Demons, Gods, and Pilgrims: The Demonology of the Hsi-yu Chi

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Demons, Gods, and Pilgrims: 
The Demonology of the *Hsi-yu Chi*

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Introduction

Any reader of the standard, hundred-chapter version of the 1592 novel *Hsi-yu chi*, *The Journey to the West*, must be struck at once by the pervasiveness of demons and monsters in the work.¹ These creatures appear in virtually every episode of the novel. The frequency of their appearance suggests that their presence in the narrative is not merely incidental but essential to the telling of the story. The demonology of the *Hsi-yu chi* is therefore certainly a subject which merits close scrutiny.

This paper, then, seeks to answer a fundamental question: What is the essence of the demonic in the novel? In order to answer this question, we must first attend to such problems as the following: How do the novel’s demons fit into the hierarchy of beings presupposed in the novel? What is the difference, and the relation, between the pilgrims on the one hand and the demons whom they encounter on the other? How do the demons fit into the novel’s emphasis on mental cultivation? What are we to think of the work’s poetic reductions of physical meetings with demons to merely mental phenomena? Why do demons almost invariably appear in the same, predictable way?

Before these many questions can even begin to be answered, in turn, two preparatory tasks must be completed. First, the ways in which demons are presented in the narrative will be discussed, and a paradigm of demonic appearances in the novel will be presented. Second, certain features of The Journey’s world which are presupposed by this narration of demonic appearances will be briefly discussed; for only if these features are understood can the full significance of the paradigmatic narrative structure be appreciated. Prominent among these features is the hierarchy of beings presupposed in the novel, about which the following questions will be asked: What is the nature of this hierarchy? What constitutes the continuum on which its various kinds of beings are hierarchically arranged? What are the mechanisms of upward and downward movement on it? After these two tasks are done, the above knot of problems which more closely surround the basic

¹I have largely relied on the complete annotated translation by Anthony C. Yu, *The Journey to the West*, 4 vols. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1977-83). In the body of the paper I have cited this text by volume and page number separated by a colon. When quoting the original text I have used the standard edition (Wu Ch’eng-en, *Hsi-yu chi*, Pei-ching: Tso-chia ch’u-pan she, 1954); when citing this edition in the text I have written “1954:” followed by the page number.

I have abbreviated the title of the novel to *The Journey*.

Throughout this paper I make use of ideas garnered in a seminar at The University of Chicago taught by Anthony C. Yu. I am grateful to the members of the class for conveying their many ideas on a fascinating text, and I am particularly indebted to Professor Yu for his superb translation, his clear communication of many insights into the novel and the culture which produced it, and for his encouragement during this project. I would also like to express thanks to Professor Andrew Plaks for his kind permission to cite his unpublished typescript of a paper on *The Journey* and the *Chin-p’ing mei*, as well as for suggestions on a draft of this paper.
question of this paper can be unraveled; once unraveled, the basic question itself can be answered: What is the essence of the demonic in the *Hsi-yu chi*?

*Demons in the Journey narrative: a paradigm*

I will first present a paradigm of the pilgrims’ encounters with demons and the subsequent subjugation of these fiends. Then, since an exhaustive consideration of all demonic appearances in *The Journey* is impractical here, I will adduce only a few textual examples of how this paradigm is fleshed out in the narrative. I will also briefly discuss certain textual divergences from this paradigm. Along the way I will divide the demons into certain categories.

Subjugation of demons in *The Journey* almost invariably takes narrative shape in the following seven steps:

1. **Description of the site where the demon lives.** Our attention is guided cinematically, as though we were looking through the lens of a camera: our approach to demons—and the approach of the pilgrims—runs through the places which lie along the road to the West, “a thousand hills and waters deep; / places full of goblins and snags” (1:394). Demons in *The Journey* are always located in a particular place; many have established large households or even miniature kingdoms populated by animal sprites. Demonic sites are usually, but not necessarily, mountains or waters. Sometimes these places at first appear deceptively peaceful and inviting in the narrative description; on other occasions they are seen from the start to have “a certain aura of monsters” (4:228). Sometimes we and the pilgrims learn only later that entire places are the illusory fabrications of resident demons or other beings (e.g. chs. 23, 65-66).

2. **Initial encounter.** Demons always initially appear under a disguise—usually as human beings, sometimes with a combination of animal and human features, occasionally as a higher deity (such as the Buddha himself, chs. 65-66). Tripitika and, to a lesser extent, Chu Pa-chieh are deceived by these disguises with notorious frequency; it is almost always Monkey who first sees through them (exception: 4:105).

3. **Initial battle(s).** These grand fights between pilgrims and demons, often protracted struggles narrated in prose and verse of several chapters’ length, are often preceded or accompanied by recitals of the autobiographies of the pilgrims and sometimes of the demons. The fights always involve magic powers and weapons, the latter being frequent objects of poetic eulogy. The relative degree of magic power possessed by demons and pilgrims is a function, often, of their relative degree of self-cultivation.

4. **Stalemate or initial defeat for pilgrims.** The mode of demonic attack is often that of engulfment or envelopment; since many of the novel’s demons live in caves, the captured pilgrims are often “bagged” in the dark recesses of these mountain lairs.

5. **Location of the demon’s “master.”** When the nadir of defeat is reached, it becomes important for the true name and identity of the demon to be found out. So we constantly find Monkey inquiring of local people or deities (t'u-ti 地) about the identities of

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2A good example of how the aspect of a place can change with the state of mind of the pilgrims is 4:159.

3That the pilgrims usually are in a position to recite their stories openly, while the demons normally conceal their true identities, is in itself a clue to the fundamental difference between them which will emerge in the last section.
nearby fiends. This information, usually detected by Monkey, allows the master (chu主) of the demon to be located and his or her aid solicited. For every demon there is a master, as the Chinese saying goes (quoted, I believe, somewhere in the novel):物各有其主. This being—almost always a deity (shen神) or immortal (hsien仙) in the Taoist-Buddhist pantheon, a being more or less highly placed in the cosmic bureaucracy—then either makes an appearance in person or lends Monkey some powerful device capable of effecting the capture of the monster. Sometimes the master appears before being bid to do so by the pilgrims, having “calculated” the location of his or her delinquent subordinate.

6. Subjugation (fu伏, chin禁, hsiang降). Demons are usually surprised to see their true lords and masters present, and surrender readily; the masters are often equally surprised to discover the antics of their former servants. The demons are physically subdued; their motion is stopped; where possible, restitutions are made. The complete details of their identities and biographies are revealed, and we learn that, for instance, a great martial king is really Lao Tzu’s green buffalo (chs. 50-52), or that the princess

“This concern with the naming and taxonomy of demons pervades not only The Journey but much of Taoist, Buddhist, and popular lore as well. The radical mutability of demons into so many different kinds of thing prompted a concern with the classification of their types, a concern manifest, for instance, in the *Pao Pu-tzu*: “The mountain power in the form of a little boy hopping backward on one foot likes to come and harm people. If you hear a human voice at night in the mountains talking loud, its name is Ch’i. By knowing this name and shouting it, you will prevent it from harming you... There is another mountain power, this one in the shape of a drum, colored red, and also with only one foot. Its name is Huí. Still another power has the shape of a human being nine feet tall... Whenever one of these appears, shout its name, and it will not dare harm you...” (James R. Ware, trans., *Alchemy, Medicine & Religion in the China of A.D. 320: The Nei Pien of Ko Hung* (New York: Dover, 1966), p. 287; this work has many more examples of demonological theory. For an interesting hypothesis on the significance of lameness, going on one foot, etc., cf. Whalen Lai, “Symbolism of Evil in China: The K’ung-chia Myth Analyzed,” *History of Religions* 23/4 (May 1984), pp. 316-343). The Journey belongs to an old tradition of the encountering of demons while traveling; see Chiang Shao-yuan, *Chung-kuo ku-tai lu-hsing chi yan-chiu* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1935). Likewise, in esoteric religious Taoism there is a long tradition of exorcising demons and controlling spirits by techniques involving the visualization of their physical appearances and the recital of their true names, complete knowledge of which is a guarded secret. See, for example, Michael Saso, *The Teachings of the Taoist Master Chuang* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978). Other techniques of control of demons included the use of mirrors (cf. Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine, and Religion*, p. 281—this technique is still in use today by Taoist celebrants in Taiwan, who place a mirror on their altar while performing rites) and of the power of Buddhadharma, unlocked through mudras and dhāranis (e.g. J. J. M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China* [Taipei: Ch’eng-wen Publishing Co. 1972 rept. of original 1892!1910 ed.], vol. IV, pp. 192-194, a story from the *Sou shen chi*). The novelist was of course entirely familiar with this tradition, as evidenced in the following passage (2:235):

“If you know those stories about strange plants and possessed vegetation, you should know that every thing can become a spirit. In most cases, they may not be too dangerous, but if you should run into something like a python which has become an evil spirit after prolonged self-cultivation, you’d be in trouble. A spirit like that can even possess knowledge of a person’s nickname. If he should call out, hiding in the bushes or in the fold of the mountain, a person may get by if he does not answer him, but if he does answer, the spirit can snatch away his primal soul, or he can follow that person and take his life that night. Let’s get away! Let’s get away! As the ancients said, ‘If you escape, just thank the gods.’”

E. g. in ch. 95, the appearance of Ta Yin Hsing Chin to subdue the Jade Hare. Chao Ming-cheng, *Ye fan ‘Hsi-yu chi’ chung shen-fu yu yao-mo ti kuan-hsi”* 也談《西遊記》中神佛與妖魔的關係 (A contribution to the discussion on the relation between gods and demons in *The Journey*), *Wen-shi che 文史哲* 1982:5, pp. 59-64, stresses the dependence of most of the novel’s demons on their celestial masters.

That masters do not know what their subordinates are doing constitutes one of the novel’s several modes of political satire.
of an Indian kingdom is really the Jade Hare of the moon (chs. 93-95). The revelation of these true biographies matches the physical manifestation of the "true form" or "original shape" of the creature (hsien pen shen 現本身, pen hsian 本相, yuan shen 原身, pen hsing 本形).

7. Integration of demon into cosmic order. Important demons with or without celestial origins are not usually killed—unlike their lesser, animal-spirit followers, who are almost always exterminated en masse. Rather, they are installed in a "right" position: either they are restored to the post in the cosmic bureaucracy which they occupied before descending to earth, or a new niche in that bureaucracy is created for them if they occupied none previously.

The structure of the Red Boy episode (chs. 40-43) illustrates this paradigm of demon-subjugation. None other than Kuan-yin is required to subdue the fiend, after the pilgrims fail to do so in several rounds of battle. Kuan-yin spares his life after he converts to Buddhadharma; she promises to use him as her personal attendant.

Another demonic encounter which closely follows the pattern of the Red Boy’s subjugation is that of the Bear Monster of Black Wind Mountain, who steals Hsüan Tsang’s cassock (chs. 16-17). In this case, too, the demon is so powerful as to require the assistance of Kuan-yin as master. Here, too, the "bogus immortal’s" life is spared so that he may be installed as a guardian god (shou-shan ta-shen 鈞山大神) at Potalaka Mountain. His "vaulting ambition checked" and "boundless license curbed," this subdued demon, like Red Boy, finally is made to "convert" to dharma (hsiang-kuai ch'eng-chen 僧怪成功, 1954:202).

Red Boy and the Bear Monster typify one particular sort of demon in the novel. Like all demons, they have cultivated the Tao for enough generations to have achieved

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7This integration of quelled demons into cosmic order is paralleled in Indian Buddhist naga lore which, reported by the historical Hsüan Tsang in his Hsi-yu chi after his return from India, was certainly accessible to the author of the novel. Cf. Lowell W. Bloss, "The Buddha and the Naga: A Study in Buddhist Folk Religiosity," History of Religions 13/1 (August 1973): 36-55, and also his unpublished dissertation, "Ancient Indian Folk Religion as seen through the Symbolism of the Naga," University of Chicago, 1971. The Buddhist prototype of the subjugation of demons is of course that of Mara by the Buddha, for which see, e.g., Lowell Bloss, "The Taming of Mara: Witnessing to the Buddha's Virtues," History of Religions 18/2 (November 1978), pp. 156-176. All of the noted correlates to the demonology of the novel are rough at best, however; the novel is distinguished not only in its comic handling of demon-subjugations but especially in the following two ways: (1) while the demons in many Chinese tales usually just happen to prey on people, without warning and for no particular reason, in the novel there is of course an inexorable logic to their appearances along the journey's path, a logic seen most clearly in the numerological scheme of eighty-one (9 x 9) trials which the pilgrims must pass through. The demonic attacks thus become the very unifying thread of the journey narrative, the engine as it were of the story’s progression; and they are laden with much more significance than they have in most popular contexts. (2) There is no hint in most popular tales (though there is in esoteric Taoist ritual and Buddhist doctrine, facts which themselves say something about the roots of the novel) of the reduction of demons to mental disturbances or illusory miasma; yet this mentalization of demons pervades and is central to The Journey, as will be shown below.

8Space does not allow a detailed correlation of the steps in the paradigm of subjugation with the story of Red Boy. It is interesting to note that the figure of Red Boy already appears in early versions of the story, where he is sometimes connected with Hariti = Kuei-tzu Mu 鬼子母. Kuei-tzu Mu appears in the hundred-chapter version, all right, but in that version it is the character Raksa—who will receive ample comment in this paper—whose story parallels that of the pre-Ming Hariti figure. The story goes that Buddha abducted the most beloved of Hariti’s thousand sons, her youngest, in order to convert her to dharma. See Glen Dudbridge. The Hsi-yu chi: A Study of Antecedents to the Sixteenth-Century Novel (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 16-18, 72-74, 95.
considerable powers.\(^9\) (For instance, we learn that the Bear Monster “attained the way of humanity through self-cultivation [hsiu ch'eng jen tao修成人道], through the “magic of nourishing one’s essence and feeding on breath” [yang-shen fu-ch'i chih shu養神服氣之道, 1954:197]. Similarly, Red Boy’s fire is said to be the product of his self-cultivation.) But the distinguishing feature of this category of demons is that they have never yet been promoted to a position in the celestial hierarchy. Although they have pursued the work of self-cultivation over many generations here on earth, in the bear’s case even ascending up the scale of being from animal to human, they have still not been integrated into cosmic bureaucratic order by being awarded an official post in recognition of their achievement.

Much more common in The Journey is a second type of demonic biography, and under this type must be included not only most demons in the novel but also all five of the pilgrims. This type of being held an official post in the celestial bureaucracy prior to the T’ang era, the era of the pilgrimage. However, owing to some misdeed or base intention, the miserable creature was banished or fell to earth to eke out an existence as an animal-spirit, a combination animal-human, or (in Gold Cicada’s case) a human being with superior powers. The reason for these delinquent beings’ fall is explained in the novel on three levels. On a simple moral level, the former celestial officer has transgressed a rule or manifested a lack of appropriate moral attitudes, and therefore deserves to descend to earth. On the Buddhist level, the unfortunate being must descend to this world to work out, often through the mechanism of rebirth in lower forms, the effects of the bad karma generated above. On the Taoist level, finally, the misdeed above may be ascribed to a deficiency of self-cultivation, and the being, displaced to a lower level in the cosmic hierarchy, must through cultivation work its way back up the ladder. Both in frequency of mention and in power of imagery, the “Taoist” explanation of these delinquents’ fall dominates the novel’s etiology; but the other two sorts of notions are also frequently woven into the demonic biographies.

Narrative appearances of demons of this second sort follow the same basic paradigm as that sketched above. Episodes involving these fallen demons differ slightly from episodes of upwardly-mobile fiends like Red Boy, however. In the case of Red Boy and the Bear Monster, for instance, there was no particular reason, apart from her vast dharmic powers and pre-existent iconography, to seek out Kuan-yin as deliverer; other powerful deities might have served the pilgrims’ purpose, and indeed it was the Ao brothers who were first sought to quench the Boy’s fire. But in the case of the latter and far more numerous class of fiends, only that particular being who, by virtue of his or her placement in the celestial bureaus, is both responsible for the delinquency of the monster and capable of overpowering it will prove to be the appropriate agent of subjugation. In these cases, other beings will not do, even though they possess great powers; the economy of master-and-subordinate (物各有其主) requires that the precisely appropriate deity be enlisted. Accordingly, in these sorts of episodes, subjugation takes the form of a restoration of previous orderly arrangements through a reconstitution of proper relations between master and subordinate.\(^10\)

\(^10\)Other episodes involving fallen celestial beings turned into monsters include those of the Black Rooster demon king, originally Manjusri’s green-haired lion (chs. 37-9); the Yellow Robed Monster, actually Revati, the Wood-Wolf Star, one of the twenty-eight constellations (chs. 29-31); Manjusri’s green lion (making another
Actually, however, even fiends on their way up, such as Red Boy, are often subdued, not by just any master, but by divine creatures which according to folklore are especially potent foes of the type of demon in question. In Chinese villages, for instance, roosters are turned loose on noxious insects; so in several episodes of the novel it is rooster-spirits who quell demonic centipedes and scorpions (chs. 55, 73). And Monkey, in his contests of transformation with wily ogres, runs through often lengthy series of changes into creatures suitably equipped to vanquish the form assumed by the demon (ch. 61; also his initial contest with Erh Lang in ch. 6).11

Not all earthly spirit-creatures which appear in The Journey do so according to the paradigm of demon-subjugation outlined here. There is a class of animal-spirits who, while not as important in the narrative as the demons around whom episodes are built, nevertheless yield clues to the system of demonology implied in the novel. For purposes of discussion, this class of spirits may be divided into two parts.

The first part consists of those “little ones” or “lesser demons” (hsiao-te men, hsiao-yao 小妖) who constitute the household servants and armies of more important and powerful demons (yao-mo, mo-t'ou 妖魔, 魔頭). They are animals who have cultivated themselves to the point of possessing a few powers. These powers often include the ability to assume human form. It is important to note, however, that while they may take on the outward appearance of humans, they are not really human in the same sense as are Hsüan Tsang, lay people, or even a reformed demon like Raksasi who has attained the “way of humanity” (3:184). Monkey can see through their disguises to their real nature underneath. And when the pilgrims wipe out whole nests of these comparatively harmless fiends, at the point of death they reveal their “original forms” (yuan shen 原身). For example:

When Pilgrim saw them [Pa-chieh and helpers], he asked, “What happened at the Cloud-Touching Cave?” “The mistress of that old bull,” replied Pa-chieh, chuckling, “was killed by one blow of my rake. When I stripped her, she turned out to be a white-faced fox. The rest of the fiends were all donkeys, asses, cows, stallions, badgers, foxes, musk deer, goats, tigers, antelopes, and the like—they have all been wiped out” (3:179, ch. 61).

These animal-spirits, in order to further their own self-cultivation and climb the ladder of perfection, hitch their fortunes to that of an upwardly mobile spiritual and appearance here) and Visvabhadra’s white elephant, along with a Great Roc who, because of events soon after the parting of Chaos, is “somewhat related” to Tathagata and is therefore subdued by him (ch. 77); the Jade Hare of the Moon, who in human form unsuccessfully tempts Tripitaka sexually (ch. 95); and others. Demons who have not fallen from the Region Above but are working their way up from below—demons of the first category mentioned above, typified by Red Boy—include a huge centipede which has cultivated itself to the point of commanding powerful golden beams and taking on the form of a Taoist (subdued by a hen-deity, since “chickens are the deadliest foes of centipedes,” ch. 73); a scorpion spirit, who assumed human form to tempt the T’ang monk sexually, of whom the author says: “In vain the scorpion seeks the human ways; / she now her true, original form displays” (ch. 55); the spider spirits who accompany the centipede above (chs. 72-3); a rodent-spirit with a history of troublemaking, who had worked her way up to being adopted as Devaraja Li’s daughter, only to transgress again by seizing Hsiian Tsang for the purpose of cultivation through “stealing his yang” by sex (ch. 83); and others.

11 The transformability of demons into almost any form—including animals, plants, and even rocks—is perhaps their chief characteristic in popular demon lore. For examples, cf. de Groot, Religious System, vols. IV and V; Maspero, Taoism and Chinese Religion, book II; and most of the stories collected under demonic headings in the Tai-p’ing kuang-chi (Shanghai: Sao-ye shan-fang Press, 1930).
political leader: spiritual, because this leading figure often aids them in the cultivation of self, sometimes by providing them with foods that enhance longevity; political, because the structure of authority in these little communities always mirrors the familiar Chinese monarchical model.

In the story of Monkey and his kingdom of simians and other animal allies (chs. 1-7) we have an expanded picture of the process by which these groups take shape around their leaders. His fellow monkeys name him king because of his superior abilities. He rules for “three or four hundred years,” appointing officers and ministers. But, troubled by his awakening to the fact of mortality, he sets out to seek a Way to “be young forever.” His subjects approve of this, for among them, too, “each one [is] troubled by his own impermanence” 俱以無常為慮 (1:73, 1954:6). They benefit from the Great Sage’s acquisition of immortal’s powers and learn for themselves something of the spagyrical arts. And the status of the Monkey King as one proficient in the cultivation of the Way entails his enhanced political charisma (the two are inseparable), attracting the allegiance of non-simian animals, even insects. At the same time, most of the followers of the Sage—especially his non-simian allies of the community, the “tigers and leopards, wolves and insects, badgers and foxes” (1:149)—must suffer extermination when their leader disturbs the heavenly throne.

The other sort of animal-spirit which does not match the paradigm of demon-subjugation is typified by the White Turtle of the Heaven-Reaching River. He is described in language laden with clues to the novel’s implicit system of demonology. A poem celebrates him as “a square-headed divine not of this world; his name: a water god most subtle and shrewd” 方頭神物非凡品，九助機號水仙，one who is truly enlightened by nourishing his breath 禍氣含靈真有道 (2:399). He tells Pilgrim: “Since I had awakened to my source and origin, I succeeded in nourishing my spiritual breath and I have been practicing self-cultivation in this place” 我因省悟根本成靈真在此處修行 (2:400). But he has far to go in the work of self-cultivation, for he tells Tripitika: 12

I have practiced self-cultivation here for a full thirteen hundred years. Though I have lengthened my age and lightened my body, and I have also acquired the knowledge of human speech, I find it difficult to shed my original shell. When you get to the Western Heaven, I beg the old Master to inquire of the Buddhist Patriarch and see when I may cast off my original shell to acquire a human body (2:401, 1954:571-72).

We have here, then, a type of being which, while not appearing frequently in the novel, nevertheless is distinct: an animal which cultivates itself through the spagyrical arts in a peaceful way, not disturbing the proper order of the cosmos as Monkey prototypically does; an animal which, moreover, is perhaps on the verge of a particularly significant step up the implied ladder of perfection—the step from animal to human.

This completes our survey of the types of demons and terrestrially located animal-spirits in The Journey. There is still, of course, an entire category of spiritual beings whom we have not yet discussed explicitly: those heaven-dwelling (and hell-administering) gods, goddesses, spirits and immortals who are as prominent among the novel’s colorful cast of characters as are the beings treated above. Since an understanding of the novel’s celestial (more accurately, cosmic) hierarchy of beings is crucial for an adequate treatment of its demons, it is to this hierarchy and notions associated with it that we now turn.

12I do not know whether the expression “original shell” in this speech has special Taoist or Buddhist significance.
The cosmic hierarchy

The *Journey* is populated not only with demons but with a colorful range of other creatures, from plants and insects, to humans, to celestials. These creatures bear certain regular, apparently systematic relations to one another, among which is the relation between higher and lower beings. But we may speak of a hierarchical "system" of beings in the novel only at the risk of oversimplification. *The Journey* is, after all, a work of fiction, so whatever "systems" we as readers claim to find in it are liable to be opaque, incomplete, perhaps even internally inconsistent. What follows, therefore, is at best a tentative sketch of some features of the hierarchy of beings in *The Journey*, of which the demons are a part.

We may first ask: *Is there a single continuum on which the beings of the universe are hierarchically arranged? That is, is there a single parameter for the classifying and ranking of beings? Or are there several?* The answer, as I will argue below, is that there are several, which are nevertheless often lumped together under one rubric.

Now clearly the most evident trait which separates types of beings in the novel is the degree of self-cultivation which they have achieved—self-cultivation understood here in the strictly Taoist sense of the cinnabar cult, the refinement of the outer and especially the inner elixir of immortality. Recent critical writings on the novel have already sufficiently documented this point.13 Suffice it here to note that refinement of the inner elixir is the mechanism of "upward mobility" in the cosmic hierarchy which we hear about most often; it is practiced by three of the pilgrims and by all the demons.

Yet elixir-refinement is hardly sufficient to explain several significant features of the hierarchy, and it is these on which I want to focus attention. First of all, careful reading shows that there are certain subtle differences between the Buddhist and the Taoist deities who appear in the novel; yet the fact of such differences does not make sense in terms of nei tan (内丹) lore alone. As Anthony C. Yu has noted, while both groups of deities (with the possible exception of Kuan-yin, who alone among the celestials is treated with unfailing respect by the author) come in for biting satire, the wisdom and mercy of the Buddha and particularly of Kuan-yin are constantly emphasized, in pointed contrast to the author's treatment of all Taoist deities.14

Second, it is not the case that demons—and those reformed demons who accompany the T'ang monk on his journey—can make their way into and up through the hierarchy simply by elixir-cultivation alone. For instance, while it is true that Monkey is at first admitted to this hierarchy merely because his prowess at cultivation makes him a dangerous character to be reckoned with, he remains, in the Jade Emperor's terms, a "bogus immortal" (yao hsien 道士); and so it is inevitable that, in the end, Monkey...
will be subdued by properly constituted cosmic authorities, after he persists in perpetrating rebellious and immoral acts. The same holds for the beings encountered on the journey: as long as they peacefully refine their elixirs without harming the pilgrims or the common people resident in their area (e.g. the White Turtle), they are left alone, but when they block the progress of the pilgrimage or interfere in the lives of mortal humans, they are invariably killed off or subdued (e.g. the extirpation of centipede spirits in ch. 95, 4:341—these do not even interfere with the pilgrims directly).

Third, if only the degree of one’s elixir-refinement counts in determining one’s rank in the cosmic hierarchy, how are we to explain the superior status of human laypersons over that of even highly ‘cultivated’ animal-spirits with lifespans of hundreds of years? These animals, although they live longer than humans and therefore presumably are more successful in refining their elixirs (laypersons by definition do not even attempt this ‘practice of austerities’), are constantly portrayed as striving for ‘the way of humanity’ (jen tao 人道).

Therefore, it is clear that factors other than internal elixir-refinement are at work in the novel’s hierarchical placement of beings. Certain Buddhist parameters are most obvious among these other factors. For instance, it is the degree of insight into truth possessed by the novel’s characters which frequently differentiates them from one another. Thus Kuan-yin and Buddha, although they are in some loose sense part of the total cosmic hierarchy, maintain a status that is distinct from and probably superior to that of the Jade Emperor and his court (e.g. 1:170-71); and the power which they have and the Emperor’s hosts lack is significantly referred to as ‘dharma-power’ (fa-li 法力).

Another specifically Buddhist parameter which seems to govern placement in the Journey’s hierarchy is the karma and merit possessed by individuals, often reflected in their rebirth status. There is much talk among the pilgrims of the ‘fruits’ and ‘merits’ (cheng kuo, kung kuoli 城果, 功果) they will accumulate on the journey, and of the good stock (shan ken 善根) which will mature—‘conditions,’ as Anthony Yu has pointed out, ‘which are socially beneficent and are to be achieved through mutual dependence and communal effort’ (1:62). Hence the language used by Monkey in his crucially important speech to Tripitaka after their liberation from the body is specifically Buddhist, not Taoist; it includes explicit reference to merit-making and also presupposes the Buddhist doctrine of pratiyā-samutpada:

[After they went ashore and boatman and boat disappeared,] immediately Tripitaka awoke to the truth. Turning quickly, he thanked his three disciples instead. Pilgrim said, ‘We two parties need not thank each other, for we are meant to support each other. We are indebted to our master for our liberation, through which we have found the gateway to the making of merit, and fortunately we have achieved the right fruit 僧侣修功得果. Our master also has to rely on our protection so that he may be firm in keeping both law and faith to find the happy deliverance from this mortal stock’ (4:384-85, 1954:1105-06).

Furthermore, Buddha, speaking at the pilgrims’ apotheosis, cites the merit of each as the reason for his appointment in the hierarchy (ch. 100). Explicitly Buddhist language of karma is invoked not only to explain static placements in the hierarchy but also to explain upward and downward movement on the cosmic ladder. Thus the episode of the Jade Hare and the White Lady is described by Monkey as a ‘karmic process’ (位段因果) (1954:1076; cf. also 2:228, 3:353, 3:417). It is also the notions of karma and rebirth
status that can explain why the "way of humanity" is higher in the novel’s hierarchy than that of animals or demons, for this is of course the order given these categories in the Buddhist doctrine of the six gati or courses of rebirth (liu-sheng liu-tao/64|/66/) mentioned explicitly several times in the text (e.g. 1:180, 4:19).

Apart from exclusively Taoist or Buddhist factors determinant of hierarchical order, there remains what for lack of a better term might be called the moral quality of beings’ intentions and actions. Any absolute correspondence between prowess in the spagyrical arts and moral behavior is consistently, and often humorously, undercut in the novel. It is consistent with this undercutting that the novel’s implied hierarchy is hardly an entirely moral one: higher-ups such as Lao Tzu, the Jade Emperor, even the Buddha are sometimes guilty of slight transgressions of Confucian norms, as Monkey never tires of pointing out to them. Nevertheless, while the moral status of individuals is clearly unrelated to their success in the refinement of the internal (or external) elixir, it is related to, and probably inseparable from, their level of insight and mental cultivation. Monkey’s own standard of behavior is the best example of this relation. 15

Indeed, all of the above parameters of rank—strictly Taoist elixir-cultivation, Buddhist insight, virtue, and karmic status, moral behavior and intention—tend to be lumped together in the novel’s dominant rhetoric of (not strictly physical but) mental cultivation (hsiu hsin /心/心/). The novel’s emphasis on mental self-cultivation, as well as its typically late-Ming, syncretic way of expressing this emphasis, have already been convincingly and exhaustively demonstrated. 16 If any single continuum may be said to constitute the novel’s hierarchy, it is self-cultivation in this broad, Ming sense of the term. 17 Yet, as the above discussion has shown, this broad notion of hsiu tao lumps together under one rubric a variety of sometimes conflicting, sometimes unrelated reasons for particular beings’ vertical placement in the fictional cosmos. Hence it has been necessary to uncover the various types of reasons, explicitly mentioned or implied in the narrative, for the location of beings in the hierarchy.

A second question about the novel’s hierarchy and the place of demons in it is this: How firmly fixed are the boundaries between categories and kinds distinguished in the

15 That is to say that, while he may wax playful on occasion, Monkey’s actions along the road to the West bring about numerous improvements in the welfare of local inhabitants.

16 That the novel is concerned with mental cultivation was already pointed out as early as the 1592 Shih-te-t’ang edition, where Ch’en Yuan-chih says in the preface:

“...For demons are the miasmas caused by the mouth, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the body, the will, the fears and the illusions of the imagination. Therefore, as demons are born of the mind, they will be also subdued by the mind. This is why we must subdue the mind in order to subdue the demon; we must subdue the demons in order to return to truth; we must return to truth in order to reach the primal beginning where there will be nothing more to be subdued by the mind. This is what is meant by the accomplishment of the Tao, and this is also the real allegory of the book”

(Yu, The Journey to the West, 1:34).

This point is cogently argued as well by Plaks, in both “Allegory” and the unpublished typescript, and by Yu in both the “Introduction” and in “Two Examples.”

17 For more on the broad sense of self-cultivation in Ming, cf. in particular the volumes edited by Wm. Theodore de Bary on Neo-Confucian thought. For a perspective on the demons in The Journey in relation to this broad sense of self-cultivation, a comparison between this novel’s demonology and that in the roughly contemporary novel Feng-shen yen-i, and an analysis of both demonologies within the framework of cosmogonic theory and ethics in Ming thought, see my “Cosmogony and Self-Cultivation: The Demonic and the Ethical in Two Chinese Novels,” Journal of Religious Ethics 14/1 (Spring 1986): 81-112.
hierarchy? Now there is undeniably a strong concern for taxonomy in the novel. The novel presents a clear taxonomy of celestial beings, for instance. But this specification of beings is played out in more humble contexts as well. Differentiated kinds in the animal and plant kingdoms and in the world of demons and gods are often listed in loving detail. Local deities (t’u-ti 土地) are distinguished from the gods of mountains and rivers (shan-shen, chiang-shen 山神, 江神). Interestingly, Monkey sometimes refers to himself as “a devil in (or of) the earth” (ti-li kuei 地裏鬼, 3:34, 3:391; 1954:606); this expression probably echoes the distinction in Chinese demon-lore between mountain, water, and earth spirits. There are, further, gods and immortals of yin 隱 and of yang 阳 (e.g. 2:243, 3:282). The cosmos and its residents are divided into heaven, earth, and hell, or the “three realms” (4:26), but more commonly (when hell is not important in the narrative) the text speaks of the Regions Above and Below (上界, 下界). The hierarchy in its bureaucratic aspect is also carefully taxonomized in detailed and satirical enumerations of office-names. In short, the novel displays at times an almost obsessive concern with taxonomy, as if its author approved of that notion which the fourth-century writer Ko Hung quoted with disapproval—that “everything has its own individual seed”


19The literature on the gods and realms of yin and yang is ample. One convenient discussion is Emily M. Ahern, The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1973), chap. 13. I will return to this point in the conclusion.

20Hell in the novel is neither as formidable nor as important as it has been in popular Chinese culture. Emperor T’ai-tsung and others are able to modify their supposedly inexorable ming 明, and Monkey makes the traditionally awe-inspiring ten kings of the underworld look ridiculous, wiping whole species of creatures off the dreaded registers kept by these dark bureaucrats—feats which must have delighted Chinese audiences.

21For hell’s bureaucracy cf., e.g., 1:110-12; for the red tape which Monkey must endure to procure a rainshower, 2:253 among others. Ch. 51 amusingly piles up office names. The Jade Emperor gets treated satirically in chs. 1-7, passim; Lao Tzu, 3:33; Buddha, 3:29.


It would be an interesting exercise to compare the total hierarchy of beings implied in The Journey with some standard scholarly treatments of the Chinese pantheon, for example Henri Maspero, Taoism and Chinese Religion, trans. Frank A. Kierman, Jr. (Amherst: Univ. of Mass. Press, 1981), book II; Emily Martin Ahern, Chinese Ritual and Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981); David K. Jordan, Gods, Ghosts and Ancestors: Folk Religion in a Taiwanese Village (Berkeley: Univ. of Cal. Press, 1972), ch. 2; Stephan Feuchtwang, “School-Temple and City God,” and Arthur P. Wolf, “Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors,” in Arthur P. Wolf, ed., Studies in Chinese Society (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978), pp. 103-130 and 131-182 respectively. It seems to me that they all, in varying degree, suffer from a number of interrelated defects: (1) They ignore or slight the importance of the possibility of gods, stars, etc. descending to earth to wreak havoc (besides the numerous examples in de Groot, The Religious System of China, cf. for example Hou Ching-lang, “The Chinese Belief in Baleful Stars,” in Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel, eds., Facets of Taoism: Essays in Chinese Religion (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 193-228); more generally, therefore, they ignore the entire category of beings which as a category are the subject of this paper, and which appear distinctly not only in fictional works such as The Journey and its contemporary novel The Investiture of the Gods (Feng-shen yen-i) but also in popular tradition and cult: namely, the demons. (Taoist, Buddhist, and other demonological traditions are too complex even to summarize here, although it is against the background of these traditions that the demonology of The Journey must ultimately be understood.) These treatments share the mistaken notion that all terrestrial spiritual malefactors are ghosts, i.e. deceased humans, not recognizing that many of those malefactors, both in the novels and in popular culture, have never been humans,
This taxonomical tendency is repeatedly undercut, however, by the dazzling possibility of crossing the boundaries of classes and kinds. The phenomenon of demons (and pilgrims, too) assuming a fantastic array of bodies and forms not their "own" illustrates an effervescent mode of crossing, namely that of hua 化. Two other modes of crossing categorical boundaries—but in this case a crossing that sticks longer, if not eternally—are reincarnation (e.g., Gold Cicada incarnated as Hsüan Tsang; note the bits of rebirth theory at 2:212 and 1:73) and, of course, cultivation. Through both of these modes it is possible to make the two big steps in the ladder of beings, those from animal to human and from human to immortal. Still another mode of changing oneself and one’s status in the cosmos is conversion or subjugation. Ironically, such enforced "conversions" to Buddhaharma as those of the Red Boy and the Bear Monster result in an elevation of status for the initially unwilling monster. The example of Raksasi (3:184-85) shows how conversion to the "right fruit" of dharma constitutes a mode of status elevation in the hierarchy (or soteriological advancement) superior to that of elixir-cultivation. The question of what boundary these beings cross when they convert to dharma must be reserved until the conclusion.

humans, and that many are fallen celestials. (2) They do not allow for the place of animals and plants in the hierarchy, though both in the popular lore of animal- and plant-spirits (cf. de Groot) and in the Journey and the Feng-shen yen-ts 他们 play a prominent role. (3) Both of these errors of emphasis are due to a fundamental one: these authors often focus too exclusively on the bureaucratic, human-society-reflecting nature of the hierarchy, missing the crucial point that it is not just humans who are promoted to rank, but all sorts of beings. Emily Martin Ahern thus says that the three major categories of spirits—gods, ancestors, and ghosts—are "regarded as persons: indeed they are all thought to have been living humans, who passed into one spiritual status or another after death. Being persons, each is believed to act on the basis of human-like reasons or motives suitable to his personal history and present status." (Chinese Ritual and Politics, p. 1).

Arthur P. Wolf has given the most detailed working out of this seemingly de rigeur tripartite division of the spirit world. His statement of his own methodological perspective can be taken as fairly representative of all the works cited here: "The most important point to be made about Chinese religion is that it mirrors the social landscape of its adherents" ("Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors," p. 131). While not wanting to deny the obvious society-reflecting aspects of Chinese religions, nor to argue with the characterization of the Chinese cosmos as highly bureaucratic in conception and imagery, I would maintain nevertheless that these authors have to a large extent overlooked the larger set to which ghosts belong, namely demons. Virtually all demons in China have human-like features, but not all of them are former human beings (ghosts); some are celestials fallen to earth, or plants/animals/objects spiritualized and capable of changing form at will. It is precisely the category-tension inherent in the expression human-like, implying both that X is like a human and that X is nevertheless not a human, that generates the category of the demonic which, as a category, these authors largely neglect.

This almost exclusive focus on those aspects of the novel which mirror human society is shared, although utilized in very different fashion, by most Mainland Chinese scholars who have recently written on the novel. By and large they tend to see the opposition between gods and demons as a reflection of social class opposition; the argument, for them, is over the precise form taken by the novel’s supposed "class" alignments. Besides the articles cited below, cf., for instance, Chu Ta-hung "Chung-kuo hsiao-shuo shi-lueh" cha-chi 他(C) (A book of observations recorded while reading [Lu Hsiin’s] work Outlines of a History of the Chinese Novel), Shanghai, 1981, pp. 96-107; and Kao Ming-ko "Hsi-yu chi" li ti shen-mo wen-t’ i (The problem of gods and demons in The Journey), Wen Hsueh Yi Ch’in 文學叢誌 1981:2, pp. 118-127. It is interesting to note how these scholars’ focus on the social-critical aspects of the novel lead them to detailed analyses of its demonology, while the above Western scholars’ sociological inquiries led them largely to ignore the category of the demonic in the religious phenomena they studied.

23So far this discussion of The Journey’s hierarchy has focused on its vertical dimension. But it also has an important horizontal dimension. The easiest way to discuss this dimension is to focus on the way the words cheng 城 and hsieh 豪 are used in the text. These paired terms take on two aspects. In one of their aspects
The fixedness of hierarchical distinctions is even more radically undercut by a tendency in the novel’s rhetoric to deny duality. This tendency is most superbly expressed in an exchange between Monkey and Kuan-yin. Monkey asks, “Is the monster the Bodhisattva, or is the Bodhisattva the monster?” The Bodhisattva laughed and said, “Wu-k’ung, the Bodhisattva, and the monster—they all exist in a single thought, for originally they are nothing.”

The non-duality theme also receives poetic expression such as in ch. 99: “In Advaya’s gate the dharma profound / Reveals Heav’n and Earth and demons confounds” (4:404). Most frequently, however, the truth of advaya is expressed by reference to the Heart Sutra and its identification of form with emptiness (色不異空空不異色 色即是空空即是色, ch. 19).

We must conclude, then, that the basic emphasis of the novel is on the mutability of kinds and the relativity of distinctions among kinds; typological divisions at times appear, especially in the work’s more philosophical rhetoric, to be mere illusion. Yet the exuberant profusion of categories and colorful particular details in the novel, most evident in the cosmic hierarchy of beings, remains as a counterbalance. We will better understand this tension in the following section.

The fundamental demonology of The Journey

I have discussed the ways in which narrative appearances of demons are handled in The Journey, and I have indicated the different types of demons and other spiritual beings which populate the work. I have also discussed the nature of the novel’s hierarchy of beings. It is only after having laid this groundwork that I am in a position to attempt to answer questions at the deepest level concerning the demonology of The Journey. Many questions present themselves, but fundamentally they all revolve around two core issues which lie at the heart of the novel’s view of demons. In addressing these issues, I will be able to describe succinctly the essence of the demonic in the text.

The first issue: Demons are presented in the novel in two ways which, if not mutually contradictory, at least seem to be in tension. That is, on the one hand the author narrates they bear a generic sense which may be paraphrased by saying that either a creature is integrated with, a legitimate part of, in harmony with the cosmic hierarchical “system” in the broadest sense of that term (cheng); or, on the other hand, that creature is not yet integrated with (or has fallen from integration with), not a legitimate part of, out of harmony with the hierarchy (hsieh). In their other aspect cheng and hsieh bear a more specifically Buddhist sense which is in the novel distinct in principle, if indistinguishable in most instances, from the generic sense.

In its generic sense, hsieh is often coupled with a term for “demon” to form a compound expression: for example, in the titular couplets we find hsieh mo 魔精, yao hsieh 妖精, se hsieh 怪精, hsieh t’ai 邪胎 (for the famous demonic embryos). It is also used alone as a metonym for “demon” (e.g. titular couplets of chs. 46, 63). In ch. 38’s titular couplet we have both terms in their generic senses: “. . . knows the perverse and the true” 知邪正; these terms are opposed to “the false and the real” 假真 in the second line of the couplet.

In its Buddhist sense, cheng often modifies fa 法 (dharma); when hsieh is paired with cheng in this context, it takes on the meaning of “(one who) opposes dharma” (e.g. titular couplets for chs. 30, 46). Other Buddhist uses of cheng occur in the titular couplets for chs. 10, 36, 95.

When expressions like kuei cheng 鬼正 are used, implying conversion to Buddhism, no integration into the bureaucratic hierarchy is entailed: although the two might be connected in the narrative in most instances, they are in principle distinct.
the physical appearance of demons, their actions and words, and above all their tremendous struggles with the pilgrims, in a highly “realistic” fashion. Detail is piled upon detail; many demons and their picturesque dwelling-places, if not all, are depicted in ways that make them come alive in our hearts as we read the novel and in our memories as we recall it. In short, most of the work’s important demons are fictional characters, not mere flat types, and we are given to feel that they are nothing if not real. Yet, on the other hand, countless poetic and dialogue passages seemingly reduce demons to illusions of the mind. In this way the novel seems to fold back in upon itself in self-referential paradox. What are we to make of this?

The second issue: Clearly, on one level of reading, the demons are simply malevolent forces which ought to be extirpated—and frequently are. Yet, equally clearly, there is another level of reading at which demons do not appear so one-dimensionally bad; they are more complex than that. More to the point, there is a level of reading at which the demons seem both a hindrance to the progress of the journey and, simultaneously, a key ingredient—a necessary condition—of the fulfillment of the pilgrims’ quest. How are we to make sense of this?

That demons in *The Journey* are described in engagingly “realistic” terms hardly needs lengthy demonstration. An illustration will suffice. Any reader of the novel cannot escape being affected by the portrayal of the Bull Demon King, Raksasi his wife, and the king’s mistress who turns out to be a white-faced fox (chs. 59-61). There is humor, to be sure, in the quarrels of this triangle, probably heightened for contemporary Chinese readers by seeing a common domestic situation in their own society projected onto the demonic world. But there is pathos as well, particularly in the figure of Raksasi, the abandoned wife. We cannot fail to be saddened by her joyful response to her long-absent husband’s homecoming—saddened because we know that it is only Monkey in disguise. Similarly, when the real Bull Demon King does come home in chapter 60, the author’s understated prose at this point well conveys the sense of emptiness felt by Raksasi and her maidservants (e.g. the skillful touch of having the maids point out that the king’s weapon isn’t to be found there, 3:167). And while we may not regret the elimination of the benighted demon king (or even that of his mistress), we would certainly feel it a pity for Raksasi to die as well. The author lets her live, however, in one of few episodes that end happily for a demon as well as for the pilgrims: “In the end she, too, attained the right fruit and a lasting reputation in the sutras” (3:185). In short, most demons in *The Journey* are hardly the flat, one-dimensionally evil-intentioned forces which we sometimes (but not always) find in early popular fiction or even in earlier narrative and dramatic versions of the journey-to-the-west story.24 On the contrary, most demons in the hundred-chapter novel are described with a realism and a human touch that lend them rounded personalities of their own.

However, this literary realism flies in the face of reminders sprinkled throughout the entire work that the demons are mere mental phenomena. As these none-too-subtle reminders have been amply noted by both Chinese and Western commentators, a few

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examples here will suffice. Tripitika’s words at the outset of the pilgrimage indicate that he thoroughly understands the miasmic illusoriness of demons, if his subsequent deportment on the journey belies this: “When the mind is active, all kinds of mara [literally, ‘demons’] come into existence; when the mind is extinguished, all kinds of mara will be extinguished” (1:283心生種種魔生，心滅種種魔滅 1954:143). The opening poem of chapter 41 says: “Composed, you have peace deep and lasting; / Muddled, you’ll be besieged by demons” (2:246). Often when the pilgrims have fallen into adversity the following sort of verse appears: “Shiftless and slothful, Zen nature’s confused; / Fated for dangers, the mind of Tao’s obscured” (4:275). The titular couplet of chapter 50 says: “Feelings grow chaotic and nature falls prey to desires; / Spirit’s confused and the affected mind meets demons” 情亂性從因憂愁，神昏心動遇魔頭 (1954:574). In addition to these general mentalizations of demons, there are also passages which subsume the fiends under more specific, often Buddhist, schemes. Demons are thus often verbally reduced to miasmas of the six senses, or of the twelve nidanas, as in the titular couplet of chapter 36 (also 2:284, 3:133, 2:163, 4:19).

This apparent conflict, then—between the narrative realism with which the demons are portrayed in the novel and the frequent explicit statements that demons are nothing more than illusory fabrications of a confused mind—needs to be understood. Before tackling this task, however, let us move on to the second issue mentioned above: for, as will be shown, the two issues and their resolutions are closely linked.

The second paradox in the way the demons are handled in the novel—their simply evil nature on the one hand, their complexity and their mutual implication with the pilgrims on the other—is more likely to be an importation to the novel by a Western reader than a problem in the novel itself. One might expect, upon encountering the term “demon” or “fiend” in the text, that these beings would have a more or less flatly evil nature, and that the opposition between them and the forces of good would be clear-cut if not absolute. Not so. Purely bad characters in the novel are hard to find, and the closest approximations are not demons but human robbers who kill for plunder (chs. 96-97). That the demons which haunt the pages of the work are not transparently bad may be seen on two levels. On the narrative level, the roundedness of their characters, noted above, discourages any simple moral judgment on them. They are quite human, liable to the faults but also capable of the virtues of all humans—virtues which are often directly attributed to them (e.g. 3:351, “‘An honest person, the fiend king...’”).

On a more philosophical level, that the demons are not absolutely evil may be seen by briefly examining the terms used to designate them in the novel. Not a single one of the manifold expressions in the text translatable as “demon, demonic, fiend,” etc., connotes anything like a Manichean absolute polarity between Good and Evil. The term yao 妖 by itself or in formulas such as yao ching 妖精, yao mo 妖魔, yao hsiieh 妖邪, yao kuai 妖怪, and so on, does imply malevolence, but its root meaning suggests something deviant from the norm, something undeveloped, bogus, not so much evil as not all good, perverse. The same holds true for the term kuai 怪 as used alone or with yao or wu 27Cf. the works by Plaks and Yu cited above, and particularly the Chinese critical works cited therein. 28This association of “muddled” 廿 quality with the demonic is interesting, for, as we will see below, (1) the text associates demons with yin, and (2) Manfred Porkert, The Theoretical Foundations of Chinese Medicine (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974), p. 28, points out how Chinese medical theory correlates the yin with murkiness. 29I owe this insight to one of Prof. Yu’s comments in class.
in compounds; this term connotes the unusual, the odd, more than the “wicked.” Similarly for the term hsieh which, in addition to its textual meanings noted above (see note 23), is often seen as a “heteropathic force,” arising from within the body as well as from without, which checks normal physiological processes. The author’s frequent use of the term ching to refer to demons is particularly suggestive, for as a theoretical term (especially in Chinese medicine), as Porkert notes, ching is “unspecific, unattached energy derived by a concentration” whose quality “cannot be ascertained empirically and defined according to any conventional standard of value.” Like ling which is itself sometimes used in compound with ching to denote demons in the novel, ching should be thought of more as (in Porkert’s terms) “unattached structive energy,” something incompletely formed, than as unambiguously “bad.”

We now come to a crucial question as yet unaddressed: What is the relation between the five pilgrims and the demons in the novel? It is here that we see clearly that a dichotomized view of the novel’s characters, with the pilgrims ranged on the good side and the demons on the bad, does not fit the novel. To be sure, their relation is one of antagonism. But we have to ask what “antagonism” means in terms of the categories of meaning embodied in the novel. All the signs point to an understanding of antagonism as a relationship of mutual implication, even more radically of mutual dependence, rather than one of absolute opposition.

What are these signs? First, as has been noted above, the pilgrims—especially the four companions of the T’ang monk—often speak of the encounters with demons on the journey as a way of making merit. Even the dragon-horse gets his opportunity, in chapter 30, to participate in the merit-making activity of subduing fiends and escaping ordeals. At their apotheosis the merit of each pilgrim is cited by Buddha as the reason for his reward. It might be argued that the pilgrims thus depend on the demons as a vehicle for merit-making, such that without demons there could be no merit (unless other means of merit-earning were found).

There are several other levels of metaphorical expression, however, at which the mutual dependence of the pilgrims and their demonic antagonists is even more powerfully stated. One of these is five-phase theory. Commentators have often pointed out how the relations among the pilgrims are frequently depicted in the novel by means of the allegorical use of five-phase lore. What has been less frequently pointed out, however, is how the pilgrims are also related to their opponents in this way. In addition to poetic and dialogue passages which suggest the five-phase relatedness of the demons and the pilgrims, we have occasional explicit linkages of demons and pilgrims in five-phases relationships, such as: “Brothers, elder and younger, form the kinship of the three: / Fiends and demons correspond to the Five Phases” (2:81). Because of its two ways of arranging the cycle of elements, five-phases rhetoric powerfully and fittingly expresses the double-aspect antagonistic relation between the pilgrims and the demons, a relation in which the pilgrims not only fight the demons but also rely on them in some sense. Mutual conquest expresses the combative

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31 Plaks, “Allegory,” and in the unpublished typescript cited above; Yu, “Introduction” pp. 49ff., and also “Two Examples.”
aspect of their relation, while mutual production expresses the dependent aspect. The circular arrangement of the five phases serves further to express the mutual implication of pilgrims and demons, as does the host-guest complementarity between phases at various points in the cycle.32

If each of the five phases needs the others for its completion, it is equally the case that yin and yang so need each other. The author uses this metaphor as well to speak of the relation between pilgrims and demons. Examples abound: the clearest comes when Monkey, in an intriguing speech to Tripitaka near the end of the novel (4:406), assimilates all the demons to yin, the pilgrims to yang:

"Master, you don't seem to understand...that when we escorted you to acquire these scriptures, we had, in fact, robbed Heaven and Earth of their creative powers. For our success meant that we could share the age of the universe; like the light of the sun and moon, we would enjoy life everlasting for we had put on an incorruptible body. Our success, however, had also incurred the envy of Heaven and Earth, the jealousy of both demons and gods, who wanted to snatch away the scriptures from us. They could not do so only because the scriptures were thoroughly wet and because they had been shielded by your rectified dharma-body.... Moreover, old Monkey was brandishing his iron rod to exercise the nature of pure yang and give you protection. Now that it is morning, the forces of yang are evermore in ascendancy, and the demons cannot prevail."

It is interesting that Monkey can lump all the demons encountered on the journey under yin, even though many of them have apparently yang-like attributes (most noticeably the fiery nature of Red Boy and of his parents at Flaming Mountain). That the novelist may himself have been sensitive to his readers' likely sensitivity to this seeming paradox may be indicated in his frequent reminders, when speaking of these demons' fire, that it is of spiritual ("samadhi fire," born of self-cultivation, etc.) and not of worldly nature. It is as if he wanted to remind us that this fire is a special case, perhaps an yin and not really a yang fire after all.33

Therefore, the terms used to denote demons in The Journey, their assimilation to five-phases theory, and their correlation with the yin member of the yin-yang pair, all suggest a conception of demons as incompletely formed substances, or as processes which by themselves have not yet reached completion. And they serve to emphasize the essential relatedness of the demons to the pilgrims.34

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32 Other five-phases correlations between pilgrims and demons in the novel include 2:392-3, 2:252. Good English discussions of five-phases theory include Porkert, pp. 43ff., and Joseph Needham, Science and Civilisation in China, II. 253 ff.

33 The association of yin beings with fire has precedent in Chinese myth. Cf., for example, the story, related in several early texts including the Shan-hai ching, of Ch'iih Yu's combat with the Yellow Emperor, in which the Emperor's daughter, Pa (Drought), uses her fire to defeat the Gods of the Winds and Rain whom Ch'iih Yu had persuaded to fight on his side (cf. He (Hao) Yi-hsing ed., Shan-hai ching chia-shu [Shanghai: Ssu-pu pei-yao ed., 1933], chia 17, pp. 5b-7a). I am indebted to Prof. William H. Nienhauser, Jr., for pointing out this precedent to me.

Other textual references to yin-yang theory include 2:243, 3:282, 4:406; and most saliently the chapters in which female demons try to snatch Hsian Tsang's "primal yang," notably chs. 80, 82, and 95 (including the titular couplet). I should also point out here that five-phases and yin-yang theory get linked up in various ways (e.g. water=yin, fire=yang, cf. Porkert p. 182).

34 As seen above, the author makes Kuan-yin take a further step: not only does she relate demons and pilgrims, but she also equates them as products of the same thought. Some Buddhist texts likewise argued for the "consubstantiality of demons and other beings: cf., e.g., the passage in the Taisho Daizokyo
Yet to stress the interrelatedness of the pilgrims and the demons is not to deny that the pilgrims are not, after all, demons. Tripitika’s four companions were demons before they joined the pilgrimage, as they frequently admit (or boast) (e.g. 4:295). What now makes them different from demons? The textual answer that leaps to mind is the one expression kuei cheng 虚正: that, in the text’s own terms, is what differentiates them from the demons. This expression carries a load of meanings which must be unpacked if we are to see part of what it is that makes demons demonic. The pilgrims often use these words to describe their own “abandonment of the Tao” and “returning to / taking refuge in dharma,” which for them in every case means abandoning the quest for immortality on their own lights and for their own sakes, and submitting to the guidance of the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin. The point is not, of course, that they have abandoned Taoism altogether, for (cf. note 23) cheng has as many Taoist as Buddhist connotations in the novel, the two being inseparable. Both the pilgrims and the demons of the novel continuously cultivate the Tao. But the pilgrims, unlike the demons, do so in a cheng way—in the correct, the dharmic way. It is this necessity for following the correct path to self-cultivation that the local spirit reminds them of in chapter 61: “When you mention finding another way, you are bound to fall into heterodoxy [p’ang men 旁門], and you are no longer someone concerned with the proper method of cultivation [pu ch’eng ke hsiu-hsing chih lei 丕成個修行之類 (1954:701)]. As the ancients said, where can one walk but on the main road [ching 楚]? How can you possibly think of finding another way [chuan tsou 轉走]? Remember your master, now sitting...by the road [tsai cheng-lu 在路上]...” (3:174).

Still we have not answered the question: what, fundamentally, makes the pilgrims’ “way” of cultivation correct, the demons’ incorrect? Both Andrew Plaks and Anthony Yu have succinctly stated the answer. Plaks reminds us that “while the essence of self-cultivation lies in the subordination of the individual Self to a larger vision of totality, this same vision can also lead to the illusion that the self-contained world of the individual mind [and body] can stand alone, to the extent that it can encompass the entire universe within its ken.”35 And Yu points out that it is to curb this danger of spagyrical inflation...
of Self that the narrative also emphasizes the Buddhist notions of dharmic law, karmic fruit, and merit.36 Both commentators point out that this subordination of the Self to "the larger Selfhood of the pilgrimage" (Plaks' phrase), so far from being "a matter of passive acquiescence to a hateful policy of [Buddhist] pacification," is in fact the realization of "a freedom that does not destroy" (Yu's phrases).37

The four pilgrims who are former demons, then, depend on (submit to) the Master and through him the law of Buddhism in order to cultivate themselves in proper submission to a totality not encompassable within the reach of their selves. What is demonic about the demons is therefore their cultivation of self in ways which attempt to encompass the universe within that self. Hence the appropriateness of the demons' frequent mode of attack: engulfment of the pilgrims "by swallowing, snorting them into their noses, or using an entire arsenal of gourds, bags, bottles, vases, boxes, cymbals, and bells," not to mention the spelial nature of their lairs.38 In their quest for self-cultivation, the demons have not yet realized the necessity of submitting the self to a larger Self that is the entire cosmic order; they have not yet "returned to the right fruit" (kuei cheng kuo), persisting in spurious, self-inflationary modes of cultivation (wai tao f. ). It is this status of not yet having become fully integrated into cosmic order that is emphasized by the demonological terminology discussed above, and supremely by most demons' literal desire to devour the T'ang monk and thereby practice a "short cut" version of cultivation.

Yet, in the Buddhist perspective which permeates the novel along with this cultivational perspective, it is precisely the demons' preoccupation with the self and its cultivation that is the problem. The ultimate "short cut" to salvation, could the demons but realize it, is the ultimate identity between them and their opponents and the ultimate non-existence of any "self" to cultivate. For them to realize that there is no duality and no self would allow them to transcend the whole enterprise of (Taoist-style) self-cultivation; paradoxically, it would also propel them all the more quickly toward the hoped-for higher reaches of the hierarchy of beings—that is, to the "attainment of the right fruit" and even to Buddhahood. But few of them attain this path (one who does is Rakasasi—see below), and, more importantly, it is only after their self-oriented and falsely discriminating fight against the pilgrims that they are able to attain it.

I have indicated how the author uses certain metaphors to signify the mutual dependence of demons and pilgrims. How do the demons, those loci of bloated selfhood, depend on the pilgrims, if these two groups are indeed mutually implicated in the relations of five-phases and yin-yang? The demons depend on the pilgrims in the sense that the pilgrims are the necessary (but often not sufficient, hence the need for other "masters") catalysts of the integration of the demons' cultivation-processes into cosmic order. Unless the pilgrims initiated the process by which the deviates' true masters arrive to force their submission, the demons would continue on the wrong path to self-cultivation, deluding themselves into thinking they were so powerful as to be (spatially and temporally)
equal to heaven" when in fact, as Monkey discovers, they were no bigger than the Buddha's little finger and no more indestructible than a little fillet activated by dharma's power. Submission of self is true cultivation of self: this is what deities like Buddha and Kuan-yin know, and what the pilgrims learn during their journey; it is what the demons find unacceptable. From the Bull Demon's and Raksasi's unreformed perspective, for instance, their son's subjugation by Monkey and Kuan-yin looks like a "hateful policy of pacification"; it is only after she witnesses the epiphany of Kuan-yin and Nata and the subjugation of her recalcitrant husband that Raksasi is able to acknowledge a power and an order superior to her own, to which her proper response is submission of self rather than attempted encompassment within the self: "...We have actually attained the way of humanity, though we have not returned to the right fruit. Now that I have witnessed the epiphany of the true body going back to the West, I shall never dare misbehave again... so that I may start a new life in self-cultivation" (3:184-85). Most often, then, what the demons learn from the pilgrims is the right way of self-cultivation; less often it is the way to attainment of the "right fruit," but it is not the realization of emptiness, which is reserved to the pilgrims themselves (and only to be attained at the journey's end for all but one of them).

But if the demons thus depend on the pilgrims, for what precisely do the pilgrims depend on the demons? On one level, if their journey is an allegory of that true sort of self-cultivation in which the self of the pilgrim is integrated into a larger Self of the pilgrimage, then the demons become, not mere hindrances to the journey, but the very matrix of phenomenal existence in which it is necessary to sojourn in order to achieve the goal of immortality. If the demons are, from the perspective of the pilgrims, mere mental illusions, it is nevertheless precisely through the vehicle of these illusions that they must pass in order to reach the end of their cultivational quest. It is this fundamental necessity of the demonic presence for the success of the pilgrimage that explains the fact that all eighty-one ordeals are carefully foreordained and meticulously counted up by Kuan-yin and Buddha. It is also this necessity of illusion for the perception of reality that explains the prominent place of the Heart Sutra in the novel, collapsing as it does the distinction between phenomenal illusion 毅 and true emptiness 身. Yet the Heart Sutra also suggests—as Monkey must often remind his master—that to realize fully the truth of emptiness would cause the pilgrims, not just to see the demons as their own complementary opponents who, by fighting, offer the pilgrims a matrix for their own self-refinement, but to see the demons also as ultimately identical to themselves. At this level of realization, again, self-cultivation, important as it is for the success of the pilgrimage and for the allegorical structure of the novel, is transcended by the realization of the emptiness of all dharmas, especially that of the self. Only Monkey realizes this truth throughout the journey, whence comes the appropriateness of his religious name, Awake-to-Vacuity 慎。But for the other pilgrims—especially for Tripitika—it is only through the medium of phenomenal illusion (including the battle against demons) that

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39In fact, certain expressions used in the novel to refer to subjugation of demons are also used in internal (and external) alchemical treatises to refer to stages in the cultivation process. For instance, Ming writers on self-cultivation speak of the process of subjugating the chi 瞳 (cf. Liu Ts'un-yan, "Taoist Self-Cultivation," pp. 295ff.); similarly, the term "refinement" 精, often used in alchemical texts, is used at least once in the novel in conjunction with demons—in the titular couplet to ch. 51, for instance.

the truth of emptiness (including that of the distinction between the demons and the pilgrims) can be realized. Otherwise there would be no pilgrimage story to tell.

Having come this far, we are finally in a position to resolve the puzzling issue noted above—the tension between the author’s realistic description and full characterization of demons on the one hand, and his constant poetic mentalization of them on the other. We now see that the juxtaposition of realistic descriptions of demons and reductions of them to miasma of the mind serves as a fascinating and entertaining contrapuntal expression of the central theme of the novel, the complementary relation and ultimate identity between illusion and enlightenment. Why do demons almost always appear according to the paradigm sketched in the first part of this paper? Why this repetition, this sameness, if not to underscore the miasmic quality of the demons even as narrative details convince us of their palpable sensory reality? The taxonomical detail which we noted earlier also lends a sense of palpable sensory reality, of its “overpowering immediacy” which, in this framework of meaning, may even take on a sinister aspect. And why does the author often make it so laboriously difficult for the pilgrims to subdue the demons, with many false starts and wrong turns? Why do demons put up so stubborn a resistance, if not to impress upon us the arduousness of right cultivation? The consummate artistry with which the author bodies forth in his tale the relation between illusion and reality is itself a vehicle for the perception of this relation. And his skillful allegorization of the process of self-cultivation both entertains and instructs. His story, precisely because it belongs to the phenomenal world in which the demons whom it describes also live, points through itself to a level of reality at which, as demons and pilgrims would be identical, there would be no need to tell the story. Yet, here in the phenomenal world, there is a need to tell the story: and what is more, only in the phenomenal world can the story be told, the telling of which enables us, here, to attain to that higher level. It is therefore indeed true that “If there are those who see and hear, / Their minds will find enlightenment” (4:429).

41. The intriguing suggestion by Plaks regarding the “event” in Chinese narrative and its relation to the narrative’s overall structure of meaning (“A Critical Theory,” p. 316) is also relevant here.

42. Yu, “Introduction,” pp. 25ff., has commented on this richness of detail in the work; the phrase in quotation marks is his.