

The Comparison of Monkeys: the Study of Hanuman from the Ramayana and Wu-K'Ung from the Journey to the West

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Abstract: Because of the geographical conditions and the history of cultural communication between India and China in religion, philosophy, and even literature and art. It is very possible that the image of Hanuman influenced Ch'eng en Wu when he was writing *The Journey to the West* and creating Wu-K'ung. As the first deity based on the picture of Monkey, the characterization of Hanuman was so perfect that it was not flexible enough. But it doesn't stop the Indian to adore and worship this mighty monkey. Wu-K'ung produced by Ch'eng en Wu is a very mature image in the traditional Chinese literature. It is not only a typical synthesis of both native and exotic culture, but also individual model contained the personal thought and creativity of the author. The complexity of Wu-K'ung can be interpreted from different perspectives and recreated under different cultural backgrounds.

1. Introduction

India is a country which has a long history and splendid civilization, and its epic the *Ramayana* is regarded as one of the essential works in India's cultural history. Hanuman, who is portrayed as an all-powerful monkey in this epic, is worshiped by Indian people for thousands of years.

It is well to be mentioned that, we can find there is a similar image with Hanuman, named Wu-K'ung, in *The Journey to the West*, which is one of the Four Great classic novels in China, and he was adored by Chinese public too. Why such two similar monkeys' images exist in two neighboring countries? Whether there are some connections between these two monkeys or not?

In this conference paper, I would like to compare these two images from different cultural backgrounds and study if there are some connections between these two monkey-like mythical figures, and whether the picture of Wu-K'ung was coming from Hanuman.

From now on, I will follow several perspectives to discuss this possibility, including the origin of Hanuman and Wu-K'ung, their characters, the similarities in the plot of two books, the cultural influences of these two monkeys and so on.

2. The Origin of This Comparison

Before analyzing this problem, I would like to introduce who raised this argument first. This problem was first pointed out by a Chinese scholar, named Hu Shi, in the 1920s. He published *The Textual Research of The Journey to the West* and presented "Wu Kong was imported from Hindu, instead of being born in China. The Indian epic *Ramayana* was utilized as the background of this monkey." Many of the Chinese scholars endorse his opinion too.

Also, there was a lot of opposition to that theory at that time, because still many Chinese scholars believed that Wu-K'ung was one of the most important symbols in Chinese classical novels. What they could not accept was Wu-K'ung would no longer be the symbol of native Chinese culture but a dependency of Indian culture. Lu Xun, another very famous Chinese author, insisted that the image of Wu-K'ung was actually from Wu Zhixie, which was a monkey coming from Chinese Myths and resided under the water. Because of Lu Xun's high status in the Chinese academic circles, his ideas influenced plenty of scholars in the next generation. And another thing needed to be noticed is most of the scholars who hold the objective opinions were not deny the influence from Hanuman to

Wu-K'ung. What they argued was the sphere, degree and even effect of the impact of Hanuman.

3. The Main Content of the Ramayana and the Journey to the West.

Hanuman is one of the most important characters in the Hinduism epic *Ramayana*, which narrates the struggle of the divine prince Rama to rescue his wife Sita from the demon king Rama. What character Hanuman plays is a general of the Monkey Kingdom, and also an ardent devotee of Lord Rama. In Hindu history, Hanuman was the first deity appeared as a monkey.

The Journey to the West is an extended account of the legendary pilgrimage of the Tang dynasty Buddhist monk Xuanzang who traveled to the "Western Regions," that is, Central Asia and India, to obtain Buddhist sacred texts (sutra) and returned after many trials and much suffering. It retains the broad outline of Xuanzang's account, Great Tang Records on the Western Regions, but the Ming dynasty novel adds elements from folk tales and the author's invention, that is, that Gautama Buddha gave this task to the monk (referred to as Tang Sanzang in the novel) and provided him with three protectors who agree to help him as an atonement for their sins. These disciples are Sun Wu-K'ung, Zhu Bajie, and Sha Wujing.^[1] We can find what Hanuman and Wu-K'ung played was the role of protector.

4. The Story of Hanuman in China

Before we discuss whether this hypothesis is tenable or not, we need to know when the story of Hanuman had been known for Chinese people. Because the *Ramayana* was written in Sanskrit, thus ancient Chinese probably couldn't understand the content of this epic.

However, from the historical materials expressed that, Since Jin Dynasty(about300A.D. to 420a.A.D.), the story of Hanuman had been come down with the spread of Buddhism.

Geographically, India and China are neighboring countries. The economy and culture interactions between these two countries had been recorded since Han dynasty. About 100A.D., Indian Buddhism had spread into China. 67A.D. there were two Indian monks who were invited by the contemporary emperor of East Han Dynasty to preach Buddhism. What the monks brought were several Buddhist sutra and statues of Sakyamuni.^[2] Since then, there were more and more Buddhism temple being built, and more and more people chose to be monks. There are a lot of connection between India's religion and its mythology. Thus, among the frequent interactions which were full of religious elements between two countries, the introduction of the *Ramayana* from India to China seemed inevitable.

The spread of the *Ramayana* was extensive in the central region of China. Since Jin dynasty, the *Ramayana* had been mentioned in the works of several well-known Buddhism scriptures' translators. For instance, Kumarajiva, who was a later Qin dynasty monk, suggested the name, author, the length, the theme and the main characters of the *Ramayana*.^[3]

Even though what these scriptures mentioned was some fundamental information, they were the first records of the *Ramayana* in China. Thus we can see that there was a basic outline of the *Ramayana* in Chinese people mind in almost 2000 years ago.

From these examples, we can trust that the influence of the *Ramayana* in China had a long history. Also, before Ming dynasty, there were a lot of folktales and theaters According to the record of *Tian'qi Huai'an Chronicles*, Cheng'en Wu, the author of *The Journey to the West*, was a "smart and well-read person"^[4]. Also, he was fascinated with collecting folk tales and created the image of Wu-K'ung from plenty of ape's stories. Thus, the inspiration of Wu-K'ung is probably coming from the *Ramayana* and some Chinese traditional ape's stories and influenced by both native and exotic culture.

5. The Comparison of Hanuman and Wu-K'Ung in Personal Character.

There are a lot of similarities can be found from the depiction of Hanuman and Wu-K'ung in the *Ramayana* and *The Journey to the West*. Both of them were described as amazing monkeys with

many talents and skills. In this section, I will try to find the similarities of them in the perspective of their abilities.

In the *Ramayana*, Hanuman was a monkey with ferocious strength. To cure Rama's brother, he took a mountain from thousands of miles away; he jumped across the sea and found where Ravana lived. He could also change his size and appearance easily. To approach Sita, he transforms into a mongoose and sneaks into Ravana's palace.^[5] After he was noticed by Ravana's bodyguard, he "swelled to a huge size, and crushed dozens with each swipe of his gigantic hands."^[6]

We can also find these similar abilities in the depiction of Wu-K'ung in *The Journey to the West*. When Wu-K'ung came back, he once boasted to his subordinates that "I have mastered the seventy-two global transformations. My somersault cloud has outstanding magical powers. I know how to conceal myself and vanish. I can make spells and end them. I can reach the sky and find my way into the earth. I can travel under the sun or moon without leaving a shadow or go through metal or stone freely. I can't be drowned by water or burned by fire. There's nowhere I cannot go."^[7]

Third, the similarities between Hanuman and Wu-K'ung also express on the weapon they used. Hanuman's weapon is Vajra, which is a traditional stick-like weapon in Hinduism. More than one deity holds some weapons and other objects, and only the combination of all emblems allows an unambiguous identification of its owner. It is the symbol of solidity and always utilized to destroy demons.

Influenced by Hinduism, vajra was connected with the male reproduction organ. Also, the shape of vajra is like lingam which is an abstract or an-iconic representation of the Hindu deity Shiva. Also, lingam has a patent or at least transparent phallic meaning. In myth and legend, its phallic connotation is patent or at least transparent, and the lingam idol—apart from the fact that it rises from the yoni, contrary to the physiological situation may be sculptured in precise anatomical detail.^[8] Thus, we can see that lingam is one of the essential sex symbols in Hinduism. Because their shape is similar, I believe, there is some connection between Vajra and sexual connotation.

From the perspective of the weapons they used, there are some similarities can be found. In *The Journey to the West*, the weapon of Wu-K'ung was a stick made of iron and be buried under the sea for thousands of years. The last owner of this weapon was afraid of its power, and said "that's a piece of iron—a small stroke with it is deadly and a light tap is fatal! The slightest touch will crack the skin, and a small rap will injure the muscle."^[9] This stick played an important role in the journey, and Wu-K'ung used it to defeat countless demons and monsters. About the configuration of Wu-K'ung's weapon, there is a description in chapter 3 of the fiction: "it had two gold bands around it, while the middle part was made of black iron. There was a line of inlaid writing near the bands which said that it was the AS-YOU-WILL GOLD-BANDED CUDGEL: WEIGHT 13,500 POUNDS."^[10] The term "As-you-will" was the symbol of inundation of erotic elements in Ming dynasty's Chinese classic fiction.^[11] Also, from the description in the fiction, the Gold-Banded Cudgel can change its size just as its owners' wish. This character is so similar to male's genitals'. The sexual implication of Wu-K'ung's weapon

From the perspective of their weapons' function and potential implications, I believe, this is another proof demonstrated the influence of Hanuman brought to the creation of Wu-K'ung.

6. The Personality of Hanuman and Wu-K'Ung

After we proved that there is an apparent connection between Hanuman and Wu-K'ung, Differences between Hanuman and Wu-K'ung are visible, and we can find some traces from the books.

In the *Ramayana*, Hanuman was portrayed as the son of Wind God and a monkey-like Fairy. He had the human body and a monkey head. Hanuman inherited the power of God from his father and the face of monkey from his mother. Thus, we can find the combination of the natures from god, human, and monkey in his body.

Although Hanuman is a monkey, he is different from his kind. When his master forgot his promise to send troops to save Sita (Rama's wife) and attempted to satiate his insatiable thirst for wine and women but entirely can't remember his promise, Hanuman would try to stir his master to

action.^[12] After he went to Lanka, during the process of seeking Sita, there is a massive internal monologue depicted by the epic. When I read this section, it is hard to believe that such sophisticated psychological activities belong to a monkey, even if he is intellectual and influential.^[13] In the battle of Lanka, after Hanuman was captured by Ravana (the demon who caught Sita) and his tail was burned. He didn't get scared, but "ran through the streets and leaving a burning trail behind him, and before making the great leap over to India, he extinguished his fiery appendage in the Southern Sea."^[14] All these descriptions prove that Hanuman is a monkey proficient in strategies. It also represents his nature of human to the audiences.

However, we can hardly find the depiction of Hanuman's Monkey nature from the description of the *Ramayana*, so that I even forget the fact that Hanuman is a monkey after I read this book; however, there are so many and complex descriptions of his human nature. Thus, the quality of deity, human, and monkey doesn't express clearly on Hanuman and make his characters pale.

However, the distinct character is one of the reasons that the Chinese public are fond of him. He was a mixture consisted of natures of God, human, monkey, and even demon. When Chen'en Wu created this figure, he realized the complexity of Wu-K'ung's characters and made a detailed description from different perspectives. When he learns skills from Patriarch Subodhi, he always can't focus on the talent he is learning. When the first time Wu-K'ung saw the people, he will try to mimic their behavior and draw on their clothes. When he realized the post of pi-ma just a horse feeder, he

After he comes back from his master to the Flower and Fruit Mountain, he ate the whole peaches in the park with a vengeance.^[15] All these plots were the expression of his monkey nature.

Born from a stone, rob the heaven, deleted all the monkeys' name from the Hell of Ninefold, and gathered demons and monsters together to against the heaven.....^[16] All these things he did represent his demon nature from another aspect.

What he learned from the

Wu-K'ung is unlimited. Unlike Hanuman, he is a sophisticated being. Wu-K'ung is art model created by the author derived from different folk and ape stories.

7. The Creation Background of Hanuman and Wu-K'Ung

To study a literature work and discuss the content, it is impossible to cut its connection with the contemporary period background when the author wrote it. Thus, to comprehend the relationship of Hanuman and Wu-K'ung, it is essential to understand the situation of society, religions and mental activities that the author was staying.

Since the introduction of Buddhism to China, its influence on culture and ideology also gradually deepened, finally became one of the three major religions (the other two were Taoism and Confucianism) in feudal China. *The Journey to the West* was written in the period of Ming Dynasty of China, and the emperor at that time was Jiajing, who was fascinated with Taoism and its rituals. Even if in such period, the influence of Confucianism still rooted in the contemporary intellectuals' mind. Because of his Buddhist identity, in *The Journey to the West*, Cheng'en Wu mixed the elements from the three religions together and created the image of "Monkey King."^[17]

The Journey to the West was an officially banned book in Ming dynasty because the author used Wu-K'ung to represent his discontent with the manifest failure of current rulers. Jiajing ignored the national affairs for a long time because he was rapt in Taoism at that time. In this fiction, the gods from Taoism was weakened and always asked for help from the gods of Buddhism.

The author also tried to declare the Buddhism doctrines in many places of the book. The first chapter's name is "The divine root being conceived, the origin emerges; The moral nature once cultivated, the Great Tao is born (in the Chinese context, the "Tao" should be understood as "doctrine.") We can still find some poets who are full of Buddhism conception." For instance, we can see "The true wondrous doctrine of Bodhi thoroughly comprehended; The destruction of Mara and the return to origin unify the soul." "Heresy deludes the True Nature; The Soul assists the Native Mind."

"Two minds cause a disturbance in the great universe; It's hard for one substance to make perfect

rest.” Cheng’en Wu even borrowed Wu-K’ung’s mouth to say that “Many are the turns of Kingship, and next year the turn will be mine.” By these instances, the author wanted to express his assertions that all men are equal. At the end of the story, Wu-K’ung finally succeeded in his quest and became the Warring and Winning Buddha. This result also tells us: everyone has a chance to become great if he or she can finish the work with merit and virtues.

Also, Cheng’en Wu was unsatisfied with Jiajing’s policy of “venerated Taoism but opposed Buddhism.” There are a lot of images of evil Taoist priest. However, what the author was seeking for was not “venerated Buddhism but opposed Taoism,” but “combine the three teachings by honoring both the Buddhist clergy and the Way of Taoism, and by also educating men of talent in the Confucian tradition.”^[18]

We can find the ideas of Confucianism in the image of Wu-K’ung. During his journey to the west, he never forgets to help local people. Saving people, being honest and being a gentleman are three of the most important thoughts in the ideology of Confucianism. In Chapter 59, when Wu-K’ung passed by the Fiery Mountain, he tried three times and finally “borrow” the Plantain Fan from the Raksasi. His goal was not only let his master pass this region safely but also protect the residents from the torture of Fiery Mountain anymore.

Wu-K’ung always faithful to his master, even if his master used to expel him. The author also praised Wu-K’ung through the word of Sha Wujing, who is one of Wu-K’ung’s junior fellow apprentice, that “Our eldest brother(Wu-K’ung) is a good and honorable gentleman.”^[19]

Because Wu-K’ung is an aggregation of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism, and the power gifted by the author, all these elements made him become the imperishable art image in Chinese classic literature. The reason that people are fond of this character has not only the religious feature but also express their hope for good life.

8. The Comparison of the Plots from the Ramayana and the Journey to the West.

After we discussed the similarities between Hanuman and Wu-K’ung on personalities and outside appearances, in this section, we will focus on the plot of two different books and analyze their schemes in common.

The *Ramayana* talked about a story that Hanuman help Rama to save his wife; In *The Journey to the West*, we can find almost the same story with the Ramayana in one of the chapters. In chapter 59, when the master and his three apprentices passed through the Purpuria, the king was sick because of missing his wife so much, and his wife was captured by a demon. Wu-K’ung cured the king of his disease and helped him to defeat the demon, saved the king’s wife.^[20] The coincidence of the similar plot from two different literature was further evidence to prove that the potential connection might have between these two books.

9. The Expression of Hanuman and Wu-K’Ung in Modern Society.

As we mentioned before, these two monkey images had been worshiped by local people for a long time since they were created. Till now we can find the influence of them expressing in works of art.

Bajrangi Bhaijaan narrates a warm story that Bajrangi (played by Salman Khan), an ardent devotee of Hindu deity Hanuman, who embarks on taking a mute six-year-old Pakistani girl (Malhotra), separated in India from her parents, back to her hometown in Pakistan.^[21] Actually, Bajrangi is another name of Hanuman, and Bhaijaan means “brother” in the Hindi. Thus, we can find the title of the film is soaked with myth elements. Actually, from the perspective of mythology prototype, not only the title, the whole content of the film is full of the mythical aspects.^[22]

Pawan, the main character of the film, is a devout disciple of Hanuman, and the first time he met Shahida, a lost Muslim girl from Pakistan, was in a Hanuman temple. The first advice he gave to the girl was to stay in the temple and wait for her families. Pawan believes Hanuman will solve all her problems. That is the most straightforward connection between Pawan and Hanuman. However, as the study moved along, I found, the identity of Pawan, what the film wants to create, is not only a

Hanuman's devotee but also the avatar of the monkey God in the world.

First, the name "Pawan" in Hindi means wind. Coincidentally, Hanuman is the son of Wind God. Thus Pawan is not a devotee that was chosen randomly, and his name implied the potential relationship between Pawan and the Wind God. Also, in the film, when Pawan first met his fiancée's father, in desperation, he said: "I am the son of Chaturvedi, Bajrangi!"^[23] In the following plot of the film, Bajrangi becomes his another name, and many people call him the Monkey God.

Second, in the film, Pawan is not smart since he was a child, but he is honest and warm heart. His first personal character expressed in the movie is slow-witted. No matter the sports or study, he can't do well. From the depiction in the movie, Pawan took the high school graduated exam ten times, so that his father knew him finally pass the exam, he was so excited that even passed away. His stupid and Hanuman's ugly can be regarded as one of their similarities to some degree. Because these characters belong to their exterior part, however, their interior part, what means their heart, was kind and pure. Their deficiency of outside conditions presents a striking contrast to their beautiful heart.^[24]

Third, the identity of Pawan is similar to the identification of Hanuman in the *Ramayana*. Both of them play the role of a protector. The importance of Hanuman as a protector is expressed in the local Indian culture. In a lot of places in Northern India, there are "verses about him are repeated at the beginning of each day and the beginning of each enterprise. Small pamphlets called *Hanuman-Caclisac*, "Forty Verses about Hanuman," drawn from the *Ramayana* are used as prayer books and as talismans. Powerful verses (mantra) invoking the name of Hanuman, the red-bodied hero, are used to exorcise demons or to gain power over enemies."^[25] In *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*, there are several times that Shahida is placed in a perilous situation: when she separated from her family, Pawan existed and took her with him; when she was sold to the prostitution, Pawan arrived in time again and protected her from the evildoers. When her mother couldn't find her and come back home sadly, her grandfather comforted her mother that "there must be some god-sent in India who will look after our Shahida."^[26] This god-sent protector should be Pawan. Thus, the process of Pawan protecting Shahida represented the protection function of Hanuman.

Better yet, this name, Shahida, is like a transformation from the name of Rama's wife, "Sita," who is the person that Hanuman had to rescue. But I can not make sure it is a coincidence or the editor of the film intended to do so.

We can also find some similarities between the plot of the film and the *Ramayana*. One of the keywords in the epic was the promises. Because of his commitment, the king (Rama's father) had to ask his son to renounce his claim to the throne. If the old king violated his promises, his merit would be tarnished. Also, in the film, after Pawan committed to sending Shahida back to her home, he never thought about giving up, even when he was chased by the police and his life was in danger.

Second, as we mentioned before, the main content in the *Ramayana* described Rama and Hanuman rescue Rama's wife Sita from the demon king Ravana. The plot can be simplified as a female was forced to leave her relatives and finally was rescued. In the film, the experience of Shahida was similar with Sita's. When Shahida and her mother came back to Pakistan, she separated from her mother by accident. Her experience was not based on her own mind but also forced by the specific conditions. Also, the plot of the film mainly tells the audience how Pawan help Shahida to reunite with her families.

The difficulty that both female characters in separated works faced was losing their virginity. After Sita was grasped by the demon, Ravana forced her to marry him, or she would be killed. In the film, Shahid was once sold to the brothel, and she was too young to revolt. Hanuman and Pawan played the role of savior when these female characters were in danger. When Sita didn't want to lose her purity and prepare for suicide, Hanuman existed and told her the situation of her husband, and promised that she would be safe in quickly.

Not only in this movie, but also in the other Indian films and television series, compared with the original image portrayed in the *Ramayana*, the modern image of Hanuman doesn't change a lot.

However, in modern society, the image of Wu-K'ung gradually become different with the original

image described in the fiction. According to the analysis of Professor Shao, nowadays the image of Wu-K'ung becomes more secular and sentimental than before.^[27]

Although Wu-K'ung was affected by the story and the image of Hanuman, the influence of the former is much broader than the latter. In modern films, the directors prefer to portray Wu-K'ung as a mortal but not a deity. No matter in the movie of *The Journey to the West* adopt by Hong Kong, Japan, or America dictators, all of them subvert the original image. In these films, Wu-K'ung experiences love, friendship, "up-time" and "downtime". The gods do not have any difference with ordinary people.

The existence of desire in modern *The Journey to the West* deserves to be noticed. Love becomes the central theme in some of the works. Wu-K'ung is not a monk who cleanse his heart and limit his desires, but a human who devote himself for his love. In the film *The Chinese Odyssey* (which adopt from the Journey to the west and the main character in this film is Wu-K'ung), Wu-K'ung fall in love with the Whited-Boned Demon and tried to save her life by time-travel.^[28] In the film *The Forbidden Kingdom*, the image of Wu-K'ung merges with American ideology and is portrayed as a pragmatist and full of the spirit of personal heroism.^[29]

Wu-K'ung is not only a hero of China but also a hero of the world. From the difference between the adoption of *The Journey to the West*, there is a culture fusion happening around us. Some of them are positive, but some of them are negative. Because the creation of Wu-K'ung himself was a phenomenon of cultural fusion, the interpretation of him is much more complex.

10. Conclusion

In conclusion, because of the geographical conditions and the history of cultural communication between India and China in religion, philosophy, and even literature and art. It is very possible that the image of Hanuman influenced Ch'eng en Wu when he was writing *The Journey to the Western* and creating Wu-K'ung. As the first deity based on the picture of Monkey, the characterization of Hanuman was so perfect that it was not flexible enough. But it doesn't stop the Indian to adore and worship this mighty monkey. Wu-K'ung produced by Ch'eng en Wu is a very mature image in the traditional Chinese literature. It is not only a typical synthesis of both native and exotic culture, but also individual model contained the personal thought and creativity of the author. The complexity of Wu-K'ung can be interpreted from different perspectives and recreated under different cultural backgrounds. As the ancestor of monkey image in literature, we should never forget what Hanuman contribute to the birth of Wu-K'ung.

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