



A Comparative Study of the Chinese Trickster Hero Sun Wukong

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Submitted date: May 2016

This project was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Graduate Liberal Studies Program in the Graduate School of Duke University.

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Abstract

Sun Wukong is a fictional hero from the Chinese classic *The Journey to the West*. As a well-known trickster, Wukong has a lot of similarities with several other tricksters around the world. In order to analyze him, I try to explain both his similarities with, and differences from, other tricksters, especially in the Ancient Greek folklore and myth traditions. In the Introduction, I discuss the formation process of *The Journey to the West* and its main character by tracing the historical records and referencing scholarly research. The most noteworthy stages of the formation throughout several centuries are arranged in the Introduction.

The first half of the paper focuses on the general characteristics of tricksters. As a very distinctive group in global mythology, tricksters have particular features. The definition and symbolization of tricksters are illustrated by comparing Wukong and major Greek tricksters, such as Hermes, Odysseus, and Prometheus. The second part of the paper is concentrated on the heroic features of tricksters and the cultural values reflected in the Wukong narrative. How tricksters become cultural heroes is the main theme of Chapter Three. I explain their evolution by elaborating on the change in their nature mentioned in the second chapter. The fourth chapter illustrates the reason why Wukong is an East Asian cultural hero. I explore the personalities of Wukong and see how they fit the dominant philosophy and cultural values of the region. The last chapter briefly shows how popular Wukong is in Chinese and the entire East Asian cultures.

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Acknowledgements

The Chinese fantasy fiction *The Journey to the West* is one of the earliest books I read when I was a kid. Thanks to the TV series, cartoons, and video games, Sun Wukong had already become my favorite hero before I personally read the fiction. Although I have already been reading this book for almost two decades, it can still surprise me with its novelty and wisdom. The knowledge and pleasure of the fiction are like a refreshing spring that never goes draught. Therefore, it is not too hard to imagine how happy I was when Dr. Gregson Davis, who is an expert on classical literatures, approved my idea to write a paper on Sun Wukong. Thus, I would like to show my appreciation to my advisor Dr. Gregson Davis who has always been an excellent mentor. To be honest, I enjoy every meeting we have in his bookshelves-filled office. His insightful advice always orient me to the right direction.

As the core of our division, Dr. Donna Zapf and Dr. Kent Wicker are always supportive of my project. Actually they offer their help on everything, not only on my paper, but also on my class selection and study plans. And I really appreciate for their instructive sessions and friendly reminders on our academic responsibilities.

Dink Suddaby provides me with help whenever I need it. I always feel welcome when I step into the GLS house. No matter how bad the weather is or how heavy her duties are, she always laughs when I tell my jokes. And honestly, I am always amazed at the velocity she replies to our emails.

A lot of friends and classmates offer me help and inspiration on this paper, especially my comrades in GLS. I would like to thank every friend who has ever helped me with my paper, and

I am looking forward to enjoying their projects as I hope they will enjoy mine.

I want to show my gratitude to all the scholars whose work I cite. I did my research on their shoulders.

At last, I want to thank my parents not only because I always do, but also because they brought me to that particular bookstore and bought me my first copy of *The Journey to the West* with pictures on that Sunday afternoon.

Introduction

Many cultures have their beloved trickster heroes; their tales have been told, acted, and modified for hundreds, even thousands of years. The main goal of this paper is to introduce the Chinese mythological trickster figure, Monkey King, who is also known by his name, Sun Wukong, and compare and contrast with trickster heroes from other cultures, especially Hermes, in so far as they reflect the general trickster cycle and essential cultural values of two ancient civilizations. The primary sources of the Greek trickster heroes are *The Homeric Hymns*, *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, and so on, while the story of Monkey, or Wukong, comes from one of the four Great Classic Novels in China¹, *The Journey to the West*.

If there is a survey asking every Chinese to pick their most beloved Chinese hero, I would bet on Sun Wukong. As one of the most famous tricksters worldwide, the Monkey King has remained popular in China for centuries. The Monkey King is the main character of the Chinese fantasy fiction *Xiyouji* which was written in the Ming dynasty², and he becomes one of the most beloved Chinese hero since then. In 1960s, the Monkey King was also viewed as the symbol of liberty and revolution. Now he lives in fictions, comics, operas, movies, and TV shows. The TV show *Xiyouji*, which is produced by China Central Television in 1982, has been played on various channels more than three thousand times. The actor of Wukong in that TV show is one of

¹ The Four Great Classic Novels refer to *Xiyouji*, *Shuihuzhuan*, *Sanguoyanyi*, and *Hongloumeng*. They are also known as *The Journey to the West*, *Water Margin*, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, and *Dream of the Red Chamber* respectively. These four novels are the most popular and influential of pre-modern Chinese fictions. Three of them were written in Ming dynasty (1368-1644) when *Dream of the Red Chamber* was written in late Qing dynasty (1644-1911).

² The Ming dynasty is a China dynasty which ruled China from 1368-1644.

the most recognizable actors in China, as so were his father and brother who also played the Monkey King in operas. The 3D anime movie *The Monkey King: Hero is back* is the highest-grossing anime film made in China. Four of the the top twenty highest-grossing Chinese film are about Wukong and his journey. The Monkey's influence in China, even in East Asia, is phenomenal.

Chapter One: The Formation of the Hero and His Tales

This fiction *Journey to the West* is based on the real trip of Xuanzang³, the most well-known Buddhist monk in the Tang dynasty⁴. The famous Buddhist monk determined to go to India because Buddhism had fragmented into too many sects and their texts and translations in Chinese contradicted each other at that time. He wanted to find authentic Buddhist doctrines in India where Buddhism originated and to solve the incompleteness and misinterpretation in Chinese Buddhist texts. Xuanzang took his trip to India by foot and part of his journals is compiled into the book *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*⁵. The emperor honored Xuanzang for his contribution to Chinese Buddhism; however, Xuanzang was first accused of treason since he did not have any permission to go abroad. In his journals, Xuanzang described his illegal smuggling. He had to hide in the day time and walk at night in order to escape border checks; he was attacked and detained multiple times. Obviously the real journey of Xuanzang is much less romantic than the one in the novel, but his journals did broaden the knowledge and insight of Chinese people.

Although Xuanzang died in the ninth century, his stories had not reached an end. Chinese writers have never stopped attempting to make his magnificent journey more imaginative. After

3 Tang Xuanzang (602 – 664) was a Chinese Buddhist monk and translator. He was active in the early Tang dynasty, and left China for India in 629 ac and returned to China with Buddhism classics from India in 645. In the fiction he is also known as the Monk Tang, Emperor's brother, child river float, or Elder Gold Cicada.

4 Tang dynasty in a Chinese dynasty from 618–907.

5 The Great Tang Records on the Western Regions is a narrative of Xuanzang's journey through East Asia to South Asia between 626 and 645. It was compiled in 646 by Xuanzang's apprentice

his death, Xuanzang's trip become the basis of dramas and operas, and therefore dyed with mythological and religious colors in the following centuries. The skeleton of the journey, including the several most famous stories such as Monkey's rebellion, the Women Nation, and the Mountain of Flames, was already formed in the Yuan dynasty. A large number of plays and fictions were created based on the skeleton in Song⁶ and Yuan⁷ dynasties. However, *The Journey to the West*, which is written by Cheng'en Wu in the late Ming dynasty, is usually acknowledged as the best creation among those literatures. It blends Xuanzang and his apprentices' journey with myths, folklore, poems, and philosophy. Therefore, its complexity makes Wu's version the most entertaining one among all the others.

The Journey to the West is composed of one hundred chapters and the journey itself occupies ninety-two of them. In the fiction, the reason why Xuanzang determines to go to the West is different from the historical fact. *The Journey to the West* articulated the purpose of the journey from the ninth to the twelfth chapter. In Cheng'en's explanation, the idea of the journey comes from Li Shiming, the second emperor of the Tang Dynasty. One day during a dream, Shiming accidentally took a trip in hell which was filled with unpeaceful spirits. He was told by the hell lords that the chaos in hell was caused by people's lack of morality. Because they were violent, unfaithful, and ignorant of ethics while alive, they cannot obtain eternal peace in the afterlife. In order to bring them peace, Shiming determined to hold a massive Buddhist ritual; however, the existing Buddhist doctrines in China were classified as Hinayana⁸ which cannot serve the dead or

6 The Song dynasty is the dynasty which follows the Tang dynasty from 960-1279ac

7 The Yuan dynasty follows the Song dynasty from 1271-1368

8 Hinayana means "smaller vehicle" in Sanskrit. It is one of many sects of Buddhism

conduct the authentic Buddhist practice. The Mahayana⁹ texts, which contain Buddhist wisdom were still with the Buddhist Patriarch in the Spirit Mountain¹⁰. Thus, as a favor to Shiming, Xuanzang volunteered to go to India. He left Chang'an¹¹ alone, and encountered four apprentices during the journey. They were Wukong, Wuneng¹², Wujing¹³, and Aolie¹⁴.

The first eight chapters describe the origin of Wukong. Those chapters explain why Monkey is destined to join the journey. Wukong was born from a stone egg. Except for his abnormal birth, he seemed like any other ordinary monkey until he found a natural shelter for his kin and was crowned to be king. Thus Wukong is also known as the Monkey King. He celebrated with his monkey fellows for years until one day he felt the threat of death. Having determined to learn how to escape from the cycle of life and death, the Monkey king spent tens of years abroad to find saint mentors. Wukong eventually found one and gained immortality and supernatural powers. After Monkey has gained immortality and superpowers, he stole his weapon, which is known as the golden-hooped rod, from his neighbor, the dragon king of East Sea. Wukong also beat the death summoner and coerced the underworld lords to erase his lifetime records and those of his kin by force. In order to keep Wukong in peace, Jade Emperor, the ruler of the

9 Mahayana means "larger vehicle" in Sanskrit. It is one of many sects of Buddhism and usually contrasted with Hinayana

¹⁰ The Spirit Mountain is the fictional sacred mountain in India. The founder of Buddhism, Tathagata, lives in the Thunder-clap temple on the Spirit Mountain

¹¹ Chang'an was the Capital of China in Tang dynasty. Now it is named Xi'an

¹² Wuneng is Xuanzang's second disciple. Wuneng's another name, Bajie, is more well-known. He was the Marshal of the Heavenly Navy but later exiled to human world and turned into a humanized pig because he tried to sexually assault the Moon goddess. He loves eating and flirting with girls. Wuneng also likes make jokes on his big brother Wukong.

¹³ Wujing is Xuanzang's third disciple. He was the Curtain-Raising Captain for Jade Emperor but later expelled since he carelessly broke the crystal lamp. He is a silent and faithful character.

¹⁴ Aolie is Xuanzang's fourth disciple. He was the son of the dragon king of West Sea. Aolie was sentenced to death because he had offended his father. In order to atone his sin, he was turned into Xuanzang's white horse and carried him through the entire journey.

Celestial Palace¹⁵, appointed Wukong a horseman. Wukong thought he was appointed to a crucial seat, but later he escaped because he realized his job was only menial. Jade Emperor later honored Wukong with the title “Great Sage, Equal to Heaven” to keep him from trouble since Wukong defeated the generals from Heaven. However, he only stayed peacefully for a while until he messed up with the Queen Mother’s banquet as an uninvited guest and stole all the immortal peaches, food, wine, and elixirs. Captured by the little sage Erlang¹⁶, Wukong was put into in the Brazier of Eight Trigrams for forty-nine days. The Monkey King survived the dealy heat, escaped, and rebelled against Heaven again. No god was able to stop him this time utill the Buddhist Patriarch¹⁷’s arrival. The Buddha made a wager with Wukong that Wukong could not escape from his one-foot cross palm. Although a single somersault of Wukong’s can carry him one hundred and eight thousand miles, Wukong lost the wager and was eventually captured. Tathagata transformed his five fingers into five mountains and pinned Wukong down. After serving a five hundred years’ sentence beneath the mountain, Wukong was selected to join the journey and protect Xuanzang.

Wukong is usually depicted as a skinny monkey about four to five feet tall. He wears a monk’s robe with an apron made of tiger skin, and has a golden hoop on his head. The golden hoop restricts his behavior because it would tighten when Xuanzang recite the Tight-Fillet Spell. He always carried his weapon, a golden-hooped rod in his hand. Wukong keeps his title as the

15 The Celestial Palace is the administration facility of the world. It is ruled by the Jade Emperor and other deities and saints.

16 Erlang Immortal is one of the most powerful Gods in Heaven. However, he does not stay in Heaven because he has his own dojo in the human world. He is the nephew of the Jade Emperor.

17 The Buddhist Patriarch is also known as Tathagata or Gautama Buddha. He is the leader of Buddhism and the most powerful figure in The Journey to the West.

“Great Sage, Equal to Heaven” although he was punished by the Buddhist Patriarch for his rebellion against the Celestial Palace. Immortals and deities call him “Great sage” even after his punishment. As the most powerful, faithful, and insightful apprentice of Xuanzang’s, Wukong is always the one who defeats rapacious monsters and rescues his master from death threats. However, Wukong is sometimes arrogant and reckless. Because of his carelessness, Wukong has been trapped and cheated by other tricksters in various scenarios. Wukong serves his master as well as he can while he treats enemies without mercy; sometimes he kills without clear motives and explanation. Because the abuse of violence strictly conflicts with the Buddhist doctrines, Xuanzang sometimes felt uncomfortable with Wukong’s aggressiveness; he released Wukong from the team for his violence twice. Nonetheless, the author spends more pages on Wukong than any of the others as he is unquestionably the main character in the book.

Xuanzang’s trip has been compiled and composed in hundreds of versions. Xuanzang finished most of the journey alone in the original story. Nevertheless, imaginative writers decided to add some company on the lonely trip. The monkey pilgrim first appeared in the epic poem *QujingShihua*¹⁸. The pilgrim was described as an elegant human scholar in white clothes. He introduced himself to Xuanzang as “the king of eighty-four thousand iron-head monkeys.” The author did not articulate the pilgrim’s background, but he did mention a bit of the pilgrim’s history, such as the theft of the Jade Emperor’s peaches. The white clothes pilgrim is believed to be the predecessor of Wukong. Later in the Yuan dynasty, the monkey pilgrim was eventually

¹⁸ *Qujingshuhua* is an epic poem based on oral poetry of Xuanzang’s story. It was written during Song dynasty (960-1279)

given the name of Wukong and sometimes referred to himself as the “Great Sage, Equal Heaven.” Monkey’s personality was very different in the early editions of the journey in the Yuan dynasty. The monkey pilgrim was a tricky, erotic, and violent monk in those stories. In the stage play *Xiyouji*, Monkey had sexually assaulted females; even after his conversion to Buddhism, he liked to violate the doctrines and show off his penis while Buddhist practice forbids sex.

Wukong’s personality appears to be completely different in Wu’s book; he becomes a wise, just, and asexual monk. Such improvement is worth-noting and some Chinese scholars assume that some of the Monkey King’s characteristics might be inherited from Hanuman¹⁹. According to Shih Hu²⁰, Cheng’en’s Wukong is probably a Chinese version of the brave Indian monkey God Hanuman. Hanuman is described as a powerful and friendly monkey god in Ramayana.²¹ He is known as the hero who retrieved Rama’s wife Sita from the demon Ravana. Interestingly, Wukong rescued the kidnapped princesses and queens from demons several times during his journey. Indeed, the two monkey heroes are extremely alike in various aspects. Nonetheless, the hypothesis is not only based on their similarities, but also built on the fact that China and India had been closely connected for centuries. Indian religious epics were usually mixed with myths, folklores, and poems, and Hanuman is one of the most popular Gods in Indian culture. Since he was frequently mentioned in Indian literatures, some Chinese scholar thought it was possible that

19 Hanuman is a very popular monkey deity in Hinduism. He is described as a smart and just god in the Indian epic poems Ramayana and Mahabharata.

20 Shih Hu (1891-1962) was a famous Chinese scholar, philosopher and essayist. Shih is recognized as one of the key contributors to Chinese liberalism and language reform.

21 Ramayana is an epic poem written by the Hindu Sanskrit poet Valmiki. It describes Rama’s life and his journey. Rama is helped by Hanuman for multiple times.

Hanuman was brought to China with Xuanzang and his Indian texts. Recent evidence has buttressed their theory. According to the research of Nakano Miyoko²², a brief version of Ramayana was translated into Chinese in the late 3rd century. Additionally, China and India were commercially related since the 5th century BC. More and more details about the Ramayana were imported by the incoming Indian literature. Thus, it is completely reasonable that Hanuman took his journey to the East with businessmen and monks; and later Hanuman might have been absorbed by Wukong and made the latter a more hero-like figure rather than an erotic monkey.

Shih Hu's good friend Lu Xun²³ was responsible for another theory of Wukong's origin. He believed that Wukong is a pure domestic product based on ancient Chinese myths. In the opera *Xiyouji zaju*²⁴, Wukong introduced himself as the brother of two monsters from *Classic of Mountains and Seas*²⁵, and some of Wukong's stories are very similar with the account of another monster from the same book. Thus Lu Xun argues that Wukong was first generated as a variant of an ancient Chinese monster. According to Lu Xun, although it is undeniable that Hanuman and Wukong share a lot of similarities, Cheng'en's Wukong inherits his arrogance and recklessness from his Chinese ancestors.

22 Nakano Miyoko is a famous Japanese researcher of Chinese culture. She is a professor in Hokkaido University and has devoted herself in the study of *The Journey to the West*.

23 Lu Xun was one of the key figures of modern Chinese literature.

24 *Xiyouji zaju* is a famous opera written by Yang Jingxian in Yuan dynasty.

25 *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, or *Shan Hai Ching*, is a Chinese classic which describes Chinese geography and myths. The earliest known version was probably written in the 4th century BC.

Chapter Two: Definition of Trickster

Wukong is one of the best known trickster heroes around the world. A trickster, in the definition given by C.G.Jung²⁶, is a figure whose physical appetite dominates his behavior. In other words, a trickster always has abnormal desires for food, sex, pleasure, reputation, or political power. We can always find at least one element from Maslow's hierarchy of needs²⁷ that drives him to trick. In *Man and His Symbols*, Jung further specified that a trickster only has the mentality of an infant. He can be cruel, cynical, and selfish because he does not care about anything except for his own gratification. And as the category indicates, a trickster usually attains his goals through deceptive actions (104). A lot of famous mythological characters fit the definition, such as Loki²⁸, Wakdjunkaga²⁹, and Seth³⁰. In this section, I will treat Monkey as a trickster based on Jung's definition, and compare him to other tricksters from around the world, especially Hermes.

According to Jung's account, the motivation of a trickster to trick at first is merely to satisfy his hunger. Hermes, for example, showed a strong needs for personal gratification. When Hermes was an infant, instead of lying in his mother's arms like other newborns, he "leaped from Maia's limb and started to search for Apollo's cattle" (Crudden 43). He later stole the cattle from Apollo

26 Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) was a Swiss psychiatrist who founded analytical psychology. Jung was a student of Sigmund Freud.

27 Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a psychological theory proposed by Abraham Maslow in 1943. Maslow ranked human needs in a layered pyramid and tagged each layer with "physiological", "safety", "belongingness", "self-esteem", "self-actualization", and "self-transcendence" to describe the pattern of the progressive human motivations.

28 Loki is a trickster God in Norse mythology. He is one of the most important roles in Norse mythology system and is mentioned in a lot of popular stories.

29 Wakdjunkaga is a Native American trickster in Winnebago tribes. The trickster's tale is record in Paul Radin's book the Trickster.

30 Seth is the God of desert, disorder, and violence in ancient Egyptian religion. He murdered his brother Osiris for his throne.

and invented the lyre along the way. Although later Hermes was caught and forced to stand in front of his almighty father and powerful brother, he did not panic, and his eyes were still glittering with cunning and joy. Throughout the entire *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, every trick he did was driven by personal gratification. In other words, the only reason Hermes tricked Apollo and his herds was to please himself. In this case, Hermes, just as in Jung's definition, was a trickster who only obeyed his natural appetites. And interestingly, Hermes' mentality and appearance were both in the infant stage.

In parallel, Wukong played his tricks in the early stage of the novel for no one's good but his own. In the first eight chapters of *The Journey to the West*, the Monkey King showed his naked trickster nature. After Wukong achieved immortality and supernatural power, he immediately utilized his power and trick talent to obtain his weapon, honorific title, and reputation. The hunger for reputation is always one of Wukong's primary motives. Even after his conversion Wukong still cares about his reputation tremendously. In the meantime, his appetite was growing and in order to satisfy it, Wukong had to demand more. When the Jade Emperor conferred on Monkey the title of "Great Sage, Equal to Heaven" as Wukong requested, his appetite for power had not been filled. Having benefitted from the Heaven's compromise, Wukong spotted the weakness of the Celestial Palace and saw the chance to replace the Jade Emperor. His appetite and desire drove him to achieve immortality and vanquish the heavenly army; meanwhile, his boosted ego also led him to his failure against Tathagata. Thus, Wukong's behavior in the first eight chapters can only be explained by his self-absorbed desires. During this stage, Wukong showed no mercy and mockery to everyone who dare to stand in his way. As Jung has articulated, Wukong was selfish, deceptive,

cruel and cynical. Both the Monkey King and Hermes were typical tricksters based on the narratives in the primary sources. They were driven by their appetites and nothing could motivate them to use their talents.

It is not uncommon that tricksters are sometimes described as brave characters. They search for novelty and challenge authorities. When Radin describes Wakdjunkaga, the famous Winnebago trickster, he says the tricksters are “the spirit of disorder, the enemy of boundaries.” (Radin 132) Most of the tricksters are risk-seekers, and new experience can always feed their thrill-seeking nature. Odysseus, as a trickster, was a risk-seeking character since in a famous adventure, he tied himself to a pillar without waxing his ears so he could hear sirens’ lethal songs. As a trickster, Wukong does not like to follow the easy way either. He enjoys novelty and new experiences as much as other tricksters do. In the seventy-fifth chapter, Wukong shrunk himself, flew into the demon’s stomach, and conquered his enemy from inside. The shrinking trick is one of the frequent trick Wukong uses. However, when the demons challenged the Monkey for a fist fight, Wukong, who loves new challenges and cherishes reputation, did not hesitate to agree since he thought “Yes, yes! If I pull his intestines apart and bust up his bladder, I can finish off the fiend right now. What’s the difficulty about that? Yet that truly ruined my reputation.” (Wu, 3: 3) He jumped out from the demon’s mouth and physically conquered it by force. The occasion is not alone, Wukong rarely refuse challenges.

As a matter of fact, almost all tricksters challenge authority. As the enemies of boundaries, tricksters do not like the lines drawn by the authority. The adventurous nature of Hermes and Wukong drove them to cross lines. Their challenging spirits can be shown by the quoted words

from the primary sources respectively. According to *the Homeric Hymns to Hermes*, the infant Hermes said to his mother that

As for honor, I too shall enter the rite of Apollo enjoys.

My power – to be the leader of thieves;

and if the son of glorious Leto comes in search for me,

for I shall go to Python, to break my way inside his great abode. (Cruden 49)

A similarly bald and challenging statement were also been made by Wukong in the early stage of *The Journey to the West*. When the Buddha Patriarch came to rescue the Heaven Palace from the destruction of Wukong, he asked why the Monkey King was “so violently and unruly.” Wukong answered, without hesitation, that “many turns of kingship: By next year the turn will be mine!” (Wu, 1: 194) However, whether or not Wukong and Hermes truly understand bravery in their mentally infant stage is questionable. From my perspective, Wukong and Hermes’ challenges were inevitable under their respective authoritarian societies. Since their appetites were difficult to be properly fed, they had to use as much resource as they could. However, from these stories we can see that the social authorities fixed boundaries and the limits to restrict their behavior and appetites. For tricksters who did not have a clear idea of social order, such restrictions were intolerable. They had to challenge the authorities to satisfy their expanding egos. Therefore, instead of their bravery, their dominating appetites were responsible for their challenging spirits in the quoted stories. Hermes challenges Apollo since Apollo stands in his way of obtaining

pleasure. He has to trick Apollo to attain more fun while Wukong challenges the Jade Emperor because the Jade Emperor possesses the political power he wants. A lot of people regard the early Monkey King as the symbol of liberty and revolution in 1960s, but from my perspective, he is different from idealists and liberalists. The motivation of revolution and rebellion is merely his ambition. Thus, without clear knowledge of the boundary, newly born tricksters would cross the line without any concerns. Their ignorance is easily confused with true bravery.

Marion Grau, the author of *Refiguring Theological Hermeneutics*, gives her summarization of tricksters in her book. She says that tricksters are usually neutral characters. They are ambivalent and chaotic. Because they only possess the mentality of new born, tricksters' contributions and damage are by-product of the pursuit of gratification. Wukong and Hermes were neutral characters in the beginning of their stories. They were neither saints nor villains. Undeniably, both of Hermes and Wukong suit the definition of tricksters given by Jung and Grau. Jung has also expressed similar idea of the chaotic identity of tricksters. In his book *Four Archetypes*, Jung describes the Native American trickster as the combination of primitive and divine. The trickster sometimes is stupider than animals although he is supernatural. Such behavioral inconsistency expresses itself in his human nature and animal appearance. The statement is also very precise when we talk about the Monkey.

The transformation ability is very popular in the universe of tricksters. Though Hermes did not manifest this skill, it is very common for Olympian Gods to transform themselves. Zeus, who has some trickster features, transformed himself into a white bull and won the love of princess Europa. The tricky ruler of Olympus also won the love of Hera by transforming himself into a bird.

Such illusionary tricks are the favored by tricksters all over the world. Wukong's most well-known magic is his transformation ability. He is able to transfer himself into seventy-two forms, and in the novel he showed in more than twenty images. In addition, a lot of tricksters even change their genders. For example, Wakdjunkaga transferred himself into attractive woman and Loki turned himself into a mare and gave birth to the divine horse Sleipnir³¹. Wukong also changes his gender. In his first encounter with Wuneng, Wukong transformed himself into Wuneng's wife and vanquished the pig pilgrim who later becomes the second disciple of Xuanzang. According to Grau's account, the tricksters' switches of gender reflect their chaotic and ambivalent nature. In other words, tricksters represent a primitive mentality of human being which is full of confusion.

The ability to switch gender reflects tricksters' subconscious confusion of sex; furthermore, the confusion possibly comes from their primitive and ignorant mentality. Except for the sex confusion, the animal forms of tricksters may also reveal their original and immature psychological status. A lot of trickster stories, like fairy tales, are performed by animals. Foxes, wolves, birds, and monkeys usually play the roles of tricky ones in the realm of animals. As a typical trickster, Wukong's authentic form is a monkey, and he usually turns himself into other animals. Wuneng, who also has the transformation ability, is a humanized pig. The white dragon horse of Xuanzang's can switch his forms into both male and female human beings as well. The transformation ability of trickster rarely turns them to become inorganic matters but animals. It is possible that their transformation ability, especially in animal forms, echoes with their savage consciousness.

31 Sleipnir is an eight-legged horse. He is the child of the trickster Loki and the Stallion Svaoilfari, and known as Odin's steed.

Additionally, the children-friendly backgrounds of most of the trickster stories may also implies that trickster's primitive nature more easily echoes with immature kids.

It is very common that tricksters sometime are tricked. Although Hermes is always invincible, Hercules, who also shares some trickster attributes, has also been tricked by others. Likewise, the Winnebago trickster has been tricked by animals. In Jung's opinion, the inconsistency in trickster's performance is caused by their dual-nature of animal and divine. Because of they are chaotic, tricksters cannot guarantee that their acute senses never go blunt. Wukong has been fooled by other tricksters in numerous cases. For example, in his theft of the palm-leaf fan, Wukong succeeded in the third attempt by transforming himself into the Bull Demon King. Nonetheless, he does not expect to be tricked in the exactly same way. In order to retrieve the fan, the Bull Demon King turns himself to Wuneng's image. As Wuneng, he sees Wukong in the sky and calls him in the tone of Wuneng. Normally Wukong is able to figure out any illusion by his eyes, but because he was still enjoying in the happiness of the successful theft, Wukong hands the fan to the Bull Demon without any suspicion. In most of the cases, Wukong's arrogance and carelessness blind his eyes and makes him to perform worse than usual.

In addition to the fact that they are both tricksters, Hermes and Wukong also have other characteristics in common. One of the most noteworthy similarities is that Wukong and Hermes are both master thieves. Unlike traditional heroes who vanquish everything in their way, trickster heroes sometimes have to achieve their targets by less straightforward skills. Stealing is one of the distinctive skills that separates tricksters with traditional heroes. As the god of thieves, Hermes is known for stealing Apollo's cattle and Hector's body, while Wukong is remembered

for countless thefts including that of Jade Emperor's wine and elixir. They are both very confident about their stealing skills. Hermes called himself "the leader of thieves" while Wukong introduced himself as "the world's most famous thief." (Wu, 1: 461) According to *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, we are able to observe Hermes' outstanding skills of distracting, raiding, and hiding. His first theft as a newborn was worthy enough for him to be called the leader of the thieves. Nevertheless, the honor of the best thief does not belong to Hermes alone. Wukong is a widely acknowledged professional thief as well. During his journey, Wukong proves himself qualified as an exceptional thief again and again. He commits more than two dozens of thefts and seldom fails. The Monkey King dares to steal from everyone including the highest ruler of the universe. When Wukong encounters powerful weapons that he could not match, he just steals those weapons and turns them upon the villains. The theft of the palm-leaf fan³² is one of the most famous thefts committed by Monkey. It is so well known because Wukong spent a long time and utilized a lot of his skills to steal the fan. The marathon theft took three entire chapters. The reason why Wukong decides to steal the fan from its owner, Princes Iron-Fan³³, is because it is the only magic tool that cools down the unbearable heat of the Mountain of Flames. Wu articulates the first attempt at the theft in very detailed narrative.

With one shake of his body, he changed into a tiny mole-cricket and crawled inside

32 The steal of palm-leaf fan is mentioned in 59-61 chapters. The palm-leaf fan is a magical fan which can cool down the extreme heat of the Mountain of Flames.

33 Princes Iron-Fan is also known as Raksasi. She is the wife of one of Wukong's old dudes, the Bull Demon King, and the mother of the Red boy, one of Wukong's former enemy who later convert to Buddhism.

through a crack in the door. Pilgrim spread his wings and dived right into the tea. As she was extremely thirsty, Raksasi grabbed the tea and finished it in two gulps. Pilgrim by then already reached her stomach. Suddenly he shoved his foot down hard and unbearable pain shot through Raksasi's lower abdomen... Raksasi told one of her maids to hold up a palm-leaf fan and stand on one side. When Pilgrim crawled up to her throat and saw it, he said 'Since I'm going to spare you, I'll leave through your mouth.' Changing at once into his original form, Pilgrim took the fan in his hand and said 'I'm right here. Thanks for lending it to me.'" (3: 147)

It is not exceptional for Wukong to sneak into other's stomachs and force them to do whatever he asks. He usually turns himself into fruits or insects. As a matter of fact, Hanuman used the same strategy when he encountered Surasa³⁴. However, this time Wukong was cheated by Raksasi because what he got was a fake fan. Then, Wukong thought of another plan to steal it. He stole the Bull Demon King's golden-eyed beast as vehicle while the Bull Demon King was meeting a friend. Wukong transformed himself into the Bull's form and showed himself in front of Raksasi's door. Wukong's appearance successfully tricked Raksasi; she had no doubt about the identity of her husband. Wu has described Wukong's second attempt in the following quote.

When the Great Sage saw that she was acting with such abandon, he took care to bait

³⁴ Surasa is a Hindu goddess who is best known for her tale as it is told in Ramayana. She swallowed Hanuman but was later tricked and spat him out.

her with the words: ‘Madam, where have you put the real fan? You must be careful constantly, for I fear that Pilgrim Sun with his many ways of transformation will sneak in somehow and wangle it.’ Giggling, Raksasi spat out a tiny fan no bigger than an almond leaf. Handing it over to the Great Sage, she said, “Isn’t this the treasure?”

The second attempt was achieved by the Monkey’s ability to transform. Transformation is another common skill of Wukong’s in his career of stealing. Interestingly, although Hermes does not have any records of transforming, the capability to transform appears in many trickster stories all over the world, many include the ability to steal.

A sense of humor is another trickster characteristic. Their humorous and ironic attitudes differentiate them from the more conventional heroes. As Jung defines, tricksters are cynical. Their sense of humor sometimes accompanies acute sarcasm. Hermes and Wukong both possess a very strong sense of humor; they make fun of others wherever they are. For example, in *the Homeric Hymns*, Hermes was accused of the theft of Apollo’s cattle and brought to Mountain Olympus. In front of his raging brother and almighty father, Hermes skillfully and humorously denied his theft and mocked Apollo. His confidence and humor amazed Zeus and earned the admiration of other Olympian Gods. Also, when Aphrodite and Ares were captured committing adultery, Hermes satirized Ares in face in front of Olympian Gods. In comparison, the Monkey also makes fun of others as much as he can. Because whoever eats Xuanzang’s flesh can achieve immortality, Xuanzang was much wanted by almost all monsters. He and his disciples, Wuneng and Wujing, were captured uncountable times during their journey. As the most powerful one, Wukong always

had to rescue his master and brothers from captivity. However, as a trickster hero, Wukong rarely shows his worries. His calm attitude and sense of humor always relieve the tension of dangerous situations. For example, in the seventy-sixth chapter, Wuneng was captured by an elephant demon. In order to rescue him, Wukong turned himself into a fly and sneaked into the demon's cave. Suddenly he decided to make fun of Wuneng who always quarrels with him. Wukong flew near Wuneng's ear and pretended to be the summoner of the Hell lord. He informed the pig pilgrim that his time is up and threatened Wuneng that he would take away his life. Wuneng was too shocked to penetrate the fraud. For his life's sake, Wuneng bribed the "death summoner" with his secret private saving hidden in his ear. Wukong revealed himself, took away all of Wuneng's deposit, and mocked Wuneng in the enemy's house.

Paul Radin has mentioned as a coincidence in his book *The Trickster* that the Winnebago tricksters and Hermes' identities are usually represented by phalluses. Wakdjunkaga cut off his penis and sends it as gifts, similarly, the phallus-shaped pillars with Hermes' face was used as landmarks in ancient Greece. As a trickster figure, Monkey King is also connected with the phallus shape. In the beginning chapter of *The Journey*, Wukong was born from a phallus-shaped stone. According to Wu's description, the stone egg which give birth to Wukong was "measured thirty-six feet and five inches in height and twenty-four feet in circumstance." (1: 101) Nakano Miyoko expresses her idea that the phallus shape of the immortal stone might be the reflection of the phallus worship of the ancient Chinese people. This may also symbolize trickster's strong appetite for sex. Another phallus metaphor in Monkey King's story is his weapon. Perhaps, can easily associate to the golden-hooped rod, which changes its size at the owner's will, with the

penis. Actually the rod is sometimes referred as male phallus in informal oral mandarin.

Another theory about trickster symbolization is that they sometimes represent the idea of limits. As the enemies of boundary, Hermes and Wukong ironically symbolize limits. In ancient Greece, pillars with Hermes' face were regarded as milestones and boundary marks. People used them to differentiate jurisdictions and regulate spiritual and political limits. Wukong is connected with limits as well; his wager with Tathagata, for example, links him to the idea of boundary. When Wukong tried to escape from Tathagata's palm, he utilized his magic and travelled one hundred thousand miles in a somersault. He discovered five gigantic pillars which he thought were the boundary marks of the world after he flew far enough. He could not pass them so he peeped on the pillars as the proof of him reaching the edge of universe. As a matter of fact, these pillars were the fingers of Tathagata, and Wukong had never left his right palm. Interestingly in daily language, Tathagata's palm implies complete control and an unbreakable limit; obviously the metaphor is derived from Wukong and his bet with Tathagata. Also, Wukong's weapon, the golden hooped rod, symbolizes a limit because it was "the measure of Great Yu³⁵ which fixed the depths of the rivers and oceans when he conquered the flood" (Wu, 1:135). Before Wukong took the rod as his weapon, it used to act as a landmark and a measure.

Wukong and Hermes' capabilities are highly comparable. First, they are both known for their extraordinary speed. Hermes possesses a pair of winged sandals, also known as Talaria, which

³⁵ Great Yu is a ruler in ancient Chinese history. He is known as the conqueror of the catastrophic flood which had lasted for decades. His son is the founder of the first Chinese dynasty, the Xia dynasty (2070bc-1600bc)

enables him to fly swiftly. The legendary sandals were once lent to Perseus and enabled him to approach Medusa and complete his assassination. Wukong's incredible speed comes from one of his magic powers called the cloud-somersault. When Monkey is ready to fly, he speaks a magic spell and jumps on a cloud in a single somersault. The cloud-somersault carries him for one hundred and eight thousand miles in a wink. No one was ever faster than Wukong except for Gautama Buddha. An interesting coincidence is that the distance of Xuanzang's journey is exactly one hundred and eight thousand miles. Therefore, the phrase "one hundred and eight thousand miles" indicates an extremely long distance in Mandarin. These two speedsters are so influential that they have become the symbol of speed in various cultures. For example, the American comic superhero, Jay Garrick, who is also known as the first Flash, wears a winged helmet like Hermes does, whereas the Japanese comic hero, Goku³⁶, travels in the cloud-somersault.

Perhaps because of their unparalleled speed, Hermes and Wukong both have the role of messengers. When Wukong first learned his cloud-somersault spell, his classmate said "lucky Wukong, he can become a dispatcher for someone to deliver documents or carry circulars." (Wu 1: 123) One of Hermes' most important identities is the messenger of the Greek pantheon; he is also the patron of messengers. Hermes relays information between gods and mortals; he also guides dead souls to Hades the Underworld lord. In ancient Greece, Hermes was worshipped as the bridge between mortal and immortals; nowadays he is the symbol of the Hellenic Post.

³⁶ Goku is a fictional hero from one of the most popular Japanese comics, The Dragon Balls. The name Goku comes from the pronunciation of Wukong.

Although a messenger is not Wukong's main identity, he delivers information between two parties various times. For instance, in the eighty-seventh chapter, the pilgrims arrived in a county that had suffered from extreme drought for three years. To save the people and bring their wishes to heaven, Wukong flew to Jade Emperor and asked why the heavenly ruler refused to give rainfalls. Jade Emperor told Wukong that because the prefect had offended the Heaven three years ago, no one was allowed to bring any rainfall to the place. Wukong brought back the Emperor's message and taught the prefect how to repent and return to virtue. When the prefect's regret was heard by the Heaven, thunder and rainfall followed immediately. And this particular case is not alone. During his journey, Wukong brought several countries the rainfalls they needed. In some cults in Fujian province, Wukong is worshipped as a rain god since he brings the wishes and needs of mortals to Heaven.

Hermes and Wukong share more similarities other than their identities as speedsters and messengers. For instance, the two trickster heroes are both known as animal tamers. Hermes is the patron of shepherds while Wukong was once Jade Emperor's horse keeper. When Wukong introduces his strength, he always says that he is strong enough to "tame tigers and subdue dragons." Another highlighted similarity between the two is that both are eloquent speakers. As tricksters, they know how to persuade, avoid responsibility, and make fun of others through the art of languages. Sometimes tricky tongues are all they needed to do their magic. Hermes showed his eloquence when arguing with Apollo; and Wukong never met a rival in debating in the novel. Other tricksters, such as Loki and Prometheus, are known for their speaking skills as well. Hermes and Wukong are both excel at the skill of putting someone to sleep. This skill comes extremely

convenient in their thefts. According to Homeric Hymn, Hermes is the “bringer of dreams.” And during his theft of the cattle, Hermes used his lyre to lead Apollo’s herds into dreams. Moreover, according to *Iliad*, “he charms men’s eyes to sleep.” Wukong’s hypnosis trick is his sleep-inducing insects: he won the insects by gambling with the guards of the Heaven Palace. The insects can turn human and demons into sleep as deep as Wukong wishes, and this trick has helped him to successfully steal numerous treasures from his enemies. Wukong once put an entire country which had forcedly killed all Buddhism monks in sight to deep sleep and shaved all heads of its people just like Buddhist monks. No one was able to figure out Buddhist monk anymore since everyone in the country was bald. Nonetheless, different from Hermes, Wukong is capable to freeze anyone he wants. The freezing ability also comes useful in theft; Wukong freezes the peach harvester the Queen Mother sent and ate all the big peaches in front of them.

It is believed by Jung that the tricksters’ dream-bringer identities reflect their roles as the middle man between mortals and immortals. The ability to put someone to sleep echoes with their identities. In various civilizations, including Greek and Chinese cultures, people sometimes receive prophecy and sacred messages from God’s messengers in dreams.

Because tricksters are clever, most of them are good at calculations. When their sly and cunning nature adds up with eloquence and arithmetic, tricksters become perfect businessmen and consultants. As the patron of traders, Hermes and his Roman identity, Mercury, are worshipped by businessmen in various cultures. Although Wukong is not widely known as a businessman, Monkey’s exceptional arithmetic and eloquent speech enable him to deal with all kinds of business. He also talks about his missions and challenges like businesses. In chapter

forty-sixth, three demons challenge Xuanzang and his disciples for three competitions because Wukong beat them in rain praying. Since they wanted to save their reputation as powerful shamans, they dared Wukong to cut off his head, opening his chest, and take a bath in boiling cauldron with them. As a thrill-seeker and immortal, Wukong said “Lucky! Lucky! Business has come to my door.” (Wu, 2: 342) when he heard the demons. In another chapter, Wukong accuse the Devaraja Immortal³⁷ for letting his daughter abduct Xuanzang. When Wukong was tied up before he had won the case, he smiled and said “Old Monkey has to do his own business this way: he must lose and then he’ll win, relax, that’s how one should do business” (Wu, 4: 131) Wukong is also the most reliable consultant of his master. Because of his unparalleled strength and creativity, Wukong is always the first choice for Xuanzang when problems come along. Odysseus, although not a commercial person, was the most reliable consultant of the Greek army in the Trojan War. It is Odysseus who designed the Trojan Horse and breaches the impregnable gate of Troy.

³⁷ Devaraja Immortal is a military leader in the Celestial Palace who controls one hundred thousand of heaven soldiers. He is defeated by Wukong during the Monkey’s rebellion; therefore, he hates Wukong subconsciously. Devaraja has a daughter by the bond of grace who abduct Xuanzang. He forgets about her existence until his son reminds him.

Chapter Three: How do tricksters become cultural heroes

As I mentioned earlier, tricksters are ambivalent and neutral. Their ignorance of good and bad can lead them to be constructive or destructive. Nonetheless, becoming a cultural trickster hero requires much more than just being a trickster. Like growing children, tricksters have to choose their paths; they can either be enslaved by their desires and become villains, or forsake their destructive natures, devote themselves to good, and become heroes. Obviously Loki belongs to the former type while the Monkey and Hermes belong to the latter. Except for their enormous appetites and ignorance of authority, Wukong and Hermes are alike since they are more than talented thieves and hungry adventurers; they both chose to wave goodbye to their chaotic natures and embrace their social responsibilities. According to Radin's³⁸ definition, the exploits of trickster often form a cycle. A trickster usually has a secret but marvelous birth. In the beginning, he is unsocialized and only follows his instincts. But in later stages a trickster hero learns to absorb societal rules and turns into a more sophisticated individual. His motivations to perform trickery are no longer be instinctual. A mature trickster usually devotes himself to a greater cause and eventually turns into a culture hero when he tricks and sacrifices for the good of society. (Radin 132-146) For example, Prometheus, a Greek trickster, brought fire to the human world and earned him reputation as a cultural hero although he disobeyed the king of Olympus. His contribution to human society is what so memorable. Wukong and Hermes

³⁸ Paul Radin (1883-1959) was an American cultural anthropologist and folklorist. Paul is the author of Native American folklore the Trickster.

precisely match Radin's cycle, and all of their later actions and growth can be explained by the norms of trickster cycle.

First, Hermes and Monkey King both have secret but marvelous births. From the description of Homeric Hymns, we can see that Hermes is born in a secret circumstance. His mother, Maia, "dwelt in a deep-shaded cave, where Kronos' son used to join with the nymph whose tresses are fair at the milking-time of the night, while Hera whose arms are pale in the sweetness of sleep was clasped, and neither immortal god nor mortal humans knew." (43) The entire process of Maia's impregnation is mentioned in less than two sentences. So secret was the birth that, even Hera, Zeus' jealous and alert wife, could not notice. In comparison, Hermes' birth took place in a safer condition than some of the other Greek heroes. Hercules, who is a half-brother of Hermes, faced the threats of death and strangled the snake sent from Hera immediately after his birth. Another brother of Hermes', Apollo, also encountered attacks from Hera's python right after he was born. Despite the silence, Hermes' birth is also miraculous. He showed his unusual abilities even during his infancy. Hermes invented the lyre and stole cattle from his brother Apollo as a newborn. To quote from *The Homeric Hymns to Hermes*:

The issue was brought into daylight, and what had been done was made clear:

It was that she bore a child who was shifty and cunning in mind,

A seeker of plunder, a rustler of cattle, a leader of thieves, a leader of dreams,

a spy who keeps watch in the night, who lies in ambush at gates.

And would soon show glorious works amongst the immortal gods. (Crudden 43)

Homer's language depicts a vivid image of a cunning genius who is destined to be great even among the greatest Olympians. Indeed, Hermes' birth fits the standard of the trickster's secret but marvelous birth. The other trickster, Monkey King, has a not only quieter, but also longer birth. In Anthony Yu's translation of the first chapter,

There was on top of that very mountain an immortal stone... Though it lacked the shade of trees on all sides, it was set off by epidendrums on the left and right. Since the creation of the world, it has 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 the divine inspiration, it became pregnant with an embryo. One day it split open, giving birth to a stone egg about the size of a playing ball. Exposed to the wind, it was transformed into a stone monkey endowed with fully developed features and limbs. (Wu, 1:101)

From the description, one can see that Wukong's gestation lasted for thousands of years. He was born from an immortal stone egg on the top of a mountain. No one noticed his birth until "two beam of golden light flashed from his eyes to reach even the Palace of the Polestar." (Wu 101) The phenomenon was so unusual that it even shocked the Jade Emperor who decided not to pay specific attention to Wukong's birth. Monkey King's birth is silent and time consuming. It is as silent as sun and moon shifts. However, the fact that Monkey is born from an immortal stone is a

biological miracle; moreover, the golden beam, which even attracted the attention from the Jade Emperor for a moment, implies the unusual fate of Wukong. According to the accounts from the first chapter, Monkey King's birth could also be said to be secret and marvelous; moreover, from my perspective, such births symbolize their destiny to transcend the trickster status.

Hermes and Wukong have broad social connections with others. Although Jung defines tricksters as unsocialized characters, cultural heroes deserve friends. Their trickster natures show their immense creativities, and their heroic natures reveal their just personalities. The mixture of novelty and righteousness makes trickster heroes very popular among mortals and immortals. As one of the most beloved gods in Olympus, Hermes is the best friend of Apollo whom he once tricked. From other Greek mythology sources, we can see that Hermes is very popular among mortals as well. As the courier of God's will, Hermes is welcome in the human world because he is the bridge between immortals and mortals. In comparison, Wukong is the most well-connected character in *The Journey*. After he was honored as the Great Sage, Wu describes Wukong "having neither duties nor worries, he was free and content to tour the mansions and meet friends, to make new acquaintances and form new alliances at his leisure... He called them all brother and treated them in a fraternal manner." (1: 160) When Wukong tricked Wuneng and pretended to be the death summoner, Wuneng asked for his mercy by saying "Please go back. Inform the Hell Lord that, for the excellent friendship he enjoys with my elder brother Sun Wukong, I should be spared one more day." (v4. 12) Even though Wukong was a world renowned criminal, deities and immortals seldom rejected his requests during his journey. In the twenty-fifth chapter, all of Xuanzang's crew were captured by Immortal Zhenyuan because

Wukong cut down his Ginseng fruit tree. Because the tree is divine and unique, Wukong made a wager with Immortal Zhenyuan that if he could bring the tree back to life in three days, Zhenyuan should release them. If not, Xuanzang would punish Wukong through the Tight Fillet Spell. Before Bodhisattva eventually saved the tree, many immortals and deities came to Xuanzang and asks for extensions in Wukong's favor. In another stories, a completely strange Bodhisattva Pralamba promise her help because "the Great Sage comes here in person and I will not destroy the good deed of scripture seeking." (Wu, 3:391) From my point of view, the author expresses his idea through Bodhisattva Pralamba that although tricksters are admirable, people would truly befriend them and offer them help when their motivation become altruistic. As Mencius³⁹ has stated, "the people who follows the righteous way get help from others whereas those who lost their ways get none." When Wukong determined to sacrifice for the scripture seeking career, he finds his way and help follows.

A lot of tricksters have two faces. As the representation of chaos, tricksters sometime have double personalities. They sometimes show themselves in both black and white. When Jung comments on the Winnebago trickster, he says trickster's "split-off personality is not just a random one, but stands in a complementary or compensatory relationship to the ego-personality." (Jung 141) The counter-tendency in the growth of unconsciousness is Jung's explanation for trickster's double identities. Because they have grown up, tricksters are able to look back upon

39 孟子 Mencius (372-289bc) was one of the most famous Confucianist philosophers and scholars. His teaching was compiled in Mencius which is one of the four Confucianism classics.

the earlier state of themselves and incarnate them. In other words, their unconsciousness build images of the old, childish, and selfish versions of tricksters and project them in reality. Jung defines the reflection of tricksters as their shadows, and he argues that the shadows appear only when tricksters' mentality has arrived at a higher level. From my perspective, the trickster's encounters with his shadow is a proof of his mental development. He could only look back when he becomes someone more than a childish trickster. Wukong had the chance to meet his reflection in the fifty-seventh chapter. Since more than half of the journey has passed, Wukong has become a much more responsible disciple of Xuanzang. His determination has replaced his appetite; however, Wukong is still not flawless. Under such condition, Wukong has his chance to look at the old him. After Wukong abuses his super power by killing several bandits, Xuanzang exiles him from the team for the second time. Without his best apprentice, Xuanzang meets a fake monkey pilgrim. The faux monkey slams Xuanzang and robs his of all his belongings. Later the true Monkey hears about it and finds the counterfeit. However, their identical appearance and superpower confuses everyone. No one can figure out which one is true until they find Buddhist Patriarch. Tathagata, who knows the origin of the fake pilgrim, figures out the identity of both monkeys and helped the real Wukong to capture the false one. Wukong executes the fake one and returns to Xuanzang. The fake Wukong represent the old Great Sage. He was tricky, selfish, and ignorant of authority. However, such a pure trickster Monkey is no longer tolerable; as a result, Wukong's immediate execution of the fake one represents Wukong's divorce from his chaotic nature, and his determination to vanquish anyone who jeopardizes his career. The counter spirit reinforces the heroic feature of Monkey King, and Wukong never abuses his superpower

again. Having forsaken his childish mentality, Wukong becomes a cultural hero as their journey moves forward. Interestingly the same scenario happens to Xuanzang in the ninety-ninth chapter when the team reaches the destination. Before they finally reach Tathagata Buddha, Xuanzang sees his dead body floating on the river by his own eyes. He is confused because there are two of him. Wukong explained that it is because his master has accomplished his duty and jumped out from the cycle of life. So as an enlightened immortal, Xuanzang is able to revise the old, mortal, and unenlightened self. As a grown pilgrim, Wukong embraces his maturity earlier than his master.

Redemption is sometimes considered as the major theme of *The Journey*. All the five pilgrims have made mistakes before they went west. Xuanzang was exiled to the human cycle because his prenatal identity, Buddhist Patriarch's second disciple, was not paying attention during Buddha's lecture. Monkey was imprisoned under a mountain for five hundred years because of his rebellion against the Heaven Palace. Although Hermes does not need to make up any severe mistake of his own, another trickster hero, Prometheus, is known for his eternal punishment. The similarity between Monkey and Prometheus is that their tricks are played on the wrong people, precisely the unchallengeable authority. Monkey's insurrection, which was driven by his hunger for reputation and power, jeopardized the universal order whereas similarly, Prometheus's trick fooled the King of Olympus. Such a theme can also be found in the exploit of Odysseus. As the hero of the Trojan War, Odysseus unconsciously offended the Olympian God who stood for Troy. Moreover, his tricks on the Cyclopes ignited the rage of Poseidon and directly led Odysseus into his difficulties.

Tricksters break rules, but cultural heroes take the responsibility. The strong sense of responsibility of Wukong is one of the reasons why he is a cultural hero. Wukong has mentioned more than once during the journey that he wishes his contribution could counteract his sins of the rebellion against the heaven. He regards all of his effort as the way to pay back his early crime and actualize his value. From my perspective, this thought of Wukong symbolizes his mental growth as he has developed his sense of responsibility. And the as the journey goes further, the monkey pilgrim is becoming more and more responsible.

As the previous section has stated, tricksters were slaves of desires right after their birth. However, Hermes, Prometheus, Odysseus, and Wukong are admired as cultural heroes because they devote their talents to something other than personal appetites. The most important element that enable each to be so crucial to their cultures is that they have contributed to the civilization. They transform from chaotic personalities to ordered ones. They start to acknowledge rules and authorities, and adapt to the society. Even though tricksters cause destructions, people still love the prodigal sons when they return and find their paths. Thus, although he was one the biggest criminals in the world, Wukong's reliability and righteousness have earned him eternal glory.

Chapter Four: The Uniqueness of Wukong

Although Hermes and Wukong share their trickster natures, they have their differences. Their differences are caused by their genealogies, experience, social class, and most importantly, their distinctive cultural and religious backgrounds. Since Chinese hero is obviously different from those of other cultures, Wukong has to fit the ideology of Chinese philosophy. As Anthony Yu, the translator of *The Journey to the West*, mentions in one of his articles, “The full length novel seems to indicate a presumption of the Three-Religious-in-One ideology.” The novel is so constructed because all of the three religions are deeply rooted in Chinese culture, so as a Chinese hero, Monkey King is a mixture of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism.

It is widely acknowledged that Wukong is first a Confucian hero. Generally speaking, the social order of the novel is constructed on Confucianism although its geography is built on Buddhism classics. As the most influential domestic religion, Confucianism regulates social order and relationships. Like the ancient Chinese society, both mortals and immortals in the fiction live in a harmonious but clearly ranked community. Everyone follows the Five Bonds⁴⁰ of relationships. Although Buddhist ascetics are not forced to practice Confucian doctrines, both Xuanzang and his disciples follow the order as well. Having changes from the boundary-free trickster he used to be, Wukong bows his head to his master spontaneously and devotes everything to protect Xuanzang

⁴⁰ The Five Bonds is the Confucianist regulation for people to deal with their personal connections with each other. The bonds are ruler to ruled, father to son, husband to wife, elder brother to younger brother, and friend to friend. Every party in any relationship has specific duties. For example, the younger parties should respect the older. A son should not disobey his parents and a wife should not disagree with her husband. Confucianism believes the absolute adoption of the Five Bonds is the right way to achieve social harmony.

during the journey. Like his first apprentice, Xuanzang is absolutely loyal to Li Shiming and his parents. Wukong treats his master as father although he is more than five hundred years older than Xuanzang. Like the oldest son in a family, Wukong has to take care of his master and younger brothers. His unconditional loyalty toward Xuanzang can be considered as filial piety since the filial piety is the most important moral value in Confucianism. According to Lin Geng, a respectful researcher of Chinese literatures, Wukong's moral code is not even close to Buddhism. As a Chinese cultural hero, Wukong has to adopt Confucianism since the philosophy dominates mainstream ideology for thousands of years. Nevertheless, Wukong is different from typical Confucian hero, most of whom sacrifice their lives to career and morality. Wukong is one of the few Confucian heroes whose careers culminate in happy endings.

Because Confucianism is very restrictive of sexual relationships, Wukong is not sexually related to anyone in Cheng'en Wu's novel. Actually he never has sexual needs while his brother, Wuneng flirts with every female can. In sharp contrast, Hermes' bloodline continues for generations, and another famous trickster, Odysseus, is one of his descendants and obviously inherits the tricky gift. Loki, Wakdjunkaga, Seth, and a lot of other tricksters are all sexually involved. Wukong's immunity to sex comes with his birth, however, Wukong does face seduction. When he transforms himself into the Bull Demon King, the Raksasi treats him as her husband. Wu gives us a very detailed description.

After drinking a few rounds, Raksasi felt somewhat tipsy and her passion was gradually aroused. She took a mouthful of wine, and then he took also a mouthful of

wine from the same cup. They also traded fruits with their mouths. The Great Sage, of course, was feigning tenderness in all this, although he had no choice but to laugh and dally with her...the Great Sage put the fan inside his mouth before giving his own face a wipe to change back to his original form. ‘Raksasi,’ he shouted, ‘take a good look at me to see if I’m your husband! How you’ve pestered me with your shameful doings! Are you embarrassed?’ (Wu, 3:165)

Although Wu’s Wukong is an asexual hero, the Monkey wasn’t always immune to sexuality historically. Wukong’s personalities are clearly marked by different eras. The erotic monkey only appeared in Yuan dynasty. As it has been mentioned before, the monkey pilgrim in Yang Jingxian’s play has very strong sexual needs. Before he was recruited to the team, the Monkey had captured women and had sex with them in his cave. Even after he joined Xuanzang, he never stopped bragging about the size of his penis. Such erotic imagery of Monkey was very common in the dramas in the Yuan dynasty. Because the Yuan dynasty is a period when China was ruled by exotic Mongolians, the influence of authentic Confucianism was not as strong during Song and Ming dynasties. With very few restrictions from the central government, playwrights in the Yuan dynasty took the monkey pilgrim from the Song dynasty and added more human nature to him. As far as playwrights were concerned, the erotic elements always attract more audience. Although Chinese Buddhism also abandons sex, the effect of Confucianism is more obvious because the Mongolian, who ruled China in the Yuan dynasty, regarded Buddhism as their national religion.

After the Mongolian dynasty had been overturned, the Ming government restored and reinforced the domination of Confucianism. The imperial examination system was further completed; candidates were only allowed to quote Confucian classics in their papers⁴¹. The Ming government fully inherited the ascetic Confucian philosophy from the Song dynasty. Therefore, all the candidates and scholars had to learn Confucianism. Most of the Ming novels contained much less sexual involvement than the Yuan literature. Almost all the heroes of the Ming fictions and opera are very constraint with their sexual relationships. Although the most famous Chinese erotic novel, *Jin Ping Mei*⁴², was written in the Ming dynasty, the bad ending in fact warns people that the lusty lifestyle could cost their life.

Second, Wukong also can be categorized as a Buddhist hero. His main identity are the Buddhist pilgrim and scripture seeker. Wukong abandons Taoism and becomes a Buddhist monk in the ninth chapter; he becomes the Buddha Victorious in Strife after his accomplishment. Buddhism is his final destination. And also, *The Journey's* frame and geography is borrowed from Buddhism.

Wukong is sometimes referred as the Mind Monkey. As an idealistic religion, Zen Buddhism⁴³ emphasizes mental enlightenment. The journey is sometimes considered as a training for Wukong that focuses on his immaterial change of heart and mentality; his physical strength does develop

41 According to Li Diaoyuan, the first Ming emperor did not only regulated quotation range, but also settle the format. The content of candidates' papers could not contradict with Confucianism classics.

42 *Jin Ping Mei*, also known as *The plum in the Golden Vase*, is a Chinese erotic novel written in Ming dynasty. It is written by an anonymous author who took the pseudonym of Lanlin xiaoxiaosheng. It describes the corrupted and lustful life of Ximen and his three concubines in very vivid language; thus the book has been banned for a long time before the foundation of the Republic of China.

43 Zen, or Chan, is a branch of Mahayana Buddhism which originated in China during the Tang dynasty. Later it spread to South Korea and Japan. Zen Buddhism requires monks to discover their Buddha-nature by meditation, and express it in daily life.

much since he is unable defeat the fake monkey by force. Wukong is fully aware of the importance of his mental cultivation. He understands the Zen secret of mind training. When Xuanzang misses his home and shows his anxiety, it is the simian pilgrim who consoles him that

You can walk from the time of your youth till the time you grow old, and after that, till you become youthful again; and even after growing through such a cycle a thousand times, you may still find it difficult to reach the place you want to. But when you perceive, by resoluteness of your will, the Buddha-nature in all things, and when every one of your thoughts goes back to its very source in your memory, that will be the time you arrive at the Spirit Mountain. (Wu 1:452)

The effect of Taoism on Wukong was strong in his early stage. It is Taoism he practices to become immortal because only Taoist teaching could enable mortals jump out of the cycle of life and death. Before Wukong eventually becomes the Buddha Victorious in Strife, he is usually known by his Taoist title: The Golden Immortal of the Great Monad. Most of his friends and brothers are deities from Taoism, and the Celestial Palace is ruled by Taoist immortals. Interestingly, Wu is very likely to use the Celestial Palace to symbolize the central government, since most of the Ming emperors believed in Taoism.

Another difference between the Monkey and the Greek heroes is that Wukong is a hero who is not genetically connected to anyone. Born from a stone egg, Wukong does not have any relatives. Unlike Wukong, Hermes carries the blood of the most powerful God in Greek mythology. The

almighty father of Hermes already guarantees him his royal identity. Like the brand effect, heroic ancestors always produce heroic sons in folklore. Heroes genealogies is the best explanation of their natures and behavior, and Greek heroes are not exceptions. The most obvious reasons that Hercules, Perseus, Ares, and Apollo are invincible heroes in the myths is because they are the sons of Zeus; likely, Odysseus is said to be a heroic trickster partially because Hermes is his ancestor. Such phenomena exist in mythologies all over the world including Chinese mythology. Nonetheless, Wukong has a very different genetic background from other trickster heroes. Although they all have mysterious and marvelous births, Wukong and Hermes were born in very different social classes.

Heroes, including trickster heroes, always have to face the challenge of death. Very few cultural heroes are able to escape from the pursuit of death, even someone as strong and wealthy as Gilgamesh. One of the reasons I love tragic epic is because the heroic but inevitable death elevates the meaning of a hero's career. Wukong and Hermes are two trickster heroes who conquer death. But unlike Hermes who was born immortal, Wukong has to face the threat in person. Actually the original motivation for Wukong to leave his hometown and look for saints is because he wants to escape from the cycle of life and death. He spends decades to finding a mentor and learnt supernatural powers to overcome his fate. Unlike Wukong, mortal Greek heroes cannot escape from their final destinations.

Such differences in genealogy, social status, and gifts might be attributed to the influence of the Chinese imperial examination system which was first introduced in the Sui dynasty⁴⁴. The imperial examination system is the system to recruit officials from all civilized citizens to serve the central government. It was the primary way that Chinese government to select officials for more than one thousand years and was eventually abolished in 1905. Although it is no longer adopted by the government, the Imperial Examination system had a far-reaching impact. The National Higher Education Entrance Examination, which is also known as Gaokao⁴⁵, is sometimes regarded as the modern equivalent to the imperial examination. The imperial examination was first established to select literate officials in the late 7th century. Later in the 8th century, the civil examination also added the military section to choose army officers. (Wang 2) The imperial examination had mostly fixed the problems of the recommendation system which was the recruiting system before the civil examination. The recommendation system was a recruiting method based on celebrities' recommendations and local consensus. Although the recommendation system had provided a considerable number of scholars and intellectual officials, most of the time it was dominated by the powerful bureaucrats who never recommended anyone but their own children and students. Sometimes corrupt bureaucrats were bribed to give their recommendations to rich people they never knew. Thus, wealthy and powerful families always occupied the most important spots in the central government. The flawed system built an invisible ceiling to block

44 隋朝 The Sui dynasty (581-618) is the dynasty before Tang.

45 高考 Gaokao is the annual academic college entrance examination in People's Republic of China. Senior high school students have to take the examination for entrance into almost all undergraduate level education institutions. It is sometimes regarded as the Chinese SAT.

intelligent people in the lower social classes from serving the national administration institutions. Therefore, the recommendation system is said to be responsible for the numerous peasant riots. The corruption and confrontation accelerated the destruction of many dynasties prior to the Sui dynasty. The introduction of the imperial examination system successfully solved the problem because the examination system was built on the idea of general equality. Anyone who studies the Confucian classics had the opportunity to participate in the respective levels of the exam. Although cheating took place occasionally, the new system brought liberalization to the educated citizens in all classes. According to the historical facts, it did largely reduce the amount of peasant riots and improve social stability. Shiming, one of the most brilliant emperors in China, said that the imperial examination brought “all the talented people in China in my control.”

The Imperial Examination broke the glass ceiling and liberated the civilized citizens from their social statuses. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the effect of the system has extended to Chinese myths and folktales. As I have mentioned above, the monkey pilgrim was generated after the Tang dynasty; therefore, all of the literal works of Wukong were written after the introduction of the imperial examination. The Monkey King may be a projection of the scholars' wishes. A monkey without any advanced educational background could be honored as the “Great Sage, Equal to Heaven” mirroring the hope of the scholars. The administrative institutions were no longer monopolized by aristocrats; normal civilized citizens were able to actualize their value by hard work. The impact of the imperial examination can be chronicled in sociological data. Almost all of the heroes before Sui dynasty either came from aristocratic family or carried the blood of Great ancestors. As one of the most important mythology classics

before the 7th century, the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* gives clear family trees for great rulers, and all of the heroes were able to be traced to great ancestors. As China's close neighbor who copied the entire administration system from China but not the imperial examination system, Japanese heroes usually had elite class backgrounds. Before the Meiji Restoration, people were not allowed to have family names except for the upper level aristocrats and warriors. Thus, the heroes in the folktale who have names must belong to the emperor, shogun⁴⁶, and aristocrats' families.

It often appears to readers that Wukong is a much more humanized than most of the trickster figures. Unlike lofty gods, Wukong is a less abstract character. Readers are able to access more than one aspect of Wukong, not only his trickster part. As an immortal, he has mortal feelings. His happiness, anxiety, anger, and sense of humor make him feel like an ordinary person from our daily life. His experiences are typical of those in the universal trickster cycle: We are able to observe his entire growth from a childish trickster to a mature cultural hero. I feel that Wukong is a childhood friend who I grow up with. He was educated by the secular world during his trip seeking immortality; the human world gives him the businessman nature, sense of humor, and secular wisdom. It is possible that Wukong's amiableness comes from the way he is created. Before the formation of *The Journey to the West*, the story of the pilgrims was told by drama and pingshu⁴⁷ masters. Because pingshu and Chinese drama were presented to all citizens, the plots

⁴⁶ Shogun is the military leader of Japanese government. During the Edo period (1603-1868), shogun was actually the ruler of Japan.

⁴⁷ 评书 Pingshu literally means story-telling. Pingshu masters are usually known as story-tellers, bards or poets. They tell stories in public and charge their audience for their talk shows. Pingshu masters usually tell stories in crowded area such as farmer's markets and business districts.

and narratives could not be too abstract and obscure so everyone could understand the stories and morals. Not to mention the general literacy rate in China was low before the 20th century. Thus, in order to attract more audience, pingshu masters and play writers made Wukong speak in a shallow and funny way. Although later scholars, including Wu, compiled the stories into a literal work, Wukong's plebian characteristics was reserved. Because the religious classic-seeking story is very popular in the realm of pingshu, it is not strange that Monkey has combined both religious and secular wisdom. Such phenomena is not strange in other famous fictions written in the Ming dynasty since the period was the golden era for Pingshu art. The other two of the Four Great Classics Novels, *Water Margin* and *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, are both written in very easy language during the Ming dynasty as well. As a matter of fact, fictions and documents were usually written in literary Chinese,⁴⁸ but all the Four Great Classic Novels are written in vernacular Chinese, which is a much more accessible written language than the literary Chinese.

In sharp contrast, Wukong solves problems not only by tricks, but also by overwhelming force. In contrast with Wukong, Hermes never confront anyone straightforwardly. A lot of other tricksters, such as Loki and Odysseus, never abuse their power if they have alternative ways. Their power is only considered mediocre among deities. However, Wukong is considered powerful even among immortals. His attempt to replace the Jade Emperor is driven by the fact that no deity could defeat him. Countless enemies have been defeated by his overwhelming power, and his weapon is so scary that most of the immortals and demons tremble when they hear its name. in so far as he

48 Literary Chinese, or Classic Chinese is the language of classic literature since the Spring and Autumn period. Almost all the formal writing was written in Classic Chinese before the 20th century. Classic Chinese is not very reader-friendly, especially to those who were not well educated.

combines the cunning and masculinity, Wukong is distinctive from other Chinese heroes. Moreover, his contribution to both religious and secular worlds and his success in Taoism and Buddhism makes him unique among cultural heroes. He is so loved that his popularity has lasted for generations. Chairman Mao once admired Monkey King in his poem “With my comrade Guo Moruo”:

The gold monkey swings his mammoth club,

And knocks ten thousand miles of dust out of the air:

the sky is transparent jade. (Mao 109)

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