Monkey King: Journey to the West Annotated Bibliography

Please feel free to use these resources as entry points into the novel as well as for understanding its literary, historical, and theoretical contexts.

Chen, Irene (Chen Ying-Yu). "Monkey King's Journey to the West: Transmission of a Chinese
Folktale to Anglophone Children." *Bookbird*, vol. 47, no. 1, 2009, pp. 26-33. *ProQuest*,
https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/monkey-kings-journey-west-transmission-c
hinese/docview/216100531/se-2.

Chen discusses the prominence of Monkey's character in *Monkey King's Journey to the West* despite the novel's focus on the real pilgrimage of Xuanzang. She argues that Monkey's transformation from a "culpable monster to a venerated saint" teaches that "violence, suppression and abandonment" are less effective than companionship (27). Particularly, Monkey's story and transformation function as a representation for young adults on how to properly treat others. Chen explores the differences between cultural reproductions, those that closely follow the original form, and reversions, those that involve new narratives, and how western retellings contain both forms. She analyzes Aaron Shepard's *Monkey: A Superhero Tale of China* (2005) and the Japanese TV series *Monkey* (1979) as examples of cultural reproductions that maintain Monkey's "robust image," while exploring Patricia Chao's *Monkey King* (1997) and Gene-Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* (2006) as examples of Monkey King revisions that portray Monkey as an anti-hero (29). Through her readings of these adaptations, and an in-depth analysis of the boundary-breaking *American Born Chinese,* Chen demonstrates how Monkey King bridges cultural gaps and encourages an increase in cross-cultural literature for children.

Hegel, Robert E. "China I: Until 1900." *Encyclopedia of the Novel*, edited by Paul Schellinger,
vol. 1, pp. 205–11. Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998.

In Hegel's chapter from *Encyclopedia of the Novel,* he provides a chronological overview of the Chinese novel, its formal features, common themes, and audience. The Chinese novel was produced during the Ming period, and by the sixteenth century historical fiction became widely popular, such as the Chinese classic, *Shuihu zhuan,* or *Outlaws of the Marsh.* Following the sixteenth century, novels featuring the fantastic adventures of religious figures appeared, including *Journey to the West.* Hegel explores the content of *Journey to the West* and then compares it to *Jin Ping Mei,* or *The Plum in the Golden Vase,* a novel circulated amongst only a handful of intellectuals in its day. After the seventeenth century, Chinese novels were primarily romances featuring talented young men and virtuous young ladies. Hegel then examines the effects of the Manchu Qing dynasty (1644-1911), its restrictions, trends, and popular literary works. Novels became a means of self-exploration and a way to highlight the moral nature and social roles of individuals. Hegel continues by examining the formal features of many Chinese classics, such as length and language, and common themes, such as moral weakness in leaders, perversity of humanity, and Confucian ideals. Finally, Hegel concludes with a discussion

of circulation and audiences, attributing the transition from pre-modern novels to modern form around 1900.

Lovell, Julia. Introduction. *Monkey King: Journey to the West*, by Wu Cheng'en, translated by Lovell, Penguin, 2021, pp. xv–xxxviii.

In the introduction to her translation of *Journey to the West*, Lovell situates the novel in its long literary and cultural history. This brief introduction offers background information for understanding *Monkey King*, starting with its origins back to the real Tripitaka who traveled to India and brought Buddhist scrolls back to China in the 7th century. She then traces the evolution of the as a sidekick Monkey was introduced in the 13th century and slowly became the star of the many variations of Tripitaka's journey until the 16th century when an unknown author (possibly Wu Cheng'en) compiled the various stories into one novel, *Monkey King: Journey to the West*. Lovell identifies two camps of Monkey King scholars: those who believe the novel is "religious allegory for the human condition" and those who see it as "good-humored supernatural slapstick" (xxi). Lovell falls into the second category, arguing that *Journey to the West* critiques cultural institutions—such as the Ming dynasty bureaucracy, Taoism, Buddhism, gender—with a consistently playful tone. The last half of her introduction focuses on the transformations of the Monkey King story since the compiled novel was published, proving how Monkey King has adapted to fit into countless cultural contexts.

Sterckx, Roel, Martina Siebert, and Dagmar Schäfer, editors. *Animals Through Chinese History: Earliest Times to 1911*. Cambridge UP, 2019.

This open-access collection of essays provides an overview of the history of animals in China from antiquity to the early twentieth century. Employing a variety of critical lenses, such as animal studies, ecocriticism, and literary studies, this volume examines the important multifaceted roles that animals have played throughout Chinese literature, culture, and history. Those reading *Monkey King: Journey to the West* may be particularly interested in Keith N. Knapp's essay "Noble Creatures: Filial and Righteous Animals in Early Medieval Confucian Thought." Knapp discusses how early Confucian thinkers considered some animals (specifically dogs, crows, and monkeys) to be "just as capable of being virtuous as humans" (64), establishing an interspecies kinship between humans and animals. Additionally, by analyzing religious and literary texts from the period, Knapp contends that this shared potential for virtue means that humans as well as certain animals are expected to practice filial piety through intergenerational respect, service, and obedience as "part of Heaven's endowment that all creatures share" (65). Knapp's work, as well as the other essays in this collection, can help inform readers' understanding of *Journey to the West*'s many animal characters within the novel's historical context.

Sun, Hongmei. *Transforming Monkey: Adaptation and Representation of a Chinese Epic*. U of Washington P, 2018.

In this monograph, Sun discusses the millennium-long evolution of Sun Wukong (Monkey King) in China and in the United States. Blending cultural studies, literary studies, film studies, and translation and adaptation studies, Sun's work examines the

changeability of *Journey to the West*'s protagonist. "[T]he popularity of the Monkey King's image alone," Sun posits, "serves as rich cultural capital that can be repeatedly reused" according to its specific sociopolitical context (4–5). Ultimately, Sun argues that Monkey King's pervasive, longitudinal appearances in literary and mainstream texts reveal "how influential a literary classic can be, and how, via adaptation, the classics exercise such influence" (5). This text, along with Yang's and Chen's articles, provides readers with a capacious understanding of the extent of Monkey King's global impact.

Yang, Qing. "Cross-cultural Variation: Chinese Monkey King Legend as a Trickster in America." *Comparative Literature: East & West*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2019, pp. 205-215, https://doi.org/10.1080/25723618.2019.1696264.

Yang examines how Monkey King changes as an icon when moving from a Chinese context to an American context. Yang argues that Monkey King is a Chinese cultural symbol of "the spirit of defying restraints and oppression, cleverness, and braveness," but she finds that Monkey King is predominantly seen as a trickster in the American context (208). Her article focuses on two American adaptations of the Monkey King story, Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (1990) and Gerald Vizenor's *Griever:An American Monkey King in China* (1987). Yang finds core differences in how the two authors transform the legacy of Monkey King based on their own needs and their source material. Kingston, a second-generation Chinese-American, used translations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms, Dream of the Red Chamber*, and *Journey to the West* as her sources for her novel and presents an image of Monkey King that speaks to the needs of people trying to balance their Chinese and American identities. Vizenor, a Native American, uses a Chinese opera as his source material and creates a representation of Monkey King that speaks to the Anishinaabe tradition of the trickster figure as someone who disrupts authority. In her readings of both novels, Yang demonstrates how Monkey King can shapeshift to fit multiple cultural contexts.