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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In der Hoffnung verwurzelt
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Festschrift in Honor of
Festschrift für

Roman Malek S.V.D.

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Volume 1

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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 魚, 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 中庸説 (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

¹ I wish to thank Prof. Andrew H. Plaks (Princeton University), Prof. Wu Xiaoming 伍小明 (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.
(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 Biaojí 表記 (Record of Signposts), the Fangjí 防記 (Record of Dams) and the Zíyí 淚衣 (The Black Jacket) all belonged to a work entitled Zisí 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 Ziyí, the Biaojí and the Fangjí.

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

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

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

Zíyí: the title is taken from an Ode (Shíjīng 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 Zisí in 23 juan, whereas the “Yiwenzhi” of later times, until the Song dynasty, mentions a Zisí in 7 juan. The “Yinyuezhi” 音樂志 (Treatise on Music) of the Suishu (13:288) quotes Shen Yue, who maintains that the Zhongyong, the Biaojí, the Fangjí and the Zíyí were all taken from the Zisízi (「中庸」, 「表記」, 「防記」, 「涕衣」, 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 Zíyí 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 Su’ 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 Zíyí shows this conclusion to be wrong with regard to the date of composition of the Zíyí 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, 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 Zizi 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

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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 jian, 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 shishi,” “Mulu lei” 四庫全書, 史部十四, 目錄類, ch. 4. Chen Duoxu 陈多旭, “Zhongyong zu 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 kexueyuan) 太原师范学院学报（社会科学版）* 6 (2007) 2, pp. 38-41.

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* 诚 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

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


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 華山 (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 (章). According to Liang Tao 梁濬, 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

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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 梁濬, “Zisi Ziyi, Biaoji, Fangji sixiang shiuta” 子思《繹衣》、《表記》、《方記》思想試探, see www.jianbo.org/admin/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 Su’ 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 it is written that Zisi was the author of the Zi yi; rather, he considers that the Zi yi 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 武內義雄, there was a relationship between the Zhongyong and the works known as Biaoji, Zi yi, 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

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17 Li Ling 李零, Guodian Chujian 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 zhexue 中国哲学 No. 20 (1999), pp. 13-17.
20 Tu Wei-ming, Centrality and Commonality, p. 17.
eponymous work associated with the grandson of Confucius.” 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 […]”

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 程頤 (1032–1085) and Cheng Yi 程頗 (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

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22 Qian Mu, Zhongguo xueshu sixiang shi, p. 308; Soffel – Tillman, Cultural Authority, p. 45.
23 名曰中庸者，以其中和之為用也。庸，用也。Liji 禮記, in: Shisanjing zhushu 十三經注疏 (Taipei: Yiwenshuguan, 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 諒州 (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 buyi 無過不及 was Lü Zuqian, as Zhu Xi himself acknowledged in his Zhongyong huowen, 6:548. Soffel – Tillman, Cultural Authority, p. 38.


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 Intorcella, 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]).\(^{31}\)

**Sinensis Imperii Libri Secundus Classicus Dicitus Immutabile Medium, Sinici Chum Yum.**

**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

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

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.  

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).  

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.” 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.” 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

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


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 Constante 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.
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”).

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.

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.

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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 失諸正鹄，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.”

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.

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.

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.”

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.” 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.”

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.”

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 zhanguo jizhu, p. 19.

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.”\(^{52}\)


\(^{50}\) 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.


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!”

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.”

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.

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 placidity of everyday normality.
The interpretation of yong as common, ordinary (pingchang 平常) was empha-
sised 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, re-
spectively, “the common man’s virtue” (Qian Mu), “the ordinary practice of
every man, in accordance with the seasons and with the circumstances” (Xu
Fuguan).\footnote{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 renxinglan shi 中国人性论史 (Shanghai: Sanlian, 2001) maintains that yong refers to eve-
day practice (pingchangde xingwei 平常的行为) that is “the ordinary practice of every
man, in accordance with the seasons and with the circumstances.” Li Zehou 李泽厚, comment-
ing 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 jinda 论语今读 (Beijing: Sanlian, 2004),
pp. 185-186.}

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.\footnote{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 ex-
ceeded 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,
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.}

In fact, as well expressed by Kanaya Osamu, “the middle between two ext-
remes is not fixed at a single central point but is an appropriate middle that
moves while maintaining a balance between two extremes.”\footnote{Kanaya Osamu, “the Mean in Original Confucianism,” p. 85; see also Jullien, Zhongyong, p. 53.} 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:
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.
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 (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

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66 子莫，魯之賢人也，知楊墨之失中也，敢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 子溫而厲，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， voltaire 人同. 當其喜， 則溫之氣形， 當其怒， 則烈之氣形； 及乎喜怒未發，則恭之意常在也. Li Zehou, Lunyu jindu, p. 222.


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 (*jianqi 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

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72 四海之内其性一也。其用心各異教使然. Ibid., pp. 703-705 (tr. slightly modified).
73 君子慎其獨也 (*Zhongyang*, 1).
If he can fulfill 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.

77 因为有些部分的“不苟篇”和《中庸》本身，尤其是篇目20-26和篇目32，与《中庸》的讨论有关。《中庸》之义参见《中庸》 brilliance, and some Chinese scholars have concluded that these pericopes were composed later than the Xunzi. See for example Zhang Hongbo 张洪波, “Zhongyong zhi cheng fanchou kaobian”《中庸》之成范畴考辨, 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 diweij”《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.


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

80 不能慎其獨故其德亦不能形於外。習而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.