

# The Comic Devices in *Hsi-yu Chi*

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*Hsi-yu Chi* is no doubt one of the most popular comic works in classical Chinese literature. Strangely enough, while many Chinese and Western literary scholars have studied its theological, philosophical, allegorical, and social implications, very few of them have done an analysis on its comic devices. There are basically four major comic approaches applied in the work: witticism, colloquialism, portrayal of human weaknesses, and irony. Since I have dealt with the first two linguistic issues in a separate article, I will devote my discussion to the latter two in this paper.<sup>1</sup>

In *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes suggests that "the apprehension of some deformed thing in another" is a main cause of human laughter. "By observing the imperfections of other men," he explains, people are "forced to keep themselves in their own favour" and thus there results a feeling of "sudden glory" which is a passion that causes laughter (Chapman & Foot 63). While the validity of this superiority theory of humor is still subject to the research of modern psychologists, this device of making fun of other people's inferior characteristics has been widely used in many classical and modern comic works in the East as well as in the West.<sup>2</sup> The gullibility of Dionysus in *The Frogs*, the cowardice of Falstaff in *Henry IV*, the miserliness of Harpagon in *L'Avare*, the blind indulgence of Quixote, the rusticity of Liu lao-lao in *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, and the blatant hypocrisy of Wu Chin-tzu's scholars all belong to this category. In *Hsi-yu Chi* the author tries to ridicule five basic human characteristics: simple-mindedness, clumsiness, cowardice, childishness, and the lack of self-restraint. While each of the main pilgrims in the story is endowed with at least one of these characteristics, the author does not limit the particular characteristics only to these major figures. Instead he profusely assigns them to many minor figures in order to expand the comic effects of his work.

Pigsy, for instance, often becomes a laughing-stock in the novel as a result of his simple-minded reactions to the jolly tricks played upon him by the other characters, especially Monkey, who seems to greatly enjoy taking advantage of his naivety.<sup>3</sup> In the Level-Top Mountain Monkey coaxes him into volunteering for a dangerous errand. "To look after Master," Monkey exaggerates,

means that if he wants to move his bowels, you wait on him; if he wants to journey, you assist him; if he wants to eat, you go to beg for vegetarian food. If he suffers from hunger even slightly, you'll be beaten; if he pales a little, you'll be beaten, if he loses some weight, you'll be beaten. (2:105)

In the meantime, Monkey understates the fact about the patrolling mission: "go into the mountain and find out how many monsters there are, what kind of mountain this is and what kind of cave there is" (2:106). While these deliberate exaggerations and understatements are most obvious to the reader, they easily fool the simple-minded Pigsy. By choosing the latter mission he falls prey to Monkey's trick. On another occasion, Pigsy and Sandy are anxiously looking for Tripitaka who has been kidnapped to the cave of the Yellow-Robe Monster. The monster from within the cave teases them: "Yes, there's a T'ang monk in my house, and I haven't denied him any hospitality either. I was just preparing some buns filled with human flesh for him to enjoy. You two can go inside and have one also. How about it?" (2:47). Pigsy presently forgets all about his master's firm commitment to Buddhist vegetarianism, and would have accepted this invitation if Sandy had not reminded him that this invitation is nothing but a trick. In addition to Pigsy, a large group of demon kings and the followers are endowed with simple minds. To name a few, Yellow-Wind Monster leaks critical information about himself, which leads to his own subjugation by Bodhisattva Ling-chi (Chapter 21); Golden-hair Wolf-Monster mistakes "Grand-pa" for Monkey's surname (Chapter 71); Lion Demon takes every fly in his den as a transformation of Monkey (Chapter 75); Lion Demon's followers presume that he is flying a kite while in actuality he is being tortured by Monkey (Chapter 76). In all these cases, the dimwitted behavior of the characters generates great pleasure for the reader. It seems to be one of the most favorite comic strategies in *Hsi-yu Chi*.

Clumsiness is another major comic element that is characterized

primarily by Pigsy. Every so often he is seen tripping over something in a game or during a battle, awkwardly falling to the floor. While trying to grasp the three beauties transformed by Kuan-yin, Mañjurī and Viśabhadra in the inner chamber of an illusory house, Pigsy “stumbles and falls all over the place – tripping on the threshold in front of him, smashing into the brick wall behind him! Fumbling and tumbling around, he ends up sitting on the floor with a bruised head and a swollen mouth” (1:458). His battle against the Spider Demons also demonstrates clumsy motions:

The moment he moved his legs, he began to stumble; he headed to the left and his face hugged the ground; he went to the right and he fell head over heels; he turned around and his snout kissed the earth; he scrambled up only to do a handstand. He tumbled over countless times until his body turned numb and his legs flaccid, until his head swam and his eyes could not see straight. Unable even to crawl, all he could do was lie on the ground and moan. (3:372)

In like manner, the Supreme Taoist Patriarch falls “head over heels” as he tries to seize the fugitive Monkey at the Tushīta Palace (1:168); Tripitaka “falls to the ground . . . trips over the root of a tree and stumbles a second time” when he hears the clang of a bell in a decayed temple (4:82); even the Pilgrim, despite his superb physical alertness, “tumbles beak-first to the ground” twice while intending to steal water from the Abortion Spring (3:45). Similar examples are abundant in the novel. Probably derived from the farcical tradition of *ts'an-chün hsi* (參軍戲) started in the Tang Dynasty, the slapstick device plays an important role in the story because the lively visual comic scenes it provides help to make the work appeal particularly to the less sophisticated audience (Yang 1).<sup>4</sup> As in the case of the punishment scenes in *Candide*, the fighting scenes in *Don Quixote*, or in the works of avant garde theater as Professor Leonard Feinburg suggests, the demonstrations of physical humor add greatly to the popularity of the comic works (211).

On the other hand, Tripitaka's cowardice, which is manifested through his extremely unmanly attitude whenever confronting perilous situations, is as delightful to the reader as Pigsy's clumsiness. A normal warning by countryfolk makes him “fall down at once from the horse with a thud” (3:395). Another warning in the Bhiksu Kingdom “so terrified him that the

spirit of Three Cadavers left him and smoke poured out of his seven apertures. He fell to the ground at once, his body covered with sweat. All he could do was roll his eyeballs; he could not utter a word" (4:53). As a devout and determined Buddhist pilgrim, Tripitaka supposedly should have expected the utmost danger and hardships involved in the pilgrimage and thus not be so easily frightened by a mere warning. The juxtaposition of these two conflicting attitudes in one character results in comic incongruity. The same device is used in the characterization of several other weaklings in the story, including the pilgrims and especially the deities of the ocean and underworld courts. In T'o-lo Village, both Sandy and Pigsy are caught off guard by a gust of evil wind. The former "covers up his head and face" whereas the latter "falls on the ground; digging a hole with his snout, he buries his head in it and lies prone as if he had been nailed to the Earth" (3:280). The Dragon King of the Eastern Ocean and his marine force show similar apprehension of Monkey:

He wielded the rod to make lunges and passes, engaging in mock combat all the way back to the Water-Crystal Palace. The old Dragon King was so terrified that he shook with fear, and the dragon princes were all panic-stricken. Sea-turtles and tortoisés drew in their necks; fishes, shrimps, and crabs all hid themselves. (1:105)

All the mountain gods and local spirits appear to be faint-hearted in front of Monkey. One old local spirit at the Cobweb Ridge is said to be so fearful of his striking that while informed of his summons, the spirit "goes round and round in his shrine as if he were turning a millstone" (3:365). He simply cannot collect enough courage to face the short-tempered Pilgrim.

Despite his fearful magic power and short temper, Monkey is also assigned a major comic characteristic, childishness. At the age of at least one thousand years, he behaves like a naughty urchin on several occasions without regard to his Buddhist identity. A little joke can make him laugh into convulsions. On the battlegrounds he sometimes sportively sneaks past his enemy, gives him a sudden slap and runs away; frequently he makes fighting a playful game as shown in the case of his taming the Python Monster. Stimulated by Pigsy's jolly suggestions, he first sticks his rod into the monster "to raise his torso until he resembled a bow-shaped bridge," he then "plunged the iron rod downward" making "the fiendish creature

looked like a sloop from the Kan River district." To further satisfy Piggy's prankish curiosity, Monkey "pushed his iron rod upward from the spine of the fiendish creature until it reached a height of some seventy feet and the shape of a mast" which eventually killed the monster (3:284). In this case as well as in many other cases the ferocious battleground is turned into a comic playground as a result of the pilgrim's playful attitudes. While dealing with demon spirits he sometimes gets so carried away by his own childish nature that he himself starts to act exactly like one. In the Level-Top Mountain, he tries to imitate a fortune-teller with a gourd which he has swindled from the Silver-Horn Monster:

He gave the gourd a shake and it was swashing even more loudly. "This sounds like the rattle of a fortune-telling tube," he said. "Old Monkey should make an inquiry to see when Master can come out of this door." Look at him! He shook the thing in his hand constantly while reciting. "The I Ching of King Wên, Great Sage Confucius, Master Chou of Lady Peach-Blossom, Master Kuei-ku Tzũ. . . ." (2:151)

Similarly puerile behavior is found in all the other pilgrims, the demon spirits, such as Golden-Horn, Silver-Horn, Sly Devil and Wily Worm (Chapter 33), and even in such high deities as the Taoist Patriarch (Chapter 39). For the decent adult figures, particularly the revered supernatural beings, to act so childishly not only creates comic incongruity, it can also remind the reader of his pleasant childhood experiences as Freud explains in his *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*:

If one might generalize, it would seem most attractive to place the specific characteristic of the comic which we are in search of in an awakening of the infantile — to regard the comic as the regained "lost laughter of childhood." One could then say: "I laugh at a difference in expenditure between another person and myself, every time I rediscover the child in him." Or, put more exactly, the complete comparison which leads to the comic would run: "That is how he does it — I do it another way — he does it as I used to do it as a child." (Lauter 411)

In addition to the four main characteristics discussed above is another

common human weakness — the lack of self-restraint, that would generate a sense of superiority in the reader. Unlike the earlier ones that can be clearly identified with a certain main figure in the story, this last characteristic is much more inclusive; it applies to most major and minor characters in the disguise of different personalities. Monkey, for example, can hardly control his own temper. He will be immediately provoked by anyone who addresses him by the nickname of “pi-ma-wên” (Chapters 7 & 18). Trivial matters such as a complaint from Pigsy, or sometimes even a little joke played by a local spirit or a divine guardian would easily make him exasperate (Chapters 18 & 20). In spite of the constant warnings from Bodhisattva Kuan-yin and Tripitaka, he is never able to check his short temper. Likewise, while ridiculed by Monkey on different occasions, even Tathāgata and Kuan-yin instantly lose their temper, completely forget their own dignity as the highest Buddhist deities (Chapters 15, 17, 77 etc.).

Pigsy cannot refrain himself from submitting to the temptation of two major carnal pleasures: lust and gluttony. Earlier in the pilgrimage, he is tied to a tree for a night because he proposed to the three beauties transformed by the Buddhist goddesses (Chapter 23). But he remains to be as prurient throughout the trip. On Tripitaka’s behalf, he volunteers to marry the beautiful queen of the Nation of Women (Chapter 54). During his battle with the beauties transformed by the Spy Demons, he changes himself into a sheat fish “darting madly between their legs” (Chapter 72). He even tries to flirt with the divine maidens in front of the king and the other citizens of the Kingdom of India:

As they looked up into the air, Chu Pa-chieh was moved to lust. Unable to contain himself, he leaped into the air and embraced a rainbow-skirted immortal, crying, “Sister, you and I are old acquaintances! Let’s go play!” (4:337)

The comic element in the scene lies in Pigsy’s inability to control his sensual desire even though he well knows the disastrous effect it might cause. As Henri Bergson points out in his essay on laughter: “What is essentially laughable is what is done automatically. In a vice, even in a virtue, the comic is that element by which the person unwittingly betrays himself — the involuntary gesture or the unconscious remark” (229). Pigsy’s gluttony and Tripitaka’s frequent craving for food both contain the same comic element.

Another comic figure designed by the same device is the old abbot at Kuan-yin Hall. Having been a monk all his life, he cannot restrain his greed when he is shown Tripitaka's cassock. This peculiar behavior even puzzles his close fellowmen.

"The grand-master is erring," said the little monk. "The T'ang monk is a mendicant who had to leave his home and country. You are enjoying the benefits of old age here, and that should be sufficient. Why do you want to be mendicant like him?" The old monk said, "Though I'm relaxing at home and enjoying my declining years, I have no cassock like his to put on. If I can put it on for just one day, I'll die with my eyes shut, for then I shall not have been a monk in vain in this World of Light."  
(1:336)

It is ludicrous to see a normal adult, being unable to check his own desire, "weep till midnight" for a piece of treasure that belongs to someone else. The comic effect is doubled in this case because it happens to an abbot two hundred and seventy years old. At the end of his fading years, he should have understood the Buddhist teaching about the "emptiness" of the earthly valuables and thus have been freed from such temptation. It shows the best of the author's skill in generating comic pleasure by means of ridiculing human weakness.

The next comic device in our discussion, irony, is probably also the least conspicuous in *Hsi-yu Chi*. As in the works of such great Western masters as Chaucer, Rabelais, Cervantes, Fielding, Thackeray, and Twain, this device adds to the breadth and depth of the comic pleasure. While the other devices discussed earlier in the paper give the work a flavor of low comedy as defined by Gilbert Highet in his *Anatomy of Satire*, this device helps to provide a sense of high comedy that appeals to the more sophisticated minds (103-07). The most popular irony in the story is seen in its nomenclature. The names of several major and minor figures are subject to ironical interpretations. In the event of Kuan-yin Hall cited previously, the two disciples of the old abbot, named Great Wisdom and Big Plan, design a scheme for their master to defraud Tripitaka of his cassock. But the scheme turns out to be a big disaster; it not only causes their shrine to be completely destroyed by fire, but it also forces their old master to commit suicide out of shame, thus contradicting the implications of their names (Chapter 16).

By the same token, the two demon followers by the names of Sly Devil

and Wily Worm in the Lotus-Flower Cave are not so “sly and wily” after all. Monkey easily tricks them into trading their genuine magic gourd with a fake one transformed from a strand of his own hair (Chapter 33). In another event, a close demon follower of the Jupiter’s Rival is named Going and Coming. Monkey incidentally kills him with a blow of his rod on the head and thus “renders him Going without coming” (3:329). Even the names of the two major pilgrims carry ironical meanings. At the very beginning of the story, Monkey is given the religious name of Wukong, which means “awaked to vacuity” (1:82). Nevertheless immediately after that he robs weaponry from the ocean court, erases the record of his life span at the underworld court, and fights for a higher position and title at the heavenly court. All of this is directly contrary to the implications of his religious name. Pigsy, on the other hand, is dubbed by Bodhisattva Kuan-yin the religious name of Wu-neng, which means “awake to power” (1:193). But his simple-minded, clumsy and cowardly behavior certainly does not justify such a name.

Irony is also found in the images and characterization of the main pilgrims. Their appearances usually reveal exactly the opposite of what they stand for. Tripitaka, according to a testimonial poem, has the look that promises all kinds of heroic qualities:

What handsome features!  
 What dignified looks!  
 Teeth white like silver bricks.  
 Ruddy lips and a square mouth.  
 His head’s flat-topped, his forehead, wide and full;  
 Lovely eyes, neat eyebrows, and a chin that’s long.  
 Two well-rounded ears betoken someone brave.  
 He is all elegance, a gifted man.  
 What a youthful and comely son of love.  
 So worthy to wed the pretty girl of Western Liang!  
 (3:61)

However, his image as perceived in the pilgrimage is to the other extreme. Despite the “handsome features and dignified looks,” he acts rather like a timid female in the story. His “flat-topped head and full forehead” do not show him a wise man as they normally do; instead he is regarded as naive and unperceptive. As a well-known coward, his “two well-rounded ears” do not indicate bravery. Most of all, being a devoted Buddhist monk,

he is not a "comely son of love." The poem presents an image that is utterly contrary to his real personality.

Similarly, as the most energetic, powerful, and sturdiest hero in the story, Monkey is described by an old man as "looking like a demon with a bad case of consumption" (1:399). It is little wonder that the princess of the Precious Image Kingdom, judging from his tiny, thin and weak physique, openly questions him of his ability to rescue her from the Yellow-Robe Monster: "Now look at you! You look like a ghost with more tendons than bones! You look like a crab or a walking skeleton! What kind of ability do you have that you dare speak of catching the monster?" (2:88). On the other hand, Pigsy and Sandy assume relatively more ferocious appearances than Monkey even though their temper is milder and their magic capability less intimidating. The testimonial poem describes Pigsy as follows:

Lips curled and twisted like dried lotus leaves;  
 Ears like rush-leaf fans and hard, gleaming eyes;  
 Gaping teeth as sharp as a fine steel file's;  
 A long mouth wide open as a fire pot.  
 .....  
 His awesome presence and his prideful mien,  
 Defy the deities and daunt the gods. (I:191)

Sandy's picture is not any less fearful according to another testimonial poem:

Face of gloomy complexion;  
 .....  
 Sinewy body with naked feet.  
 His gleaming eyes  
 Shone like two lights beneath the stove.  
 His mouth, forked at the corners,  
 Was like a butcher's bloody bowl.  
 With teeth protruding like swords and knives,  
 And red hair all disheveled,  
 He bellowed once and it sounded like thunder.  
 While his legs sprinted like whirling wind.  
 (I:188)

Unfortunately their forceful appearance does not at all match the roles they play throughout the pilgrimage. They are endowed only with limited magic which makes them rather helpless and cowardly when confronting enemies. With the exception of very few occasions, they are constantly terrified by various demon spirits. Their impotent image is in ironical contrast to their fierce appearances.

Furthermore, the inter-relationships among the major pilgrims indicate another phase of irony. As the most powerful and spiritually enlightened member in the group, Monkey is controlled by Tripitaka, the most unperceptive and physically least able in the group because Bodhisattva Kuan-yin has taught the latter the Tight-Fillet Spell which would cause Monkey to suffer unbearable headache. The spell is supposed to provide a means for Tripitaka to tame Monkey's wild nature. But very often the master uses it for false reasons and causes many unnecessary hardships on their trip as manifested in the incident of their encountering Red Boy Demon. Being aware of the demon's intention to decoy Tripitaka, Monkey specifically asks the group not to be distracted by the crying orphan who is a demon transformed. However, his master not only orders him to untie the orphan from a tree, he also commands Monkey to carry the demon on his back. Thus the proud and intelligent Monkey is to perform a humble and foolish mission because the virtually defenseless Tripitaka ironically has the power to make his head ache. On the other hand, Pigsy's negative qualities have ironically made him the favorite disciple of his master's. In spite of the numerous events that clearly evidence Pigsy's moral weaknesses, Tripitaka never seems to reduce his favor on him. On the contrary, he even takes special pity on the former's misdoings. Such a biased attitude is best seen in the event that takes place at the Level-Top Mountain. Monkey has to resort to a trick in order to coax Pigsy into a mission because he knows well that his master is extremely "protective towards" the latter (2:104). While disregarding Pigsy's open refusal to serve his assigned duty, Tripitaka severely reproves Monkey for the scheme played on him:

"You impudent ape!" scolded the elder. "As a brother, you haven't shown the least bit of sympathy or kindness. You are constantly envious of one another. With all that base cunning, all that 'clever talk and pretentious appearance,' you have managed to trick him into the so-called patrolling the mountain already. Now you are even mocking him with your laugh!" "I'm not

mocking him," said Pilgrim, "because there's another meaning in my laughter. You see that Pa-chieh has left, but he will not go to patrol the mountain, nor will he dare to face the monsters. He will go instead somewhere to hide for a while and then come back to deceive us with some story that he has made up. (2:106)

Tripitaka's favoritism toward Pigsy makes him blind to his obvious laziness and cowardice in this case. When Monkey's prediction turns out to be accurate, Tripitaka again tries to defend him and accuse Monkey of fabricating: "A person like him who has his eyes covered by his ears has to be a stupid fellow. What sort of lies can he make up? It's got to be some humbuggery of yours again, trying to put the blame on him" (2:109). He then orders Monkey to spare him the penalty after Pigsy admits to his master of his cheating. The master's favoritism is clearly reflected in Monkey's direct complaint on several occasions, such as "You are always covering up his faults" (2:109) and "Pa-chieh is rather stupid, but you are somewhat partial to him" (2:202).

Additional comic irony among the major characters can be found in several tricks which Pigsy plays upon monkey. In the episode of the Black Rooster Kingdom, Monkey used food as a bait to involve Pigsy in the task of carrying the body of the king who drowned in well. To get even with him, Pigsy slyly gives Tripitaka a hint on how to revive the dead king: "He's [Monkey] a little sick in his brain! Just recite that little something of yours, and you are certain to get a living man" (2:212). This naturally causes Monkey one more torment on his head and one more difficult mission to accomplish. A similar ironical situation is seen in the event of their meeting with Cadaver Demon in which Pigsy successfully provokes Tripitaka to recite the Tight-Fillet Spell three times consecutively (Chapter 27). In both cases the "sophiscated" Monkey falls a prey to the "simple-minded" Pigsy.

The most important irony in the novel, however, lies in the contrast between the higher world and the lower world. According to the great chain of being in Chinese myth as shown in this novel, the universe basically consists of three levels: deities, humans, and demons. The lower level the subjects belong to, the cruder and more uncivilized are their living styles. It is only through continuous self-refinement that a subject of the lower levels can eventually be promoted to be a deity of the highest world where he enjoys eternal pleasure. In actuality, the life of the demon spirits is not

so crude after all. Many of their residences, such as the Pure Florescence Immortal Residence of the Deer Demon, seem to be in rather fine taste. As the author describes it through Monkey's impressions:

Mist and smoke luminous;  
 Oblique rays of the sun and moon;  
 White clouds that often leave the cave;  
 Green moss that densely coats the yard.  
 A pathful of strange blossoms vying for glamour;  
 A stepful of rare grasses most luxuriant.  
 Warm, temperate air  
 Makes perpetual spring.  
 The place seems like Lang-yüan;  
 It's no worse than P'eng and Ying.  
 Long creepers spread o'er smooth benches;  
 Tousled vines dangle from a flat bridge.  
 Bees, red stamens in their mouths, come to the cave;  
 Butterflies, playing with orchids, pass a rock screen.  
 (4:61-62)

"Lang-yüan" and "P'ang and Ying" both refer to the well-known beautiful living quarters for the immortals. Since Monkey has travelled all around the universe and personally visited many of the divine palaces, his impressions of the demonic abode especially illustrate the high quality of their living condition.

In addition to their elegant residences, the demonic spirits seem to be more civilized and virtuous than the beings in the other two worlds. In contrast to many deities and humans who frequently use vulgar language in the story, some demons speak with surprisingly refined language and behave in the most proper manner as indicated in the following dialogue between the Red Boy Demon and his father who is actually a transformation of Monkey:

After he took a seat in the middle facing south, Red Boy faced him and knelt down to kowtow to him. "Father King," he said, "Your child gives you obeisance." Pilgrim said, "My child is exempted from such ceremonies." Only after he had prostrated four times did the monster king rise from the ground and stand below the seat of Pilgrim. "My child," said Pilgrim,

“why did you ask me to come here?” Bowing again, the monster king said, “Though your child is not talented, he has managed to capture a certain person yesterday, a monk from the Great T’ang in the Land of the East. I have often heard people say that he is someone who has practiced self-cultivation for ten incarnations. If anyone eats a piece of his flesh, this person will enjoy the same age as an immortal from P’eng-lai or Ying-chou. Your foolish boy does not dare eat the T’ang monk by himself. That is why I have invited Father King especially to enjoy with me the flesh of the T’ang monk, so that your age may be lengthened a thousandfold.” (2:265)

The demon son’s genuine concern of and his ceremonious attitude towards his father as displayed in the scene demonstrate the ideal family relationships in a Chinese society in which Confucianism prevails. Not only do the demons treat their parents with filial respect, they are also congenial and faithful to their friends and inferiors in accordance with Confucian doctrine. Whenever a demon catches Tripitaka, he always offers to share the precious meal with his friends and subordinates so that all of them can enjoy the benefit of living a longer life. On one occasion, Goldfish Demon King successfully entraps the T’ang monk through a scheme of a humble perch demon. He immediately fulfills his promise by making her his sworn sister. As the latter in formality tries to refuse the reward, the demon king says:

For “Even a team of horses cannot overtake the word that has left my mouth!” I promised you that if your plan could enable me to catch the T’ang monk, I would become your bond-brother. Today your marvelous plan did materialize, and the T’ang monk had been caught. You think I would retract my promise? (2:384)

Such is the faithfulness of the demons. If a major monster is killed, his friends will try to avenge his death until they themselves are killed. The strong brotherly bond exists in most of the demon groups; the more notable ones include Golden-Horn and Silver-Horn Kings (Chapter 35); Tiger-Strength, Deer-Strength and Goat-Strength Monsters (Chapter 46); and Lion, Elephant and Garuda Demons (Chapter 74).

Unfortunately such virtues, which are of the essence of the traditional Chinese ethics, are lacking in the higher worlds, as especially manifested

in the behavior of the major pilgrims. Tripitaka is a selfish leader; he has more concern for his own welfare than that of his disciples'. Monkey and Pigsy are constantly in conflict; the former never ceases to bully the latter; the latter always seeks opportunity to take his revenge on him. Twice in the pilgrimage Tripitaka tries to banish Monkey; three times the disciples themselves try to disband the group. The only member in the group that insists on not breaking up is ironically the white horse who remains in animal form. Even the high deities are not better beings than the demons. While asking the Immortal Master of the Illustrious Sagacity Er-lang to fight against Monkey, the Jade Emperor promises to promote him after their victory. But his words are never carried out (Sa 67).<sup>5</sup> Gold Star, one of the highest officials at the heavenly courts, deceives Monkey about the humble position and futile rank offered to him. The Supreme Taoist Patriarch is reluctant to spare even a little elixir to restore the life of a worldly king. Bodhisattva Kuan-yin makes her subjects suffer by sending her demon pets to the human world. Most of all, Bodhisattvas Ānanda and Kāśyapa deliberately give the pilgrims useless blank scrolls after their demand for bribery is refused. Despite their venerable images, these high deities show many flaws in their characters which are not found in demons.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, as indicated in the story, the heavenly world does not seem to be a better place for common people to live in. While few high deities enjoy their ruling privileges eternally, many of the others, such as Revatī the Star, Gold and Silver Brazier Boys, Green Buffalo, and Golden-haired Wolf, do not necessarily want to stay there. They seek opportunities to escape to the human world. In most cases the divine court has to send troops to force them to resume their heavenly positions. For a similar reason, in order to convert Red Boy Demon, Bodhisattva Kuan-yin has to put five magic fillets respectively around his head and four limbs to keep him from defecting. The Supreme Buddha has to offer special food to keep Garuda Demon in the World of the Western Heaven. Since the divine world does not promise happiness for the common people after all, the sole purpose of the quest, which is to provide them with Buddhist scriptures so that they will have a chance to enjoy eternal happiness in the heaven, signifies the utmost important irony in the story.<sup>7</sup>

In conclusion, besides the two linguistic approaches there are two basic comic devices applied in *Hsi-yu Chi*: dramatizing human weaknesses and irony. By revealing and ridiculing such common human weaknesses as simple-mindedness, clumsiness, cowardice, childishness, and the lack of

self-restraint in the major and minor characters, the work generates the pleasure of low comedy. The ironies of nomenclature, characterization, inter-relationships among the major pilgrims, and most of all, the purpose of their quest, make the work comparable to high comedy. Together they make the story appeal to all levels of readers and thus become one of the most important comic masterpieces in Chinese literature.

## Notes

1. "The Comic Language in *Hsi-yu Chi*." *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* XI (1985).
2. For additional studies see Feinberg (206-09), Chapman and Foot (63-89), Enck, Forter and Whitley (43-64), Hodgart (108-31), Charney (33-44), Merchant (37-52), Polts (3-26), Kerr (44-65), Hu (356-62), Hsia (134-38), Kao (229), Zhao Cong (153-67), and Zhang (142-54).
3. All citations of *Hsi-yu Chi* are to Anthony C. Yu's translation, *The Journey to the West*. The Chinese text referred to is the Shi-de-tang version published by Shang Wu Books in Hong Kong, 1961.
4. Also see Wang (I-XV).
5. Both Zhang and Yao provide good insights on this topic.
6. I analyzed the satire of religion in a separate article published in *JCLTA* 19:1 (1984). Also see Zhao (183-214).
7. For more details see another article of mine in *JCLTA* 18:3 (1983).

## Works Cited

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