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# Mou Zongsan and his Nineteen Lectures On Chinese Philosophy

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# Mou Zongsan and his *Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy*<sup>1</sup>

Stephen C. Angle

## 1. Introduction

Mou Zongsan (1909-95) was a philosophical giant whose legacy looms large over Chinese-speaking regions of the world, and who is in the process of being discovered by non-Sinophone thinkers. Faced with many challenges to earlier Chinese self-understandings, Mou and his contemporaries undertook sustained, critical engagement with philosophical thought from outside their native traditions. In the twenty-first century, philosophers in the Western world are slowly beginning to follow suit. Some are motivated by worries about the narrowness or unsustainability of present Western trends; others are prompted by worries about the rise of China; and some are simply attracted to the insights they see in Chinese traditions. No matter what the motivation, efforts to engage cross-culturally are facilitated by the wide-spread availability of excellent translations of classic texts, by a burgeoning and sophisticated secondary literature in English and other European languages, not to mention by the contemporary ease of travel and communication. It seems a safe bet that the world-wide practice of philosophy will continue to grow increasingly open to multiple traditions and thinkers, and that we will all benefit from such a critical openness.

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<sup>1</sup> This essay was originally written to serve as an introduction to Julie Lee Wei's translation of Mou Zongsan's *Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy*. Due to an on-going copyright dispute, the publication of that translation was on hold, but it is now published online on [www.nineteenlects.com](http://www.nineteenlects.com). I have decided to make this essay freely available for non-commercial uses. I wish to thank Sébastien Billioud, Jason Clower, Kai Marchal, and Julie Lee Wei for their astute comments on earlier versions of the essay. I have sole responsibility for any and all errors that remain. Please contact me at [sangle@wesleyan.edu](mailto:sangle@wesleyan.edu) with any comments or questions.

Serious scholarship on classical and medieval Chinese philosophy has been underway in non-Sinophone areas of the world for decades, but only very recently has this extended to more contemporary figures like Mou; in the last few years, the first three English-language monographs on Mou have been published.<sup>2</sup> The burgeoning interest in Mou's thought is very much an international phenomenon: the first translation of one of Mou's books was into French, and several studies of Mou's thought in French or German have been published.<sup>3</sup> These signs of global interest in Mou's thought are complemented by the tremendous attention that is being paid to Mou in Taiwanese, Hong Kong, and Chinese circles. The voluminous Sinophone scholarship includes every stance from hagiographic, to detailed explanation and defense, to constructively critical, to dismissive rejection. Suffice it to say that few Sinophone scholars whose work touches on Mou's sprawling oeuvre are comfortable simply ignoring him.

One of the goals of this Foreword is to show that there are many reasons for Anglophone Western philosophers to take Mou seriously, as well. To begin with, Mou's life-long engagement with Kant produced a lengthy catalog of interpretive claims and challenges that both scholars of Kant and his contemporary inheritors will find tremendously stimulating.<sup>4</sup> Much the same can be said for those interested in the post-Kantian European tradition, especially since the idea of "intellectual intuition" features prominently both for many 19<sup>th</sup> century European thinkers, and

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<sup>2</sup> Jason Clower, *The Unlikely Buddhologist: Tiantai Buddhism in Mou Zongsan's New Confucianism* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); N. Serina Chan, *The Thought of Mou Zongsan* (Leiden, Brill: 2011); and Sébastien Billioud, *Thinking Through Confucian Modernity: A Study of Mou Zongsan's Moral Metaphysics* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). Books that contain some substantial discussion of Mou include John Berthrong, *All Under Heaven: Transforming Paradigms in Confucian-Christian Dialogue* (SUNY Press: Albany, 1994); Umberto Bresciani, *Reinventing Confucianism: The New Confucian Movement* (Taipei: Ricci Institute for Chinese Studies, 2001); John Makeham, *New Confucianism: A Critical Examination* (New York: Palgrave, 2003); John Makeham, *Lost Soul: "Confucianism" in Contemporary Chinese Academic Discourse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008); Stephen C. Angle, *Sagehood: The Contemporary Significance of Neo-Confucian Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Stephen C. Angle, *Contemporary Confucian Political Philosophy: Toward Progressive Confucianism* (Oxford: Polity, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> See Billioud, *Confucian Modernity*, p. 2, n. 3 for numerous references.

<sup>4</sup> See the special journal issue devoted to relations between Kant and Confucianism (Martin Schönfeld, ed., *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 33:1 (2006)) as well as Stephen Palmquist, ed., *Cultivating Personhood: Kant and Asian Philosophy* (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010).

for Mou. Another area in which Mou's ideas should be very stimulating is political philosophy. He was concerned to show how a new, more democratic politics could emerge from Confucianism, but his arguments (especially concerning the need for subjective moral judgment to partially "negate" itself in order to make room for independent political norms) have important relevance outside the framework of Confucianism. Insofar as Confucianism today is emerging as a vibrant and dynamic field of philosophical thinking, of course, Western philosophers will find themselves taking its claims more and more seriously, and in so doing will encounter Mou quite directly. Finally, Mou offers us a model of how to do philosophical work across multiple traditions. Even if the model, or for that matter Mou's arguments and conclusions themselves, is found to have certain shortcomings, there can be no denying the remarkable achievement it represents.

Mou is not an easy thinker and his sprawling oeuvre is intimidating.<sup>5</sup> Thankfully, virtually all specialists will agree that his *Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy* is the best "way in" to Mou's philosophical and historical-interpretive thinking. The lectures were delivered in 1978 to graduate students of the Department of Philosophy at National Taiwan University. Though Mou did not originally intend them as a book, they were taped and his students convinced him that once compiled from recordings and from student notes, the lectures would have significant value.<sup>6</sup> The lectures range over most of the topics in Mou's mature thinking, and contain many references to detailed development of these themes in his monographs. The general organization is by philosophical school, with time spent both on explicating their historical development and on analyzing their key doctrines. Mou is quite pluralistic, drawing insights from many sources into his own system, but his system is ultimately a Confucian one. His

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<sup>5</sup> For discussion of the challenges to reading and interpreting Mou, see Clower *Unlikely Buddhologist*, ch. 1.

<sup>6</sup> For more details on the production of the text of the lectures, see the "Author's Foreword."

readings of other schools, no matter how sympathetic, are surely colored by his Confucian commitments. But of course no one approaches philosophy and its history without commitments. The *Nineteen Lectures* are an extraordinary journey through this history of Chinese philosophy with one of the twentieth century's great minds as our guide.

## 2. Setting the Stage

Before turning, in the next section, to Mou's biography and intellectual development, let us look briefly at the broader context that Mou and Confucianism faced in the twentieth century. Virtually every author who has examined the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in China speaks of a "crisis." Internal rebellions and defeats at the hands of Western imperialist nations had sapped the strength of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). Defeat in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-5) brought further humiliation. Both society and economy were changing but without clear political or intellectual leadership. In 1905, in a last-gasp effort at reform, the Qing rulers abolished the civil service examination system. Gone was the backbone of Confucianism's pervasive hold on Chinese intellectual life; no longer would preparation for the exams ensure that all ambitious, literate men studied the Confucian classics.

When the dynasty collapsed in 1911, things got still worse for Confucianism in two ways. First, Confucianism became tainted by the efforts of the general-turned-President Yuan Shikai (1859-1916) to use Confucian symbols to establish himself as the founding emperor of a new dynasty. Second, intellectuals of the New Culture Movement that began in 1915 were harshly critical of China's traditions, claiming that everything from the classical literary language to Confucianism itself had collectively held China back; if China were to enter the modern world

(and avoid dismemberment at the hands of imperialist powers) it would need to dramatically reform its culture. Only on the basis of such a cultural reform, proponents like Hu Shi (1891-1962) and Chen Duxiu (1879-1942) argued, could a new politics and a stronger nation emerge. A heady mix of democracy, science, nationalism, and socialism dominated intellectual discourse into the 1920s.

Several trends related to philosophy are worth noting. First, numerous Western thinkers were introduced to Chinese readers including, from very early in the century, Kant.<sup>7</sup> Both John Dewey and Bertrand Russell spent time in China in the late teens and twenties; the latter's presence helped to spur on the interest of young Chinese intellectuals in logic.<sup>8</sup> A second trend is the rediscovery of, or renewed interest in, non-canonical Chinese traditions. Another side of the rejection of Confucianism's dominant position, in other words, was a fascination with schools and teachings that the reigning orthodox interpretation of Confucianism had pushed to the margins. Most relevant to our story is the resurgence of Buddhism, especially of philosophically sophisticated versions like *Weishi* (*Yogācāra*), *Huayan*, and *Tiantai*.<sup>9</sup> Even many figures who would eventually play important roles in the continuation and development of Confucianism, such as Liang Shuming (1893-1988) and Xiong Shili (1885-1968), were fascinated by Buddhism and couched many of their writings at least partly in its terms. Finally, Confucian texts and ideas do not go away, but instead serve as inspiration for some of the new generation's intellectuals who are less starry-eyed about the promises of scientific development or social revolution—and

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<sup>7</sup> The earliest discussion of Kant appears in a 1903 article by Liang Qichao: "Jindai diyi dazhe Kangde zhi xueshuo [The Theories of the Greatest Philosopher of the Modern World, Kant]," *Yinbingshi quanji* [Complete Works from an Ice-Drinker's Studio] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1989), pp. 182-202.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed account of early Chinese approaches to Western logic, see Joachim Kurtz, *The Discovery of Chinese Logic* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> The role of *Yogācāra* thinking in modern China is thoroughly examined in John Makeham, ed., *Transforming Consciousness: Yogācāra Thought in Modern China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

who are worried about China losing all connection to its culture and past, which they view as essential to their continued identity as Chinese.

The 1920s, 30s, and 40s were chaotic times in much of China, though even during World War II scholars tried to keep universities open whenever and wherever they could. Some of those sympathetic to Confucianism tried to support the movement for a “third way” in politics, though the political sphere was increasingly polarized between the Nationalists (first under Sun Yatsen, then Chiang Kaishek) and the Communists. Chiang’s Confucian-themed “New Life” movement in the 1930s did little to endear anyone to Confucianism’s critical potential. Finally, with the victory of the Communists in 1949, many prominent scholars of Confucianism fled to Hong Kong or Taiwan, Mou Zongsan among them. It was in the universities of Hong Kong and Taiwan that men like Mou flourished and something that would eventually be called “New Confucianism” began to emerge. In 1958, Mou Zongsan, Tang Junyi, Zhang Junmai, and Xu Fuguan jointly issued “A Manifesto to the World's People's On Behalf of Chinese Culture” that articulated their broad cultural and political goals.<sup>10</sup> Still, for all the success of Mou and others as teachers, Confucian ideas remained quite marginal in Hong Kong and Taiwanese public life.

In the years since 1980, there has been an impressive flowering of Confucian academic activity both in Hong Kong and Taiwan and, increasingly, in China itself.<sup>11</sup> Significant energy is being expended on the explication of and, increasingly, critical engagement with leading “New Confucian” thinkers like Mou. In recent years there are also various signs of a renaissance of Confucianism in Chinese popular culture and political discourse. However, Mou and those who followed his lead in pursuing Confucianism as a professional, academic enterprise have arguably

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<sup>10</sup> Mou Zongsan, Zhang Junmai, Xu Fuguan, & Tang Junyi. (1989). *Wei zhongguo wenhua jinggao shijie renshi xuanyan* [A Manifesto to the World's People's On Behalf of Chinese Culture]. In Feng, Zusheng, ed., *Dangdai xinrujia* (Beijing: Sanlian Shudian, 1989), pp. 1-52. A partial English translation is available in Carsun Chang, *The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1962), vol. 2, pp. 455-83.

<sup>11</sup> Makeham, *Lost Soul*, is an exhaustive study of these developments up through 2005.

had little influence on their broader societies.<sup>12</sup> The disconnection between a leading thinker like Mou and developments of Confucianism in other spheres is something of a new phenomenon, if compared to the long history of Confucianism prior to the twentieth century. The issues raised are complicated and are beginning to be explored by scholars;<sup>13</sup> certainly one dimension is the political obstacles that have faced public intellectuals throughout much of the twentieth century both in China and in Taiwan, as well as the continuing difficulties in speaking out in China today. The lack of professional philosophers with a strong public voice in the United States, though, suggests that political constraints are not the whole story. So one challenge facing those who would develop the legacy of Mou Zongsan is whether his kind of scholarship can be combined with the public voice that was, arguably, important at earlier stages of the tradition. At the same time, Mou's participation in the adaptation of Western scholarly norms in China laid the groundwork not only for his own cross-cultural research, but also for the current emergence of an increasingly global practice of philosophy.

### 3. Biography and Intellectual Development

In 1909, Mou was born into a rural family of modest means in Shandong province.<sup>14</sup> His youth in the countryside, coupled with independent reading about self-cultivation and Neo-Confucian philosophy, combined to instill a deeply rooted connection to China's traditions. At

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<sup>12</sup> Billioud and Thoraval document some interesting exceptions to this generalization, in which individuals without academic training read Mou's works as devotional texts: Sébastien Billioud & Joël Thoraval, "Anshen liming or the Religious Dimension of Confucianism," *China Perspectives* 3 (2008), pp. 88-106.

<sup>13</sup> See especially Zheng Jiadong, *Mou Zongsan* (Taipei: Dongda tushugongsi, 2000), as well as the previous note.

<sup>14</sup> We have many sources on Mou's biography. The autobiography that Mou wrote at age 50 is of course a key document: Mou Zongsan, *Wushi zishu* [*Autobiography at Age Fifty*] (Taipei: Ehu chubanshe, 1989). Biographies in Chinese include Cai Renhou, *Mou Zongsan xiangsheng xuesi nianpu* [*A Chronicle of the Scholarship of Mister Mou Zongsan*] (Taipei, Xuesheng shuju, 1996); Zheng, *Mou Zongsan*; and Li Shan, *Mou Zongsan zhuan* [*A Biography of Mou Zongsan*] (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue, 2002). In English, see Bresciani, *Reinventing Confucianism*, ch. 13, and Chan, *Mou Zongsan*.



the same time, he describes himself as uncomfortable with personal relations: he did not fit in well and found it hard to care very much about traditional rituals.<sup>15</sup> His preference was for focused inner reflection and a certain distance from the world. Success in the county high school and on a competitive exam then led him to the Philosophy Department at Peking University, where he studied from 1929-1933. At university Mou became fascinated by the logic and metaphysics of Russell and especially Whitehead, and also immersed himself in study of the *Yi Jing* [*Book of Changes*]. In 1932, during his final year at university, Mou met Xiong Shili for the first time. I will discuss Xiong's influence on Mou in the following section; for now, suffice it to say that Xiong was an inspiration to Mou, even though Mou's philosophy would differ in major ways from that of his teacher.

Mou graduated from Peking University in 1933 and the next decade and a half was a difficult period for him, even if it contained key events that would shape his philosophical development. China was wracked by invasion and civil war and Mou, moving from place to place in an effort to teach, suffered both physical and emotional privation. One of the major intellectual controversies in these years concerned the notion of "dialectic"; Mou's background in logic led him to participate vigorously in the debates. His two major works of the period are *A Model of Logic* and *A Critique of the Cognitive Mind*. As Zheng Jiadong explains, these books represent a development from Russell's idea that logic needs no metaphysical foundation, to Kant's transcendental foundation.<sup>16</sup> As we will soon see, Kant would play a fundamental role in Mou's thinking ever after.

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<sup>15</sup> Zheng, *Mou Zongsan*, pp. 47-8.

<sup>16</sup> Zheng, *Mou Zongsan*, p. 69.

In 1949 Mou left mainland China for Taiwan, leaving behind his first wife and two children.<sup>17</sup> Over the next decade Mou was primarily focused on political philosophy.<sup>18</sup> Influenced in part by Hegel's ideas of history and development, Mou was concerned to open up a path to a new, modern politics for Confucianism—one that would avoid the tendency toward authoritarianism that he saw both in traditional China and in the mainland. As mentioned above, in 1958 Mou and three colleagues issued a Manifesto urging that Chinese culture and, in particular, Confucianism was vital, adaptable to the modern situation, and merited worldwide respect. Mou's major works in this period were *Moral Idealism*, *The Philosophy of History*, and *Politics and Administration*.

Mou moved to Hong Kong in 1960, teaching at Hong Kong University and then New Asia College. Here Mou was able to step back from the politics of the day and delve deeply into the history of Chinese philosophy. At the same time, he re-opened and deepened his dialogue with Kant. Over the next decade and a half Mou produced a string of major works, including his three-volume *magnum opus*, *Xinti yu Xingt*.<sup>19</sup> This work is organized as an interpretation of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, though in it and also in two subsequent monographs (*Intellectual Intuition and Chinese Philosophy* and *Phenomenon and Thing-in-Itself*), Mou articulates his simultaneous appreciation for and also critique of Kant's philosophical project. As I will elaborate below, Mou insists that the reality of morality and freedom not be something that we "posit" but something that is manifested to us, that we witness. Mou argues that the genius of

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<sup>17</sup> Billioud, *Confucian Modernity*, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> As Zheng Jiadong shows, even though we can characterize each phase of Mou's career as focused on a main theme, we can simultaneously see the emergence of concerns and writings that will blossom into the next major phase. See, for example, essays written in the 1950s (subsequently published in *Shengming de Xuewen*) that anticipate the concern with an existential "moral religion" that would emerge in his major writings of the 1960s and 1970s. Zheng, *Mou Zongsan*, p. 91.

<sup>19</sup> There is little scholarly agreement on the best translation of this book's title. Mou himself suggested "Transcendental Mind and Transcendental Nature." Billioud prefers "Constitutive Mind and Constitutive Nature," Clower uses "Ontological Mind and Ontological Nature," and Chan suggests "Moral Creative Reality: Mind and Nature."

Confucianism, especially as seen through the eyes of Mencius and his later inheritors, is to show how we can be autonomous and yet have experiential access to the reality of morality. As Mou famously puts it, this means that we should not rest content with Kant's metaphysics of morals, but insist on a moral metaphysics.

In the last two decades of his life Mou was engaged in several projects. As broader scholarly interest in the "New Confucianism" of thinkers like Mou and Tang Junyi began to emerge, Mou played a role in the explication and defense of his own thought. He deepened and systematized his long interest in Buddhism, eventually published a major treatise offering his own analysis and appropriation of the history of Chinese Buddhism.<sup>20</sup> The understanding of what he called the Tiantai Buddhist "perfect teaching," in turn, enabled him to articulate what he argues is a superior solution to Kant's question of the *summum bonum*—that is, the question of whether the lives of virtue and of happiness coincide—which he published in 1985 as *On the Summum Bonum*. In addition, over this period Mou completed his translations of Kant's three *Critiques*. When he passed away in 1995 the world lost the last, and greatest, of the twentieth-century Confucian philosophers.

#### 4. Influences and Interlocutors

Mou Zongsan was an extremely creative philosopher, and at the same time he engaged with the writings of an unusually broad range of thinkers, both East and West. It is plausible to think that his creativity was sparked, in significant part, by the many different perspectives that

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<sup>20</sup> The book is *Buddha Nature and Prajñā*, on which see the outstanding recent study: Clower, *Unlikely Buddhologist*.

his broad philosophical appetite led him to digest.<sup>21</sup> In this section I will focus on some of Mou's most prominent influences, but let me first note some of the interlocutors I will not discuss here. On the one hand, there are various Western philosophers who played roles in his philosophical development—in previous sections, I have already made reference to Russell and Whitehead; other significant voices are Kierkegaard<sup>22</sup> and Heidegger<sup>23</sup>—but not to the level of his life-long dialogue with Kant or, to a somewhat lesser degree, Hegel. On the other hand, there is the deep and abiding influence of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism. Mou first encountered Neo-Confucian writings when quite young, and Neo-Confucian orientations remain at the core of his mature thinking. I will explicate some of these connections in Section 5, but first we will turn to the individual most responsible for Mou's particular Confucian identity, his mentor Xiong Shili.

While they agree on the broad outlines, Mou's most perceptive intellectual biographers disagree on some important details concerning the nature of Xiong's influence on Mou and the ultimate similarities and difference between their ideas. Let us begin with the broad outline. Mou was attracted both to Xiong's deep commitment to Confucianism and to his eclectic and synthetic philosophical creativity. For Xiong, this meant an openness to Buddhist and Daoist insights and terminology; for Mou, this expanded to include Western thinkers.<sup>24</sup> As Serina Chan shows, in fact, Xiong was supportive of Mou's engagement with Kant.<sup>25</sup> Within the wide field of Confucian thinking, Mou was certainly influenced by Xiong's interpretation of and preference for the Neo-Confucian Wang Yangming's thesis that “*xin* (heartmind) is *li* (Pattern, Coherence, or principle)”—or in other words, that our heartmind itself is identical to fundamental moral

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<sup>21</sup> As Sébastien Billioud has pointed out to me, though, Mou's appetite had sometimes surprising limits. For example, despite their shared interest in “intellectual intuition,” Mou paid virtually no attention to post-Kantian 19<sup>th</sup>-century European philosophers other than Hegel.

<sup>22</sup> Zheng, *Mou Zongsan*, p. 93.

<sup>23</sup> Billioud, *Confucian Modernity*, ch. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Jason Clower points out that Mou not only inherits an openness to Buddhism from Xiong, but also some of Xiong's bedrock beliefs about the limitations of Buddhism. Clower, *Unlikely Buddhologist*, p. 52, n. 97.

<sup>25</sup> Chan, *Mou Zongsan*, p. 36.

reality.<sup>26</sup> Not only was Mou drawn to this thesis of Wang Yangming, but he also was profoundly influenced by Xiong's insistence that fundamental moral reality was therefore accessible to us through a special kind of experience. For Mou as for Xiong, this was not understood as normal empirical experience. Xiong taught that the "vigorous, morally uplifting moral mind...is empathic compassion or the feeling of oneness with the myriad things."<sup>27</sup> Drawing on Kantian language, Mou will come to call this a kind of "intellectual intuition," as we will see below. This possibility of personal verification of moral reality is fundamental to both thinkers.<sup>28</sup>

All analysts agree that there are also significant differences between Xiong and Mou. Chan, who places the most emphasis on Xiong's influence, nonetheless remarks that the two men differed in "objective, emphases, methodology, formal theoretical framework, and style."<sup>29</sup> Zheng goes further, insisting both that the methodological differences are more far-reaching, and that there are key differences in the content of their thought. On the first point, Zheng writes that Mou himself thought of Xiong's thought as a kind of direct insight neither supported nor encumbered by the kind of "critical" analysis that Mou, following Kant, endeavored to develop using the tools of logic and epistemology. Zheng adds that Mou also differs dramatically from Xiong in his detailed engagement with historical texts.<sup>30</sup> In terms of differences of content, Zheng's main argument is that Xiong's basic orientation is cosmological and he starts from texts like the *Yi Jing* and *Doctrine of the Mean*, while Mou's approach was an ontological one rooted

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<sup>26</sup> "Xin" is often simply translated as "mind" or "heart," but for traditional Confucians as for Mou, there is no hard line between cognitive and conative activity, both of which have their seat in our *xin* or "heartmind." The interpretation and translation of the Neo-Confucian term "*li*" is controversial. My own view, according to which the term refers to the valuable and intelligible way that things fit together, is explained in [Angle 2009, ch. 2].

<sup>27</sup> Chan, *Mou Zongsan*, p. 58.

<sup>28</sup> In addition to Chan, *Mou Zongsan*, ch. 1, good sources in English on Xiong's ideas include Tu Wei-ming, "Hsiung Shih-li's Quest for Authentic Existence," in Charlotte Furth, ed., *The Limits of Chang: Essays on Conservative Alternatives in Republican China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 242-75; Jiyuan Yu, "Xiong Shili's Metaphysics of Virtue," in Chung-ying Cheng & Nicholas Bunnin, eds., *Contemporary Chinese Philosophy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 127-46; and Jana S. Rosker, *Searching for the Way: Theory of Knowledge in Pre-Modern and Modern China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> Chan, *Mou Zongsan*, p. 63.

<sup>30</sup> Zheng, *Mou Zongsan*, p. 100

in the *Mencius*.<sup>31</sup> At issue is the starting point in one's theorizing: is it a cosmological theory that sees *li* as a cosmic first principle and prioritizes *tian* (Heaven) over humans,<sup>32</sup> or one in which nature and *li* are, in the first instance, understood as at least partly constituted by the human heartmind? As we will see below, Mou is at pains to argue for the latter position, while also maintaining that such an understanding of the ontology of moral value does not detract from its objectivity. Mou is clearly taken with Kant's emphasis on the "autonomy" of genuine morality and worries that if morality is rooted in a cosmological vision, it risks becoming heteronomous, imposed on us from without.

Before turning more directly to Mou's encounter with Kant, let us dwell briefly on the role that Hegel plays in Mou's thinking. Mou was initially quite suspicious of what he saw as Hegel's elaborate and arbitrary metaphysics, but as his friendship grew with fellow Xiong Shili-student Tang Junyi (1909-1978), Mou came to greatly value Hegel. Mou's biographers have identified three important ways in which Hegel influenced Mou. First, Hegel's view of "Spirit" lent support to the idea, central to Mou's developing thinking, of the universal inner sageliness of humans. Mou wrote that Hegel's thought "is an understanding to the point of utter clarity of the development and realization of the [moral] mind and [inborn human] nature."<sup>33</sup> Second, Mou takes from Hegel the crucial concept of philosophical and historical "development," as well as the related idea that the moral subject needs to be realized (as "objective spirit," in Hegel's terms) in the world. As Zheng Jiadong emphasizes, talking of "development" implies the incompleteness and imperfection of the present, including currently-existing philosophy.<sup>34</sup> Hegel's

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 63 and 106. Sébastien Billioud has commented to me that one could accept Zheng's argument in terms of cosmology versus ontology, without accepting that the latter is more rooted in *Mencius* than in the *Yi Jing* and *Zhong Yong*.

<sup>32</sup> Chan, *Mou Zongsan*, p. 49.

<sup>33</sup> Mou, *Autobiography*, p. 113; cf. Chan, *Mou Zongsan*, p. 107.

<sup>34</sup> Zheng, *Mou Zongsan*, p. 77.

attitude toward history thus helps to solidify the grounds for Mou's creative/constructive philosophical enterprise itself. Third, Hegel's concept of dialectic comes to play a great role in Mou's thinking. This is true both of his appropriation of Tiantai Buddhist thought in his "perfect teaching" doctrine, as well as in Mou's development of the idea of "self-restriction." Negation—by which Hegel understands the limitation of one thing by something else of a different type—is central both to Hegel's dialectic and to some of Mou's most important doctrines. As we will see in the next section, "self-restriction" lies at the heart of his effort to articulate a new Confucian politics, to explain how Confucian moral metaphysics can coexist with science, and to rework Kant's idea of the human relationship to the noumenal and phenomenal realms. In short, while it would be an exaggeration to call Mou's philosophy "Hegelian," Mou appropriates key Hegelian ideas that help him to develop many of his mature doctrines.

A natural place to begin our consideration of Kant's influence on Mou is with the question of why Kant seemed like such a natural interlocutor to Mou. It might well appear that the issues driving Kant—skepticism and epistemology, humans' relation to God, the nature of moral law and of obligation—simply have no homes within a traditional Confucian framework, and thus looking to Kant to help develop Confucianism is quixotic. According to biographer Serina Chan, the explanation for Mou's fascination with Kant is because "the two thinkers shared a common understanding of morality and a deep faith in the divine."<sup>35</sup> The common understanding she has in mind is that morality is universal and imperative; "both thinkers saw the main role of human beings in the world to be moral."<sup>36</sup> As mentioned briefly above, Xiong Shili apparently also saw this resonance between Confucianism and Kant, writing, "Kant conceives of ultimate reality (*benti*) as something that is beyond the reach of [theoretical] reason

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<sup>35</sup> Chan, *Mou Zongsan*, p. 129, n. 35.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

and can be responded to only through moral practice. His main idea can be reconciled with the spirit of our classical learning.”<sup>37</sup> Sébastien Billioud has also noted that because Kant’s philosophical works are structured into both a “Doctrine of Elements” and a “Doctrine of Method,” there is in Kant an echo of the importance of the practical focus on life and self-cultivation that one finds in Confucianism.<sup>38</sup> Still, it was obvious to Mou (as it must be to any reader) that Kant’s emphasis was not on practice. As Billioud points out, this provides Mou with the opportunity to argue for an important contribution from Chinese philosophy—indeed, to open up the possibility that Mou’s development of Confucianism might “outstrip Kant.” In this context, it is clear that another way in which Kant was important to Mou was simply because of what he took to be Kant’s unquestioned centrality in the modern Western philosophical tradition. There could be no better argument for the contemporary significance of Chinese philosophy than its ability to critique and surpass Kant.

Recall that Mou is reflecting on the meaning and importance of Confucianism at a time when most intellectuals are quite dismissive of its significance, in part because they see it as little more than a set of ossified, outmoded moral and ritual rules. Mou was determined to argue that this is a fundamental misunderstanding of Confucianism, and in this context we can see another reason for his attraction to Kant. At the center of Kant’s moral philosophy is the idea of autonomy, and Mou wanted to show that properly understood, Confucianism similarly viewed moral agents as autonomous sources of morality. Kant maintained that the moral law was not God’s command but the result of our rational self-legislation; in parallel fashion Mou argued that the classical Confucians had moved the locus of moral obligation from external rules to the inner moral mind. Rather than heteronomous imposition, the complex of moral heartmind and nature

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<sup>37</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, pp. 36-7, slightly modified.

<sup>38</sup> Billioud, *Confucian Modernity*, p. 10.



(*xinxing*) freely and spontaneously endorses the *li* (Pattern, Coherence, principle).<sup>39</sup> Even as Mou is saying this, though, he is also significantly changing the nature of the endorsement. It is not simply a matter of self-legislation by one's rational free will. Mou writes that to say the heartmind is autonomous is to say that "it is not passively, unready determined by the law, but rather is actively, readily (*ganyuande* 甘願的), and thus in accordance with the law it has established, determining itself. This is what Mencius meant by the 'order and rightness delighting in the heartmind and the heartmind delighting in the order and rightness.'" <sup>40</sup> Note that the heartmind's endorsement is not purely cognitive, but—in keeping with the fundamental orientation of Confucian moral psychology—is both cognitive and conative. It "delights (*yue* 悅)" in the moral principles. Both reason and emotion have their seat in the heartmind, and this fact connects to Mou's insistence, which we will explore below, that moral agents have the reality of the law "presented" to them in a quasi-experiential way that Kant would surely have denied.

This brings us to our final question about Kant's influence on Mou: is it genuinely substantive, or confined to formal features—that is, confined to ways in which Mou formulates and expresses his ideas? Interpreters are somewhat divided. Some, like Mou's student Lee Ming-huei, argue that Kant's influence on the substance of Mou's thought is real and the resemblances between Mou's ideas and Kant's are substantial.<sup>41</sup> Others, like Serina Chan, argue that "Mou's understanding of [Confucian] thought was not substantially influenced by Kant"; she agrees with

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<sup>39</sup> On this theme, see Lee Ming-huei, "Mou Zongsan sixiangzhong de rujia yu kangde [Confucianism and Kant in Mou Zongsan's Thought]," in *Dangdai ruxue de ziwu zhuanhua* [*The Self-Transformation of Contemporary Confucianism*] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 2001), pp. 75-7; Clower *Unlikely Buddhistologist*, p. 165, n. 30; as well as Mou, *Nineteen Lectures* (Julie Lee Wei translation), Lecture 4, pp. 74-5.

<sup>40</sup> Mou Zongsan, *Xiangxiang yu wuzhishen* [*Phenomena and Things-in-Themselves*] (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1975), p. 76; translation from Clower *Unlikely Buddhistologist*, p. 165, n. 30, modified. The Mencius reference is to 6A:7; the original reads, "...Thus order and rightness please my heart in the same way as meat pleases my palate."

<sup>41</sup> Lee, "Confucianism and Kant."

Zheng Jiadong that Kant only “influenced and changed the way that [Mou] expressed his understanding” of Chinese philosophy.<sup>42</sup> Zheng adds, however, that the influence of changed methods and modes of expression can be profound, since they are based in assumptions about social organization and institutions. Zheng sees a connection between Mou’s engagement with Kant and other Western philosophers and the transformation of the “Confucian” identity from engaged scholar to university professor. As for myself, in addition to agreeing with Zheng about the last point, I would suggest that the truth lies somewhere between Lee and Chan. Mou’s dialogue with Kant encouraged him to view the Confucian tradition in a certain way—a way also partly encouraged by Xiong, perhaps, but by no means the only way to interpret the tradition. Notwithstanding the many ways in which Mou revised Kant’s framework, Mou still reads the Confucian tradition as expressing a deontological ethical framework, as Lee in particular has emphasized. Without entering into the debate here, let me simply signal that it remains an open question whether this is the best and most constructive reading, or whether seeing both classical and Neo-Confucianism as expressing kinds of virtue ethics might be preferable.<sup>43</sup>

In any event, let us move on, because there is one more important kind of interlocutor that we must discuss, namely the Chinese Buddhist tradition. Buddhist ideas figure importantly throughout much of Mou’s writing, and become especially significant to his effort to articulate a “perfect teaching.” Buddhism also figures prominently in several of the lectures translated in this volume. In Lectures 12 through 17, Mou both explicates the ideas of several Buddhist schools

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<sup>42</sup> Chan, *Mou Zongsan*, 216; Zheng, *Mou Zongsan*, 231.

<sup>43</sup> For some relevant discussion, see Lee Ming-huei, “Confucianism, Kant, and Virtue Ethics,” in Stephen C. Angle and Michael Slote, eds., *Virtue Ethics and Confucianism* (New York: Routledge, 2013); and Stephen C. Angle, “Moral Theory in the *Analects*,” in Amy Olberding, ed., *The Dao Companion the Analects* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013). In this context, Billioud’s following comments are very suggestive: “Acting morally is much less for Mou Zongsan the result of a choice than the deployment of a capacity (*de*: ‘the capacity for our constitutive nature and heart/mind’) itself associated with self-cultivation and self-transformation. Mou’s ‘free will’ (*xinti*, *xingtì*) is in fact (and paradoxically) severed from a ‘choice-volition’ paradigm.... One could even...more radically question to which extent the very concept of ‘will’ keeps any relevance beyond the convenience of positing it provisionally for the sake of a dialogue with Kant.” Billioud, *Confucian Modernity*, pp. 61-2.

and then uses these ideas to help advance and express his own thinking. To some degree, Mou is following the lead of his teacher Xiong Shili, whose most famous book, *New Treatise on Yogācāra*, expressed Xiong’s critical engagement with Yogācāra (or *Weishi*, Consciousness-only) Buddhism.<sup>44</sup> However, Mou is both much more immersed in the details of Buddhist teachings, and arguably more sympathetic to certain of these ideas, than is Xiong.<sup>45</sup> It might be helpful to present some of the schools with which he is concerned in a chart<sup>46</sup>:

<b>Mou’s Category</b>	<b>Representative Tradition</b>
Tripitika Theory	Hināyana
Shared (Common) Theory	Madhyamaka; Emptiness ( <i>Kong</i> ) Tradition
Beginning Separation (or Special) Theory	Late Chinese Yogācāra ( <i>Weishi</i> ) Tradition
Mature Separation Theory	Huayan Tradition
Perfect or Complete Theory ( <i>Yuanjiao</i> )	Tiantai Tradition

Mou follows the lead of Tiantai masters (especially Tiantai Zhiyi, 538-597) in establishing a hierarchy or ranking of schools, all of which contribute to learning the truth but only one of which, the Tiantai school, manages to express that truth in a full and complete way. The core issue with which Mou is concerned is how to understand the relation between everyday experience and Enlightenment, *nirvana*, Buddhahood. As he explains both in both the *Nineteen Lectures* and, much more exhaustively, in *Buddha Nature and Prajñā*, the “Shared Theory” moves beyond the rudimentary Tripitika Theory via its thorough explanation of the subjective

<sup>44</sup> For an account emphasizing Xiong’s deep debts to Yogācāra, see John Makeham, “Xiong Shili’s Critique of Yogācāra Thought in the Context of His Constructive Philosophy,” in John Makeham, ed., *Transforming Consciousness: Yogācāra Thought in Modern China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>45</sup> Notwithstanding that fact that, as Clower says, some of Mou’s ground-level disagreements with Buddhism are perfectly consonant with Xiong’s own criticisms. Clower, *Unlikely Buddhologist*, pp. 52 and 97.

<sup>46</sup> Based on the chart in *Ibid.*, p. 92.

experience of *prajñā* (wisdom or discernment).<sup>47</sup> It falls short, though, in its explanation of the metaphysical side of Buddhism, that is, “Buddha nature” and the question of how it is that Buddhahood is possible to attain. Each of the “Separation Theories” come successively closer to grasping the truth of the Buddha Nature, but they are called “separation” theories in part because, Mou held, they exaggerate the differences that separate Buddhas from us.<sup>48</sup> Tiantai, finally, attains a perfect and complete theory with its teaching that, in a certain sense, we are already identical to Buddhas.<sup>49</sup> I elaborate on the “perfect teaching” idea below.

## 5. Key Ideas

*Moral Metaphysics.* In this section I will sketch the outlines of several of Mou’s key ideas. Many of these concepts are interdependent, so the introduction of each subsequent idea will enable a deeper appreciation of the foregoing ideas. Still, we need to start somewhere, and I propose to begin with the idea of “moral metaphysics.” As is well-known, Kant’s approach to morality is to offer a “metaphysics of morals,” that is, to provide an account of the non-empirical principles that make morality possible. Kant argues that we have no direct access to moral reality, but our reason can work out the principles by which we are obligated via a purely rational understanding of what it is to have a free will. This, then, provides us with an (indirect) understanding of morality. With such an understanding hand, Kant goes on to argue that instead of traditional “theological ethics,” which start from an understanding of God and derive morality, we should instead approach an understanding of God via “moral theology.” Moral theology starts from an

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

understanding of morality and tells us what God must be like, if happy moral lives are to in fact be possible.

Mou believes that Kant's shift from theological ethics to the combination of a metaphysics of morals and a moral theology was a great turning point in the history of Western philosophy,<sup>50</sup> but he also argues that Confucian philosophy has an even better framework. In a sense, we can say that Mou combines the two Kantian ideas into one, namely "moral metaphysics." Like moral theology, Mou's moral metaphysics takes morality as its starting point. However, this starting point is our direct experience of and participation in morality, rather than an abstract morality that has been worked out rationally. Our experience of morality is "non-empirical"—it is of a different kind from our regular sensory experience—and plays a role in constituting metaphysical reality. In short, our metaphysical theory will have morality built in from the beginning. Drawing on various strands of classical and Neo-Confucian thinking, Mou asserts that at its base, reality is an on-going process of life-giving creativity. This process of creativity is something that we both participate in and value. At the same time, Mou insists that reality is no less "objective" for our constitutive role in it: we may experience and even partly constitute ultimate reality, but this does not mean that we can choose arbitrarily what is valuable. As we will see in a moment, Mou argues that our experiences of morality have a direct, unavoidable nature to them. Morality is something we discover in ourselves and in the world, rather than invent.<sup>51</sup>

*Intellectual intuition.* In the autobiography Mou wrote at age fifty, he records a particularly memorable conversation that his teacher, Xiong Shili, had with Feng Youlan (1895-1990),

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<sup>50</sup> Mou, *Nineteen Lectures* (Julie Lee Wei translation), Lecture 4, p. 70.

<sup>51</sup> See Mou, *Nineteen Lectures* (Julie Lee Wei translation), Lecture 6, pp. 113-14.

another important twentieth-century Confucian philosopher. In the course of a discussion of Wang Yangming's famous idea of "innate good knowing (*liangzhi*)," Xiong questioned Feng's assertion that *liangzhi* was a "hypothesis." As Mou recalls, Xiong replied: "How is it possible to speak about a hypothesis! Innate good knowing is something truly real and, moreover, it is a manifestation (*chengxian*). This is something that demands our direct and immediate consciousness and affirmation."<sup>52</sup> These words had a profound effect on Mou; he says that Xiong's comment enabled him to grasp one of the core insights of Neo-Confucianism. Even though it has a different status from empirical knowledge, the reality and directedness of morality are directly accessible to us through a kind of experience. The paradigm for this experience is articulated by Mencius when he asserts that anyone would have a feeling of empathy upon spontaneously seeing a child about to fall into a well [*Mencius* 2A:6]. The ubiquity and necessity of this kind of reaction provides a model for the "manifestation" of moral reality that Xiong and Mou have in mind.

The manifestation of moral reality is a key notion in all of Mou's mature thought (e.g., in *Xinti yu Xingti*), but he eventually comes to appropriate the Kantian term "intellectual intuition" as his label for the idea.<sup>53</sup> Kant distinguishes between sensible intuition, which is the passive process whereby we are affected by phenomenal objects, and intellectual intuition, which is a creative interaction with supra-sensory "things-in-themselves." Kant famously distinguishes between the sensory, phenomenal realm and the "noumenal" realm of things-in-themselves, and argues that human knowledge is strictly limited to the first realm. Only God has intellectual intuition. For humans, the existence of things-in-themselves is a mere postulate.<sup>54</sup> While Mou

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<sup>52</sup> Mou, *Autobiography*, 88.

<sup>53</sup> Billioud, *Confucian Modernity*, pp. 71-2, n. 6.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 2 is an extremely thorough and insightful discussion of Mou's notion of intellectual intuition and its relation to Kant. See also Zheng, *Mou Zongsan*, ch. 7, and the fine essay by Nicholas Bunnin, "God's Knowledge

likes Kant's general idea that there is an important distinction between sensory knowledge and moral knowledge, though, he cannot accept that direct knowledge of the moral (which for Kant is an aspect of the noumenal realm) is impossible. That is the same, he says, as saying that "no real morality has ever appeared." Acting in accordance with moral law will only be "an ideal to which we may gradually approach"; because our will, unlike the divine will, is "constantly wavering." In short, sagehood is impossible and genuine, fully moral practice is unattainable.<sup>55</sup>

Mou therefore insists that intellectual intuition is possible. Recognizing that we have this capacity, and learning how to attend to it, are core aspects of Mou's understanding of moral self-cultivation.<sup>56</sup> Because the idea of human intellectual intuition is so deeply at odds with Kant's epistemology, though, scholars have asked whether Mou's endorsement of the idea shows that he misunderstood Kant in a serious way. A related question is why, given Mou's interest in intellectual intuition, he did not pursue the extensive discussion of intellectual intuition that becomes a central feature of post-Kantian German idealism and Romantic philosophizing. In my view, Sebastien Billioud's recent treatment of these questions is definitive. On the one hand, Billioud shows that Mou's understanding of the relevant parts of Kant's theoretical and practical philosophy is extremely sophisticated. On key points, he does not misunderstand Kant, but disagrees.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, Billioud also argues that Mou's efforts to engage with Kantian and other Western philosophy generates a "pervasive ambiguity about the meaning to be ascribed to concepts."<sup>58</sup> Billioud's idea is that we can see a notion like Mou's *zhi de zhijue* (i.e.,

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and Ours: Kant and Mou Zongsan on Intellectual Intuition," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 35:4 (2008), pp. 613-24.

<sup>55</sup> Mou, *Nineteen Lectures* (Julie Lee Wei translation), Lecture 14, p. 332.

<sup>56</sup> On Mou's understanding of self-cultivation, see Billioud, *Confucian Modernity*, ch. 6.

<sup>57</sup> For example, Billioud shows that Mou understands the "quasi-ontological" nature of Kant's postulate of free will, and nonetheless argues that it is (in Billioud's words) "the vague and useless by-product of an exclusively formal system modeled according to the primacy of speculative knowledge" Billioud, *Confucian Modernity*, p. 59. Kant's approach leaves morality too fragile.

<sup>58</sup> Billioud, *Confucian Modernity*, p. 77.

intellectual intuition) as simultaneously operating in two, very different conceptual universes: that of Kant's "*intellektuelle Anschauung*" and that of earlier Confucian distinctions between sensory knowing and moral knowing (*liangzhi* being an instance of the latter). The reason that Mou does not pursue the development of intellectual intuition in post-Kantian philosophy is because—despite superficial resemblances between Mou's *zhi de zhijue* and the ideas of Fichte or Shelling—the deep assumptions of the post-Kantians are very different from Mou's. As discussed above concerning moral metaphysics, Mou denies a strong gap between moral and natural orders. Morality is built-in to our metaphysics from the beginning through our participation in the creativity of the universe. Because of this continuity, efforts to use intellectual intuition to cross a gap between natural and moral are actually quite orthogonal to Mou's own project.<sup>59</sup>

*One Mind Opening Two Gates.* One of Mou's favorite expressions, liberally used in the *Nineteen Lectures*, is "One mind opening two gates (*yi xin kai er men*)." The phrase comes from a commentary to the seminal Chinese Buddhist text *Awakening of Faith* and, although Mou does not believe that the Buddhist schools that emphasized *Awakening of the Faith* offered the final, most complete version of Buddhist teaching, he finds this expression to nicely encapsulate his epistemology.<sup>60</sup> Our one mind is capable of accessing the world in its moral aspect—this is intellectual intuition, and corresponds to the Buddhist True Mind disclosing objects in their transcendental aspect—and also of accessing the world via the categorial distinctions of the limited, "discriminating" mind. As with our discussion of the idea of intellectual intuition, there

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<sup>59</sup> Billioud, *Confucian Modernity*, p. 91, n. 76.

<sup>60</sup> See Clower, *Unlikely Buddhologist*, p. 19, n. 89 for the origin of the phrase. Both the initial proponents of the *Awakening of Faith* and its later Huayan interpreters are classified by Mou as "mature separation theorists"; see above.



is an interpretive challenge surrounding how seriously to take the Buddhist conceptual context here, as opposed to parallel with the Kantian distinction between phenomenal and noumenal realms.<sup>61</sup> In my view, Mou's stress on the ways that we move back and forth between the two levels—or even come to take both into account simultaneously—that we see in his discussions of “self-restriction” and “perfect teaching” (on which see below) suggests a way to understand the doctrine of “one mind opening two gates” that is closer to Buddhism than to Kant.

*Self-restriction.* We come now to the crux of Mou's whole system. Suppose that our heartminds are indeed capable of relating to reality in two different ways, via passive sensible intuition and active intellectual intuition. Suppose also that, as suggested above, the proper relation between the heartmind's two modalities is not the rejection of sensory input in favor of permanent meditation: everyday activities and desires are themselves valuable. What, then, is the proper relationship between the two modes of intuition?<sup>62</sup> Mou's answer makes essential use of the dialectical idea of “self-restriction.”<sup>63</sup> “Restriction” here is (as Mou says) closely related to the Hegelian idea of negation, which does not mean to contradict or completely deny, but rather to limit one thing by something else of a different type. In the context of Hegelian dialectics, the idea is that only via such “negation” can the original thing be fully realized. Abstractly, then, the answer to our question is: intellectual intuition (and morality) can only realize its ends if it is

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<sup>61</sup> Lee, “Confucianism and Kant,” p. 58 stresses the similarity with Kant. As Zheng, *Mou Zongsan*, pp. 138-9 emphasizes, though, Mou's insistence on overcoming the distinction between the two realms is deeply un-Kantian.

<sup>62</sup> Mou is a profligate inventor of terminology, and one unending source of scholarly debate concerns whether various pairs of terms perfectly match with one another. For example, instead of two modes of intuition, he also talks about theoretical and practical rationality, about structural and functional presentation of rationality, and so on.

<sup>63</sup> The term Mou most often uses is “*ziwo kanxian*” or “self-restriction.” (“*Ziwo*” means “self,” and both “*kan*” and “*xian*” are terms from the *Yi Jing* with meanings related to being restrained in a pit.) In various places he explicitly glosses this as “self-negation (*ziwo fouding*)” (e.g., Mou, *Xiangsheng yu wuzishen*, p. 122), though he also uses other terms (such as “dialectical manifestation (*bianzheng de kaixian*)”) to express the same idea. See Wang Dade, “*Mou Zongsan xiansheng liangzhi kanxian shuo zhi quanshi* [The Interpretation of Mister Mou Zongsan's Theory of Self-Negation of Innate Good Knowing],” in Lee Ming-huei, ed., *Mou Zongsan xiansheng yu zhongguo zhexue zhi chongjian* [*Mister Mou Zongsan and the Reconstruction of Chinese Philosophy*] (Taipei, Wenlu chubanshe, 1996), p. 401.

“restricted” by and realized through the everyday interaction with objects that is governed by sensible intuition.

Mou offers several examples of what this means in practice. The Buddhist Bodhisattva is one instance. If Bodhisattvas completely separated themselves from the mundane and the multitude, “they would not be able to ferry over the many sentient beings to salvation.”<sup>64</sup> A Buddhist term for this is “retain delusion in order to lubricate life (*liuhuo runsheng* 留惑潤生),<sup>65</sup> although we might add that from Mou’s perspective, there is something inapt about referring to the everyday world’s concerns as “delusion.” More significantly for Mou, self-negation also turns out to be the key to understanding why modern Confucianism must demand democracy and science. The idea that Confucianism must, in order to realize its own goals, institute a democratic “new politics (*xin waiwang*)” is one of Mou’s most famous and most controversial doctrines. Some critics claim that Mou is simply abandoning Confucianism and turning to Western liberal democracy.<sup>66</sup> In fact, though, we can see it as another instance of “self-restriction.” As Mou says in the *Nineteen Lectures*, “If a sage wanted to be a president, he must leave behind his status as a sage and observe the political rules of being a president.”<sup>67</sup> Elsewhere, Mou says that no matter what one’s level of moral accomplishment, “insofar as one’s virtue is manifested in politics, one cannot override the relevant limits (that is, the highest principles of the political world), and in fact must devote one’s august character to the realization of these limits.”<sup>68</sup> Political rules like laws, rights, and a constitution restrict the expression of one’s personal moral insight, and

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<sup>64</sup> Mou, *Nineteen Lectures* (Julie Lee Wei translation), Lecture 13, p. 305.

<sup>65</sup> Mou, *Nineteen Lectures* (Julie Lee Wei translation), Lecture 14, p. 325.

<sup>66</sup> Jiang Qing, *Zhengzhi ruxue: Dangdai ruxue de zhuanxiang, tezhi, yu fazhan* [*Political Confucianism: The Changing Direction, Particularities, and Development of Contemporary Confucianism*] (Beijing: Sanlian Shudian (Harvard-Yenching Academic Series), 2003), ch. 1.

<sup>67</sup> Mou, *Nineteen Lectures* (Julie Lee Wei translation), Lecture 13, p. 305 (slightly altered).

<sup>68</sup> Mou Zongsan, *Zhengdao yu zhidao* [*Politics and Administration*] (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1991), p. 128.

simultaneously provide a means through which one's moral goals can be realized.<sup>69</sup> Finally, Mou maintains that the same structure explains how Confucians can be committed to what looks like value-neutral scientific inquiry. Like political laws and the practice that is described by "political science," the scientific study of nature has a kind of provisional independence from our reality as moral beings. Experimental outcomes are not determined by what is judged to be the morally best result, but rather by the assessment of theoretical reason.<sup>70</sup>

We must attend to one critical point about these examples of self-restriction before moving on: practice at the restricted level of politics or science can seem to be neutral or "non-moral," but in fact it is not. Mou stresses that these practices and their norms emerged out of moral concerns and, when the norms of politics and science are properly constructed, they contribute (albeit indirectly) to the ultimate realization of moral ends. It is a mistake, for example, to think that democratic institutions are morally neutral and able to be exploited by the most powerful.<sup>71</sup> To the contrary, democratic institutions serve critical functions toward the broader realization of the moral reality that originally prompted their creation. Intellectual intuition and sensible intuition ultimately work together to realize a joint end. Another way to put this same conclusion is in terms of what Mou calls a "perfect teaching," to which we now turn.

*Perfect Teaching.* We can view Mou's idea of the "perfect teaching (*yuanjiao* 圓教)" from several perspectives.<sup>72</sup> First, it is a theory concerning the sense in which everyday people are

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<sup>69</sup> I have discussed Mou's self-restriction argument in considerable detail in Stephen C. Angle, *Contemporary Confucian Political Philosophy*, ch. 2. Other helpful discussions include Albert H. Y. Chen, "Is Confucianism Compatible with Liberal Democracy?" *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 34 (2007); and David Elstein, "Mou Zongsan's New Confucian Democracy," *Contemporary Political Theory*. 11 (2011): 192-210.

<sup>70</sup> Mou, *Zhengdao yu zhidao*, pp. 57-8.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>72</sup> Clower suggests that a more perspicuous translation of *yuanjiao* might be "complete teaching," though he decides to follow Mou's on lead and translate it as "perfect teaching." I will do the same. See Clower, *Unlikely Buddhistologist*, p. 198, n. 49.

identical with sages or Buddhas. Mou believes that the most advanced Buddhist teachings agree with mainstream Confucian teachings on this. The idea is that ultimate value appears to be distinct from the universe of objects to which we have access via sensible intuition, but in fact ultimate value is in a subtle way not separate from the world of objects. Our intellectual intuition reveals to us that the everyday world of objects and desires is simultaneously, in Clower's felicitous language, "shot through with Heaven's nourishing, morally uplifting creativity."<sup>73</sup> Second, it is a theory concerning how best to express or teach this fact concerning our identity with sages. Mou came to believe that the way that Tiantai Buddhists deployed paradoxical language could be very helpful; drawing on their rhetorical practice, he calls the relationship between perfect and ordinary creatures one of "paradoxical identity."<sup>74</sup> Finally, Mou sees the perfect teaching as a more satisfactory answer to Kant's problem of the *summum bonum*: are there any grounds for thinking that virtue and happiness will coincide? Kant's answer is that our faith in God provides the grounds, since God will see to it that virtue and happiness coincide. According to the perfect teaching, in contrast, perfect people (sages, Buddhas) necessarily enjoy happiness through their realization of the simultaneous finitude and infinitude of human existence.<sup>75</sup> Sages and Buddhas recognize their infinite minds and feel subjectively united with all things. This freedom from finitude and sense of unlimited life gives them a subjective sense of well-being. Were it not for their finite status as a localized being, though, they could not actually enjoy such a subjective state. The key to the perfect teaching, once again, is the identity of perfect beings with ordinary creatures living in the material world.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195. Mou expresses this same idea in some places by speaking of the "immanence of the transcendent (*chaoyue neizai*)"; for considerable discussion of this particular formulation, in relation to various meanings of "transcendent," see Zheng, *Mou Zongsan*, pp. 126-58.

<sup>74</sup> Clower, *Unlikely Buddhologist*, p. 190.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 202-3.

<sup>76</sup> Clower spends considerable time unpacking the nature of this "identity," both in the context of exposition of Mou's ideas and when responding on Mou's behalf to certain criticisms. A key to Clower's interpretation is that the

*Historical theses.* My emphasis throughout has been on Mou as a philosopher, but readers of the *Nineteen Lectures* will immediately discover that Mou is deeply engaged in the history of Chinese philosophy. The general plan of the *Lectures* is built around this history and many of Mou's books delve into detailed interpretation and critique of major and even minor figures within the Chinese traditions. As I will amplify in the final section of this essay, though, Mou's approach to these texts is not really as an historian. His method is not to rely on historical (intellectual, social, cultural) context but rather to search for philosophical significance. Still, even though he is more interested in truth than in context, he consistently holds that philosophical ideas need to be thought within a textual and cultural tradition, without which we risk losing adequate grounding for what the words we are using mean.<sup>77</sup> Before turning to some assessment of Mou's method, it may be helpful to summarize two of his most famous historical theses. Mou argues that the key reason for the emergence during the Warring States era of various philosophical schools was what he calls the "exhaustion of Zhou culture."<sup>78</sup> The rituals around which early Zhou society had been organized were losing their effectiveness, and the different schools offered different responses to this situation, including the Confucian effort to revitalize the rituals in order to bring out objective validity. (We can see here one instance of Mou's emphasis on the relation between moral theory and moral practice.)

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identity in question is a "type identity" rather than a "token identity": "Buddhas and ordinary people are the same *type* of thing, namely the type that has the capacity for both sensible and intellectual intuition. They are not actually the same individual." *Ibid.*, p. 186. Clower goes on to say that such an identity claim is in fact quite weak. I suspect that Clower's reading is in fact slightly too weak. Mou's point is not just that I have a structurally similar mind to a Buddha or sage, but that my very own (token) heartmind's interactions with the world are serving to partly constitute life-giving moral creativity, just like a sage's or Buddha's, right here and now. As Clower later on quotes Mou as saying, "Although ordinary people cannot manifest the [unlimited mind of wisdom] completely, they can still manifest it a little, because it can appear at any time." *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>77</sup> Zheng, *Mou Zongsan*, p. 193.

<sup>78</sup> Mou, *Nineteen Lectures* (Julie Lee Wei translation), Lecture 3, p. 55.

Jumping to a much later period, Mou's most controversial historical thesis is his relegation of the Cheng Yi (1033-1107) and Zhu Xi (1130-1200) strand of Neo-Confucianism from its widely accepted mainstream or even "orthodox" status into a "side branch" of the tradition. Mou believes that Cheng and Zhu are too analytical, too focused on sensible or theoretical knowing, depart from the core insight (already seen in Mencius) of the identity of ordinary humans and sages, and thus fall into what he calls (following Heidegger) an "ethics of essence."<sup>79</sup> In my view, while some aspects of the writings of Cheng and Zhu do lend themselves to the kind of interpretation Mou offers, a balanced reading of these authors shows them to be much less different from Mou's more favored Neo-Confucian voices than he believes.<sup>80</sup>

## 6. Conclusion: Toward an Engagement with Mou

The project of translating the *Nineteen Lectures* and this essay share the goal of introducing English speakers to the thought of one of the twentieth century's major philosophers. The translation project and the present essay share another goal as well: namely, to encourage charitable yet critical engagement with Mou's philosophy. Mou's work deserves neither worship nor dismissal, but rather the kind of detailed study and reflection that is only possible for English speakers through extensive encounter with translations of texts like the *Nineteen Lectures*. (Of course, translation of other major works by Mou would further enable such reflection; Mou himself stressed that the *Nineteen Lectures* cannot be taken as a definitive statement of his views.) Calling for philosophical engagement with Mou raises the question of what kind of thinker Mou really is and thus whether engaging with him on his terms is likely to be

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<sup>79</sup> Mou, *Nineteen Lectures* (Julie Lee Wei translation), Lecture 18, p. 435.

<sup>80</sup> Angle, *Sagehood*.

worthwhile. Offering some thoughts on this subject seems like a suitable way to bring this Foreword to a close.

According to Jason Clower, a religious-studies professor and author of a recent (and excellent) book on Mou's engagement with Buddhism, Mou "little resembles a 'philosopher' as they are commonly understood in English-speaking universities and comes closer to what we would call an exegetical theologian, inasmuch as he aims to speak on behalf of the Confucian tradition, giving special weight to the teachings of its authorities, and assumes some premises that are common inside the tradition."<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, Clower argues that Mou's thought can also be understood as aimed at establishing five goals, quite independent of any philosophical argument for the value of these goals:<sup>82</sup>

- Vindicating the importance of Chinese philosophy
- Joining Chinese and Western philosophy in a common enterprise
- Asserting morality in matter and the moral mission of science
- Helping to regenerate China morally and politically
- Proclaiming metaphysical optimism

On a related theme, we can add the observation by Zheng Jiadong that "at bottom, the mission and basic concern of contemporary New Confucians' thought is not to do scholarship but to establish a teaching and propagate the Way."<sup>83</sup>

Mou was a complex individual with a complicated and multi-faceted intellectual project. I have no doubt that he was motivated by, among other things, the five goals Clower lists. It is also clear that Mou and other contemporary Confucians asserted that realizing the Way was more significant, and more appropriately central to Confucians, than is academic scholarship: this

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<sup>81</sup> Clower, *Unlikely Buddhologist*, 59.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 47-55.

<sup>83</sup> Zheng, *Mou Zongsan*, p. 91.

helps us to understand Mou's statement that "sages are not philosophers."<sup>84</sup> If we take moral practice and Clower's five goals to be Mou's exclusive motivations, then it *might* be apt to conclude that serious philosophical engagement with Mou would be fruitless. Mou could still turn out to stimulate constructive philosophical thought, but that would largely be a matter of coincidence. In fact, though, I think it is clear that Mou took himself to be engaged in something that has more continuity with philosophical scholarship than Clower credits. It is true that Lecture 1 of the *Nineteen Lectures* opens with the issue of the "special character" of Chinese philosophy, but Mou immediately moves, in this lecture and the next, into the ways in which each given philosophical tradition aims at articulating truth—and truth that is ultimately accessible from the standpoints of other traditions. To put this another way, Mou's criticisms of Kant are not based on the idea that Kant is a bad Confucian, but rather that, for all his brilliance, Kant has missed something crucial about the human condition. Mou concludes Lecture Fourteen with these words:

We must...recognize that on this point Eastern and Western philosophies can be compared and can even debate each other, in order to bring out the distinctive characters of their doctrines. Eastern philosophy must affirm the framework of "One mind opens two doors," for otherwise all the statements quoted previously would be empty words. Although according to Kant they are all fantasies, from the perspective of Chinese philosophy they represent a philosophical realm that is in some ways an advance over Kant.

From the standpoint of the development of Western philosophy, Kant's philosophy certainly did advance Western philosophy a step further. But if we wish to take Kant's philosophy another step forward, then it has to be pitted against Chinese philosophy and be integrated with Chinese philosophy. At the same time, if we wish to make Chinese philosophy richer and advance further, then it must be connected with Western philosophy. Only then can it continue to be transmitted and live on. This kind of cultural exchange and flow demonstrates precisely the importance of the Buddhist framework of "One mind opens two doors."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Mou, *Nineteen Lectures* (Julie Lee Wei translation), Lecture 14, pp. 336-7.



Mou has not provided us with the last word on his topics, and it is true that his argumentation is sometimes rushed or lacking. But in many other ways he is an exemplary philosopher for our age. Above all, his openness to challenge and learning from traditions other than Confucianism, and the creativity with which he pursued the constructive development of Confucian thought and practice, are hallmarks of his philosophical enterprise from which we can all learn.