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PILGRIMAGES IN THE CONTEXTS OF POP
CULTURE AND THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES
FROM AND TO EAST ASIA

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AESTHETIC JOURNEYS AND MEDIA
PILGRIMAGES IN THE CONTEXTS OF POP
CULTURE AND THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES
FROM AND TO EAST ASIA

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From China to the World: The main media pilgrimages of Sun Wukong (孙悟空) and Son Gokū (孫悟空)

Giovanni RUSCICA | Fudan University, China

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ABSTRACT

The 'Journey to the West', also translated as the 'Pilgrimage to the West', is one of the masterpieces of ancient Chinese literature. Published anonymously by the putative author Wu Cheng'en in the late 16th century, the story traces in broad outline the journey taken by the monk Tripitaka in the year 629 a.D. to India to acquire Buddhist scriptures, and it is the result of reworking antecedent works, such as 'Poetic notes on the pilgrimage of Tripitaka of the Great Tang to acquire the Sutras' and 'Journey to the West' Opera'. In this fiction, the writer moves away from the authenticity of the traditional pilgrimage: here the monk is escorted by sinful-followers (i.e., a dragon-horse, a pig, a demon, and a monkey) capable of removing malevolent beings throughout the journey. Sun Wukong is the wild and skillful monkey that ascends to Buddhahood, becoming a 'Victorious Fighting Buddha' at the end of the literary work. Later on, the Chinese work of fiction was used as a source of inspiration for the creation of Dragon Ball, a Japanese fantasy & martial arts manga. Published in 1984 as a manga and then adapted into an anime, Dragon Ball sketchily follows the Chinese work of fiction. After coming across Bulma, young Son Gokū decides to escort the girl in her quest to collect seven magic dragon spheres. The series' success allowed the manga's author, Akira Toriyama, to continue the story arc and launch a new series in 2015. Since 1986, several videogames with a monkey character have entered the market. The purpose of this article is to highlight the main affinities between Sun Wukong and his Japanese counterpart Son Gokū first, and then attempt to explain how the monkey character has become a world-famous symbol, and contextualise it into the phenomenon of 'worldwide pilgrimage'.

KEYWORDS

Pilgrimage; 'Poetic notes of the pilgrimage of Tripitaka of the Great Tang to acquire the sutras'; 'Journey to the West' Opera'; 'Journey to the West'; *Dragon Ball*; Hou Xingzhe; Sun Xingzhe; Sun Wukong; Son Gokū; Intertextuality.

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Introduction – Literary and geographical pilgrimages

A Pilgrimage can be considered a performance activity, essentially a social one, which permits individuals to practice their beliefs. This activity signifies a set of practices that generates a potential for self and collective change (Bajc, 2012: 1052). There are many reasons behind each pilgrimage experience, such as religious beliefs or curiosity. Pilgrimage can be authentic or fictitious, and the majority of them, both authentic and fiction, are based on religious motives. This is the case of the Italian poet

Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) who in his masterpiece *Divina Commedia* recounts his spiritual journey towards God through the three otherworldly realms; another case could be the literary cycle of King Arthur, with its pursuit of the Holy Grail by the knights, a pursuit seen as an allegory of human development and spiritual growth. Today, alongside this traditional concept of pilgrimage, we find the ‘media pilgrimage’, which indicates “both a real journey across space, and an acting out in space of the constructed ‘distance’ between ‘ordinary world’ and ‘media world’. To use the word ‘pilgrimage’, however, is not to claim any religious significance for such media-related journeys” (Couldry, 2005: 72).

An excellent example of a pilgrimage that begins with religious connotations and then shifts to becoming a ‘media event’ is undoubtedly that of the Chinese monk Tripitaka (602–664 a.D.). Approximately 1400 years have passed since the Buddhist monk Tripitaka took his first steps along the Silk Road to India to acquire the Buddhist scriptures and spread Buddhism in China. At the end of his pilgrimage, the Master Tripitaka certainly could not have imagined that his mission would from that point become the central theme of stories and fictions for centuries and centuries, nor could he have imagined becoming a worldwide icon who is compared with the explorer Marco Polo (1254–1324). As we will see, Tripitaka’s historical pilgrimage would be enriched with various fictional elements and characters, including the simian disciple Sun Wukong (孙悟空). Today, many people outside of Asia may not know Sun Wukong, but most probably know Son Gokū (孫悟空).¹ Perhaps, not everyone has realised that the characters and plot of the Japanese manga *Dragon Ball* took inspiration from the Chinese Ming period (1368–1644) novel ‘Journey to the West’ (*Xiyou Ji* or 西游记). Today the image of Sun Wukong and that of Son Gokū (his Japanese version in a 1980s’ manga) are not only heroes of two famous works, but they have also become essential characters in Chinese and Japanese mass culture. In fact, in 2016, the year of the monkey, the animal was often depicted with the icon of Sun Wukong and spread the slogan “be smarter than the Monkey itself, to succeed in 2016” (Marques, 2016: n.p.);

¹ I have added the Chinese characters to the names of Sun Wukong and Son Gokū to help readers understand that both are different pronunciations of the same name (one is Chinese, the other is Japanese) and that they are actually the exact same figure appearing in different texts.

for the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo (which, as we know, have been played in summer 2021), Son Gokū appears on licensed Olympic merchandising as one of the eight ambassadors of Japanese culture (Futbolete, 2017).

Through the introduction of concepts of transtextuality and transculturality, this study seeks to examine the significance of the 'meta-pilgrimage' concept relating to the pilgrimages in the works we will be dealing with, namely the 'literary pilgrimage' and the 'geographical pilgrimage', that is, the dissemination and reception of the works and their contents. Through a reinterpretation process of the work's contents which led to a worldwide transmission, we comprehend that the myth of Tripitaka and Sun Wukong is spreading, thus defining a 'worldwide pilgrimage'.

Historical context – Origins of the myth of the pilgrimage from China to India

The monk Sanzang (Xuanzang or, in Sanskrit, Tripitaka) was the most famous pilgrim of the Tang dynasty (618–907). According to the historical account as summarised in Wriggins and Mote (1996), Xuanzang was born under the Sui dynasty (581–618) in a family of senior Confucian officials and lived during Emperor Tang Taizong (626–649). His decision to take Buddhist orders was influenced by one of his three older brothers. After his conversion, he was dissatisfied with the Chinese translations of the *sutras*² he had been trained in, believing that their concepts were conflicting. Therefore, in the hope of grasping the direction of the Buddhist scriptures, he decided to engage in a significant undertaking: moving towards India to study and return to the capital Chang'an (today known as Xi'an) with the authentic scriptures in Sanskrit. His decision was also motivated by a dream, in which he crossed a river in the direction of Mount Meru, the sacred mountain of Buddhist mythology. In 629, he started a pilgrimage from the capital and through more than seventy countries, arrived in India after about one year, and remained there to study for about seventeen years, before finally returning to the capital. Due to his mission's success, he was immediately recognised as a hero, and then retired to the Giant Wild Goose Pagoda³, to devote himself to an immense work of translation through which he managed to translate

² In Buddhism, sutras are classic scriptures mainly recording the teachings of the Buddha.

³ It is a huge Buddhist pagoda built to hold Buddhist scriptures and statues that were brought from India to China located in Xi'an.

from Sanskrit into Chinese seventy-five of the six hundred and fifty-seven texts contained in the Buddhist Canon. He also wrote a report entitled 'Great Tang records on the western regions', in which he recorded in detail the habits, products, climate, geographical conditions, languages, and traditions of the places where he stayed for those seventeen years. Given the pilgrimage's positive outcome, Emperor Taizong himself began to promote the Buddhist doctrine (see again Wriggins and Mote, 1996).

With the monk's death, his personality was clothed with that of a legendary halo, and his adventures were adorned with fantastic and bizarre factors. British sinologist Glen Dudbridge (1938–2017) observed:

In the popular story-cycle of later centuries, Tripitaka stood out among the great names of his faith above all as a traveler of spectacular achievement. It was his journey that held the imagination, a prolonged excursion for readers and audiences into remote and semi-fabulous territory. (Dudbridge 1970: 12)

Amongst those fantastical elements that enriched the myth of the monk's pilgrimage stands out the attribution of an ape-like aspect of his adventure companion, who will take the leading role in the later Ming period work 'Journey to the West', a text published anonymously during the 16th century and later attributed to the literate Wu Cheng'en (ca. 1500–ca. 1582).⁴

Fictional pilgrimages from China to India and Japan – 'Poetic notes on the pilgrimage of Tripitaka of the Great Tang to acquire the sutras' and 'Journey to the West' Opera'

The 16th century work refers to a body of stories that, according to Zhu Hongbo, resulted from the romanticising of the historical pilgrimage of the Chinese monk. The first resulting fictional work of this corpus is 'Poetic notes on the pilgrimage of Tripitaka of the Great Tang to acquire the sutras' (*Da Tang Sanzang qujing shihua* or 大唐三藏取经诗话) (Zhu, 2017: 109), hereafter abbreviated as *Poetic notes*. Despite the short length of this text (it consists of only seventeen chapters, and the first one is missing), it represents a crucial

⁴ Note that Wu Cheng'en's authorship is still controversial. On this topic, see the Preface in Yu, 2012.

piece for the formation process not only of the 'Journey to the West' (from now on, *JtW*) but also of the manga inspired by it.

Focussing on the plot,⁵ the text records the first encounter between Tripitaka and the monkey disciple, here called Hou Xingzhe,⁶ and their tenacity in overcoming dangers and monsters accompanied by five other minor monks who have a very marginal role. The story focusses on the pilgrimage from China to India to acquire the sutras. Starting from an analysis of the Chinese title, we learn that the narrated facts are set during the Tang period, while the characters *qujing* 取经⁷ represent the nature of the quest. In order to focus on its elements, characters, and themes, we turn to the genres of this short story and we find that the text is in a popular style. It is written in vernacular, the reading is smooth, and it was probably used by monks to give lectures on religious matters to the public. The frame narrative, that is fetching sutras, allows us to identify its main theme, religious travel. Despite the text's focus on the narration of a pilgrimage made by the Master as well as the overall Buddhist nature of the work, which is immediately evident in the terminology, there is also references to the other two foremost Chinese religions, Confucianism and Taoism; it also has strong roots in Chinese mythology. Besides the encounter with Buddha, the story also plays a pioneering role in founding the rules of the genre of gods and demons (*shenmo* 神魔), just like Chinese literary critic Lu Xun (1881–1936) did, identifying it as “the embryonic form of gods and demons corpus of stories about the Tang monk's pilgrimage to acquire the Buddhist scriptures” (1981: 277).

The text we are analysing has come to us anonymously and is, according to many, from the Song period (960–1279), although in recent years the academic community has reached a consensus to recognise the period between the end of the Tang and the Five Dynasties (907-960) as the more plausible date of origin (Ren, 2017: 89). In the work, Tripitaka arrives in India in the 15th chapter; however, we must also note that his 'pilgrimage' also reaches Japan. How? The work was found in the Kōzan-ji Buddhist

⁵ For a plot summary, see Dudbridge, 1970: 189-93.

⁶ The Chinese characters for this name are 猴行者. The first means 'monkey', while the combination of the second and the third means 'itinerant monk' and is often translated as 'Monkey-disciple'.

⁷ In the *Oxford Dictionary* we find only two entries: one Buddhist that acts as a verb, and a figurative one. The first reads: “go on a pilgrimage to India to acquire Buddhist scriptures: 去西天~ go West to acquire Buddhist scriptures” (Manser, Zhu, Wang et al., 2010: 601).

temple, founded by the Buddhist monk Myōe (1173–1232) in 1206, on Toganōsan Mountain of Kyōto in the early 20th century. According to this, the text is also known as the ‘Kōzan-ji text’. Two editions of the work are known today, both found in the temple: the first became part of the book collection of the writer Tokutomi Sohō (1863–1957), the second came into the possession of the entrepreneur Kishichirō Ōkura (1882–1963) (Li, Cai 1997: 1-2). Thus, it is possible to say that the pilgrimage of Tripitaka and the monkey disciple, or rather the ‘pilgrimage of the work’, ends in Japan. Later on, it was the Chinese scholar Luo Zhenyu (1866–1940) who made a reproduction of both editions and was permitted to make the circulation of the work: from Japan it returned to China. It was only thanks to its discovery in Japan that it was possible to know the work and connect it to the earlier duet representations of Tripitaka and simian character found in China, mainly attributed to the empire of Western Xia (1038–1227; see figures 1 and 2).

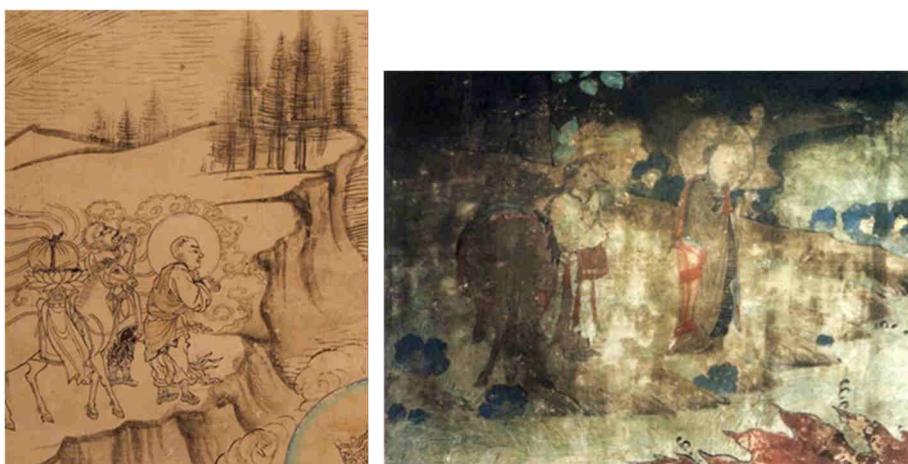


Fig. 1 & 2. (Left) Monk Tripitaka, monkey-disciple, and horse carrying the sutras on the left side of the fresco Yulin Caves, cave no. 3. **Source:** Tang, Xixia bowuguan, 2003.

(Right) Monk Tripitaka, monkey disciple, and horse on a section of the ‘Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves’, cave no. 2. **Source:** Tang, Xixia bowuguan, 2003.

Another work that resulted from the romanticising of the historical pilgrimage of Xuanzang is ‘Journey to the West Opera’ (*Xiyou Ji zaju* or 《西游记》杂剧; Zhu, 2017: 109, hereafter abbreviated as *Opera*). Also in this case, the story focusses on the pilgrimage from China to India to acquire the sutras.⁸ The work is a twenty-four-scene Yuan (1271–

⁸ For a plot summary, see Dudbridge, 1970: 193-200.

1368) drama, and it is acknowledged as the Yuan dynasty's longest opera. In the tenth scene, we can also read about the encounter between Tripitaka and the monkey-disciple, here called Sun Xingzhe⁹ or Sun Wukong or even (the) 'Great reaching-heaven sage'. In this case, the monkey-disciple's task is to accompany the monk in his quest to find the sutras and overcome dangers and monsters. On the one hand, the character seems more complex than Hou Xingzhe, and on the other hand, divergent from the Ming novel's monkey-disciple. The plot includes elements similar to the earlier *Poetic notes* and the later body of stories. In the *Opera*, the monk is also accompanied by Zu Bajie and Sha Heshang¹⁰ whom Sun Xingzhe managed to subjugate. The party arrives in India in the 21st scene; however, we must also note that this 'pilgrimage' as well reaches Japan. In fact, it was discovered in the Cabinet Library in Japan thanks to Professor On Shionoya (1878–1962), who first reprinted it in 1927–28 in the journal *Shibun* 9,1-10,3. Since then, the copy also circulated in China, becoming an object of study. Initially, it was thought to be the lost work of the same title written by the Yuan Dynasty's playwright Wu Changling (?-?), then the authorship passed to another Yuan author, the Mongol playwright Yang Jingxian (?-?) (Dudbridge, 1970: 76-7 and Li, 2013: 50).

A bigger fictional pilgrimage, from China to India and Japna: *JtW*

Belonging with the 'Four Classic Novels of Chinese Literature',¹¹ *JtW*'s authorship is also surrounded by a strong halo of mystery. So far, the oldest edition of *JtW* is the one hundred chapter-long 'Newly carved, illustrated journey to the West – A large print official edition', abbreviated to 'Shidetang'. It was originally thought that the author was the Taoist Qiu Chuji (1148–1227) of the Southern Song Empire (1127–1279), as it was confused with the travel account written by his disciple Li Zhichang (1193-1256), titled 'Journey to the West by the Taoist master Changchun'. The idea was later refuted. Although the publication of the *JtW* sparked a dispute over the authorship of the work

⁹ Just as in *Poetic notes*, the simian disciple possesses the name of Xingzhe. This time, this is preceded by the character Sun 孙, which correlates with a monkey, as explained by Patriarch Subudi in the later Ming novel, as this name will also appear in novel as one of Sun Wukong's names (Yu, 2012: 115).

¹⁰ In many English versions of the story Zhu Bajie 猪八戒 (also named Zhu Wuneng 猪悟能) is arbitrarily translated as 'Piggy' and Sha Heshang 沙和尚 (also named Sha Wujing 沙悟净) as 'Sandy'.

¹¹ Together with 'Romance of the Three Kingdoms' (*Sanguo Yanyi* 三国演义, 14th century), 'Water Margin' (*Shui Hu Zhuan* 水浒传, 14th century?), and 'Dream of the Red Chamber' (*Honglou Meng* 红楼梦, 1792).

since Hu Shi (1988) (1891–1962), the academic community has embraced Wu Cheng'en as the most likely author of the 'Shidetang' edition and seems to identify Wu Cheng'en as its compiler, and it is believed that the novel came out *post-mortem* in 1592. Unfortunately, to date, we have no further information on the author: even among the columns of the preface, we read the name of a certain Chen Yuanzhi (?-?) from Nanjing, in which he says: "On the 'Journey to the West', I do not know who composed it" (Wu, 1994: 2).¹²

JtW includes the genres of adventure and satire; its plot was not only the subject of reissues and performances,¹³ but also of various sequels.¹⁴ *JtW* shares *Poetic notes* and *Opera's* same narrative structure, that is, Tripitaka fetching the sutras. Just like in *Opera*, the monk is escorted by bizarre disciples (a dragon-horse, a pig, a demon, and a monkey), who would drive away demonic presences along the journey. Wu Cheng'en's narrative novelty lies in the use of a shifting narrator; instead of paying attention to the original character of Tripitaka, the emphasis is placed on his monkey assistant. Accordingly, the work does not open by recounting the monk's departure to India, but with the monkey's birth and growth. Only later does the work turn to Tripitaka and his encounter with the disciples-sinners, who will follow him to redemption for their sins and overcome eighty-one dangers. The importance of Sun Wukong lies in being a syncretic hero: he is the expression of the three major Chinese doctrines. He is a monkey who emerges from a stone egg and immediately joins a group of other wild monkeys, becoming their king. One day he decides to take the *tao* path and acquires some abilities, such as cloud-surfing and the ability to perform the '72 Earthly transformations'. He decides to take the title of 'Great Saint Equal to Heaven' and wreaks havoc in Heaven;¹⁵ eventually, he is subdued by Buddha in person and pressed under the weight of the Five Elements Mountain. He will be released by the monk

¹² In particular, see the introduction by Xu Shuofang (Wu, 1994); for a study on the different editions of the *JtW*, we recommend Cao, 2010.

¹³ The character of Sun Wukong is also traceable to the Beijing opera (*Jingju* or 京剧): one of the most important representations is the 'Havoc in Heaven', which tells the story of the Monkey King against the corrupt Jade Emperor. The character is recognisable by the use of a mask with monkey traits and a golden stick.

¹⁴ For example, see the 'Supplement to the Journey to the West' (*Xiyou Bu* or 西游补) by the novelist Dong Yue (1620–1686).

¹⁵ This episode inspired the production of a Chinese animated film in the 1960s that will be discussed later.

Tripitaka in order to serve his sentence only by accompanying him in his search for sutras. He wears an ochre dress, at the waist a tiger skin loincloth, on his feet cloud-walking boots, and on his head a magical circlet. He holds a golden-banded staff that can change size, fly, and attack opponents according to its master's will (figure 3).



Fig. 3. Sun Wukong while attacking with his staff in *JtW*-‘Shidetang’ edition.

Source: Wu, 1994: 447.

As mentioned above, the 100-chapter long *JtW* is the result of a creative process which rewrites and reshapes the works of others that concern the fictional pilgrimage of the Chinese monk; the 16th century novel is much more articulated and complex than the works mentioned so far.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, we find analyses by Chinese and Japanese scholars on the 100-chapter long *JtW* and especially on its simian character. The key notion in those studies was without any doubt ‘intertextuality’. This textual concept, first introduced by Julia Kristeva (1964), refers to any relationship between different texts and extends textual identity to include its origin and use of past works. In line with this theory, no text is spontaneous; every text is an interactive text, and something has happened between it and previous texts. This research field was later expanded by Gérard Genette (1992), who called the relationship between text and other texts different from itself ‘transtextuality’ or textual transcendence. For Genette, intertextuality represents “all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts”, it “covers all aspects of a particular text” (1992, 83-4). On the Chinese side, we remember Lu Xun, who in 1922 put forward the ‘theory of autochthonous origin’, according to which Sun

Wukong (and therefore Hou Xingzhe and Sun Xingzhe too) possesses characteristics that can be traced back to a river spirit present in the ‘Ancient classic of peaks and rivers’ (*Gu Yuedu jing* or 古岳读经) (1976: 49); the ‘theory of foreign origin’ formulated by Hu Shi that places Sun Wukong as an imitation of Hanumān, a simian god that appears in the Indian epic poem *Rāmāyaṇa* (Hu, 1988: 902-4); Cai Guoliang and Xiao Bing combine the two aforesaid theories, stating the hypothesis of hybridisation and thus defining the ‘theory of fusion’ (Cai, 1981; Xiao, 1982). Japanese scholars also have put forward the view that it originated from the Buddhist scriptures. Isobe Akira believes that Sun Wukong was also influenced by the icon of the wild ape in Fujian folk tales and by the Lord of Thunder’s image in ancient Chinese legends. This line of thinking was later accepted by Nakano Miyoko, who found new evidence in Fujian to support the idea that the province has many place names associated with Buddhist scripture stories and that monkey reliefs were found in several Southern Song temples in Quanzhou. Based on this, Nakano determined the Fujian province as Sun Wukong’s ‘native place’ (Nakano and Wang, 2002).

Another detail we need to stress is the fact that *JtW* was immediately accepted in Japan. Here, the legend of the pilgrimage of the monk Xuanzang in search for the scriptures began to spread during the Asuka period (592–710) and then, after the publication of the earliest edition ‘Shidetang’, its four sets circulated in Japan during the Edo period (1603–1867): the first copy in a library in Tokyo; the second one in Jigen-do Hall Nikkō Rinnoji Temple, in Nikkō; the third one in a library in Tenri; the fourth one in a library in Asano (Cao, 2010: 16).¹⁶ The first Japanese scholar who undertook *JtW*’s translation work was Nishida Korenori (?–1765). In 1758, he published his first collection that included ‘only’ the first twenty-six chapters translated with the Japanese title ‘Popular edition of the western journey’ (*Tsūzoku Saiyūki* or 通俗西遊記). This work of translation went on with the cooperation and alternation of other translators and illustrators and reached its completion in 1837 with the publication of *Ehon Saiyū zenden* (‘Illustrated edition of the history of the Journey to the West’, Vakhnenko, 2017: 8-12). This translation led to Sun Wukong’s Japanese rendering, namely Son Gokū, as well as to one of its earliest representations (figure 4).

¹⁶ The four cited texts are not the only ones found in Japan. Other reproductions of posthumous *JtW* reissues have also been found in Japan. For an overview of these findings, see the study by Cao Bingjian (2010).



Fig. 4. Son Gokū while fighting in the first edition of *Ehon Saiyū zenden*. **Source:** Nishida, Yajima, Utagawa, Katsushika *et al.* (1837).

After having provided this historical background, from the following section on the article mainly focusses on the transcultural ties between China and Japan and on the concept of media pilgrimage; previous and future references to India are intended to point out the historical pilgrimage route thoroughly.

Stories of animated pilgrimages from Japan to the World – Different shades of the same character

As discussed above, Wu Cheng'en's choice was to interact and develop relationships, whether obvious or concealed, with older works in order to give birth to a new novel which could offer to readers and writers a textual transcendence. In fact, through transtextuality investigations, since the beginning of the 20th century Chinese and Japanese scholars have been cooperating in examining the 16th century literary work and its main character Sun Wukong. Alongside this phenomenon, another factor coexists: early manga since the 1930s, and early Japanese animated works (since the 1960s) took inspiration from *JtW*.

China's first animated feature film with the icon of Monkey King is 'Princess Iron Fan' (*Tie shan gongzhu* or 铁扇公主, figure 5), which is also considered to be the first feature animation film in Asia. It was directed by Wan Laiming (1900-1997) and Wan Guchan (1900-1995), two of the four founders and pioneers of the Chinese animation industry; it was released in 1941. The film is the adapted story of *JtW*

chapters 59-60-61. The focus is on the battle between Monkey King and Princess Iron Fan, whose fan is needed to extinguish the flames of the mountains.



Fig. 5. The Monkey King fights Bull Demon King. Screenshots from 'Princess Iron Fan' (Modern Chinese Cultural Studies, 2020: timecode 1:03:08). **Source:** <https://youtu.be/ocUp840yj2c>.

'Havoc in Heaven' (*Danao tiangong* or 大闹天宫, figure 6), also translated as 'Uproar in Heaven', is a Chinese animated film directed by Wan Laiming and produced by Wan Guchan, Wan Chaochen (1906-1992), and Wan Dihuan (1907-?). The film was released in the early 1960s. The story is an adaptation of the earlier chapters of *JtW*, in which the Monkey King rebels against the Jade Emperor of heaven.



Fig. 6. The Monkey King engages Erlang Shen in a duel. Screenshots from 'Havoc in Heaven' (MonkeyKing FansFactory, 2015: timecode 1:34:04). **Source:** <https://youtu.be/Hu0XosgxCyU>.

Chronologically speaking, the first Japanese adaptation of *JtW* is *Saiyūki* (西遊記, fig. 7). The anime film was written by Uekusa Keinosuke (1910-1993), based on the 1952 manga *Boku no Son Gokū* ぼくの孫悟空 ('My Son Gokū', figure 8) by Tezuka Osamu (1928-1989).



Fig. 7 & 8. (Left) Son Gokū on his cloud from *Saiyūki*. **Source:** <https://events.umich.edu/event/27615>. **(Right)** Son Gokū fights Bull Demon King, cover of *Boku Son Gokū* vol. 2. **Source:** <https://www.animeclick.it/manga/25933/boku-no-sonGokū>.

Another of Sun Wukong's earliest Japanese representations is the anime series *Gokū no daibōken* ('The great adventure of Gokū', 1967, figure 9).



Fig. 9. Gokū on his cloud from the anime *Gokū no daibōken*. **Source:** Projectnerd.it/2018-07-the-monkey-approfondimento.

One more remake/adaptation of the novel is *Esu Efu Saiyūki Sutājingā* ('SF Journey to the West Starzinger', figure 10), an anime series written by Leiji Matsumoto (1938-) and broadcast from 1978 to 1979. The protagonist Jan Coog, originally a human being, turns into a cyborg to protect humanity. Just like Sun Wukong, he has a rebellious attitude: this is why he was imprisoned in a crystal ball and then released to serve Princess Aurora. He is tricked into wearing a golden crown, which turns out to be an instrument through which the princess can control him. His weapon is an extendable stick, the Astro-lance.



Fig. 10. Jan Coog holding his Astro-Pole from the anime *Starzinger*. **Source:** <https://digilander.libero.it/latvdiunavolta/starzinger.htm>.

Saiyūki (figure 11) is a manga series by Minekura Kazuya (1975-) distributed from 1997 to 2002. It is more like a remake of *JtW*. The protagonist Son Gokū is a cheerful and lively boy, always hungry, naive, and has great confidence in people despite his troubled history. He was locked up in Japan's Gogyō Mountain ('Mountain of the five elements') for a sin he had committed five hundred years before in the Tenkai and remained there until the priest/monk Genjō Sanzō freed him. As for Sun Wukong, he can turn to the Great Saint Equal to Heaven, his appearance becomes slightly more animalistic, his strength grows out of proportion, and he loses control of himself.



Fig. 11. Cover of the first manga volume of *Saiyūki*. **Source:** <http://gallery.minitokyo.net/view/409691>.

The character of Sun Wukong/Son Gokū is also referenced in several other anime that diverge from the main themes contained in *JtW*. One of these appears in *Naruto: Shippūden* by Kishimoto Masashi (1974-) with a character called Son Gokū (figure 12). He is one of the nine-tailed beasts who has a red-furred body-build of a gorilla,

elongated fangs, and two long horns curving upwards on its forehead like a crown. This creature was sealed within a person, Rōshi.



Fig. 12. Son Gokū and Rōshi in *Naruto: Shippūden*. **Source:** <https://animefuryz.blogspot.com/2020/04/top-10-strongest-jinchuriki-in-naruto.html>.

In episode no. 631 of the media franchise *Pokemon* (*Pokémon*) there is a ‘pocket monster’ which appears to be based on a monkey with gold elements in its design, Gōkazaru (aka Infernape, figure 13).



Fig. 13. Gōkazaru from the anime *Pokemon*. **Source:** https://pokemonfanon.fandom.com/wiki/Akira%27s_Infernape.

In China, Monkey King has long been the main cartoon character representing animation, so much so that Sean MacDonald (2016), borrowing Walt Disney’s famous statement “It was all started by a mouse”, coined the phrase: “It all started with a monkey”.

From Sun Wukong’s first representations in the Chinese media, we can point out that producers aimed to realise the authentic Sun Wukong displayed in Wu Cheng’en’s

JtW, that is to say a relatively static image. On the other hand, the implications of intertextuality and textual transcendence have permeated these different character adaptations in modern Japanese pop culture, creating different shades of the same image. Therefore, in this media process, we achieve different characters whose main features are somehow similar. Most of these adapted characters can count on superhuman strength, have a simian appearance or call to mind a monkey, are capable to fight using a rod, can fly on a cloud, possess a rebel personality, need to accomplish a journey after many tribulations and so on. Even though *JtW* is usually viewed as a Chinese literary work, most people are familiar with its world mostly through different adaptations. As a dynamic text, *JtW* “cannot stop (for example, on a library shelf); its constitutive movement is that of cutting across (in particular, it can cut across the work, several works)” (Barthes, 2009: 157) and therefore, “like a chameleon, *The Journey* succeeds in adapting to ever new and often contradictory contexts, unfolding its radical intertextuality across multiple media” (Wall, 2019: 2138).

Dragon Ball

The factors that contributed to the constant imitation of *JtW* in Japan can be assumed as units of cultural transmission (or as units of imitation) conveyed from China to Japan, but a fundamental change occurred along the way (Chan, 2020: 193). What we have seen so far are just a few examples. Several characters have played the role of Son Gokū, both main and secondary ones. Who would the ‘most powerful’ Son Gokū be? Unquestionably, the answer is the one in *Doragon Bōru* (*Dragon Ball*, hereafter abbreviated as *DB*).

Probably everyone has heard of *DB* before. This iconic *shōnen manga* (manga for male children and early teenagers) was launched in the early 1980s, but it is still considered one of the industry’s most popular manga. Created by Japanese *mangaka* (manga artist) Toriyama Akira (1955-) in 1984 (and until 1995 in its original run), it was later adapted to anime by Tōei Dōga and originally broadcast on Fuji TV from 1986 to 1989, lasting 153 episodes. The series tells the story of Son Gokū as the hero trains to become a powerful fighter. He is a foundling raised by the elderly Son Gohan, after the latter rescued him next to a spaceship near a forest at the foot of a mountain. As he grows older, Gokū begins to fight against Earth-related villains and monsters. From the canonical sequel *Doragon Bōru Zetto* (*Dragon Ball Z*, hereafter abbreviated as *DBZ*), the

hero and the audience learned that he was a Saiyan from planet Vegeta sent to the Earth with a plan to conquer. In the first episode, we read about the encounter of Son Gokū and Bulma, a brilliant girl who invented a dragon radar; this encounter sets in motion the theme of the quest for the seven ‘dragon balls’, spheres scattered throughout the planet Earth¹⁷ capable of making a dragon¹⁸ appear and grant a wish when they are gathered. The search for the spheres will involve encounters and clashes with other characters and demons; some of them will join the pursuit. In addition to the tail that comes out of a hole in his suit, the young Saiyan’s distinctive feature is his innate strength. He handles a length-changing staff skilfully, and after the meeting with Master Roshi, he moves by air through his flying nimbus (fig. 14).



Fig. 14. Gokū on his nimbus for the first time, from the manga *Dragon Ball* chapter 4.
Source: <https://dragonballread.com/manga/dragon-ball-chapter-4-online-read>.

DB is one of the most popular manga series of all time and enjoys a high readership today. It is not only considered one of the main reasons manga circulation reached its highest level between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s (Ibaraki, 2008; Michiko, 2007), but was also a major title at the time of the manga outbreak in Europe in the late 1980s, and it is part of mass culture as a cultural phenomenon; many films, video games, and other products are derived from it. The manga is sold in more than forty countries, and

¹⁷ The spheres in the non-canonical sequel *Doragon Bōru Ji Ti* (*Dragon Ball GT*, hereafter abbreviated as *DBGT*) will instead be scattered across planets other than planet Earth, while in the second canonical sequel *Doragon Bōru Sūpā* (*Dragon Ball Super*, hereafter abbreviated as *DBS*) spheres are scattered between universes six and seven. It seems that in each sequel, the quest changes in size.

¹⁸ Shenron in the case of the terrestrial dragon spheres, Porunga in Planet Namek, Red Shenron and Dark Shenron in *DBGT*, Super Shenron in *DBS*. So as the quest changes so does the dragon type.

the anime is broadcast in more than eighty countries. Many cartoonists and mangaka have cited *DB* as their source of inspiration for famous works today. In 2018, *DB* was the second best-selling manga in the world behind *Wan Pisu (One Piece)* (Peters, 2018). Therefore, Toriyama is considered one of the artists who succeeded in changing manga's history, as his work has greatly influenced later generations of mangaka.¹⁹ When they asked him "Why did the story of *Dragon Ball* begin? How was this fantastical story made?", his answer was:

Since *Dr Slump* had been set in a western [*sic*] scenery, I decided to change that impression and make my new work have a Chinese scenery. And if I was going to give it a Chinese feel, I thought I would make the story based on "Journey to the West". "Journey to the West" after all is absurd and has adventurous elements, so I guess I decided to make a slightly modernised "Journey to the West". I thought it would be easy if that story served as the basis, since all I would have to do would be to arrange things. (Toriyama, 1995: 13)

As pointed out by Price, "anime [...] is a delightfully inventive reference manual into the world of Japanese symbols, folklore, religion, history, social musings and aesthetic traditions. When audience members are not exclusively Japanese, anime unexpectedly becomes a vehicle for cross-cultural communication" (2001: 153). If we analyse the first part of *DB*, we can see that the core is Chinese culture, that is, the pilgrimage to the West; Toriyama then combined it with Hong Kong Kung-fu movies and elements of European and American cultures, including Hollywood movies and science fiction. Consequently, in the second part Toriyama uses non-Japanese stereotypes such as robots, cowboys and native Americans, combining them with elements of Japanese and Chinese cultures such as ninja and kung-fu warriors. This is why Toriyama's *JtW* is an excellent example of how

¹⁹ Toriyama admits to having been influenced, during his formation, by several manga and to having been a fan of special effects films and series with costumed superheroes, where characters change their bodies into more powerful warriors and use superpowers to defeat enemies. Western cinema also influenced his mind, and he loved watching movies like *The Terminator* (1984) and superhero films such as the iconic *Superman* (1978). Toriyama made his debut in 1978 with *Wandā Airando (Wonder Island)* and began to gain popularity in 1980 with *Dokutā Suranpu (Dr Slump)*. Unlike *Poetic notes, Opera*, and *JtW*, fortunately, we have a large amount of information on Toriyama's life. On this topic, reliable studies are conducted by the author of *The Dao of Dragon Ball* website and book series Derek Padula (in particular, 2014: 3-40) or also Mazzola (2014) which offer a careful reconstruction of the artist's life, career, and interests.

intertextuality allowed Japanese mangaka to build a world from original elements of Asian cultures, while still catering to many other cultural references, Asian and beyond Asia.

As a *pastiche*-like work, defining *DB* in terms of narrative genres is not that easy.²⁰ Although the element of play in the imitative translations of a masterwork from Chinese into Japanese can be seen as “the shift from a high-brow (the novel) to a low-brow medium (manga)” (Chan, 2020: 196), Toriyama has inadvertently incorporated five thousand years of Chinese culture into his story by using *JtW* as *DB*'s model. Compared with the 2500-page long work written in Chinese hundreds of years ago, *DB* is aimed at children and is easier to accept and understand. In his *JtW*, Toriyama seems to have emulated the Chinese writer's choice: as we can see, more than four hundred years ago, the alleged author Wu Cheng'en wrote *JtW* for ordinary people rather than for the elites. He could have written in a scholarly style since he was an educated person, but he chose to use the vernacular style. In a sense, it was also Dante Alighieri's choice: he wrote his *Divina Commedia* in the low and 'vulgar' Italian language and not in Latin as one might have expected for such a serious topic. Although in Toriyama's *JtW* the focus is away from religious²¹ and moral contents and toward humour,²² *DB* still possesses *JtW*'s flavour, but at the same time, it is still original and accessible. However many other folkloric references are present in it, connected to religion and folktales (Mínguez-López, 2014).

DB's franchise may now be more popular than ever. However, it is almost hard to estimate the age of franchising and how we are now letting people in their 30s to 40s enjoy its various forms of anime, manga, or video games, as well as children. This is visible in a video-trailer of one of the latest games based on the *DB* franchise, *Dragon Ball Z: Kakarot*. It is an action RPG (role-playing game) developed by Cyberconnect2 released in January 2020 by Bandai Namco Entertainment. The clip opens with a businessman in his 30s who

²⁰ Padula decided to break the mould and define *DB* as its own genre or, more unconventionally, a 'fusion' (2016: 276).

²¹ However, it should be noted that just like its narrative antecedents, *DB* also inherits the combination of gods and demons. In particular, we denote some references to religious personalities: in *DB* the figure of God appears; in *DBZ* Great King Enma seems to be based on Buddhist deity Yama, and Uub is a human reincarnation of Majin Bu; in *DBS* Toriyama provides an exhaustive pantheon and Son Gokū himself gets God *ki*.

²² As pointed out by Mínguez-López (2014), in *DB* religion is constantly being attenuated to create humorous scenes, but the most important thing is to make an impression that we can find amusing. One of the first examples is found in chapter 20: after the appearance of the solemn divine dragon, Oolong wishes for “a girl's pair of panties”.

remembers his love for the franchise. He is going back home from work when he comes across two boys chasing each other; one of them screams: "I'm a Super Saiyan!". He comes back home, unpacks his console video game *Dragon Ball Z: Kakarot*, and starts to play. The game reminds him of his childhood, the times he used to watch the opening theme of *DB*, every time he used to emulate Gokū's hairstyle or try to shoot a *Kamehameha* or talk about the last episode with his friends, that time he was shocked when he realised that Gokū had died, or when he used to run and buy the latest issue of *Weekly Shōnen Jump*. He used to control his *ki*, he used to try to use special powers, or the way he felt was as if he was getting stronger when using *Kaio-ken*. He then makes the player, Son Gokū, prepare a *Kamehameha*, and simultaneously he recites the same 'formula'. The clip ends with the statement: "We are all... Son Gokū!" (Multiplayer.it, 2019).

In a video-interview with Toyotaro (1978–), the mangaka chosen by Toriyama as his successor and illustrator of *DBS*, when asked, "Will we find the values of *DB* in *DBS*?", the artist replied that according to him, Toriyama did not create this work to convey values, he wanted to create an exciting, enjoyable, and funny story for everyone. Finding messages in this work is definitely something that comes from yourself; it was not Toriyama who wanted them. Obviously, friendship and family are mentioned in the work, but it was not what Toriyama wanted to propose; he just needed these elements to make the story interesting (Gexad, 2017: timecode 1:35-2:25). *DB* has inspired millions of people to strive to achieve their goals. A striking reference of this comes from Padula's (2015) contribution: since the 30th anniversary of the series, the author has collected the stories of eighty-one fans from twenty-four countries whose life stories prove that *DB* is a life-changing series and made the world a better place through its 'teachings'. Examples of these life-changing quotations are that *DB* "teaches me to believe in myself, to tap into my potential, and to endure" (Padula, 2015: 33), that it "teaches me that I am worth something. That I'm good; that I can be big, strong, and help others; that it's possible to do great things in life, so long as you endure" (37), that it "teaches me that I have to persevere and work hard at my dreams" (58), and thus forth. *DB* brings joy because the plot is charismatic; fans do not want *DB* to end, because it would mean the end of their childhood and the cultural roots they experienced with Son Gokū and his friends (Padula 2014: XIV); *DB* has become an influential element in our lives, just as the Italian *mangaka* Domenico Guastafierro (alias Cavernadiplatone) observes: "Dragon Ball has entered by force in everyday speaking, we often 'shoot a Kamehameha' while chatting" (Cavallaro, 2015: 127).

Comparing ‘the old’ and ‘the new’ – What do they share?

We would like here to reiterate that the names Sun Wukong 孙悟空 and Son Gokū 孫悟空 are just different pronunciations of the same name and that they are the exact same figure appearing in different texts. Since this study refers to the concept of intertextuality, we should not confine the understanding of intertextual in written texts alone but also in animation “as a nodal point of intersection for image, discourse, and history” (MacDonald, 2015: 206) and just like Bounthavy Suvilay (2021) did, attempt to “understand the evolution of fiction in the transmedia regime” (8).

Almost each chapter in the ‘Shidetang’ edition contains two-page illustrations that summarize what happens in the concerned chapter, for a total of 197 images. In his first appearance, Monkey King is represented as a normal monkey with a very small tail; his body seems slender and lacking in muscles (fig. 15).



Fig. 15. Sun Wukong’s first appearance in *JtW*’s ‘Shidetang’ edition. **Source:** Wu, 1994: 4.

As the story goes on, the narrative offers precious illustrations on the hero’s growth and formation. Visually speaking, *JtW*’s author would aim to give an ugly image of Sun Wukong. As for his facial features, he has a sharpened face, with deep-set eyes, nasal protrusion, small ears, and ‘thunder-god’ mouth. This last attribute can be seen mainly from the comments of frightened people and monsters within the chapters referring to him as ‘thunder-god’ (*leigong* 雷公)²³ because of his mouth’s shape and thundering

²³ In this regard, it should be noted that *JtW* belongs to the genre of gods and demons, but it should be observed that in Chinese culture there is no clear distinction between benign and malignant entities,

voice. It should also be said that the Ming novelist was also undoubtedly influenced by descriptions of pre-Ming sources that already bore the name of Hou Xingzhe. Among these, it is helpful to quote a line from a poem contained in a group of three entitled ‘Holding my Mirror’ (*Lanjing* 揽镜) by the Song Dynasty poet Liu Kezhuang (1187-1269), in which we read “Face as ugly as the monkey-disciple” (Mair, 1989: 691). He has humanoid appearance and, according to what he says in chapter 1, he has no *xing* 性, which means that he has no ‘nature’ or no ‘gender’.

The images in the work present more than sufficient representations of the figure of the Monkey King, but there are two major discrepancies. In chapter 14, Sun Wukong is tricked into putting the magical circlet on, however, in most representations it does not appear on his head (it always appears in the Japanese edition, figure 4). Another difference is related to his footwear: in some representations he wears boots, in others he wears traditional martial arts slippers (see fig. 16).



Fig. 16. Sun Wukong wearing martial arts slipper in *JtW*'s 'Shidetang' edition. **Source:** Wu, 1994: 1289.

After the good response from Toriyama's editor Torishima Kezuhiko on *Dr Slump* (Toriyama, 1995: 'Shenlong Times'), the mangaka started to sketch a boy as the protagonist for his new manga. Toriyama's first draft of Son Gokū's appearance was just very close to Sun Wukong (fig.

such as *shen*, *xian* 仙, *yao* 妖, *mo*, *gui* 鬼, *guai* 怪. In fact, at the beginning of the novel Monkey King's behaviour is described as having a *demonic nature*, although at the end of the story he ascends to Buddhahood, becoming the Victorious Fighting Buddha.

17), but due to his wife's criticisms he made a second draft: this time his manga's leading character was closer to his final look (figure 18) (Toriyama Akira Hozonkai, 1984: n.p.).

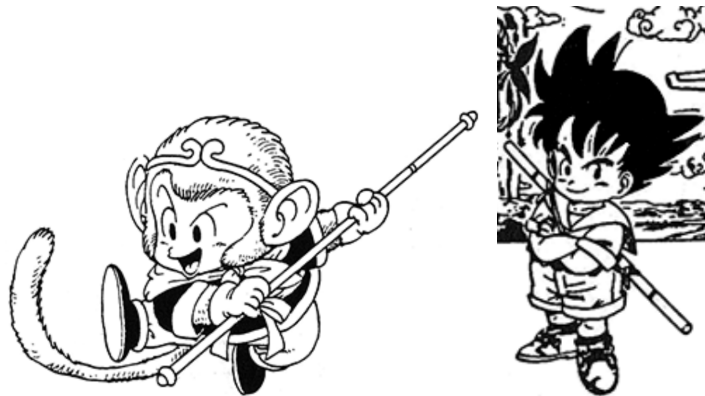


Fig. 17 & 18. (Left) Toriyama's first draft of Son Gokū (Toriyama Akira Hozonkai, 1984).
(Right) Toriyama's second draft of Son Gokū (Toriyama Akira Hozonkai, 1984).

As for his facial features, Son Gokū has big eyes, eyebrows, ears, and mouth. His hair is voluminous and pointed, diverging in different directions, and there are a few strands on his forehead. In chapter 1 of *DB*, he looks like a child with a sunny disposition, wearing a bluish suit, a belt, wristbands, and martial arts slippers. An eye-catching feature is the presence of a long tail.



Fig. 19. Son Gokū's first appearance, from the manga *Dragon Ball* chapter 1. **Source:** <https://ww3.dragonballread.com/manga/dragon-ball-chapter-1-online-read>.

When comparing 'the old' to 'the new' we can say that, like in many Japanese manga and anime, Song Gokū's eyes and ears are bigger than those of his Chinese counterparts; his appearance is still marked by a 'Chineseness' in his clothing: they are representative of the Chinese Ming and Qing dynasties, his footwear is martial arts slippers just like Sun Wukong's. Sun Wukong's brutal personality needs to be promptly controlled by monk

Tripitaka through the magical circlet; Son Gokū's personality is quite boyish and naive; however, we need to trace back to the time he was very aggressive till he fell off a cliff and hit his head, losing his memory, with the result that "his violent nature disappeared, and he became a good little boy" (*Dragon Ball* chapter 197). Sun Wukong has no sex, and can be identified as an androgynous figure; on the other hand, *DB* shows a male Son Gokū. Sun Wukong tends to be portrayed as a human being; Son Gokū tends to be portrayed as a semi-simian being. The latter has lost all monkey attributes, except for his tail and his Ōzaru form, which turns him into a giant monkey.

Conclusion

The literature review and the case studies have pointed to the existence of a recurrent 'meta-pilgrimage': a pilgrimage in another pilgrimage. The concept is centred on the pilgrimage itself as the object of the work, which can be traced in the fictional pilgrimages that follow the historical pilgrimage of Tripitaka. As shown during the historical pilgrimage, the monk Tripitaka makes a pilgrimage to India managing to bring a certain amount of sutras to be translated. This myth was exaggerated over the centuries with the addition of fantastic elements until it came to the first pilgrimage fiction, *Poetic notes*. Here, alongside Tripitaka, we have the presence of Hou Xingzhe who accompanies the Master from China to India to acquire the sutras. The work was found in a Kyōto temple, and thanks to Chinese scholar Luo Zhenyu the text returned to China. This is a case of 'meta-pilgrimage': the Chinese text 'pilgrims' to Japan and then 'makes a pilgrimage back' to China. Therefore, the *Poetic notes* had a 'literary stop' in India and a 'geographical stop' in Japan. The same happens for *Opera*: Sun Xingzhe escorted Tripitaka from China and acquired sutras in India. The work was found in Japanese territory, and it was only thanks to Japanese scholar On Shionoya that the text managed to reach China. Therefore, even in this case, we can see the presence of a meta-pilgrimage: the Chinese text pilgrims to Japan and then makes a pilgrimage back to China. The *Opera* had a literary stop in India and a geographical stop in Japan. Unfortunately, we do not know how and when *Poetic notes* and *Opera* arrived in Japan.

In the Ming 'Shidetang' edition, *JtW*'s earliest edition, the group guided by Tripitaka and Sun Wukong as the main character engages in a pilgrimage that will take them to India to acquire the Buddhist scriptures. The four reproductions of this edition were all found in Japan during the last century. However, the laborious work of translation

shows that the reproductions was already circulated in Japan during the Edo period, encouraging the novel's translation between the 18th and 19th centuries. Similarly to the *Poetic notes*, the 'pilgrimage' of the Ming novel too had a literary stop in India and a geographical stop in Japan: Sanzang and Sun Wukong arrived first in Japan, probably for diplomatic and economic reasons.²⁴

As for *DB*, the meta-pilgrimage is more complicated: the manga and the anime are a reinterpretation of the *JtW* and embody the pilgrimage of Son Gokū and Bulma; this represents the literary pilgrimage; as for the pilgrimage of the story, this coincides with the worldwide media distribution of the two works (the manga and the anime series and movies). Moreover, in *DB* the concept of meta-pilgrimage can also be traced to that of meta-narration (the story in the story), in which the young manga reader may imagine to be the real protagonist of the story s/he is reading, identifying her/himself with Son Gokū. As observed by Padula, "When Gokū pushes himself hard, endures suffering, and comes out the victor in a long battle, he gives you an ideal to strive for" (2014: 121). In this sense, we could assert that it is the fan who pursues a journey, more specifically, an inner spiritual journey, or, using Jean Leclercq's (1961: 51) words, a '*peregrinatio in stabilitate*'.

Case studies	Literary pilgrimages	Geographic pilgrimages
<i>Poetic notes on the pilgrimage of Tripitaka of the Great Tang to acquire the sutras</i>	China → India (sutras)	China → Japan
"Journey to the West" Opera	China → India (sutras)	China → Japan
<i>Journey to the West</i> ('Shidetang' edition)	China → India (sutras)	China → Japan
<i>Dragon Ball</i>	Japan → world (dragon balls)	Japan → world → all of us

Table 1. Literary and geographic pilgrimages of Sun Wukong, his predecessors, and Son Gokū.

²⁴ *JtW* circulated outside of Asia between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, thanks to the first translated sketches and the first paraphrases. However, the first version in English appreciated by the public came only as the abridged version published in 1942 by the sinologist Arthur David Waley (1889-1966) entitled *Monkey*.

In all four cases, we read about the religious quest: if the core of *Poetic notes* and *JtW* is the pilgrimage to acquire the scriptures that contain the Buddhist teachings capable of elevating the reader morally, in *DB* the attention is focussed on the quest to find the dragon balls, objects created by a divine entity that gives the possibility to evolve morally and in other ways the person who collects them, after pronouncing a formula to summon the dragon and expressing a wish. If we compare the ends, we can see that in *Poetic notes* Hou Xingzhe receives the title of ‘Great Saint from the Muscles of Steel and Iron Bones’ through the intercession of the Emperor Taizong in the last chapter; in *Opera*, there is no investiture ceremony; in *JtW*, Sun Wukong is nominated by Buddha ‘Victorious Fighting Buddha’; in *DB*, at the end of the 23rd Tenkaichi tournament, God offers Gokū his job, since he has the utmost confidence in Gokū. The latter replies: “Me...? Go ...? Is this a joke? No no no! I don’t want to. I’d die of boredom! I’m totally against it!” (*DB* chapter 194) and teases God. Gokū grabs Chichi’s arm and flies away on the flying nimbus. This attitude of Son Gokū may make us understand two aspects: 1) Toriyama perhaps wanted to make Gokū humbler than the old haughty Sun Wukong, and 2) maybe Gokū is not yet ready to receive a religious title, and as a result, other journeys will follow.

Due to the geographical pilgrimages, we could conjecture that pilgrimages in *Poetic notes*, *Opera*, and *JtW* have had a huge impact on Japanese culture and contributed to make Japan the epicentre of animated pilgrimages’ stories. How these Japanese imitations reveal, the cultural connection between the two Asian cultures is a fascinating issue and can lead to two brief observations. Firstly, Sino-Japanese relations must be regarded as the foundation for a ‘polytexting’ of Chinese narratives in the Japanese context, which should be a component in the interpretation of imitation strategies. Secondly, although it can be claimed that *JtW*’s internal features, such as its plot structure, enhance its ‘iterability’, it must be emphasised that such imitation is a deconstruction of a classic Chinese text (Chan 2020: 193–4). In the imitation of Japanese manga, we find the attempts of a fan subculture to “strive to stand out from the mainstream culture, employ different cultural products for their own purposes, conquer their own space” (Lehtonen 2000: 147).

One curious question we may have is, would *DB* have been possible without the ‘Shidetang’ edition from the 16th century? Would the elements contained in *Poetic notes* and *Opera* have been enough? Chronologically speaking, Japanese people first set

their hands on the integral translation of the *JtW* during the first half of the 19th century, while the *Poetic notes* and the *Opera* were found only at the beginning of the 20th century. If the Ming novel clearly exposes the birth and formation of Sun Wukong, all this is missing in the *Poetic Notes*. As for the *Opera*, it is one of the first sources to call the simian character ‘Sun Wukong’ and contains many elements existing in the Ming Dynasty literary work, particularly the characters of Zhu Bajie and Sha Heshang. Although in *Opera* there are many similarities with *JtW*, there are also some subtle and interesting differences. Moreover, it must be considered that both *Poetic Notes* and *Opera* mainly revolve around the monk Tripitaka; Wu Cheng’en’s novel is the first work that opens with a attention to the Monkey King. Assuming that the Japanese scholars and literates had never translated the *JtW* in Japanese language nor had received its four Chinese copies, it is possible to hypothesise that *Poetic notes* and *Opera* may have thoroughly influenced Japanese literature and culture at that time, thus laying the foundations for a series of adapted works without focussing on the monkey character. On the matter in question, it is also possible that *DB* would have been achievable even without the ‘Shidetang’ edition of the 16th century, but with a very different Sun Wukong.

In conclusion, the elements of *JtW* appear in constant change and recombinations so that it cannot be regarded as a single, static work, nor can it be considered as a set of variants of an original text. Although the code (textual or visual) may be familiar, their combination is unique and the story cannot be reduced to one version. This is why Wall (2019) regards *JtW* as a “network, or story universe, and the variations as equal, multifaceted variations of *The Journey*, each adding to our understanding of *The Journey* universe” (p. 2121). If we talk about a regional pilgrimage limited to Asia, with the Japanese ‘multi-textualisation’ we move to a planetary representation of the myth. Consequently, with its global reception, we move on to a decomposition-analysis of fiction to understand authenticity and, once understood, we go back to a study of fiction. The result is complementary: Sun Wukong and Son Gokū are perceived as two sides of the same coin, and among *JtW*’s adaptations *DB* is the link of the chain that allowed a better knowledge of the *JtW* and monkey character in the world.

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