

Jason Clower, *The Unlikely Buddhologist, Tiantai Buddhism in MouZongsan's New Confucianism*

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MouZongsan (1909-1995) is widely recognized as the most important Chinese philosopher in the twentieth century. He has left a monumental, sophisticated and wide-ranging philosophical work, which in his complete works runs to 27 volumes published in 2003 in Taiwan. Facing the historical dismissal of Confucianism in his own age, Mou claimed to retrieve the authentic message of Confucius for our modern times by drawing many concepts and methods from both Western philosophy and Buddhism. Mou devoted a considerable amount of energy in understanding the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and the philosophy of Tiantai Buddhism. There has not been so far an in-depth study of the overall system of Mou's thought, and Jason Clower's study presents us a vantage point for penetrating into Mou's philosophical system and for looking at his interpretation of Buddhism.

Mou reads the history of Buddhism as a gradual process toward the overcoming of dualism, because he holds that early schools of Buddhism have posited a radical dichotomy between this world and nirvana, between ordinary human beings and the buddhas. According to Mou, this dualism has prevented early schools of Buddhism to grasp the ontological foundation of reality, present right here, and in each of us. After it moved to China, Buddhism would have progressively attempted to overcome the dualism present in the Indian schools. Chinese schools of Buddhism came to describe reality, not anymore as split into two realms (illusions and truth), but as the same one reality seen from two different angles from an enlightened mind or from a deluded mind.

According to Mou, the Confucian tradition has always held this truth about the unity of the mind, but Chinese Buddhism has expressed it with more clarity and helped Neo-Confucianism to reach a perfect teaching. For Mou the best expression of this truth is found in the Neo-Confucian philosopher Cheng Mingdao (Cheng Hao), of the Song dynasty, who identified Heaven with the mind. For him and the philosophers of the school of mind, Heaven is incarnated in the sages. From this conviction springs an optimistic message: if we take the necessary pains to attain full spiritual perfection (which is concretely possible for each of us), we will be definitely rewarded for our efforts with complete happiness. This happiness is not a pure subjective feeling of one's completeness, but has to do also with the objective existence of the world. Unlike Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism sees the world and the whole universe as a perfect reality, already redeemed.

In the final chapter, Jason Clower proposes his own evaluation of MouZongsan's use of Buddhist philosophy. Mou considered that he analyzed the history of Buddhist thought in a neutral way. Not being himself a Buddhist, however, he did it from the point of view of Neo-Confucianism, and this led him to misread or over-interpret the Buddhist texts. Second,

in order to emphasize the specificity and completeness of Confucianism, Mou stated quite simplistically that the Buddha did not know about the moral knowledge and that Buddhism is not involved in society. Third, even though Mou considered himself a philosopher, he still held many beliefs, such as the belief that all human beings have a God-like intellectual intuition or the belief that human beings are guaranteed happiness by spiritual perfection. Fourth, Clower thinks that Mou speaks in a very abstruse and mysterious language about ontological reality, but he failed to prove really its existence as he had claimed. In the end, this is a matter of faith.

Clower's study is very informative and well written. The reader is gradually introduced into the complexities of the problems tackled by Mou, but without ever being lost. Clower shows himself to be a great pedagogue, using many examples and illustrations, he does so with a critical mind and a nice touch of humor.

I strongly recommend this book to anyone interested in the relationship between Confucianism and Buddhism in modern China. It seems to me that an important factor for the revival of Confucianism resides in its ability to come into discussion with the other great spiritual traditions, not only with Buddhism, but also with Christianity and Islam. Because Mou believed himself in Confucianism, we cannot reproach him his inclusivism, which made him consider Buddhism as one step towards the fullness of the truth of Confucianism. Others, like Liang Shuming, had considered Confucianism as a step toward the highest truth of Buddhism. An inclusivist position can be accepted as long as it respects also the others points of view, other beliefs and the pluralism of society.

People interested in fundamental questions about the meaning of human life, about the possibility of morality and happiness, will find Mou's optimism very refreshing. His belief on the innate perfection in each one of us is not a call for self-complacency or to dismiss the complexities of concrete reality, but a call to engage oneself into a deep transformation of oneself, in relation to others and to the world. Structural adjustments and new ways of governance are badly needed in our present world, but if they are not grounded on a deep transformation of our values they are doomed to fail. This makes the philosophy of Mou Zongsan very relevant.

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