

MOU ZONGSAN'S TRANSLATION OF HÖLDERLIN'S "WITHDRAWAL OF GOD" AND HIS POLITICAL UTOPIA

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Abstract: In the essay Lun Shangdi Yintui [On the Withdrawal of God], Mou Zongsan (1909-1995) recontextualized the concept of "withdrawal of God," a constant theme repeatedly appearing in Hölderlin's writing, within a set of Confucian literary and cultural parameters, thus inventing for this concept new readers and challenging the long established Confucian tradition of "tian ren he yi" [the unity of heaven and man]. This transformation has important bearing on Mou's political philosophy. Though recognized by many scholars as a political utopia, Mou's political philosophy embodies a utopian impulse that goes beyond the realizable and actualizable in order to bring a fantastic power of transgressing limiting boundaries. In this sense, we find Mou's political philosophy a plausible one and certainly worthy of our reexamination.¹

Forewords

During the years of 1949 to 1966, in order to express their dismay towards the Communists-dominated China and the predominant acceptance of Western-style science and philosophy as the only way towards Chinese modernization, which were advocated mainly by May Fourth iconoclasts, the Neo-Confucian intellectuals, such as Xu Fuguan, Mou Zongsan, and Tang Junyi, published together a biweekly magazine, the *Critique of Democracy* (Min Zhu Ping Lun 民主評論) and vowed to defend and revitalize the value of Confucian heritage. This magazine was considered the best channel at that time employed by these Chinese exiles to express their views and angst against the Chinese Communist Party and to show their desire to integrate both the Chinese and Western traditions. The main subject matter of this magazine lies in its hybrid nature of encompassing not only the comparison of cultures the East and the West but also the translation and transformation of the philosophical ideas imported from the West. At this juncture, this essay intends to discuss the article, "*On the Withdrawal of God*"², written by Mou Zongsan in the year of 1953 and his translation and transformation of the ideas of some important figures, such as *Hölderlin* and *Heidegger*, and indicates what impact this cross-cultural transformation had been made and to what extent this might be relevant to the later development of

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² Mou Zongsan, "On the Withdrawal of God" (Lun Shangdi Yintuei), collected in *The Complete Works of Mou Zongsan*, 2003 a.

Mou's philosophy.

I. Mou's Transformation of *Hölderlin's Withdrawal of God and the Relationship between Heaven and Man*

The article "On the *Withdrawal of God*" was written in 1953, in which Mou focused on the concepts raised up in Heidegger's influential commentaries on *Hölderlin's* poetry. Heidegger's commentaries were taken from two articles, "*Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung*" (1936), also translated as "*Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry*", and "*Heimkunft/An die Verwandten* (1944)" which was translated into English as "*Remembrance of the Poet*." In the two essays, Heidegger proposed his own views about the dialectic relations between God and man. Interestingly, just a year before Mou published this paper, Tang Junyi had published a paper "*On Heidegger's Existentialism*"³ talking about Heidegger's philosophy and *Hölderlin's* poetry. Since the Neo-Confucian thinkers worked quite closely at the time and tended to draw a comparison between the Western and Chinese cultural traditions, it is reasonable to assume Mou Zongsan may have read Tang's paper in 1952 from which he had the inspiration to form his argumentation about the issue of God and man in his article. It is also interesting to note that Tang's understanding towards Heidegger's commentaries on *Hölderlin* was from his reading of Werner Brock's introductory essay on Heidegger in the same book edited by Brock (Tang, 1978, 106). In addition, these two essays discussing *Hölderlin's* poetry, *Remembrance of the Poet* and *Hölderlin and the Essence of poetry*, were translated by Douglas Scott and commented by Brock in the first half section of this book. Basically, Mou's renditions of *Hölderlin's* writing are the results of the following steps of cross-cultural transmission: *Hölderlin* wrote the poetry where the theme of *Der Fehl des Gottes* was expressed, Heidegger wrote the commentaries and argued our world-age is signified by "the lack of God" or "the absence of God," Douglas Scott translated the German *Der Fehl des Gottes* into English as "the failure of God," and then Werner Brock adopted this translation in his introductory book "Existence and Being," then Tang Junyi rendered it into Chinese as "*shangdi yintuei*上帝隱退," and finally Mou Zongsan adopted Tang's term but transformed it into "*shangdi gueiji*上帝歸寂" or "God's return to silence." What I am concerned about here is to what extent the Chinese intellectuals might react when they encountered a metaphor as such in the 1950s. Since the first English translation of Heidegger's essays on *Hölderlin* appeared in 1949, Tang and Mou's introduction of 'the withdrawal of god' seems to be a new concept at the time. Did most Chinese scholars understand the metaphor and its underlying historical background in the West? Did they know how God can withdraw himself? Did this have anything to do with the revitalization of the Confucian discipline later on in Taiwan and Hong Kong? Mou's recontextualization of *Hölderlin's* metaphor within the Confucian

³ Tang Junyi, "On Heidegger's Existentialism" (Shu Heidegger zhi Cunzai Zhexue), originally published in *New Thoughts* (Xin Si Chao), Vol. 17-18 in 1952, later collected in *Introduction of Philosophy*, 1978, Vol. 2, pp.648-709.

context seemed to further complicate the acceptance of the idea in the Chinese community.

Now let's focus on Mou's transformation of "withdrawal of God" into "God's return to silence". In Chinese tradition, God is termed equally as the heavenly *di* 帝 or *Shangdi* 上帝, or the king in the heaven in contrast with the king on the earth. *Shangdi* lives in the heaven or *tian* 天 in Chinese and is worshipped by people in the rites-and-music ritual tradition. According to the oracle-bone inscriptions in Shang Dynasty, *di* or *shangdi* would "give orders to people like the king on the earth" and "he has his own royal court, officials, and messengers who are all at his service." (Chen, 1956, 572) However, if people wanted to communicate with *di* or *shangdi*, they had to rely on the *wu*-shamans to be the mediators for them to understand the oracles and the orders *shangdi* gave. In order to monopolize the rights to be the sole mediator between God and man, the earthly king, through the assistance of the *wu*-shamans, claimed he was endowed with the mandate of heaven (*tian ming* 天命) or the divine right to rule so as to secure the legitimacy of his rule as well as his status as the representative of heaven as well as his people. (Yu, 2014, 42) However, after the axial breakthrough the idea of mandate of heaven had been changed. The individuals could rely on themselves to seek for the knowledge about the universe and life. For example, Confucius claimed himself understood his mandate of heaven at fifty years old. Zhuangzi even made an astonishing remarks that "when I speak of being a coworker with heaven, I know the son of heaven and myself are equally regarded as the sons of heaven." (ibid. 43) Therefore, the earthly king no longer had the monopoly of the medium of heaven and man, and this had led to the collapse of the *wu*-shamanism system. Accordingly, the emphasis of the post-axial philosophical thinking was on the ability of "inner transcendence" of each individual rather than on the rituals or rites earthly king or *wu*-shamans demanded, thus indicating the formulation of a new relationship between heaven and man. It is also because of the new heaven-man relationship we see the continuities as well as the discontinuities in this new formulation.

One thing we are sure about is that the issue of heaven and man or *shangdi* and man has long been rooted in the Chinese tradition and philosophical debates. As Qian Mu aptly says in his last essay published in 1989: "The correspondence between heaven and man is the most fundamental concept in the whole Chinese tradition." (Qian, 2001, 376-378) In Chinese tradition, the relationship between heaven and man is described by Yu Yingshih as a transformation from the religion-political relation that the king is the divine inheritor of heaven and the ruler of the human world to a philosophical turn that treats of the relation between heaven and man from the spiritual illumination to a philosophical way of seeking for the meaning of life. (Yu, 2014) The time of a tremendous turn occurs in the axial age, or in the Warring periods, that the teachers of different disciplines reacted actively to the world they were living in and tried to express their views in response to the challenges they encountered. This kind of spiritual liberation provided the fertile ground for intellectual development that made the human beings no longer blindly followed the orders of heaven but became more consciously aware of the relation between heaven and man.

As Burton Watson says, by citing Xunzi, a distinguished disciple of Confucius, “Xunzi interpreted all the ancient sacrificial rites of the Chinese as mere aesthetic exercises intended not for the benefit of the spirits but for the edification of the living.” (Watson, 1985, 15) The idea of “Mandate of Heaven” is to emphasize men’s own social responsibility, not heaven, thereby elevating humanism. The influential Confucian master Dong Zongshu is famous for his advocacy of the theory of “*Tianren Ganying*” or the “correspondence between heaven and man” which strikes a similar note in this metaphor as that appears in the 17th century English literature where there was a trend of comparing the nature as the macrocosm and the man as the microcosm and there was a direct correspondence between the two. (Tillyard, 1988) However, Dong’s student Sima Qian has quite different views from his teacher. As a matter of fact, Sima Qian’s concept of heaven, as the modern scholar Xu Fuguan notes, regards heaven as an unreliable and mysterious myth compared with Dong’s idea that treats of heaven’s cosmological theories assigning particular influence on men. (Xu, 1980, 88) So it can be seen the idea of heaven and man has been debated and evolved with times in Chinese tradition. It can also be argued that these are all the testimonies of the continuities and discontinuities of the interaction between *wu*-shamanistic rituals and the development of Chinese spirituality.

II. The Inscription of Withdrawal of God into the Confucian Tradition

Given the abundant influence of Western cultures in the modern times, the contemporary Neo-Confucian thinkers can have a more direct access to the idea of heaven and man from the West and the importation of this idea has been translated, transformed, and reinterpreted into Chinese community, in which the Western idea has been domestically inscribed and been put in a new bottle, thereby producing a highly mixed text that involves the interpretations not only from Chinese readers’ own cultural tradition but also from their understanding towards the Western concepts. As we know that the Neo-Confucianists tended to have influence on each other at that time, we may assume Mou’s use of the term “return to silence” or “*guei ji*” 歸寂 in Chinese was borrowed from his predecessor of Confucian discipline. Following the line of this reasoning, there seems to be a high possibility that Mou’s use of the term “*guei ji*” was adopted from Liang Shu-Ming’s idea mentioned in his book *Eastern and Western cultures and Their Philosophies* published in 1921⁴. In this book, Liang discusses the idea of *Ren* 仁, or benevolence in Confucianism, and advocates the concept of ‘silence’ as the best means to ‘develop the initial good intuitive impulse through the practices of silence’ (靜中養出端倪) and ‘return to silence for one can have a direct connectedness between himself and the world’ (歸寂以通天下之感). (Liang, 2002, 162) Liang also argues that the idea of ‘silence’ (寂/靜) does not purely come from Buddhism but has already existed in the roots of Confucianism itself.

⁴ Please see the newly published version in 2002. It should also be noted that though there is no direct evidence to prove that Mou got this idea from Liang, Liang’s ideas in his book undoubtedly has profound impact on the new Confucian thinkers.

Nevertheless, Liang ostensibly borrows this term from Buddhism and Mou uses it as a metaphor to show the sense of alienation frequently felt in the souls of human beings has led to the absence of God and pushes God to return to the state of silence. Mou also uses a parallel analogy to describe the separation of God and man as a separation between "the realm of appearance" (in Chinese, *shi*, literally 'events' or 'occurrences' 事法界) and "the realm of reality" (in Chinese, *li*, literally means 'reason' and 'indicates some kind of underlying law or principle' 理法界), or in Mou's famous terms borrowed from Kant, the divide between '*the phenomenal world*' and '*the noumenal world*'. What puzzles me in this metaphor is the transformation of the image of the Western deity into a Chinese moral saint who seems to have been practicing "the discipline of silence" (*jing de gong fu* 靜的工夫). Or put it more radically, we may imagine from Mou's translation that a Western God is wearing a Chinese *kāṣāya* and practicing the "*Zen Gong Fu*" (禪工夫). This kind of cross-cultural hybridity undoubtedly has its attraction but may also brings a huge challenge to the Chinese readers if they want to know what the German original really means. This is what James St. André and Peng Hsiao-yen (2011, 11) highlight that translation as a "pivot language" that helps a concept in both Europe and China undergo a cross-cultural transmission and transformation to which more attention should be paid.

Indeed, from the Renaissance onwards, the West has been through a series of transformations that human subjectivity has been placed highly that has increased the momentum towards the development of modernization. And yet, as can be seen, the modern society has tainted with all sorts of problems, defects and human-caused disasters. Seeing all the miseries that are so shocking and unbearable, *Hölderlin*, to his dismay, accordingly points out the "failure of God" in his poetry. Witnessing the decadence of civilization in countless wars and conflicts in modern times, Nietzsche audaciously talks about the "death of God." Instead of holding such a pessimistic view towards humanism, Mou argues that God's absence is not as miserable as assumed. On the contrary, it may serve as an incentive for human beings to rethink what humanity really means and what the relation between God and man is supposed to be. Mou argues that we should not talk about the death of god, because there is no anything as such. We had better say he is '*dang ling*' (當令) or still 'there', and his practicing of the 'silence' is to maintain the 'pure subjectivity,' or in Mou's metaphor by alluding to Taoism, the idea of "standing alone, undergoing no slight change, and reaching everywhere unceasingly (獨立而不改, 始能周行而不殆)." *Hölderlin* argues that God withholds his presence and the holy names are lacking, so he calls for the return of God. Mou follows it up and says the calling for the return of God is the same as a calling for the return of the pure souls of human beings themselves. So the revelation of God has been withdrawn from man, a godless age. Bewaring of the absence of God, the calling for God's return does not only recall the memory of the god's first coming but also admits the distance between god and man is the best means of elevating the souls of man towards the upward transformation himself. So the calling for the return of God is to call the return of man's own consciousness and his very original integration with the spiritual divine. In John Milton's *Paradise Lost*,

we all know that Adam and Eve are dispersed out of the Garden of Eden due to their faulted decision to eat the forbidden fruits. It is not unlike the withdrawal of God and Adam and Eve shall learn more from this punishment. Upon their departure, the Arch-Angel Michael tells them, “To leave this Paradise/but shalt possess/A Paradise within thee/ happier far”. (Milton, 2005, XII. 586) That is because only when God has been withdrawn from man then man can face his own fate without relying on any divine intervention and create his own history. So the ‘*felix culpa*’ or the ‘happy fall’ strikes a similar note as that of *Hölderlin*’s idea of the withdrawal of god.

Of a great concern to me is to what extent the Chinese intellectuals might react when they encountered a metaphor as such in the 1950s. Since the first English translation of Heidegger’s essays on *Hölderlin* appeared in 1949, Tang and Mou’s introduction of ‘the withdrawal of god’ seems to be a new concept at the time. Did most Chinese scholars understand the metaphor and its underlying historical background in the West? Did they know how God can withdraw himself? What did they react to Nietzsche’s “death of God”? Given the limited scope of this essay, I don’t attempt to deal with these research questions in such depths. But all in all, we can see Mou was quite sensitive to the latest development of Western philosophy and was quite a rebellious cross-cultural transformer in his specific way of reading. As Mou is well-known for his digestion of Hegel’s dialectics in his political philosophy and his transformation of Immanuel Kant’s metaphysical philosophy, this article published in 1953 serves to be a preliminary essay for him to explore the relation of heaven and man, phenomenal world and noumenal world. However, in the end of this essay, Mou expresses his dissatisfaction towards Heidegger’s way of reasoning and argues that the Western philosophers cannot touch upon the Confucian concept of “*ren*” 仁 or benevolence and accordingly the calling for the return of God would come to be a total failure. In Mou’s views, the Confucian doctrines are the antidotes for the diseases the human beings have. So the gap between the God and man is not unbridgeable but only can be realized through the practices of *ren* or the disciplines of Confucianism. By doing so, man would not be kept away from God, or say, the tunnel extending from the phenomenal world to the noumenal world would not be blocked completely. This also seems to repeat the debate between scientism and metaphysics in the 1920s (*ke xuan lun zhan* 科玄論戰). However, the difference between the two periods is that for the Neo-Confucianists, they were reluctant to witness predominant acceptance of scientism as an all-inclusive system that ironically led to two world wars on the one hand, and they couldn’t tolerate the damage and attack the communists made to the Chinese tradition on the other. That is why Mou emphasized the value of *ren* in Confucian discipline as a way to escape from the predicament of political turmoil and loss of spirit in life. Through purely theoretical reflections in philosophy, Mou had formulated his own thesis of modern Confucian thinking. This is, of course, very utopian, and Mou’s political philosophy is also full of such utopian impulse.

III. Mou's Political Philosophy and his Utopian Impulse

It is argued by Lin Anwu that Mou's way of reasoning is transcendental and ontological rather than historical and practical in terms of real social and political consideration. While putting what Mou proposes in real social practices, the problems will definitely be ensued. Lin Anwu argues that Western modernization is based on John Lock and Rousseau's social contract tradition, while Mou's interpretation of Song-Ming Confucianism is based on the background of the totalitarian rule, the intimacy of familial connectedness and small-scale agricultural economy. (Lin, 1996 a) Therefore, Lin Anwu argues that since the development of Western idea of democracy and science is rooted in its own historical background, Mou's concern about Chinese modernity should focus on how to learn the Western ideas of democracy and science instead of developing them straightly from the Song-Ming Mind philosophy. If Mou's philosophy were put into real practice, the emperor-controlled intellectuals would turn slaves and their philosophical thinking would be trapped by the "misplaced Tao," (Lin, 2003) which means the ignorance of the historical developmental process of a Western concept and the rote application of it into Chinese contemporary sociopolitical development would lead to dire consequences.

Lin Anwu proclaims that the correct order of Western sociopolitical concept should be developed in three stages: the historical constitution stage, the theoretical and logic reasoning stage, and the learning and practicing stage. Indeed, "our historical and cultural development is distant from that in the West", says Lin Yushen, "the concepts, such as 'democracy' and 'science' that are deeply rooted in and connected with the Western historical and cultural background, are still not familiar to most Chinese people. However, when most Chinese were immersed in the Confucian thoughts and consider morality and self-cultivation as the pillar of political order, the Western democratic countries would take law and social contract as the political order." (Lin, 1989, 4) Accordingly, Lin Anwu argues that Mou mistook the learning and practicing stage of the Western modernity as the historical constitution stage, thereby the results were in vain while the manifestation of Chinese philosophy was put into real sociopolitical context. (Lin, 1996 b) All in all, Mou's controversial political philosophy, which is recognized as having the "condition of possibility" but ignoring the "condition of realization" required for modern democracy, is undoubtedly a kind of political utopia.

However, being a political utopia may not be as negative as we think. Perhaps some elaborations on the idea of utopia would consolidate my argumentation. I'd also like to show what this utopian impulse can teach us. As a leading scholar in East-West utopian studies, Zhang Longxi's commentaries may help illustrate this issue. "The desire for utopia is not only universal but perennial," as Zhang succinctly argues, "as the prospect for a better society lies always ahead, at the end of an ever-receding future in front of us, the end of a new millennium." (Zhang, 2005, 166) Indeed, "utopia expresses and explores what is desired and the essential element in Utopia is not hope, but desire—the desire for a better way of life", as Ruth Levitus pointed out, quoted in Zhang's essay. (ibid. 167) Zhang accordingly expounds his

views on the utopian vision in the East based on this argument and expands it with Kumar's viewpoints that "the nature of utopia is in a close relationship to secular thinking", (ibid., 170) which is compatible with the secularism in Chinese culture, especially the dominant Confucianism in which the focal concern is on the present life and the secular affairs. With this preliminary assumption and analogy, Zhang provides abundant examples to support his argumentation and proves that utopia vision exists in both China and the West.

Indeed, Utopia is "first and foremost a work of imaginative fiction in which, unlike other such works, the central subject is the good society," says Kumar (1991, 27). Depicted as the telling of a story, which explicitly details a fictional society, rather than as a systematic theory, utopia, says Sir Philip Sydney in his *Defense of Poetry* (1595) by referring to Thomas More's work, is "an example of the superiority of fiction (poetry) over history in teaching goodness." (ibid. 24) "The point is clear", says Kumar, "utopia is primarily a vehicle of social and political speculation rather than an exercise of the literary imagination in and for itself. It meant to engage our sympathies and our desires in the direction favored by the writer." (ibid. 24) Following this analogy, we may assume there is not a clear cut between a narrative fiction and a systematic social-political theory, such as Marx's or Rousseau's. As Kumar points out, "all social theories deals in imaginary worlds where impossibly pure or ideal principles reign," and in this case, the fictional attribute of "social theory does not in this respect differ much from the fiction of utopia." (ibid. 31)

However, Kumar also highlights the prerequisite as well as the restriction of the utopian theory, for one is its belief that "human is perfectible" and the other is the pessimistic view that utopia can be merely habituated in the "speaking picture" rather than in a realm of social practices. As far as the first notion is concerned, Kumar argues that "utopians do not necessarily believe in the natural goodness of man...but they do believe in his more or less indefinite malleability." So "there is nothing in man, nature or society", says Kumar, "that cannot be so ordered as to bring about a more or less permanent state of material plenty, social harmony and individual fulfillment." (ibid. 29) The second notion is that utopia and formal social theory are separated by a "fundamental difference in their modes of social analysis." "In utopia we are shown the good society in operation, supposedly the results of certain general principles of social organization; while in conventional social and political theory, we are told that the good society will follow from the application of the relevant general principles." (ibid. 31) The result is once the abstract social theory is put into practice, it often leads to quite different societies, such as Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and William Morris's *News from Nowhere*. (ibid.) It is also the reason that "human beings will constantly seek, even against their own best interest, to evade laws and institutional norms", argues Kumar. "Human social order", says Kumar, "is a constant battle against selfishness and the plunge into anarchy." (ibid. 29) Accordingly, the utopia or the desire for a better society does not lie in the realization of social-political theory, no matter how well it seems to be. That is why Chang Hao made a critique on the insinuated manifestations of dark consciousness, or one's consciousness of the darkness within humans, in Confucianism because they are overshadowed by the stress on the achievability of sagehood and the belief that one

can achieve "the inner sagemess and outer kingness" through the practice of Confucian *ren* discipline. (Chang, 1992)

Conclusion

That also keeps us alert of "the danger of grand ideas, including that of utopia," says Zhang Longxi, and "we must realize that there should always be a gap between the ideal and the real, between utopia as a concept and the reality of social and political life." (Zhang, 2005, 213) As Zhang aptly puts, "perhaps it is one of the most cruel ironies or dialectics in history that the hope for a perfect society contains the very seed of its negation, that the belief in human nature as essentially good should have elicited the worst of human greed for power and domination. And yet, humanity cannot give up the hope for a better society. (ibid.)

It is quite true that Confucius once complained that "no one understands me" (xiv: 35). One of his disciples observes: "The gentleman takes in office in order to do his duty. As for putting the Way into practice, he knows all along that it is hopeless" (xviii:7). (Confucius, 1979) This unattainable goal of seeking for the realization of his ideal society and the historical and mythical past has created a kind of "utopian distance," as Douwe Fokkema puts, and there is always a gap between his concept of perfect virtue and its realization. (Fokkema, 2012, 169) Therefore, Confucius always has an urge to create a blueprint for a better future, though he knows it will not guarantee a successful result. So a gatekeeper in the *Analects* remarks about Confucius that "he keeps working towards a goal the realization of which he knows to be hopeless" (xiv: 38). The spirit of Confucius's has provided us a good example to reflect on what the contemporary new Confucian scholars are currently conducting, either be it the guarding of Mou Zongsan's legacy via a continuation of Mou's ways of philosophizing or an establishment of a new theory as a response to Mou's theory. Their efforts to sustain the Chinese tradition and a new transformation in face of the Western challenges in the age of globalization should be applauded. However, it is just like what the critique made in utopian thought that although thinkers as Rousseau, Owen, Saint-Simon and Marx all wrote their own "utopian cannon," says Manuels, "but none of these thinkers wrote a 'speaking picture utopia,' a utopian proper, a story of the ideal society."⁵ In line of this argument, I would argue that none of the contemporary Chinese philosophers write their own theories in such vivid and telling discourse. In short, they do not have "a speaking utopia" but most of them focus on the construction of theories.

In regard to why the preaching of morality and virtue, benevolence and filial piety in Chinese philosophical tradition cannot constitute a democratic and modern China, scholars as the following have shown their dismay: Yu Yingshih's "anti-intellectual orientation in Chinese intellectual tradition," (Yu, 1976) Fu Weixun's "single monism in Chinese tradition," (Fu, 1986) Lin Yusheng's "fallacy of Chinese morality," (Lin, 1989) Zhang Hao's "a lack of dark consciousness in the

⁵ Quoted from Kumar, "The Boundaries of Utopia," from *Utopianism* (Minnesota, 1991), pp.27.

Confucian tradition,” (Chang, 1992) Mou Zongsan’s “a lack of rationale function in Chinese philosophy,” (Mou b, 2003) and Lin Anwu’s “misplaced Tao in Chinese philosophy.” (Lin, 2003) All of these arguments were made in response to the crisis the contemporary Chinese intellectuals have faced, for they are wondering why the ideal goals of Confucianism would be alienated into a distorted one, manipulated as a tool by the emperors or the dictators to control or limit one’s free will. Why the Confucian ideals that “disciplining yourself to act according to the rites” (克己復禮) would be degenerated into “the rites that kill people” (以禮殺人) which was grievously argued by Lu Xun and Hu Shih. In response to this issue, a number of Chinese scholars have made an emotional appeal for the restoration of the fundamental spirit in Chinese tradition, such as Liu Shuxian (1989), Cai Renhou (1982), Cheng Chungying (1990), Tu Weiming (1989), Wang Bangxiong (1983), ect. Accordingly, both Chinese and the Western intellectuals are all aware of this crisis and the issue that why the vision towards an ideal world seems to be contaminated and downgraded into a distorted one. Why the theories for an ideal society advocated by the ancient saints and many other great thinkers in the modern times, cannot produce a real “paradise” in the real world? Perhaps it only lies in the tension between the ideal and real, theoretical and practical, there appears the utopian desire, a desire for a better world, also an uncompromised desire to keep looking for a better future. In various pronouncements of the ‘end’ or ‘death’ of utopia at the preset times, Mou Zongsan’s idea of philosophizing has reminded us the passion and desire that long have been lost in our generation, the passion for a better society and a desire for a better future. It is only within the pendulum that swings from what is considered unattainable to what is conceptually imaginable, we see the utopian impulse that goes beyond the realizable and actualizable in order to bring a fantastic power of transgressing limiting boundaries. Mou Zongsan’s political philosophy is in this sense a life elixir of culture and certainly worthy of our reexamination.

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