

Background Information for Teaching *Journey to the West*

Roberta E. Adams

Department of English

Fitchburg State College

exeasmail@columbia.edu

Many approaches can be taken when teaching excerpts from *Journey to the West*, a novel that incorporates the three major religions and philosophies of China: Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. This introduction centers on Buddhist elements within the text, with the goal of providing instructors with background materials to enlarge their understanding of the text, whether spending one day on an excerpt or one or two weeks on a larger reading selection from the novel.

See also:

- “Buddhism in the Classic Chinese Novel *Journey to the West*: Teaching Two Episodes”
<http://www.exeas.org/resources/buddhism-journey-to-west.html>
- “Foundations and Transformations of Buddhism: An Overview”
<http://www.exeas.org/resources/foundations-of-buddhism.html>

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The Pilgrim Characters

Chen Xuanzang (Ch'en Hsüan-tsang)

Note: Names are given in *pinyin* (Jenner translation) and Wade-Giles (Waley/Yu translations), plus any alternate names used in translations. Note that in Chinese practice, the family name comes first, then the personal name, as in Chen Xuanzang, where Chen is the family name.

The monk's courtesy name is **Tripitaka** or **Sanzang**, from the “three baskets” of wisdom of Mahayana Buddhism (see <http://www.exeas.org/resources/foundations-text-4.html> for more on Mahayana Buddhism); it is given to him by the Emperor Taizong (T'ai-tsung). The fictional character bears little resemblance to the historical monk. This legendary monk is the reincarnation of the second disciple of Buddha, the Golden Cicada, who while cultivating himself through ten reincarnations slighted the Dharma (law) by letting his mind wander during Buddha's preaching. As punishment, he was sent to suffer in the mortal world. Xuanzang's fabulous history is provided in Ch. 9; in Ch. 12, Guanyin chooses him to make the pilgrimage, bringing him to the attention of Taizong.

Accoutrements: For the trip, Guanyin provides Tripitaka with a brocade cassock and a nine-ringed pilgrim staff, both from the Buddha, and Taizong gives him a purple gold begging bowl, a passport allowing him to travel freely, and a horse to carry him (later eaten by and replaced by the White Dragon Horse).

Characteristics/Symbolism: Tripitaka is pure, innocent, compassionate, committed to Buddhism and dedicated to the journey. He is the learned Buddhist scholar, the Confucian *junzi*, the “exemplary person” who serves as a model to others while striving to be a sage. In his dealings with other humans, he is respectful and authoritative, but he is easily deceived by demons, humorless and straight-laced, and bossy with his disciples. He often doubts Monkey and ignores his wise advice, usually getting them all into much trouble. As a traveler, he is impatient, stubborn, fearful and irritable, grumbling about cold and hunger, and terrified at the first glimpse of danger. Some commentators have seen him as a caricature of a monk. But as the only human on the pilgrimage, he represents human weakness and short-sightedness—but also human potential and the ability to remain good and steadfast. He represents the potential for enlightenment, obtainable after a metaphorical and literal journey.

Monkey: Sun Wukong (Sun Wu-k'ung)

Note: Names are given in *pinyin* (Jenner translation) and Wade-Giles (Waley/Yu translations), plus any alternate names used in translations. Note that in Chinese practice, the family name comes first, then the personal name, as in Chen Xuanzang, where Chen is the family name.

Monkey is born not from monkey parents but from a magic stone; the stone monkey becomes animate. After three or four hundred happy years ruling the monkeys as the Handsome Monkey King in the Cave Heaven of Water Curtain on the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit, Monkey realizes his own mortality and leaves to wander the world, seeking a way to get off the wheel of reincarnation and to erase his name from the Book of the Dead, the goal of Buddhism. He learns

human speech and manners and studies for many years with a Daoist master, the Immortal Patriarch Subhuti, who gives him the religious name **Sun Wukong, Monkey Awakened to Emptiness**. Under Subhuti, he learns the Dao, cloud-soaring, and seventy-two earthly transformations. Banished for his lack of restraint in showing off his supernatural abilities to the other students, he returns home and saves the Monkey kingdom from an evil demon. Because of his constant mischief-making, the Immortals make Monkey the Protector of the Horses in Heaven, in hope that they can watch over him there. However, when he realizes his new role is much like a stable boy, he returns home and proclaims himself the **Great Sage Equal to Heaven**. He is allowed to keep this meaningless title and given a job in Heaven overseeing the Peach Orchard. After Monkey creates Havoc in Heaven by eating the peaches of immortality, drinking to excess, and causing great mischief, the Buddha imprisons him under a mountain for five hundred years until Guanyin converts him to Buddhism and asks him to accompany the monk on the journey.

Accoutrements: In need of a weapon suitable to his powers, Monkey asks for help from Ao Guang, Dragon of the Eastern Sea, from whom he obtains the **As-You-Will Gold-Banded Cudgel**, weighing 13,500 pounds, the iron pillar that had anchored the Milky Way in place at its creation. Monkey can change this cudgel to any size, usually carrying it in his ear in the form of a needle. Through persistence and coercion, he obtains from the dragon's three brothers a pair of lotus-root cloud walking shoes, a phoenix-winged purple gold helmet, and a suit of golden chain mail. Soon after he meets Tripitaka, he kills a tiger and thereafter wears the skin as a kilt. After Guanyin provides Tripitaka with a **gold headband** and a spell for tightening it as a way of controlling Monkey, his headband becomes part of him. [See "Buddhism in the Classic Chinese Novel *Journey to the West*: Teaching Two Episodes" (<http://www.exeas.org/resources/buddhism-journey-to-west.html>) for more on the gold headband.] Graphic images of Monkey generally show him in his tiger skin and headband, wielding his magic cudgel. When he becomes frustrated at the arduousness of the task after his battle with the White Dragon (Ch. 15), he appeals to Guanyin, who provides him with **three life-saving hairs** that he can turn into anything he needs to save himself from disaster; he frequently turns them into mini-Monkeys, thus multiplying his powers.

Characteristics/Symbolism: Monkey is born from stone and therefore springs from inanimate nature and from the supernatural, rather than from animate monkey parents. Thus his birth frees him from attachments and fears. In addition to his supernatural powers and his martial skills, Monkey is rebellious, independent, penetrating in mind and vision, wily, confident to the point of arrogance, fearless, obstinate, energetic, quick-tempered, and quick to be offended. He is also whimsical, childlike, optimistic, creative, resourceful, spiritually detached, tolerant of the weaknesses of others, loyal, persistent, and totally loveable (to the reader, if not always to Tripitaka). With a hatred of evil and a scorn for authority, Monkey is the original superhero. Truly concerned about human morality, he always finds himself on the side of good and the weak. Often identified as "Monkey mind," he is *xin*, the human mind/heart. Creating havoc in Heaven, he is "the heart running rampant" and Tripitaka, in using the gold headband to control him, tames "the wayward heart" (Shi, 8). Tripitaka tries to overcome that restless, unfocused, impetuous aspect of the human will and intelligence (often described in the text as "the monkey of the mind and the horse of the will"). Tripitaka and Monkey are two parts of a whole, incapable of reaching their goal without the unity of the two selves.

Note: Though Guanyin told Monkey always to identify themselves and their mission, in their first encounters Monkey fails to do so, resulting in conflict with those she has appointed to help them on the journey. The White Dragon Horse, Pig, and Friar Sand must all be won over by Monkey (by the force of his will) before they learn Tripitaka's identity and join the pilgrimage.

Works Cited:

Shi, Changyu. Introduction to *Journey to the West*. Wu Cheng'en. Trans. W. J. F. Jenner. 4 vols. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2001.

Pig (Pigsy)

Also called:

- **Zhu Ganglie (Chu Kang-lieh) or “Iron-haired Pig”**
- **Zhu Bajie (Chu Pa-chieh) or “Eight Prohibitions Pig”**
- **Zhu Wuneng (Chu Wu-neng) or “Pig Awakened to Power” (his name in religion)**

Note: Names are given in *pinyin* (Jenner translation) and Wade-Giles (Waley/Yu translations), plus any alternate names used in translations. Note that in Chinese practice, the family name comes first, then the personal name, as in Chen Xuanzang, where Chen is the family name.

Tripitaka and Monkey encounter Pig in Ch. 18, after the farmer Gao Cai asks for help in ridding the family of an “evil spirit” who has married and isolated his twenty-year old daughter Blue Orchid, and who is eating them out of house and home. Monkey subdues Pig and learns that he is the earthly reincarnation of Marshal Tian Peng (Water God of the Heavenly Reeds), the heavenly field marshal in charge of the Milky Way, who was banished from Heaven for his drunkenness and his attempted seductions of the moon maiden. On his way to his banishment on earth, his spirit loses its way and enters the womb of a sow, so he is born with a face of a wild boar; however, he maintains his divine nature. When Guanyin converts Pig to Buddhism and asks him to wait for the pilgrim, she gives him the name **Zhu Wuneng, Pig Awakened to Power** (Ch. 8). In spite of his huge appetite, Pig is a good Buddhist vegetarian. The Bodhisattva instructs him never to eat the “five stinking foods and the three forbidden meats—wild goose, dog, and snake-fish” (Jenner, Ch. 19, 449). Hearing this, Tripitaka laughs and gives him the additional name **Bajie, Eight Prohibitions**. Yu (Ch. 8, note 32) explains that the five forbidden viands may be spices—leeks, garlic, onion, green onion, and scallion—or meats—horse, dog, bullock, goose, and pigeon.

Accoutrements: Pig fights with a Supremely Precious Gold-imbued Nine-Pronged Magic Rake, more indecorously called a muckrake, a humorous reference to his earthly occupation as a farmer. He is portrayed as corpulent, with a pig's face.

Characteristics/Symbolism: If Monkey is the mind, Pig is the flesh. He has a sensual nature, with a lust for life. He is clumsy, greedy, lazy, selfish, lustful, and simpleminded. Whenever discouraged by Tripitaka's apparent death or disappearance, he suggests they split up the luggage and go home. He misses his wife and is easily distracted by demons who appear as lovely young women. He is jealous of Monkey's influence with Tripitaka and capable of slander and

subterfuge. However, his brute strength in battle is an enormous help in fighting demons. He remains loyal to Guanyin, keeping his promise to help protect the monk, and he is rather easily won back to the community. Much humor in the novel arises in the conflicts between Monkey and Pig. In some Buddhist allegory, the pig's skill at rooting in the earth is equated to the power of rooting out the ego, but in this work, Pig's ego remains expansive.

Works Cited:

Jenner, W. J. F., trans. *Journey to the West*. Wu Cheng'en. Intro. Shi Changyu. 4 vols. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2001 (1997-1986).

Yu, Anthony C., trans. and ed. *The Journey to the West*. 4 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.)

Friar Sand

Also called:

- **Sandy**
- **Sha Monk**
- **Sha Wujing (Sha Wu-ching) or “Sand Awakened to Purity” (his name in religion)**

Note: Names are given in *pinyin* (Jenner translation) and Wade-Giles (Waley/Yu translations), plus any alternate names used in translations. Note that in Chinese practice, the family name comes first, then the personal name, as in Chen Xuanzang, where Chen is the family name.

Guanyin encounters this man-eating ogre at the River of Sand crossing and learns that Friar Sand had been the Curtain Raising General who stood in attendance by the imperial chariot in the Hall of Miraculous Mist until he accidentally smashed a crystal dish at a Peach Banquet and was exiled to the lower world. When he converts and agrees to wait for the pilgrim monk, Guanyin administers the monastic rules and gives him the name Sha Wujing. “He washed his heart, cleansed his thoughts, and stopped killing living creatures” (Jenner, Ch. 8, 174).

Accoutrements: Since the skulls of nine devout pilgrims he killed would not sink, he tied them on a rope; Guanyin suggests he wear them around his neck, as they could come in useful. (In Ch. 22, he uses them to make a boat for a river crossing.) He carries a priestly demon-quelling staff.

Characteristics/Symbolism: Friar Sand is gentle, obedient, and unreflective. He carries the luggage, follows Tripitaka, does not cause trouble, and tries to maintain harmony between Monkey and Pig. He is a quick thinker, capable of solving trouble. He provides balance and a kind of buffer to Monkey and Pig.

Works Cited:

Jenner, W. J. F., trans. *Journey to the West*. Wu Cheng'en. Intro. Shi Changyu. 4 vols. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2001 (1997-1986).

White Dragon Horse (Prince Dragonhorse)

The first of Guanyin's appointed helpers that Tripitaka and Monkey together encounter (Ch. 15), the white dragon is the son of Ao Run, the Dragon King of the Western Sea. His father reported him to Heaven as a rebel because he burned the bright pearls in the palace. Guanyin secures his reprieve from execution and places him in a deep ravine to wait for the pilgrim. Emerging from the water, he consumes Tripitaka's horse and saddle to sate his hunger. After a battle with Monkey, he learns that Tripitaka is the pilgrim; Guanyin turns him into a white horse to replace the one he had eaten.

Accoutrements: At the Temple of the Ward Altar in the land of Hami, the mountain god and the local deity of Potaraka Island, sent by Guanyin, give Monkey a saddle, bridle, saddle-cloth, saddle-pad, reins, and muzzle for the horse, as well as a whip with a rattan and leather handle and tiger-sinew thong.

Characteristics/Symbolism: The primary role of the White Dragon Horse is to carry the monk on the journey; he is quiet loyalty in all its simplicity, carrying burdens without complaint. Unlike the other pilgrims, he does not go beyond his original dragon identity. During the journey, he changes back into his dragon form only once, to try to save his master after Tripitaka had dismissed Monkey (Ch. 30). Injured in his fight with the ogre who had turned Tripitaka into a captive tiger, he surprises Pig by speaking, asking him to find Monkey and bring him back to save the monk (which he does).

Major Characters

The **Jade Emperor** rules in Heaven, and much of the novel's satire centers on him. An elaborate description of him sitting on his throne surrounded by his ministers mirrors the descriptions of many of the worldly rulers that Tripitaka and his disciples encounter on their journey. The Jade Emperor and his heavenly authority and hierarchies parallel the secular authority of the Emperor Taizong and the hierarchies of other secular rulers on earth. The Jade Emperor is frequently seen as despotic and unfair in his rule, especially by Monkey. In his Havoc in Heaven episode (Chapter 5), Monkey, upset that he was not invited to the Queen Mother's Peach Banquet, arrives early, consumes the immortal peaches and wine, steals Lao Zi's golden elixir pills, and destroys much of the surroundings. When he is finally brought back for justice, after much ado, he tells Buddha that he should rule instead of the Jade Emperor.

The **Bodhisattva Guanyin (Wade-Giles: Kuan-yin; Sanskrit: Avalokitésvara)** plays a central role in *Journey*. A bodhisattva is one who has obtained enlightenment but decides to forgo nirvana in order to help aid humans on earth attain enlightenment. In addition to her obvious bodhisattva qualities of compassion, mercy, helpfulness, and supernatural power, she is clever and diplomatic, providing advice to the Jade Emperor and others, and she has a great sense of humor. Guanyin selects Tripitaka and his disciples, monitors their journey, and provides help along the way. Yu notes that Guanyin's promise to the disciples that they will have their divine status restored and will reach a higher plane of attainment is "consistent with a long established

tradition, which venerates Avalokitesvara as one who enlightens and who delivers her followers from all kinds of perils and pains” (Yu, 56).

Lao Zi (Wade-Giles: Lao-tzu), venerable legendary source of Daoism and purported author of the *Dao De Jing (Tao Te Ching)*, is portrayed as a master of the alchemical arts: Monkey, Pig, and Friar Sand all achieved immortality through their efforts in Daoist self-cultivation. When Monkey is returned to Heaven, he is cast for forty-nine days into Lao Zi’s elixir-making Eight Trigrams Furnace, in hope he will be turned to ashes, but he is only bothered by the smoke. Lao Zi has powerful weapons and provides help to the pilgrims (or Guanyin) when asked.

Venerable Sakyamuni Buddha in this text lives at Spirit Mountain in the Western Land of Perfect Bliss. (See <http://www.exeas.org/resources/foundations-of-buddhism.html#Contents> for information on the historical Buddha and rise of Buddhism throughout Asia.) In *Journey to the West*, only Buddha can subdue Monkey. Buddha makes a wager with Monkey that, if he can jump out of his palm in a single somersault, he can take the Jade Emperor’s place. Monkey jumps, finds pink pillars at the end of the world, writes “The Great Sage Equalling Heaven Was Here,” and urinates against the pillars. Of course, the pillars are actually Buddha’s fingers; he then turns his hand over and imprisons Monkey under Five Elements Mountain. Andrew Plaks notes, here “the overblown mind-monkey is reduced to finite proportions” (271). In the novel, Buddha’s power is his innate essence.

Works Cited:

Plaks, Andrew. *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.

Yu, Anthony C., trans. and ed. *The Journey to the West*. 4 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

Supernatural Framework

The mythic framework is established in Chapter 1, which begins with a brief description of creation, the five elements, yin/yang, and the formation of the three powers of Heaven, Earth, and Man. The narrative then quickly moves to the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit in the Eastern Continent, to tell of Monkey’s birth from a magic stone. As Monkey bows to the four quarters, his far-seeing eyes send out two beams of golden light that startle the Jade Emperor in Heaven. Throughout the text, the action moves back and forth between heaven and earth. While the journey is taking place in the “real” human world, and the pilgrims supposedly reach India, the places they pass through have little or no connection to actual places; the final goal is to reach Buddha on Vulture Peak, Spirit Mountain, a supernatural realm. Sometimes Monkey or another of the immortal disciples physically leaves earth to return to Heaven for help; immortal beings are also plentiful in the mundane world.

Notes on Buddhist Elements

The Three Stores (or Baskets) of Mahayana Buddhism

Journey to the West presents Mahayana Buddhism, literally the “Great Vehicle,” rather than Theravada (lit. doctrine of the elders) or “Lesser (or Little) Vehicle” Buddhism. (See <http://www.exeas.org/resources/foundations-text-4.html> for further information on these two major Buddhist sects.) In Chapter 12, Emperor Taizong holds a grand assembly where Tripitaka preaches. Guanyin reproaches him as follows: “Why are you only talking about the doctrine of the Little Vehicle, monk? . . . That doctrine of the Little Vehicle of yours will never bring the dead to rebirth; it’s only good enough for a vulgar sort of enlightenment. . . . I have the Three Stores of the Buddha’s Law of the Great Vehicle, which can save the dead, deliver from suffering, and ensure that the body will live for ever without coming to harm” (Jenner, 290-91). When Taizong asks about the location of this Law of the Great Vehicle, Guanyin replies, “at Thunder Monastery in the land of India in the West, where our Buddha lives” (Jenner, 291). Taizong then chooses Tripitaka to make the trip to obtain the scriptures, giving him the name Tripitaka (in the Waley and Yu translations; Sanzang in Jenner), meaning the “three stores” or baskets. In Chapter 7, Buddha explains the three stores as follows: “I have one store of the Vinaya, the law, which is about Heaven; one of Sastras, expositions which are concerned with Earth; and one of Sutras, or scriptures, which save ghosts. . . . They are the scriptures for cultivating the truth, and the gate to real goodness” (Jenner, 166). Yu cites a scholar who notes the three baskets can “mean, rather, the three constitutive elements of the human self (spirit, [*shen*], voice, [*sheng*], vital energy, [*qi*])” (34).

Works Cited:

Jenner, W. J. F., trans. *Journey to the West*. Wu Cheng’en. Intro. Shi Changyu. 4 vols. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2001 (1997-1986).

Yu, Anthony C., trans. and ed. *The Journey to the West*. 4 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

The Heart Sutra

The historical Xuanzang obtained the Heart Sutra while returning from India, but Wu Cheng’en places this important text early on in the novel, after the band is complete and they have been traveling for only a month (Ch. 19). The Rook’s Nest Hermit, who cultivates his conduct on Pagoda Mountain, tells them the way will be long; but if they recite the Heart Sutra when they encounter evil influences, they will come to no harm. The narrator notes, “This sutra is the kernel of the cultivation of the truth, and it is the gateway to becoming a Buddha” (Jenner, 455). Tripitaka memorizes it immediately and recites it daily; when afraid during their journey, Monkey reminds him of the Sutra. For example, in Chapter 43, when the monk has become frightened after an episode with demons, Monkey says:

“You’ve forgotten the sentence, ‘There is no sight, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch and no mental process.’ We men of religion should not look on beauty, hear music, smell

sweet fragrances, or taste good flavours. We should not even notice whether we are hot or cold and our minds should be free from delusion. This is the way to repel the Six Bandits that attack eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. Because of your mission to fetch the scriptures you are constantly worrying. You are afraid of evil monsters because you cling to your body. . . . If you will keep on inviting the Six Bandits in over and over again how can you ever expect to reach the Western Heaven and see the Buddha?" (Jenner, 972)

The text as it appears in *Journey to the West* is the translation into Chinese made by the historical Xuanzang. It is a text of central wisdom (*prajnaparamita*) in Mahayana Buddhism. C.T. Hsia notes that it becomes the monk's "spiritual companion" on the journey, with its transcendent teaching that "form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form."

The text of the Heart Sutra as it appears in Jenner's translation is provided here. Neither Waley nor Kherdian include this important text, which should be provided to students. Note that the Sanskrit Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara becomes the female Bodhisattva Guanyin [Kuan-yin] in China.

Works cited:

Hsia, C.T. *The Classic Chinese Novel: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1968.

Jenner, W. J. F., trans. *Journey to the West*. Wu Cheng'en. Intro. Shi Changyu. 4 vols. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2001 (1997-1986).

The Wordless Scriptures

When the group arrives at Vulture Peak and presents their passports to Buddha, he directs them to select scriptures from his Three Stores to propagate in the East. But because they have no presents for the Arhat, he gives them wordless scriptures; the Ancient Buddha Dipmakara sends someone after them so they can trade them for actual texts. The pilgrims are upset by this episode, but the Buddha reminds them that "the scriptures cannot be casually passed on. Nor can they be taken away for nothing. . . . You were given blank texts because you came here to fetch them empty-handed. The blank texts are true, wordless scriptures, and they really are good. But as you living beings in the east are so deluded and have not achieved enlightenment we'll have to give you these ones instead" (Jenner, 2267). Tripitaka gives them his purple gold begging bowl and promises to have the Tang emperor send them rewards.

Andrew Plaks sees "the final irony of the 'wordless scriptures' . . . [as] a rather transparent joke" about emptiness (243.) In one episode in *Journey to the West*, after Tripitaka and Monkey discuss the Heart Sutra, Tripitaka tells the disciples, "Wukong [Monkey] understands the wordless language. That is true explanation" (Jenner, 2133). The wordless scriptures are connected both to the Heart Sutra, with its emphasis on emptiness, and to Wu Sukong, Monkey Awakened to Emptiness, who understands the wordless language. But for Tripitaka to fulfill his

mission, he must bring written scriptures back to the people of China. Only after the scriptures are internalized and understood are they wordless. As the monk said, “the thousands of scriptures all come down to cultivating the heart” (Jenner, 1953).

Works Cited:

Jenner, W. J. F., trans. *Journey to the West*. Wu Cheng'en. Intro. Shi Changyu. 4 vols. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2001 (1997-1986).

Plaks, Andrew. *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.

Self-Cultivation and Integration

The real journey is the internal one, the journey to enlightenment, true emptiness, through self-cultivation (*xiu dao*), the journey of the Dao. The pilgrims undertake this journey together as one integrated Self. Sections of the text also stress the Tripitaka/Monkey, Master/disciple relationship; they frequently seem like the two halves of one person. Each pilgrim, Master and disciples, is working toward his own self-cultivation and self-authorization, each embodies a kind of personal authority in seeking the scriptures, but only together will they achieve the goal. The demons on the trip (which in this context are demons of the mind/heart—manifestations of the unenlightened mind and the attachment to the physical world) cause frequent harm, and on many occasions the pilgrims are sure that Tripitaka is dead and all is lost. But even more dangerous than demons is the disintegration of pilgrim unity. This happens when Tripitaka twice dismisses Monkey (Chapters 27 and 56), and in episodes when there are doubles, a false Tripitaka (Ch. 39) and a false Monkey (Ch. 58). As Plaks notes, multiplicity (*duo xin*) is “an impediment to the singularity of consciousness demanded for spiritual cultivation.” (Andrew H. Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, 247).

Journey to the Western Paradise

Just as the historical monk Xuanzang actually journeyed to India and back, the fictional Xuanzang and his immortal disciples undertake a journey in the novel. However, they do not visit geographically accurate places; villages and terrain often have metaphorical or mythical significance, even if the band is supposedly traveling to India. Buddha — and the scriptures — reside on Vulture Peak (Spirit Mountain), at the Great Thunder Monastery in the Western Land of Perfect Bliss, the Western Paradise. When they reach the foot of the peak, they must “cross over the water,” which they do in a bottomless boat, since only Monkey (who is already enlightened) has the ability to cross the narrow three-mile bridge. Frightened, Tripitaka falls in the water and must be pulled back in to the boat. As they push off, they see his corpse floating downstream: Tripitaka has finally let go of bodily attachment.

In helping Tripitaka on his journey, the pilgrims overcome suffering and accomplish deeds of charity, thus cultivating good retribution for previous actions and accumulate Karma. All are rewarded at the end: Tripitaka and Monkey become Buddhas, Pig is made Altar Cleanser, Friar Sand becomes a Golden Arhat, and the White Dragon Horse becomes the Heavenly Dragon of the Eight Classes of Being (Ch. 100).