COMMON CORE THESIS AND A QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF

MYSTICISM IN CHINESE BUDDHIST MONKS AND NUNS

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the phenomenological structure of mystical experience among 139 Chinese Pure Land and Chan Buddhist monks and nuns. Semi-structured interviews, thematic coding, and statistical analyses identified Hood's Mysticism Scale as a valid tool for studying mysticism across religions and cultures. Stace's common facets of mysticism as measured by Hood's scale successfully described Buddhist experience as modified by Buddhist doctrines. Confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated that these facets could be formed into Stace's three-factor structure. A mystical introvertive unity hypothesized to be separate from an extrovertive unity appeared instead to converge in the Chinese Buddhist context. These results lent strong support to the thesis that the phenomenology of mystical experience reveals a common experiential core that can be discerned across religious and spiritual traditions. These data also demonstrated that this common core can and should be explored using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

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The Lord I remember. With faith in Him, I am able to remain patient in suffering which produces perseverance, character, and hope.

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INTRODUCTION

The social scientific study of mysticism has long recognized a bifurcation of interest in either *a* mystical experience cultivated from a particular doctrinal scheme, or *the* pure experiential core that is common across all traditions. Troeltsch (1912/1981) differentiated these two types of mysticism. One is the sense of presence of God defined and elaborated within specific religions such as Christianity. The other "narrow, technical concentrated sense" (1912/1981:734) of mysticism emerges when the focus is upon the dissolution of ego and the experience of unity.

The first mysticism resonates with a diversity thesis insisting that mystical experience be attached to a religious framework, and that there can be as many forms of mysticisms as there are numerous religious teachings and practices. Championing this perspective, social constructivists rallied around Katz (1978) to assert a crucial claim that no experience is privatized without being constructed by cultural interpretations. Contrasted to this claim is the "narrow" sense of mysticism, often associated with William James who appeared to endorse Troeltsch's position by advocating personal experience as the "root and centre" of all religions (James 1902/1985:301). Here, experience can be separated from its interpretation, and a uniform experience cuts across cultural differences. This position has been systematically developed by Stace (1960) under the rubric of the common core thesis. While proposing that a common set of components characterizes and underlies mystical experiences regardless of context, the common core thesis does not dismiss cultural or linguistic influences that structure these experiential components in a

way that is meaningful to a specific community (Chen, Yang, Hood, and Watson 2011; Hood & Chen in press).

Conceptual debates between the social constructivism and the common core thesis are not yet resolved. Empirical studies have nevertheless made progress with Stace's clear delineation of mystical factors and facets which were subsequently operationalized in the Mysticism Scale (M Scale) by Hood (1975). Two essential factors of mystical experience were each identified by two facets. *Introvertive* mysticism is composed of *ego loss*, unitary consciousness, and *timeless-spaceless*, nontemporal and nonspatial sense. *Extrovertive* mysticism is framed by *unity*, a unifying vision of all things as one, and *inner subjectivity*, a more concrete apprehension of the "One" as life in all things. The two types of mysticism are qualified by four common features which Hood (1975) identified as a third factor. This *Interpretive* factor incorporates facets of *positive affect*, blessedness, peace; *noetic quality*, sense of objectivity or reality; *sacredness*, feeling of the holy; and *ineffability,* the experience alleged by mystics to be ineffable.

Two Unities or the One

Mystical unity is at the "very heart and basis of all practical religious achievement" (Troeltsch 1912/1981:737). It also forms the psychological common core underneath most religious experiences where one seeks for universality. This experience of unity is unmediated in that it is either void of content or intuitively perceived. Based on these criteria, Stace (1960) distinguished two forms of unitary consciousness. The introvertive experience plunges into the depth of ego, where the very structures of sense, thought, time, and place are dissolved, leaving only a "naked One devoid of any plurality" (1960:62). The extrovertive experience looks outward through the senses where the multiplicity of external objects is "mystically transfigured so that the One, or the Unity, shines through them" (1960:61).

Hood (2002) further separated the introvertive state into two stages where a socially constructed self dissolves and a phenomenological unity of self emerges. The two stages are not uncommon in mystical texts. Buber (1961), for instance, clearly identified them, "I know well that there is a state in which the bounds of personal nature of life seem to have fallen away from us and we experience an undivided unity" (1961:24). The distinction Hood made is crucial since mystics who have achieved dissolution of self may not come to the unity. Loss of selfhood may be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for one to achieve unitary consciousness.

Despite this distinction, the two stages tend to be viewed as one. As Buber (1961) interpreted himself, "The unity of his own self is not distinguishable in the man's feeling from unity in general. For he who in the act or event of absorption is sunk beneath the realm of all multiplicity that holds sway in the soul cannot experience the cessation of multiplicity except as unity itself" (1961:25). The synchronicity of ego loss and unity completes Stace's view of introvertive state as a "pure unitary consciousness" (Stace 1960:89). However, the two stages may, but need not occur simultaneously. This possibility implies that the experience of unity can be obtained by means other than introspection, such as in the extrovertive mystical vision.

The inner connection between the introvertive and extrovertive states was heralded by Stace (1960) in his assertion that both "culminate in the perception of an ultimate Unity" (1960:61). The same One is disclosed either inwardly through emptiness of self (Hood's first stage), or outwardly from apprehension of a common base for all things. The two mysticisms can be viewed as two paths leading to one destination. Having this connection established, it is not necessary to create or to presume an entity for this destination. Such an entity, to be variously named for religious or individual purposes as God, Reality, or the Absolute, is bound to be a product of social construction which will be at some remove from any phenomenological focus

on the experience as it is. At the same time, however, the possibility of a transcendental being to be revealed in the unitary experience also cannot be disconfirmed outright. Methodologically it is possible to remain agnostic to this ontological claim (Hood in press; Porpora 2006). Again, Buber (1961) exemplifies a praiseworthy integrity: "But I do not know what the soul willing imagines and is indeed bound to imagine (mine too once did) – that in this I had attained a union with the primal being or godhead. This is an exaggeration no longer permitted to the responsible understanding. […] Nevertheless, in the honest and sober account of the responsible understanding this unity is nothing but the unity of this soul of mine" (1961:24).

The conceptual efforts unifying the two unities have received limited empirical attention. Hood (1975) initially uncovered two factors in the M Scale, an experiential factor that included ego loss and unity and an interpretative factor. Scholarly attention soon switched to Stace's more complicated three-factor model that explicitly discriminated introvertive from extrovertive mysticism. The focus was further obscured when Hood (2006) discovered that ineffability would be better placed as a facet in the introvertive rather than in the interpretive factor as originally suggested by Stace. An explanation for this revision appeared compelling, for loss of speech is an essential component in the ego loss which comprises a stage of emptiness.

The unrealized task of empirically conjoining the two unities may be due to the lack of a separate facet measuring introvertive unity (hereafter intro unity) in the M Scale. Except for one item in the ego loss facet measuring a state of losing selfhood (item 4, conscious of only a void), the other three items all denote a unitary experience (e.g., item 24, my own self seemed to merge into something greater). This intro unity is similar both in wording and in conception to the unity as a facet in the extrovertive factor (hereafter extro unity). Intro unity appears in such experiences as "I felt myself to be absorbed as one with all things" (item 6). In extro unity, one

"realized the oneness of myself with all things" (item 12). Both experiences signify a perception of unity of oneself with some larger entity, i.e. the world. This suggests a possible, intricate splitting out of an intro unity facet from the original ego loss facet, so that the experience of unity of void can be probed equally along with dissolution of selfhood. More importantly, the conceptual issue of "two unities or the One" may be approached more easily and directly through computing the correlation between measures of intro unity and extro unity.

Problems with the M Scale

Quantitative studies, by means of research using the M Scale, have accumulated empirical support for the common core thesis using subjects of various religious and cultural bearings. The general three-factor structure has been replicated, with moderate variations in facets arrangement, in American Protestants (Hood and Williamson 2000), Iranian Muslims (Hood, Ghorbani, Watson, et al. 2001), Israeli Jews (Lazar and Kravetz 2005), Indian Hindus (Anthony, Hermans, and Sterkens 2010), Tibetan Buddhists (Chen et al 2011), and Chinese Christians and religious nones (Chen, Zhang, Hood, and Watson 2011).

Despite its cross-cultural application, the validity of the scale may not be substantiated by quantitative designs alone. Previous studies almost invariably presupposed that the M Scale reflected Stace's three-factor structure and employed a closed Likert-type format which left little room for respondents to either rephrase item expressions or repudiate the underlying conceptions of the scale. Belzen (2010) well stated this limitation when he quipped that subjects "cannot take out anything else from the magician's hat than what the magician himself has put into it" (2010:427). In other words, Belzen suggested that the three-factor structure is largely an artifact of the scale construction, and that researchers should dig more specifically into locally variegated experiences than focus exclusively on those that are covered generically in the 32 scale items.

Criticisms of this kind, which ask for more than what is put into an instrument, may be captured hierarchically at three levels. At the item level, the way the M Scale items are phrased may not universally adapt to all linguistic contexts. Hood (2006) admitted that no language is neutral so that a single statement may inevitably carry different connotations, nuanced or prominent, for different people. Biographic factors may also amplify or suppress one's response to a certain experience based on its personal meaningfulness. It is therefore essential to evaluate whether an item is able to generate a consistent, meaningful pattern among respondents and elicit the subject's experience as relevant to "mysticism."

At the facet level, more evidence is needed to determine if items designed to assess a facet reliably generate the latent meaning of this facet. Descriptive statistics have mainly, if not exclusively, relied upon Cronbach's α to measure the extent to which items are combined together. More advanced confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) procedures go further to test if the model placing items under a designated facet reproduces an obtained covariance matrix. Although a recent study using CFA generally confirmed the item-facet structure of the M Scale in Chinese Christians (Chen, Zhang, Hood, and Watson 2011), it still leaves the question open whether these facets are actually conveying what researchers set out to express.

At the factor level, it is worth investigating if more or different factors than the presumed three factors will emerge for the best description of manifested indigenous belief. For instance, a study has uncovered a "vertical mysticism" which combined noetic quality as a qualification of introvertive mysticism in Hindu philosophy (Anthony et al. 2010). Similarly in Tibetan Buddhism, a feeling of bliss was found to be closely attached to the experience of ego loss (Chen et al. 2011). Again, as researchers fully attend to the influence of social construction, evidence will presumably reveal that experience is more than likely constructed in compliance with

cultural conventions, although the raw experience will remain comparable across cultures. This is associated with Stace's explicit assertion that there is a family resemblance among what we have referred to as the common core facets (Stace 1960:46-7).

Current Study

The psychology of religion needs a transformation of paradigms that favors more qualitative designs of an analytic and hermeneutic nature (Belzen and Hood 2006). This call, unfortunately, has yet to be heard in the study of spirituality, where less than .01% articles published between 1978 and 2003 used qualitative methods (Aten and Hernandez 2005).

The current study employed semi-structured interviews complemented by statistical procedures to reevaluate the common core thesis and the M Scale among Chinese Chan and Pure Land Buddhist monks and nuns. Chan or Zen is a sect of Mahayana Buddhism known for deliberate cultivation of meditative states. Pure Land Buddhists feature a special devotion to and invocation of *Amitabha* Buddha, ruler of the western pure land. Although the two schools differ in their unique training and sutra systems, Chinese Buddhists often practice both as a dual path of emptiness and existence (Prebish 1975). Socially constructed differences undoubtedly exist and are important in the mystical experience of participants specialized in the two schools, but the focus of the present project was on the possibility of identifying a common phenomenological experiential core in these Buddhists monks and nuns.

Selecting Buddhist practitioners as subjects made it possible to extend investigation of the common core thesis to a religious context that has received little empirical examination. In addition, such a study was unusual in that it contributed to an understanding of Mahayana Buddhist mysticism by examining large groups of monks and nuns narrating their own experience within their own culture. This endeavor resonated well with calls for a return to oral

traditions, to the particular, and to localized system of practices and experience (e.g., Toulmin 1990). Indeed, Chinese monastic Buddhist traditions are kept alive more by acts than by words, a fact that disqualifies any sole reliance on experimental or survey methods to understand those traditions. The qualitative design of this project was oriented towards analyzing individuals' experience within their temporal and local particularity. This approach had the advantage of eliciting and preserving the ingenuity of what participants were willing to share with the investigators.

By semi-structuring interview questions based on the M Scale, we are able to empirically tackle the problems associated with individual items, facets composing the common core, quantitatively identified factors, and the relationship between intro and extro unities. For the examination of items, comments on and criticisms of the interview questions described how and to what extent a particular M Scale item was maladapted to the Chinese Buddhist context. Some expressions may not be readily accepted by a non-theistic religion, for instance, a feeling of the divine. To reconstruct the facets, key Buddhist doctrines were introduced to modify themes that emerged from interviews structured under one facet. Responses to items under the same M Scale facet were expected to generate coherent patterns in the current Buddhist context as in other traditions, but the patterns were presumed to be more than likely organized by interpretations rooted in Mahayana Buddhist beliefs. As the three factors have been demonstrated robust across cultures, the further expectation was that a moderate adjustment in factor structures would best interpret Buddhist experience. More specifically, the two unities would form one factor. This solution implied a horizontal transcendence in Buddhism which would obliterate a vertical dimension of divine influence and instead implant divinity into the nature of every individual being. Horizontal transcendence also has been found to be associated with those who identify as

spiritual but not religious and may even self-identify as atheist, agnostic, or secular (Hood, Hill, and Spilka 2009:282-284). The implication was that one can apprehend the same unity both from hearing one's inner call and from seeing through another's true nature.

In summary, this study tested four hypotheses. First, questions derived from the M Scale items, with minor rephrasing, will be meaningful to and generate responses relevant to mysticism from Buddhist participants. Second, interview questions under one facet will elicit responses that define a facet comparable to the original facet in the M Scale. This outcome will emerge from analyses of themes in combination with Buddhist doctrine modifiers. Third, Stace's three-factor structure will adequately describe the qualitative analyses of reconstructed facets. Test of this hypothesis relied upon a CFA using binary data coded out of interviews. Fourth, intro unity will emerge as a facet distinct from ego loss in the thematic coding process. Moreover, a model combining intro unity and extro unity in one factor will display better fit than a model placing intro unity with ego loss.

METHOD

In qualitative studies, it is desirable to make explicit which theoretical paradigm the researchers identify with (Guba and Lincoln 1994). We took root in a postpositivist paradigm, but applied grounded theory in analyzing data. Postpositivism represented the belief that knowledge of the truth can be advanced through scientific researches, and this study explored that potential by deductively examining the common core thesis and the validity of the M Scale. At the same time, procedures remained open to empirical data that were irrelevant or opposite to our theoretical stance. Employing grounded theory, generation of theory from data, we went bottom-up looking for themes that emerged from the empirical data and also compared these themes to extant theory. Combining these two approaches made it possible both to examine the

common core thesis at a structural level and to revise the theoretical model through exploration of empirical variations.

Participants and Instruments

From March 2010 to April 2011, our research team scheduled four visits to more than 30 Buddhist temples and nunneries located in the *Jiuhua* mountains at Anhui Province of China, Each visit took three days to a week. Jiuhua, literally "Nine Glorious," is one of the four sacred mountains of Chinese Buddhism and has kept a tradition for Pure Land Buddhism since the eighth century. We approached Buddhist monks and nuns at the temples where they lived and practiced their traditions. One hundred and thirty-nine consented to participate, including 46 nuns and 93 monks. Seventy practiced Chan while 69 practiced Pure Land exclusively. Age ranged from 25 to 80, $Mdn = 50$, $SD = 13.5$. Years of practicing Buddhism ranged from 1 to 60, $Mdn = 19$, $SD = 10.6$.

We derived interview questions from the Chinese translation of the M Scale (Chen et al., in press). Each of the nine mystical facets (abbreviations in parenthesis), ego loss (ego), timelessness-spacelessness (ts), intro unity (inuni), extro unity (exuni), inner subjectivity (sub), ineffability (inef), positive affect (pa), sacredness (sc), and noetic quality (noe), was tested by one or more questions adapted from scale items. An appendix provided a full list of the questions to be used. Feedback obtained during the first visit resulted in the deletion or replacement of a few original questions because of their poor adaptability in the Buddhist context (see beginning of results section for more detail).

Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were conducted and digitally recorded by researchers who had received extensive training in phenomenological interview skills. The interview was semi-

structured so that theory-driven questions probing the common core thesis were asked in combination with open questions that situated the response within the interviewee's own biographical background. A typical interview format began, "In chanting sutras or meditating in dhyana, have you experienced X." If the response was affirmative, the respondent was asked, "Can you tell me more about what this experience looked like?" If negative, the question was, "Do you have an experience which you don't name but is similar to X?" By adopting a phenomenological protocol, the interviewers were bracketed from the research assumptions, so they could suspend their expectations in order to approach the reported experience as it was and to stay close to the descriptive data (Belzen and Hood 2006).

Thematic Coding

Thematic coding involved a balance of deductive coding derived from the facets implied in the M Scale and inductive coding of themes emerging from phenomenological presentation of participants' narratives (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006). The combination of two processes made it possible to identify how themes generated from the raw data uncovered meanings in relation to the presumed theory.

Interview recordings were transcribed, and significant statements were marked out for subsequent analyses. A panel of three independent investigators then grouped similar statements into thematic expressions; labeled each theme with a short description; identified themes with Buddhist doctrines as modifiers that best expressed their meanings; and clustered related themes into facets. Final steps reconstructed facets from themes to extant facets suggested in the M Scale, adjusted facet names, and referred to doctrinal modifiers for confirmation of the facet legitimacy embedded in Mahayana Buddhism. It is important to note that in this process themes were identified regardless of frequency of appearance. Coding reliability was achieved by employing

three independent coders, two with little background knowledge of the current thesis, a procedure which minimized expectancy effects. Discrepancies at the thematic expression level were rare. Disagreements in the reconstructed facets were resolved with cross-examination of theme-facets, M Scale facets, and Buddhist doctrines.

Structure laying technique was applied to cross-examine the credibility of transcriptions and validity of thematic categorization. Interviews were transcribed and coded into themes before we revisited five key interviewees several months after being interviewed. We asked these interviewees to read index cards on which their essential statements and our derived categories were listed. We encouraged them to reformulate the transcriptions with what they thought were more appropriate statements, and/or modify our structures if the themes derived seemed inconsistent with their subjective experience.

Quantitative Coding

Transcriptions were coded independently by three investigators. One was exposed extensively to the interview process while the other two were not, which helped counterbalance situational bias generated by exposure to the participants. All responses were coded as they were without inference of what a participant might have meant. A response was given "1" if the participant explicitly identified yes or clearly presented an experience relevant to the question. A response was given "0" if the response was a categorical no. A response was coded as a missing value if it was not answered or circumscribed in a way that was irrelevant to the phenomenon being asked. Discrepancies were minor, less than 5%, and most were easy to solve. A few answers which carried obscure meanings and generated cross-rater disagreement were set as missing values. The final coding was proofread by the senior author to minimize careless mistakes. Nine facet scores were obtained for ego, ts, inuni, exuni, sub, inef, pa, sc, and noe.

CFA was used to test three variations of the M Scale models. The Stace (1960) model placed ego and ts under introvertive factor, exuni and sub under extrovertive factor, and inef, pa, sc, and noe under interpretive factor. Based on the Stace model, the Hood model (Hood et al., 2001) relocated inef to the introvertive factor, while the Tibetan Buddhism model (Chen et al. 2011) relocated pa to the introvertive factor, and noe to the extrovertive factor. The default estimator for CFA with binary indicators is robust weighted least squares in M*plus* 6 (Muthén and Muthén 1998-2010). Correlations and cross-tabulations were created using SPSS 18.

RESULTS

Most interview questions adapted from M Scale items turned out to be meaningful to the Buddhist participants. Interviews nevertheless revealed that a few needed to be rephrased or clarified. To better assess ego loss, a question expressed in Buddhist language, "state of losing yourself or non-self," supplemented other relevant M Scale items, "everything disappeared from your mind" and "conscious of only a void or achieved a state of emptiness." Participants readily recognized the experience of a void as a state of non-self during the interview.

Participants challenged two intro unity questions, "something greater absorbed me" and "my own self merged into something greater," for the reason that "there is no 'something.' Having something means one is attached to a delusional image." We therefore changed "something" to the more concrete phrase "the world," and the questions became "merging with the world as one."

One inner subjectivity question, "nothing is ever really dead," appeared to conflict with the impermanence doctrine which teaches that no material life is constant but must cease and transmigrate into new form. We changed this item to the statement that "nothing is really dead spiritually."

One positive affect question, "I felt that all was perfection at the time," alludes to nirvana, a state of ultimate enlightenment. It was viewed as pride for a Buddhist practitioner to make the claim so achieving it, so we deleted this item. The question "experienced profound joy" aroused mixed responses, with several arguing that one should abide by the middle way, neither joy nor suffering. We nevertheless retained this item because at least some respondents found that they could identify with the blissful experience.

For sacredness, "an experience I knew to be sacred" was challenged by many in that "Buddha is enlightened man, not sacred." However, it was not unusual to hear participants reporting supernatural powers of Buddha or Bodhisattvas that aided their practice. We thus rephrased the question to "experienced a holy power that supported me."

Qualitative Analysis

More than thirty themes emerged and fell neatly into nine mystic facets, eight illustrated in the M Scale and the intro unity facet rationalized above. Furthermore, most themes found direct reference in Buddhist doctrines. Table 1 summarizes all the derived thematic expressions with a Buddhist doctrine modifier, which in turn were categorized into a facet. In the following text, we will analyze connections of the themes within each facet. We included interview quotations to illustrate each theme.

Ego Loss

This facet incorporates two kernel aspects associated with the concept of emptiness stated in Buddhist language as *anatta* and *sunyata*. Anatta refers to the notion of non-self that all things perceived by the senses are not really of "me." For this reason one should at least not cling to the body. Loss of physical senses was widely reported in both meditation and chanting sutras, "Breath became negligible; eyes, ears, noses, mouth all disappeared." Few experienced their

souls escape physical constraints which may be called out-of-body experience, "My body became weightless, flying from one mountain to another like a bird. I flew to a house and saw a hundred-year old Bodhisattva. I talked to him, who didn't speak but responded by nodding." Such experience was often immediately described as "too wonderful to be put into words."

Table 1. Thematic expressions clustered under nine facets with Buddhist doctrines as modifiers

Mystic Facets	Buddhist Doctrines	Thematic Expressions Coded from Interviews
Ego Loss	Anatta	Lose physical senses
		Out of body experience
	Sunyata	Mental function ceases
		Consciousness of a void
		The pure self emerges as a "knower"
	Atma-graha	Reject the legitimacy of the experience
	Apophasis	Reject the expression of the experience
Timeless-Spaceless	Sunyata	Lose touch with the world
		Know the empty nature of time and space
Intro Unity	Tathata	Unity in emptiness
		"Being of wonder," true self, or large self emerges
Extro Unity	Dharmadhatu	Unity of the world in diversity
		Everything is inherently connected
Inner Subjectivity	Tathagatagarbha	All things are spiritual and/or alive
		All living beings seem to be conscious
	Samsara	Cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth
		Physical body dies, but spirit is not dead
	Anitya	To die is natural
Ineffability	Non-reliance on words	Higher wisdom that cannot be put into words
		Language is transcended during the experience
		Experience is private or prohibitive to tell
Positive Affect	Madhyama-pratipad	Great liberation
		Profound joy and wonder
		Purity, tranquility, or peacefulness
		Emotions should be abandoned
Sacredness	Adhisthana	Empowerment by Buddha
		Feel presence, or see light of Buddha
	Apophasis	Negation of holiness
Noetic Quality	Intro Unity, Paramartha	Realization of the Self or Absolute within.
	Extro Unity, Paramartha	Absolute realized in all things

Sunyata, literally emptiness, denotes that nothing possesses a substantial nature. In this state, participants first went through a temporary cessation of mental function: "my mind was

immaculate, thinking of nothing" and "it's like a dreamless sleep." Then they realized that all became empty, "all of a sudden, nothing existed; no me, no world." Although all was rendered void, there still remained a Cartesian awareness perceiving this void. "The real emptiness is that you are not even aware of emptiness, but you 'know' everything." Such awareness is nonjudgmental and lucid: "look but not see, listen but not hear." Being conscious of void alludes to the immanence of a being: "only one feeling was left, existence. Consciousness was there, but I was conscious of nothing." Again, this being was not rationally known: "once I wondered where I am and what is the void, I immediately came back."

Responses to the experience of ego loss were not always affirmative; some rejected the legitimacy of such an experience. This reaction may reflect a doctrinal preference, since a few Pure Land Buddhists stated that "chanting sutra aims for opening wisdom" and "it is not encouraged to pursue for a particular state of mind." However, further inquiry revealed that our insistence on a particular experiential episode essentially conflicted with the nature of non-self. What participants actually rejected was *atma-graha*, the false attachment to me: "If you insist on losing yourself, then where has that 'you' gone?"

Some others negated our attempt to name or sketch what is emptiness. We labeled them as *apophasis*, all that can be said about a subject is wrong. Emptiness is "neither you nor me, neither empty nor being." As one is describing the experience, one has already distorted the experience with one's interpretation, "When you are saying emptiness, a being has been created. In fact even emptiness doesn't exist." So "real emptiness is without shape and ineffable."

Timelessness-Spacelessness

The non-spatiotemporal experience seemed to be a byproduct of ego loss, in which senses and consciousness were temporally forsaken and one lost connection with the material world. We

had reports of meditating in dhyana for hours to days without noticing the passage of time. "That time I meditated four days and nights before I woke up and realized that time had passed. I was on the edge of living and dying." Another reported when his spirit was wandering in the universe, "I was in a void. I was side by side with the moon and the sun. No day, no night, where is time? All is infinite, the space is in me." On the other hand, as one realized the empty nature of all, time and space also became unreal. "Time and space are characteristics of human body, but they are nonexistent in view of Buddha nature."

Intro Unity

Themes in the intro unity facet expressed a unifying experience of self with everything, and the unity emerged as a state of existence as opposed to emptiness. For some, the unity was immediately achieved when both the self and the world dissolved into a void, "The earth and I all became a void, and we got connected." To put it simply, "Everything became one, and this one was empty." Furthermore, "this unity must include me," although the concept of me had already been abandoned in the previous ego loss. "This is the essence of non-self, which means I am one with the universe. Self is a relative existence," interpreted by a monk.

This unifying experience suggested a being - the unity, which was variously named as being of wonder, true self, or the One: "The real One remains the same regardless of what you call it, God, Buddha, or Allah." Note that this being was not created from the emptiness, but is there as it is. "When the true emptiness was achieved, it was at the same time true being." If interpreted in a language of self, "Small self is within the boundary of 'me.' Big self is 'me' merging as One with the universe."

Sounding paradoxical, emptiness and existence are essentially non-dual. As one monk interpreted it, "emptiness is not real empty, and being is not real being as any phenomenal

existence. It is called the being of wonder, which is the ultimate reality." *Tathata*, translated as suchness, best describes this nature of reality. Well developed in *Nirvana Sutra*, suchness emphasized a real knowledge of the True Self on the condition of ceasing attachment to a delusional selfhood. A famous metaphor goes like this: "One first looks at a mountain as the mountain. After getting to know its empty nature, the mountain seems no longer that mountain. However, one is still deluded by the so-called emptiness. The ultimate state is to suspend all judgment, and look at the mountain as it is."

Extro Unity

Themes in this facet expressed a perception of the world and oneself unified into one which, in Mahayana Buddhist doctrine, is called *Dharmadhatu,* a realm of phenomena where all sentient beings, emptiness, and suchness are unified. This unitary vision might be a state of consciousness developed with loss of selfhood and achievement of intro unity: "After merging into the void, I found the true self. […] Then suddenly I saw you sitting by me. I felt that you are me. If you are sad, I want to cry. I felt everything is me, since everything was in the void. I couldn't find me anymore, so to love everything is to love myself." It also emerged as an intuitive grasp of the nature of the world: "Everything is a unity by nature. You don't have to experience it to tell that they are one." The unity also implied that everything is connected through the dharma: "Dharma is the universal law of the world. One comes out of the world, so one must merge into the world of dharma. Dharma includes the world as a whole, and it must include every individual family in the world."

However, unity did not suggest that all are identical; rather, it is unity in diversity. "Imagine a bulb over your head, another one, then numerous bulbs simultaneously glowing like stars. Now look at the light, tell me does it belong to each bulb or to all the bulbs that generate

the light? Of course, the bulbs or the stars are individuals, but the light is seamlessly everywhere." Some had gone further to reject our phrasing of an "undifferentiated whole," which may have implied the sameness of all phenomena. "The world cannot be said to be identical. Everything in the universe has its unique status. Each shares commonality with others but remains different."

Inner Subjectivity

Descriptions of extro unity suggested that each individual being is unique. This intrinsic uniqueness is well captured by the term *Tathagatagarbha*, Buddha nature, which teaches that each sentient being contains the intrinsic potency for becoming a Buddha. This nature can be perceived to be dwelling in each creature as a form of spirit or sentience. "Stars, trees, iron, even sand, are all aware, and I can feel them." "They are all alive, and have their own characteristics. I perceived that."

Subjectivity does not perish. Buddhist cosmology *samsara*, continuous movement, captures the core feature of the universe which is constant change. "Death is fake, and emptiness is fake too. Everything cycles. The true self never dies, but goes into a cycle." So a man is not really dead along with the cessation of his physical body: "The body dies but my 'I' remains. I have nothing to do with the cage. Body is like a car. You can change different cars, but the driver is always your soul." However, it is also incorrect to say nothing ever dies. *Anitya*, impermanence, states that everything dependently originates and dependently ceases. "There is life, there is death."

To sum it up, inner subjectivity appeared to be the substantial nature that makes every living beings unique and equal, "All sentient beings, pigs, horses, or cows are all spiritual. They are one with human beings." Given its cyclic feature, one has to be responsible for one's own

deeds, since "spirits transmigrate into different physical appearance. If you eat a cow you will become a cow in your next life."

Ineffability

A long tradition in Chan Buddhism emphasizes non-reliance upon words, "because people tend to be trapped by the inadequacy of what language can express." Many experiences are ineffable for they have surpassed what language can grasp, "What is spoken is not reality, at most a delusion of the reality." The only way is to practice and experience it oneself, "Real dhyana is shapeless. Don't ask me what it is like. If you think it is miraculous, it means you haven't experienced that. After you've been to that state, it all becomes natural."

It is also true that language is transcended during the introvertive experience of unity and ego loss. "It cannot be articulated in the dhyana. Out of dhyana, I could recollect some feelings that occurred in the state." Some others withdrew from sharing their experiences, since Buddhism put so much emphasis on personal exercise that it might be harmful to disclose one's private experience to others. "Some are heaven secrets that cannot be revealed to ordinary people, who may just discard it due to ignorance."

Positive Affect

With regard to affects, numerous themes emerged to express various degrees of bliss. Mystical experience for some seemed as intense as a great liberation, "I escaped from restrictions of any materialistic or natural law. All worries and sufferings associated with the body disappeared;" or as an unparalleled joy that is "ineffable, more enjoying than enjoy, last longer than forever." It could also move to another extreme as peace and purity, "My true self is immaculate, pure, without a bit of worries or emotional fluctuation, and I had no thoughts at all."

Given all these emotional reactions, we found a constant refrain about not indulging in any such positive state. Many admonished not to be attached with any of the affects, since "having joy is the same as having misery. Once I feel good, worry and uneasiness will ensue. You have to go by nature." What nature meant here was summarized as *Madhyama-pratipad*, the middle way, which is taken as a path of moderation between the extremes of sensual indulgence and self-mortification. The true positive affect should go by this principle, detached from either good or bad. "When you really get there, you will no longer feel joy."

Sacredness

The sacredness facet sought to tap into any religious quality in the interpretation of one's experience. Though "holiness" definitely does not fit into the non-theism of Buddhism, some experiences nevertheless were deemed to have religious connotations. *Adhisthana*, to emanate blessings and grace from Buddha or an enlightened guru, has often been experienced by Pure Land Buddhists, who invoke Amitabha and Bodhisattvas for protection and wisdom: "Invoke Bodhisattvas and great gurus constantly until I myself become an avatar of them. Then I felt my power multiplied since the Bodhisattvas came as avatars to be one with me." Chan practitioners also rely on such power to make breakthrough in deep meditative states, "I felt like electricity flowing through my body when meditating. The power is invisible and can only be felt. This is ineffable. Delusion dissipates, and emptiness emerges." It is also common for one to experience the presence of Buddha or other deities through sensory contact. "I saw Buddha coming to empower me. Sometimes I cannot see the body of Buddha, but can see light. When the light reflects in my heart, I know I am one with Buddha."

Despite the positive attitude of seeking a figurative deity, many others rejected this experience. "When you see Bodhisattva, that is hallucination. That is a reflection of your desire

from your heart." It was more common to reject the concept of holiness or awe, since Buddha nature seemed to be in all. "Buddha is nothing but enlightened man. Man is unenlightened Buddha. We are not of fundamental difference." We named this as apophasis because by negating the experience of a religious figure, these responses implicitly affirmed the religious quality of an experience that the respondents were prepared to reject (Hood, Hill, and Spilka 2009:280-287).

Noetic Quality

Paramartha means the absolute truth, which forms the basis of a fundamental renewal of knowledge of the world following a mystical experience. In the Stace (1960) definition, noetic quality denotes the "transsubjectivity" of one's experience (p. 203), while James (1985) focused on its revelation of reality. While both capture a truth, the Stace definition seemed relevant to intro unity, and James' definition worked for extro unity.

The intro unity of emptiness and suchness seemed paradoxical but definitely true for all those who have experienced it, "Non-emptiness non-being is real. It is not comprehensible rationally, but you can experience it." Transsubjectivity, on one hand, transcends subjective interpretations, which invalidates description: "It is delusion when you speak it out. It is real when you keep it from words;" On the other hand, the objectivity of the experience is maintained by that each individual can unanimously achieve the same experiential state through independent practices. So many urged that "Don't try to understand it, but practice. You will know it when you are there."

Through extro unity, one achieves a direct intuitive grasp of the nature of the world. When this revelation comes, "Suddenly you understand it. It is enlightenment. It is not what you think of. It came from nothing." It is a renewal of knowledge, "After I got to know the real face of the world, it was all different when I looked back on its appearance." It is the nature of all, "To

know the reality is like you know the secret of a magic. You can read out the synergy of sun and rain in the making of a piece of paper."

Finally, the noetic quality can be a synthesis of both unities: "When I merged as One, I was able to live harmoniously with the universe and environment. We are of the same body, the great compassion emerges from there. Wisdom precedes all morality and compassion. Before one knows of the reality, all his compassion is rootless."

Quantitative Analysis

As shown in Table 2, no mystic facet was related to how long one practiced Buddhism. Neither did age correlate with experience except for a negative linkage with positive affect. Some pairs of facets did seem to be more strongly correlated than with others, such as ego loss with ts ($\rho = .606$), exuni with sub ($\rho = .507$), and inuni with exuni ($\rho = .502$). These larger magnitudes suggested that pairs of facets might be more likely to form one factor in the CFA conducted below.

Table 2. Correlations among mystic facets, age and practice year using Spearman's ρ

	yr	ego	ts	inuni	exuni	sub	inef	pa	sc	noe
age	.429**	-.011	.036	-.152	-.174	-.176	.093	-.241*	-.104	-.197
yr	.	.081	.125	.007	-.032	-.032	.028	-.118	-.124	.128
ego		.	.606**	.273**	.351**	.292**	.565**	.227*	.249*	.308**
ts			.	.377**	.250*	.185	.356**	.069	.174	.330**
inuni				.	.502**	.250*	.389**	.123	.211	.411**
exuni					.	.507**	.384**	.308**	.215*	.526**
sub						.	.439**	.382**	.233*	.345**
inef							.	.179	.387**	.504**
pa								.	.255*	.204
sc									.	.263*

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. yr = practice year

Table 3 lists the frequencies of mystical reports of Pure Land and Chan Buddhists and of monks and nuns, respectively. Chi-square tests analyzed these data. The uniform nonsignificant chi-squares indicated that reports of mystical experience did not differ across the two sexes,

hence the results for nuns and monks are collapsed. However, Chan practitioners tended to report

more experience of ego loss, timelessness-spacelessness, and noetic quality than did Pure Land

Buddhists.

Table 3. Comparing frequencies of mystical experience by sect and sex

Mysticism facets	Pure Land $N = 69$	Chan $N = 70$	χ^2 by sect	Nuns $N = 46$	Monks $N = 93$	χ^2 by sex
Ego Loss						
No	29	9		12	26	
Yes	36	59	16.035**	20	65	.000
Timeless-Spaceless						
No	24	12		7	29	
Yes	24	42	8.586**	20	46	1.411
Intro Unity						
No	23	23		12	34	
Yes	13	30	3.605	14	29	.450
Extro Unity						
No	21	14		11	24	
Yes	35	49	3.333	30	54	.201
Inner Subjectivity						
No	8	3		2	9	
Yes	49	62	3.285	42	69	1.677
Ineffability						
No	8	7		3	12	
Yes	24	46	1.909	18	52	.217
Positive Affect						
No	9	4		3	10	
Yes	44	53	2.616	31	66	.423
Sacredness						
No	24	23		16	31	
Yes	26	33	.514	18	41	.150
Noetic Quality						
No	15	6		5	16	
Yes	29	37	4.816*	20	46	.328

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. Missing frequencies were not presented.

Table 4 displays CFA results in three sections that differed in the placement of the inuni

facet. M1 did not include inuni; M2 placed inuni along with ego loss under the introvertive factor;

M3 relocated inuni to the extrovertive factor. Under each section, we also tested the three models

as described in the method section. All three models came up with an introvertive (intro),

extrovertive (extro), and interpretive factor (intpt), while the Hood and Tibetan Buddhism models relocated one or two facets while retaining the main structure in Stace model. Model selection was based on chi-square tests while conventional fit indices were also examined. A nonsignificant *p* value indicates the model serves as a good representation of the observed covariance and thus can be retained. Since models were not nested within each other, a better fit model was identified by a smaller chi-square when dfs were equal, or by a smaller RMSEA and larger *p* or CFI when dfs were unequal.

Table 4. CFA comparing Stace, Hood, and Tibetan Buddhism M Scale models

Model	χ^2/df	*p*	RMSEA	90% C. I.	CFI	WRMR
M1: without inuni						
Stace	14.898/17	.603	.000	.000 - .067	1.000	.493
Hood	22.552/17	.164	.048	.000 - .097	.985	.643
Tibetan Buddhism	22.799/17	.156	.050	.000 - .097	.984	.637
M2: inuni in intro						
Stace	37.999/24	.035	.065	.018 - .102	.970	.790
Hood	39.121/24	.027	.067	.023 - .104	.967	.807
Tibetan Buddhism	40.712/24	.018	.071	.029 - .107	.964	.819
M3: inuni in extro						
Stace	20.724/24	.655	.000	.000 - .057	1.000	.539
Hood	27.467/24	.283	.032	.000 - .079	.993	.649
Tibetan Buddhism	25.664/24	.370	.022	.000 - .074	.996	.617

All three models including inuni as a facet of introvertive factor failed to demonstrate satisfactory model fit as was evident in the observation of significant chi-square values. We therefore excluded M2 from subsequent model comparisons. Within M1 and M3, the Stace model invariably fit better than the other two in that it had smaller chi-squares. In M1, the Hood model fit slightly better than the Tibetan Buddhism model, $\Delta\chi^2 = -.153$; while in M3, the Hood model fit worse than the Tibetan Buddhism model, $\Delta\chi^2 = 1.803$. The best fit of all proved to be the M3 Stace model, which included the inuni facet under extrovertive factor based on the Stace

three-factor structure. Evidence of a better fit than the M1 Stace model appeared in a smaller RMSEA CI by -.01 and a larger *p* by .52. A similar comparison of the M3 vs. M1 Hood models, and the M3 vs. M1 Tibetan Buddhism models revealed a generally better fit of the model with inuni than the model without inuni, though both fit the data well according to statistical indicators. Figure 1 visualizes the best fit M3 Stace model. All loadings were completely standardized and statistically significant.
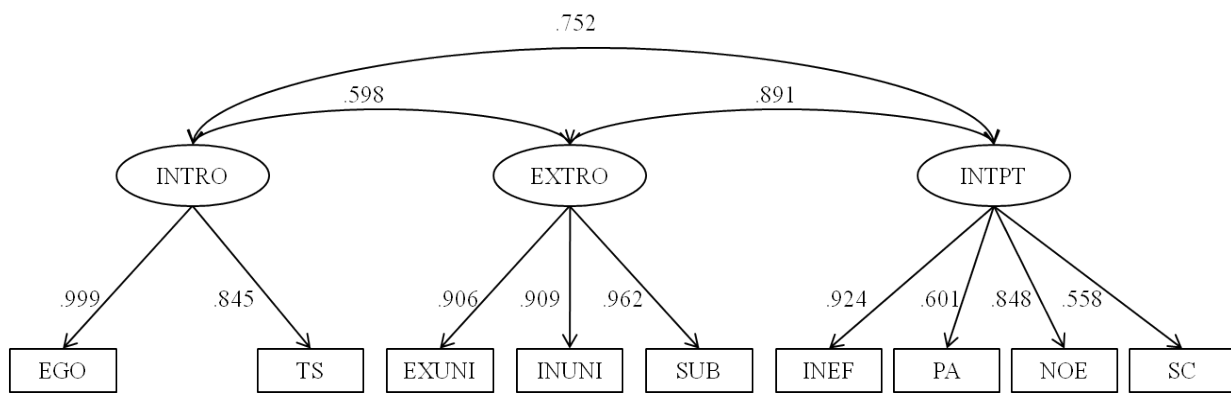

Figure 1. Replicating the M3 Stace model including intro unity under the extrovertive factor

DISCUSSION

These results generally confirmed all four hypotheses. Above all, M Scale items worked as legitimate interview questions in probing mystical experience among Mahayana Buddhists. To offer this conclusion is not to claim that the 32 items which comprise the M Scale encompassed all Buddhist experience or articulated the experience in appropriate Buddhist language. However, the M Scale, even if limited in content coverage and wording style, was able to elicit from subjects a spectrum of responses that was relevant to the experiences of these Buddhist monks and nuns. M Scale items presumably made connections with their experiences via Wittgensteinian family resemblance. In the current study, for example, a question as simple as

"consciousness of only a void" generated several distinct but interrelated themes ranging from loss of physical senses to the realization of the empty nature of all.

The semi-structured M Scale items also proved to be more efficient as an interview tool than fully opened questions like "could you tell me what experience you have had in Buddhist exercises." We tried to use such questions in an initial study, but received unproductive feedbacks such as "it's hard to say," or more defensive reactions like "what are you trying to pry from me." Aware that structuring the interview might result in data loss, we also asked each participant to add as supplemental observations what they deemed to be relevant but were not asked by the interviewer. Most indicated that their experience had been well covered by the interview questions.

These data documented the content validity of the M Scale, but we are not claiming that it has a linguistic universality. Instead, we support adapting some of the items to indigenous expressions. Employing "God" language displays empirical advantages with American Protestants (Hood and Williamson 2000). In this study we also borrowed Buddhist terminologies, such as a non-self experience, to rephrase some of the interview questions. However, two risks might be associated with over-indigenizing a measurement. On one hand, there are so many theological intricacies within a faith tradition that it is impossible to cover them all. Furthermore, an expression that is especially religiously sensitive might increase acquiescence bias. Christian believers, for example, will unlikely deny the presence of God even if only a few actually "experienced" Him. Therefore, M Scale language may offer a good balance between objective description and subjective interpretation. For instance, many Buddhists rejected using the M Scale term "profound joy" as an equivalent to what they called

"dharma joy," but both forms of "joy" denoted a blissful experience and could be phenomenologically identified.

Validation of Facet and Factor Structure

In line with the second and third hypothesis of this project, experiential themes that emerged within the Buddhist context could be categorized into facets and factors that were comparable to structures found in other traditions. These findings challenged another criticism leveled by social constructivists that using structured questions from the M Scale would elicit only experiences that fall into the proposed structure (Belzen 2010). The thematic expressions derived from the interviews were not only rich and variegated, but invariably took root in Buddhist doctrines (e.g., sunyata), not in any of the proposed facets (e.g., ego loss). In other words, the M Scale did not impose a structure on individual experience, but allowed individuals to structure their experience in a way that was appropriate to its social and cultural context. The social constructionist claim that there is not a mystical experience in general does not rule out the possibility of a set of common characteristics that can exist to identify all individual experiences (Hood 2010).

Support for this type of conclusion seemed available in a more detailed analysis of how themes of a Buddhist nature clustered into mystic facets could form the generic three factors of the M Scale. Ego Loss, in the current Buddhist sample, was characterized by the dual emptiness of inner self (anatta) and the outside world (sunyata), and an inability to articulate this emptiness. Such a state where all consciousness dissolves into a void made Timelessness-Spacelessness a natural consequence as no ego was left to be aware of these physical dimensions. Empirically, these two facets therefore combined together to define the introvertive factor.

Extro Unity was defined as unity in diversity which entails an Inner Subjectivity subsisting in all creatures. Put it in another way, each individual being is both distinguished from and unified with each other through their unique and equal Buddha nature. These two facets neatly formed an extrovertive factor in Buddhism, an outcome that can perhaps be intuitively grasped through outward perceptions of the world. In the Buddhist sample, such a perception of was represented as a communion with all sentient beings by talking to animals spiritually, or by feeling the vitality in trees as they are growing.

Hood (2006) argued that ineffability could be closely linked with the ego loss of the introvertive factor. This seemed plausible because the emptiness of ego loss is devoid of an empirical content that can be communicated; so, any attempt at description becomes a negation of the empty nature. This paradoxical apophasis of emptiness is best described in the *Heart Sutra* as "emptiness is form; form is emptiness." However, in the present project, ineffability was placed in the interpretive rather than the introvertive factor. Ineffability, measured as "something unable to express in words," apparently carried broader meanings than those suggested by ego loss. Ineffability can denote that a particular experience is prohibitive or too private to be revealed, or simply that an experience is too complicated to be put into words. Positive Affect, as a great experiential liberation, often emerged as our Buddhist respondents realized the true nature of the world in the state of emptiness. It could also come as peacefulness from concentration on reading sutras or as a burden lifted by believing in Buddha. Noetic Quality can be derived as an interpretative by-product both from introvertive transsubjectivity and from extrovertive renewal of knowledge, which has been supported by its two themes of paramarthas. In the non-theistic tradition, Sacredness appeared more as an auxiliary experience of those who held a strong enough religious view of Buddhism. These four facets, therefore, formed a separate interpretive

factor that qualified the introvertive and extrovertive mysticism of Stace's original conceptualization.

The three factors derived from above analysis of themes and facets received quantitative support form CFA tests that Stace' three-factor model fit generally well and better than both Hood and Tibetan Buddhism models. However, this is not to conflict with empirical and conceptual variations of the factor structure; both Hood et al. (2001) and Tibetan Buddhism model (Chen et al. 2011) did yield good fit to the data. It is rather in favor of the modified social constructive common core thesis proposed by the above authors that experiential facets may be organized in a locally and temporally preferable way conferring to a particular ideological context. Therefore, we expect modest variations from Stace's supposition, but his model (Stace 1960) may remain adaptive to most cultures.

Two Unities and the One

From the interviews, we noticed that realizing an intro unity was actually a separate, if not higher, state from achieving ego loss. Many attained the state of emptiness, but only a few proceeded to recognize the unity or the dialectical existential side of emptiness. CFA tests that placed intro unity and ego loss under one factor resulted in a poorly fit model. This result indicated that people might not tend to realize the experience of intro unity and ego loss at the same time. However, intro unity does include an aspect of experience closely following ego loss as a theme of "unity in emptiness." It may be better to understand such intro unity as a *process* of unifying, that is, as all dissolves into a void this "all" is simultaneously unified in the void.

A further analysis of the qualitative data implied that this process is not stable until an independent state of unity is achieved. Such *being* of unity, represented in the second theme of intro unity as "true self or large self," revealed the substantial, as opposed to empty, nature of the

reality. This substantial side of the world apparently could be equally grasped by a deeper understanding of the unifying nature of phenomenal multiplicity. Similarly, the extro unity in Buddhism denoted a realm that incorporates both emptiness and being to be well achieved from intro unity. At this point the two unities converge. CFA results supported this conceptual analysis by a strong model fit placing the two unity facets under the one extrovertive factor.

The separation of intro unity as an extrovertive facet from ego loss as an aspect of the introvertive experience aided our understanding of an incomplete ego loss, which dissolved the selfhood without merging it to a larger, solid unity. Such an incomplete ego loss has been argued as a narcissistic and psychopathological elevation of oneself to become God in contrast to a complete ego loss in which one is absorbed into God (Hood and Byrom 2010). The distinction of two stages of ego loss may also help explain empirical findings that introvertive experience was often associated with psychoticism and somatization in both American and Iranian samples (Hood et al. 2001).

However, more work needs to be done before one can make more than just a tentative conclusion about the two unites. It has been well discussed that in theistic traditions intro unity almost immediately occurs with a loss of ego, and the introvertive unitary consciousness marks a "higher category" than the extrovertive one (Stace 1960:133). Here we must leave the question open concerning why Buddhist unity might be different from unity in Christianity, should such a difference actually appear in future empirical research. As Copleston (1982) humbly pointed out, "Even when there is a connection between a philosophy of the One and mysticism, the relationship need not be uniform, exclusively of one kind" (1982:30). For us, variations of local systems are always appreciated within the context of analyzing the common core.

Difference by Sect

Quantitative analysis also revealed that sex, age, and years of practice did not make a difference on appearance of a certain mystical experience. This result was well supported by many participants' remarks that "Buddhist practice is largely dependent upon one's root of wisdom, which comes more by nature than by nurture." However, we did notice that Chan Buddhists reported more introvertive experience featured by loss of ego and spatiotemporal sense than those who practiced Pure Land. Though not hypothesized, such a difference is reasonable since Chan itself is a system of techniques that facilitate entrance into a state of emptiness from which the true nature and wisdom are found. Chan uses a general technique called introspection, as a monk reported, "Fix eyes on your spleen, your spleen on your heart…Finally all you senses and spirits are focused as one, then I can transcend myself and the body constraint frees." On the other hand, Pure Land practitioners may attain the same introvertive state, but with more difficulty by "chanting the sutra with your entire mind, and all your heart. Be focused on every single word, pronouncing them absolutely correct. All of a sudden everything became empty, nothing left in mind. I was filled with dharma joy from the wisdom of sutras," said a nun.

Limitations and Conclusion

As the current project employed face-to-face interviews and analysis of narratives, the results largely depended upon participant's verbal ability and eloquence in articulating their experience. Introverts may not like to talk as much as extroverts. Also we have no way to know the difference in contents between those who talked an hour on an experience and those who chose to give a short "yes" without any elaboration. Many experiences may also be essentially ineffable which makes it difficult to probe empirically. On top of all these issues, the degree of

literacy may also influence how one can effectively frame their experience in a comprehensible way.

Another issue arising from using verbal expressions is more implicit. We cannot know about what one's "non-experience" is like. This may sound like a convoluted and esoteric concern, but it is quite reasonable to worry that many of those saying "no" to a question actually had an answer that might be indirect, but quite relevant to the experience being investigated. This problem could be detrimental to phenomenological research, since we have no way to elicit the full range of an individual's experience with a limited number of questions. These methodological inadequacies are not readily solved, but some researchers suggested that at least in studying religious experience, reliance upon narratives may be relatively effective (Wildman and McNamara 2010).

By combining qualitative and quantitative methods, we tried to present a phenomenological structure that would meaningfully describe mystical experience in a certain group of Chinese Pure Land and Chan Buddhists. However, we could not avoid touching on some metaphysical concerns, such as the issue of unities. But as always, we tried to maintain a commitment to aloofness in judging what this unity is or whether it exists. This attitude might be better expressed in the metaphor common in Buddhism given by a monk when we constantly begged him to describe what emptiness is: "You are asking me what the moon is like which I am not able to tell you. But I can point the moon to you. My language is the finger pointing to the moon. Don't fix on my finger, but towards the direction my finger is pointing, you can see the moon yourself."

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APPENDIX A

MAJOR QUESTIONS USED IN THE INTERVIEW

In chanting sutra (if the respondent practices Pure Land), or meditating in dhyana (if the respondent practices Chan),

Have you experienced a feeling of loosing yourself, or non-self? (Ego Loss Not-Item)

Everything disappeared from your mind? (Ego Loss Item4)

Conscious of only a void, or achieved a state of emptiness? (Ego Loss Item 4)

Experienced no sense of time or space? (Timelessness-Spacelessness Item 11)

You merged with the world as One? (Intro Unity Item 6& Item 24)

All things seemed to be unified into a single whole? (Extro Unity Item 30)

Everything is connected? (Extro Unity Not-Item)

All things are alive, or have spirit? (Inner Subjectivity Item 8)

Everything is conscious? (Inner Subjectivity Item 29)

Nothing is ever really dead spiritually? (Inner Subjectivity Item 31)

In this process, have you experienced profound joy? (Positive Affect Item 5)

Experienced great peacefulness? (Positive Affect Item 7)

Experienced holiness (Sacredness Item 9)

A feeling of awe? (Sacredness Item 22)

Experienced a divine power that supported you? (Sacredness Not-Item)

You have known the reality of the world? (Noetic Quality Item 26)

The experience cannot be adequately expressed in words? (Ineffability Item 32)

VITA

Zhuo CHEN (in Chinese 陳卓), known as Job, was born and raised in the city of Qingdao, China. He is the only child to his family. He was called to believe in Christianity at the age of 16. Job came to the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga in 2009 for graduate study in psychology after having obtained a B. A. degree in philosophy from Wuhan University. His research interest is in psychology of religion, personality and culture, certainty and self-deception. He has interest in Buddhist cultures. Currently, Job is looking for a doctorate program to continue his research agenda and get trained to teach in college as his life-long career.