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CONFUCIAN PHILOSOPHY OF ZHONGDAOLOGY AND ITS PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE IN RESOLVING CONFLICTS

ABSTRACT

The essence of traditional Chinese Confucian philosophy can be termed “Zhongdaoology”; it searches for the appropriate degree of *zhong* which is a standard guiding people’s actions. The Chinese pictographic character “*zhong*” has multiple meanings, including centrality, middle, appropriate, fit, just, fair, impartial, upright, etc. In early Confucianism, it has been developed into an important concept with profound philosophical connotations; it includes a combination of subjective and objective views, a fusion of different stances and considerations, and postulates a harmony of the internal and external worlds. Zhongdaoology takes a dynamic, contextual, correlative and dialectic view of things in the world, and provides a way of thinking different from the traditional Western ontological (metaphysical) way of thinking. The practical rationality and wisdom of Zhongdaoology are very significant for promoting dialogue and resolving a variety of conflicts in human societies.

Keywords: Chinese philosophy; Confucianism; Zhongdaoology; practical rationality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional Western philosophy focused attention on metaphysics, which studied the fundamental being of entities in reality. Ontology, equivalently metaphysics in the Aristotelian sense, has played an important role in Western philosophy since the Presocratics’ times. With the premise that all entities in reality have their constant and fixed being, ontology deals with the abstract and static concept of being and the categories of being. This premise leads to the categorical distinction of entities, that is, entities definitely belong to certain categories, each category has its distinct definition, and there are clear boundaries between the categories. This way of thinking has set a solid foundation of human

knowledge and greatly promoted the development of human knowledge, especially in the realm of natural science and technology.

However, this metaphysics has defects, especially when dealing with some human spiritual and social-cultural issues. Many spiritual or social-cultural phenomena are not ontically static entities and they do not belong to fixed ontic categories, but are dynamic and on-going events or processes. The traditional way of metaphysical thinking views being as static, and it imposes rigid categories also on spiritual and social-cultural phenomena, thus it creates some improper boundaries and segregations among entities, sometimes it cuts off the relationship among correlative entities and neglects the organic wholeness of entities. As an effect, the uniqueness and differences of entities have been over-enhanced and resulted in confrontation and animosity, which has triggered out many ideological, political and social-cultural conflicts in human society.

Contrarily, ancient Chinese philosophy, especially classic Confucianism, takes what I call the “zhongdaological” rather than ontological view on the variety of philosophical issues. Instead of studying the static being, the ancient Chinese philosophy is more concentrated on the searching for the relative and dynamic “*zhong* 中,” which is a very important idea in early Confucian philosophy. In it the concept “*zhong*” represents an appropriate state or degree of relationship between different objects; it is not the being of anything, but can be understood as the “betweenness” of objects. Confucian Zhongdaology provides a quite different way of philosophical thinking in comparison to that of traditional Western metaphysics. It also suggests a kind of practical reasoning or practical wisdom for mediating or resolving various kinds of conflict in human society.

However, the researches on Confucian Zhongdaology carried out hitherto usually interpret it only as the identical to Aristotle’s “doctrine of the mean.” Although there are some similarities and connotations between the two, yet more connotations and a deeper philosophical significance of Confucian Zhongdaology are frequently neglected by contemporary scholars. Thus it is needed to discuss it further. In this paper, I will first give a brief account of the origin and evolution of the concept “*zhong*” and the philosophy of “Zhongdaology” in early ancient Chinese philosophy, especially in classical Confucianism. Then I will discuss the unique philosophical significance of the zhongdaological way of thinking in comparison with the traditional Western ontological way of thinking. Finally, I will discuss the practical significance and application of Zhongdaology in conflict resolution.

2. THE MEANING OF “ZHONG” AND CONFUCIAN PHILOSOPHY OF “ZHONGDAOLOGY”

The Chinese character “*zhong* 中” is commonly used in Chinese language, in ancient Chinese as well as in modern Chinese. It frequently appeared even as early as in the so-called “oracle inscriptions,” the earliest Chinese writing system on the tortoise shells and cattle bones, which belongs to the Shang Dynasty (16–11th centuries B.C.E.). Although scholars still differ in the earliest original meaning of this single pictograph, the semantic meanings of the word “*zhong*” in daily language are quite clear. “*Zhong*” literally means “center,” “internal,” “middle,” “medium,” “mean,” “in between,” “fit,” “to the point,” etc.¹ From later Spring-Autumn to the Warring States times, it had been gradually evolved into an important philosophic concept in early Confucian philosophy.

We know that the concept “being” in traditional Western ontology was also originated from a commonly used word, i.e., the predicate verb “to be.” The root “onto-” in the word “ontology” was originated from the predicate verb “to be” in ancient Greek. However it might be unbelievable to Western language speakers that in early ancient Chinese language there was not a similar predicate verb as “to be” at all. The modern Chinese equivalent of “to be,” i.e., “*shi* 是,” began to be used as a predicate verb no earlier than in the later Han Dynasty (25–220 B.C.E.). Therefore, the Western ontological concept of being was not the focus of the philosophical thinking of ancient Chinese philosophers.

However, another commonly used word “*zhong*” had become an important philosophical concept in early Chinese philosophy. Searching for “*zhong*,” holding fast on “*zhong*,” and applying “*zhong*” had become a crucial task of Confucian philosophy. And a series of philosophical ideas related to the concept of “*zhong*” appeared in early Confucian texts, such as “*zhong yong* 中庸” (usually translated as “the doctrine of the mean), “*zhong he* 中和”(zhong and harmonious), “*zhong zheng* 中正” (being just and correct), “*shi zhong* 时中” (timely correct or timely appropriate), “*zhong jie* 中节” (fitting the due degree), “*zhi zhong* 执中” (holding on the principle of Zhong), “*Cheng yu zhong* 诚于中” (being honest at heart), “*yong zhong* 用中” (applying the principle of zhong), etc. We generally can call all of these ideas “*zhong dao*” (the Way of Zhong), or more conveniently, “Zhongdaoology.”

According to some early Confucian texts, the origin of Zhongdaoology can be traced back to some legendary Sage Kings of the remote antiquity. “Holding the way of *zhong*” was an important political principle which has been imparted and inherited from generation to generation among those exemplary rulers in

¹ For a more detailed discussion on the original meaning of the character “*zhong*” and its philosophical significance in early Confucianism, see Xu, K. 2012, “A Synthetic Comprehension of the Way of Zhong in Early Confucian Philosophy.” *Frontier of Philosophy in China*, 7, 3, 433–438.

the Confucian historical narratives.² Some newly discovered bamboo scripts belonging to the pre-Qin time also provide an evidence that the Confucian records about the transmission of the “Way of *zhong*” among the ancient Sage Kings are not fictional.³ Afterwards, “*zhong*” has been evolved into an abstract concept in Confucian philosophy. Confucius and his successors, notably Zi Si (the grandson of Confucius), Mencius and Xun Zi, have made a great contribution to the philosophy of Zhongdaology, and continuously enriched and developed its scope. The zhongdaological way of thinking can be found in many aspects in Confucianism, as well as in Chinese culture in general. Actually, in the thoughts and theories of other ancient Chinese philosophers, such as those who belong to the Daoist or legalist traditions, we can also find some impacts of the zhongdaological way of thinking. In a certain sense we can say that Zhongdaology is the essence of traditional Chinese philosophy. Its position in ancient Chinese philosophy is not less important than that of ontology in traditional Western philosophy.

As I have pointed out earlier, in certain contexts “*zhong*” has the meaning of “medium,” “mean,” so Confucian Zhongdaology or “*zhong yong*” has some similarities with Aristotle’s “doctrine of the mean.” Like Aristotle, Confucius also thinks that “*zhong*” is a perfect virtue, which is neither excess nor deficiency, but an intermediate between two extremes. However, the significance and application of Zhongdaology are not limited to this sense. Generally speaking, “Zhongdaology” can be understood as the basic way of thinking or basic philosophical methodology of Confucianism. It has been applied in many branches of Confucian philosophy, such as ethics and morality, social political philosophy, etc., so it can be considered the meta-ethics or meta-politics of Confucianism. The core concept “*zhong*” in Zhongdaology does not refer to any static substantial being, yet it exists constantly and dynamically in different forms. *Zhong* does not exist as a “being” in itself, but it depends on other beings. It always stays in the middle, yet it is sustained by the two ends at the opposing directions. It dwells at the center, yet its position will be dissolved without the surrounding of the edge or margin. It represents an average or moderate degree, yet this kind of degree refers to the extreme parameters. It is not a kind of pure knowledge, yet it relies on related knowledge. The Confucian zhongdaological philosophy advocates the correlative, balanced and dynamic way of thinking, proposes communication and dialogue, thus to increase the fusion of ideas and to build consensus. It is helpful to promote inclusiveness and harmony among different groups of people and different cultures.

² Xu, K. 2012, op. cit., 423–424.

³ Chan, S. 2012. “Zhong and Ideal Rulership in the Baoxun (Instruction for Preservation) Text of the Tsinghua Collection of bamboo Slip Manuscript.” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*, 11(2), 129–145; Liang, T. 2014. “The Baoxun Bamboo Manuscript of Tsinghua University and Confucian Daotong Revisited: With a Discussion of Xun Zi’s Status in Daotong.” *Social Sciences in China*, 35, 1, 190–206.

3. THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE ZHONGDAOLOGICAL AND ONTOLOGICAL WAYS OF THINKING

As I have pointed out earlier, in early ancient Chinese language, there was not an equivalent of the predicate “to be” and its gerundial form “being.” As a result, the issue of being could not become an important topic in ancient Chinese philosophy, at least in its original Western sense. Therefore, it is understandable that some modern researchers think that in ancient China there was no ontology at all; however this view is controversial. Some people even go further and declare that there was no philosophy in ancient China at all. For instance, in September 2001, during his visit in China Jacques Derrida declared that “there were only thoughts but no philosophy in (ancient) China.”⁴ Derrida’s casual comment on Chinese philosophy has caused unexpected responses in the Chinese academic circle, especially among philosophers. Some of them chime in with Derrida and started to question the legitimacy of “Chinese philosophy” as a discipline, which had become a problem of discussion even before Derrida’s comment.⁵ Others were aflame with indignation and criticized Derrida’s arrogance and ignorance. It has also triggered out a vast discussion on the “legitimacy issue of Chinese philosophy.”⁶

However, even if there was not a kind of ontology in ancient China in the exact traditional Western sense, it would be absurd to claim that there was no philosophy in ancient China at all. Actually, although ontology has constituted a very important tradition in Western philosophy, yet the limitation of philosophy to ontological issues is questionable. In fact, many modern and postmodern Western philosophers, including Derrida himself, have called in question or even tried to deconstruct the traditional Western ontology. Therefore, philosophy can get rid of the traditional ontological thinking. In other words, Chinese philosophy has no reason to be disparaged even if it is really weak in ontological thinking. Actually, as some scholars have clarified, when giving that comment on Chinese philosophy, Derrida did not try to specially belittle Chinese philosophy, because according to his deconstructionist view, not only Chinese philosophy, but also Western philosophy lacks legitimacy.⁷ But then who could legitimize philosophy? Has philosophy ever been officially legitimized?

Actually Chinese philosophers and researchers on Chinese philosophy do not need to defence a fortress of “Chinese philosophical ontology” to preserve its legitimacy. Rather, they should try to explore and develop the uniqueness of

⁴ Wang, Y. 2007. *The Collected Works of Wang Yuanhua*, vol. 10. Wu Han: Hubei Education Press, 157.

⁵ Zhao, J. 2003 (6). “Summary on the Study on the Legitimacy Issue of Chinese Philosophy.” *Social Sciences in China* (Chinese version), 36–42.

⁶ Peng, Y. (Ed.). 2011. *The Legitimacy Crisis of Chinese Philosophy as a Subject*. Baoding: Hebei University Press.

⁷ Peng, Y. 2011, op. cit., 64.

Chinese philosophy which may be different from other philosophies, and may provide a supplement or even a remedy to other philosophies, thus to make its own special contribution to philosophy in general. In my view, Zhongdaology is just one of the features representing the uniqueness of Chinese philosophy.

It is no doubt that ontology has played a crucial role in the development of Western philosophy. In a sense we can say that the whole history of Western philosophy can be considered an evolution based on or surrounded by the theoretical issues of ontology. Therefore, the ontological way of thinking is an inveteracy of Western philosophy. At the very beginning, the ancient Greek philosophers had already set being as the ultimate goal of philosophical wisdom; they focus on the inquiry of the fundamental questions of what there really is or what does really exist. Plato believes that the true being is hidden behind all the perceivable objects, and could be grasped only by ideas. Therefore, reality has been divided into two worlds, the physical one and the metaphysical one, phenomenon and the noumenon, the material or sensational world and the ideal or rational world. In these pairs of dualisms, the former is determined by the latter, and the latter is usually considered as true reality, which represents the fundamental and ultimate truth, and the source of absolute certainty. The ontological way of thinking is featured with the unremitting inquiry on absolute truthfulness, and the unchangeable and universally applicable rules or principles. It pursues absolute and abstract theoretical clearness and cannot stand with contradictions and ambiguity.

The ontological way of thinking is a human driving power in pursuing truth; it has its advantages in some aspects of human culture such as scientific research. However, this way of thinking also has some defects and some negative consequences in human society. It tends to deny or to neglect the sensational multiformity and mutability of the living world, and this easily leads to rational hegemony and conception domination. As a result, philosophy becomes more and more detached from human experience and alienated from the human living world. It also easily leads to absolutism and dogmatism. Actually, the mediaeval theological domination in Europe can be considered an extreme form of the ontological way of thinking; God can be considered the personalization of the ultimate, universal and absolute Being. Some modern Western philosophers were gradually aware that there was no difference between such ontological thinking and theology, thus started the process of the deconstruction and transformation of the traditional ontology.

Contrary to Western traditional philosophy, ancient Chinese philosophy has not been ontologically oriented from its very beginning. This means that—according to ancient Chinese philosophers, especially those pre-Qin scholars who lived in the Spring-Autumn and the Warring States periods—ontological questions such as “what there is?” or “what exists?” were not their focus or main concern. For them, the being or existence of entities is not a problem; instead the problem is how things function and how different things are related

with each other. In my point of view, some pre-Qin philosophers were more interested in no being rather than being, or interested in non-existence rather than in existence. They were not indulged so much in probing the being of things, rather, they were more interested in discussing the nothingness of things, or the “betweenness” of things.

For instance, Lao Zi’s concept of “Dao” has been frequently interpreted as a kind of ultimate being in the universe. But this is just a case of how traditional Chinese philosophical concepts have often been misunderstood in the Western philosophical perspective. Actually, Lao Zi uses many metaphors to indicate that Dao is no-being rather than being. Dao is characterized with nothingness and emptiness, it is not only invisible, but also inconceivable and indefinable, even naming it with the word “Dao” is an unnecessary. According to Lao Zi, all things are originated from nothingness; being is originated from no-being. So he always emphasizes the aspects of nothingness and emptiness in the world. For instance, in Chapter 4 he indicates that it is just the emptiness of Dao that provides the endless usage for the world.⁸ In Chapter 11, he uses the cart axle and clay vessels as metaphors, indicating that it is nothingness (the empty space at the center of the axle or in the vessels that provides the usefulness of things. In Chapter 40, Lao Zi indicates that all things in the world come from being, but being come from no-being. Therefore, according to Lao Zi no-being is more original than being. It is the no-being, emptiness or nothingness, rather than the substantial being of thing, which generated the real function of things. Therefore, Dao is no-being rather than being, it is not the Western ontological concept which represents a substantial entity of spirit.

The ancient Chinese philosophers were also more interested in the betweenness or inter-relativeness of things rather than in things themselves. For instance, the significance of the so-called “five elements” (*wu xing*) theory does not mainly consist in that what each of the “five elements” really is, but rather in the mutual-generating and mutual-constraining relationship among them. The unique feature of the “yin” and “yang” theory does not just produce another pair of opposing dualist concepts, but rather the dynamic interactivity between the two. This unique feature might be a little bit difficult to comprehend by outsiders, and Western scholars are still inclined to use ontological terms to interpret the Chinese yin-yang theory. For instance, one European scholar expounded:

“Special conditions of ancient Chinese anthropogeny and social and economic development gave rise in this cultural region to an original theory of being, which in modern terminology can be referred to as an ontological

⁸ There are many different editions of the book of *Lao Zi* or *Dao De Jing* in Chinese, as well as in other languages. My citation and the mark of chapters of *Lao Zi* in this paper is based on: Chen G. 1984. *Lao Zi Zhu Shi Ji Ping Jia* [Annotation and Commentary on Lao Zi]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company.

model of a fundamental Yin-Yang dialectic of a bipolar and non-homogeneous synergy of being.”⁹

The Confucian virtue concept “*ren*” (usually translated as “benevolence” or “kindheartedness”) is not a kind of internal property of an individual, but rather an intersubjective ethic relation among different human beings. The Confucian concept “*yi*,” is usually translated as “righteousness” or “justice,” but the etymological origin of this Chinese word indicates that it may not have any ontological connotation of a categorical or absolute principle, but rather a degree of suitability or appropriateness under given contexts or situations. It may indicate a moderate and appropriate degree between two extreme ends. Scholars have different opinions if there was a concept of “human right” in ancient Confucian philosophy. In my opinion, there was not an ontological concept of “human right” in ancient Confucianism. That means that ancient Chinese philosophers did not believe that all human beings were universally created with some innate and inalienable privileges. The modern Chinese equivalent of the word “right” in “human right” is “*quan*,” which etymologically refers to the weighing stone on a steelyard, which can be slide on the weigh beam freely between heavy and light according to the weight. Therefore, “human right (*quan*)” in the ancient Chinese semantics could refer to a contextual and dynamic weighing of the pros and cons between different things.

This kind of non-ontological way of thinking in ancient China is the philosophical soil that has created zhongdaological philosophy. The *zhong* is not the being of things; rather, it is the appropriate “betweenness” of things, or the empty center space which can function as the hub of different things. *Zhong* sometimes has the meaning of “right” or “correct,” but its “rightness” or “correctness” is neither determined *a priori* nor categorically defined, rather, it is contextually constituted. *Zhong* can be a standard for people’s practice in reality, but it is not a fixed, absolute, permanent or universal principle. It is a timely *zhong* which may be adapted to new situations and make readjustments.

In general, zhongdaological thinking focuses on the “betweenness” and “relativeness” of different or even opposing things; it tries to bridge the gap between the opposing conflicting things by creating a mediating *zhong* somewhere between the things involved. For instance, in the field of the subject-object dichotomy, “*zhong*” can be understood as a coincident or fitness between subjective will and the objective condition, a perfect harmony in which the internal and external worlds are merging together without conflicts. To deal with the problem of the differences or divergences of ideas and opinions, Zhongtaology takes the Yin-Yang philosophy as its background, that is, it considers different things or even sometimes sharply conflicting things as mutually related and

⁹ Carnogurska, M. 1998. “Original Ontological Roots of Ancient Chinese Philosophy.” *Asian Philosophy*, 8, 3, 203.

interdependent. So there is always a possibility to constitute a temporary mediation or balance between them. Zhongdaology does not exclude nor try to replace any ontological views or stances, no matter whether they are a kind of self-evident ontological commitment or a scientifically proved truth, or even just some quasi-religious beliefs. Zhongdaology may provide a dialectic view on dilemmas between those extremely contradicting principles caused by ontological thinking. For instance, it suggests a temporary and balanced weighing between individual rights and collective benefits, an ideal principle stance and flexibility in special situations. Zhongdaology represents a kind of dialectic and practical reasoning which may provide some strategic wisdom for resolving variety of conflicts in reality.

4. THE PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ZHONGDAOLOGY IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Today our world is still full of conflicts and turmoil, and far from being in peace and tranquility. There are conflicts between different interests, ideologies, beliefs and values, among different ethnic groups, religions, states, nations and cultures. When the “Cold War” ended at the beginning of 1990s, some scholars, among others Francis Fukuyama, were overwhelmed by the triumph of the Western ideology and optimistically expected the coming of the Hegelian “end of history” in which there would be no more contradictions and conflicts, society would be stable, every man would be satisfied, and the historical process would be thus terminated.¹⁰ Actually this Hegelian concept of history is also a fruit of Western ontological thinking. The Hegelian concept of history supposes that the absolute spirit (an ontological principle) rules historical events. The evolution of history has its destination which is determined by that ontological and universal rule. But others were not so optimistic. Fukuyama’s teacher Samuel Huntington predicted that after the ending of the Cold War, “the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural [...] The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics.”¹¹ Our experience in the past two decades has not provide enough evidences to support the “end of history” hypothesis, while some events happened in the new century are seemly backing Huntington’s prediction of conflicts or clashes between cultures or civilizations. But it is questionable whether these conflicts or clashes are inevitable and uncontrollable, or whether

¹⁰ Fukuyama, F. 1992. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: The Free Press. A Division of Maxwell Macmillan.

¹¹ Huntington, S. P. 1993. “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs*, 72, 3, 22.

this kind of conflicts and clashes will definitely end with one civilization's defeat or even diminish another.

From the non-ontological Chinese philosophical view, there may not be any ontological dominant principle ruling the evolution of human history. According to ancient Chinese philosophy of history, e.g. that represented by the Yin-Yang School, history is an endless circulation among the mutual reactions and movements among different factors (symbolized by the "Five Elements"), and it is always driven by the contradictions and conflicts between opposing powers (symbolized by *Yin-Yang*). Ancient Chinese philosophers may have in their minds an ideal society called "great unity," but they do not think that there is a rule which has determined an *a priori* path and stages of the development of human society. It is also unimaginable that there could be a well determined perfect final mode of society at the "end of history." Therefore, we should not expect that we can enter in an ideal society in which there will be no more contradiction and conflicts. However, conflicts and contradictions are always controllable and resolvable, albeit when the old conflicts and contradictions have been solved, new ones will surely happen again. And the Confucian zhongdao-logical philosophy just provides some practical reasoning helping to control and mediate variety of conflicts and contradictions in our world.

Conflict in human society is defined by some scholars as "a social situation, in which a minimum of two actors (parties) strive to acquire at the same moment in time an available set of scarce resources."¹² Therefore, the typical resolution of conflicts consists in finding a way to satisfy the actors (parties) involved in the conflicts and allow them to acquire a fair portion of that scarce resource. However, in many cases conflicts are not initiated by contending for certain resources, but rather arise from differences in beliefs, opinions or perspectives.¹³ In other words, different beliefs, faiths, opinions sometimes may create animosity among rivals and push them against each other. Therefore, L. L. Putnam and M. S. Poole defined conflict as "the interaction of interdependent people who perceive opposition of goals, aims, and values, and who see the other party as potentially interfering with the realization of these goals."¹⁴

In my view, differences in beliefs and opinions indeed cause many conflicts in society. And the ontological way of thinking more likely initiates conflicts based on different beliefs and opinions. This is because this way of thinking enhances people's self-confidence in the absoluteness, the ultimate, and univer-

¹² Wallensteen, P. 2002. *Understanding Conflict Resolution: War, Peace and the Global System*. London: SAGE, 16.

¹³ Menkel-Meadow, C. J. (Ed.) 2005. *Dispute Resolution: Beyond the Adversarial Model*. New York: Aspen Publishers, 27.

¹⁴ Putnam, L. L., M. S. Poole. 1987. "Conflict and Negotiation." In: *Handbook of Organizational Communication: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* Jablin, F. M., L. L. Putnam, K. H. Roberts, L. W. Porter (Eds.). Newbury Park, CA: SAGE, 552.

sality of their beliefs and opinions, thus it encourages them to persist on their own stances more obstinately and to confront their opposites more vigorously.

In opposition, the Confucian Zhongdaological way of thinking does not commit to any absolute, ultimate and permanent rules. Therefore, basing on this way of thinking one more likely adapts himself to new situations, agrees for compromises, or realizes a fusion of different ideas. Actually, in Confucius's teachings, there are seldom any dogmatist definitions or absolute principles. What he has taught are mainly some contextual advices how to behave or act under different conditions or situations. Confucius was recorded by his students as refrain from four things, namely, presumed conjecture, insist on certainty, be inflexible, be egotistical.¹⁵ This indicates that Confucianism disapproves self-centered paranoia and opinionated persistence. This does not mean that there are no firm beliefs or basic principles in Confucianism. Actually, the way of *zhong* is just one of the Confucian principles. But the intricacy is that *zhong* has no ontological connotations, it is a flexible, adjustable focus on the betweenness of things, it is a hub that dwells at the hollow center among related factors and ready to merge different elements and make a fusion.

Zhongdaology can provide significant practical reasoning for conflict resolution. Actually, at the very beginning, Zhongdaology was a political wisdom for the reconciliation of different interests and opinions. As recorded in the *Zhong Yong* [*The Doctrine of the Mean*] Confucius praises Shun, one of the ancient Sage Kings, saying that Shun is good at listening and considering the speeches of others, though they might be shallow; he concealed what was bad in them and displayed what was good. He took hold of the two extremes, determined the *zhong*, and employed it in his governing people.¹⁶

There are many studies on the issue of conflict resolution or conflictology. People have formulated five forms of getting through conflicts: 1. Avoiding it, i.e., shunning away from the conflicts; 2. Confrontation with the hope of realizing one side domination; 3. Conformism or obliging; 4. Compromise; 5. Cooperation or integrating.¹⁷ Yet Zhongdaology can provide some more practical tactics and philosophical wisdom for conflict resolution.

First, Zhongdaology advocates a relative and reciprocal perspective between the rivalries in conflicts, that is, viewing things from the perspective of others, or putting oneself in other's position, and taking an empathetic understanding of the concerns of the opposite side. This will help those involved in a conflict to

¹⁵ *The Analects of Confucius*. 1983. Lau, D.C. (Trans.). Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 77.

¹⁶ 1991. "The Doctrine of the Mean." In: *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 1. Legge, J. (Trans.). Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 388.

¹⁷ Rahim, M. A., T. V. Bonoma, 1979. "Managing Organizational Conflict: a Model for Diagnosis and Intervention." *Psychological Report*, 44, 1323–44.

eliminate “mimetic desire” and “mimetic rivalry,”¹⁸ which is frequently the cause of creating conflicts out of nothing.

Second, at the same time, Zhongdaology suggests that people involved in conflicts or those who try to mediate conflicts may temporarily suspend the ontological or ultimate beliefs or goals on each side, and try to focus on the *zhong* or the betweenness between them, in other words, try to seek the current and possible common points between them while reserving ultimate and ontological differences.

Third, do not be too stubborn on one’s own preoccupied perceptions and stance, try to be flexible enough to consider more factors and elements involved; instead of concentrating on the existing being, one also may pay attention to “no-being” or “nothingness.” In some multinational organizations, “compared to American participants, Chinese participants more likely take several factors into consideration when dealing with conflict, among them stakes, power, relationships, situations, and possible consequences.” And also, “Chinese people have used different conflict management styles according to different circumstances.”¹⁹

Fourth, do not expect to eliminate all contradictions and reach a one handed present perfect resolution for conflicts in once and for ever. Contradictions and conflicts are the normal state of all things in the world. A fixed and permanent being may be just a kind of illusion. Although we may keep that illusion in mind, we should not confuse it with real living things. We, human beings in the world have only a temporary and historical existence. The human being can only reach a temporary *zhong* on the ever changing process of things, preventing the things from going to extreme ends.

5. CONCLUSION

In general, traditional Chinese philosophy, especially that represented by the pre-Qin Confucianism, concentrates on the question “how to?” and not on the question “what is?” As a result, the ancient Chinese philosophers were not interested so much in the inquiry on the ultimate and fundamental being of the world, as their Western counterparts did. Rather, they tended to find an appropriate and correct degree of *zhong* as the principle or standard for guiding people’s action and practice. Confucius considered *zhong* a perfect virtue, as well a standard in moral cultivation, education, government affairs, and even poetry appreciation. *Zhong* is neither the permanent being of anything, nor a substantial entity; rather, it could be the “betweenness” of different things, the perfect

¹⁸ Farneti, R. 2009. “A Mimetic Perspective on Conflict Resolution.” *Polity*, 41, 4, 548–549.

¹⁹ Yuan, W. 2010. “Conflict Management among American and Chinese Employees in Multinational Organizations in China.” *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal*, 17, 3, 307.

state of an event which involves different factors, an appropriate degree of an ongoing process. Seeking, maintaining and adhering on the principle of *zhong* represent a Confucian philosophy of Zhongdaology, which provides a way of thinking contrasting with the traditional Western philosophy characterized by fundamentalism and essentialism. Zhongdaology pursues the realizable perfect degree of appropriateness and correctness for men's action and practice. It is featured with a combination of subjective and objective views, a harmony of the internal and external worlds, a fusion of private experience and collective consciousness, a balance between radicalism and conservatism, an equilibrium among different ideas and divergences, a weighing between the ideal principle stance and flexibility in special situations, a dialectic between consistency and forever changing in time and history, etc. It advocates a communal, constructive, dynamic and inclusive attitude in dealing with variety of contradictions, divergences and conflicts, concerning human ideas, opinions, beliefs and interests. It is a practical rationality and worldly wisdom which may be used as a kind of remedy to the defect of metaphysical dogmatism, self-centered paranoia, and religious extremism. In today's world, the Confucian philosophy of Zhongdaology is still relevant and significant. It can be helpful in promoting dialogue between different cultures, increasing mutual understanding among peoples, seeking common ground while reserving differences, thus to create a more harmonious and peaceful human world.

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