

A HIDDEN THEORY OF MIND IN *JOUREY TO THE WEST*

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Abstract: *The essay demonstrates that 'Journey to the West' (JW) treats all Buddhist and Daoist scriptures as canons for cultivating the mind. Since the novel explicitly states that Sun Wukong is resolved to cultivate Xuan (玄), Xuan should be interpreted as a faculty of the mind, which has never been done before. A hermeneutic reading of the novel and Dao De Jing (DDJ) under the constraint that all text are referring to minds gives rise to a tri-part model, which consists of an "empty" mind state free of concepts, a mindful state filled with concepts, and a dualistic mind faculty that goes between the other two (Xuan). By this token, it can be established that the protagonist Tripitaka represented the "empty" mind, while the protagonist Wukong represents the dualistic Xuan. This understanding thus makes it possible to explain the relationship between Daoism and Buddhism in JW. Without Buddhist Tripitaka, Wukong would be lost due to his desires that drive Xuan. Without Daoist Wukong, who had insight into the forms of the Way, Tripitaka would fall for distractions and misunderstandings. Thus, only when Buddhism and Daoism are combined, we can get the true Buddhist sutras. This analysis also makes it possible to understand the core debate between the southern and northern lineage of Daoism, and JW's stance on such debates.*

Introduction

Journey to the West (JW) is a Chinese classic written in the Ming dynasty. It has sustained its popularity to this day. The novel is about a Buddhist monk, Tripitaka, and his disciples, Monkey, Piggy, and Sandy, who went on a journey to the West (India) to retrieve Buddhist scriptures. Although Tripitaka (602-64 AD) was a real monk who did go to India in Tang dynasty, the novel follows the genre of Shenmo Xiaoshuo (*Tales of Gods of Demons*), which has little correlation to historical events. Among his disciples, Monkey, with the given name Sun Wukong (*Awakening to Emptiness*), is the actual protagonist who acts as the protector and guardian to the rest of the gang.

The novel contains numerous entertaining stories of fending off demonic foes along the journey. However, there are also enigmatic poems embedded in each of the 100 chapters which make references to Daoist and Buddhist scriptures. Such a mix is very puzzling and critics such as Bantlty (1989), Hsia and Dudbridge (1971), Plaks (1977) and others have interpreted the novel from non-religious, Confucius, Buddhist or Daoist perspectives. Recently, the view that *JW* contains syncretic ideas that

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combine Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism is gaining acceptance. By differentiating Zhang Boduan's (987-1082) and Wang Chongyang's (1115-1234) interpretations of Chan Buddhist philosophy, Ping Shao (2006) developed a thesis that *JW* is hermeneutic of Zhuang Boduan's integrated Daoist and Chan Buddhist philosophy. Such a view is supported by Zhang's personal appearance as Immortal Purple Cloud (紫阳仙, Chap. 71, *JW*) and the many poems attributed to him (Introduction, Anthony Yu, 2012) in *JW*. In addition, Shao supported this argument by noticing that

The novel's two-part structure appears conspicuously imitative of his *Wuzhen pian* (*Understanding Reality*) written by Zhang Boduan that claims importance first for the elixir and then for the Chan approach to the mind. Unlike the Daoists that came before him, Zhang's idea of immortality was based not on the absolute primacy of elixir development but on the primacy of Buddha nature as an absolute guarantee for the elixir.

While these works successfully identified Daoist and Buddhist influences, their analysis have not been constructed based on the actual theory of mind that is hidden in the Daoist or Buddhist text. Consequently, it is impossible to develop a clear understanding of the driving thesis of *JW*. For example, there is a significant difference between the teachings of internal alchemy from the southern and northern lineages of Daoism. Zhang Boduan was the founder of the southern lineage. In his work, *Wuzhen Pian* (*Understanding Reality*) (Zhang, B., & Liu, Y., 1987), he exposed one major contention within Daoism: "The Yin Essence(精) in Yang is not strong in its makeup (阳里阴精质不刚)." A later master from the southern lineage, Xue Daoguang (Xue Daoguang et. al. 卷二), explained that Essence, Qi, and Spirit are Yin in nature. This statement directly contradicts the teachings of the Quanzhen Sect (northern lineage of Daoism), which claims that the cultivation of the elixir is the process of cultivating Essence, Qi, and Spirit (Qiu Chuji, *Direct Path to Grand Elixir*).

Given these debates, a natural question arises: How had these debates within Daoism shaped the content of *JW*? What was the core debate about? Since both lineages talked about elixir, which is another name of Xuan, we must decipher the meaning of Xuan in order to understand *JW*. We shall interpret Xuan based on the constraints stipulated in *JW*: "The Mind is the Buddha, and the Buddha is the Mind (心即是佛, 佛即是心)" (Chap. 14, *JW*), which was a stance adopted from Chan Buddhism. It is not hard to see that the author of *JW* had taken the perspective of mind theory in treating all Daoist and Buddhist texts. For example, Tripitaka said: "

According to that quatrain, the thousands of scriptures all come down to cultivating the mind (三藏道... 若依此四句, 千经万典, 也只是修心)." (Chap. 85, *JW*). In the story of *JW*, we know that Wukong is determined to learn and cultivate Xuan (Chap 2, *JW*). Monkey King is aware of his happiness, and said to himself silently...In the whole world, nobody is resolved to cultivate Xuan. However, if you do, Xuan will make itself clear. (美猴王自知快乐, 暗暗的自称道... 举世无人肯立志, 立志修玄玄自明)." "

Since Xuan is defined in the Daoist scripture *Dao De Jing (DDJ)*, so according to *JW*, Xuan should be interpreted as a mind faculty. Note that in later Daoism, there are a lot of references of elixir. Xuan is either elixir itself, or a tool/mind faculty for the cultivation of elixir. In Chapter 99 of *JW*, there is a commentary: “After the completion of the elixir, I have got to know the original nature (丹成识得本来面).” The fact that Wukong set out to cultivate Xuan in Chap 2, and got the elixir in Chapter 99 establishes their equivalence. However, Xuan, which is originally defined in *DDJ* (Laozi, 1995), has had various interpretations. The most prevalent interpretations today are cosmological and Xuan is routinely translated as a mystery, (Lao-tse, et al. 1973, Laozi 1995) rather than a mind faculty.

Given that the general cosmological interpretation of Xuan cannot be applied to *JW*, we need to re-examine the meaning of Xuan as defined in *DDJ* with the constraints stipulated in *JW*. A hermeneutic reading of *DDJ* reveals a tri-part model for the mind. The “empty” and mindful cognitive states are two parts of the model, and Xuan represents the third part that goes between the previous two. In the “empty” state, the mind can grasp the reality. On the contrary, the mindful state constructs a cognitive world based on previously acquired concepts, which can distort the reality. While the validity of this model can only be established using evident based scientific method, it can explain various phenomena. Especially, it offers a perfect explanation of how could a difference of concepts arise among different people and why both Daoism and Buddhism always urge people to return to “Emptiness”. Given this interpretation, it becomes obvious that Xuan is the creative intelligence responsible for grasping the truth from the “empty” state and forming concepts to be passed onto the mindful state. Xuan is also responsible for returning formed concepts for re-examination in the “empty” state. This revealed thesis identifies Wukong as the embodiment of Xuan and Tripitaka as the “empty” mind. As the embodiment of Xuan, it explains why Wukong is casted as the guardian and protector, and why Tripitaka is incapable of finding the path to enlightenment without him.

Another contribution of *JW* to the Daoist and Buddhist theory of mind is the attribution of empathy to Tripitaka, who represents the empty mind capable of grasping the truth yet incapable of bringing the truth to formed concepts. In contrast, Wukong lacks compassion. This is alluded by his birth from a stone and his demeanor during the journey. *JW* clearly differentiates Daoism and Buddhism by identifying the specific mind faculties that they cultivate. Also, the reason for the syncretic view in *JW* becomes clear: While Daoism stresses and cultivates the intellectual aspect of the mind, Buddhism cultivates the emphatic and the truth gasping aspect. Without the guidance of the intellect, the mind will easily be affected by deviated Daoist or Buddhist teachings. On the other hand, without cultivating the “empty” mind, the intellect represented by Xuan would be not be emphatic and cannot resist the desire for fame. In the final chapter, both Wukong and Tripitaka are given titles as Buddha, which is an acknowledgement of the difference and the equal importance of both mind faculties in their role for achieving enlightenment.

In this paper, we first investigate the underlying meaning of Xuan with the constraint stipulated by *JW* in section one. Then we elucidate *JW*'s syncretic view of

Buddhism and Daoism in section two. Rather than assigning a primary role to Daoism or Buddhism, it becomes clear that the author of *JW* treated both religions as equally important. In section three, we clarify the nature of the debate between the northern and southern lineage and *JW*'s stance on such a debate. Finally, in conclusion, we discuss future directions.

I. The Meaning of Xuan in the Context of *JW* and *DDJ*

Given that *JW* makes numerous references to Laozhi and Xuan, one must re-examine *DDJ* with *JW*'s perspective, i.e., this Daoist canon must be examined from a mind theory perspective. Such a point of view is mostly inherited from Zhang Boduang's teachings. Xue Daoguang, a later master from the Southern lineage, refuted ideas for finding elixir outside the mind. "It is not in the heart, not in the lung ..." (薛道光). Concepts associated with Xuan are "Emptiness" (thoughtlessness), Havingness (mindfulness), and desires, which are all mentioned in the opening chapter of *DDJ*. The following translation is formed from a theory of mind perspective:

The Way that can be spoken of is not the eternal way; The names that can be named are not eternal names (道可道非常道, 名可名非常名). At the beginning of Heaven and Earth, there were no names (无名天地之始); Having names is the mother of all things; (有名万物之母). Often in the absence of desires, one observes the secrets (of the way) (故常无欲以观其妙); Often with desires, one views the forms of the Way (常有欲以观其徼). The two sides are from the same source with different names, and they are together named as Xuan (两者同出而异名, 共谓之). The turn of Xuan is the gate to all secrets. (玄之又玄, 众妙之门).

With cosmological interpretations, Emptiness/Havingness are often translated as *non-being/being*, and it is always puzzling how *being* could be created from *non-being*. However, if we restrict *DDJ* from a mind theory perspective, then Emptiness and Havingness are simply two mind states differentiated by whether names/concepts present or not. Given this interpretation, creating Havingness from Emptiness simply means creating names from the mind state without names, and there is no problem of understanding at all. This reading is supported by the definition of "Havingness" in *DDJ*: "Since the beginning of making name (始制名始), name (名) also (亦) is equivalent to (即) Havingness (有)." (Chap 32, *DDJ*). Note that in this sentence, strict word for word translation becomes possible when "有" is taken as a noun for a mind state, and "即" is taken as a linking verb. "即" has multiple meanings other than being a linking verb. However, alternative meanings of "即", such as already and instantly, requires one to interpret "有" as a verb, and the sentence wouldn't make sense without ignoring, adding, or distorting the meanings. Consequently, wild variations among translations of this line exist. Some examples are: "As soon as it is cut, then there are names." (Eno, 2010). In this translation, the word "亦" is ignored. In another work (Gia-Fu Feng, 1972), this line is translated as: "Once the whole is divided, the parts needs names. There are already enough names....."

Here, “亦“ is ignored and “enough” is added. In Lin Yutang’s translation, “万物兴作就产生了各种名称, 即已定了名称... (Then human civilization arose and there were names. Since there were names...)” (Lin, Y., 2013), “亦“ is ignored and “有” is modified as “定“. These examples show the difficulties in interpretation when “有“ is taken as a verb and invariably, “亦“ has to be ignored.

By reading the opening paragraph of *DDJ* as a theory of mind, it reveals that there are two cognitive states: one with names and another without names. Although most people live in the state of Havingness nowadays, we know that “Emptiness” must have existed before the invention of names. The “Emptiness” must also be a mind state full of activities, otherwise, the invention of language would not be possible. It is out of this “empty” state that words, names, or concepts are created. *DDJ* identifies desire as the agent that causes the switching between the two states, and Xuan, which is modulated by desires, has access to both mind states. Without desires, it can observe the secrets of the way, and it can bring the observations to formed concepts if desires arise. This interpretation fits the original text perfectly since observation of secrets and forms of the way are cognitive functions. If Xuan is not taken as a mind faculty as *JW* suggests, then the phrases talking about observations cannot be associated with Xuan. Then, the whole paragraph will fall apart to seemingly unrelated random phrases.

DDJ states that one needs to return to the “empty” state since it is where one can observe the eternal way. In Chap 32 of *DDJ*, it is explained that in the eternal way, there are no names (道常无名). The way that can be spoken of is not the eternal one, i.e., not always true.

Throughout history, both Daoism and Buddhism have tried various ways to convey the idea that it is only in the “empty” state, one can grasp the truth and observe the eternal way. However, “Emptiness” is a thinking state that cannot be represented using language. To overcome the difficulty in explaining this mind state, for example, Chan Buddhists tried to use paradoxical gestures that cannot be made sense of using rational thinking. Often, such attempts are confusing and would fail in conveying the ideas about “Emptiness.”

Among many ways for explaining the idea of “Emptiness”, a drawing example is very illustrative. In *Drawing on the Right Side of Brain*, (Edwards 2012), the author explains that most people cannot draw well from a picture if they can recognize the objects in it. However, a lot of people could instantly start to draw well when the picture is inverted. The two modes differ only by whether names of objects in picture are recalled or not. In the mode of having names, what is seen by the eyes is distorted in the mind. Only when names are not recalled in the state of “Emptiness,” the mind can reflect the reality. The mind in “Emptiness” is usually described as the “Empty mirror” in Chan Buddhism for its realistic reflection of the world. Since all audible and noticeable thoughts are conducted using names, the “empty” state is also perceived as the “thoughtless” mind state.

DDJ identifies desires as the driving force for the switching between the “empty” and mindful states. This inadvertently associates reality distorting names/concepts with desires which are the hurdle to getting in touch with the eternal way. As a result,

in both Buddhism and Daoism, there is a requirement of letting go of desires. In *JW*, the text states that Wukong is driven by the desire for fame. *The Great Sage Equaling Heaven* is a monkey devil after all - he has no idea about the rankings, nor cares about his salary. All he cares about is his name (齐天大圣到底是个妖猴，更不知官衔品从，也不较俸禄高低，但只注名便了)” (Chap 5, *JW*). This explains Wukong’s tendency of bragging and his hot temper. For him, the hurdle on the road to enlightenment is to let go of desires and awake to the “Emptiness” of mind. In the Christian tradition, this would be described as the sin of pride and wrath. Wukong’s fall from the heavens and his exile from his teacher are both due to these sins.

From our analysis, we can see that the specific branch of Daoism that *JW* advocates partition the mind into three parts: the “empty” mind, Xuan, and the mindful mind. Xuan switches between the two mind states. It is the intellect that is responsible for the creation of language and other concepts. Thus, Xuan can be viewed as the creative intelligence. Xuan, can be easily confused with cleverness, which is an earthly intellect according to *JW*. In Chapter 58 of *JW*, Tathagata says of the fake Monkey, the six-eared macaque, who could not be differentiated from Wukong even by some Buddha:

The fourth kind is a six-eared macaque, who is good at listening sounds, can understand rationally, knows (temporal and spatial) priority, and can understand everything (第四是六耳猕猴，善聆音，能察理，知前后，万物皆明). Obviously, this description is that of a clever mind. It’s underlying desire is materialistic as the poem in the same chapter indicates: When men have two minds, then misfortunes arise. Doubts cloud everything from sea to sky. One desires fine horses and the highest ranks, craving for eminence at the royal court (人有二心生祸灾，天涯海角致疑猜，欲思宝马三公位，又忆金銮一品台). The thinking mind operating in this mode is what Aristotle characterized as the faculty of cleverness (Aristotle, 2009, Part VI.12, *The Nicomachean Ethics*); “and this is such as to be able to do the things that tend towards the mark we have set before ourselves, and to hit it.”

The mind faculty corresponding to Xuan is not described in canonical Buddhist texts such as the *Diamond Sutra* or *Heart Sutra*, and are not explicitly explained in Chan Buddhism texts from China. Thus, we can see that Xuan is unique to Daoism.

JW, through literal narratives, offers many insights into the characteristics of Xuan embodied by Wukong. First of all, since it is a creative intelligence that creates names from “Emptiness”, it is unbounded by conventions, concepts, and usual moral codes. Thus, it has the characteristics of a rebellion. Wukong would rebel against the whole heaven’s court. Also, because of its dualistic nature, it is hard for Wukong to be accepted. Wukong’s master warned him of future disasters that ...this is not the usual way, it contends with the creations of heaven and earth, and invades the secrets of the sun and moon. After the completion of the elixir, it won’t be accommodated by ghosts nor gods (此乃非常之道：夺天地之造化，侵日月之玄机；丹成之后，鬼神难容. Chap. 2, *JW*). Such a spirit has to be suppressed for a long time. Wukong is confined under the Five Finger Mountain for 500 years. Since Xuan has access to insights and wisdoms arise from “Emptiness,” in *JW*, Wukong is the more insightful character who recognizes all kinds of demons hindering the journey to enlightenment.

Without him, Tripitaka would quickly get confused about the true identity of people and demons, and would not have reached enlightenment.

Given Xuan's nature, we now understand why Wukong can go to the West heaven in just one summersault. This is alluding to Xuan's ability in accessing the "empty" mind state for truth finding. On the other hand, since it is driven by the desire for fame, it has to be tamed like other parts of mind faculty to gradually let go of desires. Consequently, Wukong has to complete his journey to sainthood with the rest of the gang.

II. The Relationship between Daoism and Buddhism as Revealed between Wukong and Tripitaka

From the analysis of the main protagonist of the novel, Wukong, it can be seen that it is mainly a Daoist disciple. However, the whole novel is about a pilgrimage of Buddhism. There is undeniably a Buddhist aspect in the novel. The Buddhist identity is embodied by Tripitaka without any doubt. In terms of lineage, Tripitaka has a body which went through nine previous lives of Buddhist practice. Tripitaka is entirely devoid of desires as a Monk who resists sexual advances by demons along the journey. Since the requirement for entering "Emptiness" is to let go of desires as both Daoism and Buddhism call for, it is obvious that Tripitaka represents the original mind, the basis for enlightenment. He is also called "元神", which means the original spirit.

However, the behavior of Tripitaka along the journey shows that to simply let go of desires is not enough, because he constantly gets affected by Piggy and other sensory distractions. This portraiture of Tripitaka echoes with the southern lineage's criticism against the emphasis on stillness in Buddhism. In Chap 2 of *JW*, this attitude is clearly stated, "What true result can be gained from silence?" said Monkey. "It involves abstaining from grain, preserving one's essence, silence... Is this a way for becoming immortal?" Monkey asked. "It's like building the top of a kiln with sun-dried bricks," the patriarch replied. (Chap 2, *JW*) On the other hand, the author of *JW* recognizes that the Xuan, which is embodied by Wukong is devoid of compassions. The fact that he is born out of stone and his tendency to kill adversaries without mercy show this characteristic. In contrast, Tripitaka shows his compassion for all kinds of lives throughout the journey. This conflict is dramatized in Chap 56 of *JW*, in which, Wukong killed a band of robbers and Tripitaka disavowed him.

Given the exposure of weakness and strength from both the "empty" mind and Xuan, it naturally follows that the author of *JW* adopted a syncretic view. In the last chapter, he clarifies the relationship between the "empty" mind and Xuan by attributing Laozi as the Saint who started the Heaven and Earth, and Tathagata as the one who saves the whole world. Another relevant statement is in Chapter 50, which states that Daoism enlightens the benign, and Buddhism the foolish (道化贤良, 佛化愚). These statements imply that *JW* recognizes the importance of both because without Daoism's guidance, Buddhist disciples could easily get distracted by various "demons". Without Buddhism, Daoist disciples would easily forget compassion and

become overtaken by the original sin of pride and wrath. The recognition of the interdependence between Daoism and Buddhism naturally leads to the recognition of the equal importance of both religions, which is reflected by the induction of both Wukong and Tripitaka to the pantheon of Buddha at the end of the novel.

III. *JW*'s Stance on the Debate between the Northern and Southern Lineage of Daoism

Given our analysis of Xuan as a mind faculty with dualist properties, we can now understand the viewpoint of *JW* on the debate between the two lineages of Daoism. There are significant differences between the teachings of internal alchemy from the southern and northern lineages of Daoism. Zhang Boduan, who was the founder of the Southern lineage, consolidated the view that internal alchemy is the correct path to enlightenment. In his work *Wuzhen Pian* (*Understanding Reality*, Zhang, B. & Y. Liu, 1987), he exposed one major contention within Daoism: "The Yin Essence (精) in Yang is not strong in its makeup (阳里阴精质不刚)." Xue Daoguang (Xue Daoguang et. al., 卷二), who is a later master of the Southern lineage, explained that the Spirit that the Quanzhen Sect aims to cultivate is actually Yin essence and cannot lead to enlightenment. From the essence, Qi is born; From the Qi, the Spirit is born. Nothing is more important than these, for they nourish and guard the whole body. ... However, these things are Yin in nature, and their makeup is not strong (精能生气, 气能生神, 荣卫一身, 莫大于此...奈何此物属阴, 其质不刚). From these annotations, we can see that the northern lineage denies the practice of cultivating of Essence, Qi, and Spirit as the correct way for cultivating elixir or Xuan. From Chap. 21 of *DDJ*, we know that Essence is something that arises from "Emptiness." In making things out of the way, it is only achieved through the state of Huang and Hu. From Hu to Huang, there are images. From Huang to Hu, there are things.

From the barely discernable state, there is the Essence, and this Essence is pretty true and can be believed 道之为物, 惟恍惟惚, 惚兮恍兮, 其中有象; 恍兮惚兮, 其中有物, 窈兮冥兮, 其中有精, 其精甚真, 其中有信).

In the opening chapter of *DDJ*, we can deduce that "Things (物)" mean concepts of things in our mind because *DDJ* states that naming things is the mother of everything (有名万物之母). If "Havingness" is a mind state, then it is only logical to translate this line as "Naming things is the mother of creating everything in our mind." Thus, "物" are conceptual constructions of objects either out of human creations or which naturally exist. Given this perspective, it can be concluded that Essence represents the initial formed concepts of the way that arises from the "empty" state of mind. Consequently, Qi, and Spirit that follow Essence can only be attributed as substances that belong to the mind state of "Havingness."

Given this interpretation of Xuan, we can see that it directly contradicts the teachings of Qiu Chuji (1148-1227Ad), a Daoist master of the northern lineage, Cultivate Qi to turn into Spirit, cultivate Essence to turn into Qi, and cultivate Spirit to turn into the Way (炼气化神, 炼精化气, 炼神化道). His view is that the path to "Emptiness" is to cultivate Spirit, or equivalently cultivating the

“Havingness” side of Xuan. The author of *JW* obviously meant to express his opinion in such debates. In Chapter 39, when Tripitaka and his disciples are fighting the Quanzhen demon, the author commented that: “To mix Gold and Wood for cultivating Spirit? That would only leave the mother of elixir with mysterious dreams (金木和同却炼神，空留丹母懵懂梦).” This line is obviously adopted from Zhang Boduan and his followers in attacking Quanzhen sect’s focus on cultivating Spirit as the way for cultivating Xuan.

From the above analysis, we can see that the debate between the northern and southern lineage of Daoism shaped a big part of the narratives of *JW*, and without the interpretation of Xuan as a mind faculty, it is impossible to understand the debates.

Conclusion

In this essay, we re-examined the meaning of Xuan defined *DDJ* in the context of *JW*, which treats all Daoist and Buddhist scriptures as theories for cultivating the mind. Analysis of Xuan in *DDJ* according to *JW*’s constraint reveals that the mind could operate in two fundamental states. In the state without names and thoughts, the mind is merged with the surrounding realities and can grasp the truth. On the other hand, in the state with formed concepts, the mind constructs a world based on previously formed concepts. These two sides of the mind are connected by Xuan, which has access to both.

By identifying Sun Wukong with Xuan, and Tripitaka with the “empty” mind, *JW* presents a detailed theory of mind which places equal importance on both mind faculties for enlightenment. Given this insight, we can see why Wukong needs to learn to control his desires in a process similar to other parts of the mind during a long and hard journey, fending off all kinds of distractions (represented by demons). Given these initial insights, it would be exciting to further explore the controlling mechanisms among various parts of the mind, for example, those between mind faculties responsible for mundane desires represented by Piggy, and Xuan represented by Wukong.

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