

John Wu's (Wu Jingxiong 吳經熊, 1899–1986) Understanding of Mysticism – Beyond East and West

Zbigniew Wesolowski SVD

Introduction: John Wu as a Christian Mystic

John C.H. Wu (Wu Ching-hsiung [Wu Jingxiong] 吳經熊, 1899–1986) was a lawyer, juristic philosopher, educator, and prominent Chinese Catholic convert in the 20th century. He first became a Methodist Christian, baptized in the winter of 1917 at the Comparative Law School of China in Shanghai, run by the American Methodist Mission, and converted to Catholicism on December 18, 1937 through conditional baptism at the Catholic Aurora University in Shanghai,¹ after reading the autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux (1873–1897). He authored numerous articles and books on various subjects including law, philosophy, and religion.

Wu Jingxiong was equally at home in both Eastern and Western cultures and languages. That is why translation work drew his attention. John Wu first translated the *Daodejing* 道德經 / Laozi 老子. He published it in three parts in the *T'ien Hsia Monthly* (1939–1940),² and then a revised translation was published in book form in 1961. From November 1, 1942 to October 31, 1944, John Wu was translating the Psalms and the New Testament into Classical Chinese. He published the Psalms in 1946 as *Shengyong yiyi* 聖詠譯義 (Hong Kong) and the New Testament in 1949 as *Xinjing quanji* 新經全集 (Hong Kong).³

Prof. Dr. Zbigniew Wesolowski SVD is director of the Monumenta Serica Institute, Sankt Augustin/Germany, and editor-in-chief of the journal *Monumenta Serica. Journal of Oriental Studies* as well as Monumenta Serica Monograph Series and Collectanea Serica. We print here his contribution to the XVI Symposium for Chinese Catholic Young Scholars in Europe (第十六届中国天主教旅欧青年学者研讨会) which took place from November 7-9, 2023 in the Foyer de Charité La Part-Dieu in Poissy (France). The Symposium was organized by the Centro Studi Li Madou (Li Madou Study Centre / 利玛窦研究中心) in Macerata, Italy.

- 1 Wu 1951, p. 243.
- 2 Lao Tzū 1939–1940, "Lao Tzū's *The Tao and Its Virtue*" 老子道德經, translated and annotated by John C.H. Wu 吳經熊, Part One: 1-24, in: *Tien Hsia Monthly* 9 (1939) 4, pp. 401-423; Part Two: 25-48, in: *Tien Hsia Monthly* 9 (1939) 5, pp. 498-521; Part Three: 49-81, in: *Tien Hsia Monthly* 10 (1940) 1, pp. 66-99.
- 3 Wu Jingxiong 吳經熊 1946, Translation of the Psalms: *Shengyong yiyi* 聖詠譯義 (A Free Translation of the Psalms), <http://jesus.tw/Psalms>.
Wu Jingxiong 吳經熊 1949, Translation of the New Testament: *Xinjing quanji* 新經全集 (Complete Translation of the New Testament), http://jesus.tw/New_Testament.
Wu Jingxiong 吳經熊 (trans.) 1961, *Xinjing quanji* 新經全集 (Complete Translation of the New Testament), Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 3rd edition.

Here we begin with John Wu's three important convictions which pertain to his spiritual dimension and Christian mysticism:

- 1) "Our pilgrimage is therefore neither eastwards nor westwards, but inwards; and this is what I call moving beyond East and West" (1951, p. 350); he also reiterated this thought in his *The Interior Carmel* (1953): "We journey neither eastwards nor westwards, but inwards; because in the center of our soul dwells the Divine Essence, which is our true home. We must, by the help of grace, make ourselves fitting homes for God" (1975 [1953], p. 226). "In the ultimate sense, our whole pilgrimage here below is but a prelude to heaven" (1975 [1953], p. 147).
- 2) "[...] the ultimate end of man [...] is union with God" (Wu 1971, p. 245). "Thank God that our life here on earth is but a temporary exile! The fact that we have a true Home to look forward to gives us the necessary courage to face all the vagaries and vicissitudes of life without blinking [...]" (1975 [1953], p. 38). "Our hearts are made for God, and they will know no peace until they rest in Him. This fundamental insight of St. Augustine should form the starting-point for psychiatry" (1975 [1953], p. 183). "We cannot attain peace until our destiny is fully realized; and our destiny will not be fully realized until we are perfectly transformed in Christ by the Holy Spirit into children of God" (1975 [1953], p. 204).
- 3) "It was by incarnation that God became man; so it is by incarnation – that is, incorporation in His Mystical Body – that a man can be deified. As Christ is the Way of God to man, so is He the Way of man to God. The realization of this truth is the beginning of all mystical insights" (1975 [1953], p. 163).

What did this inwardness or inward character of human life as pilgrimage mean to John Wu?

"Our pilgrimage"⁴ – his basic understanding of human life or even better of a human soul⁵ – is also articulated. In many mystical traditions, especially in Christianity, man is compared to a pilgrim. Thus, John Wu understood his life as a journey with a sacred purpose and a holy place to end, that is, with God Himself: "Well, one does not become a saint and go to Heaven by cleverness, while sanctification is my sole ambition now, and the Beatific Vision my sole objective" (Wu 1951, p. 323). In his *Fountain of Justice* (1971), he described this truth in the following way: "[...] the ultimate end of law is identical with the ultimate end of man, which is union with God" (p. 245).

John Wu understood himself as a special kind of mystic:

4 That is a "Homo viator" ("pilgrim man") as man on his way towards finding God; cf. Marcel 1962. Cf. John Wu's sayings: "[...] I am not writing an autobiography but only the story of my spiritual pilgrimage" (Wu 1951, p. 118), "my juristic pilgrimage" (Wu 1951, p. 123), "spiritual wanderings" (Wu 1951, p. 149). Cf. "Was I not a traveller, a lonely wanderer in a desolate world? Did I not write: Travelling has its advantages, the chief among which is that it drives home to you that you are but a *traveller on earth*. Your wife, your children, your friends are really no more than your chance acquaintances. Your own body or even your personality is something you have casually acquired. *You are a guest in a world without a host*, for all the people you meet are as much guests as you are" (Wu 1951, p. 305).

5 Cf. Wu 1951, p. 110 ("belief in God and the immortality of the soul"); Wu 1951, p. 171 ("a keen insight into my soul"); Wu 1951, p. 192 ("the physiognomy of the Chinese soul"); Wu 1951, p. 207 ("a true peace of soul"); Wu 1951, p. 260 ("But our souls are immortal") etc.

As for me, who am a carefree mystic, the currents of time have touched me but slightly. Even in my darkest days, I have felt a secret joy bubbling from the fountain of my heart, so much so that I have often recalled the striking words of St. Paul: "as dying and behold, we live, as chastised but not killed, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet enriching many, as having nothing yet possessing all things" (2 Cor. 6.9-10) (Wu 1951, p. 63).

1. His Understanding of Christian (Supernatural) Mysticism

John Wu was a teacher of Christian mysticism. In June 1949, John Wu became Visiting Professor of Philosophy at the University of Hawai'i, where he wrote his autobiography *Beyond East and West*, publishing it in 1951. In the Spring of 1950, he was invited by the School of Religion, affiliated to the University of Hawai'i, to teach Christian Mysticism for two terms. "The lectures which I gave then have been incorporated into the present book [*The Interior Carmel*] [...] More than half of this book has been written under his [i.e., my present confessor's] wise and patient direction."⁶ Besides this, one term he taught also Thomistic philosophy. It was a happy experience for him to muse over "the things of the spirit."⁷

My whole course on Christian Mysticism, which I have been giving in the School of Religion of the University of Hawaii, is based upon this one Psalm [of the Good Shepherd].⁸

The first stage, which the spiritual writers usually call the purgative way or the age of the beginners, is symbolized by the following verses:

The Lord is my shepherd: I shall want for nothing.

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me to waters where I may rest.

He gives refreshment to my soul.

The second stage, which is usually called the illuminative way or the age of the proficients, is symbolized by:

He guides me along right paths for his name's sake.

Although I walk in a darksome valley,

I shall fear no evil, for thou art with me.

Thy rod and thy staff: they comfort me.

6 Wu 1975 [1953], p. 253.

7 *Ibid.*

8 Wu 1951, p. 303.

The third stage, which is the unitive stage or the age of the perfect, is symbolized by:

Thou preparest a table for me before the eyes of my foes;

Thou anointest my head with oil;

My cup brims over.

Goodness and kindness will follow me all the days of my life,

And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord days without end (Wu 1951, pp. 303-304).⁹

The teaching of the three stages (or ways, or states, or aspects) of Christian spiritual life has a long history.¹⁰ What is here important is the fact that John Wu discovered and witnessed this spiritual and mystical growth in his own life. These three, i.e., purgative, illuminative, and unitive stages, are also used for the classification of the degrees of Christian perfection, or for measurement of the advancement of souls in the supernatural life of grace during their sojourn in the world. John Wu's deepest insight as his answer to God's overwhelming grace, understood according to his *Beyond East and West*, we can summarize in the following paraphrase: The Christian is born into this world, and dwells herein for a certain time. But he is not of the world. Thus, as Jesus said: "They [i.e., His disciples] are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:16). The world is of no avail to him; the Christian is a stranger and a sojourner in it. The true riches of the Christian on earth are grace, close communion with God, and all that fosters the supernatural life within him. Those things only are really evil which weaken his or her spiritual life or deprive him or her of it.

9 John Wu mentioned earlier in *Beyond East and West* (1951, p. 186) a comparative dimension of spiritual life in Chinese traditions: "[...] when I read in a Buddhist Classic: 'Avoid all evil, cherish all good, and keep the mind pure. This is the teaching of all the Buddhas'; I said to myself, 'How similar this is to three ways of the Christian spiritual life: the purgative, illuminative and unitive!' When I read Confucius' program of education of his pupils: 'First arouse their interest in wisdom by means of poetry; then establish their character by making them practice the moral rules; finally, harmonize their personality by means of music'; it reminded me of the Psalm of the Good Shepherd. The spheres are wide apart as heaven and earth, but the stages of progress are quite similar, for the simple reason that even grace has to work upon the natural and psychological apparatus of man. With regard to the wisdom of the East and Christian wisdom, God has given to my mind an organic unity of transparent differences."

10 The earliest occurrence in Christian writing of the terms *purgation*, *illumination*, and *union* seems to have been found in Pseudo-Dionysius (fl. c. 550), who applied them to the mystical experience. According to Dionysius, the three acts are thearchic (i.e., given by God) and hierarchic (i.e., ordered) ways to mystical union. They describe both complementary functions and successive activities; as successive they correspond to the three stages of mystical growth set down by Evagrius Ponticus, also called Evagrius the Solitary (345–399 AD). Cf. Hathaway 1969 and Tsakiridis 2010.

Thus, it is easy to recapitulate John Wu's threefold path of mystical growth,¹¹ i.e., purgative, illuminative, and unitive states,¹² which in his book *The Interior Carmel* he gave the subtitle "The Threefold Way of Love." Love, the love of God to him, seems to be his strongest experience in his life until then:

Yes, as I look back upon these fifty-odd years of my life, it appears all of one piece, the keynote being Love. My whole life has been surrounded by God's Love. All the scattered leaves of my life have been gathered together by His loving hand and bound into an harmonious volume (Wu 1951, p. 345).

After becoming a Methodist in 1917, he was, for the first few years, quite "a zealous Christian, praying constantly and visiting the poor" (Wu 1951, p. 75). However, later he experienced the following:

As my own faith was not firmly rooted, I gradually drifted away from my first love for lack of a congenial religious milieu. Moreover, my juristic and philosophical preoccupations diluted more and more what little faith I had got, with the result that I forgot all about the doctrine of the Trinity, and became a Unitarian without my knowing it. I began to look at Christ as a mere man, a human teacher whose extraordinary personality and lightning-like flashes of moral insight continued to fascinate me. I adored Him in the spirit of hero-worship, which I had imbibed from Thomas Carlyle.¹³ As a freethinker I no longer cared whether He was born of a virgin, or whether He rose again from the dead, or whether He actually worked miracles. If He was not God, He was all the more admirable and worthy of imitation. All questions of dogma were relegated to the background (Wu 1951, p. 77).

However, after the conversion to Catholicism he experienced a deep spiritual renaissance:

For me the "transcending spiritual repose" was not to come until the winter of 1937, when I embraced the Catholic Church. In the meantime I remained as restless as ever. I tried to find one substitute for God after another, but found no peace. Without his knowing it, it was partly due to his [that is, Justice Holmes¹⁴]

11 According to Christian understanding of mysticism, Christian mystics have been described as pursuing a threefold path corresponding to body, mind, and soul, that is, purgative, illuminative, and unitive aspects of their spiritual life. The first, purgative aspect or purification focuses on discipline of the human body. It emphasizes prayer at certain times, either alone or with others, and in certain postures, often standing or kneeling. There are other disciplines required like that of fasting and alms-giving, the latter including those activities called "the works of mercy," both spiritual and corporal. The second phase, the path of illumination, has to do with the activity of the Holy Spirit enlightening the mind, giving insights into truths not only explicit in the Bible and the rest of the Christian tradition, but also those implicit in nature and everyday experiences. The third phase, usually called contemplation, refers to the experience of oneself as in some way united with God. The experience of union varies, but it is first and foremost always associated with a reuniting with Divine love. Cf. Healey 1999.

12 In *Beyond East and West* (Wu 1951, pp. 350-351), John Wu deplors the low level of spiritual education of the Christian in the West: "To take just one instance, the average Buddhist in China knows something about the three stages of Abstinence, Concentration and Wisdom; while the average Christian has no idea of the three ways, the purgative, the illuminative and the unitive. The spiritual education of the Christian is sadly neglected."

13 Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) was a British essayist, historian, and philosopher from the Scottish Lowlands. Carlyle took a central position in Victorian culture, in the words of the American scholar and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), he was a "secular prophet."

14 John Wu maintained a correspondence with U.S. Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. (1841–1935; U.S. Supreme Court Justice: 1902–1932) and later produced scholarly work examining Holmes' legal thought. In

influence that my faith in Christianity had been diluted. I still retained some faint belief in God and the immortality of the soul” (Wu 1951, p. 110).

Let me quote another testimony of John Wu in which the transforming power of God's grace was at work not only in the life of John Wu,¹⁵ but also the quality of his marriage and his whole family:

Since I became a Catholic, my family has followed me into the Church, and Christ the King has been enthroned in our house. My wife¹⁶ and I have found our rest in the Sacred Heart of Christ. We are bound together by a common Love. As we progress in the love of God, we progress in the love of each other. For the past few years, my wife and I have been receiving Holy Communion practically every day [...]. O Christ, our hearts are united in the Love of You, and how can we ever be separated so long as neither of us is separated from You?¹⁷ In Your Sacred Heart we have found our Home; who says that we are exiles? O God, Your will is our destiny, and to do Your will is our freedom!

God has opened my eyes gradually to the interior qualities of my wife, to such a degree that, whereas I formerly thought she was not worthy of me, now I realize that I am not worthy of her. Christ has become the living bond between us. [...] We only adore the Christ that we have in common, and it is He who binds us together. As each of us comes closer to Christ, we find that we are coming closer to each other (Wu 1951, pp. 140-141).

The whole *Beyond East and West* permeates the atmosphere of John Wu's experience of grace as the love and mercy given to him by God because God desires him to have it,¹⁸ not because of anything he has done to earn it. It was to him the condescension and benevolence shown by God toward him and his family as a generous, free, and totally unexpected and undeserved gift:

this period of his life, we witness John Wu's friendship with Holmes. This friendship permeates the whole *Beyond East and West*. In its chapter 9: "The Story of a Friendship" (pp. 87-106), he writes: "We were two old babies. I was a baby who was an old man. He was an old man who was a baby. And the two old babies corresponded with each other for fourteen years on questions belonging more to eternity than to time. We were asking each other whether life was a dream. Our conclusion was that we could never prove that we were awake, and that it took an act of faith to assert that. He never wearied of stressing the need of faith. He wrote to me, 'If I were dying my last words would be: have faith and pursue the unknown end.' It is ironical that a man who talked so much about faith should be called a sceptic. Concretely his faith was not mine, but his philosophy of faith, vague as it was, did encourage me to embrace what I could not help regarding as the true Faith. I said to him once, 'Beneath your cynicism, Sir, there pulses a warm heart'" (Wu 1951, p. 130).

- 15 Cf. Wu 1951, p. 317: "By nature I am a coward, but by grace I have felt in times of danger like a baby in the arms of its mother. And since Mary is my Mother, how could I help feeling grateful for her ever-watchful care of me, in season and out of season?"
- 16 John Wu's love for his wife whom he married on April 12, 1916, was "at the first sight" (Wu 1951, p. 59). She was Theresa Li Wu 李吳 (1899-1959). They eventually had thirteen children (the sixth child joined the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers).
- 17 The echo of the words of St. Paul in Romans 8:35: "What will separate us from the love Christ has for us? Can trouble, distress, persecution, hunger, nakedness, danger, or violent death separate us from his love?"
- 18 Cf. Wu 1951, pp. 228-229: "To be converted, one must first know himself to be perverted. For the first step down in our own estimation is the first step up towards God. My pride was already crushed, but it was too painful to continue that condemnation of myself. Consequently, I closed the Bible like a child whose finger had been burnt by accident. I wanted to read something lighter to distract my mind."

I don't rely only on my nature, but on His grace. His grace has changed my natural changeableness into a feeling tentacle for discovering every day new beauties of Christ and of His Church, thus ministering unto my constancy. Has St. Paul not said, "For when I am weak, then I am strong"? Shall I not say, "When I am changeable, then I am constant"? The Lord has transmuted my natural fickleness into supernatural fidelity! (Wu 1951, p. 267)

John Wu became "a soldier of Christ" (Wu 1951, p. 254) to whom

God has opened [his] eyes to one fundamental truth: Nothing really good can be accomplished without genuine suffering. The higher the achievement, the higher the price. There is no greater thing than sanctity, and therefore one must be ready to pay the highest price. Even the Son of God had to pay the supreme price for His Christhood, had to swallow the bitter cup, had to be the Man of Sorrow before He could redeem mankind from its sins. If one wants to follow Christ but at the same time shrinks from pain, it is like crying for the moon (Wu 1951, p. 258).

In accepting from God his Christian faith, John Wu was also given the gift of tears.¹⁹ To Christian mystical tradition, tears are a gift of grace from God. Thus, the shedding of tears arises from the heart that reveals an openness and vulnerability. The fruit of tears is always joy.²⁰

Although love (charity) is a basic attitude in Christian life, because "God is love" (1 John 4:8), this attitude, however, transcends Christianity as such, and is to be universally found in all human beings.

[...] Love is all. In dealing with the Orientals, one cannot too much emphasize that God is more motherly than a mother. The Chinese respect the father, but love the mother. One of the things that attracted me so strongly to St. Thérèse of Lisieux is that she knew well the maternal quality of God's love. As she said, "I had long felt that Our Lord is more tender than a mother, and I have sounded the depths of more than one mother's heart ... Fear makes me shrink, whereas under love's sweet rule I not only advance – I fly." When I read it, I said to myself, "How Chinese she is!" (Wu 1951, p. 352).

In John Wu's life, the human face of love is present from the very beginning. It was present in the painful experiences of losing very early his two mothers.²¹

19 For example, Wu 1951 (pp. 235-236): "Hardly had I finished the last paragraph [on the sinning woman at Simon's house (cf. Luke 7:36-50)] when I burst into a violent fit of weeping myself. I said, 'Jesus, I, too, am a prostitute. God has endowed me with beauties of soul and intellect, and I have wasted them on the search for worldly honors and material riches. In the world of politics and in social life, I too have been forced to pretend a pleasure I did not feel, and to show a smiling face to those whom I despised. And all the time I have been neglecting you, my Redeemer and my Spouse. Forgive me, Jesus, and let me anoint you with my tears! And forgive all my dear sisters, those poor sing-song girls, who are much better than I am. Turn them into your saints!'" For other instances, see Wu 1951, pp. 255, 260, 308, 316.

20 Cf. Wu 1951, p. 215: "Joy is perfection, says Spinoza; I may add, joy and pleasure are as wide apart from each other as heaven and earth"; and p. 211: "Only when you have tasted sickness can you realize with all the muscles of your body what a great joy it is just to be in normal health."

21 Here I would like to cite an intriguing passage from *Beyond East and West* concerning John Wu's search "for a Mother": "All my life I had been searching for a Mother, and at last I had her in the Catholic Church, and this in

The above is the context of John Wu's personal and religious life and of his thought on mysticism in which the phenomenon of love has its priority.

As far as John Wu's understanding of love is concerned, it is to be found especially in his *The Science of Love: A Study in the Teachings of Thérèse of Lisieux* (1941). In *Beyond East and West* on pages 267-269, John Wu looks back at how he came to write this booklet. His *Science of Love* is interesting because it displays what I would call "empathetic²² epistemology"²³ as understanding through the discovery of spiritual affinity. An epistemic value of spiritual life is an important way and approach to know oneself, others, and the whole universe. John Wu's *The Science of Love* is a classic example of it, although in his *Beyond East and West* this element of his epistemology is also fruitfully at work. In John Wu's description of his friendship with Holmes, he said: "We were two old babies. I was a baby who was an old man. He was an old man who was a baby" (Wu 1951, p. 130). In view of Thérèse of Lisieux, he writes: "Nor is it for nothing that this time He [the Holy Spirit] has raised 'a baby who is an old man'" (Wu 1941, pp. 34-35). Thus, through his empathetic

a triple sense. God is my Mother, the Church is my Mother, and the Blessed Virgin is my Mother; and these three Mothers have merged into one Motherhood, in which I live, move and have my being. [...] One of the charms of the Catholic Church is that this feminine element in the Character of Jesus is institutionally represented in the person of the Blessed Virgin. It is indeed the True Church, for it embodies the Personality of the Founder in Its fullness" (Wu 1951, p. 244). In Chapter 3: "My little mother" (pp. 26-32) of his *Beyond East and West*, John Wu begins as follows: "God gave me two mothers, one to bear me and another to bring me up. The one who bore me I shall call here my *little* mother; the other who brought me up I shall call my *big* mother." His little mother died when John was only four years old. About his big mother, John Wu wrote as follows: "It is not easy for me to write about my big mother. If I am asked who of all human beings is dearest to me, I would answer without the slightest hesitation that it is my big mother. I have dreamed of her more often than of any other person. I have wept more tears in memory of her than of anyone else" (Wu 1951, p. 33). One has not to be a psychologist to imagine the impact of the death of a parent, especially of a mother, for our life. Psychological research has shown that a person's age affects his or her ability to cope with the death of a parent. The loss affects adult personality development, a sense of security, and relationships with the surviving parent and significant others. Besides, younger children, as it was the case of John Wu, are more at risk for depressive symptoms than older children. His big mother also died when he was an adolescent of 15 years. Thus, we want to conclude that John Wu's "search for a Mother" has its setting in his life which influenced his understanding of his spiritual life and mysticism.

- 22 Empathy is the human capacity to recognize emotions and psychic states that are being experienced by another human or sentient, or even fictional, being. For example: A human being may need to have a certain amount of empathy before he or she can experience compassion. The German word for empathy was originally "Einfühlungsvermögen" (later also re-translated as "Empathie"), a new phenomenon explored at the end of 19th century mainly by Theodor Lipps (1851–1914). Apart from an emotional empathy (affective empathy) as the capacity to respond with an appropriate emotion to another's mental states, there is also a cognitive empathy as the ability to identify another's mental states which for us here is more important. Cf. Shamay-Tsoory – Aharon-Peretz – Perry 2009.
- 23 Cf. Ronald S. Laura – Dan Zhou 2012, "Reconceptualizing the Foundations of Knowledge to Enhance the Pedagogic Goals of Environmental Education with Special Reference to the Three Gorges Dam Project," in: 2012 International Conference on Future Environment and Energy, *International Proceedings of Chemical, Biological & Environmental Engineering*, vol. 28, pp. 224-229 (website: www.ipcbee.com/vol28/41-ICFEE2012-H2009.pdf, retrieved on March 5, 2013, not accessible any more). Here "empathetic epistemology" is contrasted with "power epistemology" as a historically Western dominant epistemological tenet, namely, that "Knowledge is tantamount to Power." The reliance on "power epistemology" as the dominant model for technologization has created a scientific discourse which marginalizes the importance of the ethical issues. "As Professor Laura reminds us in his book *Empathetic Education*, 'moral sensibility requires affective empathy, and empathy is not a value enshrined within the epistemology of power because all values are inevitably subservient to the ultimate value of power, as the medium of control. Given this epistemic paradox, we shall argue that Laura's theory of 'empathetic epistemology' can be deployed to help reconceptualise the ways in which we come to know and thus relate to the world around us as a modality of 'participatory consciousness.' Thus, every act of knowing now enshrines the value of connecting with the world in such a way that the value of empathy defines our decisional outcomes. This in turn relates to defining the ways in which we choose to reconstruct the world to suit man's purposes" (pp. 226-227).

understanding John Wu was able to say for example that Thérèse of Lisieux “seemed to [him] to combine the heart of the Buddha, the virtues of Confucius, and the philosophic detachment of Lao Tse” (Wu 1951, p. 243) or “[o]ne of the things that attracted [him] so strongly to St. Thérèse of Lisieux is that she knew well the maternal quality of God’s love” (Wu 1951, p. 352). What we experience here is simply that John Wu has re-discovered himself in Thérèse of Lisieux!

The very title of John Wu’s pamphlet on Thérèse of Lisieux, that is, *Science of Love*, seems to be provocative. In our present-day and age, this title could be misunderstood as a biology, physiology, or even chemistry of love!²⁴ John Wu’s ideal was the expectation of Pope Pius XI that “[i]t might even be said that a knowledge of Nature will serve as an introduction to what is of far greater value, an understanding of things supernatural” (Wu 1941, p. 2). John Wu’s personal hope was

The more science grows, the nearer we shall be to a living Faith. Material civilization is a welcome fuel to the fire of love. If the fire is weak, it may be smothered by the fuel. But if the fire is strong, the more fuel it has to feed on, the brighter will be its flame (Wu 1941, p. 2).

John Wu wanted to be a prophet of the love he experienced in his own life and which he re-discovered through the grace of God in the life of Thérèse of Lisieux. That is why he seemed to be optimistic about the progress of both human love and civilization:

Love has nothing to lose and everything to gain by the continual progress of civilization. And how can science ever supersede Christianity, which is the religion of Love par excellence? (Wu 1941, p. 3).

However, there was also in him a sense of criticism of our modern scientific civilization when he expresses his judgment:

The whole trouble about modern civilization seems to me to lie just in this: There is too much love of science and too little science of love.

“The science of love!” exclaimed little Thérèse, “Ah! sweet is the echo of that word to the ear of my soul! I desire no other science than that. For the sake of love, having giving [sic!] all my riches, like the spouse in the Canticles, I feel as though I had given nothing. There is nothing except love which could render us agreeable to the good God. This is so plain to me that this love has become the sole treasure upon which I set my heart” (Wu 1941, p. 4).

Thus, this alternative “too much love of science”²⁵ or “too little science of love” is the future fate of humanity envisaged by John Wu.

24 Cf. “Science of love” in www.parade.com/health/2012/02/the-science-of-love.html (retrieved July 4, 2023), “Biological basis of love” in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biological_basis_of_love (retrieved July 4, 2023), “Science of love” in <http://esciencecommons.blogspot.de/2009/10/science-of-love.html> (retrieved July 4, 2023).

25 This attitude could be called scientism as belief in the universal applicability of the scientific method and approach, and the view that empirical science constitutes the most authoritative worldview or most valuable part of human learning to the exclusion of other viewpoints. Cf. Tom Sorell 1994, *Scientism: Philosophy and the Infatuation with Science*, London: Routledge, pp. 1ff.

With the help of Thérèse of Lisieux's art of love, John Wu could systematize his own understanding of Christian spiritual life and mysticism as essentially "the growth of love" or "the threefold way of love." The outcome was his book on mysticism *The Interior Carmel: The Threefold Way of Love*.

According to John L. Mc Nulty (1898–1959), the 13th President of Seton Hall University (South Orange, New Jersey), who wrote the "Foreword" to John Wu's *The Interior Carmel* (October 11, 1952), it says:

Dr. Wu follows the concept of St. John of the Cross, who believed that sanctity was an evolution, a growing, a nurturing. He called it a voyage to Heaven and described the journey in three ways: (1) the Way of Purgation – of cleansing, of mortification, and of meditation; (2) the Illuminative Way – when the gifts of the Holy Ghost inspire us to pure acts of charity and justice; (3) the Unitive Way – the moment of perfect contemplation with God (Wu 1975 [1953], p. X).

Yes, St. John of the Cross has been very often quoted in John Wu's *The Interior Carmel*. In his book, besides him and Thérèse of Lisieux and, e.g., St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, a multitude of Christian ancient, medieval, and contemporary mystics and spiritual writers is cited, so that one fifth of his book might include relevant quotations from them and from the Bible (especially the four Gospels). As already stressed, John Wu's own contribution to understanding the concept of Christian mysticism is in the first place a profound experience of love in his life, then his understanding of the Psalm 22 [23] – "The Good Shepherd" in accordance with the classical three-stage understanding of mystical growth which we cited above. He also discovered in the Psalm 83 [84], 5-7 "our spiritual progress under the figures of pilgrimage":

(1)

*Blessed is the man whose help is from Thee,
When he has pilgrimages in his heart.*

(2)

*Passing across a parched valley, they shall make
it is a source of wells,
And the first rain shall clothe it with blessings.*

(3)

*They shall go from strength to strength:
They shall see the God of gods in Sion.*

Does this not present beautifully the budding, the flowering, and the ripening of love?²⁶

²⁶ Wu 1975 [1953], pp. 10-11.

Here we have the subtitle of his book on mysticism at hand – “The Threefold Way of Love.” On page 12 of John Wu's *The Interior Carmel*, we find his own re-formulation of the spiritual growth:

The three stages are traditionally known as the purgative way, the illuminative way, and the unitive way. I prefer to call them the budding, the flowering and the ripening of love, because there are not three ways, but only one way, the way of love, although the way may roughly be divided into three successive states. The eight Beatitudes as Christ announced them from the Mount are as follows:

- (1) *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
- (2) *Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.*
- (3) *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the land.*

[With reference to the second and third Beatitudes, John Wu followed the order of the Greek text, not that of the Vulgate.]

- (4) *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill.*
- (5) *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall find mercy.*
- (6) *Blessed are pure of heart, for they shall see God.*
- (7) *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.*
- (8) *Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when they shall revile you and persecute you and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for my sake: be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets that were before you (Matt. 5.3-12) (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 12).*

John Wu sees in the first three Beatitudes, i.e., 1 (poverty in spirit), 2 (mourning as sorrowful cleansing of the soul), and 3 (meekness), the purgative way – in his wording: “the budding of love.”

The Beatitudes 4 (justice) and 5 (mercy as charity towards others) are the illuminative way, in his formulation: “the flowering of love.”

The Beatitudes 6 (purity of heart which sees God), 7 (peacemakers who are the children of God), and 8 (all those who suffer persecution for justice as the way to being an heir of the kingdom of heaven) are the unitive way, in John Wu's terminology “the ripening of love.”

It is no wonder that his *The Interior Carmel: The Threefold Way of Love* has accordingly three parts: “Part One: The Budding of Love” (pp. 31-89), “Part Two: The Flowering of Love” (pp. 91-137), and “Part Three: The Ripening of Love” (pp. 139-221).

Thus, *The Interior Carmel: The Threefold Way of Love* depicts the experience of a spiritual journey of John Wu as the way of his mystical growth or as the way of living the spirit of the eight Beatitudes in this very world which clashes with our own human tendencies and even more with those of present-day society, or as the development of his spirituality

as a consequence of his following Jesus, or his being in the world with the spirit of inner cloister,²⁷ or even as a way of living an active life in contemplation, or simply a way of becoming a saint as response to Jesus' call: "Follow me!"

John Wu's spiritual thought was built upon various opposites (areas of tensions), such as East versus West, Christianity (Catholicism) versus Chinese religions (Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism), human versus divine, and natural versus supernatural. In this context, there is also his own clear choice and argumentation: Divinity overarches humanity, universality overcomes particularity, and inwardness surpasses the distinction between East (China) and West.

It is not fair to Christianity to call it "Western." Christianity is universal. In fact, the West has something to learn from the East, for, on the whole, the East has gone farther in its natural contemplation than the West has in its supernatural contemplation (Wu 1951, p. 350).

In his *Interior Carmel*, he especially stressed the difference between nature and supernature in human life in which the second meant for him a life upon God's grace through Jesus Christ. His experience of God's grace and his faith in Incarnation were two pillars of his spiritual and mystical life.

It should, of course, be noted that neither Confucius nor Buddha moved in the same sphere as Christ. Theirs is the sphere of nature, while His is the sphere of grace. He comes from heaven and bears witness of what He has seen and heard, while they are of earth, and from the earth they speak. But the point is that even grace is sown upon the earth, that is, human nature; and, therefore, the life of grace has to grow according to the gradual steps followed in the normal development of human nature,²⁸ and is subject to the rhythms of life as symbolized by "night and day" (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 4).²⁹

The true riches of the Christian on earth are grace, close communion with God, and all that fosters the supernatural life within him.

"Grace has transformed me, and God forbid that I should ever return to my vomit!" (Wu 1951, p. 144). That is why John Wu writes:

The great mission of Christ is to lift us from the natural sphere to the supernatural sphere, to free us from our bondage to the dialectical process of time. What is more, by His grace we are enabled to reach the Beyond by riding the chariot

27 "For what is contemplation but a 'science of love' – in the words of St. John of the Cross, 'an infused, loving knowledge of God'? This infused, loving knowledge is open to everybody, whether he lives in the cloister or in the world. In fact, the more one is engaged in exterior activities, the more need there is for him to cultivate the spirit of recollection. Just because he does not enjoy the silence and solitude of the cloister, he should build an interior cloister in his heart to enjoy the Divine friendship" (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 239).

28 Here we have the axiom of Scholastic theology believed by John Wu: "gratia supponit naturam" (Latin: grace presupposes nature), with which the relationship between human nature (creation, sin, redemption [salvation]) and grace is presented; first formulated by Bonaventure, developed by Thomas Aquinas. The axiom tries to show that, on the one hand, grace is given gratuitously (by the power of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection which is appropriated by faith), and on the other hand, the inner transformation of human life occurs through the same grace.

29 Regarding the cycles and rhythms of the spiritual life, see Wu 1975 [1953], pp. 243-250.

of mutability. For, Christ has also declared: "Blessed are ye that weep now: for you shall laugh." Here we are no longer in the natural sphere, but in the sphere of grace. We can sail safely across the ocean of time and reach the shore of Eternity, because we have welcomed Jesus into our boat (Wu 1951, p. 144).

He also witnesses:

I don't rely only on my nature, but on His grace. His grace has changed my natural changeableness into a feeling tentacle for discovering every day new beauties of Christ and of His Church, thus ministering unto my constancy. Has St. Paul not said, "For when I am weak, then I am strong"? Shall I not say, "When I am changeable, then I am constant"? The Lord has transmuted my natural fickleness into supernatural fidelity! (Wu 1951, p. 267).

In his own mystical way, John Wu discovered his mystery of Christian mysteries, i.e., the Incarnation of the Second Divine Person – the Word of God, the Incarnate Word,³⁰ i.e., Jesus Christ:

In dealing with the depth of Christ's love, we have to touch upon the mystery of mysteries: the Incarnation. Time does not allow nor my ability permit a probing into this great mystery. I wish only to say this: the Incarnation of the Word of God is the central event of human history. Without it there would have been no Revelation nor Redemption (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 111).

John Wu saw Christian spiritual life as a way to Christian mysticism according to St. Paul's "Putting off the old man" and "putting on the new man" (Eph. 4:22):

The Old Man must die completely before the New Man can be formed in you. You must be nailed to the cross with Christ, before you can say with St. Paul, "And I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2.19-20) (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 143).

It is a Christian teaching that human beings have a radical need for redemption and are completely dependent on Christ's love and grace.³¹ The old man is the natural mindset of a human being. In this natural state, we are selfish, each serving oneself,³² living according to our lusts, with no conscious decision to give them up and serve God. We are tempted by our corrupt inclinations, disordered passions to sin in our flesh, my mind agrees with them, and my body carries them out – in thoughts, words, or actions. Putting off the old man is the decision to stop serving my own lusts and to stop serving sin. This is an act of faith. This is the beginning of a spiritual and supernatural life of a Christian which normally begins with baptism. Thus, as a Christian one should leave behind his/her old life of

30 See Wu 1975 [1953], p. 177: "It is only in the Word Incarnate that mercy and truth have embraced each other, and justice and peace have kissed each other. It is only in Him that heaven and earth have united. It is only in the way of His steps that salvation is to be found."

31 Cf. Wu 1975 [1953], pp. 15-16: "This struggle of the inner man against the concupiscence of our body costs tears of anguish and contrition, but it leads to the salutary knowledge that we can do nothing of ourselves, that it is by the grace of God that we can conquer ourselves, and that the grace of God comes only through our abiding in Christ. Our relation with Christ is infinitely closer than any human relation can possibly be."

32 Cf. Wu 1975 [1953], p. 79: The turning from egocentric to Christocentric life with St. Thérèse of Lisieux.

serving his/her cravings, desires, and sin by putting off the old man, and put on the new man, starting a new life in victory over sin, serving God by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Christ came that we might have life, and have it more abundantly (John 10.10). But there is no other way to that abundant life than mortification. This sounds like a paradox, but the truth is that to be a Christian is to put on the New Man, and in order that the New Man may live, the old man in us must die. The unfortunate thing is that the old man dies hard; and this is the reason why the life of a Christian is a continual warfare against the evil tendencies and habits of his old self (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 56).

Besides the flesh, John Wu in his understanding of Christian spiritual life draws on traditional doctrine on the other two implacable enemies of the soul, i.e., the world as indifference and opposition to God's will or/and empty, passing values ("I tried to find one substitute for God after another, but found no peace"; Wu 1951, p. 110) and "the temptation of Satan," the devil – "Liar and father of lies,"³³ a real, personal enemy, a fallen angel, who works in relentless malice to twist us away from salvation:

The life of a Christian is a continual warfare against his three enemies: the worldly philosophy of life, the temptation of Satan, and the inborn evil inclinations of the old self. So long as we live, we can never be absolutely immune from these influences. We must always watch and pray, that we may not enter into temptation (Matt. 26.41). In this life, then, only relative peace can be attained; and even this can only be maintained on the condition of our ever-watchfulness (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 175).

Here let us make some main points of John Wu's understanding of Christian mysticism:

1) A Christian spiritual life "must begin by doing violence to ourselves; only through self-conquest can we conquer our three enemies, the world, the flesh and the devil. It is submitted that the first three Beatitudes are the best weapons with which to fight the three enemies" (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 234).³⁴

2) For John Wu, Christian spiritual life

does not so much consist in the discovery of new truths as in the sounding of new depths of old truths. One's spiritual life is an organism, of which dogmatic theology constitutes the skeleton and mystical life forms the flesh and blood. Without reason and dogma, mysticism is apt to be a monster. Without mysticism and contemplative, affective life, dogmatic theology and discursive reasoning are apt to be like a sapless tree. We are too prone to forget that St. Thomas himself was one of the greatest mystics of all times (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 164).

33 John 8:44: "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%208%3A44&version=NIV; retrieved July 10, 2023).

34 Read it in full length in Wu 1975 [1953], pp. 234-235.

- 3) “There is no question that contemplation constitutes the kernel of spiritual life, but it takes more than the kernel to make the whole fruit” (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 158).
- 4) “The essence of contemplation” is
To realize that the expressed is also the inexpressible, that the known is also the unknown, that the immanent is also the transcendent, is to move beyond image and logic [...] (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 201).
- 5) “The true [Christian] mystic moves beyond silence and speech, the negative and the positive, the east and the west, the south and the north, the old and the new, beyond all the universes and creatures visible and invisible; for he can never rest until he rests in the Triune God” (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 203).
- 6) “[...] one of the highest flights in the firmament of Christian mysticism [is ...] that to be just to God, we must be merciful to men. Our fraternal charity is the fulfillment of our filial piety towards God” (Wu 1975 [1953], pp. 134-135).
- 7) For John Wu, in Christian spiritual life
[...] asceticism and mysticism form a continuous whole. In the first period, asceticism predominates, while mysticism lies dormant; in the second period, the two are combined; in the third, mysticism predominates and asceticism flows from it more or less spontaneously (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 141).
- 8) Our true human and Christian destiny
[...] will not be fully realized until we are perfectly transformed in Christ by the Holy Spirit into children of God. “For ye are gods!”³⁵ These are the words of Christ (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 204).³⁶

2. His Understanding of Chinese (Natural) Mysticism

Let us begin with a clear statement from John Wu: “In fact, the West has something to learn from the East, for, on the whole, the East has gone farther in its *natural* contemplation than the West has in its *supernatural* contemplation” (Wu 1951, p. 350).

At the beginning of part two of his *Beyond East and West*, that is, chapter 12: “The Religions of China,” John Wu writes as follows:

Now that I am approaching the end of my spiritual wanderings, I must speak in some detail of the religions of China. They constitute my moral and religious back-

35 Psalm 82:6-7 reads, “I said, ‘You are “gods”; you are all sons of the Most High.’ But you will die like mere mortals; you will fall like every other ruler.” In John 10:34 Jesus answered the Jews, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods?’” (www.bible.com/bible/compare/PSA.82.6-7; retrieved July 11, 2023).

36 This is actually what the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Eastern Orthodox Church teach about “theosis” (deification as “apotheosis,” which literally means “making divine”). It is a transformative process, the aim of which is likeness to or union with God. The same concept is also found in the Latin rite of the Catholic Church, where it is termed “divinization.” “Theosis” is achieved by way of “catharsis” (as purification of mind and body) and “theoria” (as illumination with the goal of “visio beatifica” of God). According to Eastern Christian teachings, “theosis” is very much the purpose of human life. Cf. Bartos 1999, p. 253.

ground, and hence they form an integral part of the development of my spiritual life. They are an important portion of the natural dowry with which God had endowed me in preparation for my marriage with Christ. I often think of myself as a Magus from China who lays before the Divine Infant in the arms of the Blessed Virgin the gold of Confucianism, the musk³⁷ of Taoism, and the frankincense of Buddhism. At a single touch by His hands, whatever is false in them is purified, and whatever is genuine is transmuted into supernatural values (Wu 1951, p. 149).

John Wu's conversion to Christianity³⁸ in the form of Catholicism meant to him the ultimate acceptance of the absolute truth given to him by God. The offering of Chinese religions was an act of adoration of God in His son Jesus Christ as God's ultimate personal truth who became man – the Word Incarnate. That is why John Wu can say:

[Christianity] is more native to me than the Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism³⁹ in whose milieu I was born. I am grateful to them, because they have served as pedagogues⁴⁰ to lead me to Christ. Christ constitutes the unity of my life. It is thanks to this unity that I can rejoice in being born yellow and educated white (Wu 1951, p. 12).

Thus, “[...] nothing human can be greater than these [three religions, that is, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism], but Christianity is divine” (Wu 1951, p. 12). Yes, Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism were John Wu's pedagogues, teachers, and educators, however, in respect to his Christian faith as pure gift of God and as an “ultimate concern” (Paul Tillich)⁴¹ of his life which demanded from him total surrender. Thus, after his conversion to Catholicism he had only “one Teacher, the Christ” (Matthew 23:10).

In view of his Chinese compatriots, John Wu has found “the most characteristic quality of the Chinese soul”:

Perhaps, the most characteristic quality of the Chinese soul is a certain playfulness flowing spontaneously from an interior harmony. At his best, a Chinese is in tune with the Universe. The rhythms of his life are in perfect accord with the cosmic rhythms; or, rather, the two blend into one. Whether he is a Confucianist,

37 The musk is a substance secreted in a glandular sac under the skin of the abdomen of the male musk deer, having a strong aromatic odor, and used in perfumery. Cf. Matthew, Chapter 2 where three gifts of magi are explicitly identified, that is, gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Many different theories of the meaning and symbolism of the gifts have been brought forward. While gold (king's majesty) is fairly obviously explained, frankincense (worship), and particularly myrrh (Jesus' death) are much more obscure. Interestingly, in his text John Wu exchanged “myrrh” (*moyao* 沒藥) with “musk” (*shexiang* 麝香).

38 Cf. Wu 1941, p. 29: “To me as a Chinese, the great thing about Christianity is that it combines the profound mysticism of Lao Tzu with the intense humanism of Confucius,” or p. 30: “Only Christianity can satisfy my mind completely, because its idea of God is at once broad and personal. And it is Thérèse who has confirmed my faith in my Religion, for her mind is as subtle and detached as that of Lao Tzu, while her heart is as affectionate and cordial as that of Confucius.”

39 Cf. Wu 1951, p. 185: “Now that I think of it, I have inherited from Buddhism an intense longing for the ‘Other Shore,’ which is but another name and a faint foreshadowing of the Kingdom of God which is within us.”

40 Cf. Wu 1951, p. 48: “Whenever I think of Confucius and Mencius, Buddha and Lao Tse, I am inclined to call them – as St. Justin Martyr called Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle – ‘Pedagogues to lead men to Christ.’”

41 Cf. Paul Tillich 1957, *Dynamics of Faith*, New York: Harper & Row.

a Buddhist or a Taoist, the feeling of oneness with the Universe forms, as it were, the inarticulate substratum of his soul. This feeling is a direct aesthetical intuition beyond words and images (Wu 1951, p. 355).

[...] what is the most fundamental characteristic of the Chinese spirit? To my mind, it is the union of the abstract with the concrete, of the universal with the particular, of utmost unearthliness with complete earthliness, of transcendental idealism with a matter-of-fact practicalness. This union is not a matter of theoretical synthesis, but a matter of personal experience (Wu 1951, p. 182).

These two convictions of John Wu point out to his understanding of the fountain of natural contemplation of the Chinese, i.e., their “pantheistic inspiration” (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 195):

The soul in peace with God and with itself lives harmoniously with the whole universe and with the spirit of the liturgy, being perfectly attuned to the rhythms of life and to the liturgical cycles of the Church. There is a parallel of this harmony even in the natural sphere, for natural contemplation attunes one's spirit to the Cosmos (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 194).

John Wu quoted two poems, one by the Daoist recluse of ancient China, Lu Yun 陸雲 (262–303),⁴² with the title “Gu feng” 谷風 (The Valley Wind) and the second by the neo-Confucian Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085). He said further: “But there is room in the Christian soul for all that is beautiful, good and true in pantheism” (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 195). One proverb – so John Wu – says:

Love me, love my dog. In this light you come to appreciate St. Francis's Canticle of Brother Sun. It is a marvelous privilege to be a Christian. A Christian can enjoy all the lyrical ecstasies of a pantheist at their very Source, and without the danger of being drowned in the ocean of creatures. The truth is that, as God contains all things in Himself,⁴³ so His lovers carry in their hearts all other creatures” (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 21).

There is still another characteristic of the Chinese soul which is according to John Wu its syncretism. He understands it as a means of leading to the spirit of tolerance:

42 To Lu Yun was attributed the Daoist work *Luzi* 陸子 (Master Lu) which was lost during the Song dynasty. The Qing dynasty scholar Ma Guohan 馬國翰 collected the extant fragments. Cf. www.chinaknowledge.de/Literature/Daoists/luzi.html (retrieved July 12, 2023).

43 Here John Wu speaks like a panentheistic Christian! Panentheism regards God and the world to be inter-related with the world being in God and God being in the world. Both panentheism and theistic systems affirm divine transcendence and immanence; however, theism prioritizes the difference between God and the world and rejects any influence by the world upon God, while panentheism affirms the world's influence upon God as a part of him. A number of ordained Catholic priests dealing with Christian mysticism, including Richard Rohr, David Steindl-Rast, and Thomas Keating, seem to understand panentheism as the original view of Christianity. Cf. Rohr 2019. See also the criticism of his views by Douglas Groothuis “A Heretic's Christ, a False Salvation: A Review of *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope for, and Believe* [by] Richard Rohr” (www.equinox.org/articles/a-heretics-christ-a-false-salvation-a-review-of-the-universal-christ-how-a-forgotten-reality-can-change-everything-we-see-hope-for-and-believe-richard-rohr/; retrieved July 25, 2023): “Richard Rohr is a heretic in the robes of a Franciscan priest.”

The Chinese people are syncretically minded. Men of different religions or denominations have no prejudices against one another at all. In fact, if a Catholic tries to live up to his professions, all people will respect him. President Chiang Kai-shek, a Methodist, co-operated wholeheartedly with me on the translation of the Psalms and the New Testament. In the history of China, many beautiful friendships have existed between men of avowedly different faiths (Wu 1951, p. 354-355).

In view of his own life, John Wu confesses:

The mystical tendencies that I had imbibed from Taoism were reinforced tremendously by the study of the Zen [Chan 禪] masters.

There is something very charming about Zen Buddhism, which has been described as one of the most beautiful flowers of the Chinese mind. Let me begin with an anecdote about the Zen master Hsuan Sha [Xuan Sha 玄沙⁴⁴], which has impressed me as truly Franciscan. Hsuan Sha had ascended to the platform and was ready to preach a sermon, when he heard the twitter of a swallow. Quite abruptly he remarked to his audience, "What a wonderful sermon on Reality!" Thereupon he came down from the platform and retired (Wu 1951, p. 178).

In *The Interior Carmel: The Threefold Way of Love*, John Wu depicted Laozi 老子 as "A Chinese Philosopher of Meekness" (Wu 1975 [1953], pp. 85-89). At the end of this part (p. 89), he turned to Christ as "True God and True Man" with the words of Laozi: "He knows the masculine, but keeps to the feminine. [...] He knows the white, but keeps to the black. [...] He knows the glorious, but keeps to the humiliations. [...]"⁴⁵

Thus, for John Wu, there are many correspondences between the natural and supernatural mysticism and vice versa. So, in the context of two forms of mystical death as experienced by St. Teresa von Avila (Wu 1975 [1953], pp. 201-202), he writes: "This degree of supernatural contemplation corresponds to the degree attained by Hui-neng⁴⁶ in the sphere of natural contemplation. Lao Tse said: 'If Tao could be described in the words, it would not be the eternal Tao.'⁴⁷ The Christian mystics, too, are profoundly impressed with the thought of the transcendence and incomprehensibility of God" (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 202).

This corresponding similarity between the Christian mysticism and Chan mysticism, John Wu formulated a few pages earlier in the following way:

The point I am stressing is that Christian mysticism employs what the Oriental philosophers call the negative method, as well as the positive. In Chinese Zen Bud-

44 Xuansha Shibe 玄沙師備 (835–908) was a Chinese Chan monk in the lineage of Qingyuan Xingsi 青原行思 (660–740) and a predecessor of the Fayuan 法眼 school of Chan Buddhism.

45 "知其雄，守其雌，為天下谿。為天下谿，常德不離，復歸於嬰兒。知其白，守其黑，為天下式。為天下式，常德不忒，復歸於無極。知其榮，守其辱，為天下谷。" (<https://ctext.org/dao-de-jing>; retrieved July 14, 2023).

46 Huineng 惠能 (Dajian Huineng 大鑒惠能, 638–713) was the Sixth Patriarch (Chanzong liuzu 禪宗六祖), regarded as the founder of the "Sudden Enlightenment" in Southern Chan school of Buddhism as an immediate and direct attainment of Buddhist enlightenment.

47 The first sentence in the *Daodejing* is "道可道，非常道。" (<https://ctext.org/dao-de-jing>; retrieved July 18, 2023).

dhism, the positive method is represented by a poem written by Shen Hsiu,⁴⁸ who was the founder of the northern school:

*The body is like a Bodhi-tree,
And the mind to a mirror bright;
Carefully we cleanse them hour by hour
Lest dust should fall on them.⁴⁹*

The negative method is represented by the poem of Hui-neng, the founder of the southern school:

*Originally there was no Bodhi-tree,
Nor was there any mirror;
Since originally there was nothing,
Whereon can the dust fall?⁵⁰*

The two schools have never been reconciled. But both of the methods work harmoniously in Christian mysticism, the positive method being used in the purgative and illuminative stages and the negative in the unitive. As the soul draws nearer and nearer to God, she begins to realize the truth of what St. Thomas Aquinas said: "This is the final knowledge of God: to know that we do not know God" (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 199).

What John Wu called "the positive method" and "the negative method" in Christian mysticism can be associated with the difference of "cataphatic" and "apophatic" theologies. The first one is the use of affirmation ("kataphasis") and the second of negation ("apophasis") in their ways of understanding God. The use of negation and affirmation in relation to God has had a long history, longer than Christianity itself, reaching back into the traditions of the Hebrew scriptures and classical Greek philosophy which Christian theology had early incorporated.

Actually, the tension between "the positive method" and "the negative method" differentiated by John Wu in Chan Buddhism is the opposition of subitism as a sudden awakening of Buddha-nature and gradualism as the original Buddhist approach which consists in following the dharma only step by step, through an arduous ascetical practice. In reality, the gradualism is like the mystical stages of purgation and illumination, and the subitism resembles the unitive stage.

48 Shen Xiu 神秀 (Yuquan Shenxiu 玉泉神秀, 606–706).

49 "身是菩提樹, 心如明鏡臺。時時勤拂拭, 勿使惹塵埃。" (<https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E6%83%A0%E8%83%BD>; retrieved July 18, 2023).

50 "菩提本無樹, 明鏡亦非臺。本來無一物, 何處惹塵埃。" (<https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E6%83%A0%E8%83%BD>; retrieved July 18, 2023).

Conclusion

1) John Wu's understanding of mysticism beyond East and West demonstrated his Chinese way of thinking, though he expressed himself in English. The first characteristic is "ars contextualis" which to me consists in accuracy of choosing a multitude of relevant quotations to support and corroborate his thought on mysticism. The second one is his predilection for correlative thinking which is characterized by analogies, parallels, and correspondences.

The reading of John Wu's English works cited in this article let me discover his Chinese way of thinking, especially its two characteristics: Chinese thinking as "ars contextualis" and "the dominance of correlative thinking."⁵¹ In the following citation from *The Interior Carmel: The Threefold Way of Love*, we will discover this way of thinking where analogies, parallels, and correspondences are predominant:

You will realize that the [Holy] Mass is the perfect embodiment of the threefold way of love. The first part [...] corresponds to the budding of love. [...] The middle part [...] corresponds to the flowering of love, whose keynote is the spirit of sacrifice. [...] The third part [...] corresponds to the ripening of love, whose keynote is peace and joy. [...] Thus, the whole Liturgy of the Church forms a seamless tunic⁵² with her spiritual doctrine. "This is the will of God, your sanctification" (Wu 1975 [1953], pp. 98-99).

And again, with the help of Dr. Paul Sih (1910–1978):⁵³

51 Cf. "Chinese Philosophy" by David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online*: www.rep.routledge.com/articles/overview/chinese-philosophy/v-1/sections/chinese-thinking-as-ars-contextualis ("Perhaps the best designation for the most general 'science' of order in the Chinese tradition would be *ars contextualis*. 'The art of contextualizing' contrasts with both *scientia universalis* and *ontologia generalis*. Chinese thinkers sought the understanding of order through the artful disposition of things, a participatory process which does not presume that there are essential features, or antecedent-determining principles, serving as transcendent sources of order. The art of contextualizing seeks to understand and appreciate the manner in which particular things present-to-hand are, or may be, most harmoniously correlated") and www.rep.routledge.com/articles/overview/chinese-philosophy/v-1/sections/the-dominance-of-correlative-thinking ("Rational or logical thinking, grounded in analytic, dialectical and analogical argumentation, stresses the explanatory power of physical causation. In contrast, Chinese thinking depends upon a species of analogy which may be called 'correlative thinking'. Correlative thinking, as it is found both in classical Chinese 'cosmologies' [the Yijing (Book of Changes), Daoism, the Yin–Yang school] and, less importantly, among the classical Greeks involves the association of image or concept-clusters related by meaningful disposition rather than physical causation. Correlative thinking is a species of spontaneous thinking grounded in informal and ad hoc analogical procedures presupposing both association and differentiation. The regulative element in this modality of thinking is shared patterns of culture and tradition rather than common assumptions about causal necessity") (retrieved July 18, 2023).

52 "Seamless tunic" – these two words have a spiritual echo in John Wu's life: "[...] when I was engaged in the translation of the Psalms and the New Testament I wept over the Bible only once. One night, as I was translating Chapter 19 of St. John's Gospel, I came across this: *Now the tunic was without seam, woven in one piece from the top. They therefore said to one another, Let us not tear it, but let us cast lots for it, to see whose it shall be.* Suddenly I burst out weeping. The whole scene flashed upon my mind like a sudden illumination. This seamless tunic had been woven by the motherly hand of the Blessed Virgin, and had been worn by her grateful Son Who was now hanging on the Cross! [...] But what made me weep was the lightning-like flash of intuition that whatever Our Lady had woven could not be divided, being without seam from the top! Wherever Our Lady is, there is seamless unity" (Wu 1951, pp. 310-311).

53 Xue Guanqian 薛光前: A native of Qingpu 青浦, Jiangsu Province, a political figure and scholar in the Republic of China. In April 1948, he converted to Catholicism in Rome. After 1949, he settled in the United States.

[...] my Friend Dr. Paul Sih has discovered a very interesting analogy. This is what he has written to me:

Recently I painted some woodwork at home and the thought came to my mind that painting quite naturally forms an analogy to the development of the spiritual life. A worthwhile and satisfactory painting job usually calls for three coats of paint, first sealing, then priming and finally finishing. [...]

I wonder whether these three coats of paint may not be likened respectively to the purgative way, the illuminative way and the unitive way of climbing up the mountain in our spiritual journey (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 244).

The answer of John Wu was: "This analogy appeals to me as extremely appropriate" (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 244).

2) For John Wu Christian supernatural mysticism was a "natural" outcome of following Jesus as its way is to be found in the Four Gospels. It is an expected result of living the Gospel, for him especially the Eight Beatitudes, every day in cooperation with God's grace as the development of the threefold way of love, i.e., the budding of love, the flowering of love, and the ripening of love. Or simply said: A Christian mystic is a person who has "experienced" the redeeming and sanctifying power of God's grace in Jesus Christ in his or her life, i.e., who has "experimental knowledge of Him" (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 172).

Once Karl Rahner (1904–1984) said the following famous words:

The pious of tomorrow will be a "mystic," one who has "experienced" something, or he will no longer be, because the piety of tomorrow will no longer be carried along by the unanimous, self-evident public conviction [...] of all in advance regarding a personal experience and decision [...].⁵⁴

John Wu said something similar in his explication of Jesus' words in John 16:16:

Christ himself has clearly indicated the signification of seeing Him during our life on earth. During the Last Supper, Christ spoke to His disciples some words which mystified them. He said: "A little while and you shall behold me no longer; and again a little while and you shall see me, because I go to the Father." [...]

In other words, to see Him does not mean to have a vision, either physical or mental, of Him; it means rather to have an experimental knowledge of Him (Wu 1975 [1953], p. 171-172).

3) John Wu was primarily concerned with the inner, spiritual nature of the pilgrimage of the humanity and each of its members. Thus, the center of humanity for him was spirituality, the inner life of man, i.e., the mystical dimension of human existence, which seeks, discovers, and experiences the Ultimate Truth. After his conversion to Christianity, espe-

⁵⁴ Rahner 1966, pp. 22f.: "Der Fromme von morgen wird ein ‚Mystiker‘ sein, einer, der etwas ‚erfahren‘ hat, oder er wird nicht mehr sein, weil die Frömmigkeit von morgen nicht mehr durch die im Voraus zu einer personalen Erfahrung und Entscheidung einstimmige, selbstverständliche öffentliche Überzeugung [...] aller mitgetragen wird [...]." The English translation comes from the author (Z. Wesolowski).

cially to Catholicism, Christian faith was for John Wu a pure gift and an undeserved grace given him by God Himself:

Grace is all. Nobody can come to Christ without first being drawn to Him by the Father (John 6.44), nor can anyone come to the Father except through Christ, nor can anyone be sanctified except through the Sacraments of the Church, which are the regular channels of grace. It is no more than the truth to say that ever since I became a Catholic, my life has been a continual feast, a feast that satisfies without satiating. Adversities and tribulations there are aplenty, but even these are sweet, or rather they serve to bring out the marvelous sweetness of God (Wu 1951, p. 9).

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