

A Comparison of Different Values of Freedom Reflected in the Characters of Sun Wukong and Dean

HUANG Kaihong, WEN Hui
SWUST, Mianyang, PRC

Both the characters of Sun Wukong in *The Journey to the West*, which is a traditional Chinese fiction, and Dean in *On the Road*, which is a typical American Beat Generation novel, have been pursuing a carefree lifestyle based on their living environments respectively, but their values of freedom bear quite different meanings: Sun Wukong tries his best to struggle for a happy life for all his family and his friends as well as for himself with little consideration of the risk of his own life, while Dean is always on his way at random for his own personal happiness with little consideration for anybody else. Therefore, Sun Wukong's behavior represents a kind of collectivism within his individualism, while Dean's act reflects his American free life style of individualism to a certain extent.

Keywords: comparison, collectivism, individualism, *The Journey to the West*, *On the Road*

Introduction

The fundamental difference between Chinese culture and Western culture (especially American culture) is, in the author's personal opinion, their different traditional values. In traditional Chinese culture, the idea that "You may only fuck yourself if you are poor; you might fuck the world if you are rich enough!" (which actually means that if you are able enough, you can lend your hand to more other people; but if you yourself are extremely weak, you just stay where you are and mind only your own business.) plays a very important role, influencing the goals for many people. But in the Western culture, especially in American culture, it is a common sense for people to pursue their own totally individualistic personal freedom and happiness.

As one well-known novel among the traditional Chinese classics, *The Journey to the West* belongs to the genre of magical mythical realism, but the characters depicted in it reflect different aspects of the real world life, especially the character Sun Wukong who symbolizes the true hero for freedom in the real society. In the same way, an American modern novel *On the Road*, which is the most typical representative of the Beat Generation novel, realistically and passionately describes the post-war American rebellious youth who runs against the American mainstream value of going upward for the American dream to change from rags-to-riches. Among all the characters, Dean stands out for his pursuit of personal freedom and happiness. In the following analysis, Sun Wukong and Dean will be compared and contrasted on the relationship between collectivism in Chinese traditional value and individualism in the American culture respectively through some detailed analyses.

The Journey to the West is a chaptered traditional Chinese novel, including 100 chapters. Its total style features both on magical mythical realism and vivid realism, integrating the mystery of magical myth with the concrete real society. In the first 10 chapters, the novel depicts the stone monkey Sun Wukong's birth, apprenticeship, his struggling against both the Heaven and the World of Darkness, his going against the Heavenly Palace, and his failing in the wager with the Buddha, finally having been pressed under the bottom of the Five Elements Mountain (including the five elements of wood, fire, earth, metal, and water) for five hundred years. In the later chapters, the novel focuses on the Tang Priest's scripture-fetching team, which has carried out a long and difficult journey and successfully gained the true Scriptures in the end. After the team's successful return from the West, all the team members got their rewards as a happy ending of the whole story.

On the Road is the representative novel of the Beat Generation, marking the heritage of American picaresque novel. Today *On the Road* has already been regarded as one of the American classics. This fiction totals five parts, depicting "My" (Sal Paradise's), Dean's (Neal Cassady's), and several other characters' carefree pursuit of individual freedom and happiness. These characters will put whatever in their mind into practice whenever they have a peculiar impulse, which they regard worthy of trying regardless of any exterior obstacles, showing their values of life fantastically with various detailed life incidents. This article relates mainly to the contents from the beginning to the fifth section of Part II, which details the personal behaviors and words of Dean, compares and contrasts with Sun Wukong's personal thoughts and collectivism in action, and gets the conclusion that the different meanings of freedom between the Chinese tradition and the American culture result from the different understanding, different attitudes, and different social practices.

Comparison and Contrast Between Sun Wukong and Dean

Sun Wukong, who was born with the cultivation and natural nursing of the Sun and the Moon, feels a fit of depression one day when enjoying a banquet with his kin members. He wanted to learn a special Way to have an eternally immortal life. After several years' hardships and downs of seeking a master of Way in many places, he finally was successful in meeting the Patriarch Subhuti an immortal in the Western Continent of Cattle-Gift and became one of the Patriarch Subhuti's disciples. Then he succeeded to train himself the Way to stay eternally young and immortal and the skills of traveling by mounting the clouds and riding the mists. Finally, he returned his hometown which is called the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit in the Eastern Continent of Superior Body, enjoying his communal happy life with all his kin members. Just as what described in the novel as follows,

... "When I left you," Sun Wukong replied, "I followed the waves and the currents, and drifted across the Eastern Ocean to the Southern Jambu Continent. Here I taught myself to take human form and to wear these clothes and boots. I swaggered around for eight or nine years, but I never found the Way, so I sailed across the Western Ocean to the Western Continent of Cattle-Gift. After long enquiries I was lucky enough to meet a venerable Immortal, who taught me the True Result, which makes me as immortal as heaven, and the great Dharma Gate to eternal youth." The monkeys all congratulated him and exclaimed that his like could not be found in a billion years. Sun Wukong laughed and said, "Children, we should congratulate ourselves on having a surname. My surname is now Sun, and my Buddhist name is Wukong." The monkeys all clapped their hands with joy and said, "Your Majesty is Old Sun, and we are Second Sun, Third Sun, Thin Sun, Little Sun—a family of Suns, a nation of Suns, a den of Suns." They all offered Old Sun their respects, with big plates and small bowls of coconut toddy, grape wine, magic flowers, and magic fruit. The whole household was happy! (Wu, 1980, pp. 24-25)

Sun Wukong himself was offered the surname “Sun”, which was regarded as one great event by the monkey family and therefore it reflected his sense of collectivism. Moreover, such terms as “a household”, “a nation”, and “a den” also revealed the consensus of collectivism.

In order to prevent the outside invasion or intervention and keep guard of the peaceful life, Sun Wukong has won the title Monkey King and has “borrowed” plenty of various types of weapons from an arsenal of a frontier city near the eastern territory by means of his magic spell. He assembled all the monkey hosts that numbered over 48,000 and instructed them to hold a military drill and paraded every day. Their training activities alarmed all the strange beasts and various kinds of kings of monsters:

... (that numbered) seventy-two in all, all came to pay homage to the Monkey King. They offered tribute every year and attended court in each of the four seasons. They all took part in drill and paid their seasonal grain levies. Everything was so orderly that the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit was as secure as an iron bucket or a wall of bronze. The kings of the monsters sent gongs, drums, colored flags, helmets, and weapons in abundance, and every day there were military exercises. (Wu, 1980, p. 28)

As seen from the above description, Sun Wukong not only had unbelievable individual abilities, but also had a strategic insight into nipping in the bud, taking the lead to set up a united front, making good use of all the resources that he could get, and organizing a very powerful coalition, all revealing his value of collectivism.

More details manifesting Sun Wukong’s value orientation can be displayed in the relation with other six monster kings. After he has finished all the arrangements for the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit, Sun Wukong,

Thus freed from cares, he mounted the clouds and rode the mists, wandering round the four seas and enjoying the thousand mountains. He practiced his martial arts, visited many a hero, used his magical powers, and made a wide and distinguished circle of friends. He went with six sworn brothers of his: the Bull Demon King, the Salamander Demon King, the Roc Demon King, the Camel King, the Macaque King, and the Lion King. With himself included they made seven. For days on end they talked about politics and war, passed round the goblet, strummed, sang, piped, danced, went off on days out together, and enjoyed themselves in every possible way. A journey of thousands of miles seemed to them to be no more than a walk in the courtyard. It could be said that they traveled a thousand miles in the time it takes to nod one’s head, and over three hundred with a twist of the waist. (Wu, 1980, p. 32)

Thus, it can be clearly seen that Sun Wukong has made friends with other monster kings to lead a free and unfettered life and feast away. In reality, such a kind of life is a reasonable pursuit of happy life for any human being. As far as this kind of pursuit of happy life does not hamper other people’s freedom or benefits, it can be naturally regarded as one part of the ideal pursuit of the whole human kind. Therefore, this kind of pursuit can be viewed as one goal of collectivism, similar to the current “China Dream”, which focuses on the communal interests, on whose base all the people live happily and harmoniously with their own diverse group interests.

In addition, Sun Wukong’s struggle for the interests of the monkey kinsmen can also been clearly shown in the detailed description of his venturing to the Senluo Palace of the World of Darkness, which also gives a clue to his thoughts and actions of collectivism. The book has such description

One day he instructed his four Stalwart Generals to arrange a feast for the six other kings. Oxen and horses were slaughtered, sacrifices were made to Heaven and Earth, and the assembled monsters danced, sang, and drank themselves blotto. When he had the six kings out and tipped his senior and junior officials Sun Wukong lay himself down under the shade of the pines beside the bridge and was asleep in an instant. The four Stalwart Generals made the others stand round and guard him, and they all kept their voices down. (Wu, 1980, p. 32)

When Sun Wukong was sleeping soundly because of his drunken stupor, he dreamed that two fetchers of the dead came to drag him to the city of the World of Darkness. At that moment, he recovered himself and reminded the two fetchers of the dead that he himself had already been in a state beyond the Three World and no longer subject to the Five Elements, so they should set him free. But the two fetchers of the dead insisted to drag him into the city of the World of Darkness, which made Sun Wukong lose his temper and killed the two fetchers of the dead with his Gold-Banded Cudgel in an instant. Then Sun Wukong unbound himself and made his way directly to the Senluo Palace of the World of Darkness. The 10 kings of the Senluo Palace greeted him outside of the Palace, and in request of Sun Wukong's insistence of checking the Register of Life and Death, welcomed him in and demanded the presiding judge to fetch the Register of Life and Death to have a check. The judge looked through them all one by one but could not find the name of Sun Wukong.

There was another register, and Sun Wukong looked through this one himself. Under "Soul No. 1350" was the name of Sun Wukong, the Heaven-born stone monkey who was destined to live to the age of 342 and die a good death. (Wu, 1980, p. 34)

Having seen this,

Sun Wukong took the register, crossed out all the names in the monkey section (with an ink-soaked brush), and threw it on the floor with the words, "The account's closed. That's an end of it. We won't come under your control any longer." (Wu, 1980, p. 34)

So, the reason why from then on so many mountain monkeys "have never grown old is that their names are not on the books of the officials of the Underworld" (Wu, 1980, p. 34). In reality, it was in his dream that Sun Wukong helped all his kinsmen gain the great benefit to have a rather long longevity, which displays his action of collectivism.

Before Sun Wukong was pressed under the bottom of the Five Elements Mountain by the Buddha, Sun Wukong had called himself the title "Great Sage Equaling Heaven" which had also been agreed by the Jade Emperor of the Heaven Palace (Wu, 1980, p. 42). But because Sun Wukong had violated the Heaven's rules by eating all the big ripen longevity-giving peaches, drinking the liquor for the feast offered by Queen Mother, and eating all the golden pills of refined elixir in Lao Zi's Tushita Palace, the Jade Emperor begged the Buddha for help to press Sun Wukong under the bottom of the Five Elements Mountain, where Sun Wukong had to wait 500 years for Tang Priest to form a team to carry out a journey to the West for fetching the Scriptures. Finally, the Tang Priest's team overcame a great number of frustrations and difficulties and all the team members got their rewards with granted honorable titles. So, it can be regarded as a satisfactory and happy ending for all, showing a sense of harmonious collectivism.

In comparison, the American Beat Generation representative novel, *On the Road*, has a peculiar writing style showing a sense of individualism. *On the Road* now ranks a typical classic novel with spontaneous writing style, describing a series of pictures of pursuit of personal freedom in American continent. Just as the remarks in the book itself obviously state, *On the Road* is a "Holy Book for the rebels", "an autobiography of the souls of the BG key figures" (Kerouac, 2012, Back Cover). This novel is the second novel of Jack Kerouac and its publication is hailed as "a significant historic event" (Kerouac, 2012, Back Cover). The main character Dean, who is emphatically depicted, is a symbol of the individualistic rebellious soul for those days, representing the idealistic free life the individualists. The novel (the original version) starts as follows:

I first met met (note: original form) Neal (note: Neal for Dean) not long after my father died ... With the coming of Neal there really began for me that part of my life that you could call my life on the road... Neal is the perfect guy for the road because he actually was born on the road, when his parents were passing through Salt Lake City in 1962, in a jalopy, on their way to Los Angeles. (Kerouac, 2012, p. 7)

Consequently, the title of the book *On the Road* itself is the result of an inspiration that the author gained from the incident of Dean's birth on the road, symbolizing the changing of everything, just like the incessant beating of the heart. From the descriptions of "being born on the road" and "old car", it is clear for readers to know that Dean's parents were always on the road for the life of the whole family, and that Dean's family environment was on the move all the time, and his childhood experience had a significant impact on his values of his later life, preparing himself for his later rebellious acts. In the following analyses of several details, Dean's rebellious individualistic acts can be explicitly perceived.

The novel goes on with the description as follows:

At one point Allen Ginsberg and I talked about these letters and wondered if we would ever meet the strange Neal Cassady. This is all far back, when Neal was not the way he is today, when he was a young jailkid shrouded in mystery. Then news came that Neal was out of reform school and was coming to New York for the first time; also there was talk that he had just married a 16 years old girl called Louanne. (Kerouac, 2012, p. 7)

As the soul of the main characters in the book, Dean attracts all the members' attention and interest because of his youthfulness and mysteriousness. In reality, for Dean, food, drink, and sex mean all comforts. As a result, as soon as he and his newly-married wife Louanne firstly arrived in New York, they "cut around the corner looking for a place to eat and went right in Hector's, and since then Hector's cafeteria has always been a big glazed cakes and cream puffs" (Kerouac, 2012, p. 7). Louanne is but a sex mate for Dean's desire for sex; therefore, there is no true love in their relation. Very soon later, Dean and Louanne had a quarrel and then separated from each other because of inexplicable trivialities and Louanne even called the police for help. Dean had to leave New York in a flurry for New Jersey where his friend (Sal Paradise the author of the book, also a main character in the book) and his friend's aunt lived. He begged the author and his aunt to take him in and asked the author to teach him how to write. Dean could desert his newly-married pretty wife just for some inexplicable trivialities, which can indicate that he was longing for a kind of carefree individualistic life. As long as he ran across the anxious trivialities, he would act abnormally, and even desert his family. In this sense, what Dean did is just like what Huckleberry Finn and what Harry Angstrom respectively did in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Run, Rabbit*. All of these mentioned characters are pursuing a kind of idealistic and carefree life with no worry or anxiety, and such life is the essence of the individual idealistic American Dream in its original core.

As to the relationship between Dean and his friends, the author himself seemed to understand and sympathize for them.

In all, what Neal was, simply, was tremendously excited with life, and though he was a con-man, he was only conning because he wanted so much to live and also to get involved with people that would otherwise pay no attention to him. (Kerouac, 2012, p. 10)

In fact, the author was seeking excuses for Dean's misconducts, explaining that the delinquent such as Dean would not draw any attention from others, unless they had special attractions or extraordinary talents. In the novel, Dean's successful tricks are described as a reflection of leading a kind of comfortable life, so the reader should

understand such tricks from a positive perspective. As is known to all, such a delinquent as Dean could easily be looked down upon and treated with prejudice, but Dean's tricks could be endured because

He was conning me, so-called, and I knew it, and he knew I knew (this has been the basis of our relation) but I didn't care and we got along fine. I began to learn from him as much as he probably learned from me. (Kerouac, 2012, p. 10)

Such is the subtle relationship between the author Sal and the main character Dean. During their coexistence of the author and Dean, the author gained the raw writing materials and inspiration for his book from Dean, while Dean got for himself solid benefits from the author, so they had their own personal purposes, living together peacefully and independently, unlike the relationship between Dean and his first wife Louanne. In a word, no matter what the relationship between Dean and his first wife Louanne is or what the relationship between Dean and the author is, all those relationships embody the main character's idealistic individualism functioning in the real world. In fact, Dean could restrain his impulsive personality whenever it is necessary.

In order to have a clearer understanding of Dean's idealistic individualism and peculiar individualistic behavior, here is more description as follows:

He had lived happily with Carolyn in San Francisco ever since that Fall in 1947; he got a job on the railroad and made a lot of money. He became the father of a cute little girl, Cathy Jo Ann Cassady. Then suddenly he blew his top and while walking down the street one day he saw a 49 Hudson for sale and rushed to the bank for his entire roll. He bought the car on the spot. (Kerouac, 2012, p. 111)

Superficially, Dean's family life was very comfortable, along with a tolerable job. However, Dean himself was a disciplinarian who did not like to lead a restrained type of lifestyle. He could put whatever came into his mind into action in order to have a personal experience on the road only for satisfying his carefree emotional impulse. It was that newly-bought car that Dean and his railroad workmate Al Hinkle drove four thousand miles within four days from San Francisco to the place where the author was, on the way going round Denver to pick up his sweet firstwife Louanne, damaging several parts of the newly-bought car, and the car itself was still in installation. "There was only one instalment paid on it too" (Kerouac, 2012, p. 116). From the previous description about Dean, one can see it's clear that Dean had the fascinating personality that attracted the author because Dean had the natural and unrestrained character as what a famous Chinese poet Li Bai described in his poetry: "Heaven has made us talents, we're not made in vain./A thousand gold coins spent, more will turn up again" (XU 315).

In addition, Dean's individualism is still reflected as follows: He did anything all at his will, without taking any consideration of other people's reaction. He would put whatever he thought enjoyable into practice wherever and whenever he felt like doing so. He did not think over and over again before he was to act, just daringly enjoying whatever process he was experiencing, and giving off an infinite charm and attraction.

Conclusion

In summary, Sun Wukong in *The Journey to the West* mainly carries out his plan according to the collective needs of their team, which is surely for the benefits of the group or community, while Dean in *On the Road* only goes his way just according to his temporary individual desires, whose purpose is chiefly to experience the process of individual freedom intuitively without any consideration of exterior interference or benefits. However, it is not easy to distinguish absolutely the difference between Sun Wukong's collectivism from Dean's individualism. This is because it is just like human being's mix of material desires and spiritual demands, or

because it is just like human being's identity of both an individual being and a social being coexisting in a person all at once. Only on different occasions and/or through different behaviors can human beings show their differences, which is closely related to the different perspectives of different cultural backgrounds. So, the topic of the relation between individualism and collectivism is worth further studying and researching.

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