

## Article

# The Bible between Literary Traditions: John C. H. Wu's Chinese Translation of the Psalms

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**Abstract:** In the history of Chinese Bible translation, the Psalms have been a privileged site for the encounter between biblical thinking, poetics, and Chinese classical literature. This encounter was initiated by the translators of the Delegates' Version, followed by John Chalmers, and outstandingly represented in particular by John C. H. Wu 吳經熊. In his version of the Psalms, underpinned by his cultural stance of "beyond East and West", Wu borrows numerous Chinese idioms and popular verses and transposes Chinese traditions from Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. Specifically, Wu's rendition inaugurates an intertextual dialogue between the Psalms and *Shijing*, involving the disciplines of both comparative literature and comparative scripture at the same time. By adapting various Chinese classical poetry styles for his version of the Psalms, Wu transforms their spiritual traditions and broadens their representation spaces by injecting a Judeo-Christian spirit. Relocating the biblical texts among multifarious Chinese literary traditions, Wu's translation of the Psalms achieves a deep interaction between the Bible and Chinese culture, provokes questions, and provides insights regarding the relation between biblical theology and intercultural poetics.

**Keywords:** Bible and literature; Bible translation in the Chinese context; the Bible and Chinese literature; the Psalms; John C. H. Wu



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## 1. Introduction: The Psalms as Chinese Classical Literature

Apart from its liturgical importance, the Book of Psalms is recognized for its poetic beauty, and it is even considered the Biblical book that is most representative of the art of biblical poetry.<sup>1</sup> Though appealing to translators from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, its translation into Chinese, judging from extant sources, had not been undertaken until the pioneering work accomplished by Louis Antoine de Poirot (1735–1814), a French Jesuit who came to China in the middle of the Qing dynasty (1636–1912). Before that, the Italian Franciscan friar Giovanni da Montecorvino (1247–1328), who was dispatched to China during the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), mentioned his translation of the New Testament and the Psalms into "the Tatar language" (perhaps Mongol) in his correspondence, but no texts have been found.<sup>2</sup> Around five hundred years later, Poirot rendered biblical texts into a colloquial language popular in Beijing and the nearby areas, assuming thousands of unlearned as his intended readers, but a mixture of colloquial and classical Chinese can be detected upon reading his rendition of the Psalms.<sup>3</sup>

The next major advancement in translating the Psalms into Chinese was carried out by Protestant missionaries. Two versions, each as a part of a translation of the entire Bible, are especially prominent in this history: that of Joshua Marshman (1768–1837) and Joannes Lassar (1781?–1835?), and that of Robert Morrison (1782–1834) and William Milne (1785–1822). Both were rendered in classical Chinese, and the expression was insufficiently smooth and idiomatic, prompting a new version, which was finally completed by a group of four, with Walter Henry Medhurst (1796–1857) and Karl F. A. Gützlaff (1803–1851) as the leading translators (this translation is sometimes called the "Medhurst–Gützlaff Version").<sup>4</sup> Aimed at translating the Bible into standard and even admirable Chinese, this new version preceded another milestone project carried out in the mid-nineteenth century: the Delegates'

Version, an outcome of the first collective effort to produce a Chinese Bible.<sup>5</sup> However, due to the conflict caused by the “Term Questions”,<sup>6</sup> the committee of translators split up after completion of the New Testament, leaving the Old Testament to be rendered separately by each side. Representing the British missionaries, Medhurst promoted the idea of “the Bible as Chinese literature”, claiming that he and his colleagues were translating the Bible according to the standard of Chinese classical literature. To achieve this goal, he relied heavily on local literary assistants: the first one third of the New Testament (from the beginning until the Romans) was polished by Wang Changgui 王昌桂 (?–1849) and the last two thirds and the Old Testament by his son Wang Tao 王韜 (1828–1897), a traditional Chinese scholar and, at the same time, a pioneer of modernization and Western learning.<sup>7</sup>

According to some internal documents of the British and Foreign Bible Society, the style of the Delegates’ Version should be largely attributed to Wang Tao’s writing skill, a talent that is especially on display in his version of the Psalms.<sup>8</sup> The Delegates’ Version (DV for short) is generally based on the Medhurst–Gützlaff Version (MGV for short), and in terms of the Psalms, the divergence can still be observed: the MGV stays closer to the original, whereas the modal particle “*xi*兮”<sup>9</sup> is added to the DV, implying an imitation of the style of “*cifu* 辭賦” (“lyrical narration”, a genre of Chinese classical literature), and more paraphrases can be found to facilitate the comprehension of Chinese readers. For example, ʾיָמֵי (right hand) refers to God’s power and authority in the original Hebrew of the Psalms, but the translators of the DV paraphrase it as “*nai er juneng dali* 乃爾巨能大力” (“It is your great ability and power”, 44:3) and “*shiren wei ju xi* 使人畏懼兮” (“It is awe-inspiring”, 45:4). However, the style of the Psalms in the DV, without the modal particle “*xi*”, is considerably different from the style of “*cifu*”, for its sentence pattern is not as fixed.

It was John Chalmers, a missionary sent by the London Missionary Society, who translated the Psalms in the style of “*cifu*” strictly. This version, published in 1890, only contains Psalms 1–19 and 23, with the title “A Specimen of Chinese Metrical Psalms” on the cover page. To exemplify the “free rhythmic style” adopted by this version, on the first page, Chalmers selects a passage of *Jiuzhang* (九章, nine chapters) written by Qu Yuan 屈原 (c. 340 B.C.–278 B.C.), a world-renowned poet living in the Warring States Period (475 B.C.–221 B.C.) (Chalmers 1890). Emphasizing the regularity of sentence pattern and end rhymes, this version goes further than the Delegates’ Version, bringing a real encounter between two traditions of ancient poetry—Chinese and Hebrew. This encounter resulted from long-term preparation rather than a whim of the translator: as early as the 1870s, Chalmers had published some English translations of Chinese ancient poems, mainly works of Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) and Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), eminent poets of the Tang dynasty (618–907) (Chalmers 1873a, 1873b). To some extent, this process was an accumulation of Chalmers’ knowledge about “Chinese meter”, the application of which to his Chinese translation of the Psalms can be viewed as an action of literary feedback.

After Chalmers’ specimen, the classical Chinese Union Version, based on the Delegates’ Version, adopted some characteristics of “*cifu*” (with the modal particle “*xi*”), but its rendering was more precise.<sup>10</sup> The only other classical Chinese version that sought to adopt ancient poetry styles in its translation of the Psalms was the *Shengyong yiyi chugao* 聖詠義譯初稿 (the first draft of a literary translation of the Psalms, hereafter *Chugao*), authored by John C. H. Wu (Wu Jingxiong or Wu Ching-hsiung 吳經熊, 1899–1986), an outstanding Catholic scholar famous in the fields of political science and law.<sup>11</sup> Born into a merchant’s family in Ningbo, Zhejiang, Wu received Chinese traditional education from the age of six. He began to learn English at primary school and was exposed to Western modern science at middle school. Enrolled in the Comparative Law School of China (Shanghai), established by the American Methodist Mission in 1917, Wu started his journey of legislative studies and finally received a Doctor of Law degree from the University of Michigan in 1921. Returning to China in 1924, he devoted himself to legal education (at Soochow University) and legislative and judicial works (in the Shanghai Special Zone Court, among others). On behalf of the Republic of China, he served as the internuncio in 1946, becoming an envoy of Sino-Western cultural and religious exchange. Additionally, being a Methodist in his youth

but a convert to Catholicism in his middle age, Wu experienced spiritual transformation, which left an indelible imprint on his Bible translation (Wu [1951] 2018).<sup>12</sup>

Published in 1946, Wu's Chinese version of the Psalms is a masterpiece of literary translation. He re-titled every psalm, combined different Chinese classical poetry styles, borrowed Chinese idioms and popular verses, and integrated cultural concepts from Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism to interpret Jewish ancient history and Judeo-Christian monotheism, with the aim of better accommodating Chinese readers. Meanwhile, some rhetorical devices, images, and expressions with Hebrew features were preserved in the translation, opening a new literary space for Chinese classical poetry.<sup>13</sup> Upon publication, Wu's version received highly favorable reviews. For instance, the Catholic Archbishop of Nanking Yu Bin 于斌 (1901–1978) praised the translation in the preface, writing that "it captures the essence of the Psalms and renders it in a natural style, which cannot be achieved without rich knowledge, profound thinking, hard work, excellent talent or the help of God" (Wu 1946, "Preface by Archbishop Yu", p. 2).<sup>14</sup>

From the groundbreaking endeavor of the translators of the Delegates' Version and Chalmer's improvement of the Psalms' poetic style in the mid- and late nineteenth century, to Wu's monumental translation fusing different styles of Chinese classical poetry with Judeo-Christian imagery and concepts in the mid-twentieth century, the three versions discussed above attempted to rebuild the Psalms as Chinese classical literature. Possible connections between these three translations can be discovered. Basically, the Psalms in the Delegates' Version were rendered by Wang Tao, who worked together with Chalmer and established a deep friendship with him in the London Missionary Society Press (Shanghai) founded by Medhurst. It is reasonable that Chalmer was inspired by Wang Tao to compose his specimen.<sup>15</sup> Classified as a Catholic Bible, *Chugao* is different from the other two versions in the way it renders important theological terms like "God" and "Spirit". However, in the bibliography appended to his translation, Wu mentions a whole Bible in classical Chinese ("*Xinjiuyue shengshu wenli ban*", 新舊約聖書[文理版]) published by the Bible Society, which was probably the 1921 edition of the Delegates' Version (Choi 2018, p. 197). In other words, Wu was also influenced by Wang Tao's rendering. Nevertheless, there is no textual overlap between the three versions, suggesting that they were each independently produced. More probably, there is a relationship of inspiration and inheritance.

Compared with the other two versions, *Chugao* is more successfully inculturated in terms of style, wording, and concepts. Following Medhurst's general vision of the "Bible as Chinese literature", we can conceptualize the paradigm of the above three versions as "rendering the Psalms as Chinese classical literature". From this perspective, *Chugao* has no equal in the history of Chinese Bible translation and is thus the focus of the present article. The Bible is not only a religious classic venerated worldwide, but also a significant original point of Western literature. Additionally, it has distinct literary and aesthetic value, which can be manifested in both the original and the translation, and cross-cultural translation can even relocate the biblical texts among multifarious literary traditions. In this case, Bible translation is not only about language conversion but also involves the interchange and integration of literary and cultural traditions. We can observe, in his *Chugao*, that Wu attempts to bridge the gap between, on the one hand, Chinese traditional cultures, and, on the other, Judeo-Christian faith, taking the Psalms beyond the dichotomy of East and West. He takes full advantage of Chinese classical literary resources to translate the spirit of the Psalms, interacting in particular with *Shijing* 詩經 (the Book of Songs, also transliterated as "Shih Ching") in what I refer to as a "dialogue between scripture and literature". Significantly, his adaptation of those Chinese classical poetry styles leads to the transformation of their spiritual traditions, widening their literary space for depicting life experience from foreign lands. In the following, we will elaborate on these claims.

## 2. The Psalms "beyond East and West"

In 1951, Wu published his autobiography, entitled "Beyond East and West", in which he summarizes his understanding of Christianity as universally valid and involving the

pilgrimage of believers “neither eastward nor westward, but inward” (Wu [1951] 2018, pp. 310–18). The spiritual tradition of the East is worthy of being studied by the West, and the spirit of Chinese culture can help enrich and deepen our understanding of Christian faith. Upholding this position, he describes his endeavor of Bible translation as “weaving a garment with Chinese style for Christ”. Aside from *Chugao*, Wu also translated the New Testament (Wu [1951] 2018, pp. 285–88; Haft 2008), but the former, seen as a literary achievement, is more remarkable than the latter, and thus can be termed as “a gorgeous garment with Chinese style” woven for Christ.

As mentioned above, Wu converted from Protestantism to Catholicism in midlife. Before him, there were no Chinese Catholic translators who rendered the Bible into Chinese in a creative way. Rather, they either translated it literally or paraphrased it, but all stayed closer to the original.<sup>16</sup> The exceptional approach of Wu was endorsed by Jiang Jieshi 蔣介石 (also transliterated as Chiang Kai-shek, 1887–1975), a sponsor who appreciated, reviewed, and commented on his rendition many times (Zhang 2017). There seems to be no record of Wu’s having studied biblical languages, i.e., Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. According to the bibliography of *Chugao*, his rendition is based on James McSwiney’s English version, which juxtaposes an English translation of the Hebrew Masoretic text (the traditional Hebrew text of the Jewish Bible, with diacritical marks to indicate the correct pronunciation) with another of the Latin Vulgate (McSwiney 1901). Wu referred not only to McSwiney’s English translations but also to his notes on each psalm, which incorporate different readings (from the LXX, Arabic sources, etc.) and commentary by some patristic writers such as Jerome and Origen. Furthermore, Wu refers to other versions of the Psalms (in English, French, German, Chinese, etc.), and some modern commentaries.<sup>17</sup> Though Wu’s version is classified as Catholic, it follows the Masoretic text in numbering the Psalms, as Wu indicates in the general notices (凡例, *fanli*) of his version (Wu 1946, “the General Notes”, p. 1). We will therefore return to McSwiney’s English translation of the Masoretic Text (hereafter MEM) in the following discussion (for a summary, see Table 1 in Page 5).

The reason that *Chugao* possesses the grace of Chinese classical poetry lies in its adaptation of Chinese idioms and fashionable verses in an ingenious manner. For example, Psalm 2:4 is rendered as “*zaitianzhe bi daxiao xi, xiao fuyou zhi buzheziliang, zhong bi boran’ernu xi, yi cheng dangche zhi tanglang*在天者必大笑兮，笑蜉蝣之不知自量。終必勃然而怒兮，以懲擋車之螳螂” (He that sits in the heavens laughs at the dayfly for not knowing its own limits. He will finally flare up and punish the mantis for overrating itself.) (MEM 2:4 reads “He-that-sits in the heavens laughs: Adônây mocks at them.”) In this case, “*xiao fuyou zhi buzheziliang*笑蜉蝣之不知自量” and “*yi cheng dangche zhi tanglang*以懲擋車之螳螂” are creatively added by the translator to reinterpret the original: the former combines two verses—one composed by Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) (“*ji fuyou yu tiandi*寄蜉蝣於天地”(Life is transient like a dayfly between the everlasting heaven and earth)) and the other by Han Yu (“*pifu han dashu, kexiao buziliang*蚍蜉撼大樹，可笑不自量”(Like an ant shaking a big tree, overrating oneself is ridiculous)), refashioning the image of “*fuyou*蜉蝣” (dayfly) as “not knowing its own limits”—and the latter borrows the idiom “*tangbi dangche*螳臂當車” (“a mantis trying to stop a chariot”, meaning an overestimation of one’s ability that results in failure). Both “dayfly” and “mantis” are insects, and by these images Wu demonstrates “parallelism” (對仗, *duizhang*), common in Chinese classical poetry. Notably, some of Wu’s borrowings coincide with literary devices used in the original of the Psalms: for instance, “*shanqiu pi qingjin*山丘披青衿” (the hills wear cyan coats) in Psalm 65 (“And with joy do the hills gird-themselves” (MEM 65:13b)). In this verse, the translator adapts the popular verse “*qingqing zijin, youyou woxin*青青子衿，悠悠我心” (your cyan lapels are floating in my longing heart), which comes from *Shijing* and is repeated by Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220), a prime minister and poet of the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220). Referring to the cyan lapel of the coat worn by ancient Chinese scholars, the image of “*qingjin*青衿” resonates with “the hills gird themselves” in MEM, preserving the art of personification in the original. Some of Wu’s borrowings exploit Chinese idioms, for example, “*shen cheng zhongshizhidi*身成衆矢之的” (becoming the target of all arrows), a rendition of “And the reproaches of



them—that-reproach “They are fallen upon me” (MEM 68:10b). Here, Wu makes use of “zhong shi zhi di 衆矢之的”, a Chinese idiom meaning “the target of all public criticism”, staying close to the original verse but expressing it in a more concise way.

**Table 1.** Summing up Wu’s translation discussed in Section 2.

|           | <i>Wu’s Translation</i>           | <i>McSwiney’s English Translation of the Masoretic Text (MEM)</i>  | <i>Wu’s Borrowing from Chinese Literatures or Idioms</i> |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| 2:4       | 在天者必大笑兮，笑蜚蜚之不知自量。終必勃然而怒兮，以懲擋車之螳螂。 | He—that-sits in the heavens laughs: Adônây mocks at them.  | “寄蜚蜚於天地，渺滄海之一粟。”（蘇軾）、“虻蜚撼大樹，可笑不自量。”（韓愈）、“螳臂當車”（Idiom）    |
| 65:13     | 山丘披青衿                             | And with joy do the hills gird-themselves.   | “青青子衿，悠悠我心。”《詩經·鄭風·子衿》                                   |
| 68:10     | 身成衆矢之的                            | And the reproaches of them—that-reproach “They are fallen upon me.”  | “衆矢之的”（Idiom）  |
| 38:20     | 群集如青蠅                             | But mine enemies are—lively, are—strong.   | “營營青蠅”《詩經·小雅·青蠅》   |
| 85:8–9a   | 沐浴芳澤兮，酣暢春風。諦聽聖言兮，其馨若蘭。            | Show us Thy loving—goodness, YaHweH: And grant us Thy salvation. I—will—hear what God YHWH will—speak.   | “仰慕同趣，其馨若蘭。”（嵇康）   |
| 22:27a    | 謙謙君子，飲和飽德。                        | The meek shall—eat and be—satisfied.   | “飲和飽德”《隋書·音樂誌（下）》  |
| 76:13     | 務使衆牧伯，克己以為仁。                      | He—cuts—off the spirit of princes: He is terrible to the kings of the earth.   | “克己復禮為仁。”《論語·顏淵》   |
| 51:9      | 灑以靈菟，澡雪吾魂。載洗載濯，玉潔冰清。              | Unsin me with hyssop, and I—shall—be—clean: Wash me, and I—shall—be—made—whiter than snow.   | “澡雪而精神”《莊子·知北游》  |
| 128:5–6   | 積善有餘慶，兒孫世世芳。和平臨義塞，國泰民斯康。          | YHWH bless thee out of Sion; And look—thou upon the good (i.e., prosperity) of Jerusalem: All the days of thy life, And see—thou sons to thy sons: Peace be upon Israël. | “積善之家，必有餘慶。”《周易·坤·文言》                                    |
| 62:10a    | 富貴貧賤皆泡影                           | Only a breath are men of low degree, and men of high degree are a lie;   | “一切有為法，如夢、幻、泡、影，如露，亦如電，應作如是觀。”《金剛經》                      |
| 75:10a    | 諦觀妙道，手舞足蹈                         | But as for me, I—will—declare for ever,  | “隨汝諦觀，汝身佛身。”《楞嚴經·卷二》                                     |
| 78:1      | 咨爾百姓，諦聽吾訓                         | A Mas’kil to Asaph; Give—ear, my people, to my teaching: Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.   | “汝今諦聽，當為汝說。”《圓覺經》  |
| 138:2b, c | 《道與名》：“聖名固已弘，聖道更無邊。”              | and give—thanks to Thy Name for Thy loving—goodness and for Thy truth: For Thou—hast—magnified Thy word above all Thy Name.  | “道可道，非常道。名可名，非常名。”《道德經·體道章第一》                            |

To a great extent, the character of Wu’s rendition can be attributed to his use of different kinds of literary devices, including personification, metaphor, and synesthesia, spotlighting the exquisite charm of Chinese classical poetry. We find “*qunji ru qingying* 群集如青蠅” (gathering like a crowd of greenbottles) in Psalm 38 as an instance. There, the verse is inserted into the context of “But mine enemies are—lively, are—strong” (MEM 38:20a), and by the image of “greenbottle”—a metaphor for a despicable person (borrowed from *Shijing*)—the translator describes enemies of the psalmist in a lively way. “*Muyu fangze xi, hanchang chunfeng. diting shengyan xi, qi xin ruo lan* 沐浴芳澤兮，酣暢春風。諦聽聖言

兮，其馨若蘭” is another example illuminating Wu’s literary skill. It is his augmentation of MEM 85:8–9a (“Show us Thy loving-goodness, YaHweH: And grant us Thy salvation. I-will-hear what God YHWH will-speak”), in which he describes the feeling of receiving the grace of God as “bathing in the spring wind” and the feeling of hearing God’s Word as “smelling the fragrance of orchids”. By synesthesia—stimulating one sensory or cognitive pathway by another, such as smelling sounds or tasting colors—he creates an imaginative path to the sacred realm for the reader.

In describing *Chugao* as “beyond East and West”, we refer not only to its borrowing of Chinese idioms and verses, but also its transposition of Chinese cultural concepts. In Wu’s autobiography, he discusses three Chinese philosophies or religions: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. Laying stress on the Confucian insistence on filial piety, Daoist mysticism, and the Buddhist desire for the other world, he expresses his appreciation for a Chinese eclectic stance on religion. From his perspective, Chinese religious thinking is beneficial for understanding Christian theology (Wu [1951] 2018, pp. 137–75). This cultural standpoint is manifested in his rendering of the Psalms, wherein Confucianism leaves the clearest impression. The concept of “*junzi*君子” (gentleman), appearing many times in *Chugao*, refers originally to a person with high moral accomplishment in the Confucian context and the aim of self-cultivation by Chinese ancient scholar-officials. However, in Wu’s usage, “*junzi*” refers to God’s pious believers, who behave in a righteous way with monotheistic faith. A good example can be found in Psalm 22, in which “The meek shall-eat and be-satisfied” (MEM 22:27a) is rendered as “*qianqian junzi, yinhe baode*謙謙君子，飲和飽德” (literally, “humble gentlemen can be filled by drinking peace and virtue”). As for “*yin he bao de*飲和飽德”, it is cited from *Suishu*隋書 (the Historical Record of the Sui Dynasty), which Wu employs to build up the metonymy of “drink” and “fill”, not literally denoting diet but connoting moral achievement. This case exemplifies the translator’s talented rendition, which can also be demonstrated in his appropriation of “*keji fuli wei ren*克己復禮為仁” (self-discipline fulfills the rites and contributes to humanity). In Psalm 76, Wu alludes to this statement in his rendering “*wushi zhong mubo, keji yiwei ren*務使眾牧伯，克己以為仁” (he requires all worldly shepherds to be self-disciplined and meet the principle of humanity), whereas MEM reads “He-cuts-off the spirit of princes: He is terrible to the kings of the earth” (76:13), referring to God’s restraint on the pride of secular rulers. To remold it, Wu interprets awe towards God in terms of both the demands of Confucian rites and the essence of humanity.

Jesuit missionaries coming to China in the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing dynasties adhered to the strategy of inculturation, one aspect of which is exemplified in their theological writings combining Confucian self-cultivation and Christian spiritual life; an example would be Diego de Pantoja’s (1571–1618) *Qike* 七克 (seven ways of self-restraint). Though a Chinese Catholic, Wu was in line with this approach, as can be observed in his *Chugao*. In addition to “*keji yiwei ren*克己以為仁”, he also borrows the concepts of “*wei jing wei yi*惟精惟一” (be fine and pure), “*zao shen yu de*澡身浴德” (clean the body with virtue), “*xiushen yi qiji*修身以齊家” (cultivate oneself and put family in order), and so on. Confucianism aside, Wu also learned from Daoist thoughts on spiritual cultivation, which can be viewed in Psalm 51: “Unsin me with hyssop, and I-shall-be-clean: Wash me, and I-shall-be-made-whiter than snow” (MEM 51:9) is rendered as “*sa yi lingxian, zaoxue wuhun, zai xi zai zhao, yujie bingqing*灑以靈莧，澡雪吾魂。載洗載濯，玉潔冰清”, wherein the translator associates Zhuangzi’s (莊子(c. 369 B.C.–c. 286 B.C.)), also transliterated as Chuang Tzu, one of the founding philosophers of Daoism, living in the Warring States period) teaching of “*zao xue er jingshen*澡雪而精神” (sprinkle yourself with snow and refresh your spirit), interpreting the prayer of cleansing oneself from all sins as the pursuit of self-cultivation in the Chinese cultural context.

There are 73 Hebrew psalms claiming the authorship of King David, some of which are prayers for the country and the people; Wu’s translations of these display another dimension of how he connects the Psalms with Chinese classics in his rendition. For example, “*jishan you yuqing, ersun shishi fang, heping lin yisai, guotai min si kang*積善有餘

慶，兒孫世世芳。和平臨義塞，國泰民斯康” (Doing good brings good results for the offspring; the peace will come down to Israel and the people will enjoy happiness) in Psalm 128. In this case, Wu borrows “*jishan zhijia, biyou yuqing* 積善之家，必有餘慶” (the families keep doing good with good results) from *Zhouyi* 周易 (the Book of Changes, one of the “Five Classics” of Confucianism and also a foundational source of Daoism, consisting of an all-encompassing philosophy of the universe and human life), exhorting readers to do good and praying for the people as well. In other cases, the translator elucidates the everlasting grace of God from the opposite side, emphasizing the transience of the prosperous world through an appeal to Buddhist insight. For instance, Psalm 39, entitled “*meng huan pao ying* 夢幻泡影” (dreamy illusion), echoes a proverb cited from the Diamond Sutra (a Mahayana Buddhist scripture that was well-received in China), which describes the nothingness of secular life. This proverb is also used in “*fugui pinjian jie paoying* 富貴貧賤皆泡影” (both wealth and fame are dreamy illusion) in Psalm 62, encouraging readers to turn to God rather than the world. Compared to Confucianism, which emphasizes ethics, both Daoism and Buddhism provide more epistemological illumination, equipping Chinese people with alternative ways of thinking about life and the world. In Wu’s version of the Psalms, he appropriates some concepts from these two schools of philosophy. For example, he uses “*diting* 諦聽” (listen carefully) and “*diguan* 諦觀” (watch carefully), two concepts denoting the correct manner of learning the Buddhist doctrines (Dharma), in several psalms (e.g. Psalm 75, 78, 81, 92, 103, 111) that refer to the learning of God’s Law and Word. Another example from Psalm 138, entitled “*dao yu ming* 道與名” (the Way and the Name), resonates with the first chapter of *Tao Teh Ching* 道德經 (the foundational classic of Daoism authored by Lao Zi 老子 (c. 571 B.C.–471 B.C.)), which speculates on the ontological meaning of the Way and the Name. However, in Wu’s usage, “*dao* 道” is used to render the sacred Word of God, and “*ming* 名” refers to his great name, in which his people believe and pray.

Assessed from within the tradition of Chinese Christian literature, Wu’s rendition of the Psalms can be placed into the lineage of “*tianxue* poetry” (天學詩, *tianxue shi*), a kind of poetry written by Western missionaries or local converts aimed at proclaiming Catholic doctrines or depicting religious life and experience with the resource of Chinese classical literature. It emerged from the end of the Ming dynasty but had not left impressive works until Wu Li 吳歷 (1632–1718), an eminent poet and painter in the early Qing. Immersed in Confucianism and Buddhism in his youth, Wu Li converted to Catholicism in his 40s, moved to Macao to study theology in the Colégio de São Paulo in 1681 and became a Jesuit next year. In his midlife, he composed numerous works of “*tianxue* poetry” to address his spiritual transformation with the literary skills and traditions of Chinese classical poetry, becoming the first representative of this genre.<sup>18</sup> Though produced in different times, John C. H. Wu’s literary translation of the Psalms echoes Wu Li’s “*tianxue* poetry” at a distance, with the aim of spreading Catholic faith through a Chinese poetic vehicle.

### 3. Between Scripture and Literature: The Psalms Encounters *Shijing*

By borrowing numerous Chinese idioms and popular verses, as discussed above, Wu transplanted biblical texts onto the soil of Chinese classical literature and explicated Jewish and Christian thoughts that were heterogeneous for Chinese readers. He did this by engaging deep-rooted concepts in Chinese traditional culture in his translation. In other words, this Chinese version of the Psalms lends itself beautifully to the methods of comparative literature and comparative scripture. Another important aspect of the *Chugao*’s intertextuality is the relationship Wu establishes between the Psalms and *Shijing*. As one of the “Five Classics” (五經, *wujing*), *Shijing* exemplifies the Confucian ideal of education, serving as the starting point of study for Chinese scholars and also one of the debating points for Confucian exegetes. It is reasonable that Wu thought highly of it: not only for its importance in Chinese Confucian history but also for its aesthetic value and influence as the great beginning of Chinese classical literature, which so fascinated him.<sup>19</sup>

The origination of *Shijing* consists of folk songs circulated in different vassal states from the Western Zhou (1046 B.C.–771 B.C.) to the Spring and Autumn period (770 B.C.–476 B.C.) (風 *feng*), of individual compositions by aristocrats (雅 *ya*), and of songs for worship in ancestral temples (頌 *song*). According to *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian), it was Confucius who selected around three hundred extracts from the songs when preparing teaching material for his pupils. Starting from the Han dynasty (202 B.C.–220), interpreting *Shijing* from the perspective of Confucianism gradually became the long-established criterion, with Mao's Prologues (毛詩序, *maoshixu*) and Zheng Xuan's 鄭玄 (127–200) commentary as the most authoritative references, leading to a preoccupation that tended to draw attention away from the literariness of the texts. This situation had not changed until the Northern Song (960–1127)<sup>20</sup>, and it was Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), the leading Neo-Confucianist of the Southern Song (1127–1279), who played the most significant role in reconciling the attributes of *Shijing* as both a Confucian scripture and a literary work. He argued that the first part of *Shijing*, entitled *Guofeng* 國風 (the spirit of a country; “*Feng* 風” for short), consisted essentially of folk songs and was not aimed at political propaganda or criticism. Rather, some of these songs were about love affairs (Mo 2001). As a champion of Neo-Confucianism, Zhu Xi propounded the constraint on human desire by natural law and did not appreciate the emotion expressed in *Shijing*, but he acknowledged its literariness from the directions of the work itself and reader response. His contribution cannot be denied (Zhang 2013): some intellectuals of the Qing dynasty followed his approach to breaking down the limitation set by Confucianism, proclaiming the distinctive literary character of *Shijing* and its depiction of human emotion (He 2016).<sup>21</sup>

From the perspective of modern biblical study, as a text that is both literary and scriptural, the Psalms also possess a comparably dual nature.<sup>22</sup> Some form critics tried to reconstruct the *Sitz im Leben* behind various psalms and classify them into “individual laments”, “community laments”, “hymns”, “thanksgiving psalms”, “royal psalms”, and “wisdom psalms” (Longman and Enns 2008, pp. 2506–22). Whatever their original purpose, the Psalms document ancient Israelites’ prayers, laments, and praises to God, addressing different life situations. Judging from the Greek Psalms present in the Septuagint, combined with the discovery made via the Dead Sea Scrolls that the Book of Psalms consists of 151 psalms, we can conclude that this book, as part of the Hebrew Scripture, played a significant role in the religious life of Jewish communities before the second century B.C. Even in the canonical gospels, the Psalms are cited as part of “the Scripture” of Judaism, regarding Jesus’ life as their fulfillment. To put it in another way, the New Testament writers understood the Psalms typologically, the practice of which was developed by the Alexandrian school as allegorical exegesis (Brown 2014, pp. 7–9). Whether in the Hebrew Scripture or the Christian Bible, the canonicity of the Psalms was entrenched from an early stage. With regards to its literariness, the book had been explored from the patristic period and was acknowledged by the historical critics emerging in the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries, whose main interest was in reconstructing the social contexts behind the text. Starting from the Romantic movement of nineteenth century Europe, the literariness of the Psalms was really appreciated, anticipating the literary approach of biblical studies popular in the twentieth century.<sup>23</sup>

To sum up, both *Shijing* and the Psalms are deeply rooted in the contexts of their respective exegetical traditions, yet their literary attributes were overlooked for a substantial period of their history. Taking the approach of literary translation, Wu infused the rendition with his own interpretation and recreation, on the premise of conveying the main idea of the original<sup>24</sup>; in a sense, he challenged the authority of scripture by means of literature. On the other hand, Wu’s translation inaugurates an intertextual dialogue between these two classics: verses of *Shijing* hold new implications in the context of the Psalms, and literary interaction provides the platform for the practice of comparative scriptural study.<sup>25</sup> Thus, it is Wu’s way of alluding to *Shijing* in *Chugao* that implies his complicated attitude towards this Chinese classic. As many students of Chinese classical literature know, *feng* 風, *ya* 雅, *song* 頌, *fu* 賦, *bi* 比, and *xing* 興 are known as the “Six Doctrines” (六義, *liuyi*) of *Shijing*.



In short, *bi* means analogy and metaphor, making comparisons with similar things to describe their features; *xing* means evoking the reader's attention to the subject matter by means of certain images; *fu* means exaggeration and elaboration (Liu 2021, pp. 411–12, 85). Considering that these three “doctrines” are involved in the above discussion of Wu's borrowing of verses and images from *Shijing*, we will concentrate on his attitudes towards *feng*, *ya*, and *song*, three main genres applied in this classic.

It is *Guanju* 關雎, the first song of *Shijing*, that spotlights the controversy among Confucian exegetes. In Confucius' comment, it expresses temperate joy and sadness, exemplifying a kind of “modest beauty” (中和之美, *zhonghe zhi mei*). In Mao's Prologue and Zheng's Commentary, it is about the empress' virtue (后妃之德, *houfei zhi de*), with the aim of cultivating social morality, especially about the spousal relationship, and thus becomes a representative case of the Confucian tradition of poetic education (Mao and Zheng 2018, pp. 1–5). Similarly, in Zhu Xi's argument, *Guanju* manifests the calm disposition of the empress and the poet, supporting his teaching of mental cultivation (Zhu 2011, p. 3). Conspicuously, in Wu's version of Psalm 3, we can read “*wumei si fu, zhu'en wangji* 寤寐思服，主恩罔極” (what I think of day and night is the marvelous grace of God), the first half of which comes from *Guanju*. The original superscription of Psalm 3, however, reminds us that it was a prayer composed by David when he tried to escape the attack launched by his son Absalom.<sup>26</sup> Placed in this context, “*wumei si fu* 寤寐思服” (continually thinking of it when sleeping or upon awaking) loses its original connotation regarding a secular relationship but relates to the yearning for the one true God, with strong emotions of resentment, worry, and fear caused by a broken father-son relationship rather than “temperate joy and sadness”. By transposing “*wumei si fu* 寤寐思服” into his rendition of the Psalms, Wu establishes intertextuality that replaces the implication of “modest beauty” with religious passion. A similar case can be seen in Psalm 24, in which “*zhi bi lingshan* 陟彼靈山” (climbing up the spiritual mountain) is an allusion to “*zhi bi nanshan* 陟彼南山” (climbing up the southern mountain), a verse of *Caocong* 草蟲 (“Insects”, a song in *Guofeng*). As a piece of literature, this song depicts a young lady longing for her husband, who is traveling away from home, whereas the commentator in Mao's Prologue appropriates it as a reminder to deal with the spousal relationship according to feudal ethical codes (Mao and Zheng 2018, pp. 18–19). Breaking new ground, Wu relates it to the experience of pilgrimage and the space of sacredness, having nothing to do with secular affection or an ethical code.

In the tradition of Confucian exegesis, the authors' purpose in composing *Shijing* is basically to praise the rulers (美 *mei*) or to criticize negative social phenomena (刺 *ci*), while the Psalms can be divided into two categories: hymns of praise and laments. In Wu's allusion to *Guofeng*, this interesting parallelism was manipulated. The above examples suggest how he transformed the praise of secular authority and Confucian morality to that of God, and additionally, when alluding to some other sections of *Guofeng* that reflect people's suffering or immoral practice, his cynical tone targets human selfishness and wickedness. For example, “*su suo qinni, ceng shi wo su. zuijiu baode, jing yi huai'er* 素所親暱，曾食我粟。醉酒飽德，竟亦懷貳” (Unexpectedly, those people who used to be close to me and ate my food betray me) in Psalm 41 signals that the translator is inspired by “*shuoshu shuoshu, wu shi wo shu! sansui guan ru, mo wo kengu* 碩鼠碩鼠，無食我黍！三歲貫女，莫我肯顧” (Don't eat my crop, big mice! You simply ignore me, setting aside my grace of having raised you in your immaturity”), popular verses from *Shuoshu* 碩鼠 (“Big Mice”, a song in *Guofeng*). Overall, Psalm 41 is a prayer in sickness, including accusations against ungrateful friends, who can be identified with those cruel officers represented in *Shuoshu*. The image of “big mice”, though not mentioned directly, is implied by the description of “*ceng shi wo su* 曾食我粟” (used to eat my food) rendered by Wu. His allusion to criticism of unethical behavior can also be discovered in Psalm 119: “*ersan qide, wo suo tongji, wu ai dafa, weijing wei yi* 二三其德，我所痛疾。吾愛大法，惟精惟一” (Half-heartedness is what I hate bitterly. Whole-heartedness is the great code I admire). Cited from *Meng* 氓 (“Common People”, a song in *Guofeng*), “*er san qi de* 二三其德” (half-heartedness) is an accusation by a

lady to her unfaithful husband, whereas placed in the context of Psalm 119, it suggests a satire of a half-hearted person in practicing God's law: just like an unfaithful lover.

In addition to *Guofeng*, Wu also alludes to *Xiaoya* 小雅 (the minor odes of the kingdom),<sup>27</sup> which can be exemplified by “*shuai tu zhi bin, mofei er shu, putian zhixia, mofei er pu* 率土之濱，莫匪爾屬。普天之下，莫匪爾僕” (all the lands are your territory and all the countrymen are your servants) in Psalm 24, an allusion to *Beishan* 北山 (“Northern Mountain”, a song in *Xiaoya*). As several scholars argue, the main idea of *Beishan* is a complaint about the “unfair dispatch of officials” (Cheng and Jiang 2017, pp. 490–91), while Psalm 24 is about various Israelite cities’ cheering for the descent of God. The entanglement of these two texts may seem perplexing at first glance, but upon second thought, an encounter between two worldviews can be realized: the system of enfeoffment of ancient China and the monotheist theocracy of ancient Israel. The former leads to the poet’s suffering from parent–child separation (Cheng and Jiang 2017, p. 490), and the latter brings the psalmist a feeling of sacred joy. Wu’s rendering injects a sense of piety to *Beishan*, signifying a dialogue between two kinds of political cultures.

Notably, Wu’s allusion to *Shijing* concentrates on *Guofeng* and *Xiaoya*, whereas *Daya* 大雅 and *Song* are seldom invoked. One probable explanation has to do with the differing focuses of these texts. Both *Guofeng* and *Xiaoya* reflect the real social life of various areas and classes, with deep feeling and sincere emotion, which fits the tone of the Psalms better. In contrast, the main purpose of *Daya* and *Song* is to praise the military and political achievements of the emperors, full of flattering words and lacking in sincerity, ingenuity, and literary value.<sup>28</sup> The underlying reason may be related to Wu’s understanding of Confucianism: its central idea is humanity (仁, *ren*) rather than filial piety (孝, *xiao*); filial piety is underscored for being the natural starting point of practicing humanity (Sih 1965, pp. 3–6). Based on this logic, we can deduce Wu’s thought on Confucian poetry education: he might have regarded the central goal of education as nurturing humanity rather than discipline in ethical code. Compared with *Daya* and *Song*, *Guofeng* and *Xiaoya* are closer to this goal. In this sense, we can conclude that Wu’s attitude to *feng*, *ya*, and *song* suggests his distinctive stance towards Confucian hermeneutics.

#### 4. The Adaptation of Classical Poetry Genres and the Transformation of Their Spiritual Traditions

The intriguing interaction between the Psalms and *Shijing* reveals that Wu’s adaptation of Chinese classical poetic genres expands their spaces of representation by transposing the life experience of an exotic culture and further transforms the spiritual tradition behind these genres. As Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 (1910–1998), an outstanding scholar in contemporary China, argues, “*feng* 風” can denote “*fengyao* 風謠” (folk songs) and “*fengjiao* 風教” (cultivation and education) (Qian 2019, vol. 1, pp. 101–2). To elaborate, the folk songs in *Guofeng* collated and interpreted by Confucian scholars facilitated the communication between the emperors and the common people. Similarly, as a kind of aristocratic literature, *Xiaoya* connected the emperor and his subordinate officials. By alluding to both *Guofeng* and *Xiaoya*, Wu interprets the religious and life experience of ancient Israel, transposing the livelihood issues and popular sentiments of ancient China to the life and feelings of God’s people, and the relationship between the emperor and the subordinate to the obedience of King David to God. Thus, Wu opens up new expressive possibilities. Furthermore, in his monograph entitled “Four Seasons of Tang Poetry”, Wu explicates poems by Li Bai 李白 (701–762), Wang Wei 王維 (c.701–761), Du Fu, Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), and Li Yu 李煜 (937–978), in conjunction with their personalities, by means of the metaphors of spring, summer, autumn, and winter. In this work, he compares Tang poetry with the writings of some Western poets, including John Donne (1572–1631), John Keats (1795–1821), and Robert Browning (1812–1889), which reveals Wu’s talent in comparing Chinese and Western poetry and their spiritual traditions (Wu 1972). This talent for fostering inter-cultural dialogue was continued in his rendition of the Psalms and developed into a kind of poetics of creative transformation.

Apart from the four-character style prevalent in *Shijing*, Wu also adapted other Chinese classical poetry genres, including the style of Qu Yuan's lyrics, five-character style, seven-character style, and miscellaneous style. As introduced before, rendering the Psalms in the style of "cifu" was a tradition beginning with the Delegates' Version, improved by John Chalmers and best represented by Wu's *Chugao*. Deriving from Chinese literary history, the style of "cifu", characterizing Psalms 2, 10, 13, 18, 22, 42, 43, 52, 57, 58, 59, etc. in *Chugao*, originated in Qu's lyrics, which include the modal particle "xi". Moreover, in *Lisao* 離騷 (the sadness of departure), the most renowned work of Qu, the first person is used to sharpen the image of Qu as a worried and indignant but persistent poet, similar to the image of King David in the Psalms. Coincidentally, the first person is also prevalent in the Psalms to express feelings directly. For instance, Psalm 10, entitled "Wenzhu 問主" (to ask the Lord), begins with the verses "wo wen zhu xi hegu, miaoran shi xi bu wo gu 我問主兮何故，邈然逝兮不我顧" (I ask the Lord why he left me behind and departed away). Even though they were not alike in the sense of their respective achievements—though having a prominent political talent, Qu committed suicide due to his failure in serving the motherland, whereas David was the second king of the United Kingdom of Israel (reigned from 1010 B.C. to 970 B.C.)—their personalities and emotions were comparable: self-disciplined, upright, aspiring but sentimental. To describe his own aspiration, Qu frequently refers to his ethical pursuit with metaphors of various kinds of sweetgrass, such as autumn orchid and wild ginger, and he symbolizes his yearning for a wise emperor with the plot of pursuing a goddess, such as "Fufei 宓妃". This is the origin of "sweetgrass and the beauty" (香草美人, *xiangcao meiren*), a tradition running through the history of Chinese ancient literature. Wu must have known this tradition well, for he adopted metaphors of sweetgrass repeatedly in his *Chugao*, for example, "zaoshen yude, fangze shi mu 澡身浴德，芳澤是沐" (I wash my body with virtue like the fragrance of sweetgrass) in Psalm 92. The tradition of describing the wise emperor as a beautiful woman also influenced Wu's rendering, which can be exemplified in "fangzong zhi suoguo, bubu liu feiwo 芳蹤之所過，步步留肥沃" (Her gentle footsteps fertilize everywhere). "Fangzong 芳蹤" refers to the footsteps of the beauty, an image that is, however, adapted by Wu to describe God, the Heavenly King, rather than a secular wise emperor. In a word, by translating the Psalms with the style of Qu's lyrics, Wu, at an intertextual level, transforms the spiritual tradition behind this genre. To elaborate further, the influence of *Lisao* in the history of Chinese literature can be compared with that of *Shijing*, which lies in not only its literary elegance but also its status as a first attempt to express intensively the ethical and political ideals of scholar-officials in ancient China. Nonetheless, in Wu's rendition, this genre is adapted to depict God's virtue and great work, and to express the everlasting yearning for God, adding new spiritual dimensions to this genre beyond self-cultivation (修身, *xiushen*) and serving the motherland (報國, *baoguo*).

Aside from the great traditions of *Shijing* and *Lisao*, Wu also adopted Chinese classical poetic genres of five-character style, seven-character style, and miscellaneous style. While aiming to preserve the central meaning of the original biblical text, Wu combined multifarious poetry styles and strove to fulfill Chinese readers' expectation of rhyming poems (Wu [1951] 2018, p. 285). Among all the genres, several forms of pre-Tang poetry are flexible in the number of verses, parallelism, and rhyme scheme, and are therefore more suitable for translating the Psalms. Among poems of the five-character style, the "Nineteen Ancient Poems" (古詩十九首, *gushi shijiushou*, NAP for short) are the most celebrated: they are written in plain language and express the sorrows of love and turbulent times. *Chugao* contains several psalms entitled "Chanhui yin 懺悔吟" (lyric songs of repentance), with a style similar to that of NAP. One of them, subtitled "Youqi 憂戚" (worried and sorrowful) has the following verses: "xinhun kun yujue, tuci chang shenyin, yeye an liulei, chuangu yu qiulin 心魂困欲絕，徒此長呻吟。夜夜暗流淚，床褥濕秋霖" (My heart and soul are as if in prison, moaning in vain. I wept night by night and wet my mattress with tears like the autumn rain). It directly expresses feelings of deep regret and appeals to God for mercy, with long lines and the metaphor of autumn rain to underscore the bleakness and loneliness. Similar expression can be found in "chuhu du panghuang, chousi dang gaoshui!

*yinling hai rufang, leixia zhan shangyi* 出戶獨徬徨，愁思當告誰！引領還入房，淚下沾裳衣” (I wander outside along with worry and sadness which cannot be poured out! I return home with tears wetting my garment), cited from a song entitled “*Mingyue he jiaojiao* 明月何皎皎” (the moon is so bright), one piece of NAP. Both of these poems describe the feeling of sorrow with reference to personal belongings (mattress, garment) as witness, but the piece in *Chugao* is better in stressing the painfulness and despair. Furthermore, both Psalm 39 of *Chugao* and another piece of NAP entitled “*Xibei you gaolou* 西北有高樓” (a mansion in the northwest) express the feeling of loneliness by allusion to the Chinese popular story of “*zhiyin* 知音” (a friend can understand your inwardness by hearing your music). However, the former additionally depicts the feeling of indignation, representing more dimensions of human emotion.

As some researchers point out, the “Nineteen Ancient Poems” were written at the end of the Eastern Han dynasty, when the turbulent society triggered the life consciousness of a multitude of poets and aroused their reflection on and denial of the previous value system, prompting them to think about the ontological significance of life (Wu 2014). Adapting the five-character style of poems, Wu translates the Psalms with metaphors and narration similar to those in the “Nineteen Ancient Poems”. However, they are divergent in their views of world and life: the authors of the Psalms uphold monotheistic faith, remaining obedient to God in all kinds of difficult situations, whereas the authors of NAP face up to the nothingness of life and adhere to the secular pursuit of wealth, fame, and happiness. We can take a glimpse from the following verses of NAP: “*rensheng tiandijian, huru yuanxingke* 人生天地間，忽如遠行客” (living between heaven and earth is like traveling as a passenger), “*weile dang jishi, heneng dailai zi* 為樂當及時，何能待來茲” (seize the time and enjoy, for life does not come again), and “*hubu ce gaozu, xian ju yaolujin* 何不策高足，先據要路津” (why not gallop and capture the fortress?). In his creative rendering, however, Wu replaces the tone of nothingness of this genre with the theistic worldview and godly life attitude, for example: “*changgui wen wozhu, heshi jiu lingding* 長跪問我主，何時救伶仃” (I kneel down and ask my Lord when He will come and rescue the lonely and the helpless) and “*bimeng zhu juangu, qunzi qi zhongqiong* 必蒙主眷顧，君子豈終窮” (The pious will definitely receive the favor of the Lord, and thus avoid poverty). With respect to the seven-character style and the miscellaneous style, Wu’s rendering of “*junbujian, qunxiao wangong jianzaixian, yu yu anzhong she xianliang* 君不見，群小彎弓箭在弦，欲於暗中射賢良” (Didn’t you see that a crowd of villains are bending the bow and preparing to target the virtuous secretly?) in Psalm 11 is an example. The phrase “*jun bujian* 君不見” (didn’t you see?) is common in miscellaneous-style poems written by poets in the Tang, in order to draw the reader’s attention, corresponding to *הִנֵּה* (behold) in the Hebrew original. Compared to the five-character style, the miscellaneous style has a changeable sentence pattern and tempo and is thus more suitable for conveying a fluctuating mood, which can be exemplified by Li Bai’s verse: “*junbujian, gaotang mingjing bei baifa, zhao ru qingsi mu chengxue* 君不見，高堂明鏡悲白髮，朝如青絲暮成雪” (Didn’t you see that a bright mirror in a mansion reflects the hair that seems to change from black to grey in a day and invokes sadness?). In Wu’s rendition, the Chinese style of depicting contrasting images and expressing opposing feelings underpins the good-against-evil experience in ancient Israelite society, broadening the literary space of this archaic poetry style.

## 5. Conclusions

Since critics such as Erich Auerbach (1892–1957), Northrop Frye (1912–1991), and Robert Alter (1935–), the relation between the Bible and Western literature has become an important research field. Though the connections between the Bible and Chinese literature have also attracted some scholarly attention, it has generally been limited to the modern period with, for example, some studies on the influence of the Bible on the Chinese colloquial movement (Yuan 2014; Liu 2015) and on some famous writers (Gálik 2004). As for Chinese ancient literature, it has seemed to be a text space that does not intersect with the Bible, and there have been few researchers attempting to relate them.



However, in my close reading of Chinese translations of the Psalms, I have discovered that some translators attempted to place this profound and influential religious classic in relation to the rich traditions of Chinese classical literature by means of literary translation. This phenomenon can be conceptualized as “rendering the Psalms as Chinese classical literature”, a work initiated by Wang Tao in his contribution to the Delegates’ Version, and within the framework of “the Bible as Chinese literature” proposed by Walter H. Medhurst. John Chalmers furthered the dialogue between Chinese classical poetry and the Psalms, but it was John C. H. Wu, with his *Chugao*, who outstandingly represented this translation trend. Wu’s translation of the Psalms is full of wisdom and literary power, representing a remarkable page in the history of Chinese Bible translation and Sino-Western cultural exchange. With his distinguished talent, Wu found a way to indigenize the Bible: his translation is a cross-cultural interpretation that is “beyond East and West”, an interdisciplinary dialogue “between scripture and literature”, and a multi-genre translation that transforms the spirit of Chinese classical poetry.

As the French hermeneutical philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) reminds us, the translator is at risk of serving and betraying two masters while practicing “linguistic hospitality” (Ricoeur 2006, pp. 8–10). Specifically, Bible translators are interpreters bridging the gap between the sacred text and the recipient, who may be from a linguistic and cultural community totally foreign to the traditions of Judaism or Christianity. Thus, Bible translators are called to what I term a “double commitment”. All of the above translators of the Psalms engaged with both the Bible and Chinese traditional culture, and Wu, with his unique life experience, philosophical thought, and literary attainment, demonstrated possibilities of incarnating the Word through creative translation, providing a variety of “literary houses” for the biblical texts to dwell in. Provoked by his version, the issue of the relation between biblical theology and inter-cultural poetics awaits further investigation. Regarding poetry as “the kernel of culture” and “an upwelling from the heart” revealing “what a people most strongly desires and believes”, Wu proposed to unfold “the very soul” of the Chinese people to the world by this means (Wu 1936, p. 9). To put it further, his cultural vision of connecting the East and the West through the Christian faith, particularly in a Catholic spirit, was realized to an important extent through poetic exchange, as exemplified in his translation of the Psalms.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Robert Alter’s exploration of the “forms of faith” in the Psalms is an illuminating case. See (Alter 1984, pp. 111–36).
- <sup>2</sup> There is no evidence that Montecorvino and his fellow Franciscans had prepared any Christian texts in the Chinese language, but according to some available documents, they conducted oral preaching in China, interpreting Christian texts from Latin or other European languages, first into Turco-Mongol and second into Chinese. See (Gruttola 2021).
- <sup>3</sup> Poirot explains his thoughts on the intended reader in the “Second Prologue” of his translation. See (Poirot 2014, “the Second Prologue”, p. 3). For a comprehensive introduction to Poirot’s translation, especially his balance between transferring the original meaning of the Bible and expressing it in a vernacular language, see (Song 2015).
- <sup>4</sup> Medhurst expounds his consideration on this new version in a memorial addressed to the British and Foreign Bible Society. See (Medhurst 1836).
- <sup>5</sup> For the early history (the so-called “the first and second generations”) of Chinese Bible translation accomplished by Protestant missionaries, see (Zetzsche 1999, pp. 25–76).
- <sup>6</sup> “Term Questions” refers to several disputes that took place in the late Ming and the Qing dynasties about how to translate some important Judeo-Christian terms (God, Spirit, Jehovah, baptism, etc.) into Chinese. The dispute mentioned here is the one

that occurred in the mid-nineteenth century between the British and the American Protestant missionaries, concerning how to translate these terms when preparing the Delegates' Version. For more details, see (Wu 2000; Zhao 2019, pp. 60–80). See also Eber's (1999) exploration of this stage of the controversy and its following phase, occurring around 1866 to 1877.

7 For Wang Tao's life and thought, see (Cohen 1987).

8 For Medhurst's idea and the process of preparing the Delegates' Version, see (Hanan 2003) and (Liu 2013, pp. 140–47).

9 As a modal particle, "xi兮" is commonly used in Chinese classical poetry of the early period, for example, *Shijing*, Qu Yuan's lyrics and *cifu* composed in the Han dynasty; it indicates an archaic style.

10 For the relation between these two versions, see (Choi 2018, pp. 363–64).

11 See (Wu 1946). In the present article, all citations of *Chugao* refer to this version.

12 Invited to teach Chinese philosophy as a visiting professor at the University of Hawaii, Wu left China and moved to the city of Honolulu. In 1951, he joined the law faculty at Seton Hall University in New Jersey. He moved to live in Taiwan in 1966 and passed away there in 1986. For a glimpse of his later life, see (Lindblom 2005).

13 There has been some research on Wu's *Chugao*: a journal article by Ren (2011) and a doctoral dissertation by Lindblom (2021) are worthy of specific review. Each provides a survey of this version, acknowledging its contribution to Sino-Western cultural exchange, and each discusses Wu's appropriation of the Chinese philosophical concept "Dao道" in particular. Ren points out Wu's cultural stance as essentially "Christian-centered", whereas Lindblom prefers to affirm the spiritual value of Wu's translation and perceives it as a "sacred art". However, neither investigator further elucidates how Wu's *Chugao* entangles different literary traditions, nor do they register its ingenious reaction to Chinese classical poetry, thus underestimating its value for comparative literature and cross-cultural poetics. It is precisely this value that is the focus of the present article.

14 In their overview of Catholic Bible translation in twentieth-century China, Choi and Mak (2014) introduce Wu's translation of the Psalms and the New Testament, describing it as "a literary approach to the Chinese Catholic Bible".

15 Wang Tao and Chalmer had some communication about the "Term Questions" in Bible translation and ancient calendars in the Chinese classic *Shangshu*尚書 (the Book of History). See (Yao 2016, pp. 19–22).

16 For example, Li Wenyu李問漁 (1840–1911) and Ma Xiangbo馬相伯 (1840–1939), who were also Chinese Catholic translators. Both of them accomplished Bible translations and paraphrases/compilations. However, even for the latter type of text, they preferred to reorganize the original content rather than incorporate their personal creative expression. For an in-depth analysis of Li's and Ma's Bible translation, see (Hong 2022).

17 As Wu admitted, his translation was completed in wartime, when collecting research material was arduous (Wu 1946, p. 119). This can be attested by his references: the number is small, and the coverage is narrow. However, Wu's version of the Psalms is a literary translation, which depends less on academic research outcomes than does a literal translation.

18 For Wu Li's life and work, see (Wu 2007). For specific research of his "tianxue poetry", see (Chaves 2002).

19 In his essay titled "Some Random Notes on the *Shih Ching*", Wu points out that "nearly all the principal themes of poetry are covered by the *Shih Ching*. It set the pace to the later poetry of China". See (Wu 1936, p. 14).

20 This was the time of the revolutionary breakthrough made by three famed writers and scholars in the Northern Song (960–1127)—Ouyang Xiu歐陽修 (1007–1072), Su Shi, and Su Zhe蘇軾 (1039–1112)—who pointed out that the authors of *Shijing* were stimulated by emotions that were compatible with the humanity advocated by Confucians. See (Liu 2008).

21 Wu briefly discusses his views on the Confucian hermeneutics of *Shijing*: he points out that Confucius, the originator of this school, did read *Shijing* as literature, and affirms the literary approach taken by some scholars (e.g., Fang Runyu方潤玉 (1811–1883)) in the Qing dynasty, while denying the mainstream represented by Mao and Zhu Xi. See (Wu 1936, pp. 30–31).

22 The Psalms were attributed to King David for a long time, until some historical critics suggested later dates. Nowadays, it is widely agreed that some psalms were composed before the exile to Babylon (c. 597 B.C.–c. 538 B.C.), and some are from the post-exilic period, but all were probably completed before the Maccabean reign (143 B.C.–63 B.C.). See (Dahood 1965, pp. xxix–xxx; Brown 2014, pp. 1–23, esp. p. 5).

23 The practice of viewing "the Bible as literature" was also recognized and studied. See (Ryken 2017).

24 For the definition of "literary translation", especially its denifition as an art, see (Palfrey 1964). In this article, the author, on the one hand, acknowledges that "accuracy and fidelity to the original" are indispensable prerequisites, whereas, on the other, he emphasizes that the aim of literary translation is "felicity of phrase rather than mere accuracy, beauty of style rather than plain fidelity".

25 Wu's approach to translation can be further justified by Yeo's (2021) theory of four synchronizing moves (translation, expression, interpretation, reception), which indicates how the Bible emerged and developed within the present life-worlds in China.

26 Wu did not translate the original superscriptions since, from his point of view, they are insignificant for Chinese readers. See (Wu 1946, "the General Notes", p. 1).

27 "Ya雅" is a joint name for *Xiaoya*小雅 and *Daya*大雅 (the major odes of the kingdom).

28 Wu recommends the masterpieces in *Shijing* as "jewels" and describes their literary character as visualizing "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", "so genuine and sincere", like "the freshest water from the purest source" and "as though Nature

drove the anonymous ancient bards to singing". He also emphasizes *Guofeng* as "the most heart-thrilling poems", which "are like the wind that bloweth where it listeth". See (Wu 1936, p. 12).

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