

# **The Educational Significance of the Doctrine of the Mean and Its Enlightenment to Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language**

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**Keywords:** Confucianism; the Doctrine of the Mean; Educational Significance; TCFL

**Abstract:** According to the direction and method of academic root-seeking, based on looking back at the Chinese Confucian classic book of philosophy, the paper revolves around the educational significance and its enlightenment in teaching of Chinese as a foreign language. As a methodology, it is of great significance to education, and TCFL is no exception. If TCFL teachers can apply the Doctrine of the Mean to guide their teaching, they can not only make students feel Confucian classics, but also optimize TCFL teaching.

## **1. Introduction**

The Doctrine of the Mean is the essence of Confucianism, the essence of Chinese ideology and culture, the highest standard advocated by Confucianism and the highest wisdom in solving problems. It is the core content of Confucianism represented by Confucius, the principle of Confucian moral practice and the way of dealing with people and things, and also the reconciliation of social contradictions to achieve a neutral state. Its profound educational thoughts are also of great significance and inspiration to the teaching of Chinese as a Foreign Language. Integrating the Doctrine of the Mean into TCFL is a kind of cultural inheritance, a kind of cultural transmission, and a means to optimize the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language.

The Doctrine of the Mean is one of the Four Books and the Five Classics, with 33 chapters and 3,545 words. It is the theoretical source of Confucianism. Many concepts, propositions, creeds or methodologies of Confucianism are derived from it. The Doctrine of the Mean is brief, but it is not easy to understand its meaning, even more difficult to follow the golden mean. The Doctrine of the Mean is the best way to understand the Golden Mean, one of the most important classics, which contains epistemology, methodology and even life wisdom, has stood the test of time in the long history of The Chinese civilization (Zhong Zhixian, 2014).

## **2. The Development and Connotation of the Doctrine of the Mean**

Zhu Xi, a scholar in the Song Dynasty, explained Zhongyong or the Doctrine of the Mean in this way, "People should do something in a moderate way not to overdo or underdo it." It emphasizes harmony, stresses "too much of a good thing", and denies the absolute. It advocates the connotation that everything should not be excessive, lest it backfired. Zhong - seeking truth in contradiction; Yong - applying truth to practice. The meaning of the Doctrine of the Mean can be summarized as "moderation", "harmony", "sincerity" and "too much of a good thing". It pursues harmony and moderation in all things, and "too much of a good thing" is absolutely undesirable. "It is only by a certain degree of accommodation between the two poles of the thing that the functions of the thing are brought to an optimum state, the so-called equilibrium." (Liu Junying, 2010)

## **3. The Educational Significance of the Doctrine of the Mean**

In order to highlight the essential nature of the doctrine of mean in Confucian classics, Zhu Xi and other scholars named it together with the University, the Analects of Confucius and Mencius as the "Four Books". Although "from the perspective of content, the Doctrine of the Mean mainly discusses the Confucian philosophy of life and the way of cultivating one's moral character, and

only focuses on education in a few places, its educational thoughts are often ignored by people. However, it is in these few words, but contains a profound philosophy of education."(Fan Huaqiang, 2007) The Doctrine of the Mean touches on all aspects of education, including educational thoughts, theories and methods, shining the light of the wisdom of the Chinese nation. "Destiny is called nature, frankness is called Tao, and cultivation is called teaching" -- The opening sentence of the Doctrine of the Mean indicates the premise, purpose, content and approach of education.

### **3.1 The Premise of Education: Tao and Sincerity**

As a teacher, we must first understand the way of being a teacher, that is, teacher's virtue, teacher's ability and teacher's law. As a teacher, we must have strict moral standard, the rich knowledge, the correct way to impart the knowledge.

A teacher should be honest with his students. "Destiny is called nature" means nature is the gift of nature. Nature is man's natural disposition, which is embodied as "sincerity". Honesty is the principle of heaven. Zhu Xi wrote "Honesty is the truth not to cheat. It is the nature of the natural."

### **3.2 The purpose of education: Honesty**

Chen Zhaorong (1984) holds that honesty is the power of human nature to recognize and express truth. It is also life that expands the potential of nature and achieves real creativity. The Doctrine of the Mean points out a cultivation path according to the sincerity of heaven and humanity. "It is called nature that people can be sensible because of honesty. To be sincere through understanding is the result of education. Sincerity will make people sensible, and sensible people will be able to be honest."(RuanYuanxiao, 1980) An honest people neither deceives oneself nor others. It is the foundation of one's life, and it is also a kind of noble character. Not deceiving oneself is called self-restraining in privacy. Even when you are alone, you should be cautious and careful. According to the Doctrine of the Mean, when a person is alone, his desire is not known, and his behavior is not seen, so he should be careful. Others, though they know better, are different. So beware of those who are alone, and know that they are themselves. Therefore, we must guard against indiscretion, be careful and self-disciplined. Not deceiving others is the most important criterion in human society. Xunzi, another ideologist and educator in ancient time, also attached importance to honesty, believing that honesty was the foundation of all virtues. He said that honesty is the best approach to cultivate his moral character. Only with complete sincerity can a person give full play to his nature.

The ideal aim of education is to cultivate students' sincerity. A person with profound knowledge but without virtue can not become the pillar of the society. Honesty is also an indispensable moral character in today's society. Only those who are virtuous can succeed. Therefore, educators should regard sincerity as the ultimate goal of teaching, not only as the initiator of knowledge, but also as the shaper of morality.

### **3.3 Content of Education: Degree**

In the Doctrine of the Mean, Confucius told us that the ancient emperor Shun can abandon the two extreme aspects "too" and "less than" , and govern the people in the most reasonable and moderate way. Therefore, only by seeing clearly the two ends of things can the "middle" be properly implemented, especially in the moral cultivation and dealing oneself in the society. According to the moderate educational concept of degree, teachers should properly grasp the requirements on students and the educational and teaching objectives they want to achieve according to the students' educational level when formulating teaching objectives and teaching contents. Asking too much or too little is bad for the development of students.

### **3.4 The way of Education: Law**

#### **3.4.1 The five-word motto of "Learning, Asking, Thinking, Differentiating and Acting"**

Confucius stated in the Analects of Confucius that learning without thought is labour lost; thought without learning is perilous. He emphasizes the combination of "learning and thinking". "Learn, interrogate, meditate, discern, and practice earnestly" is the teaching process and steps

proposed by the Doctrine of the Mean. The accumulation of knowledge will lead to the discovery of problems. Only careful thinking can help to distinguish the right and wrong and finally follow their own practice. The learning process is the perception of knowledge. "To ask, to think, to argue" means to ask questions, to think constantly and to distinguish the true from the false. It is the process of internalizing, strengthening understanding and consolidating knowledge and "doing" is the process of applying knowledge to practice.

### **3.4.2 Emphasis on Training and Practice**

Confucius argued that learn until you learn, ask until you understand, think until you gain, discern until you understand, and act until you succeed. That is, if you learn, be sure to make it clear; If you ask for advice, never stop until you understand it thoroughly; If you think about something, you can't stop until you make a point; If you distinguish, never stop until you have distinguished; If you do something, never stop doing until you are satisfied with the result. Confucius also told us if others learn once, you can learn a hundred times; If others learn ten times, you can learn a thousand. To do something well, it's worth trying it a hundred times. Once learners have the tenacity of perseverance, they will be able to be "foolish but clear, gentle but strong." If this method can be carried out, even the stupid will certainly become wise, and even the weak will certainly become strong.

## **4. The Enlightenment of the Doctrine of the Mean to TCFL**

Chen Yun argues that teaching is the focus and foothold of the Doctrine of the Mean. Although the Doctrine of the Mean has been criticized for many years as a synonym for eclecticism and reconcilism, it has an important guiding significance for teaching. Then in TCFL, as a teacher to spread Chinese culture, how should the students experience the Confucian classics and use the Doctrine of the Mean philosophy to promote teaching?

### **4.1 Cultivate Yourself First Before Teaching**

Virtue matters for a teacher. It is the basic condition of being a teacher. As a mirror to see China, TCFL teachers should enhance their moral cultivation while improving their knowledge level and cultural attainment.

### **4.2 Moderate Praising and Error-correction to Promote TCFL Teaching**

The Doctrine of the Mean emphasizes moderation. In TCFL, teachers should give recognition and praise to the progress made by foreign students. And to the mistake that they make, teachers also ought to point out in time, hold the scale that praise and corrects error well. It not only enhances the foreign students' confidence in learning Chinese, arouses their enthusiasm in learning Chinese, but also makes them clearly see the problems and mistakes in learning Chinese.

### **4.3 Optimize Teaching Methods to Promote TCFL**

The five-word maxim of the Doctrine of the Mean, "Learning, interrogating, meditating, discerning, and practicing", and the emphasis on training and practice mentioned in it can promote the teaching of Chinese. Foreign students have some particularity in the subject of study, but they also have universality. The process of overseas students learning Chinese knowledge should also be acquiring knowledge, understanding knowledge and then applying it. Language learning can be deepened in practice. Therefore, in TCFL, more opportunities should be created for foreign students to use the language, such as creating situations in combination with real life. Through continuous training and practice, the understanding of knowledge can be deepened, and better use of the results can be achieved.

## **5. Conclusion**

A man's education is to inspire and teach a man, as a self-awakening creature of thought and

reason, to show his inner law consciously and flawlessly. From a methodological point of view, the golden mean is a pragmatic approach keeping pace with the times and pursuing of the best results of scientific methodology. Its characteristic is the opposition of extremism. It advocates to seek harmony and unity between dissenting views and opposition and find out the golden mean with broad inclusive and broad satisfaction to all parties.

The educational significance of the Confucian doctrine of the Mean is a brilliant treasure house, which provides many valuable ideas and wisdom for teaching Chinese as a foreign language. However, it inevitably has certain limitations. Therefore, in TCFL, educators should combine the actual situation of foreign students, analyze the specific problems and dialectically absorb and utilize them, so as to wake up the fine tradition that lies dormant in the soul of the Chinese nation and carry forward the treasures of the Chinese nation.

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