

# Secularization - The Comparisons Between the Pilgrim's Progress and the Journey to the West

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**Abstract:** Although different in culture and times, the novel *The Journey to the West* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* express similar theme in secularization. By describing the course of salvation of individuals, these two novels implicitly criticize the evil in society and praise individuals' endeavor to realize goals.

**Keywords:** *The Journey to the West*; *The Pilgrim's Progress*; Secularization comparisons

## 1. The Pilgrim's Progress

*Pilgrim's Progress* is a novel written by John Bunyan in England, which is divided into two volumes. In the first one, the narrator in a dream sees a man named "Christian" reading a book, and he is horrified to learn that his city will be destroyed by the fire of heaven. Then a man called "the preacher" told him that he must flee his homeland and go to the kingdom of heaven, which made him decide to flee away. Under the guidance of the preacher, he resolutely set foot on the road of the distant and arduous pilgrimage to the kingdom of heaven. On the way, he was almost annihilated at the debilitated swamp, then twice evaded the arrows of the Lord of the Fortress, broke through the blockade of two lions on his way, and fought to the death the Lord of Hell, "all covered with scaly armor," in the Valley of Infamy. Later, he meets another traveler, Loyalty, and the two come together to the town of Vanity. Because they were not deceived by the "Vanity Fair" run by the devil, they were sent to trial, and Loyalty was sentenced to be burned at the stake. However, just as his body was about to be consumed by the flames, a carriage fell from the sky and his soul was transported to heaven. The Christian could not escape from prison. Hope, inspired by the example of Loyalty, fled with him. They broke through the doubts of the giant "despair" and the net of flatterers, crossed the river Styx, and finally arrived at the holy city of heaven<sup>[3]</sup>.

Bunyan's narrative was indeed produced by an individualistic milieu: that of those Protestant Independents who, having fought for the Parliament in the Civil War, temporarily gained independence from the State church. It is thought that individual has the right to be a participant or founder of the churches they chose. And Bunyan created *The Pilgrim's Progress* in jail, which was a weapon of continuing to exercise that right after the Restoration. It shows the religious individualism of its milieu. To be more specific, the novel originated from the author's personal experiences, which claustrophobically expresses the neurotic, obsessional characteristics of his inner mind. Many have showed on the general as well as the specific parallels between it and *The Pilgrim's Progress*

Pluralism helps to embody individualism in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. By the end of 1679, the third edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress* included many illustrated pictures. Bunyan and his editor remained close; thus, he had a hand in the drafting of the script or at least acknowledged their identity.

## 2. The Journey to the West

*Journey to the West* is one of the Four Great Classical Novels of China. *Journey to the West* depicts the four masters and disciples with rich imagination. In Mountain Huaguo, a huge rock gave birth to a monkey. Later, he occupied the mountain as the king and claimed to be the Great Sage of Heaven and caused havoc in Heaven. The Buddha saw that the situation was out of control so that he suppressed him at the foot of Mountain Wuzhi. Five hundred years later, Priest Tang was selected by Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva as the one who went to the west for Buddhist scriptures and save all living beings. Under the guidance of Avalokitesvara, Sun Wukong worshiped Priest Tang as his leader, and set foot on the road to fetch Buddhist scriptures. On the way, Pigsy, who named Wu neng and Monk Sha whose name was Sha Wujing also joined the team. After experiencing thousands of risks and dangers, and finally, they overcame the difficulties and achieved dreams. It is based on the historical facts of monk Xuan Zang's pilgrimage to India for Buddhist scriptures in Tang Dynasty<sup>[4]</sup>. This novel introduces the journey of the four who went through all the difficulties and obstacles to the western heaven for Buddhist scriptures and finally reached the ideal realm.

In Shihua and Zaju, although there is the Sun Wukong who protects the dharma and his status becoming more and more important, the protagonist is still the holy monk Tang Sanzang, and what highlights the novel is detached wisdom of the holy monk. However, in Wu cheng'en's book, the characters of Sun Wukong and Priest Tang have undergone a qualitative change, and their positions have also undergone a fundamental reversal, which reflects the differences of value between Wu cheng'en and his predecessors. Besides, following reasons show it is reasonable to make the unfettered, willful and fearless Sun Wukong stand out.

When he was young, Wu Cheng'en was known in Huaian because of his talents. According to the Apocalypse "Annals of Huaian, he was sensitive and wise in nature and knowledgeable by reading a wide variety of books so that he could compose poems and articles in a very short time. However, this brilliant talent experienced various difficulties and troubles on the road of achieving his dreams. Such talents and related experiences have made him cynical. That's one.

Third, Wu Cheng'en lived in an era when Wang Yangming's study of the mind had been widely spread. The study of mind led the trend of ideological liberation at that time<sup>[6]</sup>. It emphasized the affirmation of subject consciousness and independent personality and re-examined the relationship between subject consciousness and ethical norms: to promote humanity, to respect individual values, and to affirm the rationality of people's desires for materials.

### 3. Familiarizing readers with a blended world

The ancient Chinese literati tend to pay attention to the fickleness of the world and the various situations of life, and often describe the society and life from a secular perspective<sup>[2]</sup>. And the novel is endowed with a sense of reality, which has real historical origin. The ideological value of *Pilgrimage to the West* lies in its relentless attack and denial of the reality in acrimonious irony. Through the description of the Priest Tang and his disciples' way to fetch scriptures, the book, satirizes the dark forces of the society full of demons and ghosts and exposes the ruler's absurd acts without mercy the late Ming Dynasty. Sun Wukong, who is painstakingly portrayed, hated evil and was full of righteousness<sup>[1]</sup>. He was invincible in destroying demons, subduing demons and rectifying evils. For example, by describing the feast of the heavenly palace, it reveals the luxurious corruption of the rulers. The plots are easy to laugh, but the reality makes the author worrying and powerless, which reveals that, people would encounter all kinds of difficulties and challenges on the way to pursuing their dreams and goals. Wu Cheng'en cedes absolute control over his world, explicitly empowering readers to create their own interpretations of events. The novel expresses people's strong desire to eliminate all the evil in the world, and build a fair and harmonious society.

'The ultimate quest of a man for the goal of his supreme desiring' and in other words, the story of 'a protagonist incompatible with the whole society, even against the grain of himself, was always checked and defeated, but he finally makes achievements through keeping honesty and integrity<sup>[5]</sup>. Bunyan deliberately designs his novel as a world in which the reader can combine the secular with the sacred through mentioning the dreaming self frequently. All of these disturb Christian's narrative process, reminding the allegory in an internal, material, and secular reality. More specifically, these interruptions are the implications of a series of descriptions of Bunyan<sup>[3]</sup>, simply saying, "I saw", which could imply the reader that the author, Bunyan is a witness of the story.

Since Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a broad, inarticulate division of emphasis between the individual and his social environment has marked philosophical discussions of mind. On the one hand, there is a traditional concern with the individual subject of mental states and events; on the other hand, there is the Hegelian preoccupation with the role of social institutions in shaping the individual and the content of his thought. These two novels composed in different times and countries, but they perform similar themes: the course of salvation of individuals through describing the protagonist's experiences.

Both Wu Cheng'en and Bunyan encourage readers to engage in a deeper and more robust interaction with the text and attend to the fleshly anchors beyond the text. On the surface, *Journey to the West* tells the story of Priest Tang and his four disciples' struggle with various demons and ghosts on their journey seek the true scriptures. In fact, it reflects the dark reality of the Ming government at that time, in where the officials at all levels are just like the demons and ghosts in the novel. While in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the author Bunyan used the form of dreams to reflect the British society at that time, honor, title, desire, happiness, could be bought and sold. Deception and demagoguery are everywhere in the society. Thus, there exists a third perspective, the importance of Bunyan's text is neither the mundanity of the rationalized world nor the pilgrimage through the sacred landscape of the dream, but instead is the space that his readers would occupy, a space that holds the two worlds in tension, a space opened and enabled by the dawn of the secular.

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