

Alchemy and *Journey to the West*: The Cart-Slow Kingdom Episode

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Since its publication in 1596, the question of how to read *Journey to the West* (hereafter *Journey*) has been approached from various angles. A number of traditional commentaries, including those of Wang Xiangxu in 1663, Chen Shibin in 1780, and Liu Yiming in 1820, considered Daoism as the proper lens through which to focus on *Journey*. These commentators went so far as to attribute authorship to Yuan dynasty Daoist master Qiu Chuji 邱處機 (Qiu Changchun 邱長春, 1148-1227), one of the patriarchs of Quanzhen 全真 [complete truth] Daoism, rather than to Wu Chengen 吳承恩, the Ming dynasty minor official.¹ This attribution was based in part on the assertion that *Journey* was really a Daoist scripture, relating in a veiled and humorous way a sequence of Daoist practices which if followed with the instruction of a master would lead to perfection and immortality.² Daoist

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¹There are a number of studies addressing aspects of this issue. On the question of antecedent versions, including the question of Ming authorship, see two works by Plaks, "Allegory in Hsi-yu Chi" and *Masterworks*. Plaks gives consideration to the attribution of Qiu Chuji as author of the 100-chapter novel, but finally asserts that given intertextual evidence the novel is "a product of the sixteenth century intellectual milieu" (*Masterworks*, 199-201). This matter is also considered in the introduction to Yu's translation of *Journey to the West*, 1:1-62. Liu Ts'un-yan makes a case for Wu Chengen as author, based on comparing poems known to be by Wu and poems from *Journey*. See Liu, "Wu Ch'eng-en" and "Prototypes of *Monkey*." For complete studies of *Journey* concerning antecedent Yang and Zhu versions, see Dudbridge, *Hsi-yu Chi* and "The Hundred-chapter Hsi-yu chi"; and Koss, "The Xiyouji." Dudbridge's book also gives consideration to sources other than the Yang and Zhu versions.

²Eva Wong continues this assertion about *Journey* as well as about folk tales such as *Seven Daoist Masters*. In her introduction to *Seven Daoist Masters*, Wong writes that these stories use the "indirect method" of teaching: "The indirect method of conveying Taoist wisdom, which is embodied in the story's action, is probably [a] more powerful vehicle of teaching. Events in stories linger long after the reader has closed the book, entering the nonconscious mind with less resistance than explicit assertions of principle....As we 'lose' ourselves in the story, our ego becomes less active in discrimination and analysis...[and] the mind can become more receptive to the wisdom that is presented to us" (xviii).

interpretations were not the only renderings given by traditional commentators, however, and until very recently they have not been a primary focus of scholars of *Journey*.³ More commonly, studies have addressed the themes of mind cultivation, as in Andrew Plaks' work, and Buddhist allegory, as in Francesca Cho Bantly's study.⁴

Anthony Yu and Liu Ts'un-yan are two modern commentators who have noted the great importance of Daoist alchemical themes and content in the novel.⁵ Yu asserts the need to consider both body and mind cultivation in determining meaning in *Journey*, refuting an emphasis primarily on the mind. He has contended that

in view of the prominence given to the images of the mind, the temptation to read the entire narrative as a late Ming allegory on idealism with preponderant Neo-Confucian overtones is enormous. But to do so...is to miss a good deal of the other elements woven into the polysemous fabric of the work. We need, therefore, to recall that *Journey* stresses not only the cultivation of the mind, but also the cultivation of the body or Tao.⁶

Liu Ts'un-yan, in a series of five articles, explores the connections between *Journey* and Quanzhen Daoism. Although they have not offered a systematic rendering of alchemical practices within the novel, both Yu and Liu suggest that *Journey* be read with attention not only to the presentation of Buddhist and Neo-Confucian themes, but also to those of Daoism. They also hold that the author of the novel was an adherent of the Three Teachings syncretic tradition.⁷

Other recent works have begun to correlate the unfolding of episodes in the novel with the sequences of practices in Daoist alchemical self-cultivation. Wang Guoguang suggests that from chapters 32 to 66 the novel is a complete accomplishment of *qigong* 氣功, the moving and refining of *qi* 氣, or energy, in the body. Wang Gang builds on Wang Guoguang's work, but designates the entire novel as the completion of alchemical self-cultivation, focusing on episodes in chapters 66-100.⁸

The work of Wang Gang and Wang Guoguang gives credence to the traditional Daoist claim that the entire *Journey* be read as an allegory of a particular sequence of Daoist practices that leads to immortality and self-perfection. A close reading of a specific episode and comparison of its contents with earlier versions of the tale of the monk Xuanzang 玄奘 also affirms this claim. By examining the alchemical content of chapters 44-46, the Cart-Slow Kingdom [*chechi guo* 車遲國] episode, and comparing the story line of this episode from the

³Traditional commentators who did not use a primarily Daoist interpretation include Zhang Shushen, *Xinshuo Xiyou ji* (1748), and Li Zhuowu, *Li Zhuowu xiansheng piping Xiyou ji* (1819-1820).

⁴Plaks, *Masterworks* and "Allegory in Hsi-yu Chi"; and Bantly, "Buddhist Allegory."

⁵In this paper, "novel" and "*Journey*" refer to the 100-chapter version of the tales of Xuanzang and his disciples, which was published in 1596 and is generally attributed to Wu Chengen.

⁶Yu, "Religious Pilgrimage," 223.

⁷See Yu, *Journey* 1:1-62, "Religious Pilgrimage," and "Religion and Literature in China"; and Liu, "Quanzhen jiao he xiaoshuo Xiyou ji," "Prototypes of *Monkey*," and "Wu Ch'eng-en."

⁸Wang Guoguang, *Xiyou ji bielun*; and Wang Gang, "*Xiyou ji*."

novel with antecedent versions, it becomes clear that through the use of allegory the author of the novel has conflated alchemical lore with earlier versions. The Cart-Slow Kingdom episode centers on the allegory of the river cart [*heche* 河車] as a means of refining elements of the body in order to attain immortality. The river cart is used in the Small Celestial Cycle, the first stage in the quest for immortality in descriptions found in texts of physiological alchemy. In addition, this episode contains a warning, typical in esoteric texts, of the dangers of attempting cultivation without a master and the potential for disaster of heterodox practices. The Cart-Slow episode contains one stage in the sequence of practices by Daoists in pursuit of immortality and enlightenment, which is described on the narrative level as the actual journey of the five pilgrims and on the allegorical level as the journey of a Daoist adept—a journey which adepts visualize as taking place in the “country” within the body. This “journey” concurrently emphasizes the techniques of cultivation to yield an immortal, incorruptible body and the importance of mind cultivation in order to properly perform the techniques. Thus, in penetrating the layers of meaning in the novel it is crucial to attend not only to the theme of cultivation of the mind and enlightenment, but also to that of cultivation of the body and the quest for immortality: the Daoist alchemical allegory is of primary importance in understanding the meaning of the pilgrims’ quest.⁹

The Cart-Slow Kingdom episode is notable not only on account of its use of imagery from Daoist practices of internal alchemy, but also because of its over-the-top, outrageous humor. In this episode the Buddhist scripture pilgrim Xuanzang and his four disciples, Monkey, Pigsy, Sha Monk, and the dragon horse, are traveling along a sandy beach when they hear a tremendous groaning. Monkey offers to investigate, and discovers a band of 500 tattered Buddhist monks groaning and straining as they try to push a cart of refuse and building material up a narrow gorge called Spine Ridge Pass [*ji guan* 脊關]. Much to his surprise, Monkey also sees two Daoists of the Quanzhen sect approach, and as the Daoists near the monks, the monks tremble and strain even harder with the cart, obviously terrified. Monkey discovers that some years ago in this country, Cart-Slow Kingdom, there was a drought and all the prayers and recitations of the Buddhists of the land were to no avail. Just when it seemed that all in the country would perish on account of the drought, three Daoist priests—Tiger Strength Great Immortal [*huli daxian* 虎力大仙], Deer Strength Great Immortal [*luli daxian* 鹿力大仙], and Goat Strength Great Immortal [*yangli daxian* 羊力大仙]—graced the country with their presence and their rain-making ability. Since that time, these three Daoists and their followers have advised the king and have received royal favor, especially in terms of material luxuries; what is more, they have become the masters of the now-enslaved Buddhists who have been punished for their inability to make rain.

⁹Plaks, who renders the meaning of *Journey* primarily in terms of Neo-Confucian mind cultivation, writes, “It is in the introduction of specifically Taoist terminology, however, that we find the clearest evidence of recasting of the source narratives into our allegorical novel” (*Masterworks*, 230). Similarly, in “Allegory in Hsi-yu Chi” he states that what “distinguishes the Ming novel from earlier and subsequent versions of the story cycle is precisely the level of allegorical meaning it evokes through the careful structuring of its source materials” (174). See *Masterworks*, 230 n. 138 and 198 n. 36, for a detailed list of sources on Daoist terminology in *Journey*.

After hearing this story, Monkey decides to rectify the situation in Cart-Slow and he shows his matchless abilities as he plays pranks on the Daoists and bests them in a series of contests. First, Monkey makes short work of the two Daoists, using his magic pole to smash them into meat patties. He then hurls the cart up Spine Ridge and through the double pass, where it shatters into pieces. Later that night Monkey, Pigsy, and Sha Monk disguise themselves in the Daoist temple as statues of the Daoist Trinity, the Three Pure Ones [*san qing* 三清], throw the temple statues of the Three Pure Ones into a stinking privy, eat the food offerings, trick the Daoists into mistaking urine for holy water, and finally wreck the Daoist temple. The next day, the Daoists attempt to revenge themselves through a series of contests. They discover that the magic tricks they have gained through incomplete cultivation are no match for the “true magic power” acquired through Monkey’s discipleship with the patriarch Subodhi and subsequent cultivation earlier in the novel.¹⁰ The contests include rainmaking, meditation, guessing games, and finally physical trials. The Tiger Strength Great Immortal challenges Monkey to a contest of beheading, the Deer Strength Great Immortal challenges him to a contest of evisceration, and Goat Strength Great Immortal suggests a contest of bathing in boiling oil. Through his magical powers and his acquaintance with celestial beings from his superior self-cultivation, Monkey soundly defeats the Daoists in all the contests, proving their strength and cultivation to be inferior to his. The final physical trials ultimately reveal the heretical nature of the Great Immortals’ cultivation and their status as demons: as each perishes, his corpse reverts to its true form—a tiger, a deer, and a goat—but beheaded, eviscerated, and boiled in oil, respectively.

The surface meaning of this episode is quite apparent from the titular couplets and other verses in the episode: the Three Daoists perish on account of their heterodoxical cultivation. Repeated references are made to the “side door” [*pangmen* 旁門], or heretical and deviant, powers of the Daoists, and their inability to compete with the powers of a self-cultivated being such as Monkey.¹¹ From the narrative and verse in the episode, it is clear that it is not the magical powers themselves that mark the three Daoists as deviants. Rather, it is that these powers have been acquired without a guide, that the Daoists have exerted these powers for material gain and control of the Cart-Slow Kingdom at the wrongful expense of others—that is, Buddhists. In addition, it is their sole focus on physical cultivation, rather than on the cultivation of both the mind and body, that marks them as heterodox. Although the demons are three Daoists and there is a definite ‘Buddhist versus Daoist’ flavor to the episode, the assertions and descriptions of deviance are not leveled at Daoism *qua* Daoism, but on the particular mode of cultivation of the three and the application of their powers. The last verse reads:

The human form is hard, hard indeed, to get!
 Make no elixir when there’s no true guide.
 You have the charms and water to send for gods,

¹⁰Yu, *Journey* 1:80-93. Throughout, all references and quotes in English from the novel are from the Yu translation.

¹¹Yu, *Journey* 2:335-336.

But not the pill to lengthen, protect your life.
 If perfection's undone,
 Could Nirvana be won?
 Your life's precarious, your efforts are vain.
 If you knew before such hardships you'd meet,
 Why not abstain, stay safely in the mount?
 Truly
 To touch gold, to refine lead—of what use are they?
 To summon wind, to call for rain—still all is vain!¹²

The role of alchemy and the allegorical meaning of the episode become clear when it is compared with earlier versions. The Cart-Slow Kingdom episode is unusual in *Journey* because its antecedent form is found in a fourteenth century Korean manual, *Pak t'ongsa ōnhae* 朴通事諺解, rather than in other earlier versions. *Pak t'ongsa ōnhae* is a manual of colloquial Chinese, most likely for ambassadors, which consists of amusing stories. It makes reference to a widely read and enjoyed version of the story of Xuanzang and his journey west, *Tang sanzang Xiyou ji* 唐三藏西游紀. *Pak t'ongsa ōnhae* contains a rendering of the story of Cart-Slow and makes reference to other episodes which also appear in the novel. The stories are written in Chinese and followed by phonetic renderings in the Korean alphabet; there are also textual notes in literary Chinese.¹³

The story of the Cart-Slow Kingdom in *Pak t'ongsa ōnhae* begins with an introduction to *Tang sanzang Xiyou ji* and a conversation between two friends about the merits of reading such a tale.¹⁴ One of the conversants asks, "What do you want with that sort of popular tale?" The friend answers, "The *Xiyou ji* is lively. It is good reading when you are feeling gloomy. Tripitaka led Pilgrim Sun to the Cart-Slow Kingdom. Do you know that one?"¹⁵ In *Pak t'ongsa ōnhae*'s abbreviated version of Cart-Slow, the villain is a Daoist called Uncle Eyes Great Immortal [*boyan daxian* 伯眼大仙]. The oppression of Buddhists in the land is due solely to his prejudice, rather than the Buddhists' failure to produce rain. As in the novel, Monkey causes mischief in the Daoist temple, although his accomplices Pigsy and Sha Monk are absent. There are a reduced number of contests compared to the novel: meditation, guessing, bathing in oil, and replacing one's severed head. Uncle Eyes Great Immortal does have a disciple—named Deerskin, not Deer Strength—and Deerskin meets his death in the contest for boiling in oil, rather than through evisceration as in the novel. As in the novel, the main Daoist dies of cutting off his head and is revealed to be a tiger demon.

¹²Yu, *Journey* 2:352.

¹³See Dudbridge, *Hsi-yu Chi*, especially chapter 4 and appendix B; and Idema, "P'ing-hua," 119.

¹⁴The term used to describe the story is *pinghua* 平話, or "plain narrative," a term designating vernacular narrative texts considered the forerunners of the vernacular novel. Various studies consider the theory that the 100-chapter novel emerged from a transcribed version of oral story-cycles told by itinerant storytellers. On antecedents to *Journey* and their relationship to the *pinghua* tradition, see Idema, "P'ing-hua." See also Dudbridge, *Hsi-yu Chi*; Koss, "The Xiyouji"; Plaks, *Masterworks*; and Yu, *Journey* 1:1-62.

¹⁵Translation of *Pak t'ongsa ōnhae* taken from Dudbridge, *Hsi-yu Chi*, 180.

It is, of course, in what is missing from this version of the story that we find the significance of the alchemical overlay: the cart of refuse being pushed up the narrow gorge; Spine Ridge and the double pass; the three Daoist Immortals (instead of only one) and their deaths—Tiger Strength, Deer Strength, and Goat Strength decapitated, eviscerated, and boiled respectively. These elements of the story indicate that this episode is a conflation of alchemical concepts and imagery with earlier versions of the story.¹⁶

The double pass, Spine Ridge, and river cart are terms from practices of *neidan* 內丹, physiological or internal alchemy, which historically developed after *waidan* 外丹, or laboratory alchemy.¹⁷ In laboratory alchemy, a practitioner used medicines made of various metals, minerals, and other elements which were transmuted into “potable gold” in the alchemist’s furnace. The medicines were elixirs of immortality, and when consumed by knowledgeable adepts who practiced other techniques were to impart longevity and ultimately immortality.¹⁸ In physiological alchemy, on the other hand, the adept uses primarily meditation in conjunction with other techniques to transmute bodily essences into the desired elixir—a means of both refining the body and attaining immortality and enlightenment.

Physiological alchemy spread primarily in the Tang and the Song dynasties, though aspects of physiological alchemy can be observed as early as the Sui dynasty.¹⁹ In physiological alchemy no distinction is made between the cultivation of the body and cultivation of the mind in the quest for immortality, and the interdependence of the body and mind are affirmed: on the one hand, “[piety], ritual, morality, and hygiene were equally essential to the prolongation of life”;²⁰ on the other, “[internal alchemy] was essentially physiological....The Chinese adept of the “inner elixir”...believed that by doing things with one’s own body a physiological medicine of longevity and even immortality (material

¹⁶In “Religion and Literature in China,” Yu notes the Cart-Slow Kingdom episode for the author’s possible use of historical material from the biography of Bu Kong 不空 (Amoghavajra) in *Song Gaoseng chuan* 宋高僧傳 to embellish the story of Cart-Slow, including the producing of rain by prayer and the descriptions of the ensuing rainfall and flood (122-123). Liu Ts’un-yan singles out the Cart-Slow Kingdom as an example of the combination of an antecedent story and references to Quanzhen Daoist practices and doctrine. See Liu, “Quanzhen jiao he xiaoshuo *Xiyou ji*,” *Mingbao Yuekan* 236: 89-90; 237: 70-71.

¹⁷See entries in *Daojiao da cidian* [Dictionary of Daoism] for *san heche* 三河車, *da zhoutian* 大周天, *xiao zhoutian* 小周天, *heche* 河車, and *sanche* 三車. The entries for *san heche* and *heche* include other designations for the three river carts, such as small, large, and purple [*xiao* 小, *da* 大, *zi* 紫]; and yellow, white, and purple [*huang* 黃, *bai* 白, *zi* 紫]. See also *Xianxue cidian* [Dictionary of the study of immortals] under *shuangguan* 雙關, *xiao zhoutian*, *da zhoutian*, *xiao heche*, and *da heche*.

¹⁸For studies on laboratory alchemy, see Sivin, *Chinese Alchemy*; and Needham, *Science and Civilisation*, vols. 2-4. For physiological alchemy, see Needham, *Science and Civilisation*, vols. 2 and 5. See also Lu Gwei-djen, “The Inner Elixir”; Baldrian-Hussein, *Procédés*; and Maspero, *Taoism*, especially book 9.

¹⁹Baldrian-Hussein, *Procédés*, 15.

²⁰Sivin, “Chinese Alchemy,” 186.

immortality, for no other was conceivable) could be prepared within it.”²¹ The integration of mental and physical cultivation is a central theme in manuals of physiological alchemy.

Physiological alchemy is not a systematic set of practices; there are variations in terminology and practice. However, there are a number of important concepts that recur. A central motif is that of reversion [*fan* 反], or “retracing one’s steps along the road of bodily decay.” Reversion was accomplished by manipulating substances of the body through meditation. Related to this practice was the idea of reversal, of inducing the fluids of the body, especially saliva and semen, to flow opposite their normal direction, or “counter-current” [*niliu* 逆流; *nixing* 逆行]. Through these and other means, alchemists believed that they were stopping the normal course of nature and then moving it backwards—that they were “turning nature upside down” [*dian dao* 顛倒] and thus cultivating an immortal, ageless body.²²

When using meditation to reverse the flow of bodily fluids, adepts “turn their eyes inward” [*neiguan* 內觀] to view the interior landscape of the body, and through meditation visualize and will the movement of those fluids. The interior landscape is described as a microcosm of the universe. In *The Taoist Body*, Kristofer Schipper describes this interior landscape: “‘The body is a country’...with mountains and rivers, ponds, forests, paths and barriers, a whole landscape laid out with dwellings, palaces, towers, walls, and gates sheltering a vast population.”²³ One sees Kunlun 崑崙 mountain (the head), the twelve story pagoda (the trachea), well known personages such as Weaving Girl and Cowherd Boy, and ultimately comes to *wei lu* 尾閭, the terminal exit that leads out the body through the reins (kidneys and genitals). Part of this landscape is Spine Ridge, which has a double gate and three barriers on its way to the head. It is up Spine Ridge that essence or semen [*jing* 精], energy [*qi* 氣], and spirit [*shen* 神] are raised, against the current, in an important part of alchemical meditative practices. Reversal and reversion of fluids require tremendous effort, as substances are being forced up the spinal column into the adept’s body.

The instrument for forcing the material up the spine is *heche*, the river cart. The river cart as a meditative technique was an important practice as early as the Tang, in the Zhonglü school of Daoism.²⁴ The patriarchs of Zhonglü Daoism, Zhongli Quan 鐘離權 (reputed to have been born in the Han and to have retired to the mountains at the end of the Tang) and his disciple Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓 (Lü Yan 呂喆) are revered as patriarchs of physiological alchemy. An important and influential text for later Daoist schools from this tradition is *Zhong Lü chuandao ji* 鐘呂傳道集 [A collection of Zhong’s transmissions of the Dao to Lü], which was important not only for the Zhonglü tradition but also for other schools, notably that of Quanzhen Daoism. In this text, the twelfth of eighteen discourses is called “The Discussion

²¹Lu, “The Inner Elixir,” 69-72.

²²Lu, “The Inner Elixir,” 73-74. On *dian dao* see also Needham, *Science and Civilisation* 5:107.

²³Schipper, *Taoist Body*, 100-101. Maspero also describes this interior country in detail; see *Taoism*, 268, 279-282. On *neiguan*, see Baldrian-Hussein, *Procédés*, 37; and Maspero, *Taoism*, 282-283, 439.

²⁴Needham, *Science and Civilisation* 5:225. Needham notes that there is ambiguity between various alchemical texts as to whether *heche* is a vehicle which actually carries material, or a machine which forces the reversed flow of fluids. Certainly the river cart is visualized as a cart “mounting Spine Ridge” in many texts, as seen below.

of the River Cart" [*Lun heche* 論河車]. Here Zhongli explains that the river cart circulates materials through the body of an adept, taking them to Kunlun (the head) and *niwan* 泥丸 (the brain), and sending them to the Yellow Court [*huangting* 黃庭] and the cinnabar fields [*dantian* 丹田].²⁵ All of these are part of the physiology traversed by the adept during alchemical meditational practices: the materials are turned into Jade Liquid [*yuye* 玉液] and Gold Liquid [*jinye* 金液]. The river cart has different names according to function and location within the adept and for designating the upper, middle, and lower cart; here Zhongli calls them the Goat Cart, Deer Cart, and Great Ox Cart.²⁶ These three carts must pass through three gates [*yizhuang sangan* 一撞三關] as they transport materials to make cinnabar [*daiwu er zuodan* 戴物而做丹].

The Zhonglü scriptures and tradition were central to the Quanzhen sect of Daoism. Quanzhen Daoism, which developed in the Song and Yuan dynasties, was a "highly purified form" of Daoism which showed a strong affinity with Chan Buddhism.²⁷ After the death of Wang Zhe 王哲 (Wang Zhongyang 王重陽, 1113-1170), the founder of Quanzhen, the sect split into the Northern and Southern schools. The Northern School was characterized by its emphasis on stillness and meditation, and was headed by Qiu Chuji.²⁸ Qiu, perhaps the most

²⁵The Yellow Court is the "central theatre of formation" of the embryo of immortality, the embryo that was engendered and nourished by such cultivation so as to render one immortal. There are three Yellow Courts, one each in the head, the chest, and the abdomen; there is only one embryo of immortality within each adept. There are also three Cinnabar Fields—in the head, chest, and abdomen. These are a "sort of command post" for the activities within the body. See Needham, *Science and Civilisation* 5:38-40, 82-83; Maspero, *Taoism*, 268, 280, 327-328, 491; and Schipper, *Taoist Body*, 105, 106, 133.

²⁶分上中三成。三成者。言其功之驗證。非此釋教之三乘。而日羊車鹿車大牛車也。 From *Zhong Lü chuandao ji*, "Lun heche." Zhongli gives other designations of the three carts, depending on the description of their functions. They are also called Small Cart, Large Cart, and Purple Cart [*xiaochē, dachē, ziche*]; and Envoy Cart, Thunder Cart, and Broken/Defeating Cart [*shizhe chē 使者車, leiche 雷車, poche 破車*]. See also n. 17. It appears that the Daoist texts have drawn from the Buddhist parable of the Three Carts from the *Lotus Sutra*. In that parable, the three carts are the Bullock, Deer, and Goat carts. These carts represent various means to salvation and enlightenment. This is repeated in the Daoist alchemical lore. The substitution of the Tiger Cart for the Bullock Cart proceeds, I believe, from the antecedent version of the story in *Pak t'ongsa ōnhae* which features Tiger and Deer demons. See *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, 85-109.

²⁷Clary, *The Inner Teachings of Taoism*, xiii.

²⁸Baldrian-Hussein, *Procédés*, 33-34; and Wong, *Seven Taoist Masters*, vii. See Baldrian-Hussein, *Procédés*, 34, for an example of a text attributed to Wang Zhe which includes Zhonglü terminology. The Southern School, transmitted by Zhang Boduan 寂伯端, is characterized by its "'grafting' techniques, or the 'twin cultivation of yin and yang.'" Some of these were practices considered questionable by Daoists of the Northern school, such as sexual practices, although both schools accepted Zhongli Quan and Lü Dongbin as masters. In his introduction to Zhang Boduan's *Understanding Reality* [*Wu zhen pien 悟真篇*], Thomas Cleary comments on the purpose of the different focus of the two schools. He states that those Daoists who emphasized the unity of the goal of the North and South branches of Quanzhen assert that the documents of each school are mutually understandable, and that given this, the practices described in either school's texts can be difficult to distinguish. He makes the delineation between

distinguished of Wang Zhe's seven disciples, is often remembered for having established relations with the Mongols in the Yuan, who became Quanzhen patrons; he also had an audience with Ghenghis Khan in 1222. It is Qiu Chuji who has been credited by Daoists from the eighteenth century to the present as being the author of *Journey*, and *Journey* is claimed as a scripture of alchemical practices by the Quanzhen sect.²⁹

We can see the use of the river cart and its central place in practices to attain immortality in an important Zhonglü text used by Quanzhen Daoists, *Bichuan zhengyang zhenren lingbao bifa* 秘傳正陽真人靈寶畢法 [Secret transmission of the ultimate methods of lingbao of the perfect man from true yang]. Farzeen Baldrian-Hussein, in a translation of this “best example of Song *neidan* practices,” explains the details of the theory and techniques behind these practices, of which the river cart is one part. Basically, the technique is to take raw materials—essence, energy, and spirit—and to send them counter to the actual flow of the body. To do this, they must be forced up the spinal column; after reaching the brain they then cascade down the front of the body and nourish it.³⁰ A description from the text of the

practices by explaining that the purely meditational practices of the Northern School were for practitioners under the age of sixty, who still had not lost too much of their bodily essences. The Southern school's “grafting” techniques, on the other hand, were meant for those who needed to “replenish their vitality; once this was accomplished they would turn their practices to the meditational techniques that characterize the Northern school” (Cleary, *Understanding Reality*, 19-20). Regardless of technique, the goal of the two schools was the same—the union of innate nature [*xing* 性] and vital force [*ming* 命] called the “cultivation of innate nature and vital force” [*xiuxingmin xue* 修性命學], which led to perfection (Cleary, *Understanding Reality*, 14; and Baldrian-Hussein, *Procédés*, 52).

²⁹This tradition, started by Wang Xiangxu and continued in the commentaries of Liu Yiming and Chen Shibin, continues to the present day. A 1976 edition of *Journey* edited by Daoist practitioner Chen Dunfu begins, “Wu Chengen is not the author of *Journey to the West*!” Plaks offers the theory that this attribution is due to confusion between the Ming novel *Xiyou ji* 西遊記 and the Yuan text *Changchun zhenren xiyou ji* 長春真人西遊記, a well-known account of Qiu Chuji's travels through central Asia (*Masterworks*, 194). It seems unlikely, however, that such a confusion would persist in such a systematic and thorough manner. See also Despeux, “Les lectures alchimique,” 61-64.

³⁰For Quanzhen practice, the technique to reverse the flow, the river cart, is transmitted from the Zhonglü tradition. In addition to the river cart, which generated heat through meditation and with that heat circulated heat and essence up the spine, through the head, and down the center of the torso to the three cinnabar fields, the practice describes two channels, called the “active” [*du* 督] and “passive” [*ren* 任], that carry materials up the spine. A shorter version of this exercise which uses the active channel up the brain is called “returning essence to replenish the brain” [*huanjing bunao* 還精補腦]. *Huanjing bunao* is an ancient sexual practice from the Han, in which during intercourse the man stops short of ejaculation and instead, by pressing a spot on the urethra, sends semen up the spine to the brain. It is mentioned in the alchemical text of the Six Dynasties, *Bao puzi* 抱樸子 (Baldrian-Hussein, *Procédés*, 109). However, in the Zhonglü tradition, this technique is purely meditative (Baldrian-Hussein, *Procédés*, 109-111). This practice was “often, though not necessarily, practiced in conjunction with sexual intercourse; in the male, ejaculation is suppressed, either by muscular contraction or external pressure, creating an extremely intense and prolonged orgasm, the heat of which is then conducted by concentration up the spine into the brain, where it ‘burns’ away mundane thought and feelings by bliss” (Cleary, *Understanding Reality*, 14). For earlier descriptions of *huanjing bunao* and other aspects of

technique used to overcome the three barriers shows the connection between these techniques and the narrative of the Cart-Slow Kingdom:

Equalize your breathing by turning the tongue against the back to close the two orifices of the palate. Then carry out the retention of the Energy. When the Field of Cinnabar heats up it is because the Essence, the Energy and the Spirit are assembling and beginning to rise; it is necessary then to relax the stomach. The cloudy Energy of Five Directions rises to leave from the coccyx, this first state is easy to think of in terms of the "Chariot of the Goat." Having arrived at the middle barrier, the procedure becomes a little more difficult: one must visualize the "Chariot of the Stag." The third barrier is the most difficult to overcome, it requires a lot of force, and one should think of a "Chariot of the Ox."³¹

In light of these central texts of physiological alchemy it is clear that the elements of the Cart-Slow Kingdom episode of *Journey* that are not in the Korean text are those which place us in the body of a Daoist adept. In the opening scene, Spine Ridge is the spinal column and the double pass is one of the barriers that must be overcome. The cart full of refuse is the river cart starting at the reins carrying unrefined materials—that is, unrefined essence—up the spinal column. The cart passes through a gate—not any gate, which in Chinese geography could be level as well as on an incline, but up through a gate on the steep slope of Spine Ridge and requiring tremendous effort—a description of scenery that cannot be justified on naturalistic topography but must be understood as internal geography. Later in the story, the three Daoist Immortals parallel the three gates that must be passed. Moreover, their demise relates directly to the gate that each cart must pass. The Tiger Strength Great Immortal, which correlates to the Ox Cart, is the pass situated at the neck: Tiger Strength is decapitated. The Deer Strength Great Immortal corresponds to the gate located by the stomach, and dies of evisceration. The Goat Strength Great Immortal, representing the pass by the reins, where heat is generated and which is characterized by its liquid environment, is boiled to death. The reason their demise occurs in the order of Tiger, Deer, and then Goat is, I believe, because the episode refers to a complete circulation of materials where the material cascades down the "front" of the adept and nourishes the three cinnabar fields.³² Their demise is a device to illustrate the dangers of practicing without a master, and of garnering magical powers without purity of intent. In contrast, Monkey, who received oral instruction from Subodhi and who now helps Xuanzang on his scripture seeking, shows the power and supremacy of orthodox cultivation.

physiological alchemy, see book 9 of Maspero's *Taoism*, "Methods of Nourishing the Vital Principles in the Ancient Taoist Religion."

³¹Baldrian-Hussein, *Procédés*, 172-174.

³²This corresponds to Chen Dunfu's commentary on this episode. See Chen Dunfu, *Xiyou ji shiyi*, 547-549, which includes a drawing of an adept and the movement of materials in the adept's body. Other illustrations of the three carts and passes and Spine Ridge from Daoist texts are found in Needham, *Science and Civilisation* 5:109, 115; and Baldrian-Hussein, *Procédés*, 173.

The assertion that a Daoist reading of *Journey* is crucial is of course by no means unique or surprising: it has been a part of the corpus of commentary on *Journey* since the seventeenth century.³³ These commentaries, which claim that the novel is primarily and fundamentally an alchemical treatise, however, were written within the context of Daoist practitioners transmitting esoteric knowledge. It is difficult to assess most of them, for in these commentaries the correlation between details of the story and alchemical practices is often abstruse, and a systematic rendering of a sequence of practices in the novel is not given.³⁴

Recent studies offer a more systematic reading of *Journey* as a complete alchemical text, and place the allegory of the Cart-Slow Kingdom episode in a larger context of alchemical accomplishment.³⁵ In particular, the work of Wang Gang demonstrates that the alchemical allegory of the novel parallels the techniques of the Small Celestial Cycle [*xiao zhoutian* 小周天] and the Large Celestial Cycle [*da zhoutian* 大周天], which together comprise a complete set of techniques for achieving immortality and enlightenment. In his study, Wang considers chapters 32-66 (which include the Cart-Slow episode) as comprising the accomplishment of the Small Celestial Cycle. His work focuses on the later chapters, which complete the second cycle, the Large Celestial Cycle, in two parts: chapters 67-83 and 84-100. Immortality is achieved in chapter 100 by the adept, mirrored by the attainment of immortality by the characters in the novel. In her translation of *Bichuan zhengyang*, Baldrian-Hussein specifically links the technique of the Three Carts to the Small Celestial Cycle. The Cart-Slow Kingdom episode allegorizes the technique of the Three Carts as one step in the accomplishment of the Small Celestial Cycle, one part of a larger process of self-cultivation.³⁶

³³See Despeux, "Les lectures alchimique," 61-76.

³⁴Several of the commentators identify the same aspects of the story as essential to understanding the episode's true meaning. Chen Shibin, Chen Dunfu, and Liu Yiming all note the importance of the river cart, the three carts, and the location of Spine Ridge; they each assert that the message of the episode is the condemnation of heretical practices. Chen Dunfu has a detailed commentary which includes not only these general observations, but which explicitly links the Three Immortals to the three carts and identifies the physical trials as a part of the Small Celestial Cycle. He also includes a diagram of an adept with markers indicating where in the body the various practices take place.

³⁵For example, Wang Guoguang's study identifying the practices between chapters 32 and 66 as a complete achievement of *qigong*. His analysis focuses on the allegorical elements of dragging the carts, the methods for moving the carts, and penetrating the double pass at the head. As with earlier commentators such as Chen Shibin, Chen Dunfu, and Liu Yiming, he identifies the episode's meaning as a warning against heretical practices. See Wang, *Xiyou ji bielun*, 88-90.

³⁶Yu, *Journey* 3:273; and Wang Gang, "Xiyou ji." Wang divides the Large Celestial Cycle into chapters 67-83, which mark the transformation of *qi* into *shen*, and chapters 84-100, which mark the refining of *shen* back into nothingness. He considers chapters 1-31 a presentation of specifically Daoist philosophy, that is, the cultivation of vital force and innate nature, as described in n. 28 above. According to Wang, there are three stages of cultivation to attain immortality: refining essence into energy [*lianjing huaqi* 煉精化氣], refining energy into spirit [*lianqi huashen* 煉氣化神], and refining spirit into emptiness [*lianshen huanxu* 煉神還虛]. Only after passing through these three stages can an adept attain immortality, attaining a state called "merging into reality with the Dao" [*yudao hezhen* 與道合真]. At this point one becomes the Gold Immortal (the highest ranking immortal) of the Daluo Heaven (the highest of the thirty-three immortal heavens) [*daluo jinxian* 大羅金仙]. The first part of

This wider framework within which to consider the Cart-Slow episode is illuminating as well as provocative. It makes feasible the assertion that *Journey* can be read as an allegory of Daoist alchemical procedures even if attributed to Wu Chengen. There is ample evidence that Daoism, including the terminology and practice of physiological alchemy, was prevalent in the Ming. Liu Ts'un-yan states that "in all Chinese history, Taoism was never more powerful or more pervasive among all social strata than during this time."³⁷ Liu notes the "indelible Taoist tinge" of the scholar officials of the Ming and many aspects of court life. He also remarks on the widespread currency of Daoist ideas and terms among the wider population, primarily through "exhortative pamphlets." The use of terms and references to what were esoteric practices by no means limited access to the novel by either scholar officials, elites, or the general populace during the Ming.³⁸

A primarily Daoist—Quanzhen Daoist—rendering even makes sense despite the amalgam of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism which suggest Three Teachings syncretism. Certainly Buddhist, Neo-Confucian, and Three Teachings messages in the novel cannot be ignored. This can be added to the commonly observed aspect of Chinese thought that "traditional Chinese ideas tend to conceive of orthodoxy as being the sum of all existing ways of thought, excluding no one."³⁹ This inclusivity encompasses not only the syncretic Three Teachings, or Chinese thought in general, but specifically Quanzhen Daoism. From its very inception, Quanzhen embraced images and teachings from Buddhism and Confucianism. The required curriculum of Quanzhen under Wang Zhe included *Dao De Jing*, *Xiao Jing* 孝經 [Classic of filial piety], and a summary of *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*.⁴⁰ Liu Yiming, an

the practice, refining essence into energy, is also called the Small Celestial Cycle; the second and third parts, refining energy into spirit and refining spirit back into nothingness, together comprise the Large Celestial Cycle. The overall structure of the practices is divided into three stages: the purification of vital force [*xing*], which requires the transformation of essence into energy; the purification of innate nature [*ming*], which requires the transformation of energy into spirit; and the mystical union in which spirit was returned into the Void. These three stages correspond to the formation of the world and the return to chaos. Wang points to the novel to show the author's marking of these achievements. In chapter 66 Monkey says, "I was accompanying the T'ang monk on his way to the Western Heaven to acquire scriptures...and our path has landed us in a dangerous ordeal. At the West Aparagodaniya Continent, there is a mountain by the name of Little Western Heaven, in which a demonic fiend has set up a Little Thunderclap Monastery. When my master entered the monastery gate...he thought that he had come upon the real Buddha." Wang states that Small Western Heaven [*xiao xitian* 小西天], which is used five times in reference to Small Thunderclap Mountain, is a reference to the Small Celestial Cycle. Thus, chapters 32-66 mark the accomplishment of the first stage of internal alchemy; but the pilgrims must go further to realize their goals. They must go to the Great Western Heaven [*da xitian* 大西天]—that is, they must accomplish the Large Celestial Cycle. As an old man in chapter 67 says to Xuanzang, who thinks that he is close to the end of his journey, "Monk...you may want to go to the West, but you can't get there. This is only the Little Western Heaven. If you want to go the Great Western Heaven, the distance is exceedingly great, not to mention all the difficulties ahead of you."

³⁷Liu, "Taoist Self-Cultivation," 292.

³⁸See Liu, "Taoist Self-Cultivation," 292-308, and "The Penetration of Taoism," 44-55.

³⁹Schipper, *Taoist Body*, 231 n. 27.

⁴⁰Baldrian, "Taoism: An Overview," 297.

eighteenth century Quanzhen Daoist, reflects on this syncretistic tradition when he states that the “three religions merge into one” [*sanjiao guiyi* 三教歸一]: “In Confucianism it is called the Great Ultimate, or principle of heaven, or ultimate good, or perfect sincerity. In Taoism this is called the infant, or primordial energy, or spiritual embryo, or restored elixir. In Buddhism this is called complete awakening, or true emptiness, or the reality body, or sacred relic, or wish-fulfilling gem.”⁴¹

It is quite likely that the author of the novel drew upon more than antecedent renderings of the story and Daoist technique; the Cart-Slow Kingdom episode may also draw from sources of a more historical nature. Contests of magic and ability between Daoists and Buddhists are not uncommon in Tang literature. In particular the emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 is noted for having Daoist and Buddhist priests at court who were often attempting to prove the superiority of their abilities and schools. Of special interest to the Cart-Slow episode are the trials between the Daoist Luo Gongyuan 羅公遠 and Tantric Buddhist Bu Kong 不空 (Amoghavajra) of the eighth century, especially a contest for bringing rain to a drought-ridden area. In this episode, it is the Buddhist who demonstrates superiority in his abilities.⁴²

Finally, the use of a Daoist adept's body as the allegorical reference for a physical journey is particularly apt for the conflation of the stories of Xuanzang and his disciples and physiological alchemy. It is obvious that the Cart-Slow Kingdom episode, which starts at Spine Ridge, is an allegory for practicing physiological alchemy. There are several other places in the journey, such as the Black River and the Heaven Reaching River, and demons met and conquered, such as the Red Boy, that parallel and suggest alchemical lore and techniques.⁴³ There are other indications that the whole journey is being undertaken by a Daoist adept as well. Anthony Yu points out that “the novel can in ways be seen as an ‘antipilgrimage,’” continually mocking the travel through physical distances and externality. Physiological alchemy is a convincing framework for taking a physical journey—without taking a footstep—and it also functions as a remedy to the problem suggested by the word play in the phrase “the journey west,” a Chinese metaphor for death. By using the allegory of physiological alchemy, the author uses esoteric teaching combined with a humorous plot to indicate a means to transcend mortality.⁴⁴

I suggest that the Cart-Slow Kingdom episode is an allegory for moving the river cart full of unrefined essence up the spinal column in the Small Celestial Cycle. I would also argue that the message of this episode—and the overall assumption and teaching of the novel—is the need to cultivate *both* body and mind. The focus on mind cultivation, even as a cipher for the larger concept of self, is not adequate to understand the allegory of the Cart-Slow

⁴¹Cleary, *Understanding Reality*, 52-53.

⁴²Verellen, “Luo Gongyuan.” This episode is also mentioned in Yu, “Religion and Literature in China,” 122; see n. 16 above. For a detailed picture of the role and life of Daoists at the Tang court, see also Verellen, *Du Guangting*.

⁴³Wang Gang's article is rich with these correlations, specifically from chapters 66-100. Wang Guoguang does not claim the entire novel as alchemical procedure, but makes similar parallels from chapters 32-66.

⁴⁴Yu, “Religious Pilgrimage,” 226-227.

Kingdom episode.⁴⁵ A close reading of Cart-Slow suggests that it is most illuminating to consider *Journey*—and the journey in the novel—with an equal emphasis on the cultivation of the body and the mind, and to do so from a primarily Daoist perspective. Yu writes that the “central religious issue of [*Journey*] has to do with personal redemption.”⁴⁶ This redemption, I would argue, is the intersection at which the cultivation of the body and mind affect each other, specifically the redemption gained for body and mind in the practices of physiological alchemy.

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⁴⁵This is in counterdistinction to Plaks, who takes mind cultivation as the primary meaning of the text. Plaks justifies considering *neidan* as mind cultivation as “a cipher for the inner core of the self,” and states that such ideas “are fully compatible with the Ming redefinition of Confucian self-cultivation as primarily a cultivation of the mind.” Along these lines, he asserts that “mind,” or *xin* 心, refers to “self,” but that this larger concept of self may also be indicated with *shen* 身, or body, so that *xiuxin* 修心 and *xiushen* 修身 may be interchangeable with references to the process of self-cultivation (*Masterworks*, 241-242, and “Allegory in Hsi-yu Chi,” 184).

⁴⁶Yu, “Religious Pilgrimage,” 219.

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