

Xiyou ji (西遊記) and the Netherworld



Professor Vincent Durand-Dastès

(l'Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales, Paris)

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Room LG18 (Faculty of Law, Sidgwick Site)

Abstract

The full-length epic novel *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji*) is, admittedly, a trip to paradise: haven't the Tang monk and his monstrous disciples been assigned as a mission to get to Buddha's pure land to fetch the Buddhist scriptures? But, for this talk, we'll be looking at the *Journey* from the depth of Hell. The 1592 novel includes no fewer than three trips to the Netherworld: Sun Wukong's short and tumultuous descent to Hell, then the long and dangerous stay of Emperor Tang Taizong, and, eventually, the trip of Liu Quan to bring a gift of melons to the Kings of Hadès. We'll try to understand the reason why those Hell's trips appear in the narrative, and, going a step further, will ask a provocative question: cannot the whole *Xiyou* pilgrimage outside of the boundaries of the normal world, across haunted landscapes inhabited by monsters and demons, be seen as a trip to Hell? To answer this question, we won't restrict our analysis to the late Ming novel, but also question the role of the *Xiyou* story in late-imperial religious narratives and rituals.

Speaker

Vincent Durand-Dastès is Professor of Pre-modern Chinese Literature at the Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales (Inalco) in Paris. His research interests dwell on late-imperial narrative literature in its relationship with religion and the supernatural. He is the author of *La Conversion de l'Orient : un périple didactique de Bodhidharma dans un roman chinois en langue vulgaire du XVIIe siècle* (2008); 'A late Qing Blossoming of the Seven Lotus: Hagiographic Novels about the Qizhen 七真' (2013); 'Divination, Fate Manipulation and Protective Knowledge: around The Wedding of the Duke of Zhou and Peach Blossom Girl, a Popular Myth of Late Imperial China' (2018); 'Une ardente alchimie ou l'immortalité par les cuisines' (2019); 'Une matinée au théâtre des enfers : les incrustations narratives dans les rouleaux verticaux des Dix rois du monde des ténèbres de la Chine moderne' (2022); and 'Corps impénétrables et nonnes entremetteuses : destins romanesques de la fille de pierre (*shinü* 石女)' (2022). He has edited *Empreintes du tantrisme en Chine et en Asie orientale : imaginaires, rituels, influences* (2016) and co-edited *Fantômes dans l'Extrême-Orient d'hier et d'aujourd'hui* (2017 with Marie Laureillard) and *Récits de rêve en Asie Orientale* (2018, with Rainier Lanselle).

