

INTUITIVE UNDERSTANDING

Chapter Three of Mou Zongsan's *Autobiography at Fifty (Wushi Zishu)*

Translated from the Chinese by Ming-Yeung Lu

English translation authorized by the estate of Mou Zongsan
© Foundation for the Study of Chinese Philosophy and Culture
All rights reserved

www.fscpc.org

Originally published as “*Zhijue de Jiewu*,”
Chapter Three of *Wushi Zishu (Autobiography at Fifty)*
by Mou Zongsan, also spelled Mou Tsung-san (1909-1995)
© 1989 Legein (Ehu or Oehu) Publisher, Taipei.
Also included in volume 32 of
Mou Zongsan Quanjī (The Complete Works of Mou Zongsan)
published by Linking (Lianjing) Publisher, Taipei, 2003.

The translation of Mou Zongsan's *Autobiography at Fifty* into English is one of two such projects undertaken by the Foundation for the Study of Chinese Philosophy and Culture; the other being the translation of his *Zhongguo Zhexue Shijiu Jiang (Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy)*. Each of these is an exclusive translation authorized by Mou Zongsan's estate. The Foundation welcomes contributions toward funding these projects. If you are interested in becoming a supporter, please go to the Foundation's web site — www.fscpc.org — for further information.

That phase of romanticism soon passed away; the way my life force expanded outward, aiming at objects that matched its amorphous nature, had come to an end. When I entered the pre-college classes at Peking University, I made up my mind to study philosophy.

It was a natural decision, an outgrowth of the strong intuition in me and my inclination toward the misty, the “forlorn-yet-not-forlorn.” Once the phase of romanticism was over, I gathered my mind and set it on studying. I had entered the first stage of my intellectual journey, a stage in which I would demonstrate capacity for “intuitive understanding.”¹ There was evidence of this intuition earlier, but it had emerged with the swirling life force and was submerged in it, so it was mixed up and misty, and what it intuited was nothing more than material confusion, undifferentiated and unformed (of the same quality as the—material—life force). The result had been an overflowing, unbridled romanticism. Now I’d become more collected, my mind more focused, and my intuition, no longer submerged, could, instead of pouring forth with the expanding life force, cast its light upon the outside—directly. It was a different picture altogether.

This sensing directly (*zhijue*) signaled that my “soul sense” (*lingjue*), my spiritual perceptiveness, had come to the fore, while the forces of primal life that was dominant earlier had subsided. For the moment this “soul sense,” rather than sensual life, would guide my approach to the world, my mind casting light directly upon the outside, engaging in intuitive understanding. I was able to get a

¹ All the footnotes in this chapter are the translator’s. In Chinese, intuition is *zhijue*—literally, “direct, or immediate, sense”; *zhijue de jiewu* is translated as “intuitive understanding.” *Jiewu* is closest in meaning to the philosophical term “apprehension,” which has the connotation of “instant awareness.” Because in common usage “apprehension” also means “dread,” to avoid confusion and for simplicity’s sake the word “understanding” is used in this translation.

glimpse of some ideas, some metaphysical truths—my “soul sense” having emerged, the principles of the world outside also surfaced, revealing themselves.

Not that this process of mind and ideas matching up had been effortless, especially in the beginning. During the second year of the pre-college classes (equivalent to today’s last year of high school), I started reading *The Quotations of Zhuzi*.² I remember sitting in the library, poring over the book every day, totally engrossed but at the same time not really understanding much. A month later, something clicked—I finally got the drift of what he was saying and could often tell what he would say next. The experience then became quite easy and smooth. I could now, on my own, find the thread and follow it.

I knew that Zhuzi was talking metaphysics, about general principles that transcended the differences and separation of things in our tangible reality. There was an atmosphere of blending together, boundaries dissolving, but instead of chaos and confusion things were brought into accord by the *li*, the principle, that gave rise to them in the first place. I felt too that this was a Confucian metaphysics, not a Daoist one. I got such an impression even then, although I wasn’t capable yet of conceptually knowing the difference, through comparison; I just kept feeling it was so. In philosophical terms, this could only count as imaginative insight, vague and indistinct—not real thought or definite understanding. Nevertheless I was

² Zhuzi or Zhu Xi (1130-1200), philosopher during the Song, a prominent figure of the *li*—“principle”—branch of Confucian thought.

truly touched, as if I'd come into contact with a kindred soul. I felt my mind, indeed my life, being lifted along, rising above and beyond the constraints of this earthly, sensual reality and reaching the creative source uniting all things.

This intuitive understanding on my part was external and imaginative, rather than internal, rooted in life and the cultivation of one's self (such internal realization is extremely difficult to come by, the result of many twists and turns on a long sojourn). Even so, that kind of external, imaginative intuitive understanding—the reaching out and rising above that it entailed—played a significant role in my development. The freeing, opening up of the mind, the transcending, going above and beyond, is what makes possible ideals, inspiration, and illumination—indeed, it's the very source of philosophical idealism, to which I've been inclined ever since.

My imagination and intuition were particularly strong then. I felt I could handle anything. Ideas that might strike others as too abstract or esoteric I could take in at a glance. I learned a little too of ideas of all sorts that were current in the West: Bergson's theory of creative evolution, Driesch's vitalism, Dewey's pragmatism, Darwin's theory of evolution, and so on. All these inspired my imagination to grow further, my mind to meet other minds. But what inspired me weren't so much their contents but overall approach, which struck me as novel, different from what I had known. At the same time, this difference was a gulf that my mind couldn't yet bridge—I hadn't a clue of their

cultural background and history of scholarship. It was as if I was watching fireworks from afar, noticing only sparkles here and there.

I was of course hardly more aware of the scholarship on Zhuzi. I didn't need to know the cultural and historical background of his thought. My imagination could get to what was eternal about it—directly—as it was after all a Chinese way of thinking. There wasn't a gulf between Zhuzi and me because we were born of the same cultural source, both nourished by the life, the vitality of Chinese culture, only he had come into it earlier. As for those ideas from the West I mentioned earlier, my mind, given its natural bent for metaphysics, could well have approached them directly, getting at their universal truths without knowing the history of Western thought, but their viewpoint, as well as their contents, just didn't match with my personality and philosophical orientation. I never developed an abiding interest in them, and [other than that initial feeling of novelty] they didn't make much of an impression on me.

As soon as I'd completed the pre-college classes and entered Peking University, I began majoring in philosophy. Free to explore and at my own pace, I attended many of the lectures. I already had my own areas of interest (which I will talk about later). The teachers who helped and influenced me most during those four years were Professors Zhang Shenfu and Jin Yuelin and, outside the University, Zhang Dongsun. Professor Zhang Shenfu taught us Bertrand Russell, then he gave a course on

mathematical logic, the first of its kind in China, and although it didn't deal with the subject in depth, I was fascinated. Professor Jin, who taught part-time, lectured on the philosophical issues he was working on, mostly related to the Neorealism that was popular then. He and Professor Zhang Dongsun were both very devoted to doing philosophy and published often. Their articles appeared in almost every issue of *Discussions in Philosophy* (*Zhexue Pinglun*), the only such journal in the country; I'd always seek them out and read them with interest.

The lectures and reading were greatly beneficial to my intellectual development. These professors were discussing issues that I was interested in and in a way that I could relate to and understand. It wasn't so with traditional Western philosophy. When I read Plato and Aristotle, or Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz, instead of affinity and connection there was a barrier, a gap, which my mind couldn't yet overcome. With Kant and Hegel the gap seemed wider still. Some of these writings I could understand—I got the letter of the text but felt no connection with its spirit—while some I understood none at all. Truth is, philosophy at that level is beyond any young college student. Even if one is endowed with a philosophical soul—a natural affinity for philosophy that, before anything else, one must have in order to enter its realm, to be really “into it”—at that stage one still lacks the knowledge and intellectual discipline to engage in it at that level. For one without such philosophical soul, the door is forever closed. What it really takes to approach Kant and Hegel is an interchange, over time, between intellectual

efforts and soul-cultivation. People talk about hard-hearted and soft-hearted kinds of philosophy and attribute the ability to understand either kind to difference in disposition—that's all too superficial. Whether or not one succeeds in meeting the minds of these thinkers depends ultimately on how deep one's capacity is to go higher and beyond, to realize *tiande* (literally, “the virtue, the nobility of heaven”).

At the time, the philosophy of Bertrand Russell, mathematical logic, and Neorealism were the kind with which I felt more of a connection, but even there I was still a passive listener, absorbing what I could rather than thinking independently. Beyond the curriculum I read quite a bit on my own, focusing on *The Book of Change* (*Yijing* or *Zhouyi*) and the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, neither of which was talked about by anybody at the University. Back in those days, none of the scholars in classical Chinese literature paid much attention to the *Yijing*, nor did people in philosophy. Shallow in their understanding, they didn't have the cosmological outlook, not to say the brilliance of mind and spirit, to fathom the metaphysical aspects of Western philosophy, and worse still when it came to Chinese philosophy. None could appreciate Whitehead or the *Yijing*, which they saw as little more than a book of divination. Einstein's theory of relativity was in vogue then, so almost everybody gravitated toward the philosophy of science. Also popular was an elementary version of epistemology based on empiricism and realism; beyond that, a few dabbled in the study of logic. If one didn't have a thorough

understanding of logic and mathematics, it'd be impossible to grasp the main tenet of Western philosophy, its tradition of rational thought. In China at the time no one could claim such understanding. As for me, I hadn't quite taken in even the rudiments.

Still, I was developing a private passion for the *Yijing* and the philosophy of Whitehead. To me they represented nothing less than a brave new world, the result of a search that originated deep within my soul. In contrast, I could sense that, among those doing philosophy, there was a pervasive rootlessness. None had any true connection to the life, the vitality of Chinese culture or that of the West. Instead of aspiring to higher truths, people were just following the trends, hanging on to mere trifles caught here and there—it was what I call a horizontal, as opposed to a vertical, way of thinking and being. Whatever understanding they had of “life”—which to them was essentially a practical affair, a utilitarian proposition—was fragmentary, unconnected to any living source of wisdom, be it from the East or West, in the form of scholarship or real practice, the practice of life. The wits that they did display were based on superficial perceptions and conventional knowledge, so what they had to say was trite and uninspiring. Sadly, in China at the time, this was true not just among scholars of philosophy but intellectuals in general—souls cast adrift with no sense at all of a meaningful life. (In the Chinese intellectual tradition the thread of wisdom had long been broken—I'll save that discussion for later.)

My love for the *Yijing* could be traced back to those pre-college days when I read *The Quotations of Zhuzi*. Among the major texts of Chinese culture, *Yijing* and *Chunqiu* stand out as repositories of wisdom from which the life, the vitality of the tradition stems. The *Chunqiu* (*Spring and Autumn Annals*) is the chronicle of the dukedom of Lu from about 722 to 481 B.C.E.; its focus is to manifest *ren*, to illustrate, with historical examples, that supreme virtue of human-heartedness. At the time I wasn't able to appreciate it yet. In fact, nor could I *The Four Classics*—including *The Analects*—and any of the writings on cultivating the mind by Confucian thinkers of the Song-Ming era. Those ruminations on inner life and moral practice weren't the kind of writings I had a natural feeling for, and I didn't understand them intuitively as I did the *Yijing*, which, of course, was also about manifesting *ren*. “The Dao—hidden in the way it operates—is manifested through *ren*,” says the “Great Commentary.”³ The ancient classic indeed points to all things in the universe as the embodiment of *ren*, but it does so more as cosmology than as philosophy of life, discourse on how to live.

As cosmology the *Yijing* lends itself to showcasing the kind of abstract understanding that can be called “intelligence as illumination” (*zhi zhi huizhao*)—which was why I loved it so, my capacity for intuitive understanding and that cosmological quality meeting like mirror images.

³ The “Great Commentary” is part of the “Ten Wings” of the *Yijing* and according to tradition written by Confucius, 551-479 B.C.E.; the composition of the sixty-four hexagrams is attributed to King Wen of Zhou, c. 12th century B.C.E.

It was as if my mind had been activated, turned on, as opposed to being steeped in moral awareness, ruminating on *ren*—an instance of “intelligence dawning” (*zhiji*) rather than “*ren* retained” (*renshou*). The latter entailed compassion and tender-heartedness; I was stronger in intuitive understanding and imagination. As I was reading, the image of Fuxi forming the original trigrams—the eight that combine to make the sixty-four hexagrams—was vivid in my mind. The ancient sage-king drawing the lines, a ray of light bursting forth at the dawn of the universe, out of the primordial formlessness—a spiritual light it was, life illuminating life, transmitting wisdom. Indeed, the entire “Great Commentary” is light. The brilliance of wisdom emanates from it. An enlightened spirit runs through it. One feels edified as when one is reading the *Chunqiu*, but the atmosphere here, being above the vicissitudes of historical events, is more blissful, more benign. This purity of perspective matched well with the simplicity and open mind of my youth—my life only just taking shape, out of its own primordial formlessness, my imagination blossoming, my strong sense of intuition directed like an antenna toward that brave new world.

I knew “it was King Wen who, imprisoned in Youli, laid out the hexagrams” and “it was done with a deep concern for humanity,” but at the time I didn’t really feel, inside me, that “deep concern.” I couldn’t yet relate to the feeling of sympathy—and, with it, the solemnity of moral uprightness—that these words conveyed: “When fortunes turn, the sage suffers with the people.” Instead, I appreciated more those lines describing the impersonality

of the Dao. “It nourishes all things but does not worry, as the sage does, about the state of the world.” How clear-cut and without fuss! And what a natural, carefree way of being: “The universe is indifferent, and in this indifference all things become what they are.”

I got the beauty of “Thunders roar and then comes the downpour, everything filled to the brim”—its depiction of primeval force—and of “Qian creates, Kun completes” [Qian is the *yang* aspect of the Dao; Kun, the *yin*]. I loved too those four characters at the beginning of the *Yijing*: “Yuan, heng, li, zhen”—how succinctly they describe the Dao’s movement, the whole process from sprouting and thriving to reaping and consolidating, from creation to conclusion. And what grandeur when this force of change—the *yi* in *Yijing*—operates and all things fall into place! “Each in accord with its nature, the divine plan, all in consort maintaining a grand harmony—that is *li, zhen*.” King Wen’s hexagrams “follow closely the movements of nature, never violating its boundaries—in the intricacies of their transformation nothing is left out of the picture”; and “The sage promotes [the study of *Yi*] so that the sublime may be fully manifest.” Indeed, “the divine is that which words wonders through all things.”

I could appreciate all that, both aesthetically and intellectually. The former involves “enjoyment” (*xinqu*)—one is delighted, enthralled—while the latter involves “awakening” (*juezhao*)—one is being enlightened. They have in them the light of life, the sparkle of inspiration, and, if one were to ascribe character to them,

these states of mind are extroverted; they exude a certain grace, a certain charisma. By contrast, the state of mind involved in ruminating on *ren*—which entails compassion and tender-heartedness—is much less flashy, much more inward. In my case, the fact that I was drawn toward inspiration and aesthetic enjoyment—and couldn't appreciate those writings on inner life and moral practice—was not unrelated to my youthful lack of experience, my ignorance of real-life hardships. Yes, I connected with Zhuzi, because I could find in his writings the kind of abstract intelligence and strong intuition that mirrored mine. But even though he too spoke about the universe as embodiment of the Dao, there wasn't the primitive grace I associated with Fuxi forming the trigrams and Confucius commenting on King Wen's *Yi*. Qualities prominent in the *Yijing*—inspiration and light, purity and clarity of perspective—aren't so in Zhuzi. His moral seriousness, which was part and parcel of his take on Confucius, had rendered the overall atmosphere of his metaphysics somewhat subdued, the clarity of a transcendent perspective a little clouded over. There is light, but it doesn't come through so directly, and any flash of beauty or insight, of "enjoyment" or "awakening," has been toned down, any natural grace also toned down.

In making the above comments, I don't mean to place myself at the same level as that great Song philosopher. Nor do I think I possess any of the qualities of Confucius and the sage-king Fuxi—their brilliance and benevolence, the clarity of vision and abundance of blessings they manifest. Back then, reading the *Yijing*, I could only

admire and be awed by the pure light coming from its pages, "the saintly aura from on high." Mine wasn't as pure, my soul still weighed down by those amorphous, earthly energies, so I couldn't simply bask in that light, contemplating the creative source (such matters are, after all, ineffable and can only be understood tacitly, with the heart.) Instead, I tried to figure it out from where I was, [mentally] laying out a cosmological scheme. I was fascinated by mathematical order and by how the mind could construct that from marveling at life's transformations, "the divine that words wonders through all things." Whereas the creative source itself is ultimately ineffable, one can devote efforts to studying mathematical order. However, I never fell for materialism and its natural philosophy; what kept motivating me, even as I was making a conscious effort to lay out that scheme, was the marvel of life's transformations—how brave it is, the universe as process. I had Whitehead to thank for that.

At the time, physics and mathematics were very much on my mind (specifically, the inspired way these were construed by Whitehead), and given my predisposition toward cosmology, and toward aesthetic enjoyment and inspiration, I definitely read the *Yijing* in light of natural philosophy—the universe as creative, evolving process. Which was different from the reductive naturalism of a materialist. Later on, I would come to realize that, even though I hadn't fallen for materialism, my perspective was still a long way from being crystal clear, still inadequate for rising into that pure light. I hadn't been cleansed, so to speak. That was because I

hadn't cultivated the moral sense within me and didn't feel or know real compassion; I had yet to make—for myself, for my thinking—a true connection with the source of all values, which was that inner moral sense. This inadequacy—abstract intelligence being more prominent in me than feeling of compassion—had a parallel in Whitehead's philosophy.

My studying the *Yijing* was done in an ambitious scale, though at first I had no idea where to start. I came across a copy of *Chengzhai's Commentary on the Yi*⁴ and found in it some fascinating ideas. I proceeded to read the whole thing. One day, I saw Professor Lin Zaiping, and when I told him I was reading Yang's commentary, he said, "You shouldn't start with him," but he didn't tell me who would be better. I went back to the library and began all over, combing through the catalog for *Yijing* references. The way they did *xiangshu*—cosmological calculations based on analysis of the hexagrams' structures—during the Han⁵ I found quite tedious, but also intriguing. To make sense of it, I picked Li Daoping's *Collected Exegeses of the Zhouyi* (a Qing-era edition of what Li Dingzao had put together in the Song dynasty) and started reading word by word, sentence by sentence. After a few chapters I got the gist and soon became conversant with all the Han methods of interpretation, for example, *huti* and *banxiang*.⁶

⁴ Chengzhai was the literary name of Yang Wanli, a major poet of the Southern Song period.

⁵ The Han dynasty, 206 B.C.E. to 220 C.E.

⁶ *Huti*: a hexagram, made up of 6 lines, is said to have a "mutual" (*hu*) relationship with a trigram when it contains in its "body" (*ti*) those 3

With the *Collected Exegeses* as foundation, I pressed on, eventually sorting out for myself the whole variety of *Yi* studies during the Han, among them the Jing, Meng, and Yu schools. I began by studying the way each had done *xiangshu*, getting a clear picture of the cosmologies of the different schools, their theoretical frameworks as well as contents, and, from there, I was able to extract many a meaningful idea. My appreciation of the transcendental, cosmological ethos of the Han had deepened, and I saw how cosmology first shone through in Chinese thought, how a distinct cluster of concepts emerged from budding to full-flowering. The ancients weren't incapable of conceptual, speculative thinking. It's just that those who came after didn't have as much talent, or vision, so the tradition was lost. Whatever was achieved would fall by the wayside, becoming only a weak strand in Chinese philosophy.

While reading, I would take notes and put my thoughts down. Soon what I had written assumed a degree of coherence and order—the language itself needed editing for sure, but it also showed a strong imagination. These notes and thoughts would eventually form the basis of my first book, *The Zhouyi and Chinese Metaphysics and Moral*

lines. By extension, if within a hexagram there are two overlapping trigrams, then it may also be *huti* with the hexagram that these trigrams combine to form—that other one looking as if it has been condensed into 4 or 5 lines. *Banxiang*: literally, "half-image," meaning that 2 adjacent lines within a hexagram suggest there is a *hu* relationship, but it's only a probability—in other words, not yet fully *huti*, which requires at least 3 lines.

Philosophy, in which, after talking about the Han schools, I moved on to *Yi* commentaries of the Wei-Jin and Song eras.⁷ At that point in my life, I had only a superficial knowledge of the Wei-Jin intellectuals and their metaphysics, their elegant lifestyle, and I had yet to develop a deep appreciation of the Song-era Confucian thinkers and their moral philosophy, their inner practice. My discussion of their approaches to the *Yijing* was therefore relatively brief. For the former, I used as reference *Examples from the Zhouyi* by Wang Bi;⁸ as regards the Song, I mainly discussed Zhuzi's views on the cosmic principles of *yin* and *yang* and his theory of *li* (principle) and *qi* (matter-energy). Neither of those periods was my focus at the time.

Scholars during the Qing⁹ specialized in philology and textual research, and as a result they did little to enrich the philosophical tradition—the only exceptions being Hu Xu and Jiao Xun,¹⁰ both experts on the *Yijing*. These two were truly extraordinary. Jiao Xun devoted his life to studying the ancient classic and, after decades of work, completed his *Three Books of Yi Scholarship*, namely, *Yi Diagrams*, *Yi General Commentary*, and *Yi Textual Analysis*, which all demonstrated, in addition to solid and sound scholarship, ingenuity and conceptual brilliance. Hu Xu, an earlier figure who lived during the reign of Kangxi, was celebrated for his skills in divination—even today legends

about him abound; his writings are collectively known as *Letters on the Zhouyi*. Hu and Jiao were *Yijing* experts in the fullest sense, and their works reflected an expert's depth of knowledge, discipline, and dedication. Both had used *xiangshu* as starting point, but their *xiangshu* was different from the kind of structural-cum-cosmological analysis practiced during the Han. When it came to interpreting the text, the Han schools became too detailed, and labored as well, so their analysis lacked overall coherence and flow; moreover, they approached the text with a set of beliefs made up of Yin-Yang theory, prophecies, portents, and the like. Hu and Jiao cleared away all that clutter and opened up their own paths, and they didn't do so by way of Daoist metaphysics, as did Wang Bi, or Confucian teachings on self-cultivation, as did Zhuzi and his fellow Song-era thinker Cheng Yi.¹¹ Instead, they were able to establish general principles from the *Yijing* itself.

Hu Xu's "theory of the actualization of hexagrams" (*tigua shuo*) showed profound insight into the workings of nature, the universe as process (in Chinese, *shengcheng*, denoting the process from origination to completion), and the way he used it in his commentary felt right, not contrived at all. He explained, with unprecedented analytical precision, why the eight characters of *chu*, *shang*, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, and 6 were used to name a hexagram's six lines.¹² He then laid out a series of cosmological concepts,

⁷ The Wei-Jin period, c. 3rd to 4th centuries; the Song dynasty, 960-1279.

⁸ Wang Bi, 226-249.

⁹ The Qing dynasty, 1644-1911.

¹⁰ Hu Xu, 1653-1736; Jiao Xun, 1763-1820.

¹¹ Cheng Yi, 1033-1107.

¹² The hexagrams are symbols (*xian*) of the various states of actualization, themselves in flux, each line representing a stage in the course of actualizing. *Chu* and *shang*, "the beginning" and "the

pairings that described moments and positions in the ever-evolving process: *shiwei* (“[points in] time or space”), *shengcheng* (“sprouting or completed”), *zhongshi* (“end or beginning”), *neiwai* (“inside or outside”), and *wanglai* (“coming or going”). All that went into his rendition of the ancient cosmic maps of River Diagram and Luo Writing (*Hetu Luoshu*), which encapsulated the principles underlying the natural process of formation—the hexagrams, with their corresponding numbers and directions, dynamically linked to each other—hence I call it “*shengcheng* philosophy,” the philosophy of becoming.

The idea of becoming, that is, development in the cosmological sense, is already evident in “*Yuan, heng, li, zhen*” and “Qian creates, Kun completes,” as well as in formulations like *weiyu* and *huayu* (“everything in place, evolving and thriving”) from *Zhongyong* of the *Four Classics*.¹³ Hu Xu’s work faithfully reflected that ancient cosmology, though in his case the starting point was the objective elements—the laws of change, the mathematical order—which he grasped by applying a methodological approach to studying the hexagrams-as-symbols. He then managed to go beyond the symbols and realized they were but subjective hypotheses: “There really isn’t such a thing

pinnacle,” are the names of the first and sixth, that is, bottom and top, lines. They aren’t called 1 and 6 because—unlike the middle four lines, called 2, 3, 4, and 5—being endpoints they don’t qualify as numbers (*shu*) for calculating (also *shu*) the degree of actualization. Finally, 9 and 6 indicate whether the line is *yang* or *yin*. For example, a line called “6-5” means “the fifth and *yin* line.”

¹³ *Zhongyong*, “The Middle Way,” one of the *Four Classics*, c. 5th-century B.C.E.

as this diagram, nor there is this symbol—all are stand-ins for the wonders in nature, the cycles of life.” Despite such insight, Hu was essentially a scholar, his *Yijing* commentary a work of scholarship. That is to say, his brilliance, dazzling as it was, paled before the light of life that was Fuxi and Confucius. Fuxi’s saintly presence bursting through the primordial confusion, illuminating the spiritual darkness around it, Confucius’s unwavering moral cultivation yielding a heart and mind of deep compassion—one doesn’t sense in Hu Xu the same authenticity or depth. His work sparkles in a way much less splendid, much more commonplace, displaying just those qualities I’ve mentioned earlier when describing my own attributes: aesthetic enjoyment and abstract understanding. I was very taken by how effortless and methodical it all was, but at the same time I could feel something was lacking. In the end, his virtuosity seemed insignificant—almost like a sleight of hand—next to the purity of being, as well as the richness in humanity, of a real sage. As a young man studying the *Yijing* I was nevertheless most impressed by the orderliness in his thinking—a point worth mentioning as that was, and still is, rare in Chinese scholarship.

As for Jiao Xun, what a first-class mind! His analysis shows a thought process so intricate and exact, although it does tend to get a little obscure, a little too technical, and in that respect it isn’t as masterly as Hu Xu’s. From the original text of the *Yijing*, that is, the judgments for the sixty-four hexagrams, he extracted five principles regarding the relationships between them—these he lays

out in *Yi Diagrams*, the first of his *Three Books of Yi Scholarship*. Then, in *Yi Textual Analysis*, he uses those five principles to interpret the entire text, including the “Ten Wings,” noting that when the sages wrote the *Yijing* every word was put there for a reason, therefore each counts and is necessary to one’s interpretation. Finally, based on *Yi Diagrams* he wrote *Yi General Commentary* to show the function of general principles in the *Yijing* and in doing so came up with many important concepts; without first reading this *General Commentary* it’s impossible to understand the intricacies of *Textual Analysis*. Jiao was furthermore quite an expert in Chinese mathematics. There is a chapter in the “Great Commentary” filled with numbers, where one finds the phrase: “The whole process of change is represented by fifty stalks, but [during divination] only forty-nine are used.” He explained it using mathematical principles—based on his analysis one can say that this chapter is all about the application of mathematical principles.

I had to devote quite a bit of effort to studying Jiao Xun. I was young then. My mental and physical energies being in abundance, I could delve into that daunting body of writings with zest and dedication and in time managed to grasp how his thought process worked. If I hadn’t gone through all that as a young man and tried doing it now, I would have to commit myself totally to the task, putting aside everything else. Even then it would take awhile—if one wants to understand Jiao Xun, there really is no other way. In fact, it’s fair to say his books are just too difficult for most people. The youths of today are willing to put in

neither the time nor the effort. Whatever they study, if it cannot be understood right away, it’s just not worth it. They want easy success—reflection of the larger trend in society toward shoddiness and superficiality. Yet, the rigor and complexity of Jiao’s *Yijing* analysis are precisely the result of much hard work and dedication, of really delving into something. Which also explains why it has the tendency to get too technical and become inaccessible to most readers. This tendency is not incidental, limited to only bits and pieces here and there, but characteristic of the entire body of his writings, giving rise to its intricate architecture, its mechanism; inaccessibility is, in other words, a major component of his work.

Jiao Xun was therefore less approachable a thinker than Hu Xu, his realm more abstract and intangible. At the same time, following the lead of Dai Dongyuan,¹⁴ he had nothing to offer in the area of moral cultivation, inner life. It’s a pity that, after having devoted so much effort into creating that intellectual edifice, he failed to attain true wisdom. He was, when all is said and done, a brilliant scholar and not more, and his *Yijing* scholarship reflected that—the limitation of a sad philological culture fostered by the Manchu court. All that effort ended up a waste, spent only to violate the spirit of a great philosophical text. Using Dai’s semantic studies as basis, he wrote *The True Meaning of Mencius*—that was a waste too, completely violating the spirit of the philosopher. If Jiao had been born in the West, he would have become a very

¹⁴ Dai Dongyuan, 1723-1777, Qing scholar whose materialism repudiated the *li* school of Confucian metaphysics.

accomplished scientist, but that wasn't possible in China at the time. Not content with just semantic studies and textual research, he brought his brilliance to bear on the spiritual teachings of the sages, only to distort them – what a pity, what a waste!

By then I had studied *Yijing* commentaries from different eras, and soon I'd complete my first book, *The Zhouyi and Chinese Metaphysics and Moral Philosophy*. It contains five sections that reflect my interest in cosmology: (1) the Han schools; (2) Wei-Jin and Song commentaries; (3) Hu Xu's *shengcheng* philosophy; (4) Jiao Xun's *Yi* scholarship; and (5) a synopsis of calendar calculations. The last part is an attempt—based on the objective mathematical order inherent in the *Yijing*, as well as Jiao's explanation of the “numbers” chapter—to bring out the larger cosmological meanings of “establishing the almanacs, marking the seasons” (*zhili mingshi*) and develop a metaphysics of ancient mathematics. I was, at the time, especially interested in that line of exploration—through it I was able to confirm that in Chinese cultural life, besides the mainstream represented by the *ren* teachings of the sage kings and Confucius, the philosophy of inner life centered on human-heartedness, there was another strand. This one can be traced back to our ancient almanacs and astronomy, “the department of Xihe.”¹⁵ The mathematical theories behind them were taken up by the Yin-Yang School¹⁶ and eventually got incorporated into medicine, astrology, and fortune telling; as a result, we know this

¹⁵ Xihe is in Chinese mythology the mother of the sun.

¹⁶ The Yin-Yang School, c. third century B.C.E.

tradition—the Xihe tradition—mostly by its popularized forms. But from the way the *Yijing* is linked to ancient mathematics (as shown by Jiao), it's clear that calendar calculations do have an important metaphysical dimension and so can rightly be called the Pythagorean tradition of China.

No less than Pythagoras and Plato, China's ancient sages, manifesting at once the light of life and the enlightenment of the mind, understood the metaphysics import of mathematics, its bearing on the question of “ontological being” (*tixing*).¹⁷ This, as Whitehead had pointed out, was the traditional, classical view of mathematics, prevalent all the way to Descartes; to view mathematics purely in terms of formal logic is a recent phenomenon. Our ancestors likewise recognized the transcendental meaning of mathematics, and the perceptiveness they showed in astronomy and calendar calculations rivaled that of the Greeks. Despite that, in China we never developed a “discipline” of mathematics, a systematic study of its components, not to say the kind of mathematical logic that had emerged in the modern West. At the time, my main interest was the transcendental meaning of the Xihe tradition. When it came to sorting out the various calculations, the spirit was willing but I hadn't enough learning to follow it through. I say this not without regret. I hope those who come after me will have it in them to reveal in full the light of our mathematical-metaphysical

¹⁷ The term *tixing* refers, in Chinese ontology, to the objective aspect of moral being—the embodiment of *ren* in the universe—in contrast to the subjective, which is inner practice, moral cultivation.

tradition.

My book was completed the year I graduated from Peking University. Professor Lin Zaiping saw it and praised it, and Professor Shen Youding remarked, “What was left to rot has undergone a sea change.” In reality, the number of people who could understand the book was less than a handful, and no publisher would touch it. So I raised some money, had a few copies printed, and gave them to my friends, but that eventually stopped as I had come to notice the book’s flaws. I hope to work on it again someday.¹⁸

I said earlier this was the phase I demonstrated capacity for intuitive understanding and a strong imagination. As for my interest in cosmology, in exploring the Xihe tradition through the *Yijing*, the credit for inspiring that must go to Whitehead. I was reading him on my own at the same time I was going through all those *Yijing* commentaries. My young mind digested everything, my imagination became even stronger, and I gained much insight. Whitehead was in his sixties and just then articulating his cosmological metaphysics; his important works had come out one by one. *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Natural Knowledge* and *The Concept of Nature* (both from around 1919) were concise essays marking the beginning of his process philosophy. The period around the publication of *Science and the Modern World* (1925) showed a further maturation, which culminated only a few

¹⁸ The book was republished in 1988 as *The Natural Philosophy and Moral Contents of the Zhouyi*.

years later in *Process and Reality* (1930), a solemnly beautiful grand edifice representing the full expression of his cosmology. I read it and was blown away. I loved it so. The book is rooted in the Pythagorean-Platonic tradition, but it also has in it contemporary developments in physics and mathematical logic—from one end to the other this long-standing source of wisdom and knowledge was what Whitehead drew from to produce his profound, firmly grounded metaphysics.

In the rest of this chapter I will talk about why I appreciate Whitehead, and how I’m different from him after all.

Whitehead possessed a strong aesthetic sense and an especially strong intuition. That aesthetic sense was at once intensional (intensive) and extensional (extensive). Likewise, his intuition gave him insights into principles both internal and external. Objectively speaking, he merged biology, physics, and mathematics together—in accordance with the modes exhibited by the relational term of copula—and as such his philosophy was extensional, extensive, and external. Subjectively speaking, through the kind of delight that came with aesthetic appreciation, as well as the penetrating insight that came with intuition, he could immerse himself in those modes—and as such his philosophy was intensional, intensive, and internal. But what made it internal—the aesthetic delight, the intuitive insight—were also external because they were dependent on the extensional modes, riding on them, so to speak. At the same time, what made

it external were also internal as those extensional modes were infused with the aesthetic sense and intuition; indeed, by virtue of the latter moving freely, without hindrance or burden, the abstract, generalized thinking that characterized mathematical models could effortlessly arrive at the concrete, settling down, becoming internal.

The mathematical models in Whitehead's philosophy were at once analyzed and aesthetically appreciated, so they were intrinsically both extensional and intensional. They were neither objective structures suspended in midair, cut off from reality, nor subjective products of logic, purely formalistic and non-existential. Instead, through cosmology and an engagement in questions of ontological being, the mathematical models were blended together with the concrete events of biology and physics. Whitehead's aesthetic sense and intuition therefore had a bearing on not only the extensional modes but also those intensional, concrete events, which were both internal, infused with aesthetic delight and intuitive insight, and external, blended together with the mathematical models. Such was the wisdom of Whitehead, what shone through so dazzlingly in his philosophy and what had always struck me as aristocratic. It was the distinctive elegance of an Englishman, but one who had taken up with the Platonic-Pythagorean tradition, making a direct connection with the noble-minded ancient Greeks while bypassing the empiricism and nominalism of his own Anglo-Saxon culture. Whitehead's aristocratic quality bespoke cultivation and learning, as well as deep insight and wisdom—here was indeed a soul worthy of praise.

But this soul of his, this aristocratic side, was understood by very few, in China as well as in the West—and so were his writings. When *Process and Reality* came out, Professor Zhang Shenfu wrote a brief introduction, in which he expressed great admiration but, at the same time, made a discouraging remark: "Nobody will understand it, and there's no reason to." Maybe he was just being tongue-in-cheek—the professor playing devil's advocate—but, looking back, I realize he really didn't have the kind of soul to understand Whitehead. When I asked Professor Jin Yuelin, he said he didn't understand it either—the book was too opaque, too obscure. He too lacked that metaphysical spirit. I later found out that "opaque" was a common criticism of *Process and Reality* in the U.S. (Whitehead had begun teaching at Harvard around the time of its publication). When the American philosopher Edwin A. Burtt came to lecture in China after the Second World War, he said the same thing. Philosophy done in America these days does not, and cannot, foster appreciation of the kind of aristocratic, Platonic-Pythagorean soul that Whitehead represents—which says a lot about the paucity of true wisdom in its cultural life. Even Bertrand Russell didn't appreciate that metaphysical aspect of him and said that he'd caved in to Bergson; they co-authored the three-volume *Principia Mathematica* but afterward went their separate ways. Russell belonged firmly in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, whereas Whitehead had transcended it.

As for me, I read Whitehead with joy, the joy of having met a kindred soul, and every step of the way I felt I got it—nothing struck me as obscure. Actually, I found his terminology both beautiful and plain, although there might well be a secret to understanding it. The words have to be taken just as they are, stripped of all the connotations and associations that society has spawned around them. Words being just as they are—Whitehead’s philosophy is straightforward that way. People think it obscure because the implied meanings are what they consider normal. His usage, in contrast, seems abnormal—common words but not “common” in meaning; indeed, the core meanings have become uncommon, non-current. As for me, I wasn’t aware of the words’ connotations. I’d never been abroad and knew little about the customs there, plus, being not much of a literary mind, I read foreign literature with difficulty, so I was quite ignorant of how the language functioned in everyday contexts. I read Whitehead’s books strictly as philosophy. I began by trying to get a sense of his general approach and conceptual framework. Then, equipped with this understanding of how his mind worked, I managed to follow his theories—indeed, follow the way he theorized—by taking his words just as they were, free of connotations and associations. Except as pure philosophy I didn’t know of any other way to approach Whitehead’s writings, and I do believe that is the way—one enters the realm of conceptual truths, where the language of social conventions is absent. In this realm, preoccupied with pure concepts and ignorant of everyday customs and parlance—not just foreign but, in fact, our own as well—I was able to connect with Whitehead,

understand his terminology, on the basis of my natural inclination, my own aesthetic sense and intuition, and I felt: here was a kindred soul, not obscure at all.

“Event” and “object”: An “event” (translated as *shi* in Chinese) can be apprehended—one can be aware of its presence. But unlike an “object” (translated as *xiang*), it cannot be re-cognized—known again. A phenomenon has to be, by itself, continuous and constant so as to be re-cognized, to be an object of cognition.¹⁹ That’s what the English word “object” means, just as it is—a directed-at phenomenon. Translated according to its philosophical, as well as original, meaning, it becomes *xiang*, the Chinese word meaning “appearance.”²⁰

An event can develop, but it cannot be repeated and, in that sense, does not change [change implies a continuation, the evolution of the same entity from one point to another]. In the development from E1 to E2 to E3 and so forth, E1 is not E2, and E2 is not E3, each is unique and ceases to be once its moment is gone—Whitehead called this “passage of nature.” Every event is, it occurs, at the instance of its occurrence. It runs its course and then passes away, and this “passage” is a development, a process, but not a shift—there’s no moving from one position to another. His insight here is similar to the “Things Do Not Shift Theory” (*Wubuqian Lun*) of

¹⁹ Here, Mou uses the word *duixiang* for “object”—literally, “directed-at phenomenon.”

²⁰ Etymologically, the English word “object” comes from the Latin *objectum*, “thing presented to the mind.”

Sengzhao.²¹ Whereas to the Buddhist monk and philosopher that theory was part of the mind's subjective enlightenment, Whitehead developed his through objective analysis. From this understanding of event as process, he went on to talk about "extension" and "relation of extension," from which came the concepts of "temporal object" and "spatial object," "temporal relation" and "spatial relation." Then, using the "method of extensive abstraction" and "law of convergence," he discussed abstractions of time and space such as "moment," "point," "line," "surface," "body," "temporal series," "spatial series," etc. The above more or less sums up the basic ideas in *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Natural Knowledge* and *The Concept of Nature*. Whitehead's exposition is both beautiful and plain, and in the way he brings together temporal-spatial mathematical order and nature's passage, it is at once internal and external, intensional and extensional.

In *Science and the Modern World*, "event" becomes "happening" or "actual occasion," while "object" becomes "eternal object." Whitehead was launching into a more in-depth discussion of concrete reality, and, being a scientist himself, he was also engaging in a kind of "self-critique" of scientific knowledge. What appears to us as the world of material things is in fact a world of abstractions, made up of moments, points, lines, surfaces, bodies, etc. Even as he upheld abstraction as part and parcel of our striving toward simplicity, our attempt to

render things graspable, he critiqued it in order to make way for concrete reality. He pointed to, for example, the "fallacy of misplaced concrete" and "simple location" — the former entails mistaking abstraction as concrete reality, the latter fixing something onto a certain point, instead of seeing it as a field of temporal and spatial extensions.

With *Process and Reality*, Whitehead probed the actual workings of experience and talked about "two modes of perception," directing his critique at Hume and Kant, as well as building up his own philosophical system (his cosmology). Philosophers had generally followed Hume, he argued, in confining their analysis of experience to the "mode of presentational immediacy," while neglecting the "mode of causal efficacy." The result had been Kant's subjectivism. To go beyond such constraints, he showed that "causal efficacy" was fundamental to perception.²² He could thus talk, with a renewed sense of dynamics, development, and organic connection, about the relationship between experience as an activity—the experiencing itself—and the "actual occasions" that were being experienced. By now Whitehead had fully developed his cosmological viewpoint and would proceed to describe all experience under the "philosophy of organism"—a system in which everything is

²² *Process and Reality*, pp. 120-121: "Memory is an example of perception in this mode...When we register in consciousness our visual perception of a grey stone, something more than bare sight is meant. The 'stone' has a reference to its past, when it could have been used as a missile if small enough, or as a seat if large enough. A 'stone' has certainly a history, and probably a future...The vector character of the datum is this causal efficacy."

²¹ Sengzhao, 384-414, Buddhist monk, philosopher, and translator.

interconnected and in the process of becoming. With “causal efficacy,” its vector character, he linked together the whole universe, and with “presentational immediacy” he detailed the geometrical models illustrating how time and space, as extensive relations, were structured.²³ He laid out a host of concepts—mathematical order, eternal object, actual occasion, apprehension, subjective form, creativity, potentiality, realization, actuality, appearance, objectification, satisfaction, continuity, disjunction, individuality, etc.—and integrated them into one philosophical system, one sublime edifice. As I said, Whitehead blended mathematics, biology, and physics together and infused them with his aesthetic sense, so this edifice is both internal and external, both intensional and extensional.

My intention here is not to expound on Whitehead’s philosophy, but to show, through some of its main points, that his works are actually quite comprehensible and can be appreciated, even enjoyed. Aesthetic sense and intuition were indeed his strong suit, enabling him to get to the truth—directly, without zigzag, and descriptively, without labored arguments. In comparison, his skills in logic, as well as his ability for rigorous discursive reasoning—for the how’s and why’s of philosophy—were less remarkable. It was of course possible to lay out mathematical schemes, as he did, without a special talent for logical, discursive thinking; Leibniz and Kant had it, as did Russell, but not

²³ *Process and Reality*, p. 61: “In this ‘mode’ the contemporary world is consciously prehended as a continuum of extensive relations, including the ‘extensiveness’ of space and ‘extensiveness’ of time.”

Whitehead, not in the same striking manner anyway. Sure, he was at his strongest when arguing for the two modes of perception, but even there he’d come to that understanding through objective intuition, against traditional philosophy’s abstract, formalistic, and subjectivist (or “non-existential”) biases—which is why his philosophy contains some profound (cosmological) insights. At the time, I could understand him because his qualities mirrored my own. My aesthetic sense and intuition were particularly strong, whereas my logical skills and discursive reasoning weren’t. I understood Whitehead intuitively and appreciated the beauty in his works. While reading, cued by just a few words, or sometimes none at all, I’d be able to fathom his insights. I’d feel that something was so, but whether it was necessarily so I hardly knew—I hadn’t asked “why” and, in any case, couldn’t think through “how.” Still, as a student of traditional philosophy, I was trained to ask why and how but found myself wanting when I did. To rely simply on intuition was like having partial vision, and, without the learning that he had, I wasn’t able to expand upon the insights I’d gained. All this meant I didn’t know why, logically and for sure, I had to follow his path. That disturbed me. I couldn’t tell what exactly Whitehead lacked, but I wasn’t content with staying at where he was either.

I had yet to stand on my own two feet—to be able to think through independently the problems posed by Western philosophy. My mind was still developing, still searching. I felt compelled to move beyond aesthetic

enjoyment and intuitive imagination, gather my mind some more, and turn to the how's and the why's and develop my skills in logical, discursive reasoning.

Why had I made this turn? It wasn't just because, objectively speaking, those how-and-why questions spurred me on. There was also a subjective aspect, which had more to do with my natural inclination—life (*shengming*) as a driving force.²⁴ That subjective aspect is more significant and is what I want to talk about here.

Although I was drawn to Whitehead's aesthetic sense and intuition, when it came to the question of inner being—what kind of soul each of us truly was, deep down—he and I were different after all. His aesthetic sense was mathematical, his intuition physics-oriented, whereas mine had to do with *shengming*, with life. The intuitive part could be traced back to the powerful life force that had been swirling inside, and the aesthetic part, to my “tendency toward primordial formlessness,” the way I'd

²⁴ *Shengming*, the Chinese word for “life,” contains various shades of meaning—ranging from “life force” in a natural, biological sense, to “living” in an existential sense, to “good life” in a moral sense—which can all come into play at the same time. When Mou uses it to talk about his own life, *shengming* has sort of an independent status, at once fundamental and transcendent, evoking the life that is his but also larger than him, a sense of personhood beyond one's personality, and as such it's almost synonymous with “being.” Another way Mou uses *shengming* is when he refers to the “life” of Chinese culture; in English usage, the word “soul” or even “spirit” would be more idiomatic. Incidentally, the Greek word for “soul”—*psyche*—originally meant the breath of life.

get carried away by “feelings of forlorn-yet-not-forlorn.” Sure, I could appreciate “formalistic beauty” as well—there was an extensive, extensional, and formalistic side to my aesthetic sense and intuition, but it wasn't as prominent after all. The full force of my life, the whole scope of my being, could not be contained there, and, conversely, that side wasn't dominant enough to permeate my life and sustain its development. Even when I was in it, intuiting extensional truths, appreciating formalistic beauty, I wanted to be more, to go above and beyond that.

I said in the last chapter: “I could sense the beauty of the poems and passages I read, but my appreciation came from a general sensitivity toward the beauty of things rather than a strong literary awareness. I wasn't appreciating literature as literature, literature in itself. To do so—yes, be really into it—is to enter its realm, becoming immersed in it, one's life merging with it. One's life being ‘in itself’ when it's in literature—this is what it means to have a literary soul, which after all I don't.” Likewise, I'm not the kind of soul steeped in mathematics and physics. Whitehead was—almost all of his aesthetic sense and intuition were involved in those disciplines, so even though they were at once internal and external, they were mainly extensional; the intensional side was there insofar as his thinking was infused with them. In the end, what Whitehead accomplished was an all-engulfing objectivism, an all-encompassing cosmological scheme—which showed both his strength and limitation.

The word *shengming* did not have a place in his

philosophy. He couldn't look life in the face, so to speak, and deal with "life in itself," and because of that he couldn't talk adequately about morality and religion. He externalized life, couching it in terms of "passage of nature," of events and occasions as process. Although concepts like creativity, energy, and potentiality did appear in his philosophy, they were all externalized, linked to physics and his cosmological scheme; at most one could call them Aristotelian, but not life-related—they had nothing to do with how the life of the mind might return one to true living, "life in itself." He admired Plato (but not Aristotle as much, because of the latter's subject-predicated logic), in whose thinking ontological concepts such as spirit and the soul-as-subject featured prominently—even if they were addressed epistemologically, as issues of knowing. But while Plato made much of the transcendental, a priori spirit of understanding and its correlating rationality, Whitehead downplayed it. That kind of colorful, vivid soul, the knowing subject that stood out, was not to his liking, and he tried recasting it with an all-engulfing cosmological, objectivist, and colorless terminology. That's what it means to externalize. He externalized *shengming*, externalized the subject of understanding, so when it came to talking about morality and religion, he was an outsider, way off from what really mattered. The God of his philosophy belonged to a cosmological system infused with aesthetic sense and intuition, inspired by mathematics and physics—not the God of life, the God of morality and religion.

Whitehead was blessed. His *shengming* could all be

contained in that mathematical, physics-oriented aesthetic sense and intuition, which, conversely, permeated his being. He came across as an optimist, free of worldly worries, his spirit having found rest and peace in the stability and simplicity of schematic display. That too was part of his aristocratic side. He seemed quite distant from the contemporary world and, instead, was absorbed in the scholarly achievements of the past three centuries in physics, mathematics, and logic. His own work was rooted in those areas and limited by them—so was his cultural and historical awareness, which wasn't strong to begin with because of his outsider's approach to morality and religion. He couldn't address issues of culture in a meaningful way because he couldn't look life in the face. On this point alone, although I admired him much, later on I would find him lacking, his philosophy unsatisfactory. We connected, because the aesthetic sense and intuition that were manifesting in my life mirrored his, but their source was different, so in the end we, too, went our separate ways. Looking back, I realize not only that the source of my aesthetic sense and intuition was the primordial, swirling life force, but that my appreciation of Whitehead, his extensional, formalistic, and mathematical-cosmological scheme, was part and parcel of that powerful life force expanding outward—when I held back a little, becoming more collected, my mind more focused, I got it and embraced that kind of externalization. Yet I wasn't blessed as he was, nor did I possess that aristocratic quality. My aesthetic sense and intuition were rooted in *shengming*, so I was prone to return to it, to eventually face this question of life, of being.

At the time, however, I hated that word *shengming*, as well as anything that had to do with value, subject, morality and religion, history and culture. I was much more inclined toward externalization, toward Whitehead's all-engulfing objectivism and theory of reality, his extensionalism based on mathematics and physics. Again, that was the result of my life force expanding outward, then holding back a little, coming into focus—I was thus living life without being conscious of it, as it's said in the "Great Commentary" of the *Yijing*, "the common folks practice it daily without knowing." Practicing it long enough, I couldn't help but be moved—my spirit touched—to reflect upon life itself, to face up to it. The tendency toward formlessness and feelings of forlorn-yet-not-forlorn, which had their source in life, would eventually return me to "life in itself"—indeed, I'd find my way in that very formlessness and forlorn-yet-not-forlorn, going above and beyond externalization, turning inward and toward life.

I had to move, on the one hand, from aesthetic enjoyment and intuitive imagination to discursive reasoning, and, on the other, from externalization to an internalizing, face-to-face encounter with *shengming*. In the next ten years, age thirty to forty, life would go along those two paths simultaneously.