

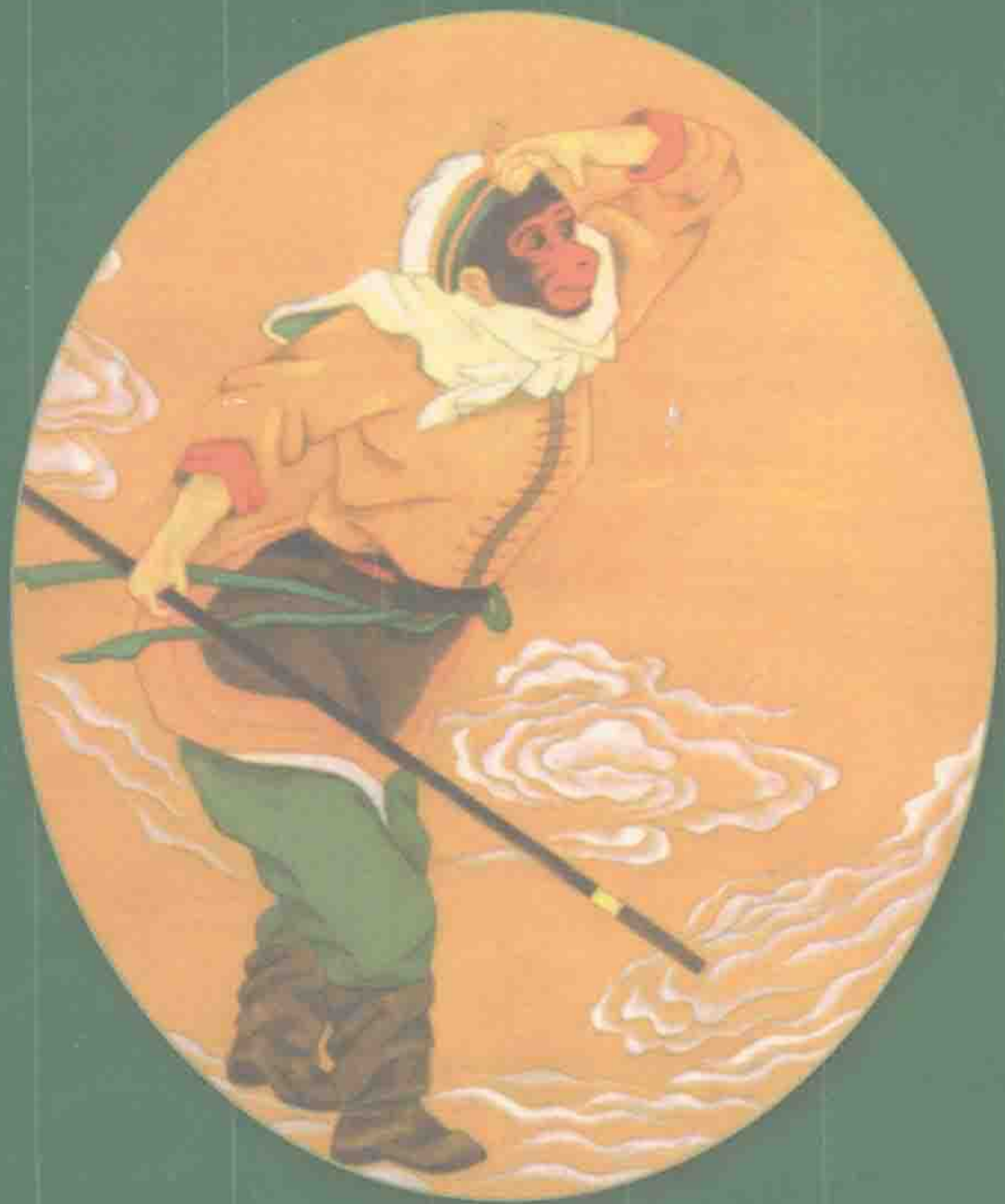
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CHINESE CLASSICS

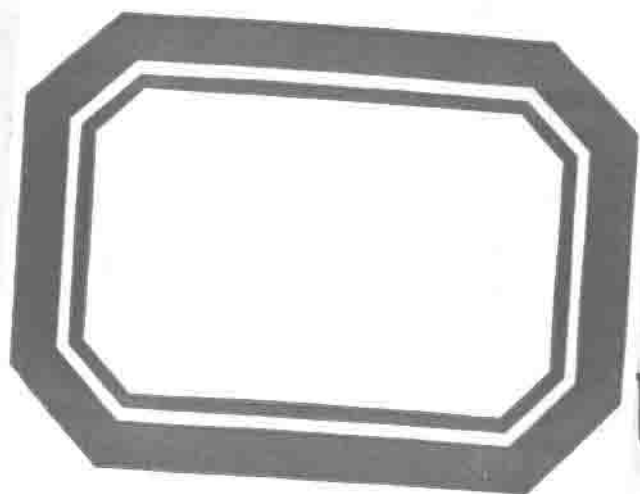
Journey to the West

BY WU CHENG'EN

VOLUME I



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS BEIJING



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Volume I

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FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS BEIJING

First Edition 1993
Sixth Printing 2006

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ISBN 7-119-01663-6
©Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1993

Published by Foreign Languages Press
24 Baiwanzhuang Str., Beijing 100037, China
Printed in the People's Republic of China

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INTRODUCTION

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At the end of the Ming Dynasty, someone called *Three Kingdoms*, *Outlaws of the Marsh*, *Journey to the West* and *Jin Ping Mei* China's four outstanding novels. The term "the four outstanding novels" became current in the early years of the following Qing Dynasty. One of these classics, *Journey to the West*, appeared in the Jiajing period of the Ming Dynasty, during the 16th century. It is based on the story of a historical journey, which had long been handed down, made by a Buddhist monk of the Tang Dynasty to the lands to the west of China. In the course of transmission and re-told from the perspective of mid-Ming society, the story became suffused with mystical elements, and the purpose of the monk's journey became a search for the Buddhist Western Paradise. *Journey to the West* has been immensely popular in China for over 400 years, on account of its fresh and convoluted plots, distinctive and life-like characters, profound and incisive ideological content, and light-hearted style.

The historical background to the novel is as follows: In the Zhenguan period of the Tang Dynasty, a Buddhist monk named Xuanzang (602-664) traveled alone through Central Asia to the land of Tianzhu (present-day India) to seek the original Buddhist scriptures. The Journey there and back — covering thousands of miles — took 17 years, and Xuanzang traversed

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138 states, writing a brilliant page not only in the history of Buddhist culture but also in the history of Sino-Indian cultural exchanges. All kinds of stories about Xuanzang's quest for the scriptures soon circulated among the people, and with the passage of time and the gradual geographical spread of these stories, they acquired a more and more mystical coloring.

As early as during the Tang Dynasty, Li Rong's *Fantastic Tales* contained an account of "Xuanzang and the Recondite Scriptures." In it, the hazards of the journey are described; wild beasts appear and disappear; a mysterious old monk comes to Xuanzang's assistance in the nick of time, etc. In this story already we can see the beginning of a gradual evolution from a historical account to the form of a fantasy novel.

The character of Monkey first appears in the stories as one of Xuanzang's escorts on his mission in the Song Dynasty, becoming an almost universal participant in the expedition during the following Southern Song Dynasty. In an extant printed storyteller's prompt book of the Southern Song, titled *The Tale of How Sanzang of the Great Tang Dynasty Fetched the Scriptures*, Monkey appears among Xuanzang's companions in episodes such as The Mountain of Flowers and Fruit, Slaying the White Tiger Spirit, Expelling the Dragon Kui, Overcoming the Deep Sand God and Stealing and Eating the Peach of Immortality. Although the characterization is somewhat coarse and unimaginative, Monkey is from then on a permanent fixture in the framework of the stories.

By the time of the Yuan Dynasty, the story had been refined by countless unknown artists of the common folk, and its content had been greatly enriched and its dramatic character enhanced. *The Story of Journey to the West*, which appeared at

this time, seems to have been much different from *The Tale of How sanzang of the Great Tang Dynasty Fetched the Scriptures*, judging by the only fragment to have survived, known as Beheading the Dragon of the Jing River and contained in the Yongle Canon (see the character Meng under the Song rhyme in Volume 13,139). The fragment consists of about 1,200 characters, and corresponds to the first part of Chapter 9 of the Shidetang version of the *Journey to the West*.

Moreover, a Korean textbook of the Chinese language, *Paktongsa Onhae*, which dates from the latter part of the Yuan period, contains a section of the *Story of Journey to the West* — the episode when the travelers reach the Kingdom of Tarrycart — which is an abbreviated version of Chapter 46 in the Shidetang version. This book also has eight notes to the text, and describes the plot of the *Story of Journey to the West*. From this we can see that key episodes in the novel *Journey to the West*, such as Havoc in Heaven, and those involving the Bear Spirit, the Lion Spirit, the Spider Spirit, the Yellow Wind Spirit, the Red Boy Spirit, the Fiery Mountains, Womanland, etc., were already incorporated in the *Story of Journey to the West*.

The story of Xuanzang's quest was early adapted for the stage. The Jin Dynasty's *yuanben* drama had a version called *Sanzang of Tang*, and the Yuan Dynasty's *zaju* drama included *Sanzang of Tang Seeks the Scriptures from the Western Paradise*, by Wu Changling. Both of these have been lost. *Journey to the West Zaju*, compiled by Yang Ne, who lived at the end of the Yuan Dynasty and the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, consists of six separate plays of a total of 24 acts. Starting with Xuanzang's birth, other episodes are Havoc in Heaven, Monkey Joins the Companions, Friar Sand Joins the Companions, Pig Joins the

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Companions, Womanland and Borrowing the Fan for the Fiery Mountains. The story of Xuanzang's quest for the scriptures thus shows an expanded scale and structure by the time of the Ming Dynasty.

There is still controversy over who the author of the Ming Dynasty novel *Journey to the West* was, and it has been erroneously attributed in the past. The earliest versions carry no author's name; the Shidetang version, the Yangmingzhai version and others simply carry the attribution "Collated by the master of Huayang Dongtian," and the version with Li Zhuowu's Critique bears the inscription "Commentary by Li Zhuowu." Neither do the prefaces to these wood-block editions indicate who the author was. The author, in fact, is a mystery in all the early printed and published versions. In the Original Preface by Yu Ji of the Yuan Dynasty included in *A Taoist Interpretation of Journey to the West*, which appeared in the early Qing Dynasty with a commentary by Wang Xiangxu, the author is named as a Taoist priest of the early Yuan Dynasty, by the name of Qiu Changchun. During the Qianlong and Jiaqing periods of the Qing Dynasty, the famous scholar Ji Yun argued that the author of the novel was a person of the Ming Dynasty, not the Yuan Dynasty, because the official titles used in the novel were of the Ming Dynasty. Textual research done by Ruan Kuisheng in his *Leisurely Chats* and Ding Yan in his *More Notes from the Stone Pavilion* identify the author as Wu Cheng'en of Huai'an, who lived in the Jiajing period of the Ming Dynasty. However, none of these various theories are universally accepted. As late as the 1920s, Lu Xun, in his *Short History of Chinese Fiction*, confirmed that Wu Cheng'en was the author, based on his appraisal of the opinions of Qing Dy-

nasty scholars. Although informed opinion is still divided, nobody has been able to dislodge Wu Cheng'en from his position as the generally accepted author of *Journey to the West*.

Wu Cheng'en (c.1500-c.1582) bore the style Ruzhong and the pen name Sheyang Hermit. His ancestral home was Lianshui in Jiangsu Province, and the family later moved to Shanyang in Huai'an (present-day Huai'an, Jiangsu Province). His great-grandfather, Wu Ming, had served as education commissioner for Yuyao County, Zhejiang Province, and his grandfather, Wu Zhen, had served as an education official in Renhe County, also in Zhejiang. His father, Wu Rui, had in his childhood shown an aptitude for study, and had received a good primary education, but due to the family's straitened circumstances he had had to abandon his studies and go into trade to earn a living, taking over a silk shop from his wife's side of the family. Despite being a tradesman, Wu Rui kept aloof from the company of his fellow merchants, instead devoting himself to literary pursuits and discussions of current affairs. On account of this, he was dubbed the "silly old fellow" by the townspeople. Influenced by this family background, his son Wu Cheng'en also showed an enthusiasm for books at a very early age, and had ambitions to pass the imperial civil service examination. While he was still young, he became very widely read, was praised by the local inspector of education and earned a reputation for learning. However, he failed to pass the examination even after several attempts, and it was only in middle age that he entered the Imperial College with recommendations. He failed the imperial examinations for another several years, and finally in the 43rd year of the Jiaqing period (1564) he was invited to the capital to be selected for

official positions by a senior official named Li Chunfang, who was from the same hometown. One or two years later, he managed to obtain an official post in Changxing County, Zhejiang, as assistant to the county magistrate. It turned out to be a menial position. Wu Cheng'en did not get along well with his superior, and before long resigned the post and returned home. Later, he was named to a post as a secretary at Prince Jing's Mansion, but it is uncertain whether he actually took up the post or not. He spent his remaining years in his hometown, passing his time in literary composition.

According to *Records of Huai'an* compiled during the Tianqi period of the Ming Dynasty, Wu Cheng'en was "lively and clever, erudite and an accomplished writer." He was on intimate terms with contemporary leading scholars, such as Li Chunfang, Wen Zhengming, Xu Zhongxing, Gui Youguang and Chen Wenyu. During his lifetime, his output of poetry and prose was considerable, but because he was too poor to get them printed, and he left no descendents, they have mostly been lost. A younger family member, however, named Sun Qiudu, collected as many manuscripts as he could from relatives and friends, and compiled them into the *Remaining Manuscripts of Mr. Sheyang*, in four volumes. Wu Cheng'en lived in the middle part of the Ming Dynasty, at a time when the prose of the Qin and Han dynasties and the poetry of the heyday of the Tang Dynasty were the fashionable models for literary men. But Wu's literary works were not modeled on any of the ancient styles, but came straight from the heart and bore the unmistakable stamp of his own individuality. Famous collections of Ming poetry published in the Qing Dynasty, such as

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Zhu Yizun's *A Digest of Ming Poetry* and Chen Tian's *A Record of Ming Poetry*, all include some of his poetic works. But Wu Cheng'en's main literary achievements were in the field of the novel. In his childhood, he had a fondness for anecdotes and stories. In the preface to his *Yuding Annals*, he writes, "When I was at school, I would secretly buy storybooks and so-called unofficial histories, and read them in secret, for fear my father might scold me and confiscate them. In this way, I became ever more curious about such lore." He was especially intrigued by the fantastic tales in such works as *Accounts of Mysteries and Monsters* by Niu Sengru of the Tang Dynasty and the *Youyang Miscellany* by Duan Chengshi. His *Yuding Annals* is a collection of a dozen or so fantastic stories. He wrote: "My book does not just deal with the supernatural; it deals with the foibles of men too. And so it can be regarded as a collection of cautionary fables." Wu Cheng'en suffered personally from the political corruption and ever-increasing social despair of the Jiajing period. He was well acquainted with the ways of the world and human nature. And he had a stubborn streak to his character. In his poem dedicated to Shaxing, he writes, "In my whole life, I never wanted any man's pity. Come laughter or dirges, I faced all with a defiant spirit." Although he did not have any influence in the sphere of politics, Wu Cheng'en wielded his pen in a progressive critique of society. In another of his poems he writes of a recluse who is sharpening an executioner's scimitar in his heart, grieved that he is unable to wield it to do away with injustice. It can be said that Wu Cheng'en treats his fantasy novel *Journey to the West* as a vehicle for the expression of his life experiences and his attitudes towards society.

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From the point of view of the plot, the 100-chapter Shidetang version of *Journey to the West* can be divided into two parts. The first part — from Chapter 1 to Chapter 12 — includes the episodes in which Monkey, Friar Sand, Pig and the White Dragon Horse are converted to Buddhism, the beheading of the Dragon King of the Jing River and Tang Emperor Taizong's descent into the underworld. The first seven chapters describe the birth of Monkey, how he seeks a master, and how he causes uproar in the Dragon Palace, the underworld and Heaven. The second part — from Chapter 13 to Chapter 100 — relates how the monk Xuanzang travels to the west to fetch the Buddhist scriptures and attains his goal after many trials and tribulations.

With regards to the main ideological content of *Journey to the West*, many theories emerged during the Ming and Qing dynasties. According to Xie Zhaozhi's *Reading Journey to the West*, there is a deep meaning in the novel which can be summed up in a few words, viz., "Seek your abandoned heart." This is in accord with the basic theory of Wang Yangming about the nature of the heart; roughly, the abandoned heart is one which has been lost to the delusions of outside things, and what one must do is try to return it to the realm of self-consciousness and knowledge of what is good. Monkey is the spirit of the heart. When he creates havoc in Heaven, that is the heart running rampant and the loss of knowledge of what is good. Monkey's becoming a Buddhist and the Incantation of the Golden Hoop, which is used to control him, signify the taming of the wayward heart. In their *A Taoist Interpretation of Journey to the West*, the early Qing Dynasty critics Wang Xiangxu and Huang Zhouxing see the main theme of the novel as an

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 elucidation of the Taoist theories of Yin and Yang and the Five Elements. Monkey's causing havoc in Heaven, according to this point of view, is explained by saying that the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit is the source of Yin and Yang and the Five Elements: "Fruit and flowers refer to wood; the Water Curtain refers to water; the Iron-Plated Bridge refers to metal; the rocky hill refers to earth; and Monkey, representing the heart, resides in fire. So all the Five Elements are represented in what could be called "an ideal cosmic setup. That is to say that it is the true meaning of Taoism." And so, it follows that Monkey's wreaking havoc in Heaven was brought about by the withering of the Five Elements, and there were no societal factors involved. Sun Wukong as the Mind Ape, belongs to the element fire. The Jade Emperor making him Protector of the Horses is using fire to fight fire. In the Garden of the Peaches of Immortality, because wood produces fire, the fire is enhanced. The Eight Trigrams Furnace cannot melt Monkey, because it uses fire to attack him, and two fire elements make each other stronger." It is only after the Mountain of the Five Elements remedies deficiencies in the Five Elements that the Mind Ape is reined in. Wang and Huang ignore the structure of the novel, and concentrate upon the images as generalized symbols, the messages of which constitute the novel's true meaning. For instance, they argue that Xuanzang and his three disciples plus the White Dragon Horse make the number of the companions five, corresponding to the Five Elements: Monkey belongs to fire; Pig to wood; Friar Sand to metal; Xuanzang to earth; and the Dragon Horse to water. These manifestations of the Five Elements mutually promote and

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restrain each other. It must be remembered that in the period in which Wu Cheng'en lived, Taoist concepts were very much in fashion, and so many of the descriptions and concepts in *Journey to the West* could not help but be influenced by the theories of Yin and Yang and the Five Elements. Nonetheless, *Journey to the West* is a novel, and a novel endeavors to express thoughts and emotions through the medium of the characters and the plot. If we ignore the link of the imagery of the characters and the plot, and regard them simply as a series of symbols or riddles, then we depart from the special methods by which literature interprets the world. The influence of *A Taoist Interpretation of Journey to the West* was immense. Following in its footsteps came *A True Interpretation of Journey to the West*, *New Explanation of Journey to the West* and *Straightforward Guide to Journey to the West*. But the fact is that there were only a small number of scholars who had the special insight to treat the obscure elements in it from the angle of the construction of the novel, grasping the fact that most readers read it as a novel.

The Havoc in Heaven episode is the most popular in the whole novel. Beating within Monkey is a heart of childlike innocence, unsullied by contact with the vulgar world. He is born from a stone, signifying that he springs from nature, and has no connection with society, and thus has no attachments or fears. When the Jade Emperor confers on him the title of Protector of Horses, he is delighted. He has no concept of titles or ranks, or of emoluments, and when he realizes what the Jade Emperor wishes him to do, he firmly rejects the post, and flees. Setting a monkey to guard the Peach Orchard is like setting a cat to guard a fish, and Monkey performs this hilari-

ous duty with a charming naivety. In the episode Stealing the Wine of the Immortals, not having been invited to the peach banquet, Monkey disguises himself as the Barefoot Immortal, sneaks in and gets to the wine first; it is a child's way of getting back at them. Drunk, he stumbles into Lord Lao Zi's elixir refinery, where he gobbles up all the pills meant for the Jade Emperor as if he were eating fried beans. Disaster mounts upon disaster, until the damage is irreparable, and a resort to arms results between Monkey and the denizens of Heaven. The author's inspiration for the siege of the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit by thousands of Heavenly soldiers must have come from the numerous peasant wars which have occurred in Chinese history, as well as contemporary conditions. What Wu Cheng'en is trying to express through Monkey's childlike "havoc" is the nature and form of resistance, ridicule the traditional reverence for sacred and exalted authority, and scoff at the traditional order sanctioned by feudal ethics and the commonly held attitudes spawned by this order. In Monkey's eyes, the Jade Emperor is a coward who cannot be roused to anger, Lord Lao Zi is a miserly sycophant, and the strutting officials in Heaven, both civil and military, who cringe before their superiors and bully their inferiors, are useless blockheads. The strict hierarchy of ranks and the stifling protocol in the Heavenly Palace, Monkey treats as ludicrous. The humorous and knowing twinkle in Monkey's eyes is able to penetrate to the core of a tradition which has congealed over thousands of years. His power of insight comes from his straightforward and natural boyish heart, and his grasp of the reasons for things. There may be a number of political and religious aspects to

the Havoc in Heaven episode, but its main theme is mockery and scorn directed at the authorities and order of the society of Wu Cheng'en's time, and to reveal man's naturally pure and childlike heart. And because this story conveys boyish delight, and transcends political, religious, national and territorial boundaries, it brings joy to the whole world.

In *Journey to the West* a total of 87 chapters are dedicated to the story of the Tang priest Xuanzang's quest for the Buddhist scriptures. In the course of their journey, they brave a series of dangers and vanquish devils and monsters. The road to the Western Paradise is fraught with danger, whether in mountains and forests or in villages and towns. Demons of all descriptions try to bar their way, even to the extent of endeavoring to kill and eat Xuanzang. Some of these ghostly opponents appear openly hostile, while others are cunningly disguised; some wield power over kingdoms or feign to be officials carrying out their lawful duties. Monkey plays a central role in every battle with the monsters, not only contending with them face to face, but also helping his companions overcome the obstacles and restraints that originate within themselves. After overcoming all kinds of evil and devious enemies, with Monkey as the backbone of the company, the travelers finally reach the Western Paradise and accomplish their sacred mission of taking back the scriptures. In this so-called "story of 81 difficulties," although it is filled with myth and fantasy, the staunch spirit and character of the four companions to battle all enemies and overcome all hurdles in order to attain their goal is manifested very clearly, and as such it is a vivid portrayal of the spirit and character of the Chinese nation.

Of the demons which bar the companions' way, some are embodiments of natural forces — the Fiery Mountains are a classic example — but most are representations of social evils. This is exactly like what the Rook's Nest Hermit warns Xuanzang: "The capital cities will be full of spirits, / And demon kings will live in the mountains. / Tigers will sit in the music rooms; / Wolves will be in charge of documents. / Lions and elephants will all be kings, / With tigers and leopards for ministers." These are all images of contemporary dark and corrupt social forces. For instance, the King of Tarrycart has three favorites whom he calls his "elders." These three enter and leave the court without acknowledging the king. Their depredations and affliction of the people bring a pestilential atmosphere to the kingdom. This situation is very close to that prevailing in the Jiajing period of the Ming Dynasty, when the emperor was held in thrall by the Taoist priests Shao Yuanjie and Tao Zhongwen. In addition, the episodes in which the King of Bhiksuland puts his faith in a secret recipe for longevity brought from overseas and given him by a Taoist and requiring as ingredients the hearts and livers of 1,111 infants, and in which the King of Miefafa wishes to slay 1,000 monks are reflections of the deluded and barbarous political reality of the Jiajing period, when the emperor lent his ear to Taoist sycophants and persecuted the Buddhists. Many of the monsters in the novel are connected with high officials in Heaven, for instance, the Yellow-Robed Monster who abducts the princess of Elephandia is the Strider, the Wooden Wolf from Heaven. Also, the two demons, King Gold Horn and King Silver Horn of Lotus Flower Cave on Flat-Top Mountain, who

wish to eat Xuanzang, are the boys who watch Lord Lao Zi's furnace. The monster which seizes control of the kingdom of Wuji is the Blue-haired Lion, upon which Bodhisattva Manjusri rides. As the ghost of the King of Wuji laments to Xuanzang: "His magic powers are so extensive and he is so well in with all the relevant officials. He's always drinking with the city god, and he's connected with all the dragon kings. The Heaven-equaling God of Mount Tai is a friend of his, and all the Ten Kings of the Underworld are his sworn brothers. We have nowhere to turn if we want to bring a case against him." All these demons have their behind-the-scenes supporters, so when they are brought to book for their misdeeds they escape the punishment they deserve. Their high-placed patrons, such as the Supreme Lord Lao Zi, Guanyin, Dragon King of the Western Sea, Tathagata, Bodhisattva Manjusri and other Heavenly kings, connive at their enormities and cover up for them when they are found out, letting them escape scot-free. Monkey is incensed, and rails against these scoff-laws. But it is a futile grumble; he knows that there is nothing he can do about the situation. This is an allegorical picture of the social and political scene in the middle of the Ming Dynasty.

The author of *Journey to the West* also has a cynical attitude toward religion. Examples of this are the Taoist priests who carry off women and gouge out children's hearts and livers to make medicine. Tathagata Buddha too is derided as a "nephew of evil spirits," as even in his Pure Land extortion and bribery are rife. The author's caustic wit is especially directed at Xuanzang, who is depicted as being obstinate and pompous when faced with difficulties, thus revealing some of the ways