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TRANSLATION REVIEW

Die Reise in den Westen. Ein klassischer chinesischer Roman mit 100 Holzschnitten nach alten Ausgaben

[The Journey to the West. A Classic Chinese Novel. With 100 Wood-cuts from Old Editions]

Translated and commented by Eva Lüdi Kong

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Der Schlüssel zur “Reise in den Westen”. Entstehung und Deutung des Romans

[The Key to the Journey to the West. Origins and Interpretation of the Novel]

Translated and edited by Eva Lüdi Kong

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The novel *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji* 西遊記) ranks among the masterworks of the Ming novel and has remained among the favourite reading matter of Chinese audiences up to the present time. To Western reading audiences, the *Journey* first became generally accessible through Arthur Waley's (1889–1966) much abridged but highly readable rendition *Monkey* (Waley 1942), which was retranslated into various other European languages (including German) and has since been widely circulated. Waley's truncated *Monkey* omitted numerous episodes and in fact included only about 30 out of the 100 chapters, for which reason some Sinologists considered it a "retelling" rather than a translation, and at best an essentialised, at worst a distorted, representation of the novel. The first full translation of the *Journey* into English was offered by Anthony C. Yu (Yu Guofan 余國藩, 1938–2015), whose *The Journey to the West* (Yu 1977–1983; rev. ed., 2013) was published in four volumes between 1977 and 1983. Yu's translation was uncompromisingly integral, as it was based on the earliest known edition of the novel *Xiyou ji* by the Nanjing publisher Shide tang 世德堂 (1582), the supremacy of which Glen Dudbridge (1938–2017) had established primarily for its earliness and assumed closeness to the original (hence Dudbridge (1969, 184) termed it edition A.1). Yu included virtually the entire number of the estimated 750 verse passages, the importance of which he justly emphasised. Moreover, he equipped his unabridged translation with a scholarly apparatus comprising many hundreds of notes explaining to the reader anything he might not readily understand in the text, or the implications of which could enrich the reader's understanding. In 2013, Yu's translation was republished in a revised and updated edition.

André Lévy's (1925–2017) French translation *La Pérégrination vers l'Ouest*, published in 1991, is comparable to Yu's *Journey*, although it was somewhat more selective in translating the verse and other potentially redundant passages in the text. Another, no less admirable approach to English renditions of the full *Journey* is represented by W.J.F. Jenner's (b. 1940) *Journey to the West*, which was published almost simultaneously with Anthony Yu's version, between 1982 and 1984 (Jenner 1982–1986), and which sought to address the general readership, and hence tried to achieve a high level of readability, virtually doing without any notes and also omitting many of the verse passages.

These earlier attempts at translating the full *Xiyou ji* novel, as outlined above, represent a range of possible approaches to the question of comprehensiveness and solutions for some of the particular challenges posed by the text. They render it evident enough that any translator attempting a new rendition of this novel must make some basic decisions and devise an overall strategy. Translating the *Journey* has to take into account that there is not a single text, but in fact a choice of relevant early editions of this novel. Moreover, in its reception history, in China too, there have been varying perspectives and approaches, representing positions along a wide scale, with its popular perception as a collection of folklore, at the one end, and sophisticated attempts at decoding its assumed depths of wisdom and of religious-philosophical knowledge, at the other.

The new translation of the *Xiyou ji* into German, to be reviewed here, is the work of the Swiss Sinologist Eva Lüdi Kong (b. 1968). While it comprises the full number of one hundred chapters and therefore may be considered “complete”, it nevertheless turns out to be tied to a markedly different edition of the novel as compared to previous full translations. The translator chose the 1663 edition by the title *Xiyou zheng dao shu* 西遊證道書 (The Book on Fulfilling the Way on the Journey to the West) as the basis of her rendition. This edition (C.1 in Dudbridge’s nomenclature), upon its first publication in the early decades of the Qing, quickly overshadowed all the other versions of the *Journey*. Its editors, though, had systematically pruned the text, omitting “most of the verse passages and much of the circumstantial detail” that we find in other editions (i.e., types A and B in Dudbridge’s system of editions) (Dudbridge 1969, 152), which reduced the overall length of the text by about one third. The editors supported the validity of their widely different version of the novel by the high claim that it actually represented the novel’s “urtext” (*guben* 古本, as opposed to the editions in circulation, termed *suben* 俗本, “vulgar editions”) which they attributed to the eminent Southern Song patriarch of the Quanzhen 全真 sect of Daoism, Qiu Chuji 丘處機 (1148–1227), based on a – most likely faked – preface they included. While this claim may have been bought by readers in the Qing, it is nowadays considered an obvious fabrication. The editors’ entire strategy, camouflaging textual innovation by anachronistically appealing to old authority and not shying away from fabricating

“evidence” in support of this construction, is strongly reminiscent of Jin Shengtan’s 金聖嘆 (1608–1661) pathbreaking edition of *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (Water Margin Saga), first published around 1644, thus preceding the *Xiyou zheng dao shu* by about two decades (Cf. Altenburger 2014). The two editing projects’ obvious parallels also pertain to their commentaries, which primarily rely on chapter comments placed ahead of each chapter. The 1663 edition of *Xiyou ji* was produced by two scholars-turned-publishers and book merchants in Hangzhou, Wang Xiangxu 汪象旭 (1604–1668, originally from Huizhou 徽州) and Huang Zhouxing 黃周星 (1611–1681, originally from Nanjing 南京), who likely combined in this edition their mercantile interests with their Daoist affiliation (Widmer 1988; Robertson 2002; Rolston 1997, 73–76). While Wang is generally considered the author of the pre-chapter comments, Huang is given credit for the comprehensive editing of the novel’s text.¹ Through the Daoist authorship they construed and Wang’s commentary, they were also influential in putting forward a Daoist line of reading of the text despite its ostensibly Buddhist plot. In the years right after the conquest, when the new Qing regime was still far from consolidated, Quanzhen Daoism was closely associated with Ming loyalism.

As for the translator’s choice of the *Xiyou zheng dao shu* as the basis of her new rendition of the full *Journey*, it clearly remains disputable. Some might argue that this is not the classic text² and that so many of the finer points of the earlier edition(s) are missing in it; nevertheless, others might justly counter that it was mostly in this edition that the novel was being circulated and read throughout the Qing. The employment of an already streamlined text from which most of the numerous verse passages had already been erased, exempted the translator from the thankless task of having to make any cuts by herself and thus crucially contributed to improving the readability of a text that is otherwise notorious for its tedious longueurs. Thus, the translator’s textual choice followed a smart, viable middle course between the contradictory demands of relative completeness, on the one hand, and easier accessibility, on the other. It would

¹ While it is officially attributed to Wang Xiangxu, Rolston thinks that there is reason to believe that the commentary was at least partially written by Huang. See Rolston 1997, 74.

² Sinological readers might complain that modern editions of this version of the novel are not so readily available. The translator herself hints (“Nachwort”, p. 1317) that she mainly based herself on the edition *Huang Zhouxing ding ben Xiyou zheng dao shu*.

have been preferable, though, had this new translation declared the alternative choice of its reference edition openly, right on the title page. However, somewhat infelicitously, the identification of the source text was banished to the final pages of the post-script (pp. 1317–1318). It nevertheless is logical and appropriate that the translator avoided attributing the text to any individual authorship, neither to Wu Cheng'en 吳承恩 (ca. 1500– ca. 1582) to whom the novel is still conventionally ascribed (despite the scant evidence), nor to the two early-Qing editors behind the edition *Xiyou zheng dao shu*. By not indicating any authorship, not even “anonymous”, the translator justly supports the notion of the *Journey* as an accretive text that was shaped by many hands.

The reading process is supported by a list of all the deities mentioned in the text, provided in the volume's appendix (“Verzeichnis der Gottheiten”, pp. 1265–1283), offering the reader good service in navigating through the novel's eclectic pantheon. In her general introduction to the list, the translator emphasises the novel's “playful and impious” treatment of this pantheon, and its “profane traits” that constantly approximate the deities' behavior to the human world (p. 1265). The list also serves to relieve the footnotes of much of their typical burden, instead reserving them for occasionally needed additional information, such as the elucidation of difficult terminology or the identification of source quotations. It is somewhat regrettable, though, that source references are not tied to any editions of texts. In other respects, however, the technical standard of this translation rather resembles that of a Sinological publication, such as in its use of romanised transcription (Hanyu Pinyin) with tone signs added, and even including Chinese script wherever a Sinological reader might expect it. The set of high-quality illustrations that were prepared on the basis of woodcut blockprints is a useful paratextual feature that not only embellishes the volume's overall appearance, but facilitates the reader's imagination of the novel's strange world (in more than one sense). The German publishing house Reclam is to be congratulated for making no compromises in presenting the translation volume in such a state-of-the-art way.

The translator's outstanding achievement has already been duly acknowledged by the award of the 2017 Leipzig Book Fair's translation prize, which further increased the translation's publicity and helped advertise it to a readership that far surpassed the typically narrow circles of specialists and amateurs of traditional Chinese literature and

culture. Since the translator's mastery manifest in this German-language rendition can hardly be done justice to in an English-language review, a few general observations and a small number of examples will have to suffice here. The translation work is noted, first of all, for its high aspiration of leaving nothing in the source text untranslated. The translator, moreover, demonstrates a precise sensitivity for the subtleties and finesse of the rich and nuanced vocabulary of the novel's hybrid source language that oscillates between lowly vernacular and high literary style. She frequently exhibits ingenuity in finding creative solutions, especially in rendering verses in rhythmic style and with end rhymes (in even-numbered lines). The reader is stunned, beyond that, by the translator's mastery in dealing with technical terminology that is always based on sound expertise in a wide range of fields, whether Daoist Inner Alchemy, Buddhism, or demonology. While acutely aware of the text's witty and playful sides, the translator insists on the ultimate profundity of the knowledge incorporated in the text.

Place names, except for historical-geographical place names within the realm of the Chinese empire, are translated as a rule, since they tend to include rather strong allegorical connotations. Family names, too, are translated if they bear obvious allegorical meaning, such as in chapter 20: "... Mein Sippename ist Schein; der meines Mannes Kein. ..." (p. 305; "...My maiden name is 'Illusion', that of my husband 'No'." 小婦人娘家姓賈，夫家姓莫。). This would appear somewhat forced, though, since in Chinese the family names Jia 賈 and Mo 莫 do exist, while the allegorical meaning of *jia* is only implied via the homophone (賈/假).

Terms of address are generally handled in a skilful way. There are only a few cases of terms of self-reference that may be confusing to the reader since their deictic implication of the first-person is too weak or virtually absent, such as when the Tang Monk's 唐僧 (i.e. Tripitaka's) self-reference *pimseng* 貧僧 is rendered as "geringer Mönch" ("humble monk", chap. 25, p. 332). The exclamation "Der gute Dämon!" ("The good demon!" 那怪物, e.g., chap. 27, p. 352) is repeatedly employed as a formula introducing the description of a demon's behavior. While not a literal translation and perhaps somewhat surprising since demons in the *Journey* are hardly ever "good", it nevertheless is a suitable stylistic choice since it seems to borrow from the language of German fairytales.

Puns are among the greatest challenges for translators, since they can hardly ever be satisfactorily reproduced in the target language, such as in the case of the homophonic pun on *xing* 性/姓, ‘character’/ ‘family name’ (in chapter 1) that is dealt with in the least elegant way, by resorting to transcription combined with an explanation in a note (p. 30, n. 23). In chapter 34, Sun Wukong, in order to confuse some simple-minded demons, inverts the elements of his name *Sun xing zhe* 孫行者 to *zhe xing Sun* 者行孫. The rendering as “Pilger Sun / Sunger Pil” (p. 434) structurally imitates the permutation of syllables, which is one viable way of dealing with this pun.³ A semiotically particularly inventive solution for a pun is found in chapter 20, where gluttonous Zhu Bajie’s 豬八戒 hunger cannot be satisfied by a host who explains:

“Auf die Schnelle kann ich kein Gramm an weiteren Speisen auftreiben. ...” (At short notice I cannot provide a single gram of additional food. 倉卒無饒。)

To which Bajie responds:

“Was schwatzt der Alte, es hat doch keiner ein Orakel gelegt. Egal, ob ‘Trigramm’ oder ‘Hexagramm’, bringt her, was Ihr habt, ...” (What is the old man babbling about, no one has had their fortune told after all. Whether ‘trigram’ or ‘hexagram’, bring over whatever you have. 老兒滴答甚麼，誰和你發課，說甚麼五爻六爻，有飯只管添將來就是。 pp. 271-272)

Zhu Bajie mishears *yao* 饒 (‘meal’, in elevated style) for the homophonic *yao* 爻 (‘line of a hexagram’), as is additionally explained in a footnote. By introducing the seme/phoneme ‘Gramm/-gramm’ (‘gram/-gram’), the translator creates an isotopy that links up food with the terminology of oracular hexagram analysis according to the *Yi-jing* 易經 (Classic of Changes), as suggested by the phrase *wuyao-liuyao* 五爻六爻 (‘fifth line and sixth line’). However, while in the Chinese text the semantic layer is shifted back to the theme of ‘food’, this is only implied in the translation, which is one reason why the recreation of this pun, despite the clever idea, fails to convince entirely. Nevertheless, while these few examples have just highlighted some problems of

³ Yu 1977-1983, 2: 144: “Pilgrim Sun / Grimpil Sun”. Since Lüdi Kong’s translation was based on a widely different source, no attempt is made here, otherwise, to compare it to any of its predecessors translated into English or any other language.

translation, it must be emphasised, once again, that this German rendition is indeed rich in felicitous solutions and pleases the reader with its high level of readability and differentiation of style. Since the entire translation was published in one heavy (1.7 kg) volume, readers who intend to take this book on a journey are advised to buy the e-book version instead.

In her knowledgeable postscript (“Nachwort”) to the volume, besides the typical philological questions, such as that of textual tradition, the translator also introduces a range of approaches toward more profound textual interpretations. As a matter of fact, in this essay she already provides the reader with several “keys” to reading the text. If the supplementary volume *Der Schlüssel zur “Reise in den Westen”. Entstehung und Deutung des Romans* (The Key to the *Journey to the West*. Origins and Interpretation, henceforth referred to as *Schlüsse*), published three years after the translation, at least in its title promises “the key” to the text, this may therefore seem somewhat misleading, even more so since it first of all offers to the interested reader a range of related source materials in German translation, the general concept of which is similar to a Chinese source collection that also served as the reference for some of the materials included (Zhu Yixuan (1983) 2002). The sources divide into three categories: (A) early versions of related story material, (B) prefaces and comments, and (C) overall commentaries on the novel. Part (A) is further subdivided into (I) early narratives on Xuanzang and the *Journey to the West*, (II) early versions of individual episodes of the novel, and (III) early tales about divine monkeys. Each item carries a brief introduction, which, however, does not always point out clearly enough the reason why this particular item has been selected, and what episode in the *Journey* it pertains to. Therefore, while browsing through this supplementary volume, the status and relevance of the textual excerpts may not always be evident to the reader.

This source collection in translation, nevertheless, is a treasure trove well worth a discovery tour. Particularly noteworthy among the texts included in section (I) are the fragmentary storyteller’s script “Tang Sanzang qu jing shihua” 唐三藏取經詩話 (Chantefable on Tripitaka’s fetching of the holy scriptures), an early popularised narrative from the Southern Song; and the Yuan dramatist Yang Na’s 楊訥 northern-style singing drama script (*zaju* 雜劇) “Xiyou ji” 西遊記 (The journey to the west). In the

case of the latter text, though, due to the overall length of the play, a number of scenes have been paraphrased rather than translated. The first item among the potential precursors to episodes in the novel, “Tang Taizong ruming ji” 唐太宗入冥記 (Tang emperor Taizong enters the netherworld), is known exclusively from a Dunhuang cave library document (S.2603, held in the British Library). It is fragmented in some places and hard to decipher due to writing variants for numerous graphs. It is somewhat infelicitous, though, that the translator based her partial rendition (*Schlüssel*, pp. 100–103) on Wang Zhongmin’s 王重民 anthology of transformation texts (*bianwen* 變文) from Dunhuang (Wang Zhongmin (1957) 1984, 1: 209–215), which no longer reflects the current textual research on early vernacular narratives from Dunhuang. She might have made use of more recent improved editions of the text that have filled some lacunae and cleared up some uncertainties in Wang’s earlier transcription (e.g., Huang Zheng and Zhang Yongquan 1997). Section “A.III” offers three items of monkey lore from the Tang and Song whose relevance for the *Journey* may be less than obvious to the reader. The third item among them, entitled “*Chen xunjian Meiling shi qi ji*” 陳巡檢梅嶺失妻記 (How Inspector Chen lost his wife on Plum Ridge), is somewhat obscurely identified in the introductory lines as a “short story” and a “storyteller script”, and the references (*Schlüssel*, p. 258) do not disclose its original source, for the translator just refers to the aforementioned collection of source materials. Actually this is an item from the early vernacular story collection *Liushi jia xiaoshuo* 六十家小說 (Sixty stories), better known by its modern title *Qingping shantang huaben* 清平山堂話本 (Storyteller scripts from the Qingping Mountain Hall), only part of which is preserved (Hong Bian 1955, 121–136). Since merely a content summary is provided for this item, a reference to a full translation into another European language would have been in place here besides a proper source identification (Dars 1987, 397–418).

Part B of the source collection comprises the two categories of (I) prefaces and post-scripts found in early editions, and (II) general critical comments and essays. The translator at first included in the supplementary volume the three arguably most important prefaces to the *Journey*, being that by Chen Yuanzhi 陳元之 (to the Shide tang edition of 1592), the one by Yuan Yuling 袁于令 (1592–1674) (to the “Li Zhuowo”

李卓吾 edition, probably from the late 1620s), and that included in the reference edition of 1663, attributed to Yu Ji 虞集 (1272–1348), a third-generation disciple of Qiu Chuji's, whose – likely fabricated – “preface” is instrumental in construing Qiu's alleged authorship. Apart from these, the translator apparently sought to outline the wide range of interpretive approaches to the text that variously include Daoist, Buddhist, Neo-Confucian and syncretist views. The emphasis on syncretism, in particular, becomes evident from several of the included prefaces and critical comments, and some allegorical readings are exemplified by them, such as, in Zhang Hanzhang's 張含章 (ca. 1730–1829) postscript to *Xiyou zhengzhi* 西遊正旨 (The proper intent of the *Journey to the West*, 1819), the idea of exploring the deeper meaning of the novel with the help of the system of hexagrams and trigrams according to the *Classic of Changes* (*Schlüssel*, pp. 147–151).

The translations are generally reliable, with few exceptions, such as the too literal rendering and insufficiently complex understanding of the term *haoshizhe* 好事者 as “Leute, die sich dafür interessierten” (“people who were interested in it”, *Schlüssel*, p. 136). This term is as ubiquitous as it is hard to grasp in prefaces to late Ming and early Qing vernacular texts, where it approximates meanings like ‘amateurs’, ‘busybodies’ or ‘aficionados’ in cultural enterprises, which could have either a slightly pejorative or an appreciative connotation (‘dilettantes’ and ‘devotees’, respectively) (McLaren 2005, 163–167).

The final section of the supplementary volume features the translation of all the one hundred chapter-commentaries from the reference edition of the novel (*Schlüssel*, pp. 177–254), which stands out as by far the longest item in the entire book. It is only logical that the translator, favouring this particular edition, also wished to include its chapter-commentaries, even more so since it was the earliest full commentary on the *Journey* and became an integral part of the edition *Xiyou zhengdao shu*. Besides the pre-chapter comments, it also included other means of commenting on the text, such as interlinear comments, which were too inconvenient to translate. Since the comments on each chapter are introduced by the – somewhat pretentious – phrase *Danyi zi yue* 澹漪子曰 (“Thus spoke Master Tranquil Water Ripples”), they are identified as having been written by Wang Xiangxu, who adopted *Danyi* 澹漪 as a changed style

name (*gengzi* 更字). The rather comprehensive translation of these chapter comments (though with occasional omissions) represents yet another tour de force. It would appear somewhat anachronistic, though, that terms such as “Buddhismus” (Buddhism) and “Daoismus” (Daoism) are used where we find *fo* 佛 and *xian* 仙 in the Chinese text (*Schlüssel*, p. 177). While the author’s strong inclination toward ideas of the Dao, with occasional references to *Zhuangzi* 莊子 and *Laozi* 老子, and an overwhelming interest in Inner Alchemy (“Golden Elixir”) can clearly be perceived, we also find strong doses of Five Phases (Wuxing 五行) and Yin-Yang 陰陽 thought, and moreover rather numerous references to the *Classic of Changes* and its system of hexagrams and trigrams, whereas Buddhist references are relatively rare. Literary, rhetorical and structural ideas, such as comparisons between different chapters, play only a marginal role, which most evidently sets this apart from the approach chosen by Jin Shengtan in his chapter commentary on *Water Margin*. There is only one comment that draws a cross-comparison to *Water Margin* (on chapter 8, *Schlüssel*, p. 185), and in the final comment on chapter 100, a rather superficial comparison is drawn to the other masterworks of the Ming novel, when the uplifting concluding chapter of the *Journey* is favorably compared to the depressing endings of the other three works (*Schlüssel*, p. 254).

As another appropriate pick (*Schlüssel*, pp. 165–176), the translator chose to include Liu Yiming’s 劉一明 (1734–1821) “Xiyou yuanzhi dufa” 西遊原旨讀法 (Reading instruction for *The Original Intent of the Journey to the West*, 1778). This “reading instruction” (*dufa* 讀法) essay served to introduce a new edition which was published over a century later than, and clearly built on, Wang Xiangxu’s and Huang Zhouxing’s edition.⁴ Interestingly, this commentator disliked Wang Xiangxu’s previous commentary which he criticised as “frivolous”.

Most items in this supplementary volume are translated incompletely, with passages omitted here and there, which is an acceptable approach to such texts for which integrality is not always required, though the reader might have wished to know how much

⁴ It was also translated into English by Anthony C. Yu as “How to Read the Original Intent of the Journey to the West,” in Rolston 1990, 299–315.

text was omitted in each place, and perhaps also for what reason. Despite some flaws, the supplementary volume is a welcome addition to the marvellous translation.

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