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A Journey of a Monkey King

“The real, historical monk Hsuan Tsang actually walked on foot from China to India, and then throughout the Indian subcontinent. The distance, scholars believe, is like walking from Maine to California.” (Learners ORG). Description of the travels of the real monk Xuan Zang is present. *Journey to the West* is a story of the Monkey King who is a hero in China. It is very popular in China, and it has made an impact on the continent of Asia. It was so popular that it even made it to the Western culture as writers from the West such as Octavio Paz to Maxin Hong Kingston have involved the Monkey King. In the twenty- first century, the story of an animal with supernatural powers would inspire other writers such as wizards, ghosts, or etc. *Journey to the West* carries a tradition and the Chinese culture of being selflessness, and not living in the material world. It would have a strong influence on Buddhism. Buddhism and Taoism are the leading religions in China. *Journey to the West* would have a background and influences from the two religions. This paper will guide the audience on how the author uses religious influences in the story. It will break down the beliefs of each religion, and it will analyze how it is implied in the story.

First, *Journey to the West* is a story of a monk. The story portrays a lot of beliefs and the teachings of Buddhism. In this paper, the philosophy of Buddhism is to be enlightened. According to Encyclopedia of Religion, “It is a general truth that Buddhist traditions highly value the difference between the ethical universe. While all beings have a future potential for enlightenment- and in some traditions an inherent capacity for buddhahood- the potential to live in the company of those with greater capacities than oneself- is a primary condition of enabling ethical transformation.” (Derris, 1083). The beliefs of Buddhism carry three basic and main themes. It is the rebirth, karma, and impermanence. Especially nirvana, the enlightenment, is being at peace from suffering. Some of the teachings from Buddhism are that they ought to carry not just one’s own life, but that they are able to carry the capacities for others. For example, Buddhism teaches not to take anyone’s life. It is to eliminate all greed, ignorance within a person, and especially hatred towards one another. Buddhism actually comes from India. It is inspired from an Indian Monk, Santideva, who vowed to commit to the teachings as an ethical act to free from all suffering. *Journey to the West* involves a monk with his four disciples and Wukong, the Monkey King. Buddha, bodhicitta, means heroic. It is the heroic actions of buddhas such as their morals. According to Derris, “Buddha’s enlightened status enables them to act with absolute morality. This is modeled in some traditions, such as Chan or Zen, as perfect responsiveness- an enlightened being instantaneously responds exactly as a situation demands.” (Derris, 1083). Throughout the story it mentions the monks and his disciples going through the practices of Buddhism. Even Wukong, the monkey king, is on a journey for his status of being immortal.

Second, the novel speaks of Tripitaka. According to Fancisca Cho Bantley, “The hero of the *Journey* himself, Tripitaka, embodies this concern as well - meaning practitioner whose obsession with the outward forms of piety hinders him from true perception. That he cannot recognize the malicious forces that appear to him in pleasant guises. More important, he cannot see beyond the appearance of all forms to their innate insubstantiality- a lesson he needs to apply to his own religious techniques.” (Bantley, 514). Bantley speaks on the character in the story that practices the beliefs of Buddhism. In the story, it is a journey where the moral standards and the teachings are compared to the beliefs of Buddhism. Bantley continues, “ in the extended episode that begins with Monkey’s first banishment by Tripitaka (chapters 27-31), interweaving plots with a consistent moral theme are in evidence. The moral tone is explicitly Confucian.” (Bantley, 517). The Monkey King was known for its character and his truth in staying good over evil. It is the symbolic triumph that it portrays. His toughness toward enemies, and his consistent positive energy in times of struggle and his courage continues to influence the religious beliefs of Buddhism.

In conclusion, *The Journey to the West* portrays a lot of themes and messages that are influenced by the religion of Buddhism. The story has many characters associated with Buddhism such as the monk and his four disciples. The author has included a Monkey King, Wukong, that conveys the readers the character traits and features of the Buddihsism. The Monkey withholds his truth, courage, power, and his morality to defeat his enemies. Through the teachings of the monk and the four disciples, they are able to go through this journey to the west.

Sources:

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