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# The Ideological Foundations of Taiwanese Modernity: Mou Zongsan's New Moral Philosophy

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**Abstract**

In order to understand the social, political and intellectual process of Chinese modernization, it is necessary to evaluate their ideological foundations and to thus become able to place it in the suitable political context. Chinese philosophy of the first half of the 20th century was still determined by the conditions of the decline of the pre-modern era. The present article aims to explore and to introduce the rise and growth of Modern Confucianism, as well as some crucial philosophical elaborations in the field of the new moral philosophy, developed by the most well-known exponent of its so-called 2nd generation, Mou Zongsan.

**Keywords:** modern Confucianism, Mou Zongsan, new moral philosophy

**Izvleček**

Če hočemo razumeti družbeni, politični in idejni proces kitajske modernizacije, moramo med drugim tudi dodobra spoznati njihove ideološke temelje in jih postaviti v ustrezni politični kontekst. V prvi polovici 20. stoletja je bila kitajska filozofija še vedno v veliki meri opredeljena s pogoji zatona predmodernega obdobja. Pričujoči članek raziskuje in predstavlja vzpon in padec rasti sodobnega konfucijanstva ter nekatere osrednje filozofske nadgradnje na področju nove moralne filozofije, ki jih je izdelal najbolj znani predstavnik tako imenovane druge generacije tega gibanja, Mou Zongsan.

**Ključne besede:** sodobno konfucijanstvo, Mou Zongsan, nova moralna filozofija

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## 1 Chinese Thought between Tradition and Modernity: the Birth of new Era and new Philosophy

The principal aim of this article is the exploration and elucidation of the rise and growth of Modern Confucianism, as well as the introduction of some crucial philosophical elaborations in the field of the new moral philosophy by the most well-known exponent of its so-called 2nd generation, Mou Zongsan.

In order to understand the social, political and intellectual context of his work, we shall begin with a brief survey of the political and social conditions and the main philosophical currents that defined the development of modern Chinese thought during the beginning of the modernization era.

Chinese philosophy of the first half of the 20th Century was still determined by the conditions of the decline of the Chinese New Age. Almost all the theorists of this period were forced to deal with the ideas and contradictions imposed by the incomparably more advanced (technologically speaking) Western countries. While the radical "pro-Western intellectuals" (全盤西化派) engaged in the iconoclastic repudiation of all traditional culture and sought to resolve China's crisis through the complete Westernization of Chinese society, the more "conservative intellectuals" (復古派) argued for a modernization of ancient, especially Confucian thought, which they believed provided the only possible spiritual basis for re-establishing an independent and sovereign Chinese state. However, ultimately the majority of the intelligentsia preferred to follow a middle course, focusing their efforts on a possible synthesis of both traditions. Based on their command of Western philosophy, they tried to reinterpret their own tradition through the most appropriate methods for integrating Western systems of thought into the framework of traditional Chinese discourses. During this period, which lasted approximately until the outbreak of WWII, Chinese philosophy was distinguished by two main currents:

1) The first was characterised by a faith in progress and in the redemptive potential of reason and the natural sciences; in social terms it manifested itself in a wide range of liberal ideologies, while philosophically it tended towards the neo-realistic and pragmatic discourses of the more recent American philosophical schools.

2) The second current was instead distinguished by a comprehensive attempt to revitalize traditional (particularly Confucian and Neo-Confucian) thought by

means of new influences borrowed or derived from Western systems. In this search for synthesis, the spirit of German idealism was especially important, while certain approaches of the Viennese circle also attracted a number of exponents of this current. During the first twenty-five years of the People's Republic this current, at least officially, was reduced to silence; however, their main concerns continued to be developed by Taiwanese theorists and, to a certain extent, also by those from Hong Kong. Over the last two decades, with the explosive economic liberalisation of the People's Republic of China, this current had been gradually rehabilitated and its tendency to revitalize traditional thought, generally known as "Modern Confucianism" (*xin ruxue* 新儒學)[1], still forms one of the mainstreams of contemporary Chinese theory.

## 2 The Confucian Revival

After representing the central state doctrine and ideological foundation of traditional Chinese society for two thousand years, beginning in the 19th century it became clear that Confucianism, at least in its orthodox traditional form, could no longer serve as an ideal basis for the further development of modern society. In the early 20th century, this criticism of Confucianism was best exemplified in the May 4th Movement, which had both a nationalist aspect in its opposition to Japanese and Western imperialism, as well as a function of internal reform in its sweeping criticism of the ossification and deleterious effects of traditional state doctrine. However, this period also planted the seeds of so-called Modern Confucianism[2], which arose as a critical attempt to revitalise and modernize this fundamental ancient tradition of thought.

> 現代新儒家思潮是五四新文化運動後期出現的文化現象, 在中國現代思想史上占有重要位置, 至今在海外華人世界以及港台地區仍有很大的影響.

[1] There are several different denotations of this current; I shall only name the two most common ones: *xiandai xin ruxue* 現代新儒學 (literal: Modern new Confucianism) and *dangdai xin ruxue* 當代新儒學 (literal: Contemporary new Confucianism).

[2] The term *Xin ruxue* 新儒學 has sometimes been translated literally as "The New Confucianism" or as "Contemporary Confucianism" by some Western authors. To avoid confusing it with the traditional "School of Principles" (*li xue* 理學), generally denoted as Neo-Confucianism or New Confucianism in Western sources (including the present work), we shall omit the literal translation and apply the most frequently used term, Modern Confucianism.

> The contemporary current of Modern Confucianism can be seen as a phenomenon which emerged during the last period of the May 4th Movement, which was striving for a cultural modernization. This current occupies an important position in the history of recent Chinese thought and still exercises considerable influence among the Chinese living abroad, as well as among those, living in Hong Kong and Taiwan. (Song 1991, 10)

This primarily philosophical re-creation of the Confucian system of thought thus bore its first fruits in Hong Kong and Taiwan, to which the defeated Nationalist government fled after 1949. While the Chinese philosophers who lived and worked in Taiwan or Hong Kong after this date dealt much less with the sinification of Marxism and its semantic connotations, they were also forced to confront the issues of modernization and capitalism much earlier than their colleagues in mainland China. We are thus dealing with a current that had a continuous development from the early 19th century onwards, and was interrupted only by the upheavals of WWII and later by the Chinese Civil War.

Most theorists focused their efforts on formulating the most appropriate, philosophically rooted criticisms of the autocratic ideologies and systems that prevailed in Taiwan during the first decades of the government in exile. In this regard, they were driven by the need to solve certain urgent problems of a practical nature in the spheres of politics, society, economy and culture. Thanks to the West's support of Hong Kong, due to its semi-colonial status, and Taiwan, because it was seen (especially by the Americans) as a democratic alternative to Chinese communism, both areas began to undergo an explosive process of Westernization as early as the 1950s. This rapid integration into the world of Modern capitalism was (in the ideological sense) accompanied by traditional Confucian ethics based upon a hierarchical system of obedience to authority, which had already proven itself in Japan to be quite compatible with the demands and the often intolerable social conditions of early capitalism.

In contrast to the People's Republic, where until the 1980s[3] Confucianism was regarded as the ideology of a superseded feudalism (Song 1991, 11), a number of intellectuals living in these societies (both of which were determined by post-colonial discourses) began to oppose the increasingly dominant Westernization of

[3] During the last two decades, in the PRC there has been an increasingly animated debate and a series of widening investigations into Modern Confucian philosophical approaches. An organisation named "The Research into the thought currents of contemporary Modern Confucianism" (*xiandai xin rujia sichao yanjiu* 現代新儒家思潮研究), which was founded in 1986 by two professors of philosophy, Fang Keli 方克立 and Li Jinquan 李錦全, is playing a particularly important role in this process.

their countries, and started looking mainly to the framework of Confucian thought for alternatives to these developments.

## 3 The Declaration and the Second Generation of Modern Confucians

Modern Confucians viewed modernization mainly as a rationalization of the world. As a discourse in which the "signposts" for a rehabilitation of traditionalism were most clearly expressed, Modern Confucianism can be considered as originating with the famous *Declaration for a Renewed Valuation of Chinese Culture as a World Heritage* (*Wei Zhongguo wenhua jingzao shijie renshi xuanyan* 為中國文化敬告 世界人士宣言), which was published by a group of philosophers from Taiwan and Hong Kong, on January 1, 1958. The declaration included an anti-communist panegyric of Western-style democracy and affirmed the importance of patriotism while preserving traditional values. In defining the goals and contents of Modern Confucianism, it represented the basic manifesto of this current. The key under signers of the declaration were Carsun Chang (Zhang Junmai 張君勱, 1887–1969), Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909–1995), Tang Junyi 唐君毅 (1909–1978) and Xu Fuguan 徐复觀 (1903–1982), who are still widely regarded as the founders of "Contemporary Modern Confucianism" (*dangdai xin ruxue* 當代新儒學), understood as a system which provided a more systematic reinterpretation of traditional Chinese philosophy based on a profounder and more integral command of the foundations of Western, especially Platonic, Kantian and Hegelian, thought (Bunnin 2002, 11).

In the declaration, the four authors expressed the ultimate goal of the new Confucian movement:

> The human existence as formed by Establishing Man as the Ultimate is that of a moral being which, at the same time, attains a higher spiritual enlightenment… Hence, this human existence is simultaneously moral and religious. Such a person is, in politics, the genuine citizen of democracy; in epistemology, one who stands over and above the physical world. Not being bound by his/her concepts, his/her intellectual knowledge does not contradict his/her spiritual apprehension (Declaration, cf, Bresciani 2001, 54)

Actually, the authors and signers of the Declaration are most commonly viewed as the second generation of Modern Confucianists. The movement has been carried

by philosophers, who were functioning as the factual pioneers of the movement and are thus belonging to the so-called 1st generation of Modern Confucianism. They have been followed by the 2nd and even the 3rd generation, which consists of living and active philosophers, who mostly live in the USA (see the table bellow):

| **FIRST GENERATION** | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Liang Shuming<br>梁漱溟<br>(1893–1988) | Xiong Shili<br>熊十力<br>(1885–1968) | Zhang Junmai<br>張君脈<br>(1886–1969) | Feng Youlan<br>馮友蘭<br>(1859–1990) | He Lin<br>賀麟<br>(1902–1992) |
| **SECOND GENERATION** | | | | |
| Fang Dongmei<br>方東美<br>(1899–1977) | Tang Junyi<br>唐君毅<br>(1909–1978) | Xu Fuguan<br>徐復觀<br>(1903–1982) | Mou Zongsan<br>牟宗三<br>(1909–1995) | |
| **THIRD GENERATION** | | | | |
| Cheng Zhongying<br>成中英<br>(1935) | Liu Shuxian<br>劉述先<br>(1934) | Du Weiming<br>杜維明<br>(1940) | Yu Yingshi<br>于英時<br>(1930) | |

Table 1: Modern Confucianists. (Source: Bresciani 2001, 33–36)

Mou Zongsan, who will be introduced a bit more in detail in the following sections, is widely considered as the most important exponent of the second generation. With the exception of Fang Dongmei, all the other scholars were disciples of Xiong Shili, who is considered to be one of the most crucial pioneers of the Modern Confucian thought. Their investigations have been based mostly on the supposition that Confucian thought could be completely amalgamated with the system of capitalistic development. Many of its proponents also believed that a renewed form of this traditional Chinese system of social, political and moral thought could serve as a basis for endowing modern life with ethical meaning and as a spiritual salve for the alienation which appeared as an undesirable side-effect of capitalist competition and profit-seeking. (Wang 1996, 63) Their efforts to

revitalize and reconstruct traditional Confucian thought can therefore be seen as an attempt to counter the dominant ideological trends and preserve Chinese cultural identity, while also contributing to the development of philosophical and theoretical dialogue between China and the West.

## 4 The Ideal Foundations of the New World

In order to achieve these aims, these philosophers mostly focused upon ontological problems which had been introduced by Western systems of thought, in the belief that questions related to the ultimate reality of the cosmos, the substance of being and the Absolute determined the meaning of life and were crucial to the establishment of a new system of values, compatible with current social conditions and the preservation of an integral cultural and personal identity. They thus looked to ontology as the philosophical discipline that would provide clear solutions to the problems they faced, beginning with that of Western modernization, and with the conviction that only through a genuine and clear comprehension of the cosmic substance would a modern man be able to find his spiritual home again. The crucial task, therefore, was to find the "proper" orientation, i.e. new, clearly marked signposts which pointed the way towards modern culture, while also providing basic criteria for solving practical problems in the sphere of politics and the economy. Without such a framework of orientations, society would slip into a generalized spiritual malaise, in which the actions of individuals would be determined by the purely mechanistic laws of technocratic utility. In this case, the comprehension of Western thought for the purposes of finding spiritual guidelines for the modernization in course would necessarily remain fragmentary, incoherent and superficial, and would therefore not only be incapable of enriching the Chinese spiritual world, but would actually accelerate the processes of spiritual disorder and alienation.

The focus upon ontological questions can thus be seen as a specific reaction of traditional Chinese philosophy to modernization.

Most of the modern Chinese philosophers from the P.R. China were following the presumption, according to which Indian and Western philosophy both speak of the *noumenon* as something more real (than the *phenomenon*) and think that the *phenomenon* is delusion while the *noumenon* is reality. This conception of reality has never emerged in Confucianism or any other classical Chinese philosophical

discourse. Chinese philosophers recognized the distinction between the root and things. It rests not with the distinction between reality and delusion, but with the distinction between root and branches, between headstream and offshoots. Ordinary things are all real, and it is not the case that only the root is real. Hence, traditional Chinese philosophers did not hold any theory that treats the *noumenon* as the only reality (Cheng 2002, 240).

According to Modern Confucian interpretations, however, classical Confucianism saw "Heaven" or "Nature" (*tian* 天) as the ultimate noumenon, which was transcendental and represented the elementary entity, creating and changing everything that exists. The Modern Confucian Heaven was also immanent; it presented human beings with "nature" (*xing* 性), essentially determined by the elementary Confucian virtue of "humanity" (*ren* 仁). However, in their interpretations of traditional systems, the Modern Confucians went a step further: in their discourses, human nature became that potential which not only formed the moral or spiritual Self, but simultaneously also transcended the individual's empirical and physiological characteristics. By acting in accordance with humanity, man could experience the unification with "Heaven/Nature" (*tian ren heyi* 天人合一), and thus comprehend the genuine meaning and value of his existence.

It has been the Confucian orthodoxy that moral ideas, cosmological insights, and ontological claims cannot be separated. It is an atypical Confucian belief that how a person should be is inherently related to how the world really is, and that only a person living according to what the world really is can be a good person (Yu 2002, 144)

In contrast to the prevailing modern Western philosophy, they maintained that original reality can be comprehended. Most of them followed the presumption that we cannot regard truth as something outside of our mind, waiting for us to explore, but that we must study ontology through understanding the human nature. Through such an introspective view, human beings could realize that original reality is in each of us, and that they cannot seek to know it in external things through reasoning. Thus, they should turn inward and let original reality present itself. In this way, the Modern Confucianists synthesized several main doctrines of Confucianism and integrated them into a coherent system in order to show that the cultivation of virtue has an ontological and cosmological foundation.

On a more general level, at the turn of the new millennium, the modern Confucian movement underwent a rapid and radical transformation, a change in method, in metaphysical outlook, and in the plans for its practical realization in the spheres of society and interhuman relationships (Bresciani 2001, 31).

## 5 Mou Zongsan: His Life and His Work

In the present section, we shall provide a brief introduction to the theoretical system of Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909–1995), the most famous Taiwanese philosopher of the latter half of the 20th century and generally regarded as the chief exponent and spiritual father of this new current. He was one of the first and best known advocates for the revitalization of traditional Chinese (especially Confucian) thought in modern times. He was born in Shandong 山東 province and studied at Peking University (*Beijing daxue* 北京大學) where he was, as already mentioned, one of the three "most gifted students" (Tang 2002, 327) of the founder of Modern Confucianism, Xiong Shili 熊十力.

> Mou reached the highest level of intellectual achievement. He was widely read and had a deep understanding of both Chinese and Western philosophy. His extensive learning provided a unique vantage point from which to compare Chinese and Western thought. His new Confucianism not only established a complete system of Chinese philosophy, but also provided the basis for the critical assessment of Western philosophy. (Tang 2002, 327–328)

Xiong's other two "most gifted students", Tang Junyi 唐君毅 (1909–1978) and Xu Fuguan 徐复觀 (1903–1982) are also considered to be founders of the Second generation of Modern Confucianism.

While being still a student, Mou published his first important work, entitled *Researches into the School of Mystery and Chinese Moral Philosophy in the Light of the Book of Changes* (*Cong ZhouYi fangmianyamjiu Zhongguo zhi xuanxue yu dao zhexue* 從周易方面研究中國之玄學與道哲學). This study represents an attempt to analyze traditional Chinese thought of the period of the Six Dynasties (六朝, 222–589) from the perspective of Western categorical premises and concepts. As a consequence of his intensifying focus on traditional Chinese philosophy, Mou would change his methodological approaches later on, while in his more mature investigations he tried to proceed from specific traditional

Chinese methodologies, which he epitomized in his work: S*pecial Features of Chinese Philosophy* (*Zhongguo zhexuede tezhi* 中國哲學的特質).

Although their professor, Xiong Shili, decided to remain in Peking after the establishment of the PRC in 1949, all three of his students escaped to Hong Kong and Taiwan where they lived under the patronage of the exiled *guomin dang* government. In the first phase of his academic work, Mou dealt mainly with logic and the theory of knowledge, and published the results of his inquiries in *The Models of Logic* (*Luoji dianfan* 邏輯典範) and *A Critique of Comprehensive Mind* (*Renshi xinde pipan* 認識心的批判). In these works, one can clearly sense the impact of Whitehead's and Wittgenstein's philosophy, though of Western philosophers it was Immanuel Kant who most influenced Mou Zongsan's intellectual development. In spite of his admiration of Kant, Mou developed his own thought through the criticism of Kantian claims. His philosophy of moral metaphysics focused on human beings as moral subjects who, unlike Kantian selves, took part in infinite mind with a world-creating capacity for intellectual intuition. (Bunnin 2002, 13)

During the 1950's, he focused increasingly upon classical Chinese philosophy, studying not only Confucianism, but also Daoist and especially Buddhist philosophy, with particular attention to their epistemological approaches. He elaborated these studies of traditional Chinese thought during his tenure at the Chinese University in Hong Kong (*Xianggang Zhongwen daxue* 香港中文大學), where he taught until the mid-70s. The books *Mind and Nature* (*Xinti yu xingti* 心體與性體), *Talent and Rationality of Mystery* (*Caixing yu xuanli* 才性與玄理) and *Buddha's Nature and Prayna* (*Fuoxing yu banruo* 佛性與般若) are among his most important works from this period. In the mid-1970s he published his most important epistemological work, in which he examined the quality and functions of human perceptive potential according to his understanding of the Chinese epistemological tradition. This work, entitled *Mental Intuition and Chinese Philosophy* (*Zhide zhijue yu Zhongguo zhexue* 智的直覺與中國哲學), together with his work *On Summum Bonum* (*Yuanshan lun* 圓善論), which appeared ten years later and summarized his moral metaphysics, contains the basic framework of Mou's own philosophical system. At the end of the 1970s he also resumed his reinterpretation and revision of Kant's philosophy under the title *Phenomena and*

*things as such (Phenomena and noumenon)* (*Xianxiang yu wu zishen* 現象與物自身).

From his retirement in 1974 until his death twenty-one years later, Mou Zongsan remained an extraordinarily active philosopher and a very productive writer, researcher and teacher.

> 60 歲以後...是牟宗三智慧圓融集大成階段. 這一 時期, 他尤其關注中西哲學, 尤其是儒家哲學與康德哲學的融匯, 從而在對康德哲學的消化吸收中, 重建儒家的道德形而上學.
>
> The period of Mou Zongsan's intellectual maturity began at the age of 60, and resulted in important theoretical syntheses. During this period, he devoted most of his attention to questions of Chinese and Western philosophy, being especially interested in a fusion of Confucian and Kantian thought. Thus, in the process of accepting and modifying Kant's philosophy, he managed to reconstruct Confucian moral metaphysics. (Wang 1996, 57)

Today, Mou Zongsan is still highly regarded by both Chinese and Western scholars, and as one of the founders and main representatives of Modern Confucianism is considered to be one of the most important Chinese philosophers of the 20th century.

## 6 Mou's Crucial Sources

Over the course of his intellectual and academic development, Mou focused increasingly upon the ancient Chinese tradition. Based on his solid command of Western discourses and an intercultural understanding of Kantian philosophy, he reinterpreted and updated a number of central concepts of Daoist, Confucian and Buddhist philosophy, of which he considered the latter to be one of the highest achievements in the history of thought. He saw Buddhism as a "very contentful and complicated" doctrine. He held that Buddhist philosophy was "the most illuminating and has opened up the newest states of reason and involved the most levels".

Mou believed that Daoism was also an important current of ancient Chinese thought, although he mainly saw it as a kind of bridge towards a better understanding of Buddhist philosophy. In traditional Chinese thought, however, his preference went to Confucianism, particularly the Neo-Confucian system of

the Song (宋 960–1279) and Ming (明 1386–1644) dynasties. Of the three main doctrines, Mou considered Confucianism to be the mainstream of Chinese philosophy because the structure of its thought originated in China and because it was primarily concerned with moral consciousness. (Tang 2002, 330)

The emphasis on ethical problems, which was typical of Modern Confucianism, was also present throughout all of Mou Zongsan's work. Mou pointed out, however, that moral philosophy was not the only priority of ancient Chinese thought. In his view, all three central philosophical discourses of the Chinese classics belong to vertical systems (Mou 1983, 103), and each dealt with metaphysics in its own way. Here, too, he saw Confucianism as the current which had contributed most to the formation of related, specific Chinese discourses. He explicitly rejected the claim that Confucianism is concerned only with morality and has nothing to do with existence. According to Mou, Confucian morality implies a moral metaphysics, that is, a metaphysics based on morality. (Mou 1983, 330–331)

> Contrary to current views of Confucianism as authoritarian, Mou argued convincingly that moral autonomy was implicit in Confucian philosophy. But even Kant was inadequate in this regard. Limited by his Christian background, Kant could treat free will only as a postulate of practical reason, the other two postulates being the immortality of the soul and the existence of God. He could therefore only establish a metaphysics of morals, at best a moral theology, but never a moral metaphysics. Mou felt that Chinese tradition went further than Kant in this respect. (Liu 2003, 484)

## 7 Elaborations and Develpoments of Traditional Confucianism

In his view, the Confucian comprehension of being arose mainly from the concept of Heaven/Nature (天):

> 通過哪個概念可以透射到存在呢? 就是 "天" 這個概念.
>
> Which concept can lead us to break through existence? It is the concept of "Nature". (Mou 1970, 75)

According to Mou, the basic feature of the Confucian worldview was its focus on positive aspects of human life, and the fact that it proceeded from the concept of the subject. He doubtless saw this positive approach in the repeated Confucian

negation of mystical and rationally incomprehensible aspects of life, which also explained why all of Confucian metaphysics was imbued with the problem of morality. In this discourse, ethics and ethical implications transcended the world of strictly mechanistically structured pragmatics. The search for possible ways to endow existence with ethical meaning, which in Western philosophies was most often seen as belonging to the domain of religious studies, remained very much a problem for the rationality of metaphysics in the context of Confucian thought. From a Western perspective, this somehow shifted the boundary between the philosophical and religious ethics that were specifically expressed in Confucian and Neo-Confucian discourses of subjectivity and social nature, something which is also reflected in Mou Zongsan's philosophy:

> To many Western philosophers, Mou's system seems to be a religious faith rather than a philosophy [...]. Although Mou specifically denied that he was a theologian, he was conscious of the religious aspects of Confucianism, and argued for their acceptance. Nevertheless, Mou believed that Confucian thought qualified as a philosophical doctrine. (Tang 2002, 340)

The second specific feature of Confucianism, which was likewise based upon subjectivity, was also closely connected to morality and ethics.

> 儒家主要的就是主體, 客體是通過主體而收攝進來的, 主體透射到客體而且攝客歸主. 所以儒家即使是講形而上學, 它也是基於道德.

> The Confucians took their departure mainly from the subject. The object was established by assimilation through the subject. The transmission of the subject assimilates the object and returns into the subject. Even when Confucians talked about metaphysics, they therefore referred to a metaphysics based upon morality. (Mou 1971, 79)

The central Confucian virtue of "humanity" (仁) thus also belonged to the sphere of subjectivity.

> 儒家經典中代表全體的觀念比如孔子講仁, 仁就是代表主體. . . 仁也是心.

> A concept which represents entirety within Confucianism is the concept of humanity, as explained by Confucius. Humanity represents the subject. *It also represents the mind*. (Mou 1971, 79)

But this does not refer to the subjectivity of a subject in the common sense, but concerns his concept of objective subjectivity (Mou 1971, 79) in the sense of a

social (political) being. This objective subjectivity, which he thus identified with the traditional concept *ren*, Mou denoted by the term "the real subjectivity" (*zhenshide zhutixing* 真實的主體性), (Mou 1971, 80):

> 這個真實的主體性不是平常我們說的主觀的主體，這是客觀的主體，人人都是如此，聖人也和我一樣.
>
> This real subjectivity is not to be equated with the subjective subjectivity we generally talk about. This is an objective subjectivity of all people, of sages as well as of ourselves (common people).[4] (Mou 1971, 80)

## 8 Daoist and Buddhist Approaches

His investigations into Daoist philosophy were especially important for his redefinition of the concept of "absence" (無), which in both China and the West has been generally and acritically equated with the Western idea of nothingness and non-existence:

> 無沒有存有論的意味，但當'無'之智慧徹底發展出來時，也可以函有一個存有論，那就不是西方為標準的存有論，而是屬於實踐的(practical)，叫實踐的存有論.
>
> Absence is not of an ontological nature; but once the wisdom concerning it is complete, it can also imply ontology. But this is not an ontology of the Western type; it is an ontology which has been defined by practise, and which can therefore be called "practical ontology". (Mou 1971, 93)

According to Mou, "nothingness" is not an ontological concept, but a practical concept which ultimately means letting things be. Mou concurred that letting things take their own course through a mental state of "emptiness and with no attachment" was great wisdom. Thus, Daoist metaphysics is based on a practical concept of "nothingness". In this sense, Daoism has a "practical ontology" or "practical metaphysics." (Tang 2002, 331) Analogously, the Daoist concept *you* (有) can in no way be equated with being or existence, since it expresses a mental orientation:

[4] This refers to the famous statement by Mencius: "凡同類者, 舉相似也, 何獨至於人而疑之, 聖人與我同類者" ("All things that belong to the same kind are similar. Why do we start doubting this when it comes to men? The saint and I are of the same kind"). (Mengzi 2011. XI, Gaozi shang, 151)

> "Being" is not taking something to put into empty "nothingness"; it is the directing of mental states. And with "nothingness" and "being", we can understand "dao". (Tang 2002, 331)

In his Buddhist studies, Mou mainly concentrated on the notion of "empty mind" (*kongxin* 空心). This is a cognitive construct of a transcendental mind without any possessiveness, attachments or obsessions. Mou found corresponding ideas in Daoist (the "way of mind" *dioxin* 道心) and Confucian ("original mind" *benxin* 本心) discourses. For him, these three notions represent different forms or different names for the "infinite (or limitless) mind" (*wuxiande zhixin* 無限的智心), (Mou 1971, 237) While this pure, original and boundless mind is an innate attribute, possessed by all people, he believed that most people were, unfortunately, unable to preserve it. Those who succeeded in doing so were becoming "sages" (*shengren* 聖人) or Buddhas. Reaching this stage was very desirable, for the enlightened not only possessed many mental privileges and advantages, such as wisdom, cheerfulness, mental (and often also physical) invulnerability or insensitivity to pain, but were also equipped with a perfect, or infallible apparatus for perception, the so-called "mentally direct perception" or "mental intuition" (*zhide zhijue* 智的直覺), which not only comprehended appearances, but also recognized and understood both things in themselves and substance. Mental intuition was, therefore, not only an instrument for understanding the world and our position in it, but also a divine quality that created both. Hence, according to Mou, the quintessence of Chinese philosophy is in its metaphysics. These metaphysics views human beings as moral subjects who have the capacity for intellectual intuition[5] that creates the world. (Mou 1971, 332)

The above mentioned problems, regarding the direct perception, are important not only in respect to epistemology, but also in the methodological sense.

> 重建中國哲學的努力始終關涉著哲學方法論的探討. 牟宗三的智的直覺理論無疑是這種努力的自覺表現.
>
> The endeavours for a reconstruction of Chinese philosophy have always been connected to the research in philosophic methodology. Mou Zongsan's theory

[5] Mou's term *zhide zhijue* 智的直覺 is generally translated in English with the phrase "intellectual intuition". This translation is inadequate, however, for with this term Mou wished to express a kind of "direct perception" (*zhijue* 直覺), which is not limited only to the cognitive (or intellectual) aspects of comprehension, but also includes emotions, feelings, sensations, experiences, inclinations, interests, memories and, above all, the potential for moral and ethical valuation.

> of mental intuition is doubtless representing a wilful expression of such endeavours. (Gong 2002, 42)

## 9 Mou and Kant: the Crossroads to New Understandings

Like most other Taiwanese and Hong Kong philosophers, Mou Zongsan also tried to find a framework for the revitalisation of traditional Chinese theories in Western methodologies and by applying Western categorical structures. In this regard, he followed Kantian theoretical approaches, which he found to be culturally closer to his own tradition than any other European discourse. Mou saw Kant's philosophy as the only philosophy that can engage in dialogue with Chinese philosophy. (Tang 2002, 332)

While Mou accepted Kant's ontological division of the world (in the *Critique of the Pure Reason*) into the spheres of appearances (phenomena) and of substance (noumenon), he differed from the German philosopher regarding human perceptive potential. Kant argued that human beings could only comprehend appearances because the senses were too limited to also comprehend things as such; these were identical with substance and comprehensible only through pure reason and thus solely by God.

Based on the assumption that morality was the basic quality of human beings, Mou accepted Kant's concept of the categorical imperative, but replaced the category of free will, which had served Kant as the basis for acting in accordance with this imperative, with the category of infinite mind. For him, free will as the source of the categorical imperative must be only a cause, and not an effect. It can limit other principles, but cannot be limited by them. (Tang 2002, 333)

Infinite mind, which can be found under various names[6] in most traditional Chinese philosophical discourses, according to Mou is the transcendental foundation of moral behaviour and is itself absolutely and infinitely universal. Thus, for human beings to be moral beings, in the Kantian sense, means they

[6] Among these we can mention the Buddhist terms "empty mind" (*kong xin* 空心) or "Buddha's mind" (*fo xin* 佛心), the Daoist "Way of mind" (*dao xin* 道心), as well as the Confucian notion "original mind" (*ben xin* 本心) and the Neo-Confucian concept of "innate knowledge" (*liang zhi* 良知), etc.

cannot issue unlimited imperatives, and the categorical imperative as the basis of morality is impossible. (Tang 2002, 333)

Mou went a step further by presupposing that human infinite mind possessed divine qualities, or, in still more radical terms, human infinite mind had to be necessarily equal to the divine mind, given that the simultaneous existence of two different, infinite and absolute substances was not possible. Kant had ascribed the ability to recognize things as such (noumenon) to God and to the divine mind, while human comprehension was limited only to the recognition of appearances (phenomena). Mou denoted this general human comprehension with the term "direct sensual perception" or "sensual intuition" (*ganchu zhijue* 感觸直覺). However, because unlike Kant he acknowledged no boundary between divine and human mind, he concluded that human mind also had to imply a potential of direct mental perception or "mental intuition" (*zhide zhijue* 智的直覺)[7].

> 牟宗三認為, 人作為理性存在者不僅具有智的直覺, 而且形上問題就是以智的直覺為基礎而建立的; 否定智的直覺, '不但全部中國哲學不可能, 即康德本人所講的全部道德哲學亦全成空話.
>
> Mou Zongsan argued, that men as rational beings do possess mental intuition. But that is not all: besides, mental intuition, according to him, was also a basis of any metaphysical questions. If we would neglect mental intuition, than the entire Chinese philosophy would not be possible at all and the same also held true for the entire moral philosophy, as explained by Kant—in that case it would also be regarded only as idle talk. (Gong 2002, 42)

## 10 Direct Mental Perception or Mental Intuition

Although mental intuition is not a kind of sensual perception, it is also not only a cognitive comprehension. Thus, mental intuition is not a discursive one (Mou 1971, 191) and can therefore not be based upon concepts. Its function, however, is not only a perceptive, but also creative one.

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[7] Originally, Mou actually applied the term *zhijue* 直覺, which is generally translated with the somewhat misleading expression "intuition", as a translation of Kant's notion Anschauung (Gong 2002, 43). But in Mou's philosophy, this expression only refers to epistemology in a narrow sense (i.e. as a "theory of perception"). To express this idea in Chinese, it would be more correct to use the word *zhiguan* 直觀 (lit.: "direct observation"), since the term *zhijue* 直覺 (lit.: "direct perception") mainly refers to comprehension in a broader sense, or to an epistemology which also implies ethics, art, religion etc. (Gong 2002, 43)

> 智的直覺自身就能把他的對象給我們, 直覺活動自身就能實現存在, 直覺之即實現之, 此是智的直覺之創造性.
>
> Mental intuition as such can transmit objects to us. Its activities as such can realize existence, for intuitive perception of objects is at the same time their realisation; that is the creativity of mental intuition. (Mou 1971, 191)

Mental intuition could not, therefore, be completely equated with rational comprehension; despite similarities, this form of direct perception differed in various respects from theoretical rationality, and also from Kant's concept of practical reason. While Mou's "mentality" (or "intellect") (*zhi* 智) is "moral reason" (*daode lixing* 道德理性), it differs from Kant's principle of moral reason, which was determined by pure form. According to Kant, this formalized principle was both the driving force and the duty of moral subjects. This principle thus manifests itself as an external force which is not identical with the Self, but functions as a kind of moral pressure. According to Mou, however, the greater this pressure, the less the possibility of genuine moral action:

> 牟宗三對康德的批評恰恰是圍繞著自律道德而展開的. 他認為自律道德現實基礎與現實動力是主體內在質料因素如愛好, 興趣, 情感等. 這些質料因素可以將超越的形式法則 "應該作" 內在化, 從而與主體的具體存在結合起來. 這種結合使道 德法則充實起來, 也消除了它與主體對立的性質, 異己的力量 成為 "自己的" 內在需要.
>
> Mou Zongsan's criticism of Kant was focused precisely upon autonomous morality. Mou believed that the real foundations and motivations of autonomous morality were qualities inherent to the subject, such as inclinations, interests, feeling etc. These qualities had the ability to integrate the transcendental formal principle, which manifested itself in duties, i.e. in the need to do something. Therefore, he could unify them with the concrete existence of the subject. This unification caused the fulfilment of the moral principle and removed the mutual contradiction between this principle and the subject. This power, which was originally separate and different from the Self, thus became ones own, innate need. (Gong 2002, 44)

The moral and values system also provided Mou with the means for defining the existence of mental intuition. In this respect, he was following Kant's assumption that the world of appearances (phenomena) could be revealed to us through direct sensory perception (or intuition), while the world (i.e. the world of concrete actuality, in which we live) could be managed and controlled by us through "knowledge" (*zhixing* 知性) and "reason" (*lixing* 理性). But the world of values,

which Mou identified with the substance of being, and which also represented the foundation of knowledge, reason and the world of appearances as such, could not be revealed to us through sensory perception. But because concrete actuality could not exist without values, and human beings could not live and act within that reality without knowledge and reason, we must also possess a method for recognizing the essence of values and substance as such.

> 這個問題, 在牟宗三看來, 是以康德為代表的西方式理路所無法解決的. 因為, 他的出發點已經決定了問題的答案, 即他從純粹知識論的立場出發, 并以此為標準來看待價值問題, 結果價值問題弄成了無意義的問題. 要解決這個問題, 必須從 "道德進路" 出發, 承認智的直覺的存在以把握價值存在.

> According to Mou Zongsan, Western discourses, with Kant in the lead, could not solve this problem, because their basic paradigms already defined the answer they would ultimately arrive at. Because they originated in pure epistemology, and applied it as a criterion for treating values, the problem of values as such had lost all meaning or significance for them. If we truly want to solve this problem, we must follow moral assumptions; if we want to master the existence of values, we must first acknowledge the existence of mental intuition. (Gong 2002, 44)

## 11 Is Ultimate Happines Possible? An Experimantal Conclusion

In his work *On the summum bonum* (*Yuan shan lun* 圓善論), Mou also departs from Kant's moral philosophy, in which the entities of happiness and goodness (*summum bonum; yuan shan* 圓善) were not possible in our imperfect concrete world and could only be incorporated in the perfect world of God. In this context, Mou stressed the value and contribution of philosophical pragmatism, which determined traditional Chinese, especially Confucian thought. This thought focused upon the concrete world of human actualities, the here and now, in which there was no need to escape into other, supernatural worlds. And while Chinese philosophy was likewise incapable of solving Kant's problem of the summum bonum, Mou showed the equivocal way in which this problem was posed by Western, especially Kantian philosophy.

> The Chinese know only too well that in real life, happiness and the good rarely go together. But the Chinese do not need to look to an otherworldly kingdom of God. No matter what happens in our lives and no matter how

> imperfect the earthly world is, we can always find fulfillment in this world... Consequently, we can always find fulfillment in non-fulfillment; the summum bonum is realized here and now; and there is no need to look for a kingdom of God in the other world. (Liu 2003, 485)

Critics of Mou's theory reproached him with placing an exaggerated emphasis upon the moral aspects of ancient Chinese thought and philosophy in general.

> "智的直覺" 並沒有成為中國哲學的基石. 中國哲學中確實有一個重視直覺的傳統, ... 然而這些直覺即有宗教型 (禪宗), 又有知識型 (朱熹), 如何能以道德直覺概括它們呢?
>
> "Mental intuition" was by no means a cornerstone of Chinese philosophy. Although traditions emphasizing intuition did exist in Chinese philosophy, […] they were usually expressed either in religious (as for instance in Chan Buddhism) or in epistemological (for example in Zhu Xi) terms; hence, how could they be summarized by any concept of moral intuition? (Gong 2002, 46)

A similar concept of mental intuition would also logically and necessarily be connected to reasoning. According to this critical assumption, the existence of the concept of mental intuition had necessarily to be defined as a structural part of human cognition:

> 牟宗三將智的直覺與一切思的活動都對立起來, 最終只能走向神秘主義. 以此作為中國哲學的基石無疑 是其主觀的臆斷.
>
> Mou Zongsan sees mental intuition as being in contradiction to any kind of cognitive activity and thus ultimately wades into mysticism. The assumption that it represents a cornerstone of Chinese philosophy is undoubtedly his own subjective surmise. (Gong 2002, 46)

Because Mou used basic epistemological categories of Western thought in his attempt to resolve the philosophical problem of recognizing substance through the concept of mental intuition, which doubtlessly belongs to the traditional concepts of ancient Chinese philosophy, his philosophy could be defined as an attempt to synthesize Western (particularly Kantian) and traditional Chinese thought. However, the concept of mental intuition appears (although under different names) throughout the history of Chinese thought as part of tradition which necessarily manifested itself in the perspective of a holistic comprehension of reality. In this context, any division of reality into the spheres of appearances and substance was seen as an artificial one, because both spheres were equally subject to direct perception. Thus, despite his originality, Mou's philosophy could be defined as an

intercultural hybrid which is incapable of being coherently developed in either tradition. Despite this limitation, Mou Zongsan is still regarded as one of the most influential Chinese thinkers of the modern era by most Western sinologists and contemporary Chinese scholars alike.

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