

THE THOUGHT OF MOU ZONGSAN

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Abstract

This study introduces and examines the thought of Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909-1995), generally recognised as the most creative and systematic *Xin Rujia* 新儒家 (New Confucian) thinker. Because very little about his thought has been written in English, this study contributes to the understanding and interpretation of Chinese thought by filling a gap in Western scholarship on a key twentieth-century *Ru* thinker.

The study accomplishes four objectives. The first objective is to examine the making of Mou's thought by tracing the various influences that shaped his philosophical thinking. Mou's thought is multi-faceted and complex. It reflects the historical time he lived in, the person he was, and the many ideological and intellectual influences that shaped his thinking. Scholars usually regard Mou's thought as a contemporary moral metaphysical reading of *Ru* thought based on the Lu-Wang Learning of the Mind, the stream of Song-Ming *Ruxue* (Neo-Confucianism) associated with Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (1139-1193) and Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529). Yet, as this thesis shows, Mou's thought is also cultural nationalist, anti-Communist, moral idealistic, Hegelian, and Kantian.

The second objective of this thesis is to introduce Mou's thought as a contemporary reading of *Ruxue*—in the form of a moral metaphysics based on the Lu-Wang Learning of the Mind. Mou's moral metaphysics reflects his understanding of the human mind as informed by the teachings of Mengzi 孟子 (Mencius) (ca 372-289 B.C.), the Lu-Wang Learning of the Mind, and the writings of Song-Ming *Ru* thinkers besides Lu and Wang. It seeks to elucidate the metaphysics of the Lu-Wang Learning of the Mind using Mahāyāna *Fo* (Buddhist) paradigms and Kantian terminology.

The third objective is to reveal the strong Han cultural nationalism that drove Mou's philosophical career. While most scholars recognise that a major, if not the most significant, contribution of Mou is in the metaphysical development of *Ru* thought, much of his writings can be seen as a relentless attempt to provide a systematic and theoretical grounding for his proposal for China's cultural reconstruction, a proposal known as the *santong* 三統 (three-unities) proposal. My aim is to show that Mou's moral metaphysics and cultural nationalist discourse are entwined. I examine his conception of Chinese culture and *Ruxue* and his notion of the third epoch of *Ruxue*. I also study his *santong* proposal, his new *daotong* 新道統 discourse (new genealogical account of the transmission of the way), which is based on his revisionist assessment of Song-Ming *Ruxue*, and the key role he played in the *Xin Rujia* movement.

The last objective is to examine critically the scholarly reception of Mou's thought and discuss how the legacy of Mou's *Xin Rujia* thought has lived on. Mou's system of thought is rigorously logical and coherent when assessed in terms of its internal philosophical premises and paradigms. Supporters embrace and acclaim it. Distracters, however, find fault with it, sometimes harshly. I highlight the major merits and deficiencies of Mou's thought as perceived by his critics.

Thesis Declaration

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