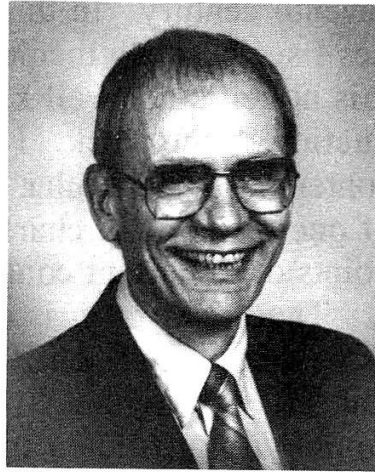


Continuities with Buddhist Fiction: Monkey's Enlightenment in the Xu Xiyou ji

by Frederick P. Brandauer

Father Richard P. McBrien, in his well-known book *Catholicism*, points out that there were at least two new emphases in the teaching on faith of the Second Vatican Council. The first is that "faith is a free gift of God, and ours is a free response to that gift."¹ Since faith and freedom go together, there may be a variety of authentic religious responses to God. Christians in today's world therefore should not only recognize the fact of religious pluralism but also maintain an open stance toward other forms of religious expression. McBrien discusses three possible approaches by Christians: 1) the belief that "insofar as other 'religions' embody authentic values and even saving grace, they do so as 'anonymously Christian' communities;" 2) the acceptance of other religions as "lesser, relative, and extraordinary means of salvation;" and 3) the affirmation of intrinsic values in other religions even to the extent that these "are perceived as having something to teach us, not only about themselves but about God, about life, even about Christ."²



Although representatives may readily be found of all three approaches, most Christians have traditionally followed either the first or the second.³ Regardless of which approach one chooses to take, however, it will be apparent that the recognition of important continuities with other forms of religious expression is assumed in each case. McBrien's approaches do not differ in terms of the fact of continuities but only in the meaning and significance attached to these.

As a student of Chinese fiction I am interested in the way in

which Chinese religious expression is reflected in traditional Chinese novels. Furthermore, as a Catholic Christian my interest goes beyond this to include a desire to understand better the continuities between the religious ideas presented in these works and my own faith.

In recent years I have been deeply moved by what I have found in an extensive study of the *Xu Xiyou ji*, one of the traditional vernacular novels based on the story of the journey to India by the Buddhist Monk Xuan Zang and his disciples in the seventh century. In this paper I wish to reflect on the continuities I see between themes in this novel and my own faith. Since this novel is not well known, I shall first provide a brief introduction to the work. I shall then discuss various aspects of its content with particular reference to the religious enlightenment of one of its main characters, Monkey, and what I regard to be points of important continuity here with my own faith.

The *Xu Xiyou ji* is one of four traditional vernacular novels associated with Xuan Zang's legendary westward journey. The four novels are: the *Xiyou ji* (Record of the Westward Journey), commonly attributed to Wu Cheng'en of the 16th century, the *Xiyou bu* (Supplement to the Westward Journey), by Dong Yue, written in the early seventeenth century, the *Hou Xiyou ji* (Later Record of the Westward Journey), by an anonymous author, probably of the late seventeenth century, and the *Xu Xiyou ji* (Sequel to the Westward Journey).

The least well-known of these four is the *Xu Xiyou ji*. This is a work which is mentioned in most of the standard histories of Chinese fiction or Chinese literature but one which has rarely been seen in modern times. For example, Lu Xun refers to it in his *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe* but adds that he had not seen the work.⁴ Liu Dajie writes in his *Zhongguo wenxue fazhan shi* that in addition to the *Xiyou ji* there was already in the Ming dynasty a sequel named *Xu Xiyou ji*. He then also adds that he has not seen the work.⁵ According to two mainland scholars, the *Xu Xiyou ji* is seldom found in libraries in either China or the West.⁶

Some scholars interested in traditional Chinese fiction have spent years trying to find this novel. In 1928 Zheng Zhenduo found a copy of it in Suzhou and then in 1933 he saw it again in Beijing. In an article entitled "Ji yi jiu san san nian jian de guji faxian" (A record of old books discovered in 1933) he wrote:

The *Xu Xiyou* is a book very rarely seen. I looked for it for many years but could not find it. Five years ago in a certain bookstore in Suzhou I got a copy from a pile of miscellaneous books. It was a pocket edition published during the Jiaqing-Daoguang period (1796-1850). I then went through a time of great turmoil and this book was lost. After I arrived in Beijing I again looked all over for it in bookstores but was unable to find it. Finally I got a copy in the Song Yun Ge. The edition was the same as the one I had found in Suzhou.⁷

This is believed to be the earliest account by a scholar who actually saw the work in the twentieth century.

Very little attention has been paid to the *Xu Xiyou ji*, and when scholars have made reference to it, it seems their comments have usually been negative. I cite two examples. In 1715 Liu Tingji commented on this work in his *Zaiyuan zazhi*. After discussing the practice of writing sequels to well-known novels, Liu evaluates several of these. He writes:

As for the *Xiyou ji* it has its own *Hou Xiyou ji* and its *Xu Xiyou ji*. Although the *Hou Xiyou ji* cannot match in beauty what went before it, nevertheless its playful laughter and angry shouting make it delightful reading. As for the *Xu Xiyou ji*, this indeed is truly a dog's tail.⁸

Liu Tingji was not alone in holding such a low opinion of the *Xu Xiyou ji*. The writer of the "*Xu Xiyou bu zaji*," which is appended to an early Qing dynasty Shuoku edition of the *Xiyou bu*, makes a similar comment:

The *Xu Xiyou ji* is written in conscious imitation [of the *Xiyou ji*] and comes close to truth, but the writer lacks restraint and particularly by adding [the two guardians] Biqu and Lingxu he has merely put feet on a snake.⁹

Although this novel has been disparagingly called a dog's tail or a snake with feet on it, there are ways in which this novel is highly significant. From the point of view of the literary historian, it is an important work for it raises interesting questions regarding the history of the *Xiyou* tradition and particularly of its own place within this tradition.¹⁰ My interest in this paper, however, is not with literary history but rather with evidence of inter-religious continuities. Here it is the Buddhist content of the novel that is noteworthy. To my knowledge, this

content is unique and in the remainder of this paper I shall try to demonstrate how this is so by focusing on the way the novel treats the character of Monkey. The way Monkey is treated, and particularly the way this treatment relates to the nature and process of Monkey's enlightenment, provides the context for the continuities I see between the Buddhist themes of this work and my Christian faith.

The *Xu Xiyou ji* is a long novel. In 100 chapters it tells the story of the return journey of Xuan Zang and his disciples from the Western Paradise back to China. Readers familiar with the standard and popular Wu text will recall that the pilgrims there have an easy time getting back to Chang'an since they fly back the whole way. The entire return trip is covered in just one chapter (Chapter 99) and the only difficulty encountered here is the dunking by the White Turtle in the Tongtian He (River that leads to Heaven). This dunking serves as the final calamity necessary to complete the predetermined number of eighty-one trials. In the *Xu Xiyou ji*, however, there are repeated references to eighty-one trials already encountered on the westward journey.¹¹ Furthermore, although the crossing of the Tongtian He is mentioned, there is no reference in the sequel to any dunking by the White Turtle.¹²

The sequel begins in Buddha's Western Paradise just as Xuan Zang and his disciples are about to arrive after their long and arduous journey. Rulai believes that the pilgrims will need special assistance as they travel back to China with the precious scriptures and so a layman named Lingxu Zi and a monk named Daobi, who usually is simply called Biqu (monk), are chosen to act as protectors, aids and guardians.

Between Chapters 3 and 99 the novel moves through thirty-three episodes in which the eastward journey back to Chang'an is described. Repeatedly the pilgrims return to places visited on their westward journey and often they meet people or monsters previously encountered. An episodic pattern similar to the parent novel is followed, the difference now being that the scriptures occupy a central place in the narrative. Instead of trying to eat or seduce Tripitaka, monsters now try to obtain the scriptures for themselves. The role of the disciples thus shifts from one of protecting the Monk to one of protecting the scriptures. In Chapter 100 the pilgrims successfully complete the journey, present the scriptures to Emperor Taizong, and then, following

the story in the familiar Wu version of the parent novel, they are taken back to Mount Ling, rewarded and promoted.

I want to focus on the way Monkey is treated here. As soon as the pilgrims meet the Buddha a major theme for the novel is introduced. Tripitaka and his disciples are each questioned individually to see if they are fit to be entrusted with the precious scriptures. Among the four pilgrims only Monkey fails to pass Buddha's test. Tripitaka shows himself to be holy, sincere, and of pure mind. Pig and Sha Monk also answer to the satisfaction of the Buddha. However, when the Buddha asks Monkey, "Why are you asking for scriptures? What is your basic intention?" Monkey responds:

I, your disciple, remember how I was born on the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit from a piece of rock which had been nourished by the truth and beauty of heaven and earth and the essence and influence of the sun and moon. Today I want to get scriptures to repay this goodness which has been bestowed on me. If you ask about my basic intention, I, your disciple, have all along followed my Master. The subjugation of innumerable demons and extermination of a great many monsters are all due to the cleverness and tricks of my mind. I have come for the scriptures just because of this clever, tricky mind.¹³

The Buddha is appalled at what he hears. Repaying goodness bestowed is compatible with the scriptures, but the part about the clever and tricky mind is dangerous for it involves deception. Monkey is therefore judged deficient for the task of escorting the sacred scriptures to China.

Thus from the very beginning of the novel Monkey is seen as one who is in need of enlightenment. The whole novel may actually be read as an account of how Monkey gradually changes to fit the author's view of what a good Buddhist ought to be. As a first step toward the reformation of Monkey, the three disciples are all required to turn in their weapons and exchange these for simple carrying poles. Henceforth Monkey, Pig and Sha Monk must deal with the various monsters encountered without the benefit of their famous weapons, the iron cudgel, the muck rake and the magic staff. The weapons are deemed incompatible with the pure, holy and miraculously endowed scriptures.

The work is highly critical of Monkey and indeed Monkey

becomes an object of satire throughout much of the book. Monkey is ridiculed for his failure to understand and follow the basics of what the novel presents as correct Buddhist doctrine. This is significant for here we have for the first time in the entire *Xiyou* tradition sustained satire directed against Monkey. Although in the other three *Xiyou* novels the Monkey figure is seen as in need of enlightenment, he is never satirized in these works. In the sequel, however, he is consistently and severely satirized. Of course, what is satirized is the Monkey figure carried forward from the parent novel. This is the Monkey who is the very ideal of the parent novel. He is powerful, wise, and discerning as well as ambitious. It is precisely this heroic image that the author of the sequel attacks. In the sequel Monkey is criticized for his failure to rely totally on the efficacy of the scriptures and for his penchant for violent and destructive behavior.

The satire against Monkey sets the sequel off against all three of the other westward journey novels. Although all four novels are projected against a view of reality characterized by Buddhist idealism, it is only the *Xu Xiyou ji* that finds all forms of violence objectionable.¹⁴ Monkey is extremely frustrated to be without his cudgel, that famous weapon with which he repeatedly slew monsters in the parent novel. Three times Monkey returns to Mount Ling and tries to get the cudgel back again.¹⁵ Each time he fails in his attempt. The first time a divine king prevents him from taking the cudgel, the second time the cudgel won't work, and the third time he is told that the cudgel has been returned to its original form and is no longer useful. Repeatedly Monkey is exhorted by Tripitaka, Lingxu Zi, Daobi, and various deities to rely solely on the scriptures. The scriptures are meant to save people, whereas the cudgel kills.

The *Xu Xiyou ji* thus promotes a kind of radical passivism and in this it is unique in the tradition. In the *Xiyou* novels the idealist presupposition leads to an acceptance if not outright affirmation of violence. If demons and monsters are all illusory, then why not kill them? But here in the sequel all violence and killing is abhorred.

The passivist stance is frequently coupled with the idea that monsters should not be harmed but rather forgiven of their misdeeds.¹⁶ For example, in Chapter 38 while the monk is led

to safety across a mountain range by the two guardians, Biqui and Lingxu Zi, the three disciples attempt to overcome a particularly nasty demon. Monkey, as usual, wants to destroy the demon, but the two guardians, who have now returned to offer assistance, urge something very different for him.

We want to tell you three teachers that the two of us have escorted your Master across the mountain and have just now been able to offer him a bit of assistance. Please now, for our sakes, forgive this demon. Killing him with your Monks' staffs would be contrary to the basic principles of benevolence which you monks ought to live by.¹⁷

Repeatedly in the novel the act of forgiveness is encouraged not just with the goal of reconciliation in mind but with the added hope that the one forgiven will be converted to the Buddhist way of benevolence. For example, in Chapter 88, Tripitaka urges that a whole group of monsters be forgiven so that they can repent and turn to Buddhism.¹⁸

The passivist stance coupled with the idea of benevolence is even carried to the point in Chapter 48 where Biqui offers to sacrifice himself in order to pacify a demon named Six Ears. Biqui says:

I say that giving up one's body in sacrifice is the basic idea behind being a monk. If I can only satisfy the monster's desire for revenge (and thereby save the pilgrims), why should I worry about offering my life.¹⁹

The satire on Monkey is closely related to the process of his enlightenment. At the beginning of the novel Monkey's limitations of understanding and failures are repeatedly ridiculed. In nearly every chapter of the first half of the novel there is some reference to Monkey's need for right thoughts rather than his need for a weapon, to the problems caused by Monkey's tricks, or to the activation of demons by Monkey's clever and scheming mind. Gradually, however, Monkey changes and there is a shift in attitude toward Monkey. In Chapter 84 he makes fake axes and exchanges these for real ones only to have Tripitaka insist that he bury these weapons. Tripitaka's words are significant:

These weapons cannot be allowed to travel with my scriptures....Wukong, haven't you heard it said, 'I myself have

the sword of wisdom for exterminating those demons.'²⁰

This event seems to mark a turning point for Monkey; he now gives up the idea of using weapons. By Chapter 92 he clearly has become even more enlightened as he decides to abandon deceptive schemes and tricks as well. In Chapter 99 Lingxu Zi describes this transformation when he states that formerly, without his weapon, Monkey relied on tricks but now "he'll soon not be using tricks anymore either."²¹ In the last chapter Monkey's enlightenment is complete for he finally deals with monsters by reciting Sanskrit scriptures rather than by using either force or trickery.

It is important to note that what is advocated in this novel is not the Chan Buddhism we find projected by the other three *Xiyou* novels. Chan stresses sudden enlightenment and sees little value in the scriptural tradition. The enlightenment experiences in all three of the other *Xiyou* novels are sudden with little or no reference to or reliance on scriptural truth. Here in the sequel, by contrast, Monkey's enlightenment comes gradually and the scriptures are central to the whole process.

Thus we find in the *Xu Xiyou ji* an author who is taking a clear stand against an earlier tradition. Despite the constraints of the sequel format he is able to create a remarkable and original work. Although the *Xu Xiyou ji* has been judged to be a dog's tail, it is a highly significant work for it projects a view of life seldom found in traditional Chinese literature.

Its emphasis on forgiveness is rare indeed. Usually Chinese literature reflects an imperative toward reciprocity. This idea of reciprocity is dominant in Chinese thought and the negative aspect of reciprocity is, of course, revenge, the antithesis of forgiveness.²²

Not only is the *Xu Xiyou ji* to be distinguished from the other three Buddhist novels in the *Xiyou* tradition, what it advocates is very different from anything we find in other major vernacular novels. Historical novels such as the *Sanguo yanyi* (Three Kingdoms) or adventure novels such as *Shuihu zhuan* (Water Margin) promote a kind of heroism involving extensive warfare and violence. The two great domestic novels of the tradition, the *Jin Ping Mei* (Golden Lotus) and the *Honglou meng* (Dream of the Red Chamber), both have plots built on the idea of determinism as manifested either through reward and

punishment for good and bad karma, or through one's destiny. Works such as the *Rulin waishi* (The Scholars) or the *Lao Can youji* (Travels of Lao Can) either promote Confucian eremitic ideals or Daoist and syncretic ideals characterized by inaction (*wu wei*). Nowhere, in the entire tradition can we find another work like the *Xu Xiyou ji*.

There are no doubt various reasons why the *Xu Xiyou ji* has failed to become a well-known or popular work among Chinese readers and scholars. The work does have some serious formal and stylistic weaknesses. Its narrative is often highly repetitive and many of its episodes rely on implausible events or contrived coincidental happenings for final resolution. At times the plot appears so complicated that even a most determined reader will feel frustrated. Such flaws, however, are actually quite common in much traditional Chinese fiction and, in my judgment, do not alone constitute sufficient explanation for why this work has been so rarely seen by Chinese readers.

I believe that a major reason for neglect of this work is that its content was judged to be unacceptable by many readers. How could the author of the *Xu Xiyou ji* deprive the popular Monkey of his famous weapon and promote a passivist stance for the entire pilgrim band? Was not the very nature of heroism in the *Xiyou* tradition defined in terms of Monkey's ambition, self-confidence, mental superiority and willingness to battle with any and all opponents? Furthermore, how could this author advocate compassion and forgiveness for one's enemies? Did not such an approach violate the fundamental principles of reciprocity and indeed the whole commonly accepted scheme of cosmic justice through retribution and reward? The *Xu Xiyou ji* has formal and stylistic flaws, but it must surely have also been viewed by many readers as a distressingly counter-cultural book.

It is precisely this counter-cultural aspect of the novel which provides the continuities with my own faith which I find important. Here we have a work of Chinese Buddhist fiction themes which come very close to the central beliefs of the Christian faith, beliefs for which Christianity has also been judged counter-cultural. Although the *Xu Xiyou ji* promotes Buddhist compassion rather than love, this compassion is to be extended towards all, including one's enemies. The novel's emphasis on compassion leads to an abhorrence of all violence and the rejection of the use of all weapons. Its stance is thoroughly passivist.

Compassion necessitates forgiveness which in turn leads to reconciliation. Furthermore, the novel tells the story of a gradual process of enlightenment to what its author proclaims as truth and this process has a strong resemblance to what we commonly call religious conversion.

The novel finds its truth in a set of religious texts which are upheld both as the basic source of moral teaching and the supreme guide for action. So important are these scriptures that, even though written in a foreign language (Sanskrit), they should be thoroughly internalized through memorization and their teachings recalled whenever difficulties are encountered.

I know of no other work in traditional Chinese fiction which presents such an array of themes which stand in direct continuity with essential teachings and practices of Christianity. We may see these continuities as "hidden Christian truths," or as lesser means of salvation, or as conveying intrinsic values of their own. Regardless of which of McBrien's approaches we take, however, the novel must surely be seen as an important work for the Christian reader. The enlightenment of Monkey of the *Xu Xiyou ji* may not be attractive or appealing to a great many other readers. Christians, however, will find it much easier to identify with this Monkey than with his popular earlier manifestation in the parent novel.

Notes

1. Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, Study Edition (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1981), p. 45.
2. McBrien, p. 269-270.
3. McBrien points out that the first position is essentially that of Karl Rahner and others, the second, that of the Second Vatican Council, and the third, that of Hans Kung, Heinz Robert Schlette, and others. See McBrien, p. 270.
4. Lu Xun, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo Shilüe* (1923; Hong Kong: Xinyi chuban she, 1967), p. 175.
5. See Taiwan reprint: *Zhongguo wenxue fada shi*, Vol. 2 (Taipei: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), p. 387.
6. Zhang Ying and Chen Su, "Guben *Xiyou* de yibu hanjian xushu," *Xu Xiyou ji* (Shenyang: Chunfeng wenyi chuban she, 1986), p. 778. To my knowledge this is the first serious study to appear anywhere on the *Xu Xiyou ji*.
7. Zheng Zhenduo, "Ji yi jiu san san nianjian de guji faxian," *Zhongguo wenxue yanjiu*, Vol. 2 (Beijing: Zuojia chuban she, 1957), p. 1373. This quotation is taken from Zhang Ying and Chen Su, p. 779.
8. Liu Tingji, *Zaiyuan zazhi*, rpt. from *Liaohai congshu*, in *Jindai Zhongguo shiliao congkan*, Vol. 38 (Taipei; Wenhai chuban she, 1966), 3, 20.

9. "Xu Xiyu bu zaji, in Dong Yue, *Xiyou bu* (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshu guan 1958), p. 9.
10. I have dealt with the question of the novel's historical relation to the *Xiyou* tradition in my paper, "On the Significance of the Dog's Tail: Comments on the *Xu Xiyou ji*," presented at the Western Branch Conference of the American Oriental Society in October, 1990. The paper is presently being revised for publication.
11. See, for example, *Xu Xiyou ji* (Shenyang, 1986), p. 264, 644.
12. *Xu Xiyou ji*, (Shenyang, 1986), Chaps. 61-63.
13. *Xu Xiyou ji*, (Shenyang, 1986), p. 19.
14. For a study of violence and Buddhist idealism in the *Xiyou ji*, the *Xiyou bu*, and the *Hou Xiyou ji*, see my article "Violence and Buddhist Idealism in the *Xiyou* novels," *Violence in China: Essays in Culture and Counterculture*, ed. Jonathan N. Lipman and Stevan Harrell (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 115-148.
15. *Xu Xiyou ji*, (Shenyang, 1986), Chaps. 7, 24, and 38.
16. For an elaboration of these ideas, in addition to the examples from Chapters 38 and 48 given below, see also *Xu Xiyou ji*, (Shenyang, 1986), Chaps. 42, 43, and 82.
17. *Xu Xiyou ji*, (Shenyang, 1986), p. 295.
18. *Xu Xiyou ji*, (Shenyang, 1986), p. 680.
19. *Xu Xiyou ji*, (Shenyang, 1986), p. 369.
20. *Xu Xiyou ji*, (Shenyang, 1986), p. 651.
21. *Xu Xiyou ji*, (Shenyang, 1986), p. 762.
22. For a study of the place of reciprocity in Chinese culture, see Paul Varo Martinson, "Pao Order and Redemption: Perspectives on Chinese Religion and Society Based on a Study of the *Chin P'ing Mei*," Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1973. For an important recent article on revenge in Chinese culture, see Richard Madsen, "The Politics of Revenge in Rural China during the Cultural Revolution," *Violence in China: Essays in Culture and Counterculture*, ed. Jonathan N. Lipman and Stevan Harrell (Albany: State University Press, 1990), p. 175-201. Madsen writes: "The Confucian tradition had little warrant for forgiving serious injury out of mercy, and the Communist Party continued this tradition." (190).

