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THE REBELLIOUS IMAGE OF SUN WUKONG IN “HAVOC IN HEAVEN” OF “JOURNEY TO THE WEST”

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Abstract: Wu Cheng'en's “Journey to the West” is one of the four great novels of ancient China, which has a great influence in East Asian countries including Vietnam. In its first part, it tells the story of a Monkey King, Sun Wukong, who engages in “Havoc in Heaven” and portrays a rebellious image in it. This article elaborates on the formation and significance of this image through analysis and synthesis, providing a useful reference for Vietnamese teachers and students to teach and study ancient Chinese literature.

Keywords: Sun Wukong, “Journey to the West”, rebellious image, ancient Chinese literature

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HÌNH ẢNH NỔI LOẠN CỦA TÔN NGỘ KHÔNG TRONG “ĐẠI NÁO THIÊN CUNG” CỦA “TÂY DU KÝ”

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Tóm tắt: “Tây Du Ký” của Ngô Thừa Ân là một trong bốn tiểu thuyết kinh điển của Trung Quốc cổ đại, có ảnh hưởng lớn đến các quốc gia Đông Á, trong đó có Việt Nam. Phần đầu tiên của “Tây Du Ký” kể về vua khi Tôn Ngộ Không với một hình ảnh nổi loạn trong “Đại náo thiên cung”. Bài viết này trình bày sự hình thành và ý nghĩa của hình ảnh nổi loạn này thông qua phương pháp phân tích và tổng hợp, qua đó cung cấp một tài liệu tham khảo hữu ích cho giảng viên và sinh viên Việt Nam khi giảng dạy và nghiên cứu về văn học cổ Trung Quốc.

Từ khóa: Tôn Ngộ Không, “Tây Du Ký”, hình ảnh nổi loạn, văn học cổ đại Trung Quốc

1. Introduction

Wu Cheng'en (吴承恩)'s "*Journey to the West*" (西游记) is one of “the four ancient Chinese novels”, which has a strong influence in East Asia, including Vietnam, and even the world. Among them, the first seven chapters of this novel serve as a relatively independent part, telling the story of Monkey King, *Sun Wukong* (孙悟空), who engages in "Havoc in heaven". Among them, *Sun Wukong* is portrayed as a "Byronic hero", specifically a hero image that emphasizes rebellion against reality (Wang, 2015, p. 299). Obviously, this contradicts the conclusion that "comedy is more developed and distinctive than tragedy in Chinese literature" (Hanan, 1981). This also attracts people to explore this unique image.

In traditional literary interpretation, the main theme of “*Journey to the West*” and the interpretation of *Sun Wukong*'s character images change with different perspectives. Ancient Chinese interpreters interpreted “*Journey to the West*” as “a book that explores human nature”, with the main theme of “exploring Zen and Taoist thought” (Wu, 2002, p. 317). Therefore, traditional interpretations of the image of *Sun Wukong* regard it as the "inner spirit, consciousness, and thinking" (心之神) (Chen, 2002, p. 225-226). This interpretation has always been the mainstream view, until the transformation of modern Chinese literary concepts and the translation of the entire novel into other languages led to an increase in research in other countries, thereby diversifying related interpretations. Among them, there are three most typical statements: The first viewpoint views *Sun Wukong* as a symbol of guiding and leading to "another world"; The second viewpoint holds that *Sun Wukong* is the romanticism incarnation of the civic ideal of resisting feudal society; The third viewpoint holds that *Sun Wukong* is a representative of those who pursue life values such as "freedom and equality" (Chūbachi, 1983; Zhu, 1978; Zhou, 1997). It is worth noting that the diversity of these interpretations largely stems from the diversity of the text in “*Journey to the West*”. “The extreme fantasy of its events and the extreme secrecy of its meaning” in the text of “*Journey to the West*” often leads readers to have a characteristic of “understanding those wonderful truths that can only be understood with the soul and cannot be conveyed through language” - this also makes the interpretation related to the reader's own knowledge background (Zhang, 2002; Liu, 2002). A feasible

approach to this is to regress to the text itself and seamlessly integrate the explanatory perspective into the intended meaning of the text - this can effectively avoid subjectivity in interpretation. This approach is also referred to by sinologist Glen Dudbridge (2005) as the "internal identification of stories" in Chinese classical novels.

This article follows this approach, which is the analysis of the text. In addition, some inspiring literature was combined and these ideas were integrated on this basis. Especially when there are multiple prototypes of the image of *Sun Wukong*, it is necessary to examine various cultural texts (Dudbridge, 1970). This article explores the rebellious image of *Sun Wukong* in "*Journey to the West*" through these methods, especially exploring how this image is portrayed and the meanings it carries. These discussions will provide reference for Vietnamese teachers and students to teach ancient Chinese literature.

2. Background

Wu Cheng'en's "Journey to the West" was written during the *Wanli* (萬曆) period of the Ming Dynasty. It is a comprehensive work on "the literary creation of the past *Xuanzang's* study abroad in India and taking away Buddhist classics", and it is also a peak. Unlike previous literary creations, it provides a more complete plot, more distinctive language, and more realistic meaning. Moreover, the protagonist of the entire novel is no longer *Xuanzang* (玄奘), but *Sun Wukong*.

Wu Cheng'en designed *Sun Wukong* as a monkey demon, but its image combines both monkey and human characteristics, especially in terms of appearance. "Monkey" has multiple meanings in ancient Chinese culture, such as sensitivity, intelligence, auspiciousness, and wealth. Among them, wealth and status are due to its pronunciation in Chinese being the same as "marquis". At the same time as the book "*Journey to the West*" was written, Chinese novels and dramas were popular with the image of the "righteous monkey" who had the quality of repaying kindness. This design not only contains various cultural metaphors, but also endows this character with richer and more complex symbolism - for example, this character retains the instincts and impulses of monkeys, but also possesses human intelligence and abilities, which gives it a duality of wildness and civilization. In addition, the most primitive image of *Sun Wukong* is related to Buddhist literature and folk mythology, such as the macaque who offered honey to the Buddha in "*Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*" (大唐西域記) and *Sun Wukong* who used skin drums to spread knowledge in Qiang (羌) mythology - this means that the image of *Sun Wukong* contains Buddhist symbolic meanings represented by "*Buddha's previous life tale*" (Jātaka, 本生經) records and certain folk mythological meanings (Xuanzang, 2005, pp. 75-76; Graham, 1958, p. 42).

The first seven chapters of "*Journey to the West*" tell the story of *Sun Wukong's* "Havoc in Heaven", even though a large part of it seems unrelated to "Havoc in Heaven" - in fact, they are actually strongly related to "Havoc in Heaven". For example, *Sun Wukong's* birth plot showcases the extraordinary identity of this character and suggests that unusual events will occur in the future, that is, "Havoc in Heaven". This section is relatively independent, and the rebellious image of *Sun Wukong* in this section is in sharp contrast to the image of obedience in the later "*Journey to the West to Obtain Buddhist Classics*", which makes the rebellious image of *Sun Wukong* in this section a very noteworthy research subject.

3. Expression of Rebellious Images

3.1. *The Rebellious Image in Rebellion*

In fact, the essence of the entire "Havoc in Heaven" section is the struggle between *Sun Wukong* and the Heavenly Court, and in this struggle, *Sun Wukong's* rebellious image is shaped.

The most superficial character portrayal is the rebellion against the "Heavenly Court" (天庭) and the damage caused to it. For example, *Wu Cheng'en's* positive description of "Havoc in Heaven" reads: "... The Monkey King (*Sun Wukong*) swung an iron rod and struck and destroyed it in any direction, all the way to the place where the Jade Emperor lived and worked." (Wu, 1987, p. 45). In the later memories of "Monk Sha" (沙僧), *Wu Cheng'en* designed a line that used a side profile description to illustrate how terrifying this rebellion was for the Heavenly Court: "He (*Sun Wukong*) once 'Havoc in Heaven', waving a golden cudgel. Among the 100,000 Heavenly Soldiers, none were his opponents. This rebellion frightened the *Taishang laojun* and the Jade Emperor." (Wu, 1987, p. 481). One piece of evidence can reflect the Heavenly Court's fear of *Sun Wukong's* "Havoc in Heaven" - after *Sun Wukong* was defeated by the Tathagata (如来), he endured the imprisonment and punishment of "eating iron pills when hungry, drinking copper juice when thirsty. From the past to the present, he was both cold and hungry, without death" (Wu, 1987, p. 98). These descriptions portray *Sun Wukong* as a rebellious character.

In addition, *Wu Cheng'en's* portrayal of *Sun Wukong's* rebellious image is not limited to what was previously mentioned, but also includes *Sun Wukong's* attitude towards the Heavenly Court and the spirit of struggle embodied therein. *Sun Wukong's* attitude towards the Heavenly Court (the authority of the world) is fearless, dissatisfied, and angry. This is perfectly reflected in his statement to *Yanwang*, "Done deal! Done deal! This time, it's out of your hands!" (Wu, 1987, p. 21). After being arrested by the "Erlang Shen" (二郎神), *Sun Wukong* continued to resist and persevere while being punished, attempting to fight his own rebellious behavior to the end and repeatedly mocking the executioners in the Heavenly Court. This also means that there is a spirit of struggle in his resistance to the Heavenly Court, which runs through his fearlessness, dissatisfaction, and anger towards the Heavenly Court.

3.2. *Motivation for Resistance Behavior*

The author of "Journey to the West" reveals the motives behind *Sun Wukong's* "Havoc in Heaven", which actually largely shapes *Sun Wukong's* rebellious image.

The most direct motivation for *Sun Wukong's* "Havoc in Heaven" was his dissatisfaction with the official positions (mainly the size) granted by the Heavenly Court. *Sun Wukong* was granted official positions by the Heavenly Court twice, the first being the "official who raised the horses of the Heavenly Court" (弼马温), and the second being the "great sage equal to the heavens" (齐天大圣). But *Sun Wukong* was dissatisfied with both of the official positions awarded. This is already reflected in the title of Chapter 4, "(*Sun Wukong*) still dissatisfied with being granted the position of 'official who raised the horses of the Heavenly Court', and still cannot obtain peace even after being registered as 'great sage equal to the gods'". Especially for the first time being awarded as a "official who raised the horses of the Heavenly Court", the fact that the official position was so small that it did "not enter the ranking of official ranks" made *Sun Wukong* very dissatisfied with this - which also led to *Zhu Bajie* (猪八戒) frequently using this official position to mock, ridicule, and anger *Sun Wukong* in the subsequent "Journey to the West to Obtain Buddhist Classics" process.

The most direct reason why *Sun Wukong* hopes to obtain an official position in the Heavenly Court is that he hopes to obtain "eternal life". This is actually why he initially chose to go elsewhere to learn how to cultivate himself - he once said, "Learn to 'eternal life' to avoid death." (Wu, 1987, p. 4). But his way of obtaining 'eternal life' seems to be unrecognized by the heavens. After a banquet, *Sun Wukong* was taken to the underworld, and the ghost in charge of soul seduction gave the reason that "your life should end today. The two of us lead the approval to seduce your soul." (Wu, 1987, p. 20). For *Sun Wukong*, this is naturally unacceptable - it is also the most primitive reason for his aversion to the Heavenly Court.

It is worth noting that *Sun Wukong's* persistence in "eternal life" is essentially a pursuit of freedom - a freedom to escape the cycle created by the order of life and death, as well as the freedom to pursue self-worth. For *Sun Wukong*, this is an absolute freedom, more precisely, it is the freedom to live freely after breaking free from the cycle of life and death - this is also the self-worth he pursues. This pursuit of self-worth creates an irreconcilable conflict with the restrictive order symbolized by the Heavenly Court. That is to say, the essence of "Havoc in Heaven" is the contradiction between two values, namely whether to "follow - rebel" the order due to freedom (Cui, 2008). For *Sun Wukong*, breaking free from the cycle of life and death, he could continue to maintain his life of "walking and jumping, eating plants, drinking spring water, collecting flowers in the mountains, and searching for fruit from trees. teamed up with wolves and insects, tigers and leopards, made friends with deer, and became relatives with macaques and apes. lived under rocky cliffs at night and visited peaks and caves in the morning." (Wu, 1987, p. 2). The depiction of this kind of life is very similar to the traditional Chinese concept of "carefree". Before overseeing the "Peach Garden" (蟠桃园), *Sun Wukong* also lived a similar life in the sky. *Wu Cheng'en* describes it:

The home of "great sage equal to the gods" with personnel from two institutions serving as attendants. (*Sun Wukong*) only knows how to eat three meals a day, sleep in the same bed at night, and live a carefree life. During this free time, (*Sun Wukong*) meets friends, visits palaces, makes friends, and builds friendships. When they see Sanqing, they call them "elders", and when they meet four emperors, they call them "Your Majesty". Be brothers with nine bright stars, five generals, twenty-eight constellations, four heavenly kings, twelve heavenly masters, five elders, all celestial stars, and the river god, and call each other by their names. They are going east today and west tomorrow, their movements are unpredictable. (Wu, 1987, p. 30)

In addition, the defense of self-dignity was also a motivation for *Sun Wukong* to engage in "Havoc in Heaven". As mentioned earlier, the size of an official position essentially represents the Heavenly Court's view on its abilities, especially in the context of Chinese culture emphasizing that "name and strength match". For *Sun Wukong*, the mistake made by the Heavenly Court in granting him official positions was a disrespect, contempt, and misjudgment of his strength. For example, when *Sun Wukong* learned about the size of the "official who raised the horses of the Heavenly Court", he said, "(The Jade Emperor) despises me so much! I am in *Huaguoshan*, known as the Great King and Ancestor. How could I be deceived into raising horses for him? The people who raise horses are all ordinary people and have lowly jobs. How could they treat me like this? I won't do this official anymore! I won't do this official anymore! I will leave!" (Wu, 1987, p. 25). For the Heavenly Court, *Sun Wukong* is just a life ruled by him - in the absolute dominance relationship considered by the Heavenly Court, *Sun Wukong*, like other ordinary lives, is in a lowly position. When the *Sun Wukong* was born, his attitude towards this was "the following creatures are produced by the essence of the world, which is not surprising" (Wu, 1987, p. 2). Even if *Sun Wukong* was granted an official position by the Heavenly Court, it was out of "granting him an official position, giving him a name, and binding him in heaven. If he obeys the Heavenly Court's orders, he will be promoted and

rewarded later. If he violates the Heavenly Court's orders, he can be arrested here directly." (Wu, 1987, p. 22). In *Sun Wukong's* view, the Heavenly Court and its system regarding talents are "disrespectful" - *Sun Wukong's* understanding is correct, because *Erlang Shen*, who was able to capture him in the end, was only a "mortal sacrifice" rather than a celestial offering. The rebellion against the Heavenly Court and its talent system became his way to awaken and maintain his own dignity - by proving through struggle that the Heavenly Court's attitude towards him was wrong, thus proving his extraordinary abilities. Here is evidence that after he learned of the lowliness of the "official who raised the horses of the Heavenly Court" and left, a monkey suggested that he self-proclaimed his official position. The monkey said, "King, why do you have such abilities to raise horses for him? Why not do 'great sage equal to the gods'? What's not allowed?" (Wu, 1987, p. 25). For the Heavenly Court, "Havoc in Heaven" is also a negation of its talent system, at least to a large extent subverting the understanding of the rulers of the Heavenly Court. For example, *Juling Shen* (巨灵神) once lamented, "The official who raised the horses of the Heavenly Court has great abilities! After being defeated by him, I came to apologize." (Wu, 1987, p. 27). The Jade Emperor, on the other hand, said with a questioning attitude, "What is the ability and means of this monkey demon to defeat 100,000 Heavenly Soldiers!" (Wu, 1987, p. 39).

The aforementioned motivations reveal the deeper reasons behind *Sun Wukong's* "Havoc in Heaven". More precisely, the entire behavior of "Havoc in Heaven" is no longer a simple rebellion, but a concentrated expression of *Sun Wukong's* personality, strength, and pursuit of certain values (such as freedom and dignity) as a rebel. It is no longer just a rebellion against the authority of the Heavenly Court, but more of a pursuit of self-identity and a longing for a more reasonable world. And *Sun Wukong's* rebellious image has also been enriched by the revelation of these motives. *Sun Wukong's* rebellion is a manifestation of independence and unwillingness to be mediocre, a manifestation of the spirit of resistance for justice and fairness (such as the desire for Heavenly Court to truly affirm talents), and a pursuit of individual liberation, faith, and ideals.

3.3. Supplement: Description of Personality

The character image of *Sun Wukong* is very complex, which makes it not only have a rebellious side, but other aspects of his character image are closely related to the rebellious image. The other aspects of these images are expressed by *Wu Cheng'en* in the form of personality descriptions.

A very typical characteristic of *Sun Wukong's* personality is his aversion to constraints. This personality is actually a manifestation of Arthur Schopenhauer's instinct for the survival and reproduction of the will to self-life. In addition to the description of his love for life mentioned earlier, it seems that he also chooses not to comply with all authorities and existing rules (including etiquette). When facing the "Dragon King" (龙王) in charge of the ocean, *Sun Wukong* said, "I am *Sun Wukong*, a natural saint of *Huaguoshan* and a close neighbor of the Dragon King. Why don't you know me?" (Wu, 1987, p. 17). Another piece of evidence is that when *Sun Wukong* first met the Jade Emperor, who ruled the world, he did not make ceremonial visits. At that time, the officials of the Heavenly Court were very frightened and said, "This wild monkey! Why didn't he pay homage to the Jade Emperor and dare to answer here, 'I am!' Damn it! Damn it!" (Wu, 1987, p. 24). This personality makes *Sun Wukong* not interested in things unrelated to his will to life. *Wu Cheng'en* once commented, "Speaking of 'great sage equal to the gods', it is a monster who does not know the official position, title, rank, and affiliation, nor does it care about the salary, as long as there is a name on the list of officials!"

(Wu, 1987, p. 30). Therefore, *Sun Wukong's* rebellious image is merely an extension of his aversion to constraints, and also an instinctive act of survival and reproduction of his own life will. If viewed from this perspective, *Sun Wukong's* rebellious image is actually driven by his instincts.

Another noteworthy personality is mischievous. The formation of this personality is not only related to *Sun Wukong's* own monkey characteristics, but also to his upbringing environment - *Sun Wukong* is surrounded by monkeys, which strengthens his mischievous nature. For example, a monkey beside him once said, "If the king's eldest surname is *Sun*, then we will be the second surname *Sun*, the third surname *Sun*, the youngest surname *Sun*, and the youngest surname *Sun* - a family with all surnames *Sun*, a country with all surnames *Sun*, and a nest with all surnames *Sun*." (Wu, 1987, p. 15). This kind of humorous and witty language can only be spoken by characters with mischievous characteristics. *Sun Wukong* also clearly has a similar personality. In the *Doushuai gong* (兜率宫), he said, "While *Taishang Laojun* is not around, I will eat some of his elixirs, which often have fresh flavors." (Wu, 1987, p. 33). This personality led *Sun Wukong* to choose different ways to express his emotions and demands, that is, to choose to engage in "Havoc in Heaven" as a rebel.

4. The Significance of Image

In the previous section, *Sun Wukong's* rebellious image in "Havoc in Heaven" was extensively explored. Journey to the West is mainly set against the backdrop of Buddhism, and in cultures that are based on Buddhism, any image carries its symbolic meaning.¹ So, what is the significance of this image? Here, we can explore the main themes of "*Journey to the West*" from two perspectives, namely the sharp satire on society and the fable on life (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023).

One obvious meaning is its social reality. The Heavenly Court in "*Journey to the West*" is actually a metaphor for the ancient Chinese government. The derogatory term used by the Heavenly Court to refer to *Sun Wukong* as a rebel, also known as "Monster Monkey," is consistent with the derogatory term used by ancient Chinese governments to refer to rebels, such as "Dao zhe," (盜跖) which is a discriminatory term combined with certain characteristics of the rebels. In addition, after the historical event of "Factional Struggles between Niu and Li Parties", the image of monkeys in Chinese culture has taken on the meaning of "causing trouble to the court" (Li, 2005). *Wu Cheng'en's* portrayal of *Sun Wukong* as a rebellious figure with noble character is largely a subversion of the ethics advocated by the rulers at that time. The Heavenly Court is portrayed by *Wu Cheng'en* as a corrupt government, for example, after suppressing *Sun Wukong*, *Wu Cheng'en* describes the "Antian Dahui" (安天大会) as follows:

The peach banquet was disrupted by monkeys, while *Antian dahui* was far superior to the peach banquet. In the gentle and auspicious light, there are flags and carriages of nobles and nobles, and in the auspicious atmosphere, there are artifacts and banners. With beautiful music and singing, accompanied by beautiful lyrics, singing loudly amidst exquisite instruments. The fragrance enveloped a group of gathered

¹ The symbols in Buddhism are the material objects represented by karmic activities at the external level and the psychological experience of the highest understanding of the essence of all existence, see (Choskyi, 1988). For example, the monkey symbol symbolizes "auspiciousness" and the understanding of auspiciousness in Buddhist culture, which means avoiding disasters. such as the amulet named Yantra Diagram in Tibet, and the integral part of Mthin, is a concrete expression of this meaning and understanding. The monkey images in Vietnamese culture also follow this path, including monkey statues reflecting the relationship between language and ritual in Buddhism and depicting Vinitarucci's sublime meditation techniques as images, see (TTXVN, 2016; Ban Nghiên cứu Văn hóa, 2024).

immortals, and the entire universe seemed peaceful to celebrate their wisdom (Wu, 1987, p. 48).

Sun Wukong's rebellious image in "Havoc in Heaven" is not only a rebellion against the Heavenly Court, but also an attempt to establish a new Heavenly Court and its order - this is a metaphor for the rebellion in ancient China. Sun Wukong said:

Although he (the Jade Emperor) has been practicing for many years, he should not occupy a position for so long. They all say, 'The emperor takes turns and will come to my house next year.' (You) just let him move out of the Heavenly Court and give it to me. If not, I will definitely continue to rebel and (let the Heavenly Court not obtain) eternal peace (Wu, 1987, p. 46).

In addition, *Sun Wukong* attempted to construct an order that truly determined its position based on its strength. He said, "The place where the Jade Emperor lived and worked cannot be given to others for too long. In the past, emperors in the human world had different inheritances. The supremacy of the strong should be given to me, and only in this way can heroes be willing to compete first." (Wu, 1987, p. 46)

It is not easy to detect that Sun Wukong's rebellious image is an anti-identity construction of the monkey image in Buddhist literature, which also hides the attitude of Confucian intellectuals represented by the author towards the ancient Chinese government. On the one hand, Sun Wukong's rebellious image is a departure from the traditional monkey image in Buddhist literature. The monkey image in Buddhist literary tradition, represented by the 129th fable in "*The Dispute Story*" (Garahita-jātaka, 諍訟譬喻經), symbolizes the special status bestowed upon bodhisattvas by kings and the lovable emotions of rulers, which is opposite to the relationship between Sun Wukong and Jade Emperor in "Havoc in Heaven". Moreover, Sun Wukong's leading role in the narrative is in sharp contrast to the memory of supporting role in the Buddhist art tradition represented by Kizil Grottoes (Zhu, 2012); On the other hand, Sun Wukong's rebellious image also follows the spiritual connotation of the monkey image in the Buddhist literary tradition. For example, Sun Wukong led the monkey's rebellion and attack on Heaven, following the virtue of the monkey playing the role of a beloved leader in the 407th story of "*Commentary of Jātaka*" (Jātakatthakathā, 本生經注) and the human king placing the needs of the people above his own in the 27th story of "*Wreath of the Bodhisattva's Past Lives*" (Jātakamālā, 菩薩本生鬘論). For example, Sun Wukong is not afraid of Heaven's judgment and punishment, and follows the image of self-sacrifice in the 56th story of the "*Six paramitas*" (Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra, 六度集經). This anti-identity construction and the reflected attitude towards the ancient Chinese government lead to another viewpoint discussed later.

Another perspective is actually to view "*Journey to the West*" including "Havoc in Heaven" as a fable, so *Sun Wukong's* rebellious image during "Havoc in Heaven" is actually a metaphor for childhood rebellion. Interpreters in ancient China tended to explore this from the perspective of personal cultivation, namely "the clarity of the mind and the manifestation of nature" (明心見性). This concept is reflected in the mockery of "common sense" based on nature, and is rooted in the playful meaning of monkey images in Chinese culture - this is reflected in Liezi's (列子) fable of 'morning three and evening four' (朝三暮四) and Shiji's (史記) metaphor of 'a monkey dressed up in a human's clothes' (沐猴而冠). In '*Journey to the West*', 'play monkey' is used as a unique expression of this concept: "Teach him to jump through hoops, perform acrobatics, do somersaults, and stand on his hands like a dragonfly. In the streets, he plays with all sorts of tricks, beating drums and ringing gongs, doing everything imaginable." (Wu, 1987, p. 296). The ancient Chinese scholar Li Zhi (李贄) once used "Tongxin shuo" (童心說) to analyze the image of *Sun Wukong*, especially his "cursing Buddha

and ancestors" (呵佛罵祖) behavior, and regarded it as a category of life - this also follows the analytical path of "the claim of the mind and the manifestation of nature". This kind of exploration is obviously reasonable - *Sun Wukong's* name itself has a philosophical meaning about life, that is, "When the world was just founded, there was no surname. To break this stubborn emptiness, one must be able to awaken to a realm beyond material things." (Wu, 1987, p. 8). Similarly, in Buddhist literature such as the no. 12 story in "*Storehouse of Sundry Valuables*" (Sajyukta ratna pitaka sūtra, 雜寶藏經) enlightened individuals are referred to as "kind macaques". The title of the first chapter about the birth of *Sun Wukong* is "Natural talent nurtures a source, and only through the cultivation of the mind can the Tao be born", which further confirms the rationality of this exploration. *Sun Wukong* has become a symbol of personal self-actualization and growth in his early years - as mentioned earlier in the article, and the personality associated with the rebellious image also points to the image of a child. Here, a comparative analysis can be conducted: in the myths of Chuanmiao (川苗) region lacking the plot of "Havoc in Heaven", the image of Sun Wukong has not undergone any changes related to "growth" (Graham, 1954, p. 211).

As a comparison, Hanumān in Indian literature is also considered one of the sources of Sun Wukong - although this claim is still controversial, it still provides a reference for thinking about the prototype of the "monkey" metaphor for human growth in the collective subconscious of culture.² In "*Ramayana*", Hanumān also symbolizes strength, loyalty, bravery, and justice, but it is also mischievous. In this work, Hanumān gradually transforms from a Rama assistant to a deity (Lutgendorf, 2007).

So, "Havoc in Heaven" can be interpreted as a tragedy of individuals in their early years who conflicted with collective rules in order to seek self-actualization, which is in stark contrast to the obedience and collective rule image in the later "*Journey to the West* to Obtain Buddhists Classics" process, as well as the resulting "achieving positive results" (修成正果). It can be said that the two stages actually symbolize the two stages of an individual, and humans need to find the meaning of life and pursue their own value in the balance of "freedom order". Furthermore, "*Journey to the West*" is a fable about the relationship between human "freedom - order", and it uses a distinction similar to Isaiah Berlin's "positive - negative" distinction of freedom to interpret this fable in advance. In addition, if we return to the discussion of "Havoc in Heaven", *Sun Wukong's* rebellious image is no longer just an example for the survival and reproduction of the will to self-life, but also a pursuit of higher spiritual realms and values (including freedom) - this is also a fable about humanity (whether individual or collective), that is, humans continuously improve and move towards higher stages in progress.

5. Conclusions

Sun Wukong is a core character created by the author of "*Journey to the West*", and his rebellious image in "Havoc in Heaven" has become the main impression on the public - and also the most soulful part of "*Journey to the West*". *Wu Cheng'en* combines the tradition of "the literary creation of the past Xuanzang's study on road in India and taking away Buddhist classes" with the imagery of "Monkey" in Chinese culture, and shapes this profound image by depicting the rebellion and the spirit of struggle in "Havoc in Heaven". He also designs a series of motivations to rationalize and complicate the image and the events involved. In addition,

² About the temporal and spatial differences of Hanumān imagery in Indian literature and the unity of character representation, see (Nager, 2004) Generally speaking, it appears as deities and epic heroes, see (Narula, 2005).

some of *Sun Wukong's* personality traits also make his rebellious image more concrete. *Wu Cheng'en's* portrayal of the rebellious image of this character is actually intended to showcase two meanings. On the one hand, in the exploration of reality, *Sun Wukong* is a metaphor for ancient Chinese rebels; On the other hand, in the exploration of human beings themselves, *Sun Wukong* symbolizes the pursuit of self by humans in their early years, but inevitably conflicts with order. Perhaps this is also why “*Journey to the West*” has been enduring - its rich and diverse expressions have yielded abundant benefits for readers. For students and teachers who are immersed in Vietnamese culture that integrates Indian, Chinese, Middle Eastern, and Western cultures, Sun Wukong's image not only has significance in understanding Chinese classical literature and culture, but also inspires critical thinking on Vietnamese culture, especially in the process of learning about “*Journey to the West*” and related cultures (Nguyen, 2020).

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