Chapter Nine

The Mission and the Definition of Indian and Chinese Heroes

Introduction

Removing harmful monsters is a hero’s duty both in the East and the West. However, the hero departs on an adventure for fame in Greece, for Dharma in India, and for a mandate from Heaven in China. Generally, Indian and Chinese heroes perform their task in the name of Dharma or a mandate from heaven while Greek heroes reveal their personal aim with no hesitation. Hercules killed Hydra, a wild boar, monstrous birds, etc. for expiation of his sin, and Theseus and Perseus kill the Minotaur and the Gorgon respectively and received a kingdom. But the Pāṇḍavas kill cousins, teachers, and Bhīṣma, their grandfather also, for Dharma. And king Tang of the Shang dynasty and king Wu of the Zhou dynasty raise troops for saving the people from distress with a mandate from Heaven. The Pāṇḍavas and these two kings do not open hostilities to gain the throne. In India and China, the individual aim or benefit of a hero should follow Dharma and Tao, not precede it. As previously stated, the heroes of both countries are beings who bring public peace as incarnations of Dharma and Tao. They are not individuals who look after their own interests. In India and China, one who restrains his personal desires and strives for common good is approved of as a hero. Sometimes, a man in both countries justifies his conduct on the basis of public interest, though it is just for his benefit. One who does not work for public interest cannot be worshipped as a hero, no matter how great and noble he is personally. The public character of a mission is the essential factor to distinguish one’s heroic qualification. Then, what kinds of tasks do heroes perform in the name of Dharam and Tao? In the present chapter, we will approach the definition of Indian and Chinese hero through the examination of a hero’s mission.

1. The mission of heroes in India and China
In modern times, in the West, various great men came to belong to the category of hero. Thomas Carlyle classifies poets and clerics as heroes. This trend reflects modern values which lay stress on self-realization. However, traditionally, in India and China, artistic or religious achievement is not regarded as public. Thus, literary creation or religious enlightenment is not accepted as a public affair. Thus, poets, clerics, etc. are not recognized as heroes. In India and China, a direct effect on the public is considered important. This difference in points of view between the East and the West is particularly seen in the quest hero. The quest hero who explores an unknown world is one of most important types of hero in the West. This hero is more significant for nomadic people who seek a new land. But, in India and China, where agriculture developed in ancient times, exploring does not seem to be accepted as a heroic deed. For, in an agrarian society, exploring does not have such a public characteristic. King Mu of the Zhou dynasty was a romantic traveler who fell in love with ‘the Queen mother of the West.’

“On the lucky chia-tzu day the emperor was the guest of the Queen Mother of the West. Then, bearing the white jade tablet and the dark jade disc of monarchy, he had an audience with the Queen Mother of the West. As a token of good will, he presented her with a brocade sash embroidered in a hundred colors and a [textual lacuna] embroidered in three hundred colors. The Queen Mother of the West accepted them with repeated bows of thanks. On the [textual lacuna] yi-ch’ou day, the emperor held a banquet in honor of the Queen Mother of the West beside Jasper Pool. The Queen Mother of the West sang an unaccompanied song for the emperor which went:

White clouds in the sky,
Hilly mounds rise up through them.
Miles of road far ahead,
Mountains are streams crossing it.
May you never die
So you can return to us again.

The emperor answered her with a poem that went:
I must go home to my land in the east
To govern all the Hsia in peace.
When the myriad people are settled and at peace
I will want to visit you.
Within three years
I will return to your wilds.

The Queen Mother of the West sang another ditty for the emperor which went:

Ever since I went to this land in the west
I have lived in these wilds.
Tigers and panthers form my pride,
Crows and jays nest with me.
I enjoy my life and will not move.
I and the Emperor of Heaven’s daughter.
How I pity all humankind
For they are parted from you.
Blow the panpipes, beat the panpipe tongues!
Let your mind soar on high,
Master of humankind,
For you alone does Heaven wait.

Then the emperor drove his horse and ascended Mount Yen. Then he recorded an inscription on a rock on Mount Yen and planted a locust tree there with a sign inscribed ‘the Queen Mother of the West’s Mountain.’

However, he receives an unfavorable evaluation by people, because exploring is understood as going sightseeing in China. He remains a model of terrible king who put aside the affairs of state, and ruined his state. Even he who is free from worldly cares through travels should return to his country immediately, when another king rises in revolt. For him

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1 Birrell, op. cit., 174-5.
also, the duty as a king is more important than exploring. Also, Danzhu, the eldest son of Yao, lost the throne to Shun, because he liked to wander. In China, exploring is only valuable, when it is for taking care of people. In India also, only a pilgrimage or a searching for settlement is meaningful. Exploring itself does not seem to be significant, and it can be mere material for literature. In the Meghadūta, a cloud receives a mission as a messenger. The travelogue of king Mu was also used as material for a novel. In India and China where public interests are the standard of hero, a simple act of exploring cannot be regarded as a heroic deed. An iron will to climb the Himalayas is not for common good, so Edmund Hillary who conquered the highest peak in the Himalayas is not a hero from the standpoint of the East. Then, what kind of thing is recognized as a heroic deed in the East?

1.1. The removal of harmful things

Whether in the East or in the West, one of the most heroic deeds is removing monsters. Heroes destroy anything which is maleficent to people. Doing away with a murderer or a robber as well as a harmful monster is the task of heroes. In India, Asuras and Rākṣasas play the villains rather than a wild animal or a brutal man. In fact, they are half brothers of gods, but they became targets for removal. Particularly, Rākṣasas who eat human flesh are regarded as monsters. Especially, in China, there are two kinds of troubles: a flood and a tyrant. Natural disaster and repressive politics should be removed before any other monster. In ancient civilizations, the need of irrigation facilities was one of the driving forces to give birth to a sovereign power. Therefore, both overthrowing a tyrant and controlling flood have a political undertone.

"Jie, the last of the Xia, and Zhouxin, the last of the Yin, were tyrants for whom historians use the same themes. Both loved luxury and debauchery. They were excessive and ‘had special talents for evil doing.’ Zhouxin had superhuman strength; he could crush wild animals with his bare hands. He invented cruel methods of punishment and torture, such as torture on a metal beam placed on a fire. These evil rulers left their principal wives and amused themselves with beautiful captive women, like Daji, who loved to attend torture sessions. They commissioned lascivious music and dances……Zhouxin gave great parties at

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2 The *Mu Tianzi Zhuan*, a romance in the 4th century B.C.
Shaqui (the hill of sand where the tyrant had had parks and terraces built.) He created a pond of wine; he suspended great cuts of meat so as to make them look like forests; he sent naked men and women to seek one another there; he gave orgies that lasted all night."³

There are various kinds of natural disasters which heroes have to remove: a drought, a flood, an epidemic, the ten suns, etc. It was believed in Greece, as well as in India and China, that a natural disaster was caused by the immoral conduct of the uppermost ruler. Therefore, it is a very important task to pacify a natural disaster not only for heroes but also for kings. Due to the sin of king Oedipus who killed his own father and married his own mother, an epidemic spread in Thebes. And the king expiates his wrongs by making himself go blind.

“The oracle warned Laius that he would die at the hands of his son: in consequence, his child was exposed on Cithaeron with his feet pinned together by a spike. But the child was found by shepherds of the childless king of Corinth, Polybus, who reared the child as his own and called him Oedipus, ‘Swell-foot’, because of his mutilation. Grown to manhood, Oedipus was taunted by a drunk with not being the true son of his father, and himself went to the oracle at Delphi for information, only to be told that he would marry his mother and kill his father. Resolved never to return to Corinth, he set out for Thebes. He was forced from the road by an old man in a wagon, whom he killed. He found Thebes beset by the Sphinx (the Strangler) whose riddle he was able to solve, becoming king in place of Laius, who had been killed by robbers on a journey. Oedipus then married the queen, Jocasta, who bore him two sons and two daughters. …

When Oedipus discovered he had killed his father and married his mother, Jocasta committed suicide and Oedipus blinded himself. His wife’s brother, the important figure in matrilinear societies, ruled in Thebes until Oedipus’s sons, Eteocles and Polynices, came of age, when they quarrelled over the joint kingship, as if they were twins. Oedipus cursed them and went to Athens, where his buried corpse defended the frontier against the Thebans who had rejected

³ Bonnefoy, op. cit., 1023 - 4.
In India also, a drought is caused by the fault of a king, but in the main, Brähmaṇa priests who can appeal to the gods with sacrifice play a role in pacifying natural disasters.

“etasminneva kāle tu sakhā daśarathasya vai
lomapāda iti khyāto hyaṅgānāmiśvaro ’bhavat.
At this time there was a king of Anga, known by the name of Lomapada, who was the friend of Dasharatha.

tena kāmāt kṛtaṃ mithyā brāhmaṇasyeti naḥ śrutih
sa brāhmaṇaiḥ parityaktastato vai jagataḥ patiḥ.
purohitāpacārāccca tasya rājño yadṛcchayā
na vavarṣa sahasrākṣāstato ’piḍyanta vai prajāḥ.
We have heard that he wantonly told a falsehood to a Brahmana. That ruler of the earth was therefore abandoned by all the Brahmanas. Thus without having had a priest, the king became sinful and therefore the deity of one thousand eyes (Indra) stopped to shower rain; and thus his subjects began to suffer.

sa brāhmaṇān paryaprcchat tapoyuktān manīṣināḥ
pravarṣane surendrasya samarthān prthīvīpate.
O ruler of earth, he asked the Brahmanas who were intelligent, able and fit how rain might be poured by the lord of the celestials.

kathāṃ pravarṣet parjanya upāyaḥ paridṛṣyaṭām
tamūcuscoditāste tu svamatāni manīṣinaḥ.
(He said), ‘How can the clouds pour rain, find out a means.’ Those intelligent men assembling together, gave out each their own opinions.

tatra tveko munivarastam rājānamuvāca ha
kupitāstava rājendra brāhmaṇā niskṛti carā.

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4 Pinsent, op. cit., 81.
Thereupon one great Rishi thus spoke to the king, ‘O king of kings, the Brahmanas are angry with you. Do something to appease them.

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\begin{align*}
\text{ṛṣyaśṛṅgaṃ munisutamānayasva ca pārthiva} \\
vāneyamanabhijñāṃ ca nārīṇāmārjave ratam. \\
sa cedavatared rājan viṣayam te mahātapāḥ \\
sadyah pravarṣet parjanya iti me nātra samāśayaḥ.
\end{align*}
\]

O king, send for the Rishi’s son Rishyashringa who knows nothing of the female sex, who dwells in the forest and who takes delight in simplicity. If that great ascetic, O king, come to your kingdom, there is not the least doubt that the clouds will instantly pour rains.’”

*Mahābhārata* (3. 109.)

Whether it is a natural disaster or a tyrant, the basic aim of heroes is removing harmful things.

1.2. The teaching of useful things

A hero who teaches useful things is called ‘culture hero.’ Prometheus who is one of the Titans belongs to the category of culture hero, because he brought fire to humankind. According to Paul Radin who studied Winnebago mythology, a hero of animal figure

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5 Vyāsa, op. cit. 2:323.

6 On his study on Winnebago heroic mythology, Paul Radin suggests 4 stages of hero: Trickster, Hare, Red Horn, and Twin hero. The Winnebago also known as the Ho-Chunk, are a Siouan-speaking tribe of Native Americans. His study deals with a image of hero in each stage of life as the development process of consciousness.

i) Trickster

The Trickster hero reflects babyhood, in which one acts to fulfill instinctive desires rather than for accomplishing a purpose. This type of hero takes the form of an animal, which symbolizes the unconscious instinct. In this stage, heroes are childish, violent, and troublesome, but they evoke mirth.

ii) Hare

When instinctive and childish desires are curbed, this type of hero appears. The Hare hero integrates his own suppressed shadow in the Unconscious into his consciousness by facing it. In this stage, heroes still have the form of an animal, but they are culture heroes who grant a creative form to an
belongs to this type of hero. For example, ox-headed Shennong (the Flame Emperor) is a representative culture hero who taught farming and the use of herbal drugs.

“The ox-headed Shennong is said to have invented the plough and to have taught men basic agriculture, but it seems likely that he was first and foremost god of the burning wind, of the technique of clearing scrub jungle by fire in order to set seeds in the area, rich in potash, which remains after the fire has passed. If this is so, then one can understand that, as planting replaces gathering and ploughing replaces slash-and-burn, the new inventions called for by new techniques are attributed to the originally presiding deity.”

And Fuxi, the upper half of whose body was human while the lower half was that of a snake, invented hunting, fishing, and cooking.

iii) Red Horn
The Red Horn is a human hero who endures troubles. This type of hero shows the typical image of a hero who overcomes difficulties and conquers his weakness with the help of assistants. In this stage, heroes lead civilized life, emerging from the natural state.

iv) Twin hero
When there are twins or brothers of contrasting powers, this type of hero appears. Twins symbolize opposite sides of the same being. Therefore, their unity signifies the completion of self. But when twins are separated, they show the archetype of mutual conflict.

7 Christie, op. cit., 96.
Besides, there are many human culture heroes like Houji who invented farming tools. In India, sages handed down culture: fire was brought and the institution of marriage was settled by sages. These sages are worshipped as culture heroes, because they taught useful things, not because they achieved mental accomplishment. Of course, teaching and thought for mental accomplishment are useful, but only external achievement seems to be regarded as a qualification of heroes in India and China. In other words, actual achievement which is useful for everybody can be accepted as a necessary condition for a hero. Therefore, generally, thinkers are not regarded as heroes in India and China. The sage Viśvāmitra helped Rāma with his weapons, and Agastya drank all the seawater to remove Asuras. Therefore, they are heroes who work for this world. However, thinkers and sages like Confucius, Buddha, etc. cannot be called heroes because of their mental achievement.

1.3. Making people comfortable by governing a country

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8 Birrell, op. cit., 70.
It is the role of all kings as well as that of heroes to make people comfortable by governing a country. In a broad sense, the removal of harmful things and the teaching of useful things are included in this role. Therefore, a hero who removed a harmful thing or taught a useful thing became a king in Greece as well as in India and China. In India, the duty of Kṣatriya and the holiness of kings are mentioned in sacred texts, and the position of king seems to have a transcendental place. The role of king is even compared with the role of god.

"3. arājake hi loke śminsarvato vidrute bhayāt
rakṣārthamasya sarvasya rājānamasṛjatprabhuḥ.

4. indrānilayamākāṇāmagneśca varuṇasya ca
candravitteśaścaiva mātrā nirhṛtya śāśvatīḥ.

5. yasmāđeśaṃ surendrāṇaṃ mātrābhyyo nirmito nrpaḥ
tasmādabhībhavateṣa sarvabhūtāni tejasā.

6. tapatyādityavaccaiṣa cakṣūṣi ca namāṃsi ca
na caināṃ bhuvi śaknoti kaścidapyabhivikṣitum."9

"At a time when the people were without a king, and were utterly perturbed through fear, the Lord created the king for the protection of all this;
Taking out the essential constituents of Indra, Vāyu, Yama, Sūrya, Varuṇa, Chandra and Kubera.
In as much as the king was created with the constituent elements of these principal gods, he surpasses all living beings by his glory.
Like the sun, he burns the eyes and minds (of men); no one on the earth can even gaze at him."10

Manusmṛti (7. 1. 3-6.)

Without removing monsters or embarking on an adventure or fighting in a battle, some are called heroes, because of this role of making people comfortable. This role seems to give a statesman a heroic position. The king sage can belong to the category of hero because of this role. Bhīṣma protected his family and kingdom without departing on an adventure, Yao took

9 Jha, op. cit., 2:2.
care of his people, though he could not remove the ten suns, and Bharata governed his kingdom instead of Rāma. But they are all recognized as heroes. Performing one’s duty in his position is regarded as a heroic deed.

Conclusion

The definite difference between the Greek hero and the Indian/Chinese hero is that a human hero is not distinguishable from a hero-god in ability and virtue. Most god-heroes, including incarnations, belong to the savior type who comes down to the world of mortals while most human heroes belong to the troubleshooter type who ascends to the world of gods. However, the function of these two types is one and the same in human society; that is, the role as a servant for common good. Actually, some heroes of both countries performed mixed roles, because they are ready to do everything for people. For example, Rāma was a sage king as well as warrior, and the Yellow Emperor was a culture hero as well as a war hero. In India and China, the most important qualification of heroes is service to the world, not self-realization. Therefore, heroes are beings who are summoned to the world for public good.

Until now, it is noticed that Indian and Chinese heroes are servants for this world, who are endowed with outstanding abilities, and free from individual desires through the internalization of Dharma and Tao. On the basis of the above discussions, we can reach a definition of hero of both countries which is as follows:

“The hero of India and China is an incarnation of Dharma / Tao, and an outstanding being who serves for the benefit of the world.”

This definition means that the hero is not locked in individuality. He follows social rules represented as Dharma/Tao. And he removes a harmful thing or teaches a useful thing, or makes people comfortable. Not only a man or a god, but also an animal can become a hero.

As previously stated, for a traditional hero, physical strength is regarded as important, while, for a modern hero, it is individual accomplishment. However, in India and China, physical strength is not considered alone. Self-realization, in both countries, signifies complete internalization of Dharma/Tao, through restraint of individual desires. Therefore, a
hero of India and China does not suffer from growing pains and internal conflicts as does a modern hero. A hero in both countries suffers from external conflicts, but he does not suffer from internal conflicts. Besides, a hero of both countries wins fame by serving the world while a modern hero becomes great by overcoming himself. Therefore, a modern hero may not be famous though he is great, but an Indian / Chinese hero is both great and famous. Because, for the hero who departs on an adventure to prove himself, receiving recognition for himself is good and enough. But, a hero who assumes a mission for the world has to complete his mission and receive recognition from the world.