

Journey to the West

(33)

Chapter 13

He falls into the tiger's den and is saved by the Planet Venus;
On Double-Forked Peak, Boqin entertains the Priest.

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For the details of the story, please refer to Chapter 13 in *Journey to the West* as translated by W. J. F. Jenner, published by Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, ISBN 7-119-00653-3

This Section concerns Sun Wukong. From Chapter 9 to Chapter 13, Sun Wukong does not appear. Actually, the last time we referred to his existence on the form level was Section 32; although Sun Wukong did not obviously figure in the story, in fact, he was still a part of it. If you don't understand that, perhaps you didn't notice him. I would like to summarize the last few chapters. Then I will go on to explain this chapter.

Some chapters which were related to Sun Wukong concerned the Five Elements Mountain - this was the start of a new life for him. We know the most important character in *Journey to the West* is Sun Wukong. As you recall, Sun Wukong disturbed the heavenly palace and then was defeated and imprisoned under the Five Elements Mountain by Buddha. After this, Buddha held a

ceremony called an "Ullambana Feast" (盂蘭盆會). In the Buddhist service, there were only flowers and fruit. Why flowers and fruit? Because Sun Wukong was raised on Flower and Fruit Mountain, these flowers and fruit somehow represented human beings practicing Tao. Some human beings, after practicing Tao, become flowers; some become fruit. To become Fruit is to get the Right Fruit. There are different sizes of Right Fruit, big or small. Flowers come in more kinds; some will grow fruit, and some will not. The Buddhist ceremony hints that in practicing Tao, to reach a certain level one must make a breakthrough. While Buddha gathered everyone to attend the Buddhist ceremony, in the human world Tang Taizong also held a Great Water and Land Mass. For this Great Water and Land Mass, some senior monks were selected and one of them was Xuanzang, who had a close relationship with Sun Wukong. Before, I mentioned this briefly. Now, I will talk about it at greater length. We know that Xuanzang was the incarnation of the Golden Cicada, the disciple of Buddha. Why

was Golden Cicada a fitting name? The cicada metamorphoses by sloughing off its shell so that it can fly. At this point, it is buried in the earth, reminiscent of the situation described by the Chien hexagram in the I-Ching. That hexagram involves a person practicing Tao in the beginning stage. A hidden dragon that hides under ground has no function. It must wait until the right time arrives for it to become a flying dragon. Likewise, Sun Wukong had not reached the right time when he followed Subhuti and learned many Dharma methods which he used to disturb the heavenly palace. Because he only learned Dharma methods, he did not really practice Tao. He had no Tao but only Dharma, so when he met Buddha, he was imprisoned under the Five Elements Mountain. After he was defeated and imprisoned, he could cultivate his heart and original true self while under the Five Elements Mountain. After cultivating his heart and original true self, he was prepared to come out. So when he came out, he was reunited with his original true self. Let us review again the relationship.

Golden Cicada was a disciple of Buddha and had a direct relationship with Buddha. We have frequently mentioned the Buddha nature of human beings, and the Golden Cicada represented the Buddha nature. Then Sun Wukong represented the heart and spirit of human beings. Zhu Bajie was the soul of human beings; and Sha Wujing was the body of human beings. The dragon horse was the guardian. At that time, this horse was not

called a dragon horse but only the white horse. It was a gift from Tang Taizong. Tang Taizong presented this gift to Xuanzang because Xuanzang was going to fetch the sutras. Tao cultivators certainly must have spirit, soul, and mind, and may or may not have guardians. But those not cultivating Tao are limited to spirit, soul, and mind - they definitely do not have guardians. Now, everyone has Buddha nature. But this Buddha nature surely is not connected with your heart. The most difficult part for a Tao cultivator is that his original true self and heart are not connected. In Journey to the West, Sun Wukong was pinned under the Five Element Mountain to cultivate his heart and original true self for 500 years. The 500 years was not a waste for him because during this time he cultivated his heart and original true self, and thus his Buddha nature was awakened and released to the human world in the form of Xuanzang. By this method, the heart could be connected with original true self. As we know, after Xuanzang took Sun Wukong as his disciple, he found Zhu Bajie, Sha Wujing, and the dragon horse. In fact, all of these were arranged in advance by Guanyin Bodhisattva. The arrangement was planned a long time before. However, it was still a plan which needed step-by-step execution by Xuanzang. This is the relationship between Xuanzang and his disciples.

From chapter 9 to chapter 13, the story mostly concerns Xuanzang. There is no Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie, Sha Wujing, or dragon horse in this part of the story. Especially in chapter 9, every-

thing centered on Xuanzang, the person and his matters. In history, Xuanzang was a son of a literary man who married the daughter of an imperial minister.

Soon the daughter was pregnant. But the literary man was murdered and his body thrown into a river. Therefore when the baby Xuanzang was born, his mother set him adrift on the river. This is why his name was “river current” and he became a monk.

But if we read history, Xuanzang’s personal history was not like this. So we know that the Xuanzang in Journey to the West is not the one found in history. Perhaps sometimes they were the same, and sometimes they were not. It is not easy to make this understood. The critical point is the 13th year of Zhen Guan - or the 13th year of Taizong’s reign.

In Journey to the West all the matters which related to Xuanzang take place in the 13th year of Zhen Guan. He was sent to fetch the sutras by Taizong in the 13th year of Zhen Guan. From his birth to the time he was 18 years of age, it was still the 13th year of Zhen Guan. When he went to fetch the sutra, it was still the 13th year of Zhen Guan. What was wrong with the writer of Journey to the West? How could a person make such an error in logic on such an easy point? This is not a careless mistake but a hint about something.

Here is an example. Suppose I am now talking about some story. Let us say that the story

took place in the 20th year of the Republic of China, and also mentions some things that took place in the 30th year of the Republic of China. Suppose also that at the end it discusses events happening today. As I discuss the narrative, time in the story coincides with the present. Time in the story and the present time are both real. The events of the story are true on some level, but not necessarily in the real world. Now do you better understand the story mentioned before?

So by the same token, now we talk about Journey to the West and what happened in the 13th year of Zhen Guan. It was not really in the 13th year of Zhen Guan but in a time space which was inside another time space that it happened.

What happened was that the spirit of a literary man and the spirit of the daughter of an imperial minister were married. Did this happen on the form level? No, it was only on the spirit level, and the author described events occurring on the spirit level. The time-space of the story is not the historical time-space. It is like the story in my example. So relating a story it is not a matter of the current time-space but of another time-space.

The example is in the time-space of historical reality, so it is easier to understand. But, think about this. Is anything that happened in the other time-space related to us nowadays? If you are able to think about this, you can understand. For instance, now I am here lecturing; but perhaps there is another spirit of me in another time-space which is not now, not the year of 1994, not on

June 20, but maybe in 30,000 B.C. or someday in the 1940s. There I am attending a meeting or eating or drinking tea, but is it real? Is it consistent with now? No. Therefore when the author of *Journey to the West* wrote the story, it related matters which happened in some other time-space. But the story involved persons of the then-current time space - namely Taizong and Xuanzang. Now when we read it, we wonder why so many matters were happening at the same time. But it is just as now I can be here talking about many things which happened in many different time-spaces. If you can think things through this way, you will understand.

Why did everything take place in the 13th year of Zhen Guan? It could be said that only in the 13th year of Zhen Guan were Tang Sanzang's real nature and heart, even mind and soul, and guardian reunited. It is what we called a reunion of form, mind, and ideal. It is a kind of consistency. He became whole in that year. Let us review the real history: in the first year of Zhen Guan, Tang Sanzang went to fetch the sutras. He came back in the 19th year of Zhen Guan. From the first year to the 13th, it was 12 years. So in these 12 years, did Tang Sanzang have the Golden Cicada in his body? Maybe not; during that time, the Golden Cicada probably stayed with Buddha, listening to his lectures. Until the 13th year of Zhen Guan, the time which the flesh and blood body of Xuanzang was in India fetching sutras, it was 12 years. That means that until the 12th year

everything was being prepared for nature and body to unite. In history, there was no Sun Wukong who accompanied Tang Sanzang to fetch the sutras. Tang Sanzang was alone. Even if he had some companions, they would not have been Sun Wukong or Zhu Bajie. There was no such human being. However, *Journey to the West* existed in history. In history, those who did accompany Tang Sanzang were unknown. In the story, these invisible characters are so famous. Now everyone knows Sha Wujing and Zhu Bajie; but who knows those monks who really accompanied Tang Sanzang? No one knows them. Therefore, the real time was the 13th year of Zhen Guan. In this year, Tang Sanzang was not in some area of the dynasty of Tang but in the West. In the first year of Zhen Guan, he was already on the way to India to fetch the sutras, and he did not come back until the 19th year of Zhen Guan. Therefore, in the period from the 12th to 19th year of Zhen Guan, his soul and nature were working together. According to *Journey to the West*, his work did not end until the 27th year. In reality, was there a 27th year in Zhen Guan? No. In Zhen Guan, there was only 23 years, even adding one before, it was only 24 years. Whence came from the 27th year? Nowhere. Then what is the meaning of the 27th year of Zhen Guan? If we counted from the 13th year to the 27th year, in total it was 14 years only. In other words, from the 13th year, the Tang Sanzang was functioning with a reunited nature, heart, soul, mind and his guiding spirit. All were working together on

fetching the sutras. After he came back in the 19th year, he was translating the sutras. In the meantime while doing the translation, should the heart and the nature still remain together? Of course they should. In that time they were reunited. That was why, the author wrote till the 27th year. It is a time counted in another time-space. So the correct number is 14 years. Counting from the start of the 13th year of Zhen Guan to 14 years later, gives the 27th year. Things were different in history. In history, he came back already in the 19th year. Was there historically a 27th year in Zhen Guan. No, in history this year did not exist.

The data I mentioned are from the Tang Sanzang biography written by his eldest pupil. It is absolutely correct because it is first hand data. Therefore, the pupil wrote which year his master left for where and which year his master came back. Everything has a basis of history, and this was not groundless work. Like Journey to the West, it is an artificial work. It describes matters which happened in the other world. If you compare it with the history, there is a large discrepancy. In fact, if we read the novel History of the three Kingdoms, it is in the same. There are many differences between the novel and the historical account also called History of the Three Kingdoms. The historical novel after all is different from history. We can explain the differences by a simple sentence: "It is a novel." In Journey to the West, there are many unreasonable parts. We can just say that it is a novel. However, even

in a novel, there are many main points which make it more than just a novel. If we could understand, we would know. Otherwise without understanding, we would just think the author is really without common sense. Even by simple addition, we can see he confused the 13th year with the 27th year of Zhen Guan, not fitting at all with history. Besides, we know that it is generally agreed that the author of the novel lived in the Ming dynasty. Though it was a long time from Ming to Tang, there were many available history books. Even if the author had no common sense, did not know math, and did not know how to refer to history books, the error was still too far from the truth. There must have been a reason for this apparent confusion; it could not have been just an error. He wrote it intentionally and with a special meaning. If we could understand this, we would know more about the novel.

Now talking about Tang Sanzang, why is he discussed from the 9th chapter until the current 13th chapter? It was the story of a spirit which came from heaven and was going to cultivate itself. In fact, we mentioned that Sun Wukong who represented heart looked for his original true self. Conversely, considering things the other way, we see that it was original true self which moved the heart. If original true self had not moved the heart, there would have been no Sun Wukong. From Journey to the West, we know whence Sun Wukong came.

(To be continued)