

The Ethical Thought of "The Mean" and its Contemporary Value

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Abstract: The Meanwhile contains a wealth of ethical thinking, this paper mainly discusses the ethical thinking of the Meanwhile from two aspects: ethical norms and ethical virtues. This paper mainly discusses the ethical thoughts of "The Meanwhile" from the aspects of ethical norms and ethical virtues, which permeate the four aspects of family relationship ethics, social interaction ethics, national. Its ideas permeate the four aspects of family relationship ethics, social interaction ethics, national political ethics and natural ecological ethics. The ethical thinking of "The Meanwhile" contains four approaches: moderation, use of the middle, and harmony and difference. Moderation is the need to grasp the right "degree" of doing things, avoiding "too much" and "not enough"; The two extremes of good and bad things are grasped and appropriate methods are used; the time is taken according to different situations; and different measures are taken; and different methods are adopted. Harmony and Difference is to get along with each other harmoniously, but not to agree with each other casually.

Keywords: The Middle Kingdom; Ethical Thought; Connotation.

1. Background to the Study

Confucius, a great Confucian scholar of the pre-Qin era, first proposed the term "middle ground" and gave it an ethical connotation. Later, Confucian scholars such as Mencius, Zi Si and Xunzi refined the ideological connotation of "Meanwhile". Later, Confucian scholars such as Mencius, Zi Si and Xunzi refined the ideological content of "Meanwhile". After the Tang and Song dynasties, with the rise of the doctrine of righteousness, Confucian scholars once again discovered the value of the Meanwhile and, on the basis of the original ideological content, gave new connotations to the Meanwhile, thus leading to the tremendous development of the Meanwhile. During the Northern Song Dynasty, two scholars, Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi, considered the Meanwhile to be of great value and gave it high praise. Zhu Xi of the Southern Song Dynasty spent a great deal of energy on the Four Books and Collected Sentences, which is enough to illustrate the historical status and value of the Meanwhile. The thought of Meanwhile is vast and profound, and scholars of all times have written numerous treatises on Meanwhile, studying Meanwhile from various aspects. In this paper, we are going to discuss the ethical thought of Meanwhile and analyse Meanwhile from the perspective of ethics.

The ethical thought of Meanwhile originated from Confucius. Zi Si retained the content of Confucius' ethical thought of "Meanwhile" and on this basis raised "Meanwhile" to the height of ontology, made up for Confucius' shortcomings in this regard, enriched the ethical connotation of "Meanwhile", and put forward the methodology of ethical thought of "Meanwhile". The ethical thought of "The Mean" has had a significant impact on the thinking of Confucian scholars in later generations. Zhu Xi held the Meiyong in high esteem, gave it a high evaluation, and continuously enriched and developed its contents on the basis of its ethical thought, making the Meiyong a colourful chapter in the history of Chinese ethical thought.

2. Status of Domestic Research

Since Confucius first proposed the term "Zhongyong", and Zhu Xi compiled the Four Books and Sentences Collected Commentaries, the book "Zhongyong" has been written independently, and it has gone through a very long history. As one of the classical works of Confucianism, "The Mean" has a rich content. Many scholars have devoted themselves to the study of "The Mean" from ancient times to the present, mainly in the following aspects.

2.1. The Composition of the Meanwhile

Regarding the composition of the Meanwhile, most people believe that it was compiled by a single person, and was therefore written at the same time. According to Xu Fuguan, the book is divided into two chapters, the first of which was written by Zi Si, and which probably contains the words of some of his disciples. The second is an extension and development of the ideas in the first, written by his disciples. Although the Middle Ages is divided into two parts, they were not written at the same time, and there is a chronological order in them. Xie Jie Li believes that the "Meanwhile" was initially as the "Rites" in the thirty-first, after the Confucian scholars continue to enrich its ideological content, until Zhu Xi will be the "Meanwhile" from the "Rites" in the extraction, re-editing chapters and sentences and do the commentary, combined with the "University," "Analects," "Mencius" and the formation of the "four books", complete the "four books", "the collection of notes", which is the only way to achieve the goal of the "four books". This was the beginning of the independent formation of the Meanwhile.

2.2. The Ethical Thought of "The Mean"

Feng Youlan's interpretation of the five da dao and the three da de is that dealing with the relationship between people, such as the ruler, the minister, the father and the son, is the da dao of the world. "The achievement of personal cultivation, such as knowledge, benevolence and courage, is the world's Daode. With the attainment of virtue, one can cultivate one's

body and rule others." Chen Shaofeng, in his book *A New History of Chinese Ethics*, argues that the *Meanwhile*, as a Confucian classic, contains many philosophical ideas and that its important philosophical concepts have influenced countless scholars. In his view, the *Meanwhile* mainly contains two basic ethical thoughts, one is about the cultivation of a gentleman and the other is about the idea of the Middle Way. "Sincerity" is a very important part of the Meanings, and Zi Si devoted a lot of chapters to it, which is enough to show the status and value of sincerity. The "sincerity" advocated in the *Meanwhile* is not the honesty that we understand in modern society, but mainly refers to the sincerity of heavenly and human ways.

In his *Study on the Philosophical Thought of Education in the Meanwhile*, Han Bailong argues that prudence is a very important idea in the *Meanwhile*, that is, when an individual is alone, he can be very cautious about his behaviour and norms, so that his words, deeds and norms of behaviour are in line with the nature of heavenly destiny and the *Meanwhile*.

Yang Haiwen, in *"Three Virtues, Five Virtues, Nine Scriptures and One, Sincerity - Interpretation of Chapter 20 of the Meanwhile"*, considers that the Nine Scriptures of Governance are the nine principles for governing a country, and that one should demand of oneself from different perspectives and in different aspects, so that one can continuously cultivate oneself physically and mentally to improve the level of governance of the country.

2.3. Methods of Ethical Thought in the Meanwhile

Many philosophers have adhered to the tenets of the *Meanwhile Ethical Thought* and have used the methodology of the *Meanwhile Ethical Thought* to think about problems, thus showing that the *Meanwhile Ethical Thought* is of great significance as a guide to identifying, thinking about and solving problems. It is better to teach a man to fish than to give him a fish. The Meanings provide us with ways and methods of thinking that enable us to look at problems from different perspectives, at different levels and in different aspects.

Tao Xiaoyun, in his *Study of the Methodology of the Meanwhile*, talks about the many methods contained in the *Meanwhile Thought*, which are of great significance in guiding people's behaviour with the *Meanwhile Way*, so that they can grasp the "degree" in their daily practice and not deviate from the *Meanwhile Way*. The methodological connotations of the *Meanwhile* are of great significance, providing us with a comprehensive perspective to think about issues. By applying the methods of "using the Mean" and "the Mean of the hour" to personal cultivation and governance, we can raise the moral standard of individuals and add bricks and mortar to the civilisation of the country.

To sum up, many scholars in China have discussed The *Meanwhile* from the perspective of Chinese philosophy, but seldom elaborated The *Meanwhile* from the perspective of ethics. In this paper, we mainly expound the *Meanwhile* from the perspective of ethics. The main purpose of this paper is to reveal the ethical thoughts contained in the *Meanwhile* through the elaboration of several important points in the *Meanwhile*. Through outlining its ethical thoughts, the paper will sort out its contemporary values in the light of the development of the times.

3. The Ethical Thought Content of the Meanwhile

3.1. The Meaning of "Zhong," "Mean," and "Mediocrity"

The Meanings of "Zhongyong" (中庸), in which it is stated that "the unleashed nature of joy, anger, sadness, and happiness is called Zhong (中); the unleashed nature of all is called Harmony. The middle of the world is also the base of the world; the harmony of the world is also the way of the world". When the four emotions of joy, anger, sadness and happiness are not aroused, they are called "neutral"; when they are aroused appropriately, they are called "harmonious". "Zhong" is the basis of everything, and "He" is the rule and the way of the world. Happiness, anger, sadness and joy are the four common emotions of people. When these four emotions are not expressed, they are called "Zhong"; when they are expressed appropriately, they are called "He". People have seven emotions and six desires, and they are often affected by emotions. Emotions are positive and negative, and we should be masters of our emotions instead of being controlled by them. Positive emotions help us to live a better life, help us to get through difficulties in life, and welcome a better future. Positive emotions help us to live a better life, help us to overcome difficulties in life, and welcome a better future. Negative emotions, on the other hand, are harmful to our body and mind and may cause problems in life. Zhi Zhong He (致中和) embodies the goal of self-supervision and self-control, which is also a manifestation of self-discipline. Human beings have social attributes and are part of the world, and they need to follow the laws that govern the operation of society, and in doing so, they need to exercise strict self-control, self-adjustment and self-supervision, so that they can express themselves in a way that is in line with "Zhong" (中). In the process, it is necessary to exercise strict self-control, self-adjustment and self-supervision, so as to bring one's emotional state into conformity with the "middle" and ultimately achieve the state of "harmony". The principle of moderation is mentioned in The *Meanwhile*, which means that there should be an appropriate "degree" in doing things, and that one should not deviate from the "degree", resulting in "too much" and "too little" emotions. "too much" and "not enough".

The situation is not to be deviated from. In the process of achieving "neutralisation", the four emotions of joy, anger, sadness and happiness should be vented in accordance with the principle of "degree", rather than allowing oneself to vent them excessively or hiding them in one's heart. Both of these deviate from the principle of moderation. Therefore, the principle of moderation must be mastered in the process of realising "harmony".

3.2. Ethical Norms in the Meanwhile

As a moral code and standard for dealing with everyday ethical norms, the "Meanwhile" provides theoretical guidance for dealing with everyday ethical relationships. As a supreme virtue, the *Meanwhile* has many norms for the realisation of this supreme moral quality. The Five Virtues and the Nine Principles of State Governance contained in the *Meanwhile* discuss the external norms of the *Meanwhile* from different perspectives, and through the discussion of the external norms, the ethical thoughts embedded in the *Meanwhile* will be elucidated.

3.2.1. The Five Virtues

In the *Meanwhile*, there are five ways to achieve the Way of the World, namely, the ethical relationships between ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, brother and friend. These five ethical relationships are broad in scope, covering almost all the relationships with people in life. In different interpersonal relationships, different ethical requirements should be applied to deal with these five ethical relationships in relation to different interactions with different people. The five Confucian ethical relationships are: ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, brother and friend. How to deal with these five relationships in order to achieve goodwill among friends, family harmony and national harmony, and thus promote the development of social civilisation.

The five ethical relationships are the basic norms of being a human being, and it is important to observe the five most important norms of interpersonal relationships in ethics. In dealing with these five ethical relationships, it is necessary to be "sincere", for "Sincerity is the way of Heaven, and sincerity is the way of man. As a category of moral cultivation in the ethical thinking of the *Meanwhile*, "sincerity" plays a very important role in the process of realising Confucian ethical norms. The "Five Lunas" are important guidelines for building harmonious interpersonal relationships, and the "He" advocated in the *Meanwhile* has a guiding role as a kind of ethical thought in dealing with interpersonal relationships. "Harmony" is embodied in all kinds of interpersonal relationships, and "harmony" is used as a goal guide to build harmonious interpersonal relationships.

3.2.2. Sanda De

In the *Meanwhile*, it is said that "knowledge, benevolence, and courage are the three great virtues of the world." Knowledge, benevolence and courage are three important moral virtues that have great value in the ethics of social interaction. Knowledge represents knowledge and wisdom. Ancient Confucianism required the mastery of knowledge and content in the six areas of rites, music, archery, imperialism, calligraphy and mathematics. Learning different aspects of knowledge and mastering the contents of different fields will enrich one's life experience and truly transform knowledge into wisdom. Good learning is close to knowledge, like to learn in order to obtain knowledge, people should have the mentality of living to learn old, people's life is a process of cultivation, in each stage should learn different content, so that learning throughout their own life.

We should learn different things at each stage, so that learning can be carried through our whole life.

4. Contemporary Value of the Ethical Thought of "The Mean"

4.1. Knowing Oneself and Combining Self-discipline with Other-discipline

In dealing with the relationship between human beings and their own selves, the ethical thinking of the *Meanwhile* stresses that human beings should live in harmony with themselves, so that they can achieve a balanced state of physiology and psychology. First of all, one should have a comprehensive and correct understanding of oneself, correctly understand one's own strengths and weaknesses, carefully analyse the reasons for their existence, and build on one's strengths and avoid one's weaknesses. The second is to

demand strict control over oneself, and constantly cultivate one's own moral concepts and moral sentiments. Combining self-discipline with other-discipline to continuously improve one's cultivation. The ethical thinking of the *Meanwhile* attaches importance to one's "internal cultivation", perfecting one's moral character through inner cultivation, which is a long process. In the process of "internal cultivation", one has actually achieved strict self-discipline. On the other hand, we should be subject to the constraints of external norms. Human beings are social animals with social attributes and cannot exist independently of society, so they need to be subject to the constraints of external norms and order. Self-discipline is important, but other discipline is also essential in the process of human growth. Therefore, self-discipline and self-discipline are complementary to each other, you have me, I have you, both are indispensable.

4.2. Improve Self-cultivation and Self-personality

The *Analects of Confucius* - for the political "I ten have five and ambition to learn, thirty and stand, forty and not confused, fifty and know the fate of heaven, sixty and ears smooth, seventy and from the heart, not over the rule." This is the process of self-cultivation and learning of Confucius, who was gifted with extraordinary talent, but remained down-to-earth, active and persistent, and who began to aspire to learning only at the age of fifteen, and was not able to do as he wished until he was seventy years old. Confucius spent his whole life practising learning, constantly improving himself and perfecting his personality. Zi said, "A gentleman harbours virtue, a villain harbours earth; a gentleman harbours punishment, a villain harbours favours." Confucius believes that the difference between a gentleman and a villain is that a gentleman considers personal virtue, while a villain considers his own self-interest. Virtue is the most important part of personal cultivation, and one should constantly improve one's moral qualities and practice ethical behaviour with the goal of "being virtuous and carrying things in one's bosom". Since ancient times, China has attached great importance to the cultivation of personal moral qualities, and has been cultivating students' moral qualities from the moral education classes in primary schools to the Civics courses in universities. Moral quality is extremely important to the development of individuals, and it not only concerns individuals, but also affects the development of the country.

4.3. Establishing a Harmonious Social System

Harmonious social system includes politics, economy, culture and other aspects, and the overall smooth and orderly development of the society, so that each aspect can co-ordinate with the others and jointly promote the development of a harmonious society. From the first primitive society to the subsequent slave, feudal, capitalist and socialist societies, the development of each society has been deeply imprinted with the traces of human beings, and human beings have pushed forward the development of society with their unique wisdom. Harmony has become a "synonym" for social development, and people of different times are striving for harmony, hoping to build a harmonious home. In an extremely complex social relationship, how to effectively deal with all aspects of the relationship, we need to establish a harmonious social system, under the common rules and regulations, to effectively promote the development of society. Harmony in society requires the mutual co-operation of many

aspects, each of which is an important part of it. How to balance the relationship between the various aspects, so that each aspect can develop in a balanced manner, not only to cooperate with the other aspects, but also to jointly promote the development of society under the overall system of rules and regulations of the society.

5. Conclusion

Through the study of "The Mean", we have come to realise the great value of traditional Chinese Confucian culture. The Meanwhile has attracted countless scholars to read it carefully for its rich ideological content and cultural implications. After thousands of years of development, the ethical thinking embodied in the Meanwhile is still of great contemporary value in the construction of a harmonious society today.

The Tzu said: "The Mean is as good as it gets! The people have been fresh for a long time! Confucius regarded the middle ground as a supreme virtue, and his rich ethical thoughts have always been an important part of Chinese ethics. Since Confucius put forward the idea of the Mean, Confucian scholars have continued to give the Mean new connotations. The book of "The Mean" has gone through a long process, from the first time Confucius proposed the word "Mean" to Zhu Xi's compilation of the "Four Books, Chapter and Verse Collected Notes", so that "The Mean" has become

a book independently, "The Mean" is not only in the pre-Qin Confucianism and the Song and Ming philosophies have a very important historical position, but also has a very important position in the development of Chinese society, especially in architecture, dress, and architecture, but also in the development of Chinese society. It is also very important in the development of Chinese society, especially in architecture, clothing, and Chinese medicine. The Meanings contains many important ethical concepts, which have contributed their valuable strength to the development of Chinese ethics. One of its core ideas is "to neutralise and harmonise", and its ethical norms include the Five Virtues and the Nine Principles of Governance, which include sincerity, prudence and solitude, the Three Virtues, loyalty and forgiveness, filial piety and respect, and demonstrate its unique ethical values in different aspects.

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