The Doctrine of the Mean and Vision for the Restoration of Human Ethics - Part 9

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Portrait of Zhu Xi (1130 - 1200), the Song dynasty Confucian scholar commonly revered by the honorific title "Zhu Zi" (Master Zhu). He established the Four Books curriculum by taking the "Great Learning" (Daxue) and the "Doctrine of the Mean" (Zhongyong) - originally chapters of the Classic of Rites (Liji) - and establishing them as independent texts alongside the Analects and Mencius. Master Zhu formulated the pedagogical succession of Confucian sages, dictating that in the course of study, one must first read the "Great Learning," followed in sequence by the "Analects," "Mencius," and "Doctrine of the Mean."

The Virtue of Zhongyong (The Doctrine of the Mean) and the Vision for the Restoration of Human Ethics - Part 9 [The Limits of Paternal Civilization and the Vision of Maternal Salvation - Contributed Article]

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Healing an Age of Imbalance through Maternal Jeongseong and the Aesthetics of Shizhong (Timeliness)

In 21st-century modern society, despite enjoying advanced technological progress and material abundance, humanity paradoxically faces a severe crisis of spiritual imbalance and relational fragmentation. The core Confucian value summoned to overcome this historical impasse is Zhongyong (中庸, The Doctrine of the Mean). Zhongyong does not merely signify a mechanical midpoint or an arithmetic average. Rather, it represents a dynamic spiritual exertion to maintain moral equilibrium within a shifting reality, as well as a grand philosophical project aimed at aligning the human order with the cosmic order.

By systematizing the philosophy of the Doctrine of the Mean into a moral metaphysics centered on Cheng (誠, sincerity/truthfulness; jeongseong), Master Zhu Xi established a framework where human internal discipline and cosmic order converge into one. While human civilization has hitherto developed along a paternal logic emphasizing vertical order and strict justice, we have reached an urgent juncture where maternal harmony - which embraces and cradles all creation - is essential to complement those inherent limitations.

The Metaphysical Foundation of Zhongyong: Heavenly Decree (Cheonmyeong) and the Restoration of Original Nature

The Doctrine of the Mean opens with the declaration: "What Heaven decrees is called Nature (性); following this Nature is called the Way (道); and cultivating the Way is called Education/Teaching (教)." This signifies that original human nature is a moral substance bestowed directly by Heavenly Parent, indicating that human life itself is the unfolding process of realizing Heaven's Will on earth.

In Zhongyong, Zhong (中, the mean/center) signifies an impartial state devoid of bias or leaning (bupyeon-buli, 不偏不倚), while Yong (庸, the constant/ordinary) denotes unchanging constancy in daily life. In other words, Zhongyong is the practice of internalizing the Heavenly principle and steadfastly living out moral truth amidst everyday existence. Viewed from this perspective, restoring one's original human nature is nothing less than recovering cosmic equilibrium - a state directed toward the complete, harmonious balance of paternal order and maternal love.

The Driving Engine of Cheng (誠): Maternal Shimjeong Born of Utmost Jeongseong

The fundamental principle running through the entirety of the Doctrine of the Mean is Cheng (誠) - sincerity, truthfulness, and devoted dedication (jeongseong). In Confucianism, Cheng is Heaven's Way

that transforms and perfects all creation, serving as the ultimate standard of character toward which human beings must aspire. In particular, the teaching emphasized in Chapter 23 of the Doctrine of the Mean - Zhiqu (致曲, "By devoting one's utmost sincerity to even the smallest matters, one can transform the world") - deeply aligns with the essence of maternal heart (shimjeong).

A mother's heart, which pours wholehearted devotion into every minute detail of her child's daily life, is the concrete manifestation of utmost devotion (jiseong, 至誠). Such authentic, true love does not remain confined to the realm of mere sentiment; it shapes the character of a human being and serves as the ultimate driving force transforming society as a whole. Jeongseong is not a passive self-cultivation, but an action-oriented philosophy of practice that evokes deep inspiration across all relationships. Only when this maternal principle of jeongseong is infused into the framework of law and justice erected by paternal civilization can civilization attain complete vitality and true fulfillment.

Zhonghe (Central Harmony) and Shizhong (Timely Mean): The Proper Alignment of Emotions and the Aesthetics of Situation

The Doctrine of the Mean does not seek to repress human emotions, but rather to express them harmoniously through Zhonghe (中和, Central Harmony). The tranquil original state before the stirring of joy, anger, sorrow, and delight is called Zhong (the Center), and when these emotions arise and achieve due measure and rhythm, it is termed He (Harmony). A mother who becomes indignant at her child's wrongdoing yet never loses underlying love represents the most universal embodiment of Zhonghe - the realm of "righteous indignation that never departs from moral principle."

Furthermore, the most critical element in practicing Zhongyong is Shizhong (時中, Timely Mean). This does not mean clinging rigidly to inflexible rules, but exercising the wisdom to make the most appropriate, optimal choices within the concrete reality of the "here and now." Just as parental roles must flexibly adapt according to the child's developmental stages and circumstances, the Zhongyong of a righteous person centers upon the aesthetics of Shizhong - acting in exact accordance with the time. Human history has now passed through an era of paternal struggle and arrived at the providential juncture of Shizhong, where maternal embrace is urgently demanded.

The Manifestation of the Only Begotten Daughter as the Substantial Fulfillment of Zhongyong

Ultimately, Zhongyong is not a static condition of remaining in quietude; it is the courageous practice of keeping one's center and moving forward amidst a constantly shifting world. The utmost jeongseong and timely consideration embodied in maternal shimjeong stand as a powerful alternative to heal the selfishness and imbalances of the contemporary world. When the spirit of Zhiqu (devoting sincerity to even the smallest matters) and the virtue of Zhonghe (emotional harmony) spread across society, all people will find their rightful standing and usher in an era of Da-dong (Great Unity), embracing one another in mutual care.

If civilization up to this point has been a paternal-centered order tilted to one side, the substantial emergence of the maternal counterpart is providentially required to restore that balance. The advent of the Only Begotten Daughter (Dok-saeng-nyeo) - who brings an end to the era of struggle and division and inaugurates the Hucheon Gaebyeok (the opening of the Later Heaven realm) characterized by embrace and reconciliation - is the most magnificent historical realization of the Way of Shizhong, timed to redeem humanity at the height of providential timing. Humanity must now enter the era of Cheon Il Guk - a new civilization where paternal and maternal principles exist in complete harmony through the substantial fulfillment of this Zhongyong.