

# Connecting East and West through Modern Confucian Thought: Re-reading 20th Century Taiwanese Philosophy

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## Abstract

This study is an attempt to establish that 20th century's canonized Taiwanese philosopher Mou Zongsan (1909–1995) has contributed significantly to the innovative burgeoning of modern Confucianism (or New Confucianism) with the revision of Western philosophy. This is based on the hypothesis that if ideas travel through the past to the present, and *vice versa*, and if intellectual thinking never knows any national, cultural and social boundaries, then there is an obvious intersection and communication of philosophical thoughts of East and West. This article also contemplates the fact that Western philosophies are widely known as they are widely published, read and circulated. Conversely, due to the language barriers philosophy and philosophers from the East are less widely known. Therefore, this research critically introduces and connects the early 20th century Confucian philosopher Shili Xiong (1885–1968), his disciple the contemporary Taiwanese Confucian intellectual Mou Zongsan, along with the Western philosophers Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), and Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), through ideas like moral autonomy, ethics, ontology, and *imago Dei*. In so doing, the article delineates the path to study 20th century Taiwanese philosophy, or broadly Chinese Confucian philosophy which makes a bridge between the East and the West through Modern Confucianism prevalently called New Confucianism.

**Keywords:** Mou Zongsan, Modern Confucianism, New Confucianism, Immanuel Kant, Martin Heidegger, Herman Bavinck

## Povezovanje Vzhoda in Zahoda skozi moderno konfucijansko misel: ponovno branje tajvanske filozofije 20. stoletja

### Izvleček

Študija poskuša pokazati, da je kanonizirani tajvanski filozof 20. stoletja Mou Zongsan (1909–1995) z revizijo zahodne filozofske tradicije pomembno prispeval k inovativnemu razcvetu modernega konfucijanstva (ali novega konfucijanstva). Izhajamo iz hipoteze, da

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če ideje potujejo skozi preteklost do sedanjosti in *vice versa* in če intelektualno mišljenje ne pozna nacionalnih, kulturnih in družbenih meja, obstajata jasno stičišče in povezava med filozofsko mislijo Vzhoda in Zahoda. V članku razmišljamo tudi o dejstvu, da so zahodne filozofske smeri splošno poznane, saj so močno razširjene in brane. Po drugi strani pa zaradi jezikovnih pregrad filozofija in filozofi Vzhoda niso enako vsesplošno prepoznavni. Ta raziskava zato na kritičen način predstavi konfucijanskega filozofa zgodnjega 20. stoletja Shili Xionga (1885–1968) in njegovega učenca, sodobnega tajvanskega konfucijanskega intelektualca Mou Zongsana, ter ju poveže z zahodnimi filozofi, kot so Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) in Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), in sicer skozi ideje, kot so moralna avtonomija, etika, ontologija in *imago Dei*. Članek tako začrta pot k proučevanju tajvanske filozofije 20. stoletja oziroma, širše, kitajske konfucijanske filozofije, ki skozi moderno konfucijanstvo, v splošnem poznano kot novo konfucijanstvo, pomeni most med Vzhodom in Zahodom.

**Ključne besede:** Mou Zongsan, moderno konfucijanstvo, novo konfucijanstvo, Immanuel Kant, Martin Heidegger, Herman Bavinck

## Introduction: Mou Zongsan as the Greatest Philosopher among Contemporary Modern Confucians

*If twentieth century China produced a philosopher of the first rank,  
it was Mou Zongsan.  
(Clower 2014, 1)*

The epigraph is taken from Jason Clower's edited and translated book, *Late Works of Mou Zongsan*<sup>1</sup>—*Selected Essays on Chinese Philosophy* (2014), where Clower discusses how Mou Zongsan's source of sagacity and the philosophical root of his thought is entrenched in Confucianism. For example, Mou implies Confucian morality with moral metaphysics. Clower also states that Mou (1909–1995) not only held a deep understanding of the philosophical legacy of the East, especially of China, but also had a strong affinity with Western intellectual traditions, including German, Anglo-American, and Greco-Roman philosophy. Although intellectuals like Jiang Qing, Li Zehou, Chan Lai and Lin Anwu criticized Mou on several points—one of which is that he revised Confucianism through the lens of Western thought instead of connecting it with the

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1 Born and educated in Shandong Province of China, and later moving to Taiwan and living there till his last breath, Mou Zongsan 牟宗 is considered a New Confucian philosopher of paramount importance in the modern era. Mou read and wrote on Western philosophers like Immanuel Kant and attempted to revise the latter's system of thought based on Confucian philosophy. See Chan 2006, 125, 126, 139.

local context, particularly with regard to mainland China—what is important that these philosophers do not hold any doubt that Mou relentlessly worked for the revitalization and restoration of Chinese intellectual thought in Taiwan and abroad (Chan 2012, 16–17; Makeham 2008, 175–76). In reality, Mou, the prolific writer and scholar of Confucian philosophy, helped Chinese intellectual traditions escape from considerable confinement and produced several volumes on the intellectual history of the region. Therefore, Mou's lifespan in the 20th century can be designated as covering an era of the revitalization and restoration of Chinese intellectual thought.

While during the course of 20th century the leaders and intellectuals of China were principally considering many varied issues, forms and reforms in the field of Sinification, Taiwanese intellectuals like Mou Zongsan found their way to discover the need to adapt other forms of modern Western thought, particularly originating from German, Anglo-American and Greco-Roman classical philosophy (Billioud 2011; Rošker 2019). The aim was to modernize Chinese traditions and consider Confucianism's appropriateness for a modern society; for example, Confucianism as a cultural force advises ways of living that can advance capitalism and industrialization; and the method used was to apply concepts from the European enlightenment and modernity. Intellectuals like Mou thought that the revitalization and restoration of Confucianism was necessary because, in the mid-20th century, Chinese religious and philosophical traditions (including Confucianism) faced disorder and restrictions in China. For example, during the 20th century Confucianism was rarely offered as a feasible way of thinking, but rather it was condemned as to blame for China's stagnation for the last few of centuries and therefore largely rejected (Sigurðsson 2014, 22), with mostly Taiwanese philosophers pushing for its revitalization and restoration (Rošker 2019). Additionally, in the 1980s this restoration process presented assorted multifaceted, comprehensible and emerging philosophical systems that showed the exceptional inventiveness of many Taiwanese theorists, such as Mou Zongsan.

In post-war Taiwan, various ways of investigating and attempts to develop traditional Chinese thoughts have been identified with the emerging Confucian intellectuals. There is plenty of research on separate aspects of Chinese religious and philosophical traditions, but few studies examine the inherent intersections, origins, and developments that took place at a later stage, especially in the 20th century. This essay studies the thriving development, revitalization and restoration of Chinese intellectual thought in contemporary Taiwanese society, and explores the inherent connection between intellectual thoughts of the East and West through Confucian intellectual traditions. In particular, this research critically introduces and involves the early 20th century Confucian philosopher Shili

Xiong (1885–1968)<sup>2</sup> and his disciple the contemporary Taiwanese Confucian intellectual Mou Zongsan, along with the Western philosophers Immanuel Kant, Martin Heidegger, and Herman Bavinck, using ideas like moral autonomy, ethics, ontology, and *imago Dei*. In so doing, this research familiarizes readers with schools of thought and intellectuals from East with West who have contributed significantly to the innovative burgeoning of contemporary Chinese philosophy, and thus makes a bridge that connects dissimilar discourses across time and space by informing and revealing several otherwise neglected traditions of Confucian philosophy.

### The Revival of Modern Confucianism

In the early 20th century, an invigorated intellectual movement of Confucianism started which has spread its influence beyond the post-Mao era in contemporary China. This modern movement, which is also deeply influenced by but not identical to the Neo-Confucianism of the Song Dynasty, has been designated as New Confucianism. Scholars like John Makeham consider New Confucianism as the neo-conservative movement of several Chinese orthodox *ru* (Confucian) traditions, with religious implications, and that this new movement promotes certain Confucian social elements (for instance, political, ecological and social harmony) as appropriate for the contemporary context in combination with Western ideas like humanism and rationalism (Makeham 2003, 25, 81). The philosophy of New Confucianism is comprised of discussions among Confucian scholars from Taiwan, Hong Kong, the USA, and mainland China, with both first- and second-generation scholars. Before we enter the discussion of how the synthesis (Mou's philosophy in synthesis with that of Western philosophers) can be materialized, this paper attempts to elaborate briefly on the issue of certain Confucian social elements, such as political, ecological and social harmony, and how they can be placed in a contemporary context in combination with Western notions of humanism and rationalism. Several papers regarding this topic have already been published in the journal *Asian Studies* (2014, vol. 2, no.1),<sup>3</sup> from which further understanding can be obtained.

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2 Xiong Shili (1885–1968) is a well-known intellectual and writer of Confucian traditions who was born in Hubei Province in China. He contributed extensively to the revitalization and restoration of Confucianism in 20th century China, and thus is a key person in contemporary Chinese intellectual history, making a path for the rejuvenation of the Confucian “Way”—*dao* (Yu 2002).

3 See “Modern Confucianism and Chinese Modernity” in *Asian Studies* (2014, vol. 2, no.1).

## Promotion of Certain Confucian Social Elements

In the issue of *Asian Studies* titled *Modern Confucianism and Chinese Modernity*, Lee Ming-huei in his Chinese foreword discusses several issues related to the developments of Confucian socio-political elements in the twentieth century. The 1950s saw a debate between the modern Confucians and liberal intellectuals, particularly from Hong Kong and Taiwan. According to Lee, the debate examined whether an ancient Chinese culture like Confucianism was still relevant for the development of modern science, technology and political organization (Lee 2014, 16). The “development of democracy from Confucianism” is a notion that Confucians from Taiwan and Hong Kong presented, and this idea not only advocates the acknowledgment of limitations with regard to the relationship between morality and politics but also reflects the understanding that China needs to update its tradition of Confucianism in order to be “a modern, technologically developed and democratic state” (ibid., 17). The point of departure for Lee is to show how Confucianism does not exclude the other, as he shows how Taiwanese intellectuals have not disregarded pluralistic approaches to democracy that depend on dissimilar cultural traditions. Keeping this view in mind, and although indirectly, these Confucian scholars contributed to the democratization of Taiwan.

Although the discussions and attempts to re-evaluate Confucianism’s suitability for a modernized Asian society took place in China and Taiwan, similar democratization processes also took place in other East Asian countries, such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea, and Vietnam (see Ali 2020). The Confucian scholar Geir Sigurðsson (2014), in his article “Confucianism vs. Modernity: Expired, Incompatible or Remedial?”, notes that Confucianism remains appealing as an ideology, on the basis that Confucianism was the “cultural ground of Singapore’s economic success story” (Sigurðsson 2014, 24). He suggests,

It was in Singapore that Confucianism was first suggested as a potential catalyst for modernization after Lee Kuan Yew’s government introduced Confucian ethics in the secondary curriculum in 1982. What ensued was a major philosophical, sociological and economic discussion hosted by the Institute of East Asian Philosophies (IEAP), which was established at the National University of Singapore in 1983, about Asian and notably Confucian values as an appropriate platform for social and economic modernization. (ibid., 23)

In a critical manner, Sigurðsson briefly informs us about an account of Confucianism’s suitability for a modernized society, and particularly since the 1980s in relation to China. In Singapore there has been a debate as to whether Confucian

values should be re-established due to the fears raised by other ethnic groups in the country with regard to the state being Sinicized. But despite this, the importance and relevance of Confucianism have remained intact in Singapore. Initially, Sigurðsson states how Confucianism has been considered as a stimulant for economic activity in Singapore, due to the Confucian sense of (political and social) collectivism:

By concocting a Confucian cultural foundation, the People's Action Party under Lee Kuan Yew's leadership has found a vindication for continuing its authoritarian rulership in a period of world history characterized by growing demands for stronger democratic principles. The state was attempting to "naturalise, validate, and ironically reunite (Chinese) Singaporeans with a presumed moral and philosophical code". Ong Pang Boon 王邦文, a first-generation People's Action Party politician, and an outspoken critic of the Confucian programme, warned that successive generations of monarchs had always made use of and promoted those parts of Confucianism that were advantageous to feudal rule. In this respect, it is illuminating that in the 1970s and into the mid-1980s, the Singapore leadership praised and encouraged "rugged individualism" until it suddenly began endorsing a Confucian kind of collectivism, duty, and self-sacrifice. (Sigurðsson 2014, 24)

He then moves on to discuss contemporary attempts to accommodate Confucianism in the People's Republic of China (PRC) in order to establish the fact that "Confucianism can be a healthy antidote to some of the ills produced by contemporary capitalist practice" (ibid., 26). While the importance of Confucianism's relevance to China's future has never been undermined, and Confucian values have always been considered as something essential, they re-entered the discussion more strongly in 1989 when the student protests were crushed. In the 21st century, from the grassroots to the state level, Confucianism has become a new and incessant "craze" for "national learning" (*guoxue* 国学). Public and private educational institutions in China have emphasized the continuance of Confucian philosophy, including more than three hundred Confucian Institutes operating globally where Confucianism is presented as an ideology for "China's future", or "a practical guide for everyday life". Though there are different schools of thought (such as Jiang Qing and Kang Xiaoguang) regarding the appropriate way of adopting Confucianism in order to meet modern challenges, Confucian-inspired policies are widely endorsed to create a new "harmonious society".

The basis of this harmonious society depends on factors like the sense of belonging and sharedness in a community. In his article, "Faith and Politics:



(New) Confucianism as Civil Religion”, the scholar Bart Dessein (2014) explores the relevance of Confucian values in contemporary China by re-discussing Confucianism as reflected in China’s political and religious narratives, which seek to generate the sense of belonging and sharedness in a community with a divine mission. This mission is amalgamated with issues like patriotism and nationalism. Dessein interprets these as constitutive elements of a “civil religion with Chinese Characteristics”, which provides the foundation of the Confucian state:

That the Confucian state is characterized by an intimate and reciprocal relationship between the ruling house, state power, the concept of “empire”, and the realm of the divine is well illustrated in the following declaration Emperor Yuan of the Han (r. 48–22 BCE) made at the beginning of his reign: “We make it a point to establish personally our ancestral temple because this is the ultimate power to build up our authority, eliminate the sprouts of rebellion, and make the people one”. This brings us to the broader political mission of the Chinese Confucian state. Commenting on the *Daxue*, (*The Great Learning*), the 39th chapter of the *Liji* (*Records of Ritual*), a work compiled in the Han Dynasty in the 3rd to 2nd centuries BCE, Wing-tsit Chan (1963, 84) says the following: “The importance of this little classic is far greater than its small size would suggest. It gives the Confucian educational, moral, and political programs in a nutshell, neatly summed up in the so-called ‘three items’: manifesting the clear character of man, loving the people and abiding in the highest good; and in the ‘eight steps’: the investigation of things, extension of knowledge, sincerity of the will, the rectification of the mind, cultivation of the personal life, regulation of the family, national order, and world peace.” (Sigurðsson 2014, 47)

The contemporary political and religious mission with its emphasis on patriotism and nationalism reflects this history that signifies national order and world peace. Even in the present religious, historical and political narratives, New Confucianism has been described as a constitutive component of a “civil religion with Chinese Characteristics”. In the West, for example in American society, civil religion can be employed as a tool to operate and transform perceptions about how the USA works as a Christian nation, and which can come close to seeing the USA as embodying God’s will. In the East, Confucianism plays a similar role for Chinese society. Though started in the 20th century, this development gets new shape in the 21st century. For example, on 21 April 2006, the then member of the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party and president of the organizational committee

of the Beijing Olympic Games, Liu Qi, declared the Olympic slogan: “One people, One Dream”. He elaborated that the ideology that China holds is to share the global community and civilization in order to build a bright future, keeping hand-in-hand with people all over the world (ibid., 57). Qi stated this ideology reflects the trust of a great nation with a history of 5,000 years long and its contemporary modernization that is committed to peaceful progress, a harmonious society and the happiness of its people. According to Dessein, Qi’s comments hold three significant claims: a) China as a nation has a history of 5,000 years; b) Chinese desire to be a part of a peaceful globalized world; and c) modernization of earlier Chinese traditions will lead to harmonious society at both the national and international levels (ibid., 57). In 2013, the Chinese government presented this idea as the “Chinese Dream”. These three claims promote two types of nationalism: cultural and political, where cultural nationalism is rooted in the long Chinese history, while political nationalism originated with the concept of modernization that started in the 20th century.

### 20th Century, Xiong Shili and the New Development of Confucianism

In the early 20th century, especially after the May Fourth Movement of 1919, Confucianism was blamed for China’s weakness and decay in the face of Western “aggression”, but a few intellectuals successfully contributed to the revitalization and restoration of Confucianism in the form of New Confucianism (Cheng and Bunnin 2002; Rošker 2009). Although mainstream Chinese philosophers considered that the redemption of China as an integrated society needed the adoption of Western science and democracy, others took the opposite position saying that the crisis in China happened because of the loss of authentic Confucian *dao* (Rošker 2009; Yu 2002). Therefore, the only way forward is not in abandoning Confucianism, but rather in the revival and restoration of the real Confucian spirit (Yu 2002, 127). Some of these thinkers used Asian philosophy to interpret Confucianism in the modern era, while others synthesized it with Western philosophies. The philosopher Shili Xiong (1885–1968) is one of the new representative voices, whose *New Doctrine*<sup>4</sup> is drawn from the Asian intellectual traditions that he considers need to be integrated into contemporary Chinese philosophy in order to better think in terms of “inborn human qualities”. He critically engages with this new approach and discusses how the revival of Confucianism is essential for China:

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4 Yu writes, “it is now almost universally held that in the *New Doctrine*, Xiong built the most creative philosophical system in contemporary Chinese Philosophy” (Yu 2002, 128).



I try to illuminate the fundamentals of benevolence and righteousness. This was accused by many of being impractical and empty. However, if there is no way to stop the prevailing of the heresy and stop its flowing, our country, and our nationality will be extinct. How could there be another way to save [China]. (Xiong in Yu 2002, 127–28)

Because of his distinct way of expressing Chinese philosophical thought in a way that had become even more relevant in contemporary times, Xiong is considered as the most innovative and creative Chinese philosopher of the modern period. According to Ng You-Kwan,

whether judged in terms of depth and comprehensiveness in content or in terms of theoretical vigour, Xiong's philosophical achievements are great and can be compared with those of Western philosophers such as Aristotle, Leibniz, Husserl, Heidegger, and Whitehead. In Chinese philosophy, his scope is on par with that of Zhu Xi (1130–1200) and Wang Fuzhi (Ng 2003, 239).

Xiong was an expert in Buddhist classics, and thus his philosophy also draws on Buddhist philosophy, particularly Yogacara Buddhism. In the first two decades of the 20th century, much importance was placed on logic and this had a great influence on the progress of academic Chinese philosophy. Similarly, the restoration of Yogacara thought by the foremost Chinese intellectuals from the late 1890s to the 1930s played a vital role in determining the currents in Chinese philosophy and modern Chinese thought. In a "Translator's Introduction", the Confucian scholar John Makeham writes:

Yogacara (*Yuqie Xingpai*, yogic practice) is one of the two most influential philosophical systems of Indian Buddhism, along with Madhyamaka. Historically, both *weishi* (nothing but consciousness) and *faxiang* (*dharma-laksana*, dharma characteristics) were used to refer to the Yogacara school in China. After the Tang Dynasty, *faxiang* was used to denote the famous pilgrim and monk Xuanzang's (602–644) Yogacara school, but soon became a mildly derogatory expression used by its opponents, mocking the Yogacaras for pursuing the "characteristics of dharmas" rather than the real nature of dharmas (*faxing*). Despite this, the Yogacaras later adopted the term, and in Japan it continues to be the official name of this school (in Japanese *Hosso*). (Makeham 2015, xii)

The background discussion on Yogacara Buddhism not only informs us about the basis of Xiong's philosophy, but also helps us to trace how Xiong's disciples

were influenced by this. For example, Mou Zongsan's intellectual traditions were also influenced by Yogacara Buddhism, where, like Yogacara, Mou also believes that objectivity is not possible without subjectivity. Moreover, Xiong claims that the classics of Eastern thought should be unified with modern Chinese thinking for more practical strength, while he also identifies the same need in Buddhism regarding "inborn human qualities". Xiong finds the brighter sides to "inborn human qualities", and he discards the Buddhist teachings of "daily decrease"—a philosophy that indicates the negative aspects of human nature and then guides us to decrease them—and states that the exercise of restraining one's dark nature is compulsory, which he connects and learns from classical Confucianism. His understanding of Confucianism claims that it not only scrutinizes the dark aspects of "inborn human qualities", but also considers how it is necessary to get used to rituals, the purpose of maintaining rituals and the achievement of *ren*, and this approach does not focus on restricting the negative sides of "inborn human qualities", but instead on adopting the "the fundamental goodness" that Mencius calls the *duan* of humans (Xiong 2015, 129). Moreover, Xiong argues that the root of the "daily decrease" is in Buddhism's metaphysical belief of an "unbridgeable" division between an utterly fixed reality, and a continuously varying and conditional phenomenal world, what Jiyuan Yu calls "separation theory"—a theory that separates the objective world from the mind, or reality from substance (Yu 2002). This utterly fixed reality (Dharma-nature or *fa-xiang*) and conditional phenomenal world (*Dharma*-Characters, or *fa-xiang*) become the centre of attraction for Confucian scholars. Because Xiong's theory of correcting the "daily decrease" relies heavily on what Jiyuan designates the "sameness thesis"—a thesis that claims the two worlds are unified or come as the same entity. Xiong claims, fundamentally, the exact reality and function are not two different things with two different natures, but one—the world of reality and function is a unity:

If they are separable, the function will differ from original reality and exist independently, and in that way, the function will have its original reality. We should not seek for some entity outside function and name it original reality. Furthermore, if original reality exists independently of function, it is a useless reality. In that case, if it is not a dead thing, it must be a dispensable thing. Thinking back and forth, I believe that original reality and function are not separable. This should be beyond doubt. (Xiong in Yu 2002, 133)

Xiong further states that function is not something we perceive other than original reality. In that case, we will need to search for another basis of function.

He considers that any function must presume a basis and hereafter needs to be distinguished from original reality, which will result in a “*regress ad infinitum*”. Moreover, his idea of this unity reflects his earlier works like *New Treatise on the Uniqueness of Consciousness*, where he claims that reality is congruent to mind:

My aim in writing this treatise is to awaken those who study the learning that is concerned with fundamental wisdom to understand that reality (*tuttva*) is not a perceptual field detached from one’s mind, nor it is a cognitive object of knowledge. This is because it is only by seeking within that there is correspondence with true realization. True realization is the self’s recognizing the self, with absolutely nothing concealed. Correspondence with true realization is called wisdom because it differs from the mundane world, which is established on the basis of discernment (*prajna*). (Xiong 2015, 21)

Therefore, for Xiong, reality is equal to mind which does not reveal itself to one’s mind, but is about universal presence. In this sense, there is a universality of mind amongst all beings, and accordingly this form of being is the reality. In this way, he indicates and emphasizes the self-mastery of one’s desires. He claims that by failing to control one’s desire of the mind, one remains a “heap of dead matter”. His argument is that one should perceive the substances of the world internally, because what is external is eventually also internal, and they are one as both mind and reality. Later we see this in Mou’s intellectualism, that was also influenced by Yogacara Buddhism, which believes that no objectivity is possible aside from subjectivity.

## Connecting East to West: Mou’s Confucian Philosophy with Western Philosophy

The founding father of the modern New Confucian school of philosophy, Shili Xiong, helped produce a few towering figures who later carried the legacy of modern Confucian thought and contributed to its flourishing. Xiong’s best-known students are Tang Junyi (1909–1978), Xu Fuguan (1903–1982) and Mou Zongsan (1909–1995), who were not only great disciples but also promoted Xiong’s philosophical ideas, helping “cultural China” to become the dominant philosophical current of Chinese philosophy in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. In the last few decades, there have been attempts to criticize Xiong’s philosophy using a narrow point of view, but in making Xiong a crucial link in the “transmission of the succession of the way” from the Ming Dynasty to the 20th century and

the retrospective creation of the New Confucian School, his disciples (like Mou Zongsan) “inherited, carried on, and advanced the teaching of the Humaneness of Confucian sages, and also inherited, carried on and advanced the aspirations of the Great Confucians of late Ming” (Makeham 2015, xiv). Therefore, Mou Zongsan is respected as one of the most influential second-generation philosophers whose philosophy of metaphysics eventually connects with Xiong’s. What is important about Mou is that he has built upon Xiong’s theories on “mind and reality” with regard to their more practical, socio-political aspects: claiming that universality should exist in all philosophical truth, and proposing that political and social notions of the world can be linked in the essence of goodness. For Mou, particularity exists because of the dissimilar systems that are grounded in different cultures. Yet, after a range of philosophical reasonings and interpretations, these dissimilar systems arrive at a similar philosophical truth. He understands that our physical limitations and restrictions—for example, our physical being—make these dissimilar systems and dissimilar cultures. Moreover, aspects of being that appear in the mind—for instance, forms—are still revealed and exist within this physical world. Mou advocates that we should not let these restrictions deter us from being involved with the philosophical reasoning of society, culture, science, and politics (ibid. 2015).

A historical necessity—the philosophical type of necessity that derives from the essence of the things which follow from the internal connection of social phenomenon—that follows human beings’ particularity is at the centre of Mou’s political philosophy. He suggests that dissimilar systems of dissimilar nations and their existence can be interpreted chiefly because of this historical necessity. Mou states that historical necessity occurs not only due to logical need or metaphysical requirement, but also due to the development of a spirit that he designates as “dialectical necessity”—which promotes establishing the spirit of truth through reasoned arguments. He argues that we should perceive and explain history as an entity that has historical necessity (here he means dialectical necessity) and ethical necessity—a necessity that is guided by moral obligations—which leads him to conclude that there should only be two types of judgment, moral, and historical. He asserts whether it is Chinese or Greek, the basic requirements in terms of the background of history and fundamental human characteristics are identical, and thus universality in philosophical truth occurs even behind history and politics. Mou’s understanding of historical and moral judgment is directly related to New Confucianism, where he strives to contribute to the re-evaluation of Sinology and modernization of Chinese culture and generates his ideas around the New Confucian manifesto, harmonious society and inclusive wisdom (Rošker 2016b). The new Confucian Manifesto as a phrase was first used in 1963,

following the essay “A Manifesto on Chinese Culture to the World”, (1958) by Mou Zongsan, Tang Junyi, Xu Fuguan, and Zhang Junmai. Eventually, this work became more important and has since been designated as the New Confucian Manifesto, even though the writers did not use this term in the article (Yu 2008). This manifesto offers a vision of Chinese culture which holds fundamental unity through all history, with Confucianism the highest expression of it. The account of Confucianism provided by the Manifesto is heavily influenced by Neo-Confucianism, especially a version of Neo-Confucianism is linked with a philosopher from the Ming Dynasty, Wang Yangming (1472–1529), in contrast to a version set out by a philosopher of Song Dynasty, Zhu Xi (1130–1200). The Confucian scholar Fang Keli claims that this manifesto has had a huge influence and should be considered “the most important event in the course of the second development phase of modern Neo-Confucianism” (Fang 1995, 24). The main argument of the manifesto is that China must learn modern science and democracy from the West, while the West should learn from the Chinese intellectual tradition, particularly from Confucianism, which is often considered as a pearl offering all-encompassing wisdom (Bresciani 2001), and which also works as the basis of a harmonious society (Rošker 2016a).

The notion of a harmonious society and Confucianism are interconnected, where the idea itself refers to the time of Confucius and the philosophy around it, which also featured in the development of New Confucianism (Fan 2010; Rošker 2016a). In the contemporary discussion, it comes back as a vital characteristic of ex-Communist Party general secretary Hu Jintao’s signature ideology of the Scientific Development Concept that flourished between 2000 and 2010, which was revised by the Hu-Wen administration during the 2005 National People’s Congress (Bell 2006; Perris 1983). The reason for this philosophy of social harmony becoming more important is the growing social inequality and injustice in mainland China due to its regulated economic growth, which has resulted in social conflict. Therefore, the philosophy of the governing body has changed in the face of economic developments to embrace an inclusive societal balance and harmony (Fan 2006). The making of a harmonious society has been set as one of the national goals for the ruling Communist Party, along with its aim of creating a moderately prosperous society. Embracing and promoting the way of a harmonious society shows that Hu Jintao surpassed the ruling philosophy of the previous leaders. During his time and near the end of his years in power, Hu attempted to spread this philosophy to give it an international dimension in order to promote international peace and cooperation, with a view to creating a harmonious world, although Hu’s successor Xi Jinping has employed it in a more careful manner (Zhong 2006). As in the governing bodies,

there are different views among the Confucian scholars on this issue. For example, Daniel A. Bell and Yan Xuetong call for the reestablishment of meritocratic Confucian institutions like the Censorate—a high-level supervisory body of ancient China, which was established during Qing Dynasty—and other bodies as a part of the New Confucian political agenda (Bell 2016; Yan 2018). On the other hand, scholars like Jana S. Rošker state that Confucianism is not something we can call a monolithic system of thought, nor a static traditional philosophy, but instead Confucianism is more a dissimilar stream of thoughts that can be employed moderately, subjectively and selectively by modern thinkers, as epitomized by their use in legitimizing the state power (Rošker 2016a; 2019). Taking the historical expansion of the notion of harmony, it is possible to see to what degree the philosophical traditions are grounded on historical conventions and to what degree they are an artefact of the modern Western philosophical and political strains of the current period. For example, Mou has taken steps to integrate the Confucian philosophical traditions and notions with Western thoughts on metaphysics, and attempted to delineate the innovative development of New Confucianism in 20th century China and the international arena of philosophical judgments concerning the Western philosophical ideas. Drawing from Jana S Rošker's *Rebirth of the Moral Self* (2016b), Dessein discusses how Mou differentiated a traditional Chinese “functional expression of reason” from a “Western constructive expression of reason”:

Having studied Western philosophy from a comparative perspective with the indigenous Confucian tradition, he differentiated what he called a traditional Chinese “functional expression of reason” (*lixingzhi yunyong biaoqian*) from a Western “constructive expression of reason” (*lixingzhi jiagou biaoqian*). For him, the “functional expression of reason” is to be equated with one’s morality, that is, to speak with Zhu Xi, the result of the way *qi* operates in function of the principle *li*. This “functional expression of reason” is practical in the sense that it is connected with actual life. Influenced by Wang Yangming’s *xinxue* thinking that “the origin of the intention is the possibility for knowledge”, he advocated that China’s traditional lack of a “constructive expression of reason”—his interpretation of Kant’s “theoretical reason”—had to be solved through finding “intellectual intuition” also in Chinese “functional reason”. The moral self in its “functional expression of reason” and the empirical self, understood as morality in the sphere of concrete performance in the world, were thus seen as parts of the same thing. (Dessein 2016, 282)



## Mou's Version of Confucianism and Kantian Philosophy

Mou Zongsan articulates and rationalizes a moral metaphysics<sup>5</sup> similar to that of his teacher Shili Xiong. Mou's intellectual ideas address the boundary of Kantian philosophy and assert the ways in which Confucianism exceeds Kantian morality, particularly in his works such *Intellectual Intuition and Chinese Philosophy* (1974) and *Phenomenon and Thing-in-Itself* (1990), which show his commitment to engagement with Kant (Bresciani 2001; Bunnin 2008). While Confucianism encourages Mou to transmute the Kantian concepts of "intellectual intuition", "Thing-in-Itself" and "moral autonomy", perhaps not only because of Kant's emphasis on the limits of knowledge and Confucian way of promoting knowledge of the world, but also Kant's asymmetrical emphasis on the doctrine of the method, Mou presents his philosophy in Kantian terms and inherits these ideas in his philosophical conceptions (Billioud 2006). Why he does so is not entirely clear, but looking at Mou's comparative study of Mencius and Kant scholars like Qiong Guo consider that he employs these concepts to facilitate a dialogue between the West and East through a demonstration of the compatibility of Chinese and Western philosophies (Guo 2007, 345–46, 349). Moreover, Sébastien Billioud discusses how Kant remains a pivotal subject of philosophical departure for Mou:

Kant is a pivotal reference for Mou, who considers that his emphasis both on the limits of knowledge and on the importance of practical philosophy echoes, to some extent, the focus on "life" (*shengming*, i.e., self-cultivation and self-transformation) rather than on "nature" (*ziran*, i.e., knowledge of the world) favoured by Chinese thought. However, though this proximity is a strong argument in favour of a dialogue with Kant, it should not be overstated. The very structure of Kant's masterpieces (a "Doctrine of Elements", a "Doctrine of Method") is revealing: on the other hand, the emphasis on method is for Mou an interesting departure point for a dialogue with Chinese thought; on the other hand, the total asymmetry between the two-part (a huge doctrine of the elements, a tiny doctrine of method), especially in the critique of reason, also points, in Mou's opinion, to the weakness and deficiencies of the Kantian project. (Billioud 2011, 10)

Kant's critical philosophy has been developed, critiqued and renovated through Mou's philosophical lens. Mou attempts to connect Confucianism and Kantianism because he finds both are corroborated by the *dao* (Way), where the *dao* is a fundamental truth and these two philosophies just manifest the different aspects

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5 That discusses the link between morality and ontology indicating the moral value of objects and self.

of it (Jiadong 2005; Schmidt 2011). Mou approaches Kant critically and comparatively, and Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in particular remains his centre of attraction, and one of his key criticisms involves Kant's esteem for free will as something theoretical (Chan 2006; Guo 2007). The different here with Kant is that Mou considers morality as something real, and thus moral life is not confined within the theoretical paradigm. This conjecture derives from Mou's understanding of the metaphysical necessity of the ability to develop one's moral praxis. With this, Mou shapes a moral metaphysics within the precept of subjectivism, while Kant conceives that intellectual intuition is only subject to God. However, we can also understand Mou's intellectual intuition with reference to Heidegger's "fundamental ontology"—where due to reinterpreting phenomenology, Heidegger considers that ontological examination is indeed something more prehistoric, as against the ontical examination of the positive sciences (Heidegger 2010, 3). Mou attributes intellectual intuition to human beings' ability to perceive this intuition, which is superior, as Mou explores, to Heidegger's fundamental ontology (Chan 2006). Mou departs from Heidegger only because of Kant, who believes that true metaphysics is transcendent. Mou then transforms Kant's philosophy into what is widely referred to as "Mind Confucianism", also known as New Confucianism.

### Mou and the Concept of *imago Dei*

While Kant finds the highest intellectual intuition is to be close to God, Mou anthropocentrically makes it possible to develop one's "inborn human qualities", which can also be elaborated with Neo-Calvinist Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck's (1854–1921) idea of "inborn human qualities" as the centre of *imago Dei*. As a theologian, Bavinck is quite well-known to Christian Chinese intellectuals. His books *The Philosophy of Revelation* (1909) and *Essays on Religion, Science and Society* (translated in 2008) remain quite insightful to readers (see Bavinck 1908; 2008). His vision of considering human beings as not carrying the reflection of God's highest goodness, but instead as the image of Him when both their soul and body practice righteousness, goodness and holiness, has recently been studied concerning Mou's New Confucian philosophy of "the inner benevolence and righteousness of human heart-mind (*renyi neizai yu xin*)" (Xu 2017, 301). Mou's philosophy is focused on a moral subjectivity and autonomy that designate his human-centered optimism. His interpretation concerning "inborn human qualities" is to declare the complete transcendence of humanity and the essential goodness of these qualities. Bavinck expresses the theocentric view of "inborn human qualities", promoting God as the absolute archetype, not humanity, but attempts to show the relationship between God and humankind where humanity is the *imago*

*Dei*, that can only be reinstated in Christ. The ideas of Mou and Bavinck are interconnected, because a dialogue has been created by showing a buffer zone with a clear differentiation between Bavinck's God and Kant's God (ibid., 323). Moreover, the parallel understanding between the "descending heavenly decree" and the *imago Dei* displays the formulation of their dialogical relationship. The idea of *imago Dei* can not only be articulated with the form of "descending heavenly decree" in Confucianism, but this can also be enhanced and developed through the further elaboration of modern ideas on the *imago Dei*. It is important to note that Mou's idea regarding outer kingliness can further be highlighted through a discussion of Bavinck's political theology and organism, by incorporating metaphysical elements to reflect his moral metaphysics:

The kingliness is concerned with democracy and science, which is the consequence of the realization of inner sagesness through self-cultivation to save and revitalize China. Mou's outer kingliness is characterized by individualism, which particularly highlights individual moral efforts. This moral praxis will contribute to the construction of a community, in a broad sense, namely a nation. Mou adopts the pattern of individual-to-community to elaborate outer kingliness [...] His "outer kingliness" simplifies and reduces the problem of evil to political and social issues so as to deal with the cultural and political crisis in China. His failure to construe the multifaceted causes of evil leads to a politically and culturally Sinocentric outer kingliness [...] In this regard, Bavinck's organicism is an appropriate supplement to Mou's outer kingliness. Bavinck critiques the non-Christian worldview as it "lacks the concept of humanity as a single interrelated organism and could never come up with the idea of a kingdom in which both the individual and the group would develop their full identities". Bavinck here articulates an organic relationship between individual and community by the notion of the Kingdom. The Kingdom, which is the highest good, is intimately connected to every aspect of life. It includes political life. Hence, the organic relationship also involves Bavinck's Political Theology. (Xu 2017, 322)

My study emphasizes and explores the concept of *imago Dei* because the idea seems to be one of the key issues not only for the philosophical discussion of Mou and Kant, but also for other Western philosophers who critically engage with absolute goodness and the exercise of free will. The idea of *imago Dei* even seems to be of high interest to intellectuals of the 20th century and after. In the modern era as well as in contemporary times, this Latin expression *imago Dei* ("Image of God") has often been connected to the ideas of "freedom/free-will" and relationality. For

example, the 20th century Swiss philosopher Emil Brunner expresses states that the social aspects of “inborn human qualities”, as beings created in the image of God, signify being as “Subject, or freedom”; it is the way that humanity is distinguished from other creatures (Brunner 2014, 55). This discussion relates to Mou’s approach to New Confucianism, where Mou’s stresses the exercise of free will for the highest goodness. Additionally, Mou’s approach to New Confucianism can also be understood with the 20th century French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005), who is known for synthesizing phenomenology with hermeneutics. Ricoeur asserts that *imago Dei* does not have any defined meaning, and the author of the *Genesis Creation Narrative* (creation myth) has surely not mastered its full treasure of meaning: “In the very essence of the individual, in terms of its quality as a subject; the image of God, we believe, is the very personal and solitary power to think and to choose; it is interiority” (Ricoeur and Gingras 1961, 37). For Ricoeur, the *imago Dei* can best be articulated through structures of experience and perfect consciousness (phenomenology), and thus can be concluded as something determined by free will (ibid., 50). Moreover, this idea of free will also has a strong place in Heidegger’s phenomenological stance, and it differs from Kant’s view regarding free will, as will be discussed below.

## Philosophical Intersection between Mou and Heidegger

Mou’s critique and transformation of Kant’s ideas led him to Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). Mou found interest in Heidegger through reading his books, specifically *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1997) and the *Introduction to Metaphysics* (2000), where Heidegger extensively discusses and criticizes Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (see Heidegger 1997; 2000). Mou’s explanation of Kant’s philosophy was thus deeply influenced by Heidegger’s philosophy. For example, Mou transforms his approach to explaining the first critique by Kant from an epistemological to an ontological approach (Chan 2006, 126–27). Mou’s book *Intellectual Intuition and Chinese Philosophy* (1974) reflects on of Heidegger’s thoughts, where Mou considers chapters from *Being and Time*. However, Mou criticizes Heidegger’s essential ontology in terms of his moral metaphysics. Mou’s early work, *Substance of Mind and Substance of Humaneness* (see Mou 1969), is also influenced by Heidegger, and contemporary scholars like Chan believe that, based on Max Müller’s works, Mou’s declaration of the “Three Modes of Neo-Confucianism” draws from Heidegger’s “Three ontological differences” (Chan 2012). Additionally, Sébastien Billioud discusses how Mou observes Heidegger’s fundamental ontology:

Heidegger's starting point is the radical finitude of human existence, and Mou Zongsan observes that fundamental ontology is the ontological analysis of this limited essence (*ren de youxian benzhi*). Such an ontology should make it possible to disclose "the Being of *Dasein*". *Dasein* relates to man questioning his own existence which he finds problematic and which consequently raises the issue of Being, the issue of his Being when he is gobbled up by daily reality. Mou Zongsan translates the concept in several different ways: *zai nali*, *zaizheli*, *you chujing de zai* (which literally corresponds to the idea of "being in situation") *orhunran zhong chu de cunzhe zhi zai* which we could try to translate as the "Being of beings indulged in everyday life". Everyday life (*Alltäglichkeit*, *richangxing*) "from which Heidegger starts his analysis of human existence" represents the most concrete dimension of our existence. (Billioud 2006, 227)

To a certain extent, Mou Zongsan shows his agreement with Heidegger's explanation of Kant. He commences a dual-layer frame of conceiving the transcendental purpose of Kantian categories, "logical" and "ontological" layers of understanding. Mou proposes that Kant's thesis of "objectivity is subjectivity" denies the "ontical proposition" and supports the "ontological proposition", where he shows consent to the analysis of Transcendental Schematism by Heidegger, signifying the denotation of objectification which presumes a subjective horizon that makes the object appear. Mou asserts the ontology of the phenomenal world, calling it "attached ontology" (*ibid.*). Here Mou encircles Heidegger's position of the subjective character of transcendental distinction by Kant, learning it from the *Kantbuch* itself. Heidegger argues that the difference between the notion of a thing in itself and the presence of it is not objective but only subjective: "the thing in itself is not another but another aspect of the representation with regard to the same object" (Heidegger 1997, 37). In his treatise, *Intellectual Intuition and Chinese Philosophy*, Mou embraces a critical approach to the "fundamental ontology" by Heidegger, showing how he fails to reflect the significance of true mind:

Heidegger's descriptions could let us think of disclosure of "true mind" (*zhen xin*) for instance when he speaks about "call of consciousness" (*ruf*, *liangxix de huhuan*), feeling of guilt (*jiuze zhi gan*), dread (*Sorge*, *jiaolu*), determined being (*Entschlossenheit*, *jueduan*) or nothingness (*Nichtigkeit*, *xuwu*). Nevertheless, all these descriptions are still "floating" and he has not been able to pave the way for a "true mind". (Mou 1974, 362)

For Mou, Heidegger's thoughts are sometimes "floating" due to his inability to identify the transcendental reality, but he emphasizes immanent metaphysics to

advance his essential ontology. For Mou, true metaphysics is “transcendental” (ibid., 32), and since the immanent metaphysics only concentrates on the problem of the connotation of phenomenal beings, it is unable to cope with Kantian transcendental notions of God, immortality, and freedom. Moreover, Mou takes Heidegger’s intellectual thoughts as something too ambitiously romantic that are incapable of maintaining an essential serenity to reach to the idea of “true mind”. Mou also finds Heidegger’s approach something “morally-neutral”, and this lack of moral awareness reflects that his (Heidegger’s) essential ontology is incapable of reaching the arena of moral metaphysics, and suggests a futile response to the subject (Liangkang 2002). Therefore, Heidegger becomes a mere “commentator” of Kant because he only stays with the Kantian thesis of the “finitude” of a human being, and cannot identify human being’s intellectual intuition, and thus his fundamental ontology results in an unsuccessful contribution to philosophy (Mou 1975).<sup>6</sup> It is important to note here that some scholars suggest that Mou’s critique of Heidegger’s essential ontology misplaces his (Heidegger’s) transcendental metaphysics, because Mou could have agreed more than he thought (Liangkang 2002). Moreover, Heidegger’s explanation of Being essentially reaches a parallel metaphysical level with Mou’s explanations of transcendental ideas of freedom, *ren* or *Dao* and God. Moreover, they share an analogous interpretation of knowledge, where Mou considers that moral learning leads to moral metaphysics and Heidegger considers that human beings can open themselves to Being in their everyday lives. What is also crucial, and Mou has not articulated, is to understand the conception of *time* between Kant and Heidegger. Heidegger’s *time* offers both essential characteristics for *being* an essential revelation of *being* where *time* remains *a priori* knowledge for Kant and it is the temporality of *Dasein*—the experience of Being that is peculiar to human beings. Therefore, to some extent, there is a fundamental nature in Heidegger’s *time* and Being, which overwhelms the regular perception of *time* in a phenomenal world. As such, Mou’s metaphysics does not depart from Heidegger’s metaphysics, but rather they intersect and meet at a common ground: the relationship between the phenomenal world and metaphysical ontology. This is the same relationship that his teacher Xiong Shili called on him to recognize in the fundamental unification of the two through intellectual intuition, the concept of which is broadly revealed in Confucian, Neo-Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist thoughts. The idea of intellectual intuition is also manifested in the Neo-Confucian thinker Wang Yangming through the various courses of action. For Mou, this is not something highly complex but a

6 See Marthe Chandler’s review of Li Zehou’s *The Chinese Aesthetic Tradition* (Chandler 2012, 148). Chandler discusses that Wing-Cheuk Chan (2006) translates the title as *Phenomenon and Thing-in-Itself*.



form of knowledge system that can be gained through our daily performances and mannerisms, including emotions and intentions.

### Conclusion—Mou’s Vision to Attain Universal Happiness

Intending to revitalize and restore Chinese cultural, political and moral traditions (particularly Confucianism), modern-day government officials, intellectuals and thinkers promote the slogan: “Chinese learning as essence, Western learning as a tool” (*zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong*) (Xu 2017). This has been well-practiced by contemporary Taiwanese philosophers who not only have worked for the revitalization of the Chinese intellectual tradition, but also promoted it all over the world by connecting it with Western philosophical traditions. Mou offers his moral metaphysics, especially good consciousness (*linagzhi*) and intellectual intuition (*zhi de zhijue*), to recognize the substance in his philosophical system, and elects to interpret his intellectual thoughts using Heideggerian and Kantian terminology to promote the essence of morality, while Confucianism, which often refers to the essence of human beings and intellectual intuition, is the force of this morality, which exists within the intellectual and transcendental mind of individuals across time and place.

Mou believes that attributing human beings with intellectual intuition given then a moral responsibility which allows individuals to enter into universal intellectual goodness, including Chinese philosophical traditions and the Western intellectual legacy. For example, this moral responsibility allows individuals to enter into Kant’s noumenon—objects or sensical event that exists independently of human sense or perception—which is completely unknowable through regular human sensation. For Mou, intellectual intuition for humans is the basis of all Chinese thought. In his book *Phenomena and Noumena*, Mou articulates that “if it’s true that human beings cannot have intellectual intuition, then the whole of Chinese philosophy must collapse completely” (Bunnin 2008, 624). This very claim is the quintessence of Mou’s philosophical expertise which, if it holds, shows that (New) Confucianism is intellectually ready for the challenges of today, and Mou’s contemporaries and successors debate its validity while maintaining the intellectual legitimacy of Chinese intellectual traditions and New Confucianism, autonomous of intellectual intuition.

What is more significant in Mou, in harmony with his concept of intellectual intuition, is his devotion to the idea of moral transformation, in which he believes that all individuals without any restrictions of culture and creed can transcend themselves and in due course become sages. Mou’s idea of moral transformation

is not only grounded in Confucianism, but is also connected to the idea of the “highest good”—*summum bonum*—which centres both the Western moral philosophical world of the Greco-Roma, Anglo-American and German intellectual legacy and the Eastern traditional philosophical principles. This is the ultimate idea or destination where there exists a connection between an individual’s pursue of happiness and the real achievement of happiness.

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