a lack of consensus on the modes by which the story conveys this and the availability of its message. Such criticism often focuses on Xuanzang's monkey disciple Sun Wukong, whose spiritual journey is the focus of the story. Also, this scholarship largely takes as its source the traditions and teachings of the religions highlighted in the novel. However, Wukong's spiritual journey also provides the opportunity to examine the story and its underlying significance from a different standpoint: the narrative itself. In this thesis, I will examine the extent to which the structure of the narrative and its account of Sun Wukong's transformation convey the universality and attainability of spiritual cultivation.

The scholarship that grapples with the question of self-cultivation in *Journey* through the lens of religion does so for good reason. Besides being a semi-historical account, the story is laden with

religious meanings: in its 100 chapters, *Journey* describes a scripture pilgrimage led by a monk aptly named Xuanzang (referred to in this thesis by his Sanskrit name, Tripitaka) and three disciples: Sun Wukong, Eight Rules, and Sha Monk. Religious elements figure prominently into the story as well—it includes a Buddhist pantheon of deities, consisting of Tathagata, Guanyin, Ananada and Kasyapa, among others; and a collective of Daoist figures, including the Jade Emperor, the Dragon Kings, and the various star generals. The story also alludes to aspects of Daoist alchemy such as *yin* and *yang* and the five elements (wood, metal, fire, earth, water), the Confucian emphasis on submitting to authority and supporting collective needs, and Buddhist sutras.

Scholars have offered differing interpretations of this religious complexity and its relationship to Wukong's journey. On the one hand, some view religious messaging as the framework from which meaning in the story derives. In *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel*, Andrew Plaks takes a Neo-Confucian approach to the story, arguing that *Journey* embraces “Daoist cosmology and Buddhist spirituality that revolve around the core Confucian concern with society and government that dominated in the intellectual and spiritual life of the time” (241). To Plaks, the novel serves as a demonstration of the ways in which one can tame the mind and resist material and sensory temptations. Francisca Cho Bantly, in her article “Buddhist Allegory in *Journey to the West*”, agrees with Plaks that the novel outlines a process of spiritual rejuvenation, but argues that “the most compelling reading of the *Journey* is an explicitly Buddhist one” due to the novel's structure and embodiment of religious tenets of “karma, compassion, emptiness, and skillful-means” (512). On the other hand, other scholars, such as Dr. Hu Shi, deny any religious significance to the story, describing *Journey* as “above all a marvelous comic work” and “a book of profound nonsense” without any intentional religious messaging (Yu 52). It is clear from this that much of the scholarly work surrounding the meanings imparted by *Journey* focuses on its religious content, though the extent to which the text functions as a religious allegory remains a subject of debate.

Sun Wukong is a central focus of scholarly criticism for two reasons. First, he is considered by many scholars, as well as Mao Zedong,¹ to be the hero of this story (Yu 69). He is the *de facto* leader of the pilgrimage, fighting the monster-spirits that block their path and reciting Buddhist texts to motivate the other disciples. Second, the narrative of *Journey* centers on Wukong's life and the spiritual transformation he undergoes during the scripture pilgrimage. Wukong changes from an impudent and impulsive ape (a fitting incarnation of the idiom *xinhou* (心猴) meaning Mind Monkey)² into a spiritually cultivated Buddha well-versed in scripture. There are indications throughout the narrative that Wukong is a representation of the human mind, such as a commentarial poem that states: "An ape's body of Dao weds the human mind. / Mind is a monkey—this meaning's profound" (1. 190). This link between Wukong and the human mind magnifies the importance of his self-cultivation in that it indicates that this process has relevance to readers. This link to the reader makes the monkey's internal transformation a significant and intriguing subject through which to consider the overarching messages of the story. As a result, two dominant aspects of *Journey*, its religious connotations and Sun Wukong's self-cultivation, are often considered in discussions of the ways in which spiritual progress is portrayed in the story.

Working alongside this rich scholarship, I will offer a new perspective from which to consider the significance of spiritual progress in the story. In this thesis, I will examine the story's message of the significance of spiritual renewal through the framework of the narrative itself. This will help us consider self-cultivation in a way that is firmly grounded in the book and not muddled by the shifting and uncertain religious layers in the story. To this end, I will use Western literary

¹ Chairman Mao Zedong made several statements throughout his lifetime showing his admiration of the literary monkey. For example, in February of 1966 he issued a public announcement that "The local areas must produce several more Sun Wukong to vigorously create a disturbance at the Palace of Heaven" (Mao).

² *Xinhou* (心猴) or Mind Monkey is a Buddhist term meaning "unsettled; restless; capricious" (Carr).

theory that grapples with the structure of stories about heroes. Because many heroic stories in the Western canon exhibit a similar structure and mode of depicting their heroes, there is abundant theory arising from this type of literature that can serve as a useful comparison for non-Western heroic literature. While this analysis is not universally applicable and does not perfectly map onto a story written within a very different literary tradition, it remains a useful starting point from which we can discuss the role of the hero in *Journey* through the story that frames him.

In my first chapter, I will consider the narrative structure of *Journey* through Mikhail Bakhtin's essay "Epic and Novel",³ which describes the ways in which two genres of heroic literature interact with their readers. It is Bakhtin's view that the events and characters of the epic are projected onto a valorized and inaccessible past that is detached from the reality of its readers and inhibits their interaction with the text. The novel, by contrast, is accessible to its readers and allows for their adaptation and analysis. Viewing *Journey* in relation to these two genres shows how it exhibits a degree of the epic's temporal detachment, but is open to its readers in a way that makes it more closely resemble Bakhtin's vision of the novel. This helps us understand the ways in which we can relate to the characters of *Journey*: while they exist in a world remote and divergent from our own, the familiarity and openness of the story make them easy to relate to and appropriate within the context of our reality.

In my second chapter, I will examine the odyssey of Wukong's personal growth through the Bildungsroman, a structure common to Western coming-of-age stories that divides its hero's development into distinct stages. Wukong's transformation process diverges from the Bildungsroman structure in several ways: it starts with a "false" journey that does not bring him to full maturity and is nonlinear in that he does not show continual progress. This contrast to a rigid

³ Bakhtin's essay appears in a book of essays titled *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*

and predictable coming-of-age pattern reflects the ways in which Wukong's development process portrays him as a realistic and relatable character. As a result, his transformation suggests the attainability and universality of self-refinement.

Finally, in my third chapter I will argue that the fact that Wukong's development process is not linear and does not mold him into a flawless, unerring figure reflects the story's emphasis on group harmony and subverting the ego to the overarching organization of the universe. Further, analyzing Wukong's development through Plaks's analysis of spiritual progress in Chinese novels clarifies how Wukong's indirect spiritual progression does not reflect a deficiency in his refinement, but rather a more fluid notion of transformation within the story. Unlike Bakhtin's epic hero, who presents a steadfast and complete nature, Wukong is susceptible to change and variability. This indicates that while the Bildungsroman structure is useful for discussing Wukong's cultivation process, it is not sufficient for understanding it—his growth process expands past the limits of established literary norms. This lack of structure in his spiritual journey helps Wukong appear as a true-to-life individual rather than a literary character with a realistic and unidealized development process.

My approach has a twofold outcome: first, it demonstrates the ways in which Western literary criticism of heroes is limited by its subject matter and is not universally applicable or comprehensive in its view of stories or their characters. The terms and norms stemming from this literary tradition, such as the "hero" and the Bildungsroman structure, are useful for analyzing Wukong and his personal odyssey, but are not conducive to formulating a deep understanding of him. Second, examining the significance of Wukong's spiritual cultivation through the structure of his story highlights the lifelikeness of his character and the flexibility and naturalness of his self-cultivation process. This in turn conveys the accessibility of spiritual maturation and sends an

encouraging message for readers to emulate such growth. Wukong's development, while convoluted and at times indefinite, communicates the universal attainability of a refined inner self.

Chapter I: Bakhtin's Epic and Novel

Journey is an overwhelmingly layered work. The story consists of varying and overlapping plotlines and environments, and features many different types of beings, from celestial deities to human-like monkeys to monster-spirits. It is difficult to determine the reader's relation to the story—is it narrated without regard for us, or are there meanings and morals underlying the clashes with deities and ceremonial banquets that we are meant to glean? While it is difficult to concretely define the role we are meant to play as readers of *Journey*, one way of better understanding the ways in which the story orients itself toward its readers is by viewing it in relation to literature that plays a fundamental role in its society. Such stories exert an unquestionably powerful influence over their audiences and form an interesting bond with them. Making this comparison will allow us to see the ways such stories interact with their readers to formulate a notion of our position in relation to *Journey*.

The narratives that reside in the foundations of our societies help form a collective consciousness and perspective. These stories, many of which grew out of early civilizations from unnamed authors and long-lost manuscripts, remain salient today: their messages are remembered and their characters renowned. In his analysis of what he believes to be the common archetypes of all myths, Joseph Campbell states, “the heroes and the deeds of myth survive into modern times” (3). While it is clear that these stories do *survive* today, their ability to speak to us in the contemporary age remains up for debate. Do these stories inspire art and creativity, do they whisper secrets to us, or are they like dead languages, dusty relics of an ancient past?

It is unclear whether myths can adapt to the conditions of modern society in a way that makes their meanings powerful and pertinent. The transmutability of heroic stories into modern works of literature is something that has been widely discussed, though its focus is complicated by

the fact that these stories, besides having little consistency in plot and characters, serve different functions and have variable modes of dissemination. Rather than looking to formulate a comprehensive view of the salience of the heroic story, it may be fruitful to consider the interactions between individual myths and their readers. Also, to the detriment of extensive and informed analysis, much of the theoretical work on the modern relevance of heroic literature overlooks non-Western stories, such as *Journey to the West*. Therefore, investigating the interface between readers and *Journey* through the framework of established Western theory highlights the differences between this heroic story and previously studied ones and enriches our critical knowledge of heroic literature.

One theoretical work that serves as an appropriate starting point from which we can discuss *Journey* as well as critical theory surrounding heroic literature is Mikhail Bakhtin's essay "Epic and Novel." In this work, Bakhtin delineates two genres of heroic stories, the epic and the novel, and analyzes their differing relationships with their readers. Broadly speaking, Bakhtin sees the epic as a form of literature entrenched in the past and closed off from its readers, whereas the contemporaneity of the novel makes it familiar to readers and open to their interpretation. Bakhtin also considers the differing degrees to which these two genres position themselves relative to the time⁴ of their readers and persist as relevant and meaningful texts. As we will see, discussing the ways *Journey* functions as a heroic text through the lens of "Epic and Novel" complicates Bakhtin's apparently clear-cut binary and the interactions these disparate genres have with their audiences. While it does contain some elements of epic, *Journey* also shows novelistic qualities, specifically humor, capacity for adaptation, use of extraliterary genres, and chronological vitality, that allows for contact between the story and its readers.

⁴ To Bakhtin, there is not a specific time that must be related to in literature; he considers "time" to be any temporal context in which readers interact with texts.

Section I: Defining the Epic

Bakhtin describes the epic as “a genre that has not only long since completed its development, but one that is already antiquated” (3). He defines the epic with three characteristics: its existence in a distant and valorized temporal construct called the “absolute past,” foundation in national traditions, and detachment from readers. Together, these qualities create the epic’s grandiosity and separate it from modernity. The first constitutive feature of the epic is its placement in a mythological past of greatness and creation. Many epic tales were written in classical eras, such as Ancient Greece, in which foundational ideas emerged that continue to inform modern political philosophy, fine arts, and writing. These tales, however, take place in an era that was distanced even from the time in which they were written *The Odyssey* and *The Illiad* are two such stories. Bakhtin holds that the epic is associated with an era of unquestionable excellence: “everything is good: all the really good things occur *only* in this past” (15). Because of this, the characters and incidents within the epic are elevated and “valorized to an extreme degree”, and as a result can not be questioned or criticized (15).

Moreover, the authority and superiority of the epic past over the contemporary world makes it distant in a way that is not merely temporal, but also relational. As a result of its indisputable grandeur, the epic past “lacks any gradual, purely temporal progressions that might connect it with the present” (15), which places it on a wholly different temporal plane from ours. The time of the epic can not be revisited or recreated, only revered as a sacred era; it is cut off from any contact with our present time. This boundary defines the epic and our relationship to it: it “is immanent in the form of the epic itself and is felt and heard in its every word” (17).

The second characteristic of the epic is its entrenchment in tradition. Bakhtin posits that the epic past “is preserved and revealed only in the form of national tradition. The epic relies entirely on this tradition” (16). We can surmise that “tradition” here refers to the stories that have existed since

the beginning of a society and remain the cornerstone of its consciousness. The epic is portrayed as having been created at the outset of a society, and for this reason the reverence created by tradition is transferred onto the epic. One result of this association with tradition is the depersonalization of the epic: Bakhtin comments, “by its very nature the world of [the epic] is inaccessible to personal experience.... It is given solely as tradition, sacred and sacrosanct, evaluated in the same way by all and demanding a pious attitude toward itself” (16). Just as tradition is a broadly and universally presented convention, the epic is unchanging and not open for individual interpretation. We can only accept the story that tradition presents to us, and are unable to consider it differently based on our own desires or ideas. Bakhtin describes how the epic “is an utterly finished thing, not only as an authentic event of the distant past but also on its own terms and by its own standards; it is impossible to change, to re-think, to re-evaluate anything in it” (17).

This gets at Bakhtin’s third definitive component of the epic: absolute distance, or a temporal zone of completeness and conclusiveness that the epic is situated in that closes it off from us and eschews our contact. In Bakhtin’s view, “the epic world is constructed in the zone of an absolute distanced image, beyond the sphere of possible contact with the developing, incomplete and therefore re-thinking and re-evaluating present” (17). Epic distance prevents any question, doubt, or reinterpretation: everything there is to know about the epic is presented to us as though behind glass.

There are several artistic consequences of absolute distance that play out in the epic. One is that portions of the story can be isolated as representations of the entire story. Bakhtin asserts that the absolute past “is closed and completed in the whole as well as in any of its parts. It is, therefore, possible to take any part and offer it as the whole” (31). To him, the epic can begin and end at any point and still adequately convey the whole of its plot and characters. Based on common conceptions of storytelling this seems inconceivable- how could a narrative begin near its end and

convey its entire story? How could it end in the middle of a scene and still be complete? Bakhtin believes that the epic is immune to these issues for several reasons. First, the strong traditional background present in the epic means that those reading it already know its plotline and end. Second, the anticipation for the outcome or ending of a story, what Bakhtin calls the “impulse to continue” and “impulse to end” that a reader may experience, only occurs in a work with which we can interact: it is “possible only in a zone where there is proximity and contact; in a zone of distanced images they are impossible” (32). Thus, the epic’s absolute distance causes a departure from the formal structure of “beginnings” and “ends”.

Identifying the ways in which absolute distance is presented in actual literature is challenging for several reasons. First, it is difficult to realize that a story might be impenetrable or indisputable without observing the reactions of readers to it. We can not say for sure that the original audience of *The Odyssey* felt detached from the epic in the ways that Bakhtin imagines. Second, Bakhtin’s understanding of the distance between story and reader is based on his own theories of the absolute past and sacred tradition—there may be other forms of interaction that Bakhtin does not take into account or are not visible. Also, it seems shortsighted to establish a binary between accessible and inaccessible literary forms. Some aspects of a story, such as time period, context, or a certain character, may be approachable for a reader, while the work as a whole is not. Defining a story as closed off or open to interpretation without leaving room for middle ground seems reductive. Perhaps a more nuanced approach to viewing this relationship would be beneficial to our understanding in this regard.

Section II: The novel, distinct from the epic

Bakhtin also presents his ideas on the novel, which he defines largely in its difference from the epic. To Bakhtin, the novel is a symbol of modernity that has evolved out of earlier genres: he

asserts that “the novel should become for the contemporary world what the epic was for the ancient world” (10). The most fundamental difference between the epic and the novel is the latter’s ability relate to the temporal and social reality of its audience and thereby allow contact with it. Thus, though Bakhtin places the novel’s formation at the end of the Roman Empire, the novel is still modern due to its recent development relative to other literary forms and its adaptability to its readers’ temporality.

For the novel and genres similar to it, “contemporary reality serves as their subject, and – even more important – it is the starting point for understanding, evaluating, and formulating such genres” (22). The novel is presented in our time and reality, a zone of contact and relatability. The fact that the novelistic hero and his surroundings exist in our world means that we can place ourselves in these stories. To Bakhtin, the literary element that accomplishes the proximity and engagement between reader and novel is comedy. Bakhtin comments that “it is precisely laughter that destroys any hierarchical (distancing and valorized) distance. Laughter has the remarkable power of making an object come up close... where one can break open its shell, look into its center, take it apart, examine it freely and experiment with it” (23). Laughter can not exist alongside fear and piety, conditions that lead to the remoteness and sacredness of the epic. Instead, laughter familiarizes the novel and makes it real, which allows us to view it within the context of our own lives.

Of course, the novel’s proximity to its readers leads to many differences between itself and the epic. Bakhtin admits that while the novel is a genre still evolving, it has developed far enough to take on three singular qualities: its stylistic variability, temporal closeness, and its accessibility and “openendedness” (11). The first characteristic, the novel’s multidimensional, variable style, reflects the expansion of movement and communication in Europe at the end of the Roman Empire. To Bakhtin, “a multitude of different languages, cultures and times became available to Europe, and this became a decisive factor in life and thought” (11). This interaction between languages destabilized

the one-to-one connection between language and meaning that exists in a monolingual society and led to the development of a distinctive mix of dialects, jargon, literary diction, and era-specific language. This mixture of linguistic forms changed the ways in which novels convey meaning.

The second aspect of the novel that differentiates it from other genres is its existence on the same temporal plane as that of its readers. Bakhtin describes this phenomenon as:

...the shift of the temporal center of artistic orientation, which placed on the same temporally valorized plane the author and his readers... and the world and heroes described by him... [makes] them contemporaries, possible acquaintances, friends, familiarizing their relations (27).

Because the novel exists in the same time as its readers, they can interact with and understand it in relation to their own lived experience. This occurs regardless of content: whether the novel's subject matter is relevant to the time of its readers, it remains familiar and appropriate. This demonstrates how the closeness of the novel to its audience is not due to content, but the modes by which it portrays it. The novel speaks to readers not from a higher, unreachable plane as the epic does, but one on which they themselves exist.

The outcomes of this closeness lead to the third facet of the novel: its mutability. Because those outside it can interact with the novel, they can rework it in ways that connect to their own ideas. This poses significant differences for the novel's author: while the author of the epic functions as a mouthpiece for a story whose existence precedes him and is inaccessible to his sway, the temporal proximity of the novel "permits the author, in all his various masks and faces, to move freely onto the field of his represented world" (27). The author of the novel can step into the story he creates and direct it according to his vision because he has access to it. The novel's accessibility is significant for readers as well in that it allows for our influence: we can reshape or reinterpret the novel based on our personal ideas. In this sense, the novel both destabilizes and empowers the author's authority: the novel's availability for change means that it is subject to countless revisions

and adaptations by those who read it. In a sense, anyone who reads it becomes an author in his or her own right.

An outcomes of the novel's creation of a zone of contact with its readers and temporal orientation is its use of extraliterary genres.⁵ These genres, according to Bakhtin, reflect the fact that the novel deals with "the incomplete events of a particular present" (33) and is a still-developing genre. Thus, the novel's extraliterary genres help it more faithfully exhibit the forms of language used in real life. These additions are "the genres of everyday life" (33) that, unlike a narration that exhibits only a single form of literature, add linguistic diversity and multiple layers to a text.

Including literary forms that readers might see in their own lives further draws the novel into the lives of its readers. In addition, the extra layers provided by extraliterary genres create a more varied reading process: rather than uncritically consuming a uniform writing style, with extraliterary genres we must adapt our interactions with a text based on the different forms of literature presented to us. For example, the language of a political speech requires a very different approach to reading and understanding than would a diary entry or omniscient narrative. This mandated adaptability is much the same as our modes of interaction with the world, which are continuously shifting in response to different types of rhetoric. The use of extraliterary genres produces a form of literature that is reminiscent of the reality of its readers and requires a more engaged approach to reading.

Bakhtin's "Epic and Novel" outlines several qualities of both literary genres to consider their accessibility and relatability to readers.⁶ Bakhtin describe how the epic's position in a valorized and idealized time and the authority it wields over the modern world places it on an entirely different plane from that of its readers. As a result, it is at once incontrovertible and final—it is beyond the

⁵ To Bakhtin, "extraliterary genres" consist of forms of writing that are not strictly fictional literature. This includes "diaries, confessions, the forms and methods of rhetoric associated with recently established courts and so forth" (33).

scope of adjustment or criticism. The novel is a much more accessible and contemporary genre. First, it exists on the same temporal plane as its readers. This does not necessarily mean that the events of the novel occur in the present time, but that the novel is adaptable to the its readers' social and temporal realities. Second, the novel allows for our contact: we can analyze, critique, and reshape it according to our own perspectives. The openness of the novel is largely what differentiates it from the epic and makes it a modern literary form. Understanding the characteristics of these genres of heroic stories helps us analyze the epic and novelistic traits in *Journey*.

We will first investigate the similarities between the story and the epic, followed by considering those between it and the novel. Analyzing *Journey* through Bakhtin's theory will show that this story does not perfectly correspond to either category, instead possessing elements of both genres. The fact that the story lies outside Bakhtin's framework initiates a discussion on how it differently interacts with readers and ways to expand theories on heroic stories.

Section III: Mythic Time and Place

Examining *Journey* through the lens of Bakhtin's epic-novel dichotomy indicates the ways in which the story is familiar and available to its readers. The correspondences between *Journey* and the epic are made clear through two frames: the story's description and its composition. First, the narrative of the early scenes of the story, particularly the formation of the universe and Wukong's birth, associate the story with tradition and grant it a degree of authority, albeit not the degree that Bakhtin envisions. Second, the composition of the world in which *Journey* is set features the integration of magical creatures and humans and spiritual realms that are accessible and geographically proximal to the Earth. This portrays an Earth quite divergent from our own, which isolates the story from our reality.

There are two events at the beginning of the story whose descriptions reference a distant and unfamiliar past: the birth of the world and the creation of Sun Wukong. The narration of the world's formation at the beginning of the story associates the story with tradition by referencing the creation myth of Pan Gu, which is part of Chinese mythology. After describing the emergence of the elements and animals on Earth, the narrator remarks, "Following Pan Gu's construction of the universe... the world was divided into Four Great Continents" (*Journey to the West*, 1. 100).⁷ This allusion to the legend of Pan Gu establishes the story's association with Chinese tradition much as the epic roots itself in tradition. However, here the link to tradition is less stable than what Bakhtin describes for two reasons. First, the legend of Pan Gu itself is not explicitly recounted, but only referenced; this lessens the scene's attachment to tradition. Second, Chinese culture does not have a singular creation myth; the Pan Gu story is one of several pictures of the beginnings of the world. As a result, the reference to the Pan Gu myth in this scene would not grant it the degree of grandiosity and sanctity that a more solidified tradition would. As a result, while this part of the story does satisfy Bakhtin's requirement that the epic embed itself in tradition, it does not do so in a way that establishes the story as sacrosanct in the way that Bakhtin sees as characteristic of the epic. This use of tradition diverges somewhat from Bakhtin's vision: while it may mark *Journey* as demanding of respect, it also allows for readers' responses. Referencing a myth that exists in multiple forms means that readers can choose whether they agree with this view of creation. This destabilizes the authority that Bakhtin believes tradition holds over literature. The opportunity for dissent offered in the myth of Pan Gu makes the outset of *Journey*, though still wrapped up in tradition, more accessible than Bakhtin's analysis supposes.

⁷ Anthony C. Yu's translation of *Journey to the West* (hereafter abbreviated as *JTW*) comprises four volumes, so citations from the novel will be in the form of the volume number followed by the page number.

The birth of Wukong, the marvelous monkey whose story occupies much of our text, is a scene also associated with tradition in its occurrence at the beginning of the universe. Wukong's birth comes right after the narrative of the creation of the universe. This juxtaposition gives the impression that his birth happened early in the history of the universe. Wukong is born from out of an immortal, divine stone: "since the creation of the world, it had been nourished for a long period by the seeds of Earth and Heaven, until, quickened by divine inspiration, it became pregnant with a divine embryo" (1: 101). Wukong's birth from a stone that is as old as the world associates him with an era of "firsts" and formation. This is a period of time so distant from our own as to be inaccessible to us and is linked to tradition in a way that imbues it with reverence and sanctity. In this sense, the story of Wukong's birth occurs in a time associated with the foundations of society, which renders it out of reach of our time and awareness. This is reminiscent of the epic's distant past: it is an era so far from our own that it eschews any critical interaction. The depiction of Wukong's birth, one of the first scenes of *Journey*, exists outside the zone of our contact. This serves a similar function as the reference to the Pan Gu myth at the beginning of the story, though the latter is less established in tradition.

In addition to description, the composition of the universe makes it unfamiliar. Though this difference is not part of Bakhtin's vision, the ways it obscures the story are significant. This is first demonstrated through a divergent construction of the Earth. In *Journey*, the division of the world accords with an Indian Buddhist worldview, which consists of "the East Purvavideha Continent, the West Aparagodaniya Continent, the South Jambudvipa Continent, and the North Uttarakuru Continent" (100). The Jambudvipa continent corresponds to the human world: real historical figures such as Emperor Taizong of the Tang dynasty, his minister Wei Zheng, and Xuanzang the scripture pilgrim, all reside here. The other continents, which are more nebulously depicted in the story, are home to magical creatures in the Buddhist tradition (Tayé 113). For instance, Wukong's magical

birth and his home, the supernaturally serene Flower Fruit Mountain, are located in the East Purvavideha continent, and Wukong's training with Subhodi takes place at the West Aparagodaniya continent.

Although the Jambudvipa continent is portrayed as the human world, it is not identical to the one with which we are familiar. Among the many qualities that distinguish Jambudvipa from our world, perhaps the most blatant is the presence of magical creatures, some of whom are able to interact with humans. One obvious example is the story's central figure, Wukong, a monkey who masquerades as a human convincingly and communicates freely with Tripitaka. Even less magically-robust creatures such as Eight Rules and Sha Monk are able to interact with the humans they come across. In addition to this opportunity for interaction, there are demons and monster-spirits residing on Jambudvipa. The existence of such beings is no secret; people in the story are aware of them and regard them as commonplace. For instance, when Wukong subdues the monster-spirit that has usurped the throne of the Black Rooster King, the subjects of the kingdom simply "lined up in rows to bow and express their thanks" (2: 207) without expressing any shock at discovering a supernatural creature living among them. In a separate instance in the Mr. Gao Village, Old Gao and his wife are distraught that a monster-spirit has kidnapped their daughter, but they do not seem concerned by the presence of the monster itself. Rather ironically, Old Gao is uneasy with the impact of a monster in his family on his social life. He complains, "my daughter having a monster as her spouse can hardly be a lasting arrangement. First, my family's reputation is ruined, and second, I don't even have any in-laws with whom we can be friends" (1: 370). Such a reaction underscores the ways in which the lives of those in Jambudvipa are disparate from ours on Earth.

The coexistence of humans and magical creatures casts Jambudvipa as dissimilar from our world; this renders the realm of *Journey* unquestionably divergent from ours and means that we can not map the story onto our reality. The normalcy with which supernatural beings exist alongside

humans displaces *Journey* from our plane of experience. This is a form of alienation that is not explicitly outlined by Bakhtin but is similar to his vision of the absolute past, whose dissimilarity from reality makes it remote. The human world of *Journey* is incompatible with our own, making the events in it incongruous with our reality and outside the frame of our comprehension.

Another way in which the story conveys an unfamiliar depiction of the world is through its representation of the accessibility of spiritual realms from the Earth. Heaven and Hell can be easily visited from the Earth, as is demonstrated by Wukong's frequent trips between realms: while causing calamity in Heaven, he frequently commutes between Heaven and Earth through his cloud somersault. After consuming all the wine at the Festival of the Immortal Peaches, he makes a quick escape back home: "he ran out of the Tushita Palace and left by the West Heaven Gate. Lowering the direction of his cloud, he returned to Flower Fruit Mountain" (1: 166). Wukong's capacity to move between the Earth and immortal realms by the magic of his cloud-somersault attests to the accessibility of these worlds from the Earth. Another consequence of this is that the deities frequently visit the Earth and its inhabitants: Guanyin, for example, goes to the Earth to monitor the pilgrimage, recruiting Tripitaka for the journey (1. 284) and reigning in monster-spirits such as Red Boy to aid the pilgrims' progress (1. 365). Guanyin is not the only deity capable of this: when Wukong receives an official appointment from the immortal rulers, the Gold Star of Venus "went out of the South Heaven Gate, lowered the direction of his hallowed cloud, and headed straight for Flower Fruit Mountain" to give it to him (1: 144). The ease with which both Wukong and the celestial rulers pass between Heaven and the Earth is quite different from readers' experiences.

This convenience does not solely belong to magical creatures: humans can also move between realms. For example, Liu Quan volunteers to sacrifice himself so that he can go down to the Underworld on behalf of Taizong. Once there, he reunites with his wife, who previously had committed suicide. To repay Liu Quan for his sacrifice, King Yama decides to send Liu Quan and

his wife, back to Earth, and they return to their lives as normal (1: 272). While this episode is regarded as a miracle within the story, the possibility that it could happen at all substantiates the notion that the world in *Journey* is vastly different from our own. This reflects how the spiritual realms are accessible more than logistically: the actions that send humans to these realms are also reversible. This reflects the ways in which the boundary between Heaven and Earth is more fluid than it is in our world. The division between mortal and spiritual realms is an essential part of our world, and the fact that the story presents a different relationship creates a fundamental distinction between the universe of the story and that of our reality that makes us less able to engage with it.

Further indication of the closeness between the earthly and spiritual realms is their directional correspondence: the story positions Heaven above and Hell below the Earth, almost as if they are satellites of it. This positioning is referenced throughout the novel, such as when Guanyin instructs Disciple Hui'an to "leave Heaven at once, go down to Flower-Fruit Mountain, and inquire into the military situation" (1. 175) and when the Region of Darkness is described as "the nether region proper to Earth" (1. 142). This structure is quite different from our experience of the universe, in which spiritual realms are distant from the material world in ways that are not merely physical, and do not have a locational relation to it. The positioning of these worlds in physical proximity to our own is a portrayal of a universe distinct from our own. While one purpose of such a depiction might be to illustrate that pursuing heavenly aims and achieving divine qualities, such as enlightenment and immortality, are achievable, in doing so it makes *Journey to the West* less accessible. The proximity of the Earth to spiritual realms in *Journey to the West* renders the background of the story fundamentally strange, making the story less understandable in terms of readers' reality.

Several features of *Journey* coalesce to portray a universe that is very different from that of readers. First, early scenes of the story are described in reference to Chinese mythology, tying it to tradition and making it detached from our world. Second, the world of the story is cast as different

from ours, which makes for a setting that is difficult to relate to: we cannot understand the narrative in terms of our own experience because we cannot situate it within our known world. This is evocative of Bakhtin's view of the epic as being located in an impenetrable world that is isolated from our contact. The universe depicted in *Journey* is fundamentally different from our own; while it does not seem to be a world of the past as in the epic, it is divergent to the extent that we can not place ourselves in it, just as we can not do so while reading the epic. Bakhtin comments that a temporal disconnect prevents our contact with the epic, in that we can not rework the story to be appropriate for our context. This seems to hold true for cosmic differences as well: it is difficult to resolve the discrepancies between the world in which *Journey* is set and our own, which makes the story irretrievably distant and difficult to relate to our lives.

Section IV: Parts versus Whole

Next, in his outline of the epic Bakhtin holds that the completeness and finality created by epic distance eliminate the necessity for a complete plotline; the anticipation for "what will come next" in the story is nonexistent. Because of this, any excerpt of the story can stand for the epic in its entirety; one can start and finish reading the epic at any point and get a grasp of the full story. The fragmentation of *Journey* is a bit more complicated than that of Bakhtin's epic. In some ways, the chapters pertaining to the journey can be taken as self-contained representations of the entire pilgrimage; each chapter functions as an "episode" in which Wukong subdues deviant monsters and reaffirms to both Tripitaka and readers the importance of self-discipline and devotion to Buddhist teachings. In this way, each chapter has its own fully-developed plotline that presents the ideas that form the overall message of the journey. To this end, every chapter can be taken as a microcosm of the story, as exists in the epic.

Despite the availability of fragments of the story, its overarching message is lost when chapters are taken in isolation from one another. Wukong's development from a "reckless ape" (1: 118) into a wise, devout Buddha is a gradual and very subtle process, yet an immensely consequential one in that it portrays how he transforms spiritually by devoting himself to Buddhist scripture. This change is hardly noticeable from chapter to chapter, but over the course of the story his growing adherence to the Heart Sutra,⁸ ability to discern good from evil, and embodiment of Buddhist teachings make him a model of spiritual maturity and religious wisdom. Wukong's transformation conveys the attainability of spiritual transformation, reflecting how the story extends beyond itself to speak to its audience. Taking *Journey* only in parts does offer some meaning, but the overarching moral of the story is lost unless it is read in full. To this end, it does not fully meet the requirements of the epic.

Section V: Humor and Extraliterary genres

According to Bakhtin, the presence of humor in a story destroys the distance between a story and its audience. In contrast to the fear and piety of the epic, in the novel "all comic creativity works in a zone of maximal proximity" (23), which is to say that the comedic aspects of the novel bring its story up close and allow for our creative and intimate contact with it. Humor manifests in a number of different ways in *Journey* that could comprise an entirely separate thesis; that being said, it is worthwhile to briefly consider some amusing aspects of the story. While *Journey* might not be laugh-out-loud funny, its absurdity and ridiculousness draw readers into it and are entertaining. The story's basic premise—that a monkey leads a Buddhist monk, pig, and water buffalo on a sacred

⁸ The Heart Sutra focuses on relinquishing attachment to material forms, including sensory ties: "...form is no different from emptiness, emptiness no different from form; form is emptiness, and emptiness is form. Of sensations, perceptions, volition, and consciousness, the same is also true" (1: 390).

pilgrimage while himself becoming wise in Buddhist teachings and attaining Buddhahood—is quite absurd. Also, two characters, Eight Rules and Wukong, provide comic relief in the story, lessening its formality and providing entertainment to readers.

Much of the comic relief and farcical parts of the story are provided by Eight Rules. Eight Rules is a demon who has the appearance of a pig and whose dearest desires are to eat as much as he wants and settle into a domestic life. Eight Rules's insatiable appetite forms the basis of amusement in the story, such as when the pilgrims are at a ceremonial banquet and he comments to Wukong, "Elder Brother, I'll leave the fruits to you, but you must let us enjoy rice, soup, and the rest" and then "without regard for good or ill, [he] attacked the foodstuff madly and ate it up in no time at all" (3. 60). When the pilgrims find themselves in the Women State in the Western Liang and the queen commands that Xuanzang become her live-in husband, Eight Rules exclaims, "My master happens to be an arhat who has happened to attain The Way after a long process of cultivation.... Send them off to the West. Let me stay here to be the live-in husband" (3. 51). The fact that a Buddhist disciple on heavenly-ordained scripture pilgrimage holds such high concern for domesticity lessens the formality and seriousness of the story.

Wukong also provides some comic relief from the seriousness and perilousness of the pilgrimage. His pre-battle trash talk, at once autobiographical and pugnacious, occurs in nearly every encounter he has with a demon: for example, he prefaces his fight with the monster of Black Wind Mountain with the words,

So you don't recognize your venerable grandfather? He is the disciple of the Master of the Law, Tripitaka, who happens to be the brother of the Throne in the Great Tang Nation. My surname is Sun, and my given name is Wukong Pilgrim. If I tell you my abilities, you'll be frightened out of your wits and die right on the spot! (1. 352)

The trash talk in the novel demonstrates one of the ways in which *Journey* strives to be entertaining.

These small speeches, while representing only a part of Wukong's character, are not vital to the plot

or overarching structure of the story. They exist, and are repeated so many times, for readers' entertainment. This shows one way that the story considers its readers, a form of correspondence between story and audience that is possible in Bakhtin's novel. This also demonstrates the modernity of the story, in that there are parts of it we still find amusing many years after its writing. Rather than existing without regard to its readers as the epic does, the story considers their feelings while reading the story. Also, the fact that the humor in *Journey* remains such today indicates another novelistic feature—its adaptation to varying temporalities. The fact that we can regard the novel as humorous so many years after its writing means that it is a story that is not merely a relic of its own time, but is suitable for a variety of eras and audiences. Humorous aspects of the novel demonstrate its timeliness and openness to readers, which indicates its novelistic character.

Similar to the novel's employment of extraliterary genres, *Journey* also diversifies its prose, inserting poems, sutras, and government reports within it. Bakhtin sees novelistic language as another key aspect of the novel's proximity and lifelikeness. *Journey* employs several forms of extraliterary genres, one of which is brief poems. These often describe landscapes or battles and draw readers' attention to certain details of a scene, thereby enhancing its detail and vivacity and helping readers clearly envision what is being described. The description of Wukong's home provides an example of the lushness of these poems and their inviting readers' interest:

*On the southwest side pile up tall plateaus;
From the Eastern Sea arise soaring peaks.
There are crimson ridges and portentous rocks,
Precipitous cliffs and prodigious peaks (1. 101).*

Such poems can be regarded as evidence of the story's novelistic nature. In the introduction to his translation of *Journey*, Anthony Yu comments that these poems "appeal directly to the reader's emotions, they arouse delight or horror; but the feelings awakened by the landscape are not allowed to seep away like vague romantic dreams" (1. 39). This form of extraliterary genre serves to depict the story with realism and exactness that grants the reader a clearer understanding of it. This, like

humor, demonstrates one of the ways in which *Journey* considers its readers and their experiences reading the story.

The comedic aspects of the story, most frequently provided by Eight Rules and Wukong, offer some relief from an otherwise serious and hazardous journey and supports the notion that the story is appropriate for the time of its reader, despite being written centuries ago. In addition, the extraliterary genres in *Journey*, in particular its short poems, embellish the text and draw readers closer to it by magnifying details and helping them more clearly picture the story. Both of these qualities attest to the story's consideration for its readers: its humor remains relevant despite temporal difference and shows concern for the reader, and it includes descriptions that improve the reader's understanding of the story. Such reader-oriented qualities indicate *Journey's* novelistic nature, in that it is adaptable and allows for contact with its readers.

Section VI: Conclusion

Journey to the West complicates Bakhtin's definitions of novel and epic by simultaneously embodying epic and novelistic qualities, and, in spite of some degree of detachment, establishes contact with its readers. Although the story's foundation in a valorized past and situation in an unfamiliar and fantastical world are reminiscent of Bakhtin's impenetrable and remote epic, the story's novelistic elements are fundamentally at odds with the epic's distanced and uncommunicative nature. The story's humor, poetic inserts, and necessity for completeness of plot allow readers to view it critically and modify it to fit their reality and perspectives. In this way, while the story does not wholly match Bakhtin's definition of the novel, its adaptability and familiarity allow for readers to engage with it in a way that shatters epic distance and makes the story more similar to the novel. The ways in which *Journey* eschews Bakhtin's constructed binary between epic and novel highlights how this theory can be useful to understanding the ways in which certain qualities of heroic

literature are more or less impactful in relating to readers, but does not perfectly apply to all such stories. It is important to consider the ways in which individual heroic stories relate to readers rather than relying on generalizing theory.

Although his analysis of literary developments takes thousands of years of Western literature into account, Bakhtin's distinctions between the epic and the novel are not all-encompassing; that is, they do not take all forms of stories into account. It is possible that heroic literature can embody both genres and straddle the boundary between two types of literature. *Journey to the West* exemplifies this; its simultaneous possession of epic distance and novelistic interactions with its readers reflects how, differing from Bakhtin's view, epic and novel are not always distinct genres. Because much early literary criticism focuses solely on Western literature, this literary tradition is frequently taken as a universal model for all genres of writing. But when we look at equally rich, non-Western stories such as *Journey*, we must question the validities of dichotomies set out in Western-centric criticism, such as those between epic and novel established by Bakhtin. A diversity of literary perspectives can only enhance our understanding of differing forms of literature and the ways in which they communicate with their audiences.

Chapter II: The Boundaries of the Bildungsroman

Introduction

Bakhtin's discussion of the disparity between epic and novelistic literature extends past the narrative structure of these two genres to consider the characters residing in each. The heroes of epic and novelistic literature are products of their respective genres, and as a result are depicted disparately. Many characters of Western literature that we might regard as "heroes"—Achilles, Hector, Odysseus—are situated in epic stories. The characterization of the epic hero parallels the epic's temporal construction: just as the absolute past is fully formed and sealed off, the epic hero is a final, distanced image. His⁹ personality and sense of self are fully developed by the time he appears in the story: Bakhtin comments, "he has already become everything he can become, and he could become only that which he has already become" (34). An outcome of this completeness is the externalization and indisputability of his personality: how he views himself is exactly how other characters, the narrator, and the audience view him (34).

Bakhtin's notion of the epic hero is useful for formulating a view of the hero of *Journey to the West*. This novel, unlike Bakhtin's epic, is a story whose accessibility and applicability to its readers' reality negates epic detachment. Likewise, the central character and hero¹⁰ of the story, Sun Wukong, is portrayed far differently from the complete and incontrovertible epic hero: in fact, much of the novel is concerned with his transformation from an immature monkey into a spiritually devout Buddha. Wukong's process of confronting his flaws and eliminating the negative aspects of himself

⁹ I will use only "he" to refer to the hero because in both Western and Chinese literature it is overwhelmingly the case that the hero is male.

¹⁰ Though some critics name Tripitaka the hero of *Journey to the West*, given the weight the novel grants to the importance of emptiness of form and to religious understanding, Tripitaka's dogmatic and narrow-minded practice of religion, as well as his material attachments, disqualify him from the position of hero.

is clear to readers and grants him a dimensionality that is missing among flat, unchanging epic heroes. In this way, his ability for transformation and Buddhahood in spite of his being a flawed character conveys the attainability and accessibility of spiritual refinement.

In this chapter, I will examine the significance of Wukong's personal journey to the plot of *Journey* and its message regarding the importance and access of religious self-cultivation.¹¹ I will explore the stages of Wukong's maturation process according to the structure of the Bildungsroman, a device common to Western coming-of-age novels. Despite the fact that Wukong's odyssey does not perfectly fit into this framework, the Bildungsroman, in breaking down the coming-of-age into distinct stages, is useful for taking a clear-cut view of a character's development. Understanding the ways in which his journey to Buddhahood follows and diverges from this literary framing will help us better understand the features of his growth process and its implications for its audience.

Section I: Defining the Bildungsroman and its significance

Before discussing the means by which the Bildungsroman provides insight into the monkey's maturation, it is useful to define the parts of this framework. Chang Ching-Erh argues that we view Wukong's growth as a Bildungsroman. She outlines this structure as being composed of three stages: "separation, transformation, and return" (547). In the first phase, the protagonist is removed from the familiarity of his home environment and must venture out into the world on some kind of search. Without the security and structure of a familiar environment, the protagonist realizes his or her immaturity and flawed characteristics. In the second, the transformation stage, the protagonist, while continuing on this search, must confront these characteristics. In doing so, the protagonist

¹¹ "Self-cultivation" as it is used in the novel is defined as the closest English translation of *xinyang* (修養), which combines *xiu* (修) (embellish, repair, study, trim, build) with *yang* (養) (support, raise, acquire, heal, recuperate). "Self-cultivation" as it is used in English does not carry quite the same weight and significance as (修養), but is the best approximation I can find.

experiences an epiphany, a sudden burst of insight that causes him to formulate a new understanding of himself and his search. The epiphany causes the protagonist's perspective and behavior to change, and through this he often becomes more mature, what we might consider "grown up". In the final phase, the protagonist goes back home, where his psychological development is made all the more clear in relation to the environment of his genesis. This kind of story frequently ends on a hopeful note, stemming from the protagonist's completing his search as well as refining his own state of mind.

In Wukong's odyssey of personal growth, he transforms from a self-interested, violent monkey into a cultivated Buddhist priest committed to spreading the teachings of Buddhism. Chang states "the novel is a Bildungsroman, one that deals with the personality development of a youth as he grows up" (542) and proposes that we frame Wukong's development process in such a way to delineate the process of his spiritual and physical maturation. This is helpful to understanding his maturation in two ways. First, it offers a system through which we can more clearly delineate the stages of change that he experiences. Second, this structure depicts Wukong's personal transformation as central to the novel and emphasizes its impact on the scripture pilgrimage and his becoming a devout, benevolent being. Because his self-cultivation underlines qualities that the novel upholds and provides an example of Buddhist enlightenment for its readership, positioning his transformation as central is appropriate. His demonstrated understanding of Buddhist doctrine and the ways in which these teachings influence his behavior provide evidence to show that much of Wukong's transformation can be credited to these teachings.

On the journey, he shows his adherence to Buddhist doctrine in two primary ways. First, he frequently reminds the other pilgrims, most often Tripitaka, of the messages of the sutras, which encourages them to continue on the journey and reminds them of the proper ways to act. Second, he becomes increasingly self-disciplined, which is enabled by the Bodhisattva Guanyin and is a trait

praised by Buddhist teachings. These qualities make Wukong the de facto leader of the pilgrimage as he helps the others thwart attacks from greedy monster-spirits and remain optimistic throughout the fourteen-year journey. This reflects the importance that his adherence to scriptures has for the success of the journey. Wukong shows the power and desirability of Buddhist virtue; the novel upholds his process of self cultivation as a model on which readers can base their own spiritual growth. Viewing this process as a Bildungsroman structure emphasizes the centrality of his enlightenment to the story's plot.

Section II: Physical transformation in the mini coming-of-age

Wukong's coming-of-age plot begins with his physical refinement in Subhodi's cave and continues with his spiritual cultivation, which occurs over the course of the scripture pilgrimage. My consideration of Wukong's physical transformation consists of two parts: first, a discussion of Wukong's early life; second, a focus on his time in Subhodi's cave. Though the initial scenes of the novel precede the coming-of-age plot, their echoes throughout the story make them a worthwhile starting point from which to discuss his development. Scenes from the early years of Wukong's life describe the divine goodness within him and the struggle between his moral and perverse sides, personal qualities that endure throughout his transformations. The light that these scenes shed on Wukong's personality can provide insight into his internal state later in the journey. In addition, analyzing Wukong's physical alteration under Subhodi elucidates how this transformation testifies to his lack of spiritual maturation and the necessity of continued development.

The scene of Wukong's birth highlights his divine qualities and is a useful one from which to begin our analysis of his growth because it underlines his inborn spiritual power and its conflict with his morality, a tension that recurs throughout the story. His birth is preceded by an outline of the formation of the universe according to Chinese traditions: "the ethereal and the light rose up to

form the sun, the moon, the stars and the Heavenly bodies,” the Earth and all things growing were formed, and “humans, beasts, and fowls came into being” (1. 100). Through its references to Chinese cosmology, Wukong’s birth reveals the magnitude of his Heaven-endowed abilities. The association of a character with the creation of the universe is not unique to *Journey*, but is a motif common among the literature of gods and demons, or *shenmo xiaoshuo* (神魔小說).¹² Evelyn Liu explains that “in general, the novels/novellas of gods and demons may begin... by recounting the myths of gods creating or saving the world so as to create a climate for the god’s later activities in the celestial realm” (140). The associations that the outset of Wukong’s narrative draws between himself and magical creatures of Chinese folklore further indicates the greatness of his powers.

Wukong’s actual birth provides further evidence of his inborn divinity. He is born out of a stone whose anatomy corresponds to the structure of Heaven and the Earth¹³ and “had been nourished for a long period by the seeds of Heaven and Earth and by the essences of the sun and the moon, until, quickened by divine inspiration, it became pregnant with a divine embryo” (1. 101). The stone’s celestial elements as well as its becoming pregnant out of “divine inspiration” further emphasizes the heavenly factors that bring about Wukong’s formation. Wukong splits open the stone and emerges from it as beams of light shoot from his eyes and shine up to Heaven, demonstrating his inheritance of the rock’s primordial energy and spirit.

¹² Shenmo xiaoshuo(神魔小說), or God and demons fiction, is a subgenre of Chinese fiction that focuses on creatures of Chinese mythology. The term was coined by writer and historian Lu Xun in the Twentieth century. Due to its narrative of celestial and religious figures, *Journey to the West* is commonly viewed as one of the earliest examples of this type of literature (Wang 201).

¹³ “There was on top of that very mountain an immortal stone, which measured thirty-six feet and five inches in height and twenty-four feet in circumference. The height of thirty-six feet and five inches corresponded to the three hundred and sixty-five cyclical degrees, while the circumference of twenty-four feet corresponded to the twenty-four solar terms of the calendar. On the stone were also nine perforations and eight holes, which corresponded to the Palaces of the Nine Constellations and the Eight Trigrams” (1. 101).

Despite the divine nature of Wukong's birth, it soon becomes clear that he is bound and weakened by his physical form. After the light from his eyes disrupts Heaven, two heavenly marshals look down at him and declare, "now that he is taking some food and drink, the light is about to grow dim" (1. 102). Once Wukong establishes a connection with the mortal world and fulfills his bodily needs by consuming food, the emblem of his divine power is extinguished; his mortality disrupts his numinous energy, as symbolized by the extinguishing of the beams. This is the first instance of the clash between Wukong's physical form and his internal refinement that will recur throughout the story: for much of his journey, his fixation on his physical strength and ability, though helpful in battle, stands in the way of the purification of his spirit.

According to the Bildungsroman structure, the first step in the coming-of-age process is the protagonist's separation from his home environment. In *Journey*, Wukong does not experience a single, momentous separation from his sphere of familiarity. Rather, he leaves Flower-Fruit Mountain several times, each time in search of a method of attaining immortality. That being said, his first departure from home that brings him into Subhodi's cave is highly significant to his physical refinement in that it teaches him Daoist methods of bodily cultivation. As the king of the monkeys, Wukong finds the object of his search: "he begins to confront the problem of death, a confrontation which creates a psychological disproportion" (Chang 548). Wukong reflects, "old age and physical decay in the future will disclose the secret sovereignty of Yama, King of the Underworld. If we die, shall we not have lived in vain, not being able to rank forever among the Heavenly beings?" (1. 107). In search of immortality, Wukong ventures to the western Aparagodaniya continent, where he meets the Patriarch Subhodi. Here, Wukong begins his physical transformation: he becomes Subhodi's Daoist disciple and learns the Cloud Somersault, the art of escaping calamities brought down by Heaven. The patriarch also teaches him the Art of the Earthly Multitude, which involves 72 bodily transformations. The techniques that Wukong acquires through Daoist study empower

him by heightening his martial skills through body transformations and helping him escape earthly calamities that would otherwise kill him. It is worth noting that although these techniques allow him to *escape* death, they do not make him immune to it. Unlike the Heavenly immortals, Wukong can still be killed; he just has the means to defend himself against it. Subhodi's tutelage commences Wukong's immense physical transformation and steels him against battle opponents and death.

Despite the significant protections it grants him, Wukong's physical refinement, through arming him with the ability to rebel against powerful beings, highlights the inadequacy of physical change for thorough transformation. Although he acquires immense physical abilities through his training with Subhodi, Wukong's spiritual development is very much lacking. He is arrogant and fixated on his physical form to the detriment of his spiritual awareness: for example, he informs Subhodi's other disciples of his mastery of shape shifting, bragging to them, "Owing to my master's instruction in the first place and my diligence day and night in the second, I have fully mastered the several matters!" (1. 124). He then shows off and performs his transformations for the disciples, shape shifting into a pine tree according to their command. Subhodi's reaction to this behavior verifies its pridefulness and uncouthness: he immediately condemns Wukong and expels him from his cave, calling him a "wretched monkey" (1. 125). Subhodi predicts that Wukong will soon fall into sin, telling him, "Once you leave, you're bound to end up evildoing" (1. 125). Wukong's behavior and Subhodi's response reveal that despite the cultivation of Wukong's physical form, his internal self remains unrefined—in fact, his newly developed abilities provide new outlets for displaying his immaturity. Wukong's expulsion from Subhodi's cave and condemnation by the Patriarch makes it clear that his external transformation does not mean he is fully transformed—he must refine his internal form in order to complete his self-cultivation and achieve immortality.

Section III: A Problematic Return

Given his altered appearance and name, Wukong's return to Flower Fruit Mountain after Subhodi's banishment appears to be the "return" part of this first coming-of-age. On the one hand, Wukong's looks are now different than those of his fellow simians: he appears "bare-headed, wears a red robe with a yellow sash, and has a pair of black boots on" (1. 129). He is conscious of his physical transition too: when he arrives at Flower-Fruit Mountain, he reflects, "I left weighed down by bones of mortal stock. / The Dao attained makes light both body and frame" (1. 125). His appellation has changed as well; whereas before he was simply the Monkey King, is now Sun Wukong, named by Subhodi. On the other hand, despite Wukong's external changes, it soon becomes clear that his internal self has not undergone much alteration. In fact, as we will see, his physical transformation arms him with the ability to be more antagonistic and combative, confirming Subhodi's prediction that he will engage in lawlessness and sin. The intensification of his miscreant behavior demonstrates the conflict between his physical and spiritual forms: his newfound strength and ability grant him new opportunities to misbehave and erode his obedience to authority and moral tenets. He uses his abilities to try and overthrow dominant power structures, such as King Yama and the Jade Emperor, in an attempt to thwart external control factors and have complete command of his life.

Wukong's abuse of his physical cultivation reflects an undeveloped spirit; in this sense, his process of journeying to Subhodi's cave, physically transforming, and returning home is more of a mini coming-of-age rather than a full-fledged journey because it does not encapsulate his complete transformation into a devout and enlightened being. While he does cultivate his physical form, his inner self remains immature by the time he returns home. This small-scale journey precedes his spiritual refinement and shows the necessity that he cultivate his inner self just as he does his physicality.

Several episodes after this initial homecoming demonstrate Wukong's lack of spiritual maturity as he uses his newfound strength and shape shifting abilities to challenge powerful immortals and universal structures in an attempt to exert control over his existence. First, when is summoned to the Underworld and finds out that his time on Earth has ended, Wukong summarily rejects the summons, stating, "I, old Monkey himself, have transcended the Three Regions and the Five Phases, hence I am no longer under Yama's jurisdiction" (1. 140). Threatening to "give a drubbing" to the Ten Kings of the Underworld, Wukong seizes "the ledger on monkeys and crossed out all the names he could find in it. Throwing down the ledger, he said, "That ends the account! Now I'm truly not your subject" (1. 141). Rather than submitting to Yama's authority to define his mortal life, Wukong rejects the external forces that wield power over him. This instance with King Yama, as well as another in which Wukong challenges the authority of the Dragon Kings of the Four Seas, demonstrates the ways in which Wukong attempts to throw off dominating authorities and universal laws and establish sovereignty over his own life. His rejection of these forces reflects his own arrogance and disrespect for authority.

Second, when he demands official recognition from the immortals in Heaven, Wukong attempts both to assert complete sovereignty over his life and seek validation of his power from beings who influence his life on Earth. When he is named a "BanHorsePlague" and put in charge of the horses, the monkey is satisfied; he "considers himself as having become formally embedded in the heavenly hierarchy, the 'society of adults'" (Chang 553). He sees himself as joining the ranks of the immortals in Heaven, which solidifies his liberation from external forces of control. Consequently, once he discovers that his official title is meaningless and he has not actually been inducted into the society of immortals, he is humiliated: he views this as a lack of recognition of his power. Gnashing his teeth and kicking over his imperial desk, he fights his way out of Heaven and wages battle with the celestial army in protest (1. 141). Confronting one of the imperial commanders

assigned to subdue him, Wukong says, “go back to Heaven quickly and inform the Jade Emperor that he has no regard for talent” (1. 153), reflecting his desire for the celestial deities’ validation. This instance highlights Wukong’s belief that physical might is sufficient for becoming a heavenly immortal: he does not realize the importance of spiritual cultivation. This failure to see the value of internal virtue as well as his brash reaction upon not receiving confirmation of his abilities speaks to his lack of spiritual refinement.

Later, Wukong returns to Heaven demanding that he be called the “Great Sage, Equal to Heaven”, a name that shows he still wants to be on equal footing with the “adults” in Heaven. His wish is granted and he again enters into what seems is adult life: “he was free and content to tour the mansions and meet friends, to make new acquaintances and form new alliances at his leisure” (1. 160). However, his lack of maturity shines through his seemingly advanced station once again: when he discovers he has not been invited to the Festival of the Immortal Peaches with the other immortals, he stages another rebellion. He uses magic to induce all the festival guests into sleep and drinks all of their divine wine (1. 165). He sneaks into Laozi’s chamber and steals his divine elixir. Similar to his return home after Subhodi’s expulsion, Wukong’s two attempts to become a heavenly immortal are both false “returns” in the coming-of-age cycle. Wukong believes his residence among the heavenly immortals shows Heaven’s recognition of his great power and autonomy. However, his violent, brutish response makes it clear that he does not actually possess the self-cultivation that would put him among the ranks of the immortals in Heaven.

Further, when celestial rulers try to subdue the monkey, his desire to assert his own power only intensifies and he stakes a claim to the Jade Emperor’s throne. Wukong recites a poem that says, “In Divine Mists Hall none should long reside... if might is honor, let them yield to me. / He only is hero who dares to fight and win!” (1. 194). This indicates his view that honor and heroism

depend entirely on battle ability and physical strength. His claim to the throne provides further evidence of his narrow perspective:

I know seventy-two transformations and a life that does not grow old through ten thousand kalpas. I know also to cloud somersault, and one leap will take me one hundred and eight thousand miles. Why can't I sit on the heavenly throne? (1. 195).

It is evident that Wukong believes that his physical abilities are enough to grant him supreme power.

He disregards the millennia of spiritual refinement and ritual that the Jade Emperor has undergone to ascend to his role and claims that his shape shifting and soaring techniques are sufficient to allow him to sit on the throne. Wukong's error is made obvious when Tathagata poses a challenge to him: if Wukong can somersault free of Tathagata's palm, he has proven his abilities and may sit on the Jade Emperor's throne. Wukong responds, "What a fool this Tathagata is! A single somersault of mine can carry old Monkey one hundred and eight thousand miles, yet his palm is not even one foot across. How could I possibly not jump clear of it?" (1. 194). However, the monkey can not overcome Tathagata's strength and can not somersault out of his palm, revealing that Wukong's powers do not match those of supreme deities. This demonstrates the limits of physical capabilities: Wukong's strength is not enough to overthrow the celestial rulers or allow him to be equal to the immortals up in Heaven. It is clear from this that Wukong must possess something more in order to truly join the immortal ranks and gain self-sovereignty.

Wukong's actions in the Underworld and in Heaven indicate his uneven rates of growth: while externally he has undergone rapid advancement, his spiritual maturity remains undeveloped. He refuses to submit to King Yama and the Jade Emperor and uses physical force to try and disrupt their control over him. Given the reverence with which the story portrays these rulers, Wukong's defying higher powers and causing destruction in Heaven demonstrates his drawing away from virtue. This demonstrates how his physicality is at odds with his spiritual refinement, which is first indicated in the scene of his birth when his consumption of food extinguishes the beams of light in his eyes. This symbol of his inner divinity can not exist alongside his corporeal needs just as his

increased strength gives way to his religious perversion. This conflict will persist for much of his journey and supports the notion that Wukong's journey to Subhodi's cave is merely a part of his transformation and that he must develop his mind to subdue his corporeal strength.

Wukong's transgressions underline his position as a hero who has been suddenly armed with immense strength and skill without the prudence to restrain his newfound abilities. His physical transformation allows him to win battles against monsters, fly all over the world, and visit Heaven. However, he does not learn to control these powers. As a result of this lack of understanding, the powers that were taught to him for the purpose of heightening his Daoist understanding and evading death instead make him more aggressive, demanding, and self-absorbed. His brashness indicates the necessity of developing self-discipline in order for him to tame his physicality and become a hero that is also virtuous.

Section IV: Rewards for Rebellion?

It is important to note that Wukong's contumaciousness and physical aggression are often rewarding. We will discuss how as part of, or perhaps in spite of, his rebelliousness, he gains martial defense, a body that is impervious to injury, and an extended lifetime. In essence, he is made a hardier and stronger fighter because of his transgressions. It is worth considering what such a skewed reward system might indicate about the moral uprightness of Heaven and the extent to which Wukong can be considered a heroic character, and one whose development others should emulate.

Despite the deities' condemnation, Wukong's bad behavior on Earth and in Heaven is ultimately advantageous for him in that it heightens his defenses and physical strength. For example, after he intimidates the Dragon Kings of the Four Seas and demand they arm him for battle, he acquires the Compliant Golden-Hooped Rod, a powerful and malleable weapon that helps him

defeat his enemies in battle. Later, when he crosses out his name in King Yama's ledger, which is condemned by the celestial deities, he is able to avoid death. His dispute of his position of "BanHorsePlague" results in the Jade Emperor granting him the official title "Great Sage, Equal to Heaven", a considerable promotion. Later, his consumption of magical peaches stolen from the Festival of the Immortal Peaches extends his lifetime many years. Further, when he drinks the banquet's divine wine and Laozi's immortal elixir, these substances fuse with the Immortal Peaches and become "refined in his stomach by the Samadhi fire to form a single solid mass. The union with his constitution gave him a diamond body, which can not be destroyed" (1. 189). The benefits he accrues as a result of his transgressions are revealed when he receives punishment for his crimes: "he proves himself vulnerable neither to scimitar-slashing, nor to ax-hewing, nor to spear-stabbing, nor to sword-hacking, nor to fire-burning" (Chang 555). In spite of the deities' censure and punishment, Wukong's rebelliousness and gluttony actually strengthen him and make him impervious to injury.

But are his actions really transgressions? Is his challenge of Heaven a rebellion against the moral structure of the universe? While the immortal rulers declare his behavior is deplorable, it is not certain that what these immortals view as "right" is truly so. Wukong's dealings with the heavenly rulers reveal the bureaucracy and rigid power structure in Heaven. Its rulers are fixated on hierarchies of control and obedience to what they deem good behavior: they dismiss Wukong as a "bogus immortal" for his earthly origins and hoodwink him into thinking he has a royal post so that he will perform manual labor for them. This shows their intolerance for outsiders: though Wukong is born of a heavenly stone and possesses divine capabilities, he is excluded from the hierarchy of Heaven because he, an animal born on the Earth, does not fit into it. The immortals' attachment to hierarchy and rule goes against Buddhist doctrines of the emptiness of everything, as conveyed in the Heart Sutra. This contradiction of religious teachings by those who would seem the most devout questions the religious commitment of the rulers. The Heavenly order's exclusivity and intolerance

questions the notion of its indisputable uprightness and hints that perhaps Wukong's rebellion against this realm is within reason, further shown by the physical refinements that "reward" his actions. The depiction of Heaven as intolerant of difference and rigidly hierarchical blurs the seemingly easy distinction between right and wrong and makes formulating a straightforward judgment on the morality of Wukong's behavior difficult.

Regardless of the nature of his actions, they result in condemnation and punishment by religious authorities. Do such sanctions indicate that Wukong should not be regarded as a hero? Do they limit the extent to which his cultivation process is a model for that of others? While these are not easy questions to answer, his revolt makes it clear that he requires further cultivation; he must undergo personal growth to realize his full celestial potential and use his powers to nondestructive ends. Although Wukong's rebelliousness demonstrates his unrefined aspects, it is still a part of his journey to becoming a Buddha and scripture bearer. His is not a linear progression of growth within the transformation stage, but this does not discount the transformative power of his journey to self-cultivation. Also, this blip makes his progress more natural by showing that he is not continuously moving toward Buddhahood; just as we do in any stage of development, during his long and arduous odyssey he confronts challenges and setbacks to his development that he must overcome.

In addition, viewing such setbacks through the traditions of Chinese storytelling makes it clear that these traits do not establish Wukong as fundamentally bad. According to Lai, many Chinese folktales feature stories of two identical beings, sometimes dragons, rhinoceroses, or rivers, in combat with one another. These beings can be seen as two halves of a single entity, their battles representing the internal struggle between order and chaos within an individual. Whalen Lai comments, in his article "From Protean Ape to Handsome Saint", comments:

Regardless of whether chaos, or nature "at war with itself," is seen as a pair of rhinos or as a pair of dragons, the point of the story is the same: there are two sides or faces to nature. In the case of a battle by a river... the story is pointing out that the river

can be both good and evil. When the water flows in an orderly fashion, it is good; when the same water floods, it is evil (34).

Through this view, we can see Wukong's brashness and rebelliousness existing alongside, not in place of, what Buddhist doctrine would deem virtuous. Wukong acknowledges his own good nature when he informs Subhodi "if a man rebukes me, I am not offended; if he hits me, I am not angered.... My whole life's without ill temper" (1. 114). Wukong's personality is not monochromatically malicious; he suffers conflict between his benevolent and egotistical sides. He must undertake self cultivation to win the battle for his upstanding side and to bring these good traits to the surface. The idea that Wukong experiences an internal struggle between opposing forces of his temperament does not cast him as wholly malicious. Rather than being totally ruled by his evil nature, he faces an imbalance between it and his virtuous side. This points to the importance of internal self-cultivation to subdue the unrefined aspects of himself.

Wukong's misbehavior and the physical fortification he gains as a result of it question his position as a hero in the story and whether his cultivation process can function as a model for the transformation of others. Despite being condemned by the celestial deities, Wukong gains significant physical refinements from his rebelliousness: he receives a diamond body and the Compliant Golden-Hooped Rod. While his reward for bad behavior may seem to indicate his moral perversity, it also hints that the ethics of those who exert moral judgment in the novel, the deities in Heaven, are not necessarily faultless. Given the immortals' intolerance for outsiders and rigid attachment to structure, Wukong's disrupting them is understandable. This, combined with the immortals' own intolerance and small-mindedness, sheds doubt on the moral authorities and complicates forming judgment on Wukong's behavior. Also, though the display of his self-interest and violence exposes the negative aspects of his character, this does not necessarily destabilize his status as hero; rather,

the display indicates the conflicting sides of his personality. This highlights the importance of his forthcoming spiritual maturation to resolve the schism between his two sides.

Section V: Scripture pilgrimage and spiritual conquest

During the scripture pilgrimage, Wukong cultivates his mind and becomes a follower of Buddhism. Though it is unclear whether he goes on the pilgrimage because of self-interest or a legitimate desire to retrieve the scriptures, the spiritual cultivation he undergoes during this time is unmistakable. He undergoes a final coming-of-age cycle: his separation period, his imprisonment under the Five-Phases Mountain, ends when he joins Tripitaka on the scripture pilgrimage. As he continues on the journey, he enters the final transformation period and experiences internal refinement as exhibited through self discipline, the strengthening harmony between his internal and external aspects, confronting perverse monster spirits, and manifesting Buddhist teachings.

Before the taming of his mind begins, Wukong is pinned under the Five-Phases Mountain for five hundred years as punishment for his misbehavior in Heaven. Near the end of Wukong's imprisonment, Guanyin passes by him on her way to solicit Tripitaka to be her scripture pilgrim. Wukong implores her to select him as a disciple, claiming, "Now I know the meaning of penitence.... I entreat the Great Compassion to show me the proper path, for I am willing to practice cultivation" (1. 215). When Tripitaka passes by the Five-Phases Mountain, the monkey calls Tripitaka "Master" and asks that Tripitaka release him from the mountain so that Wukong can become his disciple. When Tripitaka frees him, Wukong immediately bows to him four times, "a gesture that shows his recognition of the worldly Master as his tutor" (Chang 558). This suggests Wukong has developed some religious conscientiousness while under the mountain. Even before he joins Tripitaka, Wukong demonstrates spiritual development that indicates his potential for further growth.

Wukong's expressed repentance of his prior conduct and willingness to serve Tripitaka signals a break from his past psyche. It is unclear, however, whether Wukong's new persona is a genuine alteration or just a strategy for freeing himself from his imprisonment and attaining immortality. It could be that Wukong realizes that if he embarks on the pilgrimage, he can curry favor with the deities that will help him enter the ranks of immortals and gain immortality. Chang holds this view, asserting that "his submission signifies neither his surrender to the ruling class nor his loyalty to the Buddhist order; on the contrary, he is in reality devoted to the implementation of a great enterprise, the pursuit of the ideals of his life" (541). Despite Wukong's questionable reasons for joining the pilgrimage, his release from under the mountain signals the advent of the transformation stage of his internal coming-of-age.

As Wukong leads Tripitaka and the other pilgrims on the journey, he proves his spiritual transformation in four ways: through overcoming physical attachments, integrating his physicality with his spiritual self, battling perverse demons, and demonstrating the teachings of the sutras. The first sign of his development, his taming his physical form, is facilitated in part by Guanyin, who gives Tripitaka a fillet to be fastened around Wukong's head. As Guanyin instructs Tripitaka, each time the monkey is disobedient Tripitaka recites a spell that tightens the fillet around the monkey's head and causes him insufferable pain. As a result of the fillet's discipline, the monkey develops the self-restraint he so evidently lacks earlier on, when his physical might undermines his capacity for pacifism and prudence.

In checking Wukong's miscreant behavior, the fillet guides him in refining his thoughts. The pain caused by his immoral actions forces him to dispel the thoughts that bring about such behavior; in this way, the training that leads to his more peaceful exterior also purifies his mind. The positive relationship between his behavior and his mind is a departure from the prior discord between these two sides: whereas before the obstinacy and egoism that his physical strength allows him detracts

from his spiritual refinement, the taming of his corporeal form precipitates his internal maturation. In this sense, the fillet helps bring Wukong's physicality and his mental state in accord with one another.

Through the fillet, Guanyin teaches Wukong the power of self-restraint, “that it is more important to tame the demon—the ‘monkey mind’—within than subdue the demons without” (Lai 55). Throughout the story, the fillet helps Wukong learn to restrain his physical desires. For example, Wukong steals silver bells from Guanyin's golden-haired wolf, but feigns ignorance and tells Guanyin, “Old Monkey doesn't know anything about bells.... I haven't seen them!” (3. 313). As soon as Guanyin threatens to use the Tight-Fillet spell on him, he is so afraid that he can only mutter, “Don't recite! Don't recite! The bells are here!” and immediately return them to her (3. 313). At the end of the journey, the removal of the fillet indicates that Wukong has successfully learned to tame his mind and control his body. Once he has received the title of Buddha Victorious in Strife, he asks Tripitaka to loosen the fillet from his head, to which the master replies, “now that you have become a Buddha, naturally it will be gone. How could it be still on your head?” (4. 383). When Wukong reaches up to his head, he realizes that the fillet has vanished without his notice. This signifies Wukong's ability to practice self-discipline and dispel physical desires on his own.

To many critics, the importance of refining one's mind is the underlying message of *Journey to the West*. On this subject, Yu Ji, an “erudite scholar” of Ming literature, writes:

Although the book is exceedingly strange... its general importance may be stated in one sentence: it is only about the retrieving or releasing one's mind¹⁴.... When the erroneous mind is aroused, it can become so demonic that there is no place that its movement and transformation cannot reach. An example of this is when the Mind Monkey calls himself a king, a sage, to disturb greatly the Celestial Palace. When this mind is retrieved, it will be the true mind, and once the true mind appears, it can

¹⁴ Anthony Yu translates “retrieving or releasing one's mind” from Yu Ji's phrase *shou fangxin eryi* (收放心而已), which combines *shou* (收), to receive or accept, with *fang* (放), to set free. There is not an English word that aptly describes 收 and 放 together, but it can thought of as taking on and refining one's mind *in order to* set it free of material or earthly cares.

extinguish demons... there is no place that its movement and transformation cannot reach (Yu, "Introduction", 29).

This establishes the significance of the fillet in guiding Wukong's transformation and uniting his physical and mental forms. It also furthers the message of the inextricability of a restrained external form from spiritual refinement.

Further evidence of Wukong's physical self-control is demonstrated by his detachment from physical desire. For instance, early on in the journey he slays six robbers that critics believe are symbols of material attachments. Francisca Bantly, in her article, "Buddhist Allegory in *Journey to the West*", writes that these articles are "blatant personifications of the six senses, which in the Buddhist system imbue phenomena with a false sense of substantiality" (515). In exterminating these figures, Wukong shows his rejection of physical ties to the world. Later, he admonishes Tripitaka for clinging to his physical senses, telling him, "though you may be on your way to seek scriptures, your mind is full of vain thoughts... desiring vegetarian food you arouse your tongue; loving fragrance and sweetness you provoke your nose; listening to sounds you disturb your ears; looking at things and events you fix your eyes. You have, in sum, assembled all the Six Robbers together. How could you possibly get to the Western Heaven to see Buddha?" (2. 254). His condemning the Six Robbers and the worldly desires they symbolize draws a sharp contrast to his mentality before the journey. Before becoming a disciple, Wukong is ruled by his physical desires: he extinguishes the golden beams of light from his eyes because of his need for food, is enticed by the peaches and fragrant wine at the Festival of the Immortal Peaches, and seeks the eternal preservation of his body at Subhodi's cave. Now, his instructing Tripitaka to suppress physical sensations marks the monkey's growing Buddhist wisdom.

Second, besides the fillet, other forms of punishment aid Wukong's internal refinement and demonstrate the integration of his physical and psychological sides. The fortified body and eyesight Wukong acquires from his imprisonment in Laozi's brazier is an example of this: when Red Boy

builds a fire to thwart Wukong, the monkey is unperturbed because of the “fiery eyes and diamond pupils” that improve his perception even when obstructed by other elements (2. 231). Besides aiding him in battle, the diamond pupils improve Wukong’s ability to discern good from evil, such as when a monster-spirit disguised as a pretty young woman offers the pilgrims food. When Wukong “opened wide his fiery eyes and diamond pupils to take a look, he recognized that the girl was a monster” and commands Tripitaka “Master, don’t regard this girl in front of you as a good person. She’s a monster and has come to deceive you” (2. 20). The monster herself is impressed by this, commenting “Marvelous Monkey King! What perception! He could recognize me even when I changed into that form!” (2. 24). Wukong’s powers of discernment reflect the emphasis within Buddhism on the ability to perceive emptiness in the material world. Just like Tripitaka’s use of the fillet, Wukong’s smelting in Laozi’s brazier, meant to bring him into submission, helps align his body with his spiritual growth. The physical refinements that come as punishments for Wukong’s transgressions in a perplexing system of reward make him better able to discern and dispel evil, which ultimately helps the pilgrims in their quest. This also supports his increasing personal cultivation and comprehension of Buddhist principles. The implements that are meant to discipline Wukong help unite his physicality and his inner self and heighten his spiritual insight.

The third way in which Wukong demonstrates his growing self-discipline and “retrieval” of his mind is by fighting monster-spirits. Many of these monsters exhibit the qualities reminiscent of those Wukong embodied before the start of his internal refinement, and it is precisely *because* of these qualities that Wukong must battle them. Red Boy is one such monster, transforming himself into a pitiful young boy to take advantage of the pilgrims’ naiveté and kidnap Tripitaka. Red Boy’s father, the Bull Demon King, was a member of the fraternal alliance that Wukong formed to reinforce his hegemony during his rebellion against Heaven. Such a connection would make Red Boy an ally of Wukong’s. However, this monster, who Wukong calls “nephew”, does not even

recognize the monkey; this lack of recognition attests to the change Wukong has undergone since his rebellion in Heaven. When Wukong ventures to Red Boy's cave to save Tripitaka and makes mocking references to their kinship, the monster cries, "You brazen ape! What feelings of kinship do I share with you? What sort of balderdash are you mouthing around here? Who's your worthy nephew? Where do you come from, and where do I come from? How could my father and you become bond-brothers?" (2. 223). To Red Boy, Wukong's conduct and appearance as a scripture pilgrim make it impossible that he be a monster, or tied to Red Boy or the demon's father.

Many of the monsters that Wukong fights display immoral qualities that are reminiscent of those Wukong possesses as a rebellious and violent ape. These monsters, such as Red Boy, display selfishness in endeavoring to eat Tripitaka to gain immortality, violence in wielding weapons and force in their attacks against the pilgrims, and rejection of deities' commandments by obstructing a religious quest for scriptures. Wukong's duty to eliminate monsters with these immoral attributes parallels the necessity that he renounce those same characteristics within himself as part of his personal development. Referring back to the image in Chinese literature of aspects of the self at war with one another, Wukong's fighting monster-spirits who embody his former rebellious and dissolute qualities is an externalization of the struggle between his principled and depraved sides. His victories over these monsters indicates the prevailing of the virtuous side of himself as he grows more spiritually refined.

Fourth, Wukong makes further indication of his spiritual cultivation through exhibiting comprehension of Buddhist teachings. Throughout the pilgrimage, he quotes Buddhist scriptures to encourage Tripitaka and direct him away from his bodily desires. Throughout the journey Tripitaka expresses intimidation and despair when he sees the mountain peaks that stand in his path to the Western Heaven. For example, when the pilgrims exit the Dharma-Honoring Kingdom Tripitaka comments, "I'm getting more and more apprehensive; my whole body's turning numb, and I'm

filled with troubled thoughts” (4. 145). Wukong aptly replies, “And you’ve long forgotten the Heart Sutra of the Crow’s Nest Zen Master” and gives Tripitaka an interpretation of the sutra:

When the mind is pure, it shines forth as a solitary lamp, and when the mind is secure, the entire phenomenal world becomes clarified. The tiniest error, however, makes for the way to slothfulness, and then you’ll never succeed even in ten thousand years. Maintain your vigilance with the utmost sincerity, and Thunderclap¹⁵ will be right before your eyes. But when you afflict yourself like that with fears and troubled thoughts, then the Great Way and, indeed Thunderclap seem far away. Let’s stop all these wild guesses. Follow me (4. 145).

Wukong’s sermon reflects his understanding of the importance of steadfastness in the face of adversity and dispelling attachments to the world. His message is also effective: after Tripitaka hears Wukong’s sermon, he is relieved and his worries fade. Later on, when Tripitaka expresses frustration at the length of the journey, Wukong responds, “Master, could it be that you have quite forgotten again the Heart Sutra of the Crow’s Nest Chan Master?”. When Tripitaka, ever sure of his own knowledge of the sutras, replies, “How dare you say that I don’t know its interpretation! Do you?”, Wukong stays silent. Tripitaka is aware of the wisdom in such an answer, telling the other disciples, “Wukong’s interpretation is made in a speechless language. That’s true interpretation” (4. 265). In these instances, the monkey displays his understanding of the scriptures and their applicability to the scripture pilgrimage. Unlike Tripitaka, who has memorized Buddhist texts but can not glean their meanings, Wukong appears to have done both: he can recall scriptures and also explain their significance in real life. His ability to embody the scriptures and present their teachings to the pilgrims demonstrates Wukong’s growing wisdom: his perspective has been enlightened by Buddhist teachings.

Section VI: Conclusion

¹⁵ “Thunderclap” is another name for the Western Heaven.

Ultimately, the sign of Wukong's successful self-cultivation comes from Tathgata. When Wukong and the other pilgrims at last reach the Western Heaven, Tathagata tells him, "you have embraced the Buddhist religion. I am pleased even more by the fact that you were devoted to the scourging of evil and the exaltation of good. Throughout your journey you made great merit by smelting the demons and defeating the fiends" (4. 382). The deity also names Wukong a Buddha Victorious in Strife, which signifies the end of the transformation period of Wukong's spiritual maturation. Through learning self-discipline and dispelling physical attachments, extinguishing demons, and embodying the sutras, he shows his development of a cultivated mind to match his refined physicality. His virtuous side overtakes his morally unrefined one in the battle within himself and eliminates the conflict between his two natures. His two-part journey, in which he first refines his body and then his mind, makes him into a commendable and devout Buddhist immortal, the "adult" he so longed to become.

Wukong's progression from headstrong and demanding monkey to wise and refined priest is largely guided by the teachings imparted by Buddhist scriptures, indicating the value of these texts for personal development. Moreover, this odyssey, in its length and lack of linearity, underscores his relatable and familiar attributes. This suggests that Wukong's journey can serve as an example for others to follow and transform themselves. In this sense, Wukong's post-transformation character is reminiscent of heroes of ancient Greece such as Achilles in that he reinforces certain values and teachings: his character demonstrates the importance of Buddhist texts as a means of achieving self cultivation. While he is unlike the impenetrability and indisputability of these heroes—both his faults and his process of confronting them are made evident to us—his implicit endorsement of certain values makes him reminiscent of these esteemed figures. While his coming-of-age makes him accessible and relatable, his adult state renders him admirable and exemplary. The evolution of this

characterization indicates the universality and desirability of his transformation: it is one we can and should attain.

Chapter III: Allegory and Accessibility

The Bildungsroman structure outlines the passage by which a character, through dealing with external challenges imposed on him, undergoes a process of emotional maturation that forms him into an adult. In dealing with the difficulties presented by the outside world, the character learns to resolve the less refined, problematic aspects of his personality. In this sense, the Bildungsroman is a process of reconciliation that helps its character grow into a more mature, grown-up version of himself. At the end of his Bildungsroman cycle, the character appears wiser and better able to handle the difficulties of life—in a way, he has established his place in the world as an adult. This reflects the ways in which the Bildungsroman delineates the process of a character's growing into a new, refined version of himself and asserting this self to the rest of the world. This character will often remain this transformed version of himself for the rest of his existence within the story; he rarely shows the desire, nor perhaps the ability, to revert back to his former ways. The implication here is that his new form is superior to the old one and that his transformation is lasting, whether by choice or necessity.

When Wukong and the other disciples reach the Western Heaven, the terminus of their scripture pilgrimage and Wukong's journey of spiritual self-cultivation, Wukong is given the honor and recognition that signal his successful transformation as part of his coming-of-age process: he is given the responsibility to disseminate the scriptures to the people in the Land of the East and is granted the title Buddha Victorious in Strife by Tathagata. However, despite this validation of the success of his coming-of-age, he does not exhibit the sort of persistence of temperament typical of a character in a Bildungsroman. It does not seem as though he has become shed the negative aspects of his former self: he does not always model the peaceful, pacifist behavior that the Heart Sutra and other Buddhist texts espouse, or that the religious patriarchs who name him a Buddha display. This

reflects the ways in which his coming-of-age is different from that of a typical Bildungsroman in that it takes on a less well-defined shape: he does not completely shed the unscrupulous qualities that formed the necessity for his journey and adopt an entirely new persona as a result.

In fact, Wukong shows that he has retained much of the rebelliousness and neglect of Buddhist principles that he shows prior to his transformation. His behavior towards the end of the novel, while not matching the rebelliousness and destructiveness of his revolt against Heaven, is oftentimes unnecessarily cruel and harmful to others and even hampers the progress of the pilgrimage. An example of this is found towards the end of the journey, when the pilgrims' weapons are stolen by a demon named Tawny Lion. When Wukong and the other disciples venture to Tawny Lion's cave, they don't merely retrieve their weapons: they also kill all the monster-spirits in the cave, seize treasures inside the cave, and set a blaze to anything else remaining (4. 213). The pilgrims' stealing the treasures and setting fire to the cave violates their necessary poverty as scripture pilgrims and reflects greed, covetousness, and violence, which are criticized in Buddhist teachings. Although the pilgrims do not keep the goods for themselves, this crime exemplifies Wukong's materialism and illicit behavior. Once Wukong has defeated Tawny Lion and his lion attendants, he asks that the palace's butcher cook all the lions for the people of the city to eat (4. 230). While this may indicate Wukong's benevolence towards the city, it is another example of violence and goes against Buddhist principles of vegetarianism. Even though Wukong himself does not eat the lions, his request that the butcher cook them reflects Wukong's dismissal of teachings that he is supposed to endorse.

Later, Wukong takes advantage of Eight Rules' gluttony and tells him a fiction of a village that is full of people feeding monks, knowing that there is a monster-spirit nearby who is actually intent on eating monks. This entices Eight Rules to take on the guise of a monk and stumble into the monster-spirit's cave. Eight Rules is ensnared and must battle the fiend in order to escape; as this happens, the monster-spirit discovers that Eight Rules is a disciple of Tripitaka, the real object of his

flesh-eating desire, and that he is nearby. After he finishes battling Eight Rules, the fiend kidnaps Tripitaka and gets close to eating him (4. 148). Wukong's naughty prank results in unnecessary injury to Eight Rules and puts Tripitaka in danger. While Wukong does wage battle against monster-spirits and teach the pilgrims the wisdom of the sutras, his incidences of bad behavior demonstrate that he has not developed into a consistently well-behaved individual. In fact, his behavior is often unnecessarily destructive toward others and imperils his master, Tripitaka. Wukong has clearly not shed the recklessness and troublesome behavior that gets him into trouble before the scripture pilgrimage. Wukong oscillates between goodness and spiritual refinement and disorder and disobedience. Even after a long and transformative process of self-cultivation, he has not become a Buddha or a steadfastly devout being, unlike the characters in Bildungsroman cycles who often settle into unchanging versions of themselves after their transformations. This poses a challenge to the notion of the scripture pilgrimage as strongly impacting Wukong's maturity and development. Do Wukong's recurring displays of immaturity indicate that the scripture journey fails to refine him?

In this chapter, I will examine this question and its potential ramifications from two angles: first, the novel's emphasis on group harmony and the subversion of the self and second, the implications and expectations immanent in the concept of the "hero" and the ways in which Wukong's depiction is a departure from this. From this discussion, we will see that Wukong's distinctions from typical examples of "heroes" in literature do not reflect deficiency: his spiritual journey and the passage of transformation involved in it is complete, though it differs from other coming-of-age stories. This demonstrates the ways in which the Bildungsroman is a useful lens through which we can explore Wukong's cultivation, but it is not sufficient to formulating a thorough understanding of his development.

Section I: Valuing the group over the individual

In considering Wukong's mischievousness even after the apparent end of his coming-of-age and the potential implications of this, let us first consider the relationality¹⁶ among the disciples in *Journey to the West* and the ways in which their individual development processes extend beyond themselves. Given that the disciples must work as members of a group in completing the quest, the ways in which the characters interact within their group is part of understanding the progress of their development. Andrew Plaks emphasizes the importance of communal dynamics in the novel by highlighting the predisposition of authors of Chinese literature to portray characters as facets of a whole:

Observe the general tendency of Chinese fiction to present what are essentially composite characters- groups and sets of figures, rather than concentrating on the delineation of the individual hero in isolation. Perhaps the clearest example of this sort of treatment may be seen in the constellation of heroic qualities brought together in... the five pilgrims in [*Journey to the West*] It must be emphasized that this method of characterization goes beyond the simple grouping of characters to provide a set of mutual foils to highlight the specific traits of each, to a point at which the individuals in question actually fall together into a composite image of the hero, the pilgrim (345).

Plaks's view is that the Chinese novel frequently focuses on the ways in which characters function as aspects of a single entity and work in tandem to create this whole. Extrapolating from this perspective, perhaps the goal of Wukong's character growth in *Journey* is not so much on refining his individual traits as it is on his contributing to the overall cohesion and capabilities of the group to which he belongs. This is similar to the emphasis on Wukong's integrating his physical and spiritual facets during his self-cultivation: fusing these discordant parts increases his spiritual refinement, such as the fillet's helping his self-restraint. In a similar sense, integrating himself into his group helps him support it in accomplishing its goals.¹⁷

¹⁶ Here, "relationality" can be defined as the continuously varying ways in which individuals are connected to one another.

¹⁷ This is discussed in the second chapter of my thesis.

Though Wukong's self-cultivation process does not transform him into a flawless individual, it molds him into the best member of his group he can be, in this case the group being the band of scripture pilgrims. His spiritual maturation and increasing self-discipline, while potentially making him a refined individual, also help him become a better group member: his increasing obedience to the orders of Tripitaka and collaboration with the other disciples, Eight Rules and Sha Monk, make him increasingly cooperative and supportive of his group's goal of reaching Heaven and acquiring the scriptures.

Several aspects of the novel support the view of the emphasis on communal harmony over individual achievement. First, the author establishes a correspondence between the pilgrims and the alchemical elements of the natural world. Also called the Five Phases, each of these elements is brought up in connection with one of the pilgrims: Wukong is associated with fire, Eight Rules with wood (he is frequently given the nickname "Wood Mother" in the narrative), and Sha Monk, often named "Earth Mother" and "Yellow Dame" in the story, is linked to the Earth (1. 83). Chinese theories on the universe claim that these elements must harmonize with one another to create a balanced, healthy natural condition (Plaks 345). Likewise, the novel indicates that the pilgrims must learn to sublimate their individual desires to serve the needs of the group and work together with a single mind and intention in order to succeed on their journey. In his article titled "Cosmogony and Self-Cultivation", Rob Campany comments on the importance of the Five Phases to the outcomes of the pilgrimage: "the success of their enterprise depends on the kind of orderly interaction and mutual influence-response which characterizes the five phases of Chinese cosmogonic theory. The pilgrimage itself takes on the aspect of a larger Self, one which must be constituted by getting its five 'elements' in proper relationship to each other" (93). This highlights the notion that the characters on the pilgrimage must learn to integrate their individual selves into the group and work together to form a unified entity.

Throughout the novel, there are instances that indicate the importance of the pilgrims' integration into their group and one another. At the beginning of the story, Subhodi instructs Wukong, "Squeeze the Five Phases jointly, use them back and forth- / When that's done, be a Buddha or immortal at will!" (1. 121). This line, by indicating the importance of integrating the Five Phases, references conceptions of success in both Buddhism and Daoism. Subhodi's indication that making use of the Five Phases in harmony will bring rewards in both Buddhism and Daoism, two religions that many of the moral messages of the novel derive from and which the celestial deities represent, magnifies the significance of the pilgrims' fostering group harmony. Subhodi's statement both furthers the correspondence between the pilgrims and the five alchemical phases and highlights the importance of the integration of the group in accomplishing its goals. Later on in the story, the narrative includes a lyric poem that states, "Docile Metal and Gentle Wood will bear right fruit. / Mind Monkey and Wood Mother fuse with elixir source— / Both ascending to the world of ultimate bliss, / Both arriving at the gate of undivided truth" (2. 72). This indicates the importance of the fusion of Wukong's and Eight Rules's abilities in order to reach the Western Heaven, "the world of ultimate bliss" and "gate of undivided truth", and retrieve the scriptures. The Five-Phases Mountain, under which Wukong is imprisoned prior to the start of the scripture pilgrimage, symbolizes these alchemical elements and highlights the necessity that Wukong suppress his individual motives to serve the collective needs of the band of disciples. The fact that his physical form is subordinated to this mountain furthers the point that he must subvert his individual Self to the collective; after he is under the mountain for long enough he is found by Tripitaka and joins the scripture journey, where his integration transforms from idea to practice. He must subvert the fulfillment of his individual motivations and needs while on the journey in order to contribute to the objectives of his group: reaching the Western Heaven and attaining scriptures.

Besides illustrating the value of the subversion of individuality through the Five Phases, the narrative also highlights the group's increasing unity as the story progresses. This indicates that the transformative power of the scripture pilgrimage on its individual members helps them become more supportive of their group. While it is true that the disciples frequently do *not* get along, as made clear from Wukong and Zhu Bajie's frequent scuffles, throughout the journey the pilgrims become increasingly able to work together and use their abilities to help one another. Plaks notes "the author's recurrent use of such expressions as 'the group of four working in harmony', 'with common will and a single mind', and 'with a single mind and joint effort' in the latter half of the text" ("Allegory" 185). One of the ways in which the pilgrims demonstrate their increasing cooperation is through their combined efforts in battle. In the beginning of the journey Wukong alone wages battle, such as when he fights the monster of Black Wind Mountain (1. 351). Farther into the journey the disciples fight the monsters together: when Tawny Lion steals their weapons, Eight Rules and Friar Sand help Wukong retrieve them and subdue the fiend (4. 213). The pilgrims' use of joint force against the demons indicates their increasing teamwork in making progress on the journey.

The narrative's indication of the pilgrims' process of forming a single entity reflects the novel's emphasis on the integration of the individual disciples into the group. Further, the fact that such group-focused highlights occur in the latter half of the text in the later stages of the pilgrimage indicates that the pilgrims learn to cooperate with one another over the course of their journey. In the case of Wukong, whose self-cultivation process is most clearly visible, this shows how the process heightens his ability to integrate himself into the group and contribute to its overall harmony. The descriptions in later stages of the journey de-emphasize the significance of Wukong's self-cultivation process to his individual improvement to highlight the ways in which it makes him a better group member. As a result of his spiritual journey, Wukong learns to deflate his bloated self-

importance and devote this Self to the needs of the group. Through this it becomes clear that the central concern of Wukong's process of inner refinement is subverting the individual to sustain his or her group: this indicates more broadly the novel's commentary on the importance of supporting collective needs and aims over fulfilling individual desires.

Section II: Subsuming the self to the universe

Besides being demonstrated through Wukong's transformation process, the monster-spirits the pilgrims encounter along the quest also represent the process by which an individual submits himself to a higher authority and will rather than pursue his independent desires. Many of these monsters are reigned in from attempts to wield complete control over their lives and forced to submit to the order of the universe and the all-powerful deities. The importance granted to the spiritual rehabilitation of these monsters as well as the parallels drawn between them and Wukong highlights the novel's message of surrendering the control and desires of the self to the encompassing whole of the universe.

Throughout the pilgrims' journey to the Western Heaven, the primary roadblocks they encounter are those created by monster-spirits, such as Red Boy and the Bull Mountain King, who possess an assortment of magical and body-transforming abilities that allow them to pose trouble for the pilgrims. Most of these monsters endeavor to eat Tripitaka's sacred flesh because they have heard it will grant them immortality; many of the episodes of the scripture pilgrimage delineate the ways in which the pilgrims, namely Wukong, overcome these monsters and protect Tripitaka. Just like Wukong, the vast majority of these monsters gain their prowess through years of Daoist ritual and self-cultivation. Campany describes the demons' process of becoming physically strong as "gaining their formidable martial, transformative, and shamanistic powers through the microcosmogonic channels of arduous self-cultivation, collecting 'the seeds of Heaven and Earth

and the essence of the sun and moon” (89). Here, Campany quotes a line at the beginning of *Journey* that describes the composition of the numinous stone from which Wukong is born; in doing so, he draws a connection between these demons’ powers and Wukong’s own inborn faculties. Although Wukong is born with significant spiritual powers, he, like the demons, increases his strength through years of Daoist practice in Subhodi’s cave. And just like the demons he encounters, Wukong initially uses his powers to selfish ends, revolting against the laws of Heaven and the Underworld to attempt to establish his own control over his fate and to evade an earthly death. Just as Monkey’s bodily refinement and acquisition of magical powers impels him to rebel against the cosmic order, the monster spirits are emboldened by their magical abilities and thwart a Heaven-backed scripture pilgrimage in pursuit of their own immortality.

Both the pre-pilgrimage form of Wukong and the present manifestation of these demons aspire to exist outside the control of high authorities, or “to encompass the universe within the self, rather than correctly subordinating the self to cosmogonic process” (Campany 94). Rather than obey the laws of the universe and the plans of the immortal rulers in Heaven, Wukong and the demons endeavor to take control of their own destinies. This ardor is figured in illustrations in the narrative of the ways in which the monsters try to surround the pilgrims, the objects through which they can claim control of their fates; the demons encompass the pilgrims “by swallowing, snorting them into their noses, or using an entire arsenal of gourds, bags, bottles...” (Plaks, “Allegory” 186). This attempt at physically surrounding the pilgrims illustrates the demons’ desire to encircle the order of the universe with their selves rather than to be a part of it. The monsters and Wukong alike, as an outcome of similar origins and sources of power, refuse to go with the flow of life, preferring instead to *be* the flow.

In spite of the immorality of their actions and motives, the monsters, like Monkey, do not come across as inherently bad—they do not seem to be individuals that are wholly or irrevocably

evil. While their desire to subvert the cosmogonic order and take charge of their fate is unethical and reflects a lack of spiritual cultivation, it does not mean they are innately evil. Just as the conflict between Wukong's good and bad parts early on in the novel portray him as a complex character that is not inherently malicious, the demons are not so simplistic as to be simply evil. Indeed, the monster-spirits are never fully destroyed as punishment for their attempts to thwart the celestially-ordained scripture pilgrimage, but often become disciples of the deities. For example, after Red Boy, the monster whose father swore a fraternal alliance with Wukong during his years of rebellion, kidnaps Tripitaka and makes preparations for his roasting, Guanyin ensnares the monster in a net of swords. Red Boy initially agrees to being Guanyin's disciple and receive her commandments solely to save his own life; however, when Guanyin releases the monster's bonds he attacks her and tries to escape. It is only after the Bodhisattva attaches the Constrictive Fillet to the monster's head, hands, and feet that he realizes the power of the dharma and is willing to submit to it. Red Boy cries out to Guanyin, "I beseech you to be merciful and spare my life. I'll never dare practice violence again. I'm willing to enter the gate of dharma to receive your commandments" (2. 250). After this, "the monster-spirit thus returned to the right fruit; with fifty-three bows, he made submission to Guanyin" (2. 253). While self-important desires and actions of the demons may violate the Buddhist framework of the novel, it is clear that there is always a chance for redemption: even after Red Boy feigns submission to Guanyin and tries to thwart her she still believes he can be converted. The scene with Red Boy reflects the idea that the monsters are not inherently bad and that the tension between these creatures and the universe can be corrected through religious conversion and submission to the cosmogonic order of the world.

The monster spirits' and Wukong's experiences of forced conversion and submission to deities make the message clear that these beings can not achieve their aims of reaching immortality by individual, self-serving means that go against larger organizations of control in the universe.

Campany views the monsters' ordeals of compliance and conversion as "a rite of passage... which converts them from cosmogonic misfits into proper components of a new order. The true demon's career, it seems, ends in a 'conversion' which renders the demon orderly and therefore good. The vector traversed by demons becomes... one from chaos to order" (90). This reflects the ways in which the demons' conversion process is one that forgives them for their prior deeds and also opposes their former desires to subvert the power of the universe by forcing them to submit to the very beings that wield power over their lives, the celestial rulers.

We can see parallels between the demons' submission processes and the pilgrims' entering into the journey for scriptures. One example is Eight Rules, who falls into dishonor when he dallies with the Goddess of the Moon. Guanyin offers Eight Rules absolution for his bad behavior in exchange for his becoming a disciple on the journey for the scriptures. Guanyin tells him that if he partakes in the pilgrimage, "Your merit will cancel out your sins and you will surely be delivered from your calamities", to which Eight Rules enthusiastically replies, "I would very much like to follow the truth.... I'm willing. I'm willing" (1. 213). Wukong undergoes a similar conversion process, which further highlights the similarities between himself and the monster-spirits. After his 500-year-long imprisonment under the Five-Phases Mountain as punishment for his revolt against Heaven, Wukong promises Guanyin that he will convert and return to morality in a way reminiscent of Red Boy's appeals to Guanyin: Wukong cries "I implore the Bodhisattva to show a little mercy and rescue old Monkey!" and, when Guanyin asks if he will "keep the teachings and hold the rosary to enter our gate of Buddha, so that you may again cultivate the fruits of righteousness" he, like Eight Rules, responds repeatedly "I'm willing, I'm willing" (1. 216). This spurs Wukong's quest for scriptures, a task that spreads Buddhist teachings in the land of the East and reflects Wukong's subsuming his personal desires to serve religious rulers. The fact that this act of giving up personal schemes to serve Guanyin and uphold Buddhist doctrine commences Wukong's spiritual refinement

demonstrates that sacrificing one's personal desires and submitting the self to the universe is immanent in spiritual cultivation. In other words, part of the process of becoming a better individual is learning to sublimate one's personal wills into the laws of the universe and the needs of one's group.

Wukong and Eight Rules enter into the scripture journey, a pilgrimage commanded by Tathagata and organized by Guanyin, as a form of absolving themselves of their prior offenses against the heavenly rulers in a way similar to the monster-spirits' capitulations to religious authorities such as Guanyin. Wukong's conversion sets a particularly close parallel to that of the demons in that it comes as a result of his attempts to throw off the deities' control and determine his own fate. This analogy drives home the notion that *Journey to the West* provides moral commentary on the importance of deflating the ego. The novel asserts the idea that the self should exist *within* the structure of the universe rather than outside of, or enclosing it, and that part of becoming self-cultivated is learning to submit to processes of the universe rather than endeavoring to control one's fate.

The ways in which the novel promotes the idea of putting aside one's egotistical desires to follow the dominance of universal power structures and emphasizes group harmony and teamwork suggests that an individual should subdue his own self-importance to value the wills of the universe and the needs of his group. This highlights the ways in which deflating one's ego works to two ends: obeying higher authorities and serving one's group. In this instance, the group that is portrayed is the collection of pilgrims on the journey to retrieve Buddhist scriptures. While Wukong serves as a driving force throughout the journey by fighting monsters and encouraging Tripitaka when he feels discouraged and hungry, Wukong's contributions become significantly more potent towards the end of the journey. Especially as the group approaches Heaven, Wukong shows his enhanced ability to contribute to his group's functioning and act as a guide. First, Wukong recognizes that the pilgrims

must cross the bridge to the Cloud-Transcending Ferry to reach Heaven, insisting ““Unless you walk across this bridge, you’ll never become a Buddha!”” (4. 345). Just after, the Conductor Buddha, disguised as a ferryman, appears at the Ferry to take the pilgrims to Heaven. Second, Wukong is more discerning of the truth than his fellows, and uses this to help guide them. He immediately discerns that the ferryman is a Buddha and that his bottomless boat will provide safe transit to Heaven, and that the corpse of Tripitaka floating in the river symbolizes his shedding of his mortal form. Third, he leads the pilgrims once they reach Heaven, advising them to ““go to bow to those seated at the top!”” (4. 347) and taking them to Thunderclap Monastery. Wukong’s self-cultivation improves his commitment to his group and its objectives; his refinement advances him as a guide to the other pilgrims.

His cultivation process need not transform him into a flawless individual; indeed, he retains some of his old flaws and quirks by the end of the pilgrimage and is still honored by Tathagata. Because these flaws do not impact his ability to serve his group, they need not be eliminated; this reflects a focus on his functioning as a group member, not a stand-alone individual. The importance of his journey, therefore, is not in how he becomes more capable at furthering and supporting his individual abilities and needs, but in his becoming a more competent group member. The aim of his self-cultivation, therefore, is to make him into an active and contributing member of his group rather than an individual who can work toward his selfish desires.

Section III: The restrictiveness of “hero”

Another reason to rethink the significance of Monkey’s improvement as an independent entity is that such expectations might not fit a character of Chinese literature. While in Western coming-of-age stories the hero will often develop a fixed personality once his odyssey of personal development is complete, this is not necessarily true among the hero of the Chinese novel. As we

will see, in part due to the plot structure (or lack thereof) in Chinese literature, the heroes of Chinese novels frequently do not exhibit static and well-defined personalities at the conclusion of their spiritual journeys. This lack of consistency and definitiveness demonstrated in the main character further de-emphasizes the significance of the spiritual journey to individual development and points out the ways in which the forms we draw from Western literature might not necessarily apply to characters of Chinese novels.

It is Plaks's view that in Western narratives, it is expected that the character traits of the hero will remain steadfast and unchanging. Plaks writes: "the generalization may be made that the Western narrative tradition has tended to see in human character a more or less substantial entity.... Something of the conceptual solidity implied in the steadfast singlemindedness of the literal hero is carried over into a certain potential definitiveness underlying the attributes of characters on all mimetic levels, even if these attributes may be totally unheroic" ("Critical Theory" 340). This may seem contradictory to the conception of the Bildungsroman as a transformative process, but we must recall that this genre of story often creates the hero: the character that undergoes such development processes can not be called a hero until he reaches the end of the process. Thus, in Western literature the hero, once he has earned the title, exhibits an unchanging personality. However, Plaks asserts that the main figures in Chinese literature eschew such consistency; he notes that among heroes of Chinese literature there exists "a certain ambivalence that hovers over them, an uncertainty that keeps them from presenting or even tending towards an unequivocal self-image" ("Critical Theory" 340). We can see this lack of definitiveness demonstrated in Wukong, who vacillates as a character between good and bad, showing his cultivated mind and one moment and planning a naughty prank at the next. In this sense, his character is unreliable and unpredictable in how it will be expressed.

What might be a reason for this lack of stability in the personalities of Chinese literary heroes? One potential source is the structure of such stories: Chinese narrative, generally speaking, eschews plot development that is sequential in the ways that Western novels typically are. Rather than presenting a chronological sequence of events, authors prefer to create stories that display cyclical development, thematic ebb and flow, and content repetition. The plot of *Journey to the West* provides a good example of this: Plaks describes the plot as “an interminable overlapping—a dense web of intermingled events and non-events that obviates any sense of unilinear plot development” (“Critical Theory” 337). The story delineates a seemingly never-ending series of hearty feasts, battles with demons, and squabbles between pilgrims. Because these entertaining, yet not immediately significant depictions of social and traditional rituals are interspersed between scenes of the pilgrims fighting immoral beings and upholding Buddhist principles, it is hard to glean any progression in the journey or, more broadly, the novel’s development.

In another form of nonlinear development, the novel, as previously discussed, features Wukong’s self-cultivation process as cyclical, frequently diminished by his displays of immaturity and punishment from Tripitaka. The lack of temporal logic or linearity in Wukong’s story might indicate one reason why he does not develop an unchanging form of self.

The fluidity and lack of direction in the plot of many Chinese novels, including *Journey*, makes it difficult to conceive of its hero undergoing a well-defined course of development concluding in his taking on a stable, unchanging nature. The congruity between character and story highlights the issues inherent in the expectation that the hero will settle into a concretely defined persona. First, the belief that the hero will settle into a definitive, unchanging persona takes a reductive view of the hero and is consistent with the idea that he is a true-to-life, relatable individual. Second, the expectation that a hero should develop into an unwavering, perpetually “good” character (according to standards of goodness and morality of his story) at the end of his journey

undermines this development process. It assumes that once a character has completed a journey, such as the scripture pilgrimage, he has finished maturing, which overlooks the potential for later growth.

In addition, this image of the hero as taking on a steadfast temperament does not faithfully reflect Wukong's developmental process. Plaks evaluates the construction of heroes in Western literature as "a hypothetical conclusion to the process of becoming" ("Critical Theory" 340). This reflects his belief that the definitiveness of character that the hero is expected to exhibit at the end of his journey presupposes the outcomes of an ongoing process of refinement and change. In other words, transformation processes have unpredictable results, and that to expect Wukong to become a crystallized character at the end of his process might overlook its true outcomes. Wukong's moral oscillations at the end of the scripture pilgrimage, when a reader familiar only with the Western novel might expect him to take on the steadiness of the Western hero, demonstrates his rejection of this type of temperamental immobility. Rather than tending toward a form that displays unwavering Buddhist virtue, Wukong retains his characteristic mischievousness, at times interspersing his exhibitions of moral fortitude and knowledge of Buddhist doctrines with pranks and bad behavior. It is not that he doesn't undergo spiritual development; he certainly develops *in the direction of* a more refined, enlightened version of himself. However, he never wholly adopts that form and sheds the negative former parts of himself, though these aspects may become subdued over the course of his journey. In this sense, Wukong's spiritual development makes him a more refined version of himself, but does not rob him of his characteristic traits—he does not become an unfamiliar, flawless figure. To expect him to take on a consistent form is to overlook the fact that his spiritual journey refines him, yet does not eliminate his familiar less-than-perfect characteristics.

It is worthwhile to consider why we might impose the norms of heroes of Western literature onto Wukong, or why his lack of temperamental consistency might come across as unfamiliar or

unstable. Given the ways in which Wukong's development diverges from the changes that Western heroes undergo, we might consider the implications of the title of "hero" and whether it is appropriate to apply it to Wukong. Given that the concept of the "hero" derives from Western literature, which frequently features crystallized characters, it seems likely that a character to whom we affix such a label is granted the implicit expectation that he develop into a steadfast, unchanging form of self. Moreover, Plaks's analysis of the title of "hero" as "a hypothetical conclusion to the process of becoming" furthers the idea that this title comes with a set of expectations for the temperamental growth of its recipient ("Critical Theory" 340). Perhaps it can be argued that figures of Chinese literature who present a flexible view of transformation and temperamental alteration should not be given the limiting descriptor of "hero".

In considering this question, it is worthwhile to recall Bakhtin's delineation of the epic hero. These heroes, according to Bakhtin, present a vision of completeness and finality that parallels the structure of their stories: just as the epic is situated in an era that is sealed off and thereby detached from our time, the epic hero is fully developed and unquestionably falls in line with the epic's vision of morality. In Bakhtin's words, "he has already become everything that he could become, and he could become only that which he has already become" (34). In other words, the hero of the epic remains unchanged throughout his story, as the characteristics and appearances that are made apparent at the beginning of the epic are what remain at the end of the story. It seems that the previously discussed construction of the "hero" as a character that develops a fixed, unchanging persona is similar to Bakhtin's steadfast epic hero. This resemblance to Bakhtin's epic hero, who he portrays as detached and unrelatable, supports the notion that the term is restrictive in its common use and often poorly representative of the ways in which characters actually develop.

To highlight the rigidity and lack of realism in the epic hero's characterization, Bakhtin compares the epic hero's qualities with the novelistic hero's more fluid development. Bakhtin posits

that “the hero of a novel should not be ‘heroic’ in either the epic or the tragic sense of the word... the hero should not be portrayed as an already completed and unchanging person but as one who is evolving and developing, a person who learns from life” (10). This understanding of the novelistic hero stands in sharp contrast to the image of the hero as solidified and steadfast: the novelistic hero’s transformation is fluid and not restricted to a definite set of traits. This type of hero experiences development that is more reminiscent of real life, in that he undergoes flexible modes of development that combine positive and negative elements. In doing so, the novelistic hero is presented as more true to life and relatable than the unchanging, static hero. This form of the hero is most reminiscent to Wukong, who exhibits a combination of positive and negative traits throughout his development and balances playfulness with religious piety and discipline. The fact that Wukong’s disposition is inconsistent and contains negative traits casts him more in similarity to the novelistic hero than to the one of epic.

In spite of this similarities, Wukong does not completely fit into Bakhtin’s definition of the novelistic hero: the novelistic hero’s development exists within the framework of his story, as his discovery and development process are internal to this. He does not extend past the end of the novel or in ways that may not be visible to us. Wukong’s growth is different from this: in *Journey to the West* we do not see the resolution of his development process; it may occur after the termination of the novel or in ways that are not evident to those in the position of reader. His development does not take on a well-defined shape or any sense of finality by the end of the novel: he remains in a state of flux, which may sometimes tend toward spiritual goodness and enlightenment but never settles for too long on any particular form. For this reason, Wukong as an entity exists external to the frame of his story as we can imagine his development continuing on past it. This makes Wukong more true-to-life than many of the central figures of other stories, in that his character never becomes unified or predictable—he undergoes continual change in unforeseeable ways that do not

have a clear end. Wukong's transformation and variation distinguish him from typical forms of "heroes", as defined implicitly by Western literary traditions and explicitly by Bakhtin and push the boundaries of the very notion of a hero.

The fact that Wukong's development can be deemed less "successful" in molding him into a perpetually "good" character makes him more fluid and lifelike, in that he portrays naturalness and realism in developing into a being whose personality does not stay rooted in one place. This challenges Wukong's classification as a "hero" according to the view that a hero ought to adopt a fixed and unchanging personality and elucidates the restrictiveness of such a term. This highlights the need to expand on the meanings and expectations imposed by literary tags such as "hero" and consider the effects of applying such terms to characters whose literary traditions differ from the Western canon.

Section IV: Conclusion

Understanding the implications of the term "hero" and the issues inherent in using it to describe a character like Wukong, who is situated in a non-Western literary tradition and whose spiritual and temperamental development eschews a linear and eventually terminal form, can help us interrogate the ways in which uncritically applying Western literary ideas to non-Western texts and characters can be problematic and reductive. Despite Wukong's recognition from Tathagata and designation of Buddha Victorious in Strife, he does not ease into the stable, unchanging self that frequently bookends a maturation process. Rather, he still demonstrates some of the playfulness and subtle rebelliousness that characterized him before his spiritual refinement. This casts him as dissimilar from other literary figures who undergo coming-of-age experiences and take on well-wrought, unequivocal personalities as a result.

As we have seen, the ways in which Wukong's development is variable and at times erratic highlights some key aspects of the novel: first, it emphasizes the importance of group harmony and self-cultivation as a path to subverting the self to communal needs and objectives, and second, the lack of a clear-cut plot structure to *Journey to the West*, like that of many Chinese novels, lessens the necessity that its characters be distinctively and steadfastly portrayed. This brings to light the expectations immanent in the label "hero" and the ways in which such a term can set boundaries on its characters, especially those who were not made to suit Western literary frames. Just as we have discussed the ways in which Bakhtin's distinction between the genres of epic and novel does not wholly map onto non-Western forms of literature, literary ideas such as the Bildungsroman structure and the title of "hero" that derive from a particular tradition can be incongruous with characters that fall outside of such norms. This points out the necessity for prudence when viewing works of literature and their characters through external lenses, and suggests that frequently we must reformulate terms and ways of thinking to better understand and value the stories we read.

The ways in which *Journey to the West's* depiction of the hero and the journey he undertakes diverges from illustrations within Western literature indicate that terms of Western literary thought do not always perfectly map onto stories that fall outside of the Western sphere. This highlights the necessity for the reworking of such terms to expand their meanings and make them more broadly applicable. Sun Wukong embodies aspects of both the epic and novelistic hero; in straddling this binary, he exists outside of the framework by which Western literary thought conceives of the "hero". Also, his inconsistent spiritual development draws him in contrast with other literary heroes. This should not exclude him from the discourse on heroes; rather, our understanding ought to embrace the different modes through which literary figures embody notions of heroism. In diversifying our conception of these terms, we can better examine the myriad manifestations of

heroes and coming-of-age structures and the ways in which literary figures can transcend their stories to exist as exemplary individuals in the realities of their readers.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have approached the question of the attainability of spiritual transformation as depicted in *The Journey to the West* through analyzing the ways in which the story's structure colors Wukong's self-cultivation process. This approach is a divergence from that of much of the scholarship on this topic, in that it does not deal with the story's connections to religious doctrine. Rather, it considers the story's relationship with its readers as mediated by its form, and the meanings that are conveyed through this. This engenders an analysis that is based in the text and not mired down in the complex and at times overwhelming religious layers that exist within the story.

In the first chapter, I examined the ways in which *Journey* interacts with its readers. I took Bakhtin's theory on the epic and the novel as a basis for this analysis, which led me to conclude that *Journey* contains elements of both the epic and the novel, but its novelistic qualities make it accessible for readers and open to reworking and adaptation. Though *Journey* is situated in an unfamiliar world, we are still able to interact with the story and relate to its characters in the context of our own reality. This reflects the limitations of Bakhtin's analysis, in that it fails to consider the possibility that stories can be at once novelistic and epic and that the binary does not always hold true.

In the second chapter, I considered Wukong's transformation process in light of the Bildungsroman framework, a clearly defined structure which is frequently used to delineate coming-of-age processes in Western heroic stories. This comparison elucidates the ways in which Wukong's development does not perfectly fit into this structure, and that his refinement process is unique to him. His process portrays him as an individual who undergoes realistic stages of growth that could plausibly occur in our reality.

In my third and final chapter I interrogated the implications of the term "hero" and the ways in which they diverged from the hero of *Journey*, Sun Wukong. This revealed the lack of linearity and definitiveness of his process of development as well as the valuing of group harmony over individual

achievement in the novel. It also indicated the potential limitations immanent to literary ideas and structures. This supports the notion that such terms should be thoughtfully applied to literature, and may not be sufficient for formulating a comprehensive understanding of a work or its characters.

As we have seen, using Western literary theory of hero stories is a good starting point from which to discuss the structure of *Journey* and the ways in which it is open to its audience, but such scholarship is not sufficient to formulate a thorough understanding of the structure of the text or Sun Wukong's process of refining his inner self and growing spiritually mature. For example, the binary Bakhtin establishes between the impenetrable epic and the open and timely novel is put to question by *Journey*, which possesses elements of both genres. Also, as discussed in my third chapter, the implications of the term "hero" are incongruous with Wukong's development and personality, which reflects that such terms should not be uncritically applied to characters, especially those who derive from non-Western literature. This highlights more broadly the necessity for prudence when applying external lenses to literature and its characters, and demonstrates how terms and definitions often must be reconsidered and reworked to properly fit the figures and stories they are used to describe. In order to draw a full analysis of aspects of a novel such as its orientation to its readers or a character's growth process, we must examine it as an independent, multilayered work that can not be completely and definitively explained by any singular idea.

The limitations of Western-centric criticism suggest that in addition to thoughtfully using literary ideas and possibly even reworking them, we ought to embrace a variety of literary perspectives beyond those stemming from the West. This can only deepen our understanding of the ways in which stories can connect with their audiences and communicate meaning. Such a diverse perspective can help us more creatively and critically interact with texts and push the boundaries for understanding and discussing stories. Just as the people in the Land of the East in *Journey* are

enlightened by the texts of a far-off land, so can we learn from the insights and criticisms of literary thought that stems from non-Western traditions.

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