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Inner Reflection and Outward Cultivation, for Connecting Heaven and Man: An Inquiry into the Cultivation Theory of the Doctrine of the Mean Grounded on "Cheng" (Sincerity)

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Abstract. As a representative text of pre-Qin Confucianism, the Doctrine of the Mean sets out in detail the cultivation theory that Confucianism produced on the basis of cheng (sincerity), and it has long received the attention and the reflection of different scholars. On the basis of the concept of cheng, the cultivation theory of the Doctrine of the Mean builds a moral cultivation system that runs through the way of heaven and the way of man and bears a metaphysical character, and it embodies the ultimate value pursuit of Confucianism. Through a re-interpretation of cheng, the core of the cultivation theory of the Doctrine of the Mean, this paper points out its dual meaning as the law of the operation of heaven and earth and as the root of personal cultivation, and from this explains its role as a "bridge" that connects heaven and man. On this basis, this paper sorts out the two cultivation paths of "from cheng to ming" and "from ming to cheng", as well as the cultivation work of "shendu" (being watchful over oneself when alone) and "mingshan" (understanding the good), which cultivates both inner and outer, and it reveals the logic by which the cultivation theory of the Doctrine of the Mean unfolds from the inner to the outer and from oneself to others, so that the realization of "utmost cheng" is completed through self-cultivation and the state of the unity of heaven and man of "attaining centrality and harmony" is finally reached. This state is not only the completion of personal virtue; it also contains the cosmological meaning of completing oneself and completing things and of assisting the transforming and nourishing work of heaven and earth.

Keywords: cheng, cultivation theory, attaining centrality and harmony, unity of heaven and man

1. Introduction

As one of the classical texts of pre-Qin Confucianism with the greatest philosophical depth, *the Doctrine of the Mean*, revolving around the core concept of cheng, builds a moral cultivation system that runs through the way of heaven and the way of man. It is neither satisfied with abstract moral preaching nor does it stop at the external regulation of rites and rules; it raises the cultivation of the individual's heart-and-mind to the level of cosmology, and gives everyday moral practice the ultimate meaning of "assisting the transforming and nourishing of heaven and earth". Precisely

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because of this, the cultivation theory of *the Doctrine of the Mean* still radiates a strong theoretical vitality in the present age. Taking cheng as the pivot, this paper systematically examines the inner logic of the cultivation theory of *the Doctrine of the Mean*: first, it clarifies the dual meaning of cheng as the law of the operation of heaven and earth and as the root of the cultivation of the way of man, and reveals its function as a bridge connecting heaven and man; then it analyzes the two cultivation paths of "from cheng to ming" and "from ming to cheng", as well as the concrete work of "shendu" (being watchful over oneself when alone) and "mingshan" (understanding the good) that cultivates both inner and outer, showing the logic of cultivation unfolding from the inner to the outer and from oneself to others; finally, it discusses the state of the unity of heaven and man of "attaining centrality and harmony", and reveals its deep value of completing oneself and completing things and of forming a triad with heaven and earth. Through the analysis of this cultivation system, this paper tries to present the intellectual character of *the Doctrine of the Mean* of "inward reflection and outward cultivation, to connect heaven and man", and to respond to its rich meaning under the contemporary horizon.

2. Cheng: the ground of cultivation for connecting heaven and man

As the fundamental ground of all the theories of *the Doctrine of the Mean*, cheng has the basic meaning of "true" and "really existing" in the pre-Qin classics. The *Book of Documents*, "Taijia II", says: "Ghosts and spirits do not constantly enjoy offerings; they enjoy the offerings of those who are able to be cheng." [1] Kong Anguo's commentary says that "those who are able to be trustworthy and cheng will have their sacrifices accepted" [1]; the *Commentary of Zuo*, "The Eighteenth Year of Duke Wen", records: "reverent, sage, broad, deep, clear, trustworthy, sincere, cheng" [1]; Kong Yingda's Correct Meaning says: "cheng is reality. To hold the heart pure and straight, and to spread conduct that is steadfast and real." [1] It can be seen that in the Confucian classics of the pre-Qin period and in their commentaries, cheng mainly refers to the state of existence and the character of being true and without falsity. In its twentieth chapter *the Doctrine of the Mean* gives a direct definition of cheng: "cheng is the way of heaven; to become cheng is the way of man." [2] This sentence sets the way of heaven and the way of man against each other, and directly establishes the dual attribute that cheng has: cheng is both the original state of existence of the universe and the cultivation goal that man ought to imitate and pursue. Zheng Xuan glosses "cheng" as "heavenly nature" and "to become cheng" as "one who learns and becomes cheng", which points out concisely the dual meaning of cheng as the law of the operation of heaven and earth and as the foundation of moral cultivation.

2.1. Cheng is the law of the operation of all things in heaven and earth

The Doctrine of the Mean raises this meaning of cheng from the level of cultivation theory to the height of cosmology, and gives it ontological significance. "cheng is the beginning and the end of things; without cheng there are no things" [2]: cheng runs through the whole process of all things from beginning to end, and if there is no cheng, then things lose the ground of their existence. Therefore cheng is not an attribute added on to things from outside; it is the fundamental condition by which a thing can exist as itself. Zhu Xi, in his *Collected Commentaries on the Four Books*, explains this sentence saying: "cheng means true and without falsity; it is the original state of heavenly principle." [2] "True and without falsity" makes clear the basic meaning that cheng has: what is called "true" and "real" means that cheng is a definite and necessary existence; "falsity" means empty and unreal, and "without falsity" likewise shows that the existence of cheng cannot be

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doubted. "The original state of heavenly principle" shows that it is the original, regular existence in the operation of the universe, heaven and earth. On this basis, cheng is established as the ultimate ground of everything that exists in the universe.

As for this definition of Zhu Xi, the scholarly community has also raised challenges to the internal tension it holds: on the one hand Zhu Xi takes cheng as the heavenly principle that really exists between heaven and earth (ontology); on the other hand he takes cheng as a spiritual state of not deceiving oneself inwardly and not deceiving others outwardly (the theory of work). Some research points out that Zhu Xi discusses cheng with four meanings: "reality" in the original sense, "real principle" in the philosophical sense (the original state of heavenly principle and what ought to be in human affairs), "nature" in the sense of human nature, and "a real heart and real intention" in the sense of method. This multiplicity of meanings is both where the richness of his system lies and what forms the difficulty in understanding. On this basis, many scholars have produced a debate over whether the path of interpreting cheng is based on the way of heaven or based on the human. Wang Fuzhi takes cheng as the objective "real existence", that is, the ground of the existence of all things in heaven and earth. He holds that cheng is both the substance of "the way of heaven" and the ultimate cultivation state condensed in the "heart" [3]. The modern philosopher Mou Zongsan offers a metaphysical interpretation; he holds that *the Doctrine of the Mean* adopts "the approach of onto-cosmology", and establishes the substance of human nature from the objective side by way of the way of heaven. "The mandate of heaven, how profound and unceasing" turns the personal heaven into a metaphysical reality, and breaks through the separation between human nature and destiny and the way of heaven. "The substance of cheng", as the principle of creation and the principle of generation and transformation, enables all existence to develop and come into being. The Japanese scholar Nakai Riken starts from the standpoint of "the way of man", and interprets cheng by means of "loyalty and trustworthiness", revealing the self-sufficiency of the cheng of the way of man, without going on to ask about the ultimate ground of cheng in the way of heaven [4]. This forms a sharp contrast with Zhu Xi's path of passing from the way of heaven down to the way of man. Gong Jianping sums up five kinds of divergence in the understanding of cheng through history: first, using cheng together with "trust"; second, holding that cheng is equivalent to the "dao" of Daoism and even similar to the God of the West; third, Zhu Xi explains cheng as "true and without falsity" but at times also glosses it as "loyalty" and "trust"; fourth, Wang Fuzhi takes cheng as the objective "real existence"; fifth, holding that cheng is a subjective attitude or spirit. In fact, no matter which path of interpretation it is, none of them leaves the fundamental definition of *the Doctrine of the Mean* that "cheng is the way of heaven; to become cheng is the way of man"; they are all still interpretations made on the basis of cheng as the ultimate existence in cosmology and as the fundamental ground of cultivation theory. Therefore, this paper holds that cheng, in the ontological sense, has at the same time two positions: the position based on the way of heaven and the position based on the human. Although different scholars point their accounts of cheng in different directions, they all make, directly or obscurely, the same judgment, namely that cheng, in the cosmological sense, ought to be a "heavenly principle", a "real existence", a "substance": an existence that has metaphysical attributes of substance. This is a substance that is the ultimate law of the operation of the universe, and in the generation of heaven and earth it prescribes the law of the operation of the myriad things.

On this basis, *the Doctrine of the Mean* further explains the universal mode of operation of cheng as substance in the cosmological sense. "The way of heaven and earth can be exhausted in one word: it is not double in being a thing, and so the things it generates are unfathomable." [2] What is called "exhausted in one word" means that cheng is the way of the operation of all things in heaven and earth. "Not double in being a thing" means pure and unmixed, true and without falsity; it is

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precisely by the cheng of "not being double" that the way of the operation of heaven and earth accomplishes the work of assisting transformation and nourishment that is unceasing in generation and unfathomable in change. From this, cheng is not only the norm of human moral life; it further becomes the highest law that runs through everything in the universe.

2.2. Cheng is the moral root of man's self-cultivation

Cheng as the way of heaven is not merely an objective existence outside man; it is within human nature, and becomes the fundamental ground of man's self-cultivation. *The Doctrine of the Mean* says at its very beginning: "What heaven confers is called human nature; following human nature is called the way; cultivating the way is called teaching." [2] What heaven confers on man is "human nature"; to act following this heavenly nature is "the way"; and the practice of cultivating the way is "teaching". This establishes the logical chain of "heaven—nature—way—teaching". Through the proposition that "what heaven confers is called human nature", *the Doctrine of the Mean* connects "the mandate of heaven" and "human nature" from its very opening, and directly establishes the cheng of the way of heaven as the root of human nature. From "what heaven confers is called human nature" to "cheng is the way of heaven", it finds for the existence of man a metaphysical ground of substance, and through the elaboration of the spirit of "utmost cheng", it brings man and heaven together under the meaning of cheng. "Utmost cheng" is the core concept running through *the Doctrine of the Mean*; Zisi raised it to a metaphysical philosophical category, and built a moral metaphysical theory from the perspective of the heart-and-mind. Cheng has a dual cultural connotation in ontology and in the theory of moral cultivation: it has the general meaning of virtue and also the meaning of substance. It is both the unity of the way of heaven and the way of man and the unity of substance and function, and it becomes the pivot of the unity of heaven and man. Zhang Zai once put forward that "the unity of human nature and the way of heaven lies in cheng" [5], which points out that there exists between human nature and the universe of heaven and earth the possibility of blending into one, and also expresses the close and complex connection between "nature" and "cheng". In short, the pursuit of utmost cheng spoken of in *the Doctrine of the Mean* takes the ontology of the way of heaven as its theoretical starting point and the cultivation theory of the way of man as its theoretical end; that is, the return of the way of man to the way of heaven, and man's imitation of the way of heaven. In this framework, cheng as the way of heaven must at the same time be the nature of man. Therefore, cheng becomes the pivot through which human nature and the way of heaven communicate.

This logical chain can also be seen in the twentieth chapter of *the Doctrine of the Mean*: "from cheng to ming is called nature; from ming to cheng is called teaching. If there is cheng there is ming; if there is ming there is cheng." [2] These are two cultivation paths at different levels. "From cheng to ming" means reaching ming directly from the inner cheng; it is the natural manifestation of heavenly nature. "From ming to cheng" means reaching the state of cheng by way of the acquired discrimination of ming; it is the result brought about by teaching. In these two paths, cheng is both the foundation and the destination of cultivation. Zhu Xi, in his *Collected Commentaries on the Four Books*, explains "cheng is the way of heaven" saying: "cheng means true and without falsity; it is the original state of heavenly principle." [2] He explains "to become cheng is the way of man" saying: "not yet being true and without falsity, and yet desiring to be true and without falsity; this is what ought to be in human affairs." [2] The cheng of the way of heaven is "the original state", the fundamental state of existence of heaven and earth; the "becoming cheng" of the way of man is "what ought to be" — cheng is inwardly present in the original heart of man, a state of existence that needs cultivation before it can manifest. The reason man ought to cultivate himself lies precisely in

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the fact that this cheng is already present in his nature; cultivation is not adding something from the outside, it is restoring and making manifest the cheng one originally has. Therefore, the awakening and the stimulation of the cheng hidden in oneself become the starting point of self-cultivation, and cheng exists as the root of man's moral cultivation.

One question worth noticing is whether the cheng of the way of heaven has been concretely realized in the way of man. Some scholars point out that *the Doctrine of the Mean* puts forward a metaphysical theoretical framework that runs through the way of heaven and the way of man by means of cheng, but the cheng that is the way of heaven has not, in its ultimate meaning, been concretely realized in the way of man, so that the connection between the cheng of the way of heaven and the subject who realizes the way of man is rather vague, and how the subject is to realize the way of heaven is also left unstated in detail. In other words, although *the Doctrine of the Mean* establishes the theoretical framework in which cheng connects heaven and man, there is an obscurity of explanation at the link of "how man concretely realizes the cheng of the way of heaven".

2.3. Cheng is the medium connecting heaven and man

Cheng is both the law of the way of heaven and the root of human nature, and therefore naturally becomes the bridge that connects heaven and man. On the question of how the moral cultivation of man brings the self into relation with heaven and earth, the twenty-second chapter of *the Doctrine of the Mean* gives the most complete statement of it:

"Only the utmost cheng in the world is able to fully realize its own nature; being able to fully realize its own nature, it is able to fully realize the nature of others; being able to fully realize the nature of others, it is able to fully realize the nature of things; being able to fully realize the nature of things, it can assist the transforming and nourishing of heaven and earth; being able to assist the transforming and nourishing of heaven and earth, it can form a triad with heaven and earth." [2]

This is a process of layer-by-layer extension from "fully realizing one's own nature" to "fully realizing the nature of others" and "fully realizing the nature of things", finally realizing "assisting the transforming and nourishing of heaven and earth" and reaching the state of "forming a triad with heaven and earth". The starting point of this process is "utmost cheng", that is, the ultimate of cheng. The person of utmost cheng is able to fully realize his own nature, and since human nature and the nature of things are both endowed by heaven and both possess this cheng, he can infer the nature of others from his own nature and the nature of things from the nature of others, finally taking part in the transforming and nourishing of heaven and earth and standing together with heaven and earth as a third. Every step of this logical chain depends on cheng as premise and as motive force; cheng here is not only the method of cultivation, it is also the ground at the level of ontology. Precisely because heaven and man both possess this cheng at the ultimate level, man can, through inner cultivation, reach outward to all things in heaven and earth.

As for the view that cheng is the medium connecting heaven and man, different scholars have in fact already given explanations from different aspects. For example, the cosmological path of interpretation mentioned above, in which Zhou Dunyi explains "the supreme ultimate" by means of cheng: he raises cheng to the substance of the universe, and regards it as "the central link that connects heaven and man and joins things and self". Zhu Xi explains cheng by "true and without falsity", and holds that cheng is both "the original state of heavenly principle" and "what ought to be in the way of man"; through the framework of "principle" he makes cheng the bond running through heaven and man. Wang Yangming adopts the interpretive method of the learning of the heart, pulls cheng back into the inner heart, stresses the work of "making the intention cheng", and holds that

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the true and unfalsified state of inner consciousness is the key to connecting heaven and man and realizing their unity. It can be seen from this that many scholars who define cheng at the levels of ontology and cosmology in fact all realize and agree that it is at the same time the root ground of "being true and without falsity" in moral cultivation, and hold that this ground comes from, or is connected with, the meaning of cheng as the substance of the world; this creates a common connection between the cosmology and the cultivation theory of *the Doctrine of the Mean*, and thereby makes it possible for man, through moral cultivation, to apprehend heaven and earth, to "assist the transforming and nourishing of heaven and earth", and finally to reach the state of the unity of heaven and man of "forming a triad with heaven and earth".

Through an examination of the pre-Qin classics, Mr. Tan Mingran points out that in *the Doctrine of the Mean* cheng "still has the meaning of being true, without falsity, and really existing [6]. This meaning is spoken from the state of existence of all things. Applied to the cultivation of the person, it requires the gentleman to imitate the natural flowing of heaven and earth, which is true and without falsity. Since once the myriad things and the myriad affairs are not true and not real, they cannot exist and lose the value of survival and of life, therefore 'cheng' can also be extended to the level of the humaneness of completing oneself and the wisdom of completing things. In this way, cheng becomes the highest standard running through things and self, heaven, earth and the myriad things". This analysis accurately reveals the function of cheng in running through from the theory of existence to the theory of cultivation, and from substance to work.

3. The way of the mean: a cultivation theory running through the inner and the outer

3.1. "From cheng to ming" and "from ming to cheng": the levels of the innate and the acquired

After establishing cheng as the fundamental ground of moral cultivation, *the Doctrine of the Mean* goes on to set out the concrete paths of cultivation. The twenty-first chapter, "from cheng to ming is called nature; from ming to cheng is called teaching. If there is cheng there is ming; if there is ming there is cheng" [2], sums up the two cultivation paths.

What is called "from cheng to ming" refers to the natural manifestation of the inner cheng as the wisdom of ming; what is called "from ming to cheng" refers to pursuing the state of utmost cheng by means of the acquired discrimination of ming. cheng is both the substance of the way of heaven and the pursuit of the way of man; no matter which path it is, the final goal is the pursuit of the state of cheng. As for these two cultivation ways at different inner and outer levels, Mr. Cheng Liang points out: "the one who is 'from cheng to ming' points directly to the nature conferred by heaven in the inner heart, and by the clarity of one's own nature sees through the way of heaven and earth and the principle of the myriad things". "The one who is 'from ming to cheng' reaches, through learning and understanding principle, the clarity of one's own heart-and-nature in the end, and thereby realizes the grasp of the way." Both paths take cheng as their destination. This structure of "different paths arriving at the same place" embodies a theoretical character of the greatest importance in the Confucian cultivation theory: the dynamic realization of the unity of heaven and man. That is, the cheng of the way of heaven is not an abstract entity outside man; it can be recognized and practiced through the practice of cultivation.

The description *the Doctrine of the Mean* gives of "from cheng to ming" is: "the one who is cheng hits the mark without effort and gets it without thinking; he is at ease in the middle way; he is the sage." [2] The sage's heavenly nature is pure; his words and acts naturally accord with the way of heaven, and he needs no effort and no thinking. Therefore "from cheng to ming" is the way of the

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sage; only the sage can reach the point where the inner cheng manifests naturally and enters the middle way. This path takes "honoring the virtuous nature" as its core, and puts weight on the nurturing and the keeping of the inner virtue. Yet sages are after all exceedingly rare; for most people, the closer path is "from ming to cheng" — reaching the state of cheng through acquired learning and discrimination.

In its twentieth chapter *the Doctrine of the Mean* systematically sets out the concrete method of the path of "from ming to cheng": "study it broadly, inquire into it carefully, think about it cautiously, discriminate it clearly, practice it earnestly." [2] This process stresses the importance of "following the path of inquiry and study". Studying broadly, inquiring carefully, thinking cautiously and discriminating clearly belong to the work of the outer "ming"; they aim at discriminating the principles of things and distinguishing the good from the evil. Practicing earnestly is to bring the principle one knows into actual action. These five make up a complete cultivation process that goes from knowing to acting, from the outer to the inner, and then again from the inner to the outer. This process from the outer to the inner especially stresses the spirit of holding firmly of "if not able, do not give up": "if there is something not studied, or studied but not mastered, do not give up; if there is something not inquired into, or inquired into but not known, do not give up; if there is something not thought about, or thought about but not got, do not give up; if there is something not discriminated, or discriminated but not clear, do not give up; if there is something not practiced, or practiced but not earnestly, do not give up." This cultivation that pursues the state of utmost cheng is a theory of work that never gives up; it embodies the practical character of "reaching it by learning" in the Confucian cultivation theory.

Of course, the question that needs attention is whether these two cultivation paths, "from cheng to ming" as the teaching of the sage and "from ming to cheng" as the cultivation work of the ordinary person, have a strict boundary between them, or complement each other. Zhu Xi, in his *Chapter-and-Verse Commentary on the Doctrine of the Mean*, clearly distinguishes two grades, the sage and the worthy: the sage "hits the mark without effort and gets it without thinking", his heavenly nature is pure, and he naturally goes from cheng to ming; the worthy needs to "choose the good and hold firmly to it", and goes from ming to cheng through acquired learning. This reading has a far-reaching influence; it treats "from cheng to ming" as the monopoly of the sage and "from ming to cheng" as the path of the ordinary person. But Lü Dalin holds that "from ming to cheng" and "from cheng to ming" do not only correspond to people at different levels; they are cultivation work that can be adopted respectively by people at different levels. In other words, even the ordinary person can, in specific circumstances, try the method of "from cheng to ming" that points directly to the original heart; even the sage does not entirely do without the learning work of "from ming to cheng".

In substance, the two cultivation paths inevitably have differences in level, but there is even more a deep complementary relation between them, and this precisely reflects that the Confucian moral cultivation system regards cheng as a continuous dynamic process. That "from cheng to ming" produces the wisdom of ming from the substance of cheng arising in the inner heart decides its extremely high demand on the substance of cultivation: one must be able to directly stimulate and recognize the inner substance of cheng; while "from ming to cheng", as the wisdom produced by outer discrimination that then gathers inward and uncovers the cheng that was covered, provides a simpler route for the moral cultivation of ordinary people. What *the Doctrine of the Mean* says, "if there is cheng there is ming; if there is ming there is cheng", reveals the interactive relation between cheng and ming — if one is cheng one is naturally ming, and if one is ming one can further increase one's cheng. The two are not in a linear order of before and after; they nurture each other in both

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directions and increase in a cycle. This circular structure means that cultivation is not an event completed once, but a continuous dynamic process: man can both reach the ming of outer principles through the expansion of inner cheng, and can, through outer learning and discrimination, in turn deepen his inner cheng. "From cheng to ming" takes "honoring the virtuous nature" as its core and puts weight on the nurturing and the keeping of inner virtue; "from ming to cheng" takes "following the path of inquiry and study" as its core, and stresses reaching cheng through the acquired learning of "study it broadly, inquire into it carefully, think about it cautiously, discriminate it clearly, practice it earnestly". The former is the functioning from the inner to the outer, the latter is the nurturing from the outer to the inner — the two make up a complete cultivation cycle. Cheng and ming are each the premise of the other and accomplish each other, and together they point to the ultimate state of "the unity of heaven and man".

3.2. "Shendu" and "mingshan": the cultivation work of cultivating both inner and outer

On the basis of the different inner and outer levels of cultivation, *the Doctrine of the Mean* also mentions the concrete methods of cultivation, namely the two dimensions of "shendu" (being watchful over oneself when alone) and "mingshan" (understanding the good). "Shendu" (being watchful over oneself when alone) speaks of the inner keeping of cheng, while "mingshan" (understanding the good) stresses the outer practice of choosing the good. Through the way of cultivating both inner and outer, the two together make up the complete theory of cultivation work of *the Doctrine of the Mean*.

The first chapter of *the Doctrine of the Mean* first gives a definition of "shendu" (being watchful over oneself when alone) as the inner work of making the intention cheng:

"The way cannot be left for an instant; what can be left is not the way. Therefore the gentleman is cautious and careful about what he does not see, and is fearful and apprehensive about what he does not hear. Nothing is more visible than the hidden, nothing is more manifest than the minute; therefore the gentleman is watchful over his solitude." [2]

What is called "shendu" (being watchful over oneself when alone) is the unity of inner moral keeping and outer moral conduct; it is a moral awareness that transcends time and space. As for the "du" in "shendu" (being watchful over oneself when alone), Zheng Xuan's commentary says "being careful about what one does when dwelling at leisure" [7], which means keeping a cautious attitude toward one's own conduct at times when one is alone with no one about. On this basis, Mr. Yu Shusheng, through a strict textual analysis, expands on this view of Zheng Xuan. He points out: "the 'qi' in 'shen qi du' refers to the gentleman himself … 'not seeing' and 'not hearing' are 'not moving' and 'not speaking'; more exactly, 'not seeing' and 'not hearing' can generally refer to 'not seeing, hearing, speaking, moving'." [8] In other words, the core meaning of "shendu" (being watchful over oneself when alone) does not only refer to caution when living alone; it stresses keeping, in the hidden and minute places, an attitude of caution, apprehension, cheng and non-deception when others have not seen or heard, and even when one's own intention first begins to stir. Zhu Xi, in his *Collected Commentaries on the Four Books*, explains "shendu" (being watchful over oneself when alone) as "solitude is the place that others do not know and that one alone knows" [2], which refers precisely to the first stirring of the thought that others do not know; this is the place of "the hidden" and "the minute", and "nothing is more visible than the hidden, nothing is more manifest than the minute" means precisely that in the most hidden and minute place one can most see the true moral state of a person; therefore the gentleman must be especially cautious here. He deepens "shendu" (being watchful over oneself when alone) from caution about outer conduct to caution about the

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stirring of inner thoughts, so that shendu (being watchful over oneself when alone) puts on man the demand of conscious awareness to keep inwardly no matter when or where.

Confucian thought takes "turning back and seeking in oneself" as its fundamental feature, and "shendu" (being watchful over oneself when alone) is precisely the concrete use of this subject's inward-turning thinking. Zeng Guofan discusses shendu (being watchful over oneself when alone): "in curbing desire do not neglect the hidden and the minute; in following principle do not interrupt for an instant; in inward reflection have no cause for shame, and therefore the heart is at peace" [9]. "Do not interrupt for an instant" stresses the continuity and the unbrokenness of keeping — curbing selfish desire in the hidden and minute places, and following heavenly principle without departing for a moment. The work of "shen" stresses looking back at oneself and exerting force inward, supervising and restraining the self when one is alone. *Sishu Zhuzi Yitong Tiaobian* clearly states: "not deceiving oneself is something that requires exerting force from beginning to end; it is precisely the work of keeping." [10] This is not caution of one moment; it is nurturing and preserving running through from beginning to end. And the work of "du" has cheng as its core. Without cheng, shendu (being watchful over oneself when alone) is only an outer restraint; only by keeping with a heart of cheng can one, when no one supervises, still be as if facing an abyss or treading on thin ice. This kind of awe is a constant state of keeping. Whether someone is present or not, one keeps the pursuit of the good and of cheng. Mr. Yang Qianpu points out: "as moral conviction, moral will and consciousness, 'cheng' is naturally also the great motive force that pushes people to cultivate and train themselves." [8] "Du" is precisely the concrete use of this motive force in the hidden and minute places.

On this basis, "shendu" (being watchful over oneself when alone) is the premise of "making the intention cheng". The Great Learning says: "those who wish to cultivate their persons first rectify their hearts; those who wish to rectify their hearts first make their intentions cheng." [2] What is called "making the intention cheng" is to make one's thoughts pure and real, without any self-deception. Thoughts are the notions that first stir when the heart meets the outside world; they are the inner source of motive power for conduct (the person). Yet as for whether, at the instant when a thought first stirs, it is mixed with calculation of profit, others have no way of knowing, and even one oneself, if slightly unalert, finds it hard to distinguish. Just as the Great Learning says: "the petty man, when dwelling at leisure, does what is not good and goes to every length; when he sees the gentleman he then tries to conceal it, covering up his not-good and displaying his good." [2] This problem needs "shendu" (being watchful over oneself when alone) to solve. Shendu (being watchful over oneself when alone), as a high degree of moral awareness, effectively avoids the moral loophole of "doing what is not good when dwelling at leisure".

If "shendu" (being watchful over oneself when alone) puts weight on the inner keeping of cheng, then the cultivation theory of *the Doctrine of the Mean* also stresses the outer practice of "mingshan" (understanding the good). The twentieth chapter of *the Doctrine of the Mean* says: "there is a way to making one's person cheng: if one does not understand the good, one is not cheng in one's person." [2] This means that if one wishes to make oneself true and without falsity, one must first discriminate clearly what the good is; if one cannot understand the good, then what is called "making one's person cheng" loses its direction and its content.

"Mingshan" (understanding the good) is the premise of "making one's person cheng", and also the key link of the path of "from ming to cheng". "There is a way to making one's person cheng: if one does not understand the good, one is not cheng in one's person." This closely connects "mingshan" (understanding the good) and "making one's person cheng", and establishes the foundational position of "mingshan" (understanding the good) in the cultivation theory. In the cultivation

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sequence of "from ming to cheng", "mingshan" (understanding the good) is precisely the logical starting point and the key pivot of entering "cheng" from "ming" — it keeps acquired learning and discrimination from becoming a jumble of knowledge, and keeps it always anchored to the root of value, providing an epistemological guarantee for "making one's person cheng".

The practice of "mingshan" (understanding the good) is connected with "choosing the good and holding firmly to it": "the one who becomes cheng is the one who chooses the good and holds firmly to it." "Mingshan" (understanding the good) is not a one-time acquisition of knowledge; it is a continuous cultivation practice that concerns both body and heart. First, mingshan (understanding the good) means making clear the boundary between the right and the wrong of things, between the good and the evil. It points to "timely centrality" in concrete situations — that is, in the complex and changing real relations (ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, friends), seeing clearly what is the most fitting action at the moment. It requires the cultivator to have a keen moral power of discrimination, as *the Doctrine of the Mean* says, "Shun liked to ask questions and liked to examine near-at-hand words; he concealed what was evil and made known what was good" [2], discerning the sprouts of the good in the minute places of daily life. Then, mingshan (understanding the good) points to the value recognition of the good and to heartfelt conviction. True "mingshan" (understanding the good) is necessarily accompanied by an emotional recognition of the loftiness and the necessity of the good, producing the personal feeling of "as when one hates a bad smell, as when one loves a beautiful color", and turning the outer principle into an inner value conviction. In the end, mingshan (understanding the good) points to the real level of practice, that is, the knowing-by-experience and the confirmation of tempering oneself in affairs. "Mingshan" (understanding the good) is not sitting quietly in meditation or empty talk in the study; it must be constantly tempered in human relations and daily use, in responding to affairs and dealing with things. Through "studying broadly, inquiring carefully, thinking cautiously" one obtains the principle, then through "discriminating clearly" one establishes the standard, and finally in the initial "acting" one verifies whether the principle one understands is genuine.

"Choosing the good", with these various meanings as its basis, belongs to the work of "ming", and must rely on the cognitive results and the value standards accumulated by "mingshan" (understanding the good). The cognitive dimension of "mingshan" (understanding the good) provides the measure of "choosing" (knowing right from wrong); the emotional dimension provides the motive power of "choosing" (the inclination to love the good and hate the evil); the practical dimension provides the verification of "choosing" (verification by past experience). The cultivator must, in the concrete situation, bring all his reason and innate knowing into play, and make a fitting choice in an instant. "Choosing the good" is in essence a capacity to turn the universal law of the way of heaven outward into concrete life practice. Every difficult choice is a drawing near of the way of man to the way of heaven: in choosing, the cultivator does not waver between yes and no and does not pursue profit and avoid harm, but takes cheng as the only reliance — at this point, "choosing" itself becomes the way by which the way of man leads to the way of heaven. "Holding firmly" belongs to the work of "acting": the firm keeping and the earnest practice of the good one has "chosen". Its content can be analyzed from the two words "zhi" and "gu": "zhi" is keeping — it means holding fast in the inner heart the standard obtained by "choosing the good", and not easily letting it go because outer circumstances change. As Yan Hui "got one good and held it fast in his breast and did not lose it" [2], hiding the good thought deep in his breast, protecting and keeping it at every moment, not letting it be submerged by selfish desire or laziness. "Gu" is being firm — it means making the good thought solidify into a stable quality of virtue through continuous practice. It requires that "practicing earnestly" have the unyielding spirit of "not giving up" — "if there is

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something not practiced, or practiced but not earnestly, do not give up" [2]. This kind of "gu" is not outer compulsion; it is the loyalty of the inner will to the good. "Holding firmly" is not blind acting. In the process of "holding firmly", "mingshan" (understanding the good) continuously performs the function of direction-setting and correction, and "holding firmly" in turn deepens "mingshan" (understanding the good) — the more earnestly one acts, the clearer one knows and the more keenly one experiences. The two go round and back, increasing each other. If "holding firmly" is to constitute the decisive link in reaching cheng, only through the unrelenting effort of "where others can do it in one, I do it in a hundred; where others can do it in ten, I do it in a thousand" [2], practicing the standard of the good over and over until it merges into body and heart, does the outer good truly solidify into an inner quality of virtue, and does the cultivator move from "being cheng at times" to "being cheng constantly", and from acting with effort to being at ease in the middle way.

"Choosing the good" and "holding firmly" joined together make up the complete cultivation process of the way of man of "the one who becomes cheng". "Choosing the good" sifts and confirms the numerous outer "principles of the good"; this is the input "from the outer to the inner". "Holding firmly", through continuous practice and the keeping of intention, melts these "principles" into body and heart, so that the outer is no longer outer and the inner is no longer inner, and in the end "principle and heart are one"; this is the first appearance of cheng. Mingshan (understanding the good), choosing the good, and holding firmly are not a linear sequence; they are a dynamic whole that goes round and back and increases each other. "Mingshan" (understanding the good) provides the value measure for choosing the good and the direction for holding firmly; "choosing the good" tests in concrete decisions whether mingshan (understanding the good) is genuine; "holding firmly" solidifies the good into virtue, and the more earnestly one acts, the clearer one knows — every practice brings new knowing-by-experience and corrects the cognition that was formerly incomplete. Precisely in this spiral ascent in which the three contain each other, the work of "becoming cheng" in the way of man continuously draws near the complete state of the "cheng" of the way of heaven: every judgment of the cultivator has "ming" as its base, every decision is settled through "choosing", and every action is made firm by "holding firmly". When this is so everywhere in daily use and at every moment, then cheng no longer exists as an outer standard of the way of heaven, but turns into the real texture of the cultivator's life — "cheng is not merely completing oneself; it is that by which one completes things". At this point, the "becoming cheng" of the way of man finally reaches the "cheng" of the way of heaven, and the state of the unity of heaven and man is realized.

"Shendu" (being watchful over oneself when alone) and "mingshan" (understanding the good), one inner and one outer, are the inside and the outside of each other. "Shendu" (being watchful over oneself when alone) guarantees that the inner heart is cheng and without deception, while "mingshan" (understanding the good) provides a clear direction of practice for cultivation. Both "shendu" (being watchful over oneself when alone) and "mingshan" (understanding the good) take cheng as the core motive force; if cheng does not exist beforehand, shendu (being watchful over oneself when alone) cannot truly arouse the heart of careful keeping in man, so that inner cultivation becomes mere form, and mingshan (understanding the good) loses the motive power of its moral practice and sinks into pale knowledge. Only by cultivating both inner and outer can one truly reach the moral state of "really having it in oneself", and make the virtue of utmost cheng a principle that is known, and also a life experience that is one's own.

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4. The unity of heaven and man: the highest state of cultivation

4.1. "Attaining centrality and harmony": the state of the unity of heaven and man

After finishing its exposition of "what heaven confers is called human nature; following human nature is called the way; cultivating the way is called teaching", the opening of *the Doctrine of the Mean* goes on to define, by means of "before joy, anger, sorrow and pleasure are aroused it is called centrality; when they are aroused and all hit the proper measure it is called harmony" [2], the two states within human nature, "centrality" and "harmony". It then makes a judgment about the important function the two play in the operation of heaven and earth: "centrality is the great root of the world; harmony is the universal way of the world. Attain centrality and harmony, and heaven and earth take their places and the myriad things are nurtured." [2]

"Centrality" is the still state in which joy, anger, sorrow and pleasure have not yet been aroused; it is the substance of human nature, and therefore is "the great root of the world". This is not a "coldness" suppressing the emotions; it is the original state in which the substance of the heart is wholly clear and has not been pulled by selfish desire and outer things. At this time, the principles of joy, anger, sorrow and pleasure are complete in the heart, but have not taken form outside; it is like a mirror that has not yet reflected a thing, with the bright substance existing of itself. Zhu Xi calls it "the virtue of human nature", that is, the pure manifestation of heavenly principle in man; "harmony" is the state in which the emotions are aroused and all accord with due measure, with neither excess nor deficiency; it is the flowing of the way, and therefore is "the universal way of the world". It is the emotions flowing out in exactly the right way in a concrete situation. Each emotion has its measure (no excess) and its standard (no deficiency). This state embodies the flowing of "the way" in daily use.

"Attaining centrality and harmony" does not stop at the adjustment of the individual heart-and-nature; its deep meaning lies in this: if the temperament of man can reach centrality, correctness, peace and harmony, then it resonates at the same frequency with the ultimate principle of the waxing and waning of yin and yang in heaven and earth and of the succession of the four seasons. Man stands between heaven and earth, and the state of centrality and harmony of his moral cultivation is in truth a microcosmic reflection of, and a way of participating in, the harmonious order of the universe. Therefore "attaining centrality and harmony" is not only the completion of the cultivation of the individual heart-and-nature; it is also the highest state at the level of the operation of heaven and earth, namely "heaven and earth take their places and the myriad things are nurtured". Heaven and earth each rest in their places and the myriad things follow their growth, reaching a state of incomparable completion and grandeur. At this point, the cultivation of the individual and the operation of heaven and earth merge into one, presenting the grand harmony of "heaven and earth take their places and the myriad things are nurtured" [2], which is precisely the ultimate confirmation of the Confucian ideal of the unity of heaven and man.

This state is closely connected with cheng. The twenty-third chapter of *the Doctrine of the Mean* discusses the process of reaching utmost cheng through "extending to the partial": "the next is to extend to the partial; in the partial there can be cheng; with cheng there is form; with form there is manifestation; with manifestation there is brightness; with brightness there is movement; with movement there is change; with change there is transformation. Only the utmost cheng in the world can transform." [2] "Extending to the partial" refers to starting from a partial nature or a partial capacity, and through continuous cultivation, gradually expanding from the cheng of one part until reaching the cheng of the whole. When cheng accumulates within, it takes form and appears without; appearing without, it daily becomes more manifest; being manifest, it shines forth; shining

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forth, it can move others; moving others, it brings about change; bringing about change, it reaches the state of transforming and nourishing the myriad things. This progressive sequence echoes the logic of "fully realizing one's own nature, fully realizing the nature of others, fully realizing the nature of things, assisting transformation and nourishment, forming a triad with heaven and earth", and together they reveal how the cultivation of the individual can affect the operation of the universe of heaven and earth.

4.2. The unity of heaven and man as the value and the transcendence of the cultivation theory

The final direction of the cultivation theory of *the Doctrine of the Mean* is "the unity of heaven and man", and this state has a deep value content and meaning of transcendence. First, the unity of heaven and man embodies the wisdom of life in which "completing oneself" and "completing things" are unified. The twenty-fifth chapter of *the Doctrine of the Mean* says: "cheng is completing itself, and the way is guiding itself. Cheng is the beginning and the end of things; without cheng there are no things. Therefore the gentleman prizes becoming cheng. Cheng is not merely completing oneself; it is that by which one completes things. Completing oneself is humaneness; completing things is wisdom. This is the virtue of human nature, the way that unites the outer and the inner." [2] cheng is not only accomplishing oneself; it also has to accomplish outer things. Completing oneself is "humaneness", that is, the fulfillment of the nature of one's own life; completing things is "wisdom", that is, the accomplishment of the life value of others and of other things. Humaneness and wisdom both come from "the virtue of human nature", and unite the way of the inner and the outer. Cultivation does not stop at making oneself good alone; it has to extend from oneself to others and to things. This is where the transcendence of the cultivation theory of *the Doctrine of the Mean* lies. Contemporary personal growth should not be an isolated self-perfection; it should point to active care for society and for others, and complete a richer self-realization in the process of accomplishing others.

Second, the unity of heaven and man has the cosmological meaning of "forming a triad with heaven and earth". "Forming a triad with heaven and earth" means that man stands together with heaven and earth as a third; this judgment directly connects the moral cultivation of man with the operation of heaven and earth, and is the highest affirmation of the moral subjectivity of man. Mr. He Gengcui points out: "*the Doctrine of the Mean* uses cheng to run through heaven, earth and man, and affirms that cheng is the metaphysical ground of 'man forming a triad with heaven and earth'. The meaning of heaven, earth and man is generated through 'cheng', and the generation of the meaning of heaven and earth is made manifest only through the ordering and assisting of man." [11] In this sense, man not only passively accords with heaven and earth; he also actively takes part in and assists the work of the transforming and nourishing of heaven and earth. The moral practice of man is itself the embodiment and the completion of the virtue of the unceasing generation of the universe. This thought lays a solid philosophical foundation for contemporary ecological ethics, and warns us that the intervention of humankind in nature should take "assisting transformation and nourishment" rather than "conquering and mastering" as its aim. It gives the moral practice of the individual a grand cosmic meaning, and urges us to hold awe for the life of the myriad things in our daily choices, and to regard a sustainable way of life as a part of the cultivation of virtue.

Finally, the state of the unity of heaven and man embodies the ultimate value pursuit of the Confucian theory of moral cultivation. The unity of heaven and man is not a fantasy state beyond reach; it is a real state that can be gradually approached through the concrete work of "choosing the good and holding firmly to it", "shendu" (being watchful over oneself when alone) and "mingshan" (understanding the good). The substance of the unity of heaven and man is not to remove the

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difference between heaven and man; it is "the mutual participation that is born together with the unity of heaven and man and the separation of heaven and man", realizing the harmonious co-living of heaven and man on the premise that heaven and man are distinct. This is both the completion of the virtue of the individual and the achieving of the order of the universe; it embodies the highest level of the Confucian ideal of "inner sage and outer king". It tells us that the lofty spiritual state is not a suspended empty fancy; it is a real possibility that can be gradually reached through the daily work of "shendu" (being watchful over oneself when alone) and "mingshan" (understanding the good), and it provides a steady path of inner transcendence for the restless people of the present age. At the same time, this wisdom of "having distinction and yet uniting" helps us, on the premise of respecting individual difference and plural values, to seek harmony among people and social consensus, and to turn "inner sage and outer king" in the modern context into the double achievement of personal character and social responsibility.

5. Conclusion

Taking cheng as its core concept, the cultivation theory of *the Doctrine of the Mean* builds a moral cultivation system that runs through heaven and man and has both ontology and the theory of work. Cheng is both the law of the operation of heaven and earth and the root of the moral cultivation of man, and even more the medium that connects heaven and man. On this basis, cultivation appears as the two paths of "from cheng to ming" and "from ming to cheng" with different inner and outer orders, and as the work path of "shendu" (being watchful over oneself when alone) and "mingshan" (understanding the good) that cultivates both inner and outer. The ultimate direction of cultivation is the state of the unity of heaven and man of "attaining centrality and harmony"; this state contains the centrality and harmony of the individual heart-and-nature, and it also covers the broad content of completing oneself and completing things and of assisting the transforming and nourishing of heaven and earth. The distinctive value of the cultivation theory of *the Doctrine of the Mean* lies in this: it raises the moral cultivation of the individual to the height of cosmology, and gives everyday moral practice an ultimate meaning. Cultivation is not only for the perfection of the individual; it is also the participation in and the completion of the virtue of the unceasing generation of heaven and earth. Today, when moral relativism is prevalent and the relation between man and nature is growing ever more tense, rethinking the intellectual resource of the cultivation theory of *the Doctrine of the Mean*, "reaching outward cultivation by inward reflection, and connecting heaven and man", may provide a useful reference for the spiritual settling of the individual and the value rebuilding of humankind.

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