

**The Written Teachings of the Buddha Are Brought to China by the monk Tsang Tseng**  
Middle School Dina Wills

**Source of story:** My daughter Sara Michener, who studies Chinese stories. She told me the story, then called to give me more information when she found the book it was in.

**Art in the museum that relates to this story:** 1) Seated Buddha (Maitreya, of the future). Marble. Jin dynasty 1115-1234, China. 2) Thirteen Buddhist Deities. Hanging scroll: ink, color and gold on silk. Japanese, circa 1336-1568. 3) Standing Arya-Avalokitesvara (Bodhisattva on lotus base). Woodblock construction: wood with color, gold and silver pigment, crystal-inlaid eyes and metal fittings. Japanese, 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In the days when the old Emperor sat on the golden throne, and dragons flew in the mountains, there was a Buddhist monk named Tsang Tseng who walked in the monastery garden with sadness in his heart. He was very devoted to teachings about the Buddha, but he hungered to know more about this Ascended Being who had died in far-off India.

As he strolled, a monkey half as tall as he was leaped from a wall into his path. "My name is Sun Wu Kung," cried the monkey, "and I want to be your disciple, most holy monk."

Tsang Tseng drew back in disdain. "I need no disciples," he said. "I do not know enough about the Ascended One to have a disciple. I have much to learn."

Sun Wu Kung sat down on the grass in front of the monk. "I could be very helpful as you travel to India," he said. Tsang Tseng shook his head. "I have no plans to go to India," he called over his shoulder.

No one was more surprised than Tsang Tseng when some of his fellow monks pleaded with him to consider journeying to India to bring back the written teachings of the Buddha. "We know that there is no road, and that there are many mountains and deserts between us and the holy writings," they said. "You have more knowledge of the teachings now than any one else. You would be protected by the Ascended Beings."

"And perhaps a monkey," thought Tsang Tseng. As he prepared for his journey, he looked for Sun Wu Kung, but never saw him.

Months later, Tsang Tseng walked with great weariness into a small mountain town, where he was greeted by hisses and snarls from the men gathered in the town center. He could not understand their dialect, but he could tell they would do him harm. He sat down in the road to pray, since violence was not part of his practice. He heard a great commotion, but remained in prayer. When he had finished his prayers, he opened his eyes to see the monkey sitting near him, and the dead bodies of several men lying in the square. "You seemed to need help," said Sun Wu Kung. "May I be your disciple now?"

"You killed them! Violence is not part of the teachings of the Great Buddha. You may not be my disciple. Go away from me!"

A woman approached the two, wearing a dusty stained brown robe, with its hood pulled over her head. The monk bowed to her, for he knew her even in that guise. "What is your wish?" he asked the Ascended Being, Kuan-Yin. She took a silver crown from the folds of her robe, and placed it on the monkey's head. "Sun Wu Kung, this crown will

pinch you unmercifully if Tsang Tseng believes you have ever resorted to violence again. Are you willing to wear it, if Tsang Tseng will take you on his journey as his disciple?"

"Yes!" agreed the monkey. He patted the crown with joy, his eyes pleading with the monk. Tsang Tseng looked from Kuan-Yin to the monkey and sighed. "Come," he ordered Sun Wu Kung. The woman vanished.

It was many days later, as the two crawled up the steep sides of a rocky, frozen mountain as night fell, that they saw a fire in the distance. Hours later, they reached it, to see that the fire covered the face of the mountain as far as they could see in either direction. There was no way forward. Shadowy demon beings lurked near the fire, laughing wickedly.

The monkey raced forward with a stone in his hand and hurled it at the demons. Immediately, the silver crown pinched his head tremendously. He howled with pain, and the demons roared with laughter. "Master!" screeched the monkey. "They are demon beings, not human beings!" "Then violence against them is indeed permitted," called the monk. The silver crown on Sun Wu Kung's head resumed its normal shape.

When he returned to Tsang Tseng, the monk said quietly, "I've heard that there is a fan held by a human being who lives somewhere near this fire, and that the fan will put out the fire long enough for travelers to pass." The monkey nodded. "Which way shall I go?" he asked. The monk prayed for a long time, then said, "Go that way, around those rocks. There will be a hut."

Sun Wu Kung scrambled up the frozen ground, his crown now comfortable on his head. He saw a ramshackle hut, its door swinging open. When he peered inside, a shadow in the corner muttered, "Do you come from Tsang Tseng?" "Yes, I do!" The figure threw something at the monkey, who ducked but was grazed by a large wooden fan. Clutching it, he scrambled back down toward the fire, found his master, and thrust the fan into his hands.

Tsang Tseng held the heavy wooden fan in both hands and waved it slowly. The fire became dimmer. The demon beings snarled in anger, but slowly faded into air. A path appeared through the fire. Tsang Tseng laid the fan on the ground, and walked toward the path, followed by Sun Wu Kung.

These two had many adventures on their way to India to find the written teachings of the Buddha, and even more adventures as they returned with the sacred literature. The stories about their journey fill many pages, and are told around the fires on winter nights. The road they traveled became the Silk Road used by caravans for centuries. Sun Wu Kung's silver crown now sits on a shelf in a museum, never moving, and no one knows from whence it came.