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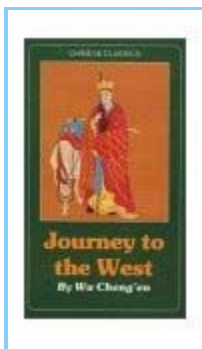
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Journey to the West

**Reviewed by Goofy*



Episodes: 25

A tale written in the Ming Dynasty (please correct me if I'm wrong), it is actually based on a real journey of a monk in the Tang Dynasty. Contrary to the story, the historical monk spent the longest part of his absence in study the language and copying down Buddhism Canons in India and only was on the road for six years or so.

This series was a traditional adaptation where each episode related an adventure of the monk and his disciples. The monk was portrayed as he is supposed to be, a normal human being with a touch of pureness and goodness.

Characters

The Tang monk:

More than one actor was used for this role although I could hardly distinguish them for all artists had the same style of makeup. In the series, we saw a physically weak monk at the beginning of the quest. He needed help from his first disciple several times. At first, he didn't trust the monkey's judgement on evil demons and had to learn his mistakes the hard way (He was changed into a beast and was almost eaten by a demon). Although he was good and brave and pure, he almost fell to a temptation in a shape of alluring beautiful lady once. I like that part because it showed that he was a human with emotion after all. He gained experience from different encounters with evilness and came out a wiser man and eventually attained godhood through his merits in bringing the Canons back to China.



All actors had the right look for this role although it might take some time to get used to that thick makeup for the new generation

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audience. After all, this series had traditional style and gave out a feel of an opera show.

Liu Xiao Ling Tong as the Monkey King:

The Monkey King was really the main attraction in this series. I can say confidently that the actor who portrayed this role was the BEST monkey king. He gave out a feeling of being a real monkey throughout the whole show. Not only due to excellent makeup, but every movement of his was superb. As a monkey supposed to be, he constantly changed poses, never be still for long. His acting alone was worth to watch this serial.



One more detail that I noticed was that his costumes would be changed often in every few episodes. They were appropriate costumes, simple but good complement to the wearer.

The Pig Demon:

The makeup on the pig looked realistic (i.e. no protruding plastic belly like in Journey to the West II). Granted that he might look rather ugly than cute like the newer versions (namely TVB's Journey to the West I and II), the fact was that the pig supposed to have unpleasant appearance.

As all series portrayed, this character seemed to be the most useless disciple in all. He was greedy, easily succumbed to lust and wealth, and was jealous of the Monkey King. One would wonder why he was to be included in this holy trip. However, I feel that he was there to show all weaknesses in human beings. While the monk showed goodness and the monkey showed prowess, the pig was simply himself. He was despicable sometimes, the way he always tried to bring down the monkey, but he was the other main character that made the series so entertaining.

The Water Demon and the Dragon Prince:

In this series, he was not that stupid. He was the most honest and steadfast disciple. He was rather matured, different from the one in the recent series.

The white horse, being the fourth disciple and was originally the Dragon Prince, had some role and a story of his own. I like the fact that he did not disappear 'conveniently' in certain scenes. He at least gave a presence of being there with the group.

Other Supporting Characters:

Although I think that Goddess of Mercy, Guan Yim, looked a bit too severe and had a bit too much accessories, the actress was quite good portraying her.

I was amazed to so good looking actresses in one series. Many of them were good dancers too. I suspect that some must be opera

artists. This is a unique character of older series where there are several traditional dances displayed in the scenes.

Despite of many youthful artists, I am quite disappointed with the portrayal of Na Cha as the actress in that role looked so old. Luckily, she was replaced with someone with more youthful look in the second half. Other gods were rather dull and uniformed. More focus seemed to be put on several Buddha reincarnations. (According to Buddhism belief, there was more than one Buddha from different era of earth. Yulai was the most recent Buddha of this period. (This is based from my Buddhism study; it could differ from Chinese Buddhism's principles.)

Plot

I like most episodes, especially the Widow City and the Magical Fruit ones. The stories were told straightforwardly with more serious tone than the new versions from TVB.

There were no cheesy proclamations or any miracles from praying involved here as those from JTTW I and II. Although this is not a bad thing in some cases, I like it better when the audience was left to interpret the morale of the stories by themselves. I found it is more profound to discover the theme of the serial without being told it to the face. That of course had to do with a good script and excellent acting. Actions truly speak louder than words in this case.

We get to see the life and destiny of every member of this holy group. We saw how their characters progressed and matured. Although the Monkey King stood out, the protagonist was doubtless and rightfully the monk as each episode wove more or less around him.

Miscellaneous:

The songs suited the ancient atmosphere and costumes were elaborated. I like the Monkey King's costumes where he had new style of clothing in every few episodes. They were nothing dashing but very appropriate.

All outdoor landscape was spectacular, and beautiful traditional dance and songs did give ancient feeling to the viewer.

The fighting choreography was also great. You can see that in all or most scenes, the monkey did his own stunts. Although coupling with some special effects, many were still hand-on combat.

Lastly, the arrival in India was well done. Some Buddhism historical places were mentioned, and the whole scene on the rabbit demon's marrying the monk was just outstanding with great costumes, song, dance, and extras. Something that the nowadays serie lacks.

Interesting Observations

Being a Thai person, I noticed that they used Thai temple as the background scene as the supposed destination. It was a bit amusing for me knowing that because technically, that temple could not have existed back then. However, I admire the effort in making the serial as realistic as possible.

Special Effects

Although they were not much to boast about, compared to the computer graphics nowadays, from JTTW I for instance, what is in the series was tastefully done and good enough for that production timeline. Lack of impressive special effects was redeemed by excellent acting of artists.

Rating

I gave 4 and a half because I really enjoyed watching the Monkey King and most of the episodes in the serial. While there were nothing that was extraordinarily exciting, the series was far from dull by all means. It had a charm of its own that would keep audience watching till the end. I wouldn't have minded if more episodes were added like the more detailed story on the monk's birth or the Pig Demon's love story.

For those who enjoyed the quality series, this is one that can be classified as a classic. I highly recommend the series for the viewers who want a more serious and traditional JTTW. And even if you don't care for the old fashioned style of the serial, watching the monkey was really worth all your money and would be an eye opener for you.

You never see the real JTTW until you have watched this serial.

Goofy's Rating: * * * * 1/2 (Scale of 5)

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