

A Review of *The Complete Works of Mou Zongsan*

By Esther C. Su, FSCPC

Mou, Zongsan (Tsong-san), *The Complete Works of Mou Zongsan* 《牟宗三全集》, Taipei 臺北; Lianjing 聯經, 2003. 32 vols.

Originally published by *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*, Vol. III, No. 2, Summer 2004: 335-341. Republished with permission.

In my many visits with Mou in his later years, I often heard him remark that his writings before he was fifty years old should not be read, and that only those he wrote when he was past fifty are worth studying (see 29:407). It was unclear to me then what he intended to convey with such a remark, other than that his age at fifty roughly demarcated his early life in China and his later life in Hong Kong and Taiwan until his death in 1995. My puzzlement over this remark was gradually resolved over the years by surveying, against his advice, his complete works both before and after he was fifty years old.

Surveying Mou's complete works is now made easier by the publication of *The Complete Works of Mou Zongsan* in 32 volumes, which includes a rich collection of his now hard-to-find early essays on a wide range of issues: logic, politics, economics, literature, and philosophy. It also includes all of his major book-length philosophical contributions: *Natural Philosophy and Moral Implications of the Book of Change* (title used in 1988 reprint. The original title used in the 1935 printing was *Understanding Chinese Metaphysics and Moral Philosophy Through Studying the Book of Change*)(vol. 1), his first book. *A Paradigm of Logic* (vol. 11) and *A Critique of Cognitive Mind* (vol.18-19) are the fruits of his 15year endeavor in logic and epistemology. *Philosophy of History* (vol. 9), *Talent-Nature and Xuan-Metaphysics*

(vol. 2), *Mind-Substance and Nature-Substance* (vol. 5-7), *From Lu Xiangshan to Liu Jishan* (vol. 8), and *Buddha-Nature and Prajñā* (vol. 3-4) contain his monumental reinterpretation of traditional Chinese philosophy of each major Chinese era. *Translations and Commentaries on Kant's three Critiques* (vol. 13-16), *Intellectual Intuition and Chinese Philosophy* (vol. 20), *Phenomenon and Thing-in-itself* (vol. 21), *On the Perfect Good* (vol. 22), "Is 'Subjective Purposiveness' the Transcendental Principle of Aesthetic Judgment?" (vol. 16) present his original efforts in converging Chinese and Western philosophies through Kant. The *Complete Works* also includes many lectures on philosophical problems and cultural issues Mou gave in his later years. These lectures reflect his mature thoughts.

It is a prohibitively difficult task to review the massive *Complete Works* within such a limited space. The only sensible approach, it seems to me, is to offer a brief but coherent account of Mou's philosophical development by retracing my own resolution of puzzlement over Mou's separating his own works before and after his fiftieth year.

Mou's entry into philosophy at a young age was characterized by a strong affinity with Western philosophy. He showed a particularly high interest in abstract thinking in logic. In the library of Beijing University, he immersed himself in the works of Whitehead, Russell and Wittgenstein. He also studied other contemporary logical systems like Brouwer's, Dewey's and Lewis' (see vols.11, 12 and 17). His intense efforts in learning logic were manifested in his many Chinese translations and introductory essays of these Western writings on logic (see vol. 17). He began his long career as an independent thinker and one of the most important philosophers of 20th-century China by writing *Natural Philosophy and Moral Implications of Zhou-Yi* at the age of 24. In that book, he applies Whitehead's concepts, such as "entity", "occasion", "matrix", "nexus", etc., and Russell's concepts of logic and number to

examining various systems of *Yijing* (the *Book of Change*) in Chinese history, from Han 漢 to Jin 晉, to Song 宋 and then to Qing 清 Dynasties. He studied commentaries on *Yijing* by Meng Xi 孟喜, Jing Fang 京房, Zheng Kangcheng 鄭康成, Xun Ciming 荀慈明 and Yu Fan 虞翻 of Han 漢 Dynasty; by Wang Bi 王弼 of Jin 晉 Dynasty, Zhu Xi 朱熹 of Song 宋 Dynasty; and Dai Dongyuan 戴東原, Hu Xu 胡煦, and Jiao Xu 焦循 of Qing 清 Dynasty. Even the format of Mou's own work, clearly illustrating the Western influence he was under at this age, is an imitation of Wittgenstein's paragraph-numbering method used in the *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus* (vol. 17). His interest in Whitehead during this period was especially strong and went beyond just logic (Mou translated his two books into Chinese: *An Enquiry Concerning The Principles of Natural Knowledge* and *The Concept of Nature*. However, these two translations did not survive. They were placed at Mou's homeland Qi-xia 棲霞, Shan-dong 山東; and were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution in China. see his *Lectures on Zhou-Yi Philosophy* [31: 17] and *Natural Philosophy and Moral Implications of Zhou-Yi*. [1: 231]): Whitehead's cosmology, in Mou's mind, was intuitively beautiful and actually very Chinese. However, in his later years he hardly taught any of Whitehead's philosophy, as his philosophical development had acquired a depth beyond Whitehead's pure-math-limited worldview. This departure of his early interest in Whitehead is probably one reason for his general rejection of his works before he was fifty. This Whiteheadian *Yijing* period was what Mou called "the intuitive understanding" period in his philosophical career in his *Autobiography at 50* (vol. 32).

Bertrand Russell once joked that there were "only six people who had read the later parts of the book [*Principia Mathematica*], Three of these were Poles, subsequently (I believe) liquidated by Hitler. The other three were Texans,

subsequently successfully assimilated.” (Bertrand Russell, *My Philosophical Development*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1959, p. 86). He would have never thought that a five-foot-tall young Chinese in the Far East actually re-proved every one of his propositions in the *Principia*. As Mou recalled: “I began with Russell and Whitehead’s *Principia*...I copied and re-derived the proof of every proposition. Every symbol that entered into my consciousness required a high concentration and great effort. I copied and derived, in the mean time, I processed its meaning.” (32:59). Mou was definitely deeply absorbed in Russell’s works. The absorption in *Principia* satisfied his thirst for pure logical thinking. In Mou’s mind, however, Russell had failed to provide a proper foundation for logic. It was exactly his search for the ground of logic that led Mou to Kant. His understanding of Kant at this time, however, was unavoidably influenced by Russell’s mathematical logic and the early 20th-Century’s anti-Kant tendency in Western philosophy, in which a progression toward formal logic set up a natural barrier for appreciating Kant’s transcendental logic. This formal logic bias led Mou to criticize Kant’s transcendental logic as “muddling with the existence” and to object to Kant’s linking “numbers” to “time”. He sided, instead, with Frege’s and Russell’s view that arithmetic, and even mathematics, could be directly derived from logic. He adhered to the view that mathematics and logic have nothing to do with existence, nor with subjective psychology, and therefore he perceived Kant’s concept of ‘mind’ as impure and argued that mixing together sensibility, understanding and reason resulted in a ‘collection of trash’ (see 11:(9)). Mou would later remarked in 1990: “At that time I only knew the logical nature of Kant’s Understanding, not the ontological nature of his Understanding” (18:(6)). Nevertheless, his appreciation of Kant’s philosophical grounding of logic helped him broaden his philosophical perspective beyond the

narrow confine of the conventionalism and the formalism of all contemporary logical systems, including Russell's. This was an important watershed in Mou's philosophical development and led to the writing of *Luoji Dianfan* 《邏輯典範》 (*A Paradigm of Logic*) (vol. 11) and *Renshixin Zhi Pipan* (*A Critique of Cognitive Mind*) 《認識心之批判》 (vols. 18-19). During this long fifteen-year period, he obtained a clear grasp of at least the logical nature of Kant's Understanding—the objective logical self (i.e., the transcendental apperception, the pure theoretical Reason itself) as the ground of logic and mathematics. This development also reversed his outwardly focused interest on 'object' to an inwardly focused concern with 'subject', and opened up the path to understanding Mencius' 'moral subject' and Lu-Wang's 陸王 philosophy of "Mind" (*xin* 心). However, the one-sided misunderstanding of Kant is the reason he later asked students not to read these books—another aspect of his rejection of his works before he was fifty.

Mou recognized his misunderstanding of Kant only after he encountered the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. In addition, he was also influenced by the Buddhist concept of dharmas of non-corresponding-to-mind thinking (*xin bu xiangying*[*si*] *xingfa* 心不相應[思]行法). According to Mou, these dharmas do not correspond to external things, or to the psychological mind. They are attached to the subject *a priori* and thereby make the object possible. They are the thinking dharmas, such as 'time, space, numbers, causality etc.' Such a Buddhist concept helped Mou understand Kant's transcendental idealism and empirical realism. From that point on, he developed his own philosophy with a unique interpretation of Kant's transcendental philosophy.

Mou was inspired by Heidegger's approach of "immanent metaphysics," which helped him grasp the ontological nature of Kant's Understanding (i.e. the metaphysics

of experience posited by the Understanding). However, He still disagreed with Heidegger's treating only the immanent thinking of being and time, as he believed Kant's original intent of transcendent metaphysics centered on the transcendental apperception, Freedom and Thing-in-itself. Mou wrote *Intellectual Intuition and Chinese Philosophy* (vol. 20) and *Phenomenon and Thing-in-itself* (vol. 21) with inspirations from Heidegger's *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* and *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. In these two books Mou reinterpreted Kant's first *Critique*, and carefully applied the great insights of phenomenon and thing-in-itself to Chinese philosophy. With these two books, Mou embarked on his later development of assimilating and, at the same time, confronting Kant's restrictive concepts of thing-in-itself and intellectual intuition in order to evolve a very original interpretation of the teachings of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. For example, Mou directly linked Kant's idea of the primacy of practical reason to Mencius' Confucianism. The maturation of his interpretative processing of Kant's philosophy culminated in his last original philosophical work *On the Perfect Good* (vol. 22), which exemplified the development of Chinese philosophy to a previously unreached high peak.

Despite the depth and breadth of his knowledge in Western philosophy, Mou's main endeavor remained with reexamining and reinterpreting traditional Chinese philosophy, particularly Confucianism. Perhaps many view Mou as a Confucian more than a philosopher. Such perception undoubtedly stemmed partly from his mentor-disciple relationship with the initiator of the contemporary neo-Confucianism, Xiong Shili 熊十力. He described his first encounter with Xiong in this dramatic passage: "At the first glance, he looked like a withered vagabond doctor just finished relieving himself in a starkly cold winter... Suddenly, he slammed the table with his palm and solemnly declared that 'at this time, only I, the person Xiong, could talk

about the Late Zhou 周 philosophers, others are all talking nonsense!’ …I was astonished and began to pay attention to this person…With his eyes wide open, focused, and sharp, with a prominent forehead, square mouth, straight cheek bones, and hearing his loud laughter resonating from the center of his being (*dantian* 丹田) to the ceiling, he now appeared clear, unique, handsome and elegant, not boring and breaking the stagnant…He roared like a lion in a chaotic dark age…” (*Learning on Life* 生命的學問, 4th. ed. Taipei 臺北:Sanming Shuju 三民書局.1976, pp. 133-134. This is the only book not included in *The Complete Works* due to copyright issue).

Xiong was clearly a primary spiritual inspiration for Mou, who wrote about how he learned from Xiong the essence of Confucianism: the life-creating creativity of the *quin yuan xing hai* 乾元性海 (the profound nature of the original qian, the first of sixty-four hexagrams in *Yijing*, representing the great creativity of life) as the infinite Mind of universal moral subject *ren* 仁. Mou, however, as evidenced by the scope of the *Complete Works* and especially the culminating *On the Perfect Good*, far surpassed Xiong as an original philosophical contributor to the interpretation of Confucianism in particular and of Chinese philosophy in general.

Mou’s central concerns with Confucianism are to criticize the narrow moralist tendency it contains, to espouse the ontological character of the central Confucian idea *ren*, and to link it to the ultimate moral principle of the perfect good. His concept of perfect good was enriched by the Kantian idea of concordance of virtue and happiness. The moralists who have only a narrow appreciation of *The Analects* and/or *Mencius* never pay enough attention to, nor offer a philosophical basis for, the moral need of concordance of virtue and happiness. In fact, they tend to lose their virtue by overtly abhorring evils. Mou believed that such narrow moralist bias is a result of

focusing on the “ought to” without first establishing a foundation for the “being”. The Confucian foundation for being, *ren*, as interpreted by Mou, is incompatible with the restrictive following of “ought to” rules without allowing the pursuit of a being’s own ultimate nature in harmony with the nature of the external things—the very definition of happiness. The Confucian pursuit of *ren* therefore has the same ontological character as Kant’s concordance of virtue and happiness. It was the deep concern with this ultimate demand of morality of concordance of virtue and happiness that motivated Mou to critically examine the various philosophical systems, East and West, both morally and ontologically, from the view of a transcendental moral subject. Such critical examination led to the development of his philosophical system based on a two-layer ontology—attachment and non-attachment—issued from One-Mind.

Mou also drew heavily on Buddhism in developing his philosophy. In his two-volume *Buddha-Nature and Prajñā* (vol. 3-4), not only did he absorb the concept of dharmas of non-corresponding-to-mind thinking from the *Vijñāna* doctrine, he also learned from Tiantai’s 天台 Preceptor Zhiyi 智顓. He dedicated the entire 2nd volume of *Buddha-Nature and Prajñā* to elaborating Tiantai’s unique teaching. From Zhiyi’s critical examination of different Buddhist schools Mou extracted the philosophical significance of “Perfect Doctrine.” The concept of “Perfect Doctrine,” combined with the idea of “Perfect Good,” pushed Mou’s philosophical thinking to a high plateau. The complete re-evaluation of Song-Ming 宋明 Confucianism with “Perfect Doctrine” and “Perfect Good” led to the very original Three-Strands interpretation, supplanting the orthodox Two-Strands (Cheng-Zhu 程朱 and Lu-Wang 陸王).

Mou identified nine philosophers over the six-hundred-year Song-Ming period as the main bearers of the Confucian tradition. Zhou Lianxi 周濂溪, Zhang Hengqu

張橫渠, Cheng Mingdao 程明道, Hu Wufeng 胡五峰, and Liu Jishan 劉戡山 all approached *Yizhuan* 《易傳》 (*Commentary on the Book of Change*) and *Zhongyong* 《中庸》 (*The Doctrine of Mean*) ontologically, representing the primary tradition of Confucianism. Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 and Wang Yangming 王陽明 focused on Mencius to give attention to the moral subject. Mou deemed these two strands as the essentials of Confucianism. Cheng Yichuan 程伊川 and Zhu Xi 朱熹, on the other hand, erroneously attempted to attain morality through the pursuit of knowledge, and were deemed by Mou as a branch-off doctrine 別子爲宗 from Confucianism proper. This original philosophical picture of Song-Ming Confucianism has become a gateway for modern Confucian thinkers who seek to further develop Confucianism—even those who set out to disprove Mou's interpretation have to start from a thorough analysis of Mou's thoughts. Mou, in this sense, has seemingly gained a Kant-like stature in modern Chinese philosophy. These fruitful treatments of Song-Ming Confucianism were explicated in detail in his three-volume *Mind-Substance and Nature-Substance* (vols. 5-7) and *From Lu Xiangshan To Liu Jishan* (vol. 8), with the latter considered as the 4th volume of the former. Although Mou judged Zhu Xi as a branch-off from the Confucian tradition, he paid high tribute to Zhu by dedicating the entire volume III of *Mind-Substance and Nature-Substance* (vol. 7) to elaborating his philosophy.

Mou was ultimately a typical traditional Chinese Confucian because he was an intellectual who took on the inescapable moral responsibility to respond to the sufferings of his time. In his time, the sufferings came from the assault on and the destabilization of Chinese culture, society, and political structure by the powerful challenges issued by the West. Mou devoted his entire life to responding to such challenges. Specifically, he took the responsibility to rigorously understand the

Western philosophical tradition, which eventually led to the maturation of his philosophy through the assimilation of Kant's philosophy. This in turn produced his systematic critical analyses of the Chinese tradition. Additionally, Mou's original philosophical achievements offer the promise of the future comparative studies of the East and the West, which will equally benefit the development of Chinese and Western philosophies.

For students like myself who studied with Mou in his mature stage (in the latter half of the 1970s), exposure to his early writings was very limited due to lack of access, as well as due to his puzzling discouragement to people who wanted to read them. Once we finally looked into his early writings, we found with delight a pure young mind and a sincere heart filled with eagerness for learning and respect for knowledge, and we completed the picture of how a sincere young thinker grew into a great philosopher of our time. I feel fully justified in going against his advice and stating that his early writings are as inspiring and deserving our full attention as his later works. The publication of the *Compete Works* has provided a greater audience with the opportunity to see how a young mind interested in so many issues matured into a great original philosopher.

As I expect few readers to tackle every single piece of the *Compete Works*, I would like to offer my recommendations for selected readings: for serious readers in Chinese philosophy: *The Particular Characters of Chinese Philosophy* (vol. 28), *Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy* (vol. 29), *Philosophy of History* (vol. 9), *Talent-Nature and Xuan-Metaphysics* (vol. 2), *Buddha-Nature and Prajñā* (vol. 3-4), *Mind-Substance and Nature-Substance* (vol. 5-7), *From Lu Xiangshan To Liu Jishan* (vol. 8), *On the Perfect Good* (vol. 22), and *Autobiography at 50* (vol. 32). For people interested in comparative studies: *Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy*

(vol. 29), *Fourteen Lectures on the Convergence of Chinese-Western Philosophies* (vol. 30), “Introduction” to *Mind-Substance and Nature-Substance* (vol. 5), *Intellectual Intuition and Chinese Philosophy* (vol. 20), *Phenomenon and Thing-in-itself* (vol. 21), *On the Perfect Good* (vol. 22), and *Autobiography at 50* (vol. 32). For general readers trying to gain an overview of Mou’s philosophy: *Lectures and Lectures* only, especially *Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy* (vol. 29). For people who are interested in Mou as a person, read his early writings, especially those critiques on classic literature (novels and poems) (vol. 26), *Learning on Life* (Sanming Shuju, 1970), and his *Autobiography at 50* (vol. 32). Below is a list of contents of different volumes of Mou’s *Complete Works*:

1. *Natural Philosophy and Moral Implications of the Book of Change* 《周易的自然哲學與道德函義》.
2. *Nominalism and Xunzi* 《名家與荀子》; *Talent-Nature and Xuan-Metaphysics* ; 才性與玄理》.
- 3-4. *Buddha-Nature and Prajñā* 《佛性與般若》.
- 5-7. *Mind- Substance and Nature-Substance* 《心體與性體》.
8. *From Lu Xiangshan To Liu Jishan* 《從陸象山到劉戡山》; *Wang Yangming’s Teaching on Completion of Moral Knowledge* 《王陽明致良知教》; *Selections of Jishan’s Complete Collections* 《戡山全書選錄》.
9. *Moral Idealism; Philosophy of History* 《道德的理想主義；歷史哲學》.
10. *Dao of Politics and Dao of Governance* 《政道與治道》.
11. *A Paradigm of Logic* 《邏輯典範》.
12. *Logic* 《理則學》; *A Concise Edition of Logic* 《理則學簡本》.
- 13-14. *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason* 《康德〈純粹理性之批判〉》.

15. *Kant's Moral Philosophy* 《康德的道德哲學》.
16. *Kant's Critique of Judgment* 《康德〈判斷力之批判〉》.
17. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus* 《名理論》; *Collection of Mou Zongsan's Translations* 《牟宗三先生譯述集》.
- 18-19. *A Critique of Cognitive Mind* 《認識心之批判》.
20. *Intellectual Intuition and Chinese Philosophy* 《智的直覺與中國哲學》.
21. *Phenomenon and Thing-in-itself* 《現象與物自身》.
22. *On the Perfect Good* 《圓善論》.
- 23-24. *Reflections on Times* 《時代與感受》; *More Reflections on Times (II)* 《時代與感受續篇》.
25. *Early Essays of Mou Zongsan (I)* 《牟宗三先生早期文集》(上).
26. *Early Essays of Mou Zongsan (II)* 《牟宗三先生早期文集》(下)
; *Unpublished Opus Postumum of Mou Zongsan* 《牟宗三先生未刊遺稿》.
27. *Later Essays of Mou Zongsan* 《牟宗三先生晚期文集》.
28. *Studies on Humanities* 《人文講習錄》; *The Particular Characters of Chinese Philosophy* 《中國哲學的特質》.
29. *Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy* 《中國哲學十九講》.
30. *Fourteen lectures on the Convergence of Chinese-Western Philosophies* 《中西哲學之會通十四講》; *Summary of Song-Ming Confucianism* 《宋明儒學綜述》;
Lectures on Song-Ming Rationalism 《宋明理學演講錄》; *Philosophy of Mind on Lu-Wang System* 《陸王一系之心性之學》.

31. *Lectures on Aristotles' Doctrine of Causality* 《四因說演講錄》; *Lectures on Zhou-Yi Philosophy* 《周易哲學演講錄》.

32. *Autobiography at 50* 《五十自述》; *Mou Zongsan's Philosophical Chronicles* 《牟宗三先生學思年譜》; *Biography for the National History; Chronological Table of Mou's Complete Works* 《國史擬傳; 牟宗三先生著作編年目錄》.