

# *A Comparison of Two Typical Rebels in Chinese and Western Classical Literature*

--Monkey King VS Satan

Li Meng, Gao Jihai

*College of Foreign Languages Henan University, Kaifeng, China*

**Keywords:** Monkey king, Satan, Rebel, Difference, Similarity

**Abstract:** Monkey King is a household name in China. He is a well formed literary figure as a rebel in Chinese classical literature. Similarly, Satan is widely known as an evil king among the westerners. Satan is created as a tragic hero in Paradise Lost, a renowned epic, written by John Milton. The two famous works are written in different languages and forms. People have tended to consider the two literary figures, Monkey King and Satan completely irrelevant since ages ago. Actually, both Monkey King and Satan are rebels, and thus they have lots of differences and similarities. Since both The Journey to the West and Paradise Lost are classical literature, thus countless Chinese and western scholars have done their study on them separately. Only a few of them make the comparison of Monkey King and Satan, though in different aspects. I think it deserves my further studying to find out their differences and similarities. Besides, it is interesting to make a comparison between the two literary figures. Probing into their differences and similarities can deepen our understanding of the two works and appreciating the characters of rebels in Chinese and western culture.

## 1. Introduction

As we all know, The Journey to the West and Paradise Lost are famous classical literary works. Almost every Chinese knows and learns the story of The Journey to the West, which is called Xiyouji in China. Similarly, Paradise Lost is widely read and studied among the westerners. Satan has always been a critical focus among the western scholars. The complexity of Satan's image has inspired many scholars to interpret from different angles and using different methods. On the one hand, many treat Satan like Prometheus (Prometheus, a Titan, who steals fire for human use, is a great hero in Greek mythology) as a hero, who challenges the authority of God and brings knowledge to human (Zhang & Sun, 2006). On the other hand, many other think Satan is a demon bringing misery to human life. And at the same time, there are many other points of view.

## 2. Research Objects and Methods

### 2.1 Monkey King's Background

The Journey to the West is one of the Four Great Chinese Classical Novels. It is a story of the

Monkey King and he performs the mission together with Zhu Bajie and Sha Heshang (another two disciples of the “Tripitaka” (Yu, 1977)) to protect the monk “Tripitaka” on the journey to the West, pursuing “the authentic Scriptures” (Yu, 1977). The book was written in the 16th century during the Ming Dynasty and attributed to Wu Cheng'en. He was a novelist and poet of the Ming Dynasty, well-known for the classical novel, *The Journey to the West*.

At the very beginning of the book, we know how Monkey King comes into being.

Monkey King has no background, but is a divine stone, a heaven-born stone monkey originally.

It is on the top of the Flower-Fruit Mountain in Ao-lai country that Monkey King comes to birth. Once, there is an immortal stone on the top of that very mountain. It has been nourished by the seeds of Heaven and Earth and by the essences of the sun and the moon since the creation of the world. The stone has been quickened by divine inspiration, and becomes pregnant with a divine embryo. One day, splitting open, it gives birth to a stone egg, which is exposed to the wind and transforms into a stone monkey endowed with fully developed features and limbs.

Its birth causes two beams of golden light flashing from his eyes to reach the Palace of the Polestar that disturbs the Celestial Jade Emperor. The Jade Emperor orders Thousand-Mile Eye and Fair-Wind Ear to find out what has happened. After that, “with compassionate mercy the Jade Emperor declared, These creatures from the world below are born of the essence of Heaven and Earth, and they need not surprise us.”(Yu, 1977: 68) This declaration gave chances to Monkey King to become a miracle and a rebel.

This is the stone monkey, and later he becomes the Monkey King and the Great Sage, Equal to Heaven. He is an orphan in the big world. Later, Monkey King ascends the throne of kingship by his courage and adventure to find the Water-Curtain Cave. He has no parents and names. Then he made himself called Handsome Monkey King.

## 2.2 Satan's Background

Originally published in 1667, *Paradise Lost*, with a total of over ten thousand individual lines of verse, is an epic poem in blank verse by the 17th-century English poet John Milton. The poem concerns the Biblical story of the Fall of Man: the temptation of Adam and Eve by the rebel angel Satan and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. It is widely considered one of the greatest literary works in the English language. Its author, John Milton is a great revolutionary poet in the 17th century.

Satan is well honored in the haven. When he falls into the hell, we can still recognize his glory and beautiful image.

“If thou beest he; but O how fall'n! How chang'd  
From him, who in the happy Realms of Light  
Cloth'd with transcendent brightness didst outshine  
Myriads though bright: if he whom mutual league,  
United thoughts and counsels, equal hope,  
And hazard in the Glorious Enterprise... (Milton, 2010: 7)

We can also indicate his honorable position and glorious image from the words said by Raphael to Adam and Eve.

...  
Is heard no more in heav'n; he of the first,  
If not the first Arch-Angel, great in power,  
In favor and preeminence, yet fraught (Milton, 2010: 127)  
His name and high was his degree in Heav'n;  
His count'nance, as the morning star that guides

The starry flock, allur'd them, and with lies  
Drew after him the third part of Heav'n's Host (Milton, 2010: 128)

## 2.3 Difference and Similarities of Their Background

Therefore, Satan has a lofty position and great honor in heaven while Monkey King has no background. He was nobody but with great gift to learn. This is their difference from the very beginning of their destiny to be rebels.

However, they also have similarity of their background, because both Monkey King and Satan enjoy the grace from the authority. Monkey King is a heaven-born stone monkey, which is very unusual. His growth has no interference from the authority. Jade Emperor shows compassionate mercy to him, though his coming into birth causes a sensation. According to angel Abdiel, God creates angels including Satan, though Satan denies this.

## 3. Reasons Why Monkey King and Satan Become Rebels

### 3.1 Strong Consciousness of Self-Identity and High Self-Esteem

They have different background but are with the same strong consciousness of self-identity and high self-esteem. Moreover, self-identity has a close relationship with self-esteem. So I would like to talk about the two characters in a combined way. According to psychology, finding oneself, finding one's relationship with the surroundings and establishing one's identity is a common psychology phenomenon among everybody. Monkey King and Satan, of course, are no exception.

When Monkey King comes to birth, he would walk, run and leap about in the Flower-Fruit Mountain. He makes his companions and friends with monkeys and other beasts, like the tiger, the lizard, the wolf and the deer, etc. He just lives there freely, without self-identity yet. One very hot morning, when he is playing with a group of monkeys, comes the chance to establish his first self-identity. The monkeys want to find the source of the stream and find a great waterfall, calling out "Marvelous water!" They have a promise:

"If any of us had the ability to penetrate the curtain and find out where the water comes from without hurting himself, we would honor him as king." they gave the call three times, when suddenly the stone monkey leaped out from the crowd. He answered the challenge with a loud voice, "I'll go in! I'll go in!" (Yu, 1977: 70)

Monkey King is eager to show his ability and establish his position among the monkeys. Here comes the proof. Monkey King jumps straight through the waterfall finding the marvelous Water-Curtain Cave. After leading the monkeys in, he does not forget to remind the monkeys of their promise.

The stone monkey then solemnly took a seat above and spoke to them, "Gentlemen! 'If a man lacks trustworthiness, it is difficult to know what he can accomplish!' You yourselves promised just now that whoever could get in here and leave again without hurting himself would be honored as king. ... Why don't you honor me as your king?" (Yu, 1977: 71-72)

Monkey King earns himself the first identity as Handsome Monkey King by courage, confidence and eagerness in this way.

He then gets a name from his first teacher, "Patriarch Subodhi" (Yu, 1977). He is called "Sun Wu-k'ung" (Yu, 1977), of which he is very proud. After his returning to Flower-Fruit Mountain, he is happy to tell his monkeys another delight is that their entire family has a name.

"What is the name of the great king?" "My surname is Sun," replied Wu-k'ung, "And my religious name is Wu-k'ung." When the monkeys heard this, they all clapped their hands and shouted happily, "If the great king is Elder Sun, then we are all Junior Suns, Suns the third, small

Suns, tiny Suns--the Sun family, the Sun Nation, and the Sun Cave!" (Yu, 1977: 99)

Now not only Monkey King has an identity, but also all the monkeys in Flower-Fruit Mountain have their identity.

However, soon, Monkey King causes great troubles which would change his destiny and make a big difference in the world. And this is also his beginning to be a rebel.

In the Translucent Palace, Ao-Kuang, Dragon King of the Eastern Ocean presents a memorial to the Jade Emperor.

...He demanded a weapon, employing power and intimidation; he asked for martial attire, unleashing violence and threats. He terrorized my water kinsman, and scattered turtles and tortoises. The Dragon of the Southern Ocean trembled; the Dragon of the Western Ocean was filled with horror; the Dragon of the Northern Ocean drew back his head to surrender; and your subject Ao-kuang flexed his body to do obeisance.

...We are indeed no match for him, nor are we able to subdue him. ... Thus we present this memorial. (Yu, 1977: 113)

From this quotation, we learn that Monkey King is very powerful after his studying great art with "Patriarch Subodhi". But troubles made by him cause the accusation by Dragon King Ao-kuang. And later comes the accusation of the Minister of Darkness, King Ch'in-kuang, since Monkey King snafus the Region of Darkness.

With the Gold Star's suggestion, the Jade Emperor summons Monkey King to the Upper Region without punishment. It is then that Monkey King has his third identity, Pi-ma-wen. He is appointed to the post of Pi-ma-wen. At first, he has no notion about this post. However, in his opinion, the post should be equal to one's power and ability. And that is why when he finds Pi-ma-wen is really the meanest level, which is the lowest of the low ranks, he becomes so furious that he leaves the Upper Region, returning to the Flower-Fruit Mountain at once.

At the Flower-Fruit Mountain I was honored as king and patriarch. How dare they trick me into coming to look after horses for them? If horse tending is such a menial service, reserved only for the young and lowly, how did they intend to treat me? I won't do this anymore! ... With a crash, he kicked over his official desk and took out the treasure from his ear. (Yu, 1977: 121)

He fights his way out of the imperial stables and flies back home. This is Monkey King's direct reaction when he finds the truth about his position in the Upper Region. Why would Monkey King have such destructive behavior? I think it is because Monkey King's high self-esteem.

The consequence is beyond the control of the Upper Region. Because of the high self-esteem, Monkey King feels he is insulted and loses face. He is eager to win this back. He fights in pursuit of his fourth identity-the Great Sage, Equal to Heaven.

Similarly, Satan also has his strong self-identity and high self-esteem. His first identity is Arch-Angel, which is a very high degree in heaven, of great power.

He of the first,

If not the first Arch-Angel, great in power,

In favor and preeminence, yet fraught

With envy against the son of God, that day

Honor'd by his great Father, and proclaim'd

Messiah King anointed, could not bear

Through pride that sight, and thought himself impair'd

Deep malice thence conceiving and disdain,

...

Unworshipt, unbey'd the throne supreme

Contemptuous, and his next subordinate

Awak'ning, thus to him in secret spake. (Milton, 2010: 127)

Satan does not want other people to be more honorable than him. He persuades one third angels in the heaven to be with him fighting against God, because he thinks the son of God challenges his position. Therefore, he loses the balance of his self-identity. This is one main reason why Satan would be a rebel.

“Know yet not then” said Satan, fill’d with scorn,  
“Know yet not me? Ye knew me once no mate  
For you, there sitting where ye durst not soar;  
Not to know mee argues yourselves unknown,  
The lowest of your throng; or if ye know,  
Why ask ye, and superfluous begin  
Your message, like to end as much in vain?”(Milton, 2010: 103)

Satan is very proud of himself. We can perceive this by his arrogant attitude towards young angels. Though he is caught in the Eden by two young angels he looks down upon them. He thinks it is certain that they should recognize him at once, rather than ask who he is. Actually, he does not know that his glory has faded away after his rebellion and his falling down to the hell. That is really a pity. When he faces up to Cherub, he still shows his high self-esteem as the first Arch-Angel. (Milton, 2010)

“If I must contend,” said he,  
“Best with the best, the sender not the sent,  
Or all at once; more glory will be won,  
Or less be lost.”(Milton, 2010: 103)

This is Satan who would not fight with angels that are inferior to him, because he thinks he will be insulted if he does so. He does favor the idea of showing off his great power as one in front of the numbers of enemies. This is detailed information and of course a strong proof of the high self-esteem of Satan.

Mee though just right, and the fixt Laws of Heav'n  
Did first create your Leader, next, free choice,  
With what besides, in Counsel or in Fight,  
... (Milton, 2010: 29)

Satan thinks he being the leader of the fallen angels is reasonable and is his legitimate rights and interests. He shows his ability of speech, persuading angels in hell. Finally, he claims himself as the King of hell, which is his second self-identity.

I have made a comparison about the strong self-identity and high self-esteem of Monkey King and Satan. The two characters are their mutual similarity. And both characters lead them to be rebels. That is to say, the two characters can be seen as the main reasons why they proceed rebellion.

### 3.2 High Motivations to Fight Against the Authority

We can think over the reason why Monkey King leaves the Flower-Fruit Mountain to learn the great art for the purpose of being young forever.

Monkey King and his monkeys live in the Flower-Fruit Mountain. They are neither subject to the unicorn or the phoenix. Nor are they governed by the rules of mankind. They held the opinion that such independence and comfort are immeasurable blessings. Monkey King enjoys his days freely, but he is concerned about the future. The Monkey King said, “Though we are not subject to the laws of man today, nor need we be threatened by the rule of any bird or beast, old age and physical decay in the future will disclose the secret sovereignty of Yama, King of the Underworld. If we die, shall we not have lived in vain, not being able to rank forever among the heavenly beings?” (Yu,

1977: 73)

When he hears that the Buddhas, the immortals, and the holy sages can avoid the Wheel of Transmigration as well as the process of birth and destruction, and live as long as Heaven and Earth, he has hope and makes his determination to find these three kinds of people, learning the great art.

Later, after finishing the great art and back to Flower-Fruit Mountain, he is arrested to the Region of Darkness, which is the abode of Yama, King of Death. He becomes furious and condemns the Ten Kings of the Underworld.

“... Old Monkey has acquired the Tao and attained immortality. I enjoy the same age as Heaven, and I have transcended the three regions and leapt clear of the Five Phases. Why, then, did you send men to arrest me?”(Yu, 1977: 111)

As a consequence, Monkey King erases his name and takes the ledger on monkeys, crossing out all the names he could find on the account of life. Since then the category of monkeys is beyond control, and inordinately life is given to the simian family. Monkey King and his monkeys are totally free.

Pursuing freedom is Monkey King's nature. Despite the fact that he gets the highest rank, as the Great Sage, Equal to Heaven, he is free and content to tour the mansions and meet friends, to make new acquaintances and form new alliances at his leisure, since he is of no duty in the heaven and used to indolence. The notion of freedom in Monkey King's mind is very simple. He does not like being controlled by someone or unable to do things he likes.

While, how about Satan?

Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.

What matter where, if I be still the same,

And what I should be, all but less than hee

Whom Thunder hath made greater? Here at least

We shall be free; th' Almighty hath not built

Here we may reign secure, and in my choice

To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:

Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n. (Milton, 2010: 12)

This is Satan's declaration that he would be free as a king in hell rather than serve for the God with glory. The situation is rather bad and serious for him to live in the hell. However, he made such a decision. What's more, Satan has his own theory of liberty.

Natives and Sons of Heav'n possest bfore

By none, and if not equal all, yet free,

Equally free; for orders and degrees

Jar not with liberty, but well consist.

Who can in reason then or right assume

Monarchy over such as live by right

His equals, if in power and splendor less,

In freedom equal? Or can introduce

Law and Edict on us, who without law

Err not, much less for this to be our Lord,

And look for adoration to th' abuse

Of those Imperial Titles which assert

Our being ordain'd to govern, not to serve? (Milton, 2010: 131)

In Satan's mind, every angel should be free ignoring their different degrees and relative unequal. And this is how he persuades so many angels to stand together on the same battlefield with him while Monkey King's nature to be free causes many disasters in the heaven, and he has to fight.

What's more, Satan's thought about knowledge also indicate his attitude towards freedom. As

Zhang Songsong and Sun Jing point out that Satan have doubts when he hears about God's order, not allowing Adam and Eve to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge and this is one reason why he tempts Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit (Zhang & Sun, 2006). In Satan's mind, it's human's right and freedom to learn knowledge, knowing good and evil. At this point, Satan regards God as a tyrant. This can also prove Satan is pursuing freedom.

Monkey King cannot be satisfied when he is appointed to the post of Pi-ma-wen. When he finally finds out the truth that his position is the lowest of the low ranks, he becomes furious and pursues the highest title of the Great Sage, Equal to Heaven. But he is just like a child, so innocent that he just does something unusual as a troublemaker to satisfy his heart.

But Satan is a schemer. He is not satisfied with his position, either, especially when God announced his son to be "Messiah King" (Milton, 2010). He feels that his position is impaired. And this leads to a direct consequence that he determines to fight against God and replaces the God's position.

Both Monkey King and Satan pursue a higher position. However, there are many differences between them.

Monkey King has no knowledge of the title or rank, nor does he care about the size of his salary. He only cares about the name of an official title, whether it sounds nice or bigger than others'. And he just places his name on the Register. He has the strong notion that titles and ranks should be equal to ones' power and ability. Since he has great martial skills and cannot find matches in the heaven, in his mind he should have the highest rank of no match, which is very simple and clear. However, this notion contradicts with that of immortals. Fu Shaohua has pointed out that Monkey King does not really care about the official title, but the fact that he is free and he is been treated equally (Fu, 2002). His words prove my opinion of Monkey King's pursuing freedom and self-esteem. This also proves Monkey King's innocent.

Gold Star has explained to Monkey King of this.

"All appointed officials advance from lowly positions to exalted ones. Why should he object to that arrangement?"(Yu, 1977: 132)

This is logical, but quite hypocritical to some extent. Seniority-based system should be criticized.

At last Monkey King shouts to reside in Divine Mists Hall, replacing the position of the Jade Emperor. This leads to the "Tathagata's" (Yu, 1977) scorn.

"A fellow like you," he said, "is only a monkey who happens to become a spirit. How dare you be so presumptuous as to want to seize the honored throne of the Exalted Jade Emperor? He began practicing religion when he was very young, and he has gone through the bitter experience of one thousand, seven hundred and fifty kalpas...You are merely a beast who has just attained human form in this incarnation. How dare you make such a boast?"(Yu, 1977: 172)

And Monkey King responds as follows.

"Even if the Jade Emperor has practiced religion from childhood," said the Great Sage, "he should not be allowed to remain here forever. The proverb says, 'Many are the turns of kingship, and next year the turn will be mine!' ... I shall continue to cause disturbances and there'll never be peace!" (Yu, 1977: 172)

Monkey King challenges the foundational principles of the immortals. We can see that Monkey King is innocent, though at last he is ambitious to say the furious words of replacing the position of the Jade Emperor. Shi Zhongyang talks about Monkey King's idea to replace the Jade Emperor in his thesis. He points out Monkey King has doubts why should the Jade Emperor be the imperator since his ability seems very limited rather than someone with greater ability (Shi, 2009). Therefore, his idea agrees with mine.

While, Satan is obviously ambitious, eager-beaver, and a tragic hero, who wants to achieve a top high position by unscrupulous scheming. He denies the idea that angels are created by God and



emphasizes that rights belong to themselves rather than given by God.

“That we were form’d then say’st thou? And the work  
Of secondary hands, by task transferr’d  
From Father to his Son? Strange point and new!  
Doctrine which we would know whence learnt: who saw  
When this creation was? Remember’st thou  
Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?  
We know no time when we were not as now;  
Known none before us, self-begot, self-rais’d  
... (Milton, 2010: 131)

Satan claims that the angels are self-created, which is his deceitful arguments.

This is his fundamental theory to persuade other angels to fight against God with him. He argues that someone who in his position will also be like him to commit insurgency sooner or later, or who as an ordinary angel is also naturally eager to reach a higher position. It is the very conspiracy theories that persuade himself that he has done the right thing to be against God and pursuing higher position.

There is a psychological theory about the phenomenon of rationalization. It is said that people are always trying to seek information or evidence to support their choices made in the past and often omitting information that seems negative to them. And this theory can be also used to explain why Monkey King and Satan go further and further to commit rebellion. They are persuaded by themselves that there are no other options for them except rebellion.

Monkey King is connived at by “Patriarch Subodhi”. He is told that once Monkey King leaves, he is doomed to end up evildoing, but the “Patriarch Subodhi” would not care about this. Monkey King is just threatened not to mention he is his disciple when he does evil things. And the authority’s attitude of concession towards him, made him more audacious to challenge the authority.

Similarly, when Satan is preparing for the rebellion, God has perceived everything. However, he does not prevent the rebellion from the very beginning. God just wants to make use of Satan to establish the position of his son. This can also make Satan bolder and help him make his determination to rebel.

“As Satan flies ... Horror and doubt distract his thoughts when he remembers that `of worse deeds worse sufferings must ensure”. But if Satan knows his mission is bound to make things worse for him, why, we may ask, does he undertake it? The answer, strictly, is that he cannot escape the terms of the fiction he finds himself in.” (Danielson, 2000: 165)

From this quotation we know how God affects Satan’s decision. God’s conniving makes Satan falls in the fiction that he will defeat God. Therefore, God’s conniving should also be responsible for Satan’s rebellion.

#### 4. Conclusion

About their similarities and differences between Monkey King and Satan, here is a general summary.

Both Monkey King and Satan are of great conscious of self-identity and high self-esteem. They love freedom. They have the same willpower, with the quality of perseverance. They pursue a higher position. Above all, both of them are heroes, who dare to fight against the authority.

Monkey King is of great magical power and great martial ability, fighting alone. However, Satan’s personal martial power is limited, less powerful than God is. Satan is a good leader and a great eloquent orator. He is cunning. Monkey King is like a naughty boy, a troublemaker, doing what he wants to do without concern about the consequence. Besides, he has a sense of humor.



I do think this comparison is interesting and may deepen our understanding of the two literary figures. We can also have a deeper thought about rebels and different rebels in different cultural background. Monkey King is a favorite literary image among Chinese people; while, Satan is the evilest in the western culture. Nevertheless, Milton gives special meaning to Satan in the epic, *Paradise Lost*. He is also a hero, with great image.

## References

- [1] Danielson, D. 2000. *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- [2] Lai, W. 1994. "From protean ape to Handsome Saint: the Monkey King", *Asian Folklore studies*, 1: 29-65.
- [3] Milton, J. 2010. *Paradise Lost & Paradise Regained*, New York: New American Library.
- [4] Potter, L. 2005. *A Preface to Milton*, Beijing: Peking University Press.
- [5] Rumrich, J. 1996. *Milton Unbound*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [6] Waley, A. 1943. *Monkey: Folk Novel of China* by Wu Cheng'en, New York: John Day Company.
- [7] Yu, A. 1977. *The Journey to the West*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.