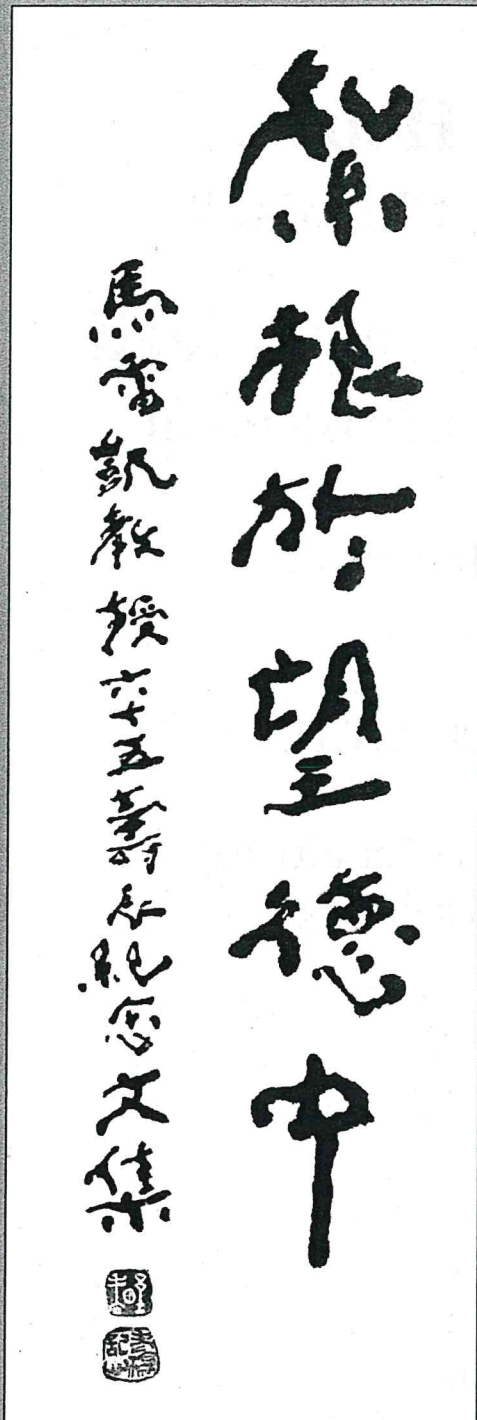


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Rooted in Hope
In der Hoffnung
verwurzelt

Festschrift in Honor of Roman Malek S.V.D.
on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday

Festschrift für Roman Malek S.V.D.
zu seinem 65. Geburtstag

Volume 1

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Volume 1

Edited by
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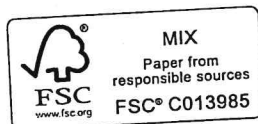
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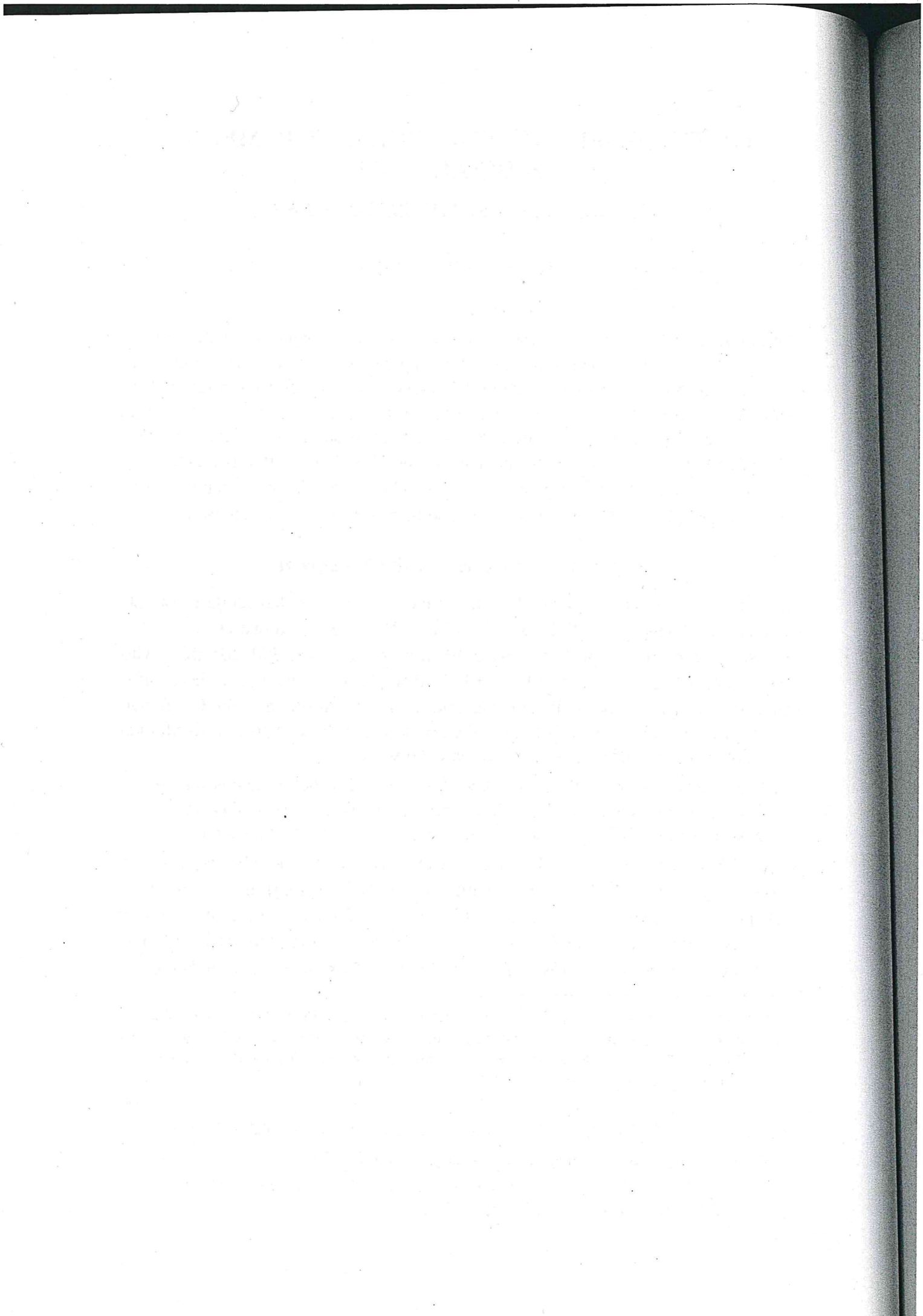
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ON THE DIFFICULT PRACTICE OF THE MEAN IN ORDINARY LIFE

TEACHINGS FROM THE *ZHONGYONG**

TIZIANA LIPPIELLO

The *Zhongyong* 中庸 is one of the most interesting, profound and controversial Chinese classical texts. The title has been rendered in so many ways that it is clear that there has never been unanimity of understanding and interpretation of this brief philosophical work, neither among Chinese nor among Western scholars. It is a composite document divided into 33 brief sections or pericopes (*zhang* 章), reflecting a multi-layered origin. During the Han dynasty it was included as a chapter into the *Liji* 禮記 (Record of Rites) and centuries later the commentator Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) promoted it as one of his *Sishu* 四書 (Four Books).

On the Alleged Genesis of the *Zhongyong*

Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–86 BC), the great Han dynasty historiographer, attributed the *Zhongyong* to Kong Ji 孔伋 (5th c. BC), better known as Zisi 子思, grandson of Confucius and later teacher of Mengzi 孟子 (ca. 390–305 BC), who studied with Zengzi 曾子 (ca. 505–435 BC), disciple of Confucius. In the Confucian tradition, Zisi played a fundamental role in the transmission of the Confucian teachings from Confucius to Mengzi, often seen as the most important Confucian philosopher after Confucius himself. Sima Qian writes:

Confucius had a son Li 鯉, styled Boyu 伯魚, who died before him at the age of fifty, before Confucius. Boyu had a son Ji, styled Zisi, [who died at] the age of sixty-two. In Song he suffered hardship. Zisi wrote the *Zhongyong*.¹

In the “Yiwenzhi” 藝文志 (Bibliographical Treatise) of the *Hanshu* 漢書 a “*Zhongyong shuo*” 中庸說 (Explanation of the *Zhongyong*) in two *pian* 篇 (“chapters”) is mentioned.² Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200) attributed the work to Zisi. According to him, Confucius’ grandson wrote it in order to clarify the virtue of his sage ancestor.³ Moreover, apparently Emperor Wu 武 of Liang 梁

* I wish to thank Prof. Andrew H. Plaks (Princeton University), Prof. Wu Xiaoming 伍曉明 (University of Canterbury, New Zealand), Prof. Burchard J. Mansvelt Beck (Leiden University) and Prof. Carlo Natali (Ca’ Foscari University of Venice) for their valuable comments and suggestions.

¹ 孔子生鯉，字伯魚。伯魚年五十，先孔子死。伯魚生伋，字子思，年六十二。嘗困於宋。子思作中庸。Sima Qian, *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1963), 47:1946.

² Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1963), 30:1709.

³ 孔子之孫子思作之以昭明聖祖之德。Liji zhushu 禮記注疏, in: *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經柱疏 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1989), 5:52/1.

(464–549) wrote a *Zhongyong jiangyi* 中庸講義 (Commentary on the *Zhongyong*).⁴

Thus, when Ban Gu 班固 (32–92) compiled the first exhaustive bibliography of Chinese literature, the *Zhongyong* probably existed as a separate text. But elsewhere in this bibliographical treatise of the *Hanshu*, we read of the existence of a work by Zisi in 23 *pian*.⁵ Did this work also include the *Zhongyong*? This hypothesis seems to be corroborated by Shen Yue 沈約 (441–512) who maintained that the *Zhongyong*, together with three other texts, the *Biaoji* 表記 (Record of Signposts), the *Fangji* 防記 (Record of Dams) and the *Ziyi* 淄衣 (The Black Jacket) all belonged to a work entitled *Zisizi* 子思子.⁶

Probably, by the Later Han dynasty and at least until the fifth century three editions of the *Zhongyong* already existed: an independent text attributed to Zisi, a text incorporated in the *Liji*, and a section of a text attributed to Zisi consisting of the aforementioned four texts: the *Zhongyong*, the *Ziyi*, the *Biaoji* and the *Fangji*.

Now, these four texts, grouped together in the *Liji*, are stylistically similar and share a common objective: moral cultivation, as we may infer from the titles of the texts:⁷

Biaoji: the title metaphorically alludes to an indicator of virtue. The *biao* (signpost) is a model everyone should have in himself to constantly measure his moral virtue.

Fangji: the dams metaphorically prevent man from straying from the way.

Ziyi: the title is taken from an Ode (*Shijing* 詩經, Book VII, *Zheng feng* 鄭風, Ode 1); the subjects of King Ping 平 showed their gratitude to Wugong 武公,

⁴ *Suishu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 32:923.

⁵ Ban Gu, *Hanshu*, 30:1724.

⁶ *Suishu*, 13:288. The “Yiwenzhi” of *Hanshu* mentions a *Zisizi* in 23 *juan*, whereas the “Yiwenzhi” of later times, until the Song dynasty, mentions a *Zisizi* in 7 *juan*. The “Yinyuezhì” 音樂志 (Treatise on Music) of the *Suishu* (13:288) quotes Shen Yue, who maintains that the *Zhongyong*, the *Biaoji*, the *Fangji* and the *Ziyi* were all taken from the *Zisizi* (「中庸」, 「表記」, 「坊記」, 「淄衣」, 皆取「子思子」).

⁷ The *Liji* was compiled, mainly from earlier sources, during the Western Han dynasty. Edward L. Shaughnessy notices that the observance of a taboo on the use of the word *bang* 邦, the name of Liu Bang 劉邦 (r. 202–195 BC), the first emperor of the Han dynasty, both in the received *Ziyi* and in the Guodian and Shanghai manuscripts denotes that the final redaction took place after Liu Bang’s reign. See E.L. Shaughnessy, *Rewriting Early Chinese Texts* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), p. 69, note 14 and p. 95, note 41. Jeffrey K. Riegel in “The Four ‘Tzu Ssu’ Chapters of the Li Chi: an Analysis and Translation of the *Fang Chi*, *Chong Yung*, *Piao Chi*, and *Tzu I*” (Ph.D. diss, Stanford University, 1978) argues that all four of these chapters were compiled toward the end of the Han dynasty. The manuscripts of the *Ziyi* shows this conclusion to be wrong with regard to the date of composition of the *Ziyi* and, as Shaughnessy observes, “doubtless with that of the other three texts as well.” Shaughnessy, *Rewriting Early Chinese Texts*, p. 70, note 14.

prince of Zheng 鄭, who was appointed minister of education (*situ* 司徒). The black jacket is the emblem of an exemplary official.

Of these four texts attributed to Zisi and included in the *Liji*, one text, the *Ziyi* is available also in two manuscript versions, the well-known Guodian and Shanghai strips, which appeared respectively in 1993 and 1994. Both the Guodian and the Shanghai bamboo strips have been dated by archaeologists to the end of the fourth century BC.⁸

The *Zisizi* has been lost and we do not know whether the received *Zhongyong* corresponds to the manuscript which, by the time of Shen Yue, had been incorporated in the *Zisizi*. Until the Song dynasty, the attribution of the work to Zisi was widely accepted, the first to express doubt was Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072), who pointed out that the theories of the *Zhongyong* were different from the teachings of Confucius; in a similar vein Wang Yinglin 王應麟 (1223–1296) stated that the work had been lifted out of an early text, the *Kongcongzi* 孔叢子.⁹ Nevertheless, it was during the Song dynasty that the *Zhongyong* became one of the works most representative of the Confucian tradition: together with the *Lunyu*, the *Daxue* (which was attributed to Zengzi), and the *Mengzi* it was promoted as one of the *Sishu* 四書.¹⁰

The Confucius-Zengzi-Zisi-Mengzi lineage was reaffirmed in this time and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) played a fundamental role in establishing this orthodox

⁸ Shaughnessy, *Rewriting Early Chinese Texts*, pp. 9-14.

⁹ Ouyang Xiu commented: “The books on the rites and music were scattered and lost, and [their contents] mixed in with the pronouncements of various Confucian scholars. It is only the *Zhongyong* that is written [by a named scholar, viz.] Zisi. Zisi was a descendant of Confucius, so what he had to tell must be correct, so how come that some of his ideas are at variance with those of the Sage?” (禮樂之書散亡，而雜乎諸儒之說，獨中庸出乎子思。子思，聖人之後，所傳宜得真，而其說異於聖人者，何也?) in: Ouyang Xiu (ed.), *Ouyang Xiu wenji* 歐陽修文集, “Wen jinshi ce san shou” 問進士策三首 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009). Ouyang Xiu doubted the origin and the attribution of the *Zhongyong* because of its discrepancies with the contents of the *Lunyu*. See Christian Soffel – Hoyt C. Tillman, *Cultural Authority and Political Culture in China. Exploring Issues with the Zhongyong and the Daotong during the Song, Jin and Yuan Dynasties* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2012), pp. 47-49. Wang Yinglin wrote: “Today it is a work in one *juan*, it is taken from the *Kongcongzi*, not the original text” (今有一卷，乃取「孔叢子」非本書也). *Hanzhi yiwenzhi kaozheng* 漢志藝文志考証, *Siku quanshu*, “Shibu shisi,” “Mulu lei” 四庫全書，史部十四，目錄類，ch. 4. Chen Duoxu 陈多旭, “*Zhongyong* yu Kong, Meng jian sixiang guodu de neizai luoji” 《中庸》与孔、孟间思想过渡的内在逻辑, *Taiyuan shifan xueyuan xuebao* (*shehui kexueban*) 太原师范学院学报 (社会科学版) 6 (2007) 2, pp. 38-41.

¹⁰ According to the historical account, in 1027 on the occasion of the imperial reception for the successful candidates of the metropolitan examination, the emperor presented a collection of his poems and a copy of *Zhongyong* as a gift. Wang Yaochen 王堯臣 as the best scholar of the year received a copy of the *Zhongyong* in the calligraphic style of the emperor. See Tu Wei-ming, *Centrality and Commonality. An Essay on Confucian Religiousness* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 15 and p. 129, note 18.

tradition. In 1190 he published the *Sizi* 四子 (The Four Masters), a work later known as *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句記注 (Collection of Notes and Commentaries on the Four Books). The work included the commentaries by Zhu Xi and by Confucian scholars of the so-called orthodox lineage. From 1313 to 1905 the *Sishu* formed the basis for the civil service examinations.¹¹

During the Qing dynasty, Cui Shu 崔述 (1740–1816) noticed that the *Zhongyong* was different in contents from the *Lunyu* and from the *Mengzi* for three main reasons: it uses an abstract language and its meanings are quite obscure, whereas the *Lunyu* and the *Mengzi* are more concrete and deal with everyday life; the *Lunyu* is simple and clear, the *Mengzi* is complicated and exhaustive; only the *Zhongyong* is complex, obscure and distant from the *Lunyu* and the *Mengzi*; moreover, he noticed that only one quotation in the *Zhongyong* also appears in the *Mengzi*, and this quotation in the *Mengzi* is not attributed to Zisi. Cui Shu, as other Qing scholars, believed that the text was compiled by more than one person over a long period of time and that it was probably composed in the early years of the Han dynasty. Therefore, he concluded that the *Zhongyong* could not be attributed to Zisi.¹²

The Qing scholar Yu Zhengxie 俞正燮 (1775–1840) provided a more articulate argument: after the burning of the books by the First Emperor of the Qin dynasty (221–206 BC), Han scholars had to reconstruct most of the classics, among them also the *Zhongyong*. The extant text was probably the result of the joint effort of Han literati shortly after the founding of the Han dynasty. They must have consulted all the available material on the subject, the structure of the work was probably faithful to Zisi's original work. Thus, he concluded, in spite of the obvious evidence of later interpolations, Sima Qian was correct in assigning the authorship to Zisi.¹³

The critical approach towards the authenticity of the classical texts was enhanced in the first decades of the 20th century, when the general trend of Chinese scholars was to doubt the antiquity of what had been labelled as classical works.

In 1947, Feng Youlan 冯友兰 (1895–1990) remarked that the 28th pericope of the *Zhongyong* could not have been written by Zisi and that notions such as *xing* 性, *ming* 命 and *cheng* 誠 were certainly later than the fourth century BC. He concluded that the *Zhongyong* was probably composed by Mengzi's followers in Qin or Han times.¹⁴

¹¹ For an exhaustive and stimulating analysis of the Song, Jin, Yuan scholarship on the *Zhongyong* see Soffel – Tillman, *Cultural Authority*.

¹² Cui Dong *biyishu*, *Zhu Si kaoxin yulu* 崔東壁遺書, 洙泗考信余錄, *juan* 3, p. 202, pp. 395–398. On the *Zhongyong* authorship, see also Soffel – Tillman, *Cultural Authority*, pp. 43–46.

¹³ Yu Zhengxie, “Zhongyong daxue 中庸大學,” in: *Guisi cunkao* 癸巳存考 (1884 ed.), 2:21b–22. Tu Weiming, *Centrality and Commonality*, pp. 12–13.

¹⁴ Feng Youlan, *The Spirit of Chinese Philosophy* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1947); Hu Zhihong 胡治洪, “Zhongyong xinquan” 中庸新詮, *Qilu xuekan* 齊魯學刊 2007/4, pp. 5–12.

As Christian Soffel has noticed, Qian Mu 錢穆 (1895–1990) maintains that the *Zhongyong*, like the *Yizhuan* 易傳, was a later work, influenced by Daoist thought, whereas Ye You 葉酉 (*fl.* 1754) had observed that in the *Zhongyong* Mount Hua 華 (Huayue 華岳 or Huashan 華山, located in the classical state of Qin) is mentioned in *Zhongyong* 26, which seems in contradiction with the attribution to Zisi, a man of the state of Lu 魯, who would probably have referred to Mount Tai (Taishan 泰山). Among other elements suggesting a late composition of the work or of sections of the work is the mention of cart track widths and the writing system in *Zhongyong* 28.¹⁵

In fact, the received *Zhongyong* is a composite work divided into thirty-three pericopes (*zhang* 章). According to Liang Tao 梁濤, it can be divided into two sections: the first section, from the second pericope to the first part of the twentieth pericope, is stylistically similar to the *Ziyi* (it often starts with the formula *ziyue* 子曰); the second part, consisting of the first pericope, the second part of pericope 20 through 33, is different and probably belongs to a second work by Zisi. It deals with the concept of *chengming* 誠明 (clarity of thought resulting from authenticity). Liang Tao also maintains that the expression *ziyue* in the *Zhongyong* and in the *Ziyi* refers to Confucius and not to Zisi.¹⁶

As said before, the *Zhongyong* was grouped together with three other texts which were ascribed to Zisi and were later incorporated in the *Liji*. Fortunately, one of these texts, the *Ziyi*, was found in two manuscript versions and can be dated to the end of the fourth century BC. Edward Shaughnessy and Li Ling 李零 have noticed that the manuscript versions of the *Ziyi* and the other texts ascribed to Zisi are stylistically similar: the pericopes begin with the formula *ziyue* 子曰, probably referring to Confucius, and are followed by quotations from the *Shi* 詩 (Odes) and from the *Shu* 書 (Documents) commented upon by the author or compiler. However, since we do not have an early manuscript of the *Zhongyong*, it is

¹⁵ Qian Mu, *Zhongguo xueshu sixiang shi luncong* 中國學術思想史論叢 (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1977), p. 308; Chen Zhaorong 陳兆榮, *Zhongyong tanwei* 中庸探微 (Taipei: Zhongzhong, 1975), p. 116; Zhu Xi, however, had not completely ignored this anachronism, in fact, in his *Zhongyong huowen* 中庸或問 he explained the passage concerning the unification of writing and the standardization of the axle lengths as the representation of the uniform rule of the Zhou dynasty. Zhu Xi, *Zhongyong huowen, xia*, in: *Zhuzi quanshu* 朱子全書 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), 6:601; Soffel – Tillman, *Cultural Authority*, pp. 44, 60.

¹⁶ Liang Tao 梁濤, “Zisi Ziyi, Biaoji, Fangji sixiang shitan” 子思《緇衣》、《表記》、《方記》思想試探, see www.jianbo.org/admin3/2006/liangtao002.htm (accessed 9 March, 2016). *Id.*, “Guodian Chujian yu Zhongyong gongan” 郭店楚簡與《中庸》公案, see www.jianbo.org/wssf/Liangtao.htm (accessed 9 March, 2016). In fact the opening passage has been identified as representative of Zisi’s thinking especially in the distinctive usage of the concepts *tian*, *ming*, *xing*, *dao* and *jiao*. An elaboration of this passage is the incipit of *Huainanzi* 11. Riegel has noticed that the same passage occurs in the *Hou Hanshu* and that the commentary ascribes it to Zisi with the formula *Zisi yue* 子思曰. See Riegel, “The Four ‘Tzu Ssu’ Chapters.”

difficult to argue, on the basis of these assumptions, that the *Zhongyong* was written by Zisi.

Nowadays, some scholars emphasize the fundamental role of Zisi in the transmission of Confucian teachings, whereas others have expressed a critical opinion on the attribution of the manuscript to him. Li Ling, for example, affirms that nowhere is it written that Zisi was the author of the *Ziyi*; rather, he considers that the *Ziyi* simply contains the words of Confucius and that probably Zisi and Gongsun Nizi 公孫尼子, followers of Confucius, recorded them.¹⁷

On the other hand Li Xueqin 李學勤 remarks: “The appearance of the manuscript not only attests that the *Zhongyong* was written by Zisi, but we can also affirm that the *Daxue* was related to Zengzi.”¹⁸

According to the Japanese scholar Takeuchi Yoshio 武内義雄, there was a relationship between the *Zhongyong* and the works known as *Biaoji*, *Ziyi*, *Fangji* and, in particular, with the first part of the *Zhongyong*.¹⁹

On the issue of authorship, Tu Wei-ming argued that the text was not composed by a single author but that “it is the result of a cumulative effort of many scholars over a long stretch of time.” According to him, in fact, the assumption that the *Zhongyong* is probably of composite authorship seems to be corroborated by the fact that, in terms of contents, the text can be divided into three sections:

The first nineteen chapters deal mainly with the character and duties of the *chünzi* (gentleman, superior man, and in this study ‘profound person’); the twentieth chapter, especially its first fifteen sections, deals mainly with the notion of *ch’eng* (politics), including the moral responsibilities and the ideal institutions of the sage-kings; and the last thirteen chapters deal mainly with the metaphysical concept of *ch’eng* (sincerity, reality and truth).²⁰

Tu Weiming affirmed that although he was not convinced that the work was written by Zisi, he still assumed that the work belonged to the school of Zisi and therefore was compatible in spirit with the Mencian tradition.

According to Jeffrey Riegel, the *Zhongyong* is the result of the debate on an original text which took place during the early Han, in his words: “The *Li chi* chapter would then be the record of a discussion in which diverse texts were brought to bear in an explanation of the significance and terminology of the

¹⁷ Li Ling 李零, *Guodian Chujiang jiao duji* 郭店楚簡校讀記 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2002), pp. 70-73.

¹⁸ Li Xueqin 李學勤, *Xian Qin rujia zhuzuo de zhongda faxian* 先秦儒家著作的重大发现, *Zhongguo zhixue* 中国哲学 No. 20 (1999), pp. 13-17.

¹⁹ Takeuchi Yoshio 武内義雄, “Zisizi kao” 子思子考, in: Naitō Torajirō 内藤虎次郎 *et al.* (eds.), *Xian Qin jingji kao* 先秦經籍考. Trs. Jiang Xia’an 江俠庵 (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1931), p. 122. See also Cao Feng 曹峰, “Si-Meng xuepai de jiangou yu jiegou – ping Liang Tao ‘Guodian zhujian yu Si-Meng xuepai’” 思孟學派的建構與解構——評梁濤“郭店竹簡與思孟學派,” see www.jianbo.org/admin3/2010/caofeng004.htm (accessed 11 March 2016).

²⁰ Tu Wei-ming, *Centrality and Commonality*, p. 17.

eponymous work associated with the grandson of Confucius.”²¹ Elaborating on Riegel’s thesis, Christian Soffel argues that the proto-*Zhongyong* would thus be a text which inspired discussion on its terms such as, for example, *xing* 性, *dao* 道, *jiao* 教, *zhonghe* 中和, *zhongyong* 中庸, *cheng* 誠 and *ming* 明. Therefore the received *Zhongyong* might be seen as a sort of commentary or explanation to the various terms of a brief text. In this respect, Soffel recalls a metaphor by Qian Mu which reflects a similar perception of the *Zhongyong* and in general of the classical philosophical literature, comparing the development of Chinese traditional thought to a snowball rolling down and thus becoming bigger and bigger. “Each work,” Qian Mu says, “includes the explanations of different ages, and all of these explanations are part of the core of the work [...]”²²

The Title: What Does *Zhongyong* 中庸 Mean?

The *Zhongyong* is a brief philosophical treatise, heterogeneous and syncretic. In the second century Zheng Xuan commented:

It is called *Practice of Equilibrium* because it records the practice of equilibrium and harmony. *Yong* means practice.²³

Zhu Xi in the 12th c. glossed the title as follows:

Zhong is a term meaning “neither to one side nor the other; neither to overshoot nor to fall short.” *Yong* means “ordinary, constant.”²⁴

The Masters Cheng, i.e., Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085) and Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107), quoted by Zhu Xi, provided a different interpretation:

To lean neither to one side nor to the other is what is called *zhong*; “unchanging” is what is called *yong*. *Zhong* is the true Way of the world; *yong* is the fixed principle of the world.²⁵

²¹ Riegel, “The Four ‘Tzu Ssu’ Chapters,” p. 107.

²² Qian Mu, *Zhongguo xueshu sixiang shi*, p. 308; Soffel – Tillman, *Cultural Authority*, p. 45.

²³ 名曰中庸者，以其記中和之為用也。庸，用也。Liji 禮記，in: *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1989), vol. 5, p. 52. For an exhaustive analysis of the meaning and the origin of the compound *zhongyong* see, for instance, Xiao Bing 蕭兵, *Zhongyong de wenhua xingcha* 中庸的文化省察 (Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 1997).

²⁴ 中者，不偏不倚無過不及之名；庸，平常也。Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集註 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), p. 17; Daniel K. Gardner, *The Four Books. The Basic Teachings of the Later Confucian Tradition* (Indianapolis – Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2007), p. 107. In fact, it is not clear whether the Masters Cheng considered the *Zhongyong* a fundamental text. Zhu Xi mentioned a work written by Cheng Yi entitled *Zhongyongjie* 中庸解; before dying, Cheng Yi ordered that the book be burned in his presence. Zhu Xi thought that the reason was that Cheng Yi was not satisfied with his book. However, as Soffel remarks, “If the *Zhongyong* were a central text for Cheng Yi’s philosophy, as Zhu Xi’s writings would lead readers to assume, it appears extremely strange that Cheng would have burned his only major writings on this canon text.” Soffel – Tillman, *Cultural Authority*, p. 56.

When Zhu Xi's disciples noticed that his reading of *yong* as *pingchang* differed from the reference by the Masters Cheng to it as *buyi* 不易 ("unchanging"), he explained that the term "constant" also implied "unchanging."²⁶ As Daniel Gardner paraphrases, the disciples wondered how it was possible that the sensitive judgement and behavioural flexibility required by different circumstances could be reconciled with adhering to a fixed principle; Zhu Xi answered that, by weighing the circumstances at hand and acting as one should in those particular circumstances, one is certain, at all times, to be in accord with universal principle-as-it-ought-to-be.²⁷

Moving from these glosses, we encounter various renderings of the title of the work, to start with Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607). In the year 1593, during his stay in Shaozhou 韶州 (Guangdong), the Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) began the Latin translation of the *Sishu* 四書. One year earlier he wrote to the Jesuits in Rome that he was teaching the contents of the *Sishu* to his confrère Fr. F. De Petris, explaining that it was "a course concerning the moral issues of China described in four books of four very good Chinese philosophers."²⁸ A manuscript of the Latin translation of the *Sishu* is kept in the Vittorio Emanuele II Library in Rome. The manuscript, Fondo Gesuitico (3314) 1185, was attributed to Ruggieri, missionary in China in the years 1579–1588. It is possible that Ruggieri was the author of a section of the manuscript or that he had copied the original translation by Matteo Ricci.²⁹ In any case, the author of the manuscript translated the title of the work as: *Semper in medio*.

²⁵ 不偏之謂中，不易之為庸；中者天下之正道，庸者天下之定理。Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, p. 17. In fact, as Soffel remarks, the originator of this rendering of *zhong* as *wuguo buji* 無過不及 was Lü Zuqian, as Zhu Xi himself acknowledged in his *Zhongyong huowen*, 6:548. Soffel – Tillman, *Cultural Authority*, p. 38.

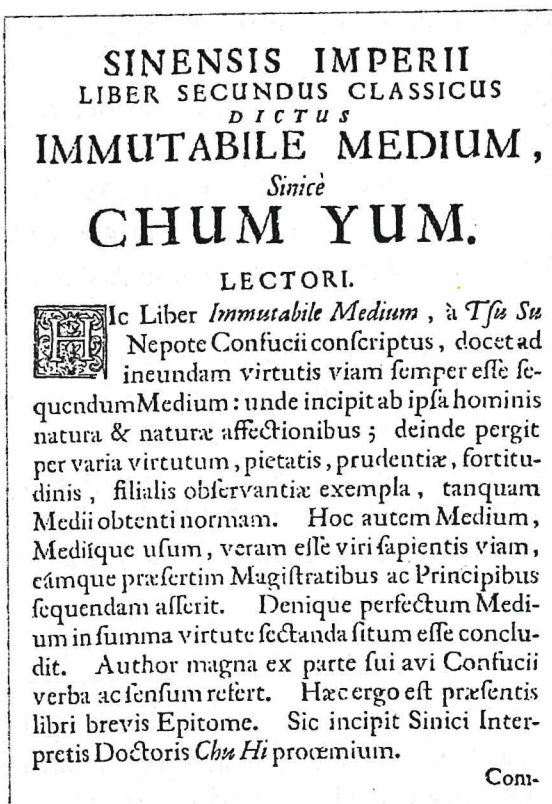
²⁶ *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類, ed. Li Jingde 黎靖德 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 62:1479-1486, 1480. Gardner, *The Four Books*, pp. 108-109.

²⁷ *Zhuzi yulei*, chap. 62, pp. 1479-1486; Gardner, *The Four Books*, p. 109.

²⁸ "[...] e finii di leggere al padre mio compagno come un corso che costumano udire delle cose morali i letterati della Cina, che sono Quattro libri di quattro philosophi assai buoni." M. Ricci S.I., "Al p. Claudio Acquaviva S.I., Preposito generale – Shaozhou, 10 dicembre 1593," in M. Ricci, *Lettere (1580–1609)*, a cura di Francesco D'Arelli (Rome: Quodlibet, 2001), p. 184.

²⁹ On this hypothesis see Francesco D'Arelli, "Il Codice Fondo Gesuitico (3314) 1185 della Biblioteca Nazionale V. Emanuele II di Roma e la critica storica", in: Sandra Marina Carletti – Maurizia Sacchetti – Paolo Santangelo (eds.), *Studi in onore di Lionello Lanciotti* (Napoli 1996), pp. 473-483; Francesco D'Arelli, "Michele Ruggieri, l'apprendimento della lingua cinese e la traduzione latina dei *sishu* (Quattro Libri)," *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale* 54 (1994) 4, pp. 479-487; Tiziana Lippiello, "Kongzi zai Yidali wenhua zhong: yanjiu yu fanyi" 孔子在義大利文化—研究與翻譯, in: Antonella Tulli – Zbigniew Wesolowski (eds.), *Yidali yu Zhongguo xiangyu. Yidali Hanxue yanjiu de gongxian* 義大利與中國相遇—義大利漢學研究的貢獻. Furen daxue diwu jie Hanxue yanjiu de gongxian 輔仁大學第五屆漢學國際研討論 (Taipei: Furen daxue chubanshe, 2009), pp. 360-382.

The authors of *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (Confucius, the Philosopher of China)³⁰ interpreted the title as “Medium Constanter Tenendum” (*Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, 1687, by Philippe Couplet, Prospero Intorcetta, François de Rougemont *et al.*); other Latin translations are: “Immutabile medium” (*Sinensis imperii libri classici sex* by Noël François, Prague 1711), and “Medii Aequabilitas” (*Cursus Litteraturae sinicae* [Shanghai: Catholic Mission, 1915]).³¹



Preface to *Zhongyong*

in: Noël François (ed.), *Sinensis imperii libri classici sex*, Prague 1711.

The pioneering work by the Jesuits provided solid grounds for the translations of the following centuries: worth noticing are the works by Abel Rémusat, *L'invariable milieu* (1817) and by James Legge, who translated the work first

³⁰ The *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* consisted of the Latin translations of the *Daxue*, *Zhongyong* and *Lunyu*. It was published in 1687 by the Royal Library in Paris. For an excursus of the text and a translation of the preface and of the *Daxue*, see Thierry Meynard, *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus. The First Translation of the Confucian Classics* (Rome: Insitutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2001).

³¹ In 1687 the Jesuits Prospero Intorcetta, Philippe Couplet, François de Rougemont and others published the translation of a section of the *Sishu* in a work entitled *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, whereas in 1879 the Jesuit Angelo Zottoli translated the *Zhongyong* as *Medii Aequabilitas*. On the Latin translation see also Andrew Plaks, “The Man, Nature, and Self-realization. European Translations of the *Zhongyong*,” in: Viviane Alleton – Michael Lackner (eds.), *De l'un au multiple. Traductions du chinois vers les langues européennes* (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1999), pp. 311-332.

entitling it *The Doctrine of the Mean* (1861) and later as *The State of Equilibrium and Harmony* (1893).³²

In the year 1952 the poet Ezra Pound published his translation of the *Zhongyong*, entitling it *The Unwobbling Pivot*, probably misreading the written form of the character *zhong*. He meant the axis which is at the centre of the universe, characterized by a circular motion around it.³³ It is interesting to notice how Ezra Pound synthesizes the three main subjects of the *Zhongyong*: *metaphysics*, which is represented in the *Zhongyong* by the concept of *cheng* 誠 (authenticity); *politics*, the art of government, represented by the metaphor of the axe-handle used to mould the axe-handle, similar to the use of man to govern man (*Zhongyong*, 13); *ethics*, represented by the metaphor of the archer, who, when he misses the bull's eye, turns and seeks the cause of the error in himself (*Zhongyong*, 14).³⁴

According to Ezra Pound, man finds the axis, the root of the universe around which the cyclical course of the universe moves, in himself, and behaves accordingly: "The two ideograms *chung* and *yung* represent most definitely a process in motion, an axis round which something turns." He comes to this conclusion by his reading of the following passage of the *Zhongyong*: 君子中庸，小人反中庸， which he translates as "The master man finds the center and does not waver; the mean man runs counter to the circulation about the invariable."³⁵ Ezra Pound interprets *zhong* as "axis" and *yong* as "unwobbling." Man finds the axis in himself and consequently he never vacillates or wavers. Is this the meaning of finding the centre? Does it imply being resolute and steady? We shall see how Ezra Pound's interpretation of *yong* is wrong, *yong* implying, as suggested by Zheng Xuan and by Song scholars, flexibility, common practice, constancy, rather than firmness and resoluteness.

Ernest R. Hughes, for instance, rendered *Zhongyong* as *The Mean in Action*, explaining that *zhong* means "centrality," *yong* means "commonly and generally active."³⁶ He argued that to consider *zhong* as represented by the image of the bull's eye in a target was wrong, meaning that *zhong* was not simply the centre

³² On Legge's translations see Wang Hui, *Translating Chinese Classics in a Colonial Context. James Legge and His Two Versions of the Zhongyong* (Bern et al.: Peter Lang, 2008).

³³ Ezra Pound, *Confucius. The Great Digest and the Unwobbling Pivot* (London: Peter Owen, 1952; repr. 1968), pp. 97, 103. See Plaks, "The Man, Nature, ...," p. 315.

³⁴ Pound, *Confucius*; see also Tu Wei-ming, *Centrality and Commonality*, p. 132.

³⁵ Pound, *Confucius*, p. 103.

³⁶ Ernest R. Hughes (trans.), *The Great Learning and the Mean-in-Action* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1943), p. 1, note 1. Hughes remarks: "To translate *chung* as if the centrality conceived were via the image of the bull's eye in a target is attractive but probably wrong. A mean of truth between exaggerations of error represents more what the author had in mind. To translate *yung* as 'functioning' also is attractive, but it is doubtful whether the author had the biologist's notion of functioning. I have, therefore, given the book's English name as the Mean-in-action."

but rather the condition of perfect balance man should achieve in any circumstance.

Tu Wei-ming, adopting Zhu Xi's explanation of *yong* as "ordinary," "common," translated *zhongyong* as two separate, coordinated nouns, "centrality" and "commonality," arguing that *yong*, which is usually associated with notions such as "common," "usual," "ordinary," "simple" and "unchanging," in this context has a positive connotation: it represents a great Confucian virtue which refers to commonly shared experiences. He comments: "It is the Confucian belief that the ultimate meaning of life is rooted in the ordinary human existence."³⁷

Other examples of translation are: *Zhong Yong. La regulation à usage ordinaire* (François Jullien, 1993), *Focussing the Familiar* (Roger T. Ames – David L. Hall, 2001), *On the Practice of the Mean* (Andrew Plaks, 2003), *Use of the Center* (Edward Shaughnessy, 2006), *Maintaining Perfect Balance* (Daniel Gardner, 2007), *La costante pratica del giusto mezzo* (Lippiello, 2010).³⁸

As it may be noticed, the various interpretations vary on the semantic as well on the syntactic level. For instance, Matteo Ricci and Michele Ruggieri translated *zhongyong* as *Semper in medio*, whereas the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* by Philippe Couplet, Prospero Intorcetta, François de Rougemont etc., rendered it as *Medium Constanter Tenendum*. Both translations suggest what the Masters Cheng had explained: it is necessary to constantly maintain a condition of equilibrium, meaning never inclining to one side nor to the other, never wobbling (in Ezra Pound's words), neither to exceed nor to fall short.

Jullien explains the reasons of his rendering of *zhongyong* as *La regulation à usage ordinaire*. According to him, translations as "juste milieu" (the mean) or "invariable milieu" (invariable mean) are not exhaustive, as the meaning of *Zhongyong* is not simply to avoid the extreme poles or to find a timeless medium.

Il m'a donc fallu renoncer à suivre une voie qui se révélait depuis longtemps sans issue: celle de traduire la notion de *zhongyong* en modulant, d'une façon ou d'une autre, à partir des termes, retenus jusqu'ici, de "centre," d'"équilibre" ou de "milieu." Je m'y suis résolu, on s'en doute, non sans beaucoup de scrupules et d'hésitations. Mais puisqu'il s'avérait impossible de rendre la notion de *zhongyong* en traduisant littéralement les deux termes, *zhong* et *yong*, mieux valait essayer, m'a-t-il semblé, d'en exprimer directement l'idée – d'en restituer globalement la teneur: quand la voie de la philologie s'épuise, n'est-ce pas au sens philosophique d'assumer la relève?

Voilà pourquoi j'ai préféré mettre en avant, en changeant carrément de registre, le terme de régulation. Selon le Robert, ce terme désigne le "processus

³⁷ Tu Wei-ming, *Centrality and Commonality*, p. 133, note 4.

³⁸ On Ames and Hall's translation see Wu Xiaoming 伍晓明, "Yingyi 'zhihou' de *Zhongyong*. Yi An Lezhe dui *Zhongyong* zhi 'cheng' de fanyi wei li" 英译"之后"的《中庸》——以安乐哲对《中庸》之"诚"的翻译为例 (The *Zhongyong* "after" Translation. A Case Study of Ames' Rendition of the Chinese Notion of *cheng*), paper presented at the International Conference for Sinological Translations promoted by the International Academy for China Study, Beijing daxue, 1–2 November 2014.

par lequel un mécanisme ou un organisme se maintient dans un certain équilibre, conserve un régime déterminé ou modifie son fonctionnement de manière à s'adapter aux circonstances" (et, de même, le sens premier de régulateur, pris comme substantif: "ce qui discipline, ce qui modèle, ce qui rend régulier, ordonné").³⁹

The French term "régulation" designates the process by which a mechanism or an organism maintains an equilibrium, keeps a determined regime or modifies its functioning in order to adapt to circumstances. François Jullien remarks that this idea of centrality coincides with inner rectitude and with the logics of alternation. Also, it encompasses moderation and finally harmony.

This implies an inner equilibrium which is well explained in a passage of the *Zhongyong*, 1:

Before pleasure, anger, sorrow, or joy have arisen – this we call the not-yet-manifest, this we call *zhong* (inner equilibrium). After they have arisen and attained due proportion – this we call *he* (harmony). Inner equilibrium is the great foundation of the world; harmony is the Way that unfolds throughout the world.⁴⁰

The control and balance of these emotional states – pleasure, anger, sorrow and joy – are essential for attaining first inner equilibrium, then cosmic harmony. The mean is the primary source of human experience, whereas harmony is the fulfilment of the Way. How to moderate feelings? They must attain due proportion and be in tune. As Wu Xiaoming has suggested, *jie* 節 indicates the joining area of the two sections of the bamboo, the articulation point where things are joined together and where they are separated. Literally *zhongjie* 中節 means "to hit the correct target." Hence the sentence *fa er jie zhongjie* 發而皆中節 refers to a situation in which emotions do not go too far nor fall short. They are in tune with one another and therefore contribute to the cosmic order.⁴¹

³⁹ François Jullien, *Zhongyong. La Régulation à usage ordinaire* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale Édition, 1993), pp. 15-27.

⁴⁰ 喜，怒，哀，樂之未發，謂之中。發而皆中節，謂之和。中也者，天下之大本也。和也者，天下之達道也。Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, p. 18; Plaks, *Ta Hsüeh and Chung Yung*, Gardner, *The Four Books*, p. 111 (translation slightly modified). According to the commentary, emotions, when appropriately expressed, with moderation and without excess, do not hinder the equilibrium and harmony of human nature. The great foundation is the human nature bestowed by Heaven. Plaks remarks that these four archetypal emotional states are commonly quoted in early Chinese texts (see for instance *Xunzi*, ch. 17 and 22), therefore he connotes them as "markers of human experience," stressing their different role before they have arisen and when they do emerge. The first emotional state is the source of equilibrium, the second of harmony. Plaks, *Ta Hsüeh and Chung Yung*, p. 81, note 6.

⁴¹ Wu Xiaoming, personal communication (23 December, 2014). Zhu Xi explains that the sentence "喜怒哀樂未發謂之中" and the sentence "君子之中庸也，君子而時中" are complementary and illustrate the meaning of *zhong*, that is not to exceed nor to fall short. As for "喜怒哀樂未發謂之中" Zhu Xi explains: "喜、怒、哀、樂、情也。其未發、則性也、無所偏倚、故謂之中。發皆中節、情之正也、無所乖戾、故謂之和，" Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, p. 18. The key concept is *shizhong* 時中 which he interprets as "to

We understand that the conditions of inner equilibrium and harmony are not easily accomplished; it is through practice, constancy and continuous self-cultivation that the *junzi* 君子 (man of noble character) achieves his equilibrium. He constantly practises the mean (*junzi zhongyong* 君子中庸), he practises it by watching himself when he is alone (*junzi shen qi du* 君子慎其獨也) and searching the causes of his errors in himself (*Zhongyong*, 1, 2), like an archer who searches in himself the causes of his mistake when he misses the target (*shi zhu zheng gu, fan qiu zhu qi shen* 失諸正鵠, 反求諸其身, *Zhongyong*, 14).

Not so far from these considerations, Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, 1) maintains that we do not receive moral virtues by nature, but it is by habituation (*ethos*) that we build or destroy them. Excellence of character results from habituation and not by nature. The excellences develop in us neither by nature nor contrary to nature, but because we are able to receive them and bring them to perfection by means of habituation. In fact, in the case of those things that we receive by nature, as in the case of the senses, we did not acquire them as the result of habituation, such as of repeated acts of seeing or hearing, but, on the contrary, we use them repeatedly because we have them. In other words, Aristotle says that we improve our moral virtues by habituation, by practice. We become just by doing just things, moderate by doing moderate things, and courageous by doing courageous things. Interestingly enough, according to Aristotle dispositions are determined by behaviour and practice, in his words: “[...] some people become moderate and mild tempered, others self-indulgent and irascible, the one group as a result of behaving one way in some circumstances, the other as a result of behaving another way.”⁴²

The *Nicomachean Ethics* is talking about “habituation”; also, it argues that temper and dispositions are determined by our practice and habitual acting: for example we can become courageous or cowardly by acting in frightening situations, and through being habituated to fearing or being confident.

Aristotle argues that excellence is a disposition of intermediacy between two states, one involving excess and the other involving deficiency. Excellence is intermediacy, but “in terms of what is best, and good practice, it is extremity,”

find the mean/equilibrium according to the circumstances” (*suishi* 隨時) and exemplifies it with the sentence “What you saw yesterday was the mean, what you see today is no longer the mean.”(本意只是說昨日看得是中, 今日看得又不是中). Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類, ed. Li Jingde 黎靖德 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 64:1480.

⁴² *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a14-b25; see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translation by C. Rowe, Philosophical Introduction and Commentary by S. Broadie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 111-112. On the relation between Aristotelian and Confucian ethics through the interpretation of the Italian Jesuit Alfonso Vagnone (1566-1640) see Thierry Meynard, “Aristotelian Ethics in the Land of Confucius: A Study of Vagnone’s Western Learning on Personal Cultivation,” *Antiquorum Philosophia. An International Journal* 7 (2013), pp. 145-169; Andrew Plaks, “Means and Means: A Comparative Reading of Aristotle’s *Ethics* and the *Zhongyong*,” in: Steven Shankman – Stephen Durrant (eds.), *Early China/Ancient Greece. Thinking through Comparisons* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002), pp. 187-206.

as “not every act admits of intermediacy, nor does every affection.” In some cases intermediacy or the mean is not moderation but it is an extreme. Take the case of courage. Courage in a way is an excess, but with regard to the feelings of fear and boldness, it is an intermediate state: in fact, the one who is extremely bold is rash, whereas the one who is excessively fearful and deficiently bold is cowardly.

On the other hand, Aristotle continues, with regard to pleasures and pains, the intermediate state is moderation, the excessive state self-indulgence.⁴³

Pleasures, pains, fear: we find similar examples in the *Zhongyong*. The concepts of mean, inner equilibrium, intermediacy, are perceived under the angle of duration, as a continuous process in the course of time. Its constancy is a continuous adaptation to the situation which is in a constant process of evolution and transformation.

In his essay “Means and Means: A Comparative Reading of Aristotle’s Ethics and the *Zhongyong*,” Andrew Plaks masterly outlines the most interesting points of common conception and divergence of the two unrelated texts which are considered the *loci classici* of the doctrine of the mean, the *Zhongyong* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*: first of all he notices that, unlike the authors of the *Zhongyong*, Aristotle’s attempt to define moral excellence is inspired by the Greek concern for the attainment of an ideal “well-being of the Soul” (*eudaimonia*), meaning that “the adoption of a balanced ethical stance, defined in terms of avoidance of extremes of excess and deficiency along a series of axes of human behaviour, seems to promise the fulfilment of a healthy moral balance for the individual, while also providing an apt model for a healthy balancing of forces in the ordering of a just society at large.”⁴⁴

In the *Zhongyong* the aspiration towards “well-being” as the highest goal of individual cultivation is not considered, the object of moral cultivation being rather shifted on the level of interpersonal relations with the others and integration with the cosmos. However, although the idea of justice is not expressed in the *Zhongyong* as in Aristotle’s *Ethics*, the section on *cheng* 誠 deals with the art or rulership, moving from self-cultivation for the sake of interpersonal harmony to the public dimension. Plaks significantly concludes: “I believe that if this text were accessible in their own time and tongue, Plato and Aristotle in far-off Greece would have recognized this idea as very much a vision of the fulfillment of their much-sought *eudaimonia*.”

The Value of Time in the Practice of the Mean

The idea of constancy combined with the need of a continuous adaptation to circumstances is expressed in *Zhongyong*, 2.

⁴³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1105b20-1108b10, Broadie – Rowe, *Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 117-118.

⁴⁴ Plaks, “Means and Means,” p. 192.

Confucius said: "The man of noble character constantly practises the mean, whereas the man of base character acts in opposition to it. The man of noble character constantly practising the mean is because he is able to find equilibrium according to the circumstances. The man of base character behaving in a manner contrary to it is because he is neither cautious nor timorous."⁴⁵

In the interpretation of this passage the character *shi* 時, an adverb of time, plays a pivotal role. It has been read in two ways: a. constantly, always; b. at proper times or according to circumstances. Andrew Plaks, for instance, maintains that "The argument of the *Chung Yung* requires that it be understood in this passage as emphasizing the unceasing process of counterbalancing demanded by the pursuit of a degree of harmony in human experience – itself but an approximation of the balanced 'mean' of the cosmic order."⁴⁶ Daniel Gardner, following Zhu Xi's interpretation, comments that preserving the balance is situational and determined by the circumstances of the moment, as "the challenge for the individual is to weigh all circumstances sensitively and behave in a manner fully appropriate to those circumstances."⁴⁷

In fact the two readings of *shi*, "constantly, always" and "at proper times or according to circumstances" are complementary and congruent with the dual concept of *yong*, "common, ordinary, constant" (as suggested by Zheng Xuan) and "unchanging" (as suggested by the Masters Cheng). In order to understand this complementarity, we shall analyse a few passages from the *Zhongyong*. First of all, it is truly arduous to constantly maintain equilibrium and harmony, as we may infer from the following passage:

The Master said: "I know why it is that the *dao* is not practised: those in the know go beyond it, while the ignorant do not come up to it. I know why the *dao* is not understood: the wise go beyond it, while the worthless do not come up to it."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ 仲尼曰：“君子中庸，小人反中庸。君子之中庸也，君子而時中；小人之反中庸也，小人而無忌憚也。” *Zhongyong*, 2. Cf. Plaks, *Ta Hsüeh and Chung Yung*, p. 26; Gardner, *The Four Books*, p. 2. It is interesting to notice here that also Aristotle, in discussing the mean, considers the concept of fear and confidence but he is clear about the mean between these two extreme poles: courage, with regard to the feelings of fear and boldness, is an intermediate state. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1107b; Broadie – Rowe, *Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 117-119. See above, pp. 87-88.

⁴⁶ Plaks, *Ta Hsüeh and Chung Yung*, p. 82.

⁴⁷ Zhu Xi maintains that "the reason why the *junzi* practises the mean is that he is endowed with moral excellence and therefore he can occupy the mean position. (...) For the mean is without fixed concreteness, it has its place according to circumstances, and so it represents the regular, constant principle." Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, p. 19.

⁴⁸ 子曰，道之不行也，我知之矣，知者，過之，愚者，不及也。道之不明也，我知之矣，賢者，過之，不肖者，不及也。 *Zhongyong*, 4; Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, p. 19; see James Legge, *The Chinese Classics. with a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena, and Copious Indexes*, 5 vols. Vol. 1: *Confucian Analects, the Great Learning, and the Doctrine of the Mean*, revised second ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893 [first ed. 1861]), p. 387 and Plaks, *Ta Hsüeh and Chung Yung*, p. 26. Zhu Xi in the commentary

Thus, going beyond and falling short are two extreme poles and *zhong* corresponds to a variable state of equilibrium between them. From this passage we understand that *zhong* means equilibrium between excess and deficiency. In other words, *zhong* expresses the idea of centrality understood as a delicate and variable point of equilibrium between two extreme poles. Therefore, there is not a fixed and established centre, and the idea of centrality changes according to circumstances, depending on human conditions and contingent situations.⁴⁹

Zhu Xi interprets *shi* as “depending on the circumstances,” he comments:

Therefore the equilibrium has not a fixed substance, it depends on the circumstances of the moment ...⁵⁰

Zhu Xi wants to emphasize the “situationality” in the practice of maintaining the balance. In fact, maintaining the equilibrium constantly is a challenge for the individual: it implies that he weighs all circumstances sensitively and behaves in a way appropriate to those circumstances. Circumstances always change and for this reason it is difficult to constantly maintain equilibrium.

As we read in the *Lunyu*:

The Master said: “Practising the mean with constancy is the highest virtue. Few, indeed are those among common men who are capable of sustaining it for a long time.”⁵¹

To maintain the mean constantly and for a long time is difficult, as we can read in *Zhongyong*, 7:

The Master said: “People all say ‘I know’. But if you drive them into a net, a trap, or a pit, none will know how to escape. People all say ‘I know’, but having chosen to practise the mean, they are unable to abide by it for even a month.”⁵²

remarks that the knowing and the worthy exceed the right balance in knowledge and their deeds, whereas the ignorant and the unworthy are inadequate, therefore all of them are far from practising the Way, hence far from the condition of equilibrium.

⁴⁹ Plaks, “The Man, Nature ...,” p. 317.

⁵⁰ The full quote is: 君子之所以為中庸者，以其有君子之德，而又能隨時以處中也。小人之所以反中庸者，以其有小人之心，而又無所忌憚也。蓋中無定體，隨時而在，是乃平常之理。The man of noble character maintains constant equilibrium because, being a man of noble character, he accords with circumstances in finding the equilibrium. The small man opposes the equilibrium because, being a small man, is devoid of fear and restraint. Therefore, the equilibrium has not a fixed substance, it depends on the circumstances of the moment, this is a common principle. Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, p. 19; cf. Gardner, *The Four Books*, p. 113.

⁵¹ 子曰：「中庸之為德也，其至矣乎！民鮮久矣」。 *Lunyu*, VI.29; *Zhongyong*, 1.3. Cfr. Plaks, *Ta Hsüeh and Chung Yung*, p. 26; Gardner, *The Four Books*, p. 113.

⁵² 子曰：「人皆曰予知：驅而納諸罟獲陷阱之中而莫之知辟也。人皆曰予知：擇乎中庸，而不能期月守也」。 *Zhongyong* 1.7; cf. Plaks, *Ta Hsüeh and Chung Yung*, p. 26; Gardner, *The Four Books*, p. 113.

Only the Sages can fulfil this task, and in fact Shun became Shun because he was able to practise the mean:

The Master has stated: "The great sage Shun was a person of supreme wisdom, was he not? Shun had a penchant for learning by enquiring, and for probing the deeper meaning of things expressed in everyday speech. He would keep men's evil deeds discreetly hidden from view, while elevating the good for all to see. He grasped the two ends and put the mean into practice. It was by this that he took his place as the great Shun!"⁵³

It was Yao who, when Heaven conferred the line of succession on Shun, suggested to him to hold fast to the mean.

Yao said: "Oh – You Shun! The line of succession conferred by Heaven rests on your person! Faithfully hold fast to the mean. If there shall be distress and want within the four seas, the Heavenly revenue will come to a perpetual end."⁵⁴

The Qing scholar Liu Baonan 劉寶南 (1791–1855) observes that *zhong* here means *zhongyong*, and that, after Yao, the sages in discussing the art of government all started from this concept.⁵⁵

It is necessary and fundamental for a Sage to practise *zhong*, a virtue which is rarely practised unceasingly. This passage seems to corroborate Matteo Ricci's translation, "Semper in medio." The Sage maintains constant equilibrium because he is able to accord with the circumstances in practising the mean.

To constantly practise the mean is difficult as it implies a continuous adapting to circumstances and finding the mean according to the variability of the situations. The Japanese scholar Kanaya Osamu affirms that "the Mean is the moderate middle of ordinary existence," in his words:

Zhong and *yong* are, however, rhyming words with the same vowel formation and when these are combined in a single compound they assume a similar meaning. Therefore, the emphasis on *zhongyong* is after all on *zhong*, and it may be considered to mean that the state midway between two extremes is by nature endowed with the placidness of everyday normality.⁵⁶

⁵³ 子曰：「舜其大知也與！舜好問而以好察邇言，隱惡而揚善。執其兩端，用其中於民，其斯以為舜乎！」 *Zhongyong*, 6; Plaks, *Ta Hsüeh and Chung Yung*, p. 27 (tr. slightly modified). See also Legge, *The Chinese Classics ...*, vol. 1, p. 388.

⁵⁴ 堯曰：「咨！爾舜！天之曆數在爾躬，充執其中。四海困窮，天祿永終。」 *Lunyu*, XX.1; Legge, *The Chinese Classics ...*, vol. 1, p. 350 (tr. slightly modified); cf. Roger T. Ames – Henry Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius. A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine, 1998), p. 226.

⁵⁵ 自堯發之，其後賢聖論政治學術，咸本此矣。Liu Baonan, *Lunyu zhengyi* 論語正義 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), p. 757.

⁵⁶ Kanaya Osamu, "The Mean in Original Confucianism," in: Philip J. Ivanhoe (ed.), *Chinese Language, Thought, and Culture* (Chicago – La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1996), pp. 83-93.

The interpretation of *yong* as common, ordinary (*pingchang* 平常) was emphasised also by Qian Mu and Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 (1904–1982) who, in commenting *Lunyu* VI.29 explained the meaning of *yong* in the compound *zhongyong* as, respectively, “the common man’s virtue” (Qian Mu), “the ordinary practice of every man, in accordance with the seasons and with the circumstances” (Xu Fuguan).⁵⁷

Shun’s ability of “grasping the two ends” (*zhi qi liangduan* 執其兩端, cf. above) means that he fully took hold of the both extremes and then chose the harmonious mean between them, meaning that he inclined neither to one side nor to the other. On the contrary, he was able to adopt a measure, a position that encompassed both sides.⁵⁸

In fact, as well expressed by Kanaya Osamu, “the middle between two extremes is not fixed at a single central point but is an appropriate middle that moves while maintaining a balance between two extremes.”⁵⁹ But how to find the mean?

Weighing the Circumstances: The Example of Zimo 子莫

Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book II.8, 1108b30-1109a10) argues that the mean may on some occasions lean to one side or to the other, in the sense that one extreme is sometimes more opposed than the other, hence it is more extreme than the other with regard to intermediacy, in his words:

⁵⁷ Qian Mu in *Lunyu xinjie* 論語新解 (A New Explanation of the *Lunyu*, 2 vols. [Hong Kong: Xinya yanjiusuo, 1964]) states that the man who practises the *zhongyong* is the common man, the virtue of *zhongyong* is the common man’s virtue. Xu Fuguan in *Zhongguo renxinglun shi* 中國人性論史 (Shanghai: Sanlian, 2001) maintains that *yong* refers to everyday practice (*pingchangde xingwei* 平常的行為) that is “the ordinary practice of every man, in accordance with the seasons and with the circumstances.” Li Zehou 李澤厚, commenting on *Lunyu* VI.29, follows Xu Fuguan’s interpretation, saying that *yong* means “to practise the *dao* of man in everyday life. The *dao* of man is the *dao* of Heaven, it consists in everyday constant practice.” Li Zehou, *Lunyu jindu* 論語今讀 (Beijing: Sanlian, 2004), pp. 185-186.

⁵⁸ As Aristotle wrote in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book II.6, 1105b20-1106b1), the mean is not necessarily the number six, midway between two and ten, but may vary, in his words: “[...] by intermediate ‘with reference to the object’ I mean what is equidistant from each of its two extremes, which is one and the same for all, whereas by intermediate ‘relative to us’ I mean the sort of thing that neither goes to excess nor is deficient – and this is not one thing, nor is it the same for all. So for example if ten count as many and two as few, six is what people take as intermediate, with reference to the object, since it exceeds and is exceeded by the same amount; and this is the intermediate in terms of arithmetical proportion. But the intermediate relative to us should not be taken in this way ...” (Broadie – Rowe, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 116). Plaks (“The Man, Nature ...,” pp. 317-318) explains that this means something “embracing” the entire spectrum of moral choice from end to end, as a step toward locating the functional mean that may vary according to the circumstances.

⁵⁹ Kanaya Osamu, “the Mean in Original Confucianism,” p. 85; see also Jullien, *Zhongyong*, p. 53.

Again, in some cases what is at the extremes has a certain similarity to the intermediate, as rashness has to courage and wastefulness to open-handedness; whereas there is most dissimilarity between the extremes in relation to each other, and things that are furthest away from each other are defined as contraries, so that things that are further apart will also be more contrary to each other. What is more opposed to the intermediate is in some cases the deficient state, in others the excessive, as in the case of courage it is not rashness, an excessive state, but a deficient one, cowardliness, whereas with moderation it is not "insensateness," a state involving lack, but self-indulgence, an excessive state. [...]

So for example because rashness seems to be something more like and closer to courage, and cowardliness more unlike it, it is the latter that we oppose more to courage – because things that are further removed from the intermediate seem to be more contrary to it.⁶⁰

Aristotle provides concrete examples: with regard to feelings of fear and confidence, courage is the mean, with regard to pleasure and pains, the mean is moderation, the excess is indulgence; with regard to honour and dishonour, the mean is proper pride, with regard to anger also there is an excess, a deficiency, and a mean, the intermediate state being "mildness." And, as far as shame is concerned, Aristotle says that although a sense of shame is not an excellence, people are praised for having a sense of shame, too.

The *Zhongyong* does not indicate where or what is the mean in different situations and what is the excess or the deficiency. It is Mengzi who exhorts the reader to be careful in holding the mean between the two extremes by introducing a new concept: *quan* 權 (weighing of circumstances). *Quan* is the measure adopted to avoid falling to one side by holding on to a single, fixed point. He first describes the attitude of Yang Zhu 楊朱 which he stigmatizes as "if plucking out one hair from his body would have benefitted the whole world, he would not do it."⁶¹ On the contrary, he continues, Mozi 墨子 "favoured 'impartial caring' and, if by rubbing smooth his whole body from the crown to the heel, he would benefit the whole world, he would do it."⁶² Zimo 子莫 adopted a virtuous attitude between two extremes:

Zimo held fast to a middle course between the two; and by holding fast to a middle course he came close to it [the Way]. But holding fast to a middle course, without weighing of circumstances, is the same as holding fast to a single position.⁶³

⁶⁰ Broadie – Rowe, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 121.

⁶¹ 楊子取為我，拔一毛而利天下，不為也。Mengzi, 7A.26; Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, p. 357.

⁶² 墨子兼愛，摩頂放踵利天下，為之。Mengzi, 7A.26; Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, p. 357.

⁶³ 子莫執中，執中為近之，執中無權，猶執一也。Mengzi, 7A.26; Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, p. 357. Legge, *The Chinese Classics ...*, vol. 1, p. 465; Gardner, *The Four Books*, p.

Quan “to weigh, to judge what is appropriate in each situation,” is the measure to evaluate the right and correct point between the two extremes in each circumstance. Mengzi makes it clear that *zhong* should not be considered a fixed, absolute central point. Instead it is flexible and should vary. That is why *zhi zhong* 執中 (holding fast to a middle course), requires a constant and accurate practice. In fact, one should not fall into taking a single position and becoming blind to others, as Mengzi exhorts:⁶⁴

What I dislike about holding fast to a single fixed position is that it does harm to the Way. Taking a single fixed position disregards a hundred others.⁶⁵

Zhu Xi comments:

Zimo was a worthy from the State of Lu. He was aware that Yang Zhu and Modi had lost the middle course, therefore he measured the two extremes and held fast to a middle course. To be close, means to be close to the *dao*.

Quan means “to weigh,” it is to evaluate the weight of things and hold fast to a middle course. To adopt “the centre” without weighing is to adhere to a fixed centre.⁶⁶

In other terms, to hold to a middle course is not simply to pursue moderation in one’s behaviour; it means to constantly ponder the circumstances from all perspectives, and not from a single fixed point and to choose what is most appropriate in any single circumstance.

Confucius was an example of equilibrium. As Mengzi asserted (*Mengzi*, 4B.10), he did not do anything extreme. We know from the *Lunyu* VII.38 that he was “mild yet resolute, majestic yet not fierce, deferential yet at ease.”⁶⁷

According to Li Zehou, this was an example of practising the *zhongyong* and of moral equilibrium. Commenting on this passage, he quotes the *Lunyu zhaji* 論語札記 by Li Guangdi 李光地 (1642–1718) who considers that if the feelings of pleasure and anger are moderate then there is sense of deference. Confucius was an example because he could control his feelings: he was mild – though resolute – and deferential.

In the feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy, men and the sages are all the same. In pleasure we have the manifestation of mildness, in anger we have

98; cf. Bryan Van Norden, *Mengzi. With Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2008), p. 178.

⁶⁴ *Mengzi*, 7A.26; Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, p. 357. Legge, *The Chinese Classics ...*, vol. 1, p. 465; Gardner, *The Four Books*, p. 98; cf. Van Norden, *Mengzi*, p. 178.

⁶⁵ 所惡執一者，為其賊道也，舉一而廢百也。 *Mengzi*, 7A.26; Gardner, *The Four Books*, p. 98.

⁶⁶ 子莫，魯之賢人也。知楊墨之失中也，故度於而二者之間而執其中。近，近道也。權，稱錘也，所以稱物之輕重而取中也。執中而無權則膠於一定之中。 *Mengzi*, 7A.26; Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, p. 357.

⁶⁷ 子濫而厲，威而不猛，恭而安。 *Lunyu*, VII.38.

the manifestation of sternness. Before there are stirrings of pleasure and anger, the real sense of deference will constantly prevail.⁶⁸

The Guodian manuscript *Xing zi ming chu* 性自命出 (strips 2-3) also mentions the feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy, but it is more explicit about their relation to the external world: emotions should not be manifested because, once they are manifested, the external world takes hold of them.

The *qi* of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy are human natural tendencies. Once they are manifested, external reality takes hold of them. Natural tendencies come from the mandate, and the mandate descends from Heaven (strip 2).⁶⁹

In other words, all men are endowed with a common nature and therefore they are similar, and the feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy are part of it. But when they are manifested and interact with the external reality (*wu* 物), human nature differentiates.⁷⁰ The manuscript explicitly states that, although all people possess human nature, their heart-minds have no fixed inclinations, which depend on external things. Human nature acts as a host.

In general, human nature acts as host, and [external] things take hold of it. The tones of bronze [bells] and stone [chimes] are such that they do not sound unless they are struck (strip 5).⁷¹

In other, more explicit words:

Within the four seas, human nature is one. That each of them employs their heart differently, depends on their education.⁷²

⁶⁸ 喜怒哀樂，聖與人同。當其喜，則溫之氣形，當其怒，則威之氣形；及乎喜怒未發，則恭之意常在也。Li Zehou, *Lunyu jindu*, p. 222.

⁶⁹ 喜怒哀樂之氣性也及其見於外則物取之也性自命出命自天降。Scott Cook's reading of the passage is slightly different: "The vital energies of joy, anger, grief, and sorrow are [human] nature; once they manifest externally, things take hold of them. [Human] nature comes via mandate, and [this] mandate is sent down from Heaven." *Id.*, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian. A Study and Complete Translation*, Cornell East Asia Series, 165 (Ithaca, NY: East Asia Program, Cornell University, 2012), pp. 698-700.

⁷⁰ I do not intend to examine here the problem of the relation between human nature/natural dispositions (*xing* 性) and feelings (*qing* 情) in pre-Han literature. My purpose here is just to point out the affinities between the *Zhongyong* and the Ruist manuscripts on the subject. See for example Tang Yijie, "Emotion in pre-Qin Ruist Moral Theory: An Explanation of 'Dao begins in *Qing*,'" *Philosophy East and West* 53 (2004) 2, pp. 271-283; Attilio Andreini, "The Meaning of *Qing* 情 in Texts from Guodian Tomb no. 1," in Paolo Santangelo with Donatella Guida (eds.), *Love, Hatred, and Other Passions. Questions and Themes on Emotions in Chinese Civilization* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 149-165; Andrew H. Plaks, "Xin as the Seat of Emotions in Confucian Self-Cultivation," *ibid.*, pp. 113-125; Ulrike Middendorf, "Basic Emotion Terms in Warring States Texts: Sequences and Patterns," *ibid.*, pp. 126-148. On the *Xing zi ming chu* see, for instance, Dirk Meyer, "Meaning-Construction in Warring States Philosophical Discourse: A Discussion of the Paleographic Materials from Tomb Guodian One," Ph.D. diss., Leiden University 2008, pp. 183-236.

⁷¹ 凡性為主，物取之也。金石之有聲也，弗扣不鳴。Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian*, pp. 700-701.

We find an analogous concept in the *Lunyu*, XVII.21 though expressed more laconically: Our natures resemble each other, but in practice we diverge widely (性相近，習相遠也).

However, the Sage, we read in the *Zhongyong*, is able to find an equilibrium between the stirring of his feelings, incited by the contact with the outer world, and their moderate expression, which takes the form of deferential demeanour and tranquillity. Thus, the process of grasping the two extreme poles and finding “an appropriate centre,” depending on the circumstances, starts from the exercise of self-cultivation and regulation. The *junzi* is watchful over himself when he is alone.⁷³

The author of the *Zhongyong*, as we have said before, envisages the risk of wrong conduct if one nourishes the hidden and imperceptible impulses of one’s nature without any restraint. He affirms:

Therefore the gentleman is able to be vigilant and cautious even before he has seen [the danger], to be filled with alarm even before he has heard [the bad news]. There is nothing more visible than what is hidden, nothing more manifest than what is subtle. Therefore the *junzi* is watchful over himself when he is alone.⁷⁴

Zhu Xi interprets this passage by underlining the importance of directing one’s thought inwards and searching in ourselves (*fanqiu zhushen* 反求諸身). According to Zhu Xi, the “hidden” in the text refers to the “subtle, incipient tendencies” of things; these tendencies are active before things themselves become manifest. Man, when in solitude, is attentive and capable of sensing these tendencies.⁷⁵

Looking into the heart and being watchful over oneself means searching even the darkest, the most secret and minute parts of oneself, of one’s inner nature.

The notion can be also found in a passage of the Guodian manuscript *Wuxing* 五行 (strip 16):

The good man, the man of noble character, one and unique is he in his demeanour.

Only if he is able to preserve his integrity, can he make himself into a man of noble character.

He is watchful over himself when he is alone.⁷⁶

⁷² 四海之內其性一也。其用心各異教使然。 *Ibid.*, pp. 703-705 (tr. slightly modified).

⁷³ 君子慎其獨也 (*Zhongyong*, 1).

⁷⁴ 是故君子戒慎乎其所不睹，恐懼乎其所不聞。莫見乎隱，莫顯乎微，故君子慎其獨也。 *Zhongyong*, 1. Cf. Gardner, *The Four Books*, p. 110, Plaks, *Ta Hsüeh and Chung Yung*, p. 25, Legge, *The Chinese Classics ...*, vol. 1, p. 384.

⁷⁵ Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, pp. 17-18. Gardner, *The Four Books*, p. 111.

⁷⁶ 淑人君子，其儀一也。能為一，然後能為君子，慎其獨也。 Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian*. See Liu Xinlang 劉昕嵐, “Guodian Chu jian *Xing zi ming chu pian jianshi*” 郭店楚簡《性自命出》篇箋釋, in: Wuhan daxue Zhongguo wenhua yanjiuyuan 武汉大学中国文化研究院 (ed.), *Guodian Chu jian guoji xueshu yantao hui liuwenji* 郭店楚簡國際學術研討會論文集 (Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 2000), pp. 330-354; see also Pang Pu

If he can fulfil his integrity he becomes a *junzi*, and the *junzi* is constantly watchful over himself. To be watchful over himself means “to be as one authentically is”, “to be true to oneself” when one is alone with one’s innermost feelings and thoughts.

The “Bugou pian” 不苟篇 (Nothing indecorous) of *Xunzi* develops this concept in an analogous way.⁷⁷

For the man of noble character to nurture his mind, nothing is more excellent than authenticity.⁷⁸

[The sky, the earth, and the four seasons] have regularity, so as to attain authenticity. Similarly when the man of noble character has attained to perfect inner virtue, though he remains silent, he is understood, though he has never bestowed any favour, he is considered affectionate; and though he does not display anger, he possesses an awe-inspiring dignity. He adheres to his destiny, by being watchful over himself when he is alone.⁷⁹

The text further reads:

善之為道者。不誠則不獨。不獨則不形。

Even if a man is adept at acting in accord with the way, if he lacks authenticity, he will not be watchful over himself in his solitude, and if he is not watchful over himself in his solitude, then [his virtues ?] will not take form.

Watching over oneself when in solitude, means to cultivate [one’s virtue], as we understand from the commentary of Wang Xianqian 王先謙.⁸⁰

In conclusion, the virtue of *zhongyong* is the individual’s inclination to experience the self and the reality in its totality, from one pole to the other, according to the circumstances. Man perceives it without limitations, without expressing any judgement, without partiality, without inclining to one side or to the other.

庞朴, “Zhu bo *Wuxing pian yu Si-Meng wuxing shuo*” 竹帛《五行》篇与思孟五行说, *Zhexue yu wenhua* 哲学与文化 26 (1999) 5, pp. 469-473.

⁷⁷ Because some sections of “Bugou pian” and of *Zhongyong* overlap, especially pericopes 20-26 and pericope 32, devoted to the discussion of the concept of *cheng* 誠, some Chinese scholars have concluded that these pericopes of *Zhongyong* were composed later than the *Xunzi*. See for example Zhang Hongbo 张洪波, “*Zhongyong zhi cheng fanchou kaobian*” 《中庸》之诚范畴考辨, *Wuhan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 武汉大学学报 (哲学社会科学版) 60 (2007) 4, pp. 615-619, Wang Yuechuan 王岳川, “*Zhongyong zai Zhongguo sixiang shi shang de diwei*” 《中庸》在中国思想史上的地位, *Xinan minzu daxue xuebao (renwen sheke ban)* 西南民族大学学报 (人文社科版) 2007/12, pp. 56-74.

⁷⁸ 君子養心莫善於誠. *Xunzi*, II.28-29 (*Zhuzi jicheng* ed.); John Knoblock, *Xunzi. A Translation and Study of the Complete Works* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), vol. 1, p. 177.

⁷⁹ 夫此有常以至其誠者也。君子至德。嘿然而喻。未施而親。不怒而威。夫此順命以慎其獨者也. *Xunzi, ibid*; cf. Knoblock, *Xunzi, ibid*.

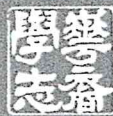
⁸⁰ 不能慎其獨故其德亦不能形見於外。俞樹曰上文云致誠則無他事矣。唯仁之為守為義之為行所謂獨者 ... *Xunzi*, II.29.

He does not stop in a fixed point or centre, he adapts to the circumstances in a process of continuous change and evolution, of continuous self-cultivation conducted through introspection and comparison with the other and with the external world. His aim is to proceed along the human path and in order to do that, he chooses to live an ordinary life.

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