

A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy

Chan, W. (1969). *A sourcebook in Chinese philosophy*.
Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

CHAPTER 5— SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS: THE DOCTRINE OF THE MEAN

A Book Review by S.A. Martin (2011)
Confucius Teachings & Chinese Philosophy 808-327
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The 4 Books (of Chu Hsi)

1. Analects
2. Book of Mencius
3. Great Learning
4. **Doctrine of the Mean**

Chapters from the
Book of Rights

Civil service examinations from 1313 until 1905

Introduction (p.95)

- Of main importance to Neo-Confucianism along side The Great Learning
- Discourse on psychology and metaphysics
- Discusses human nature
- Focuses on reality
- Religious and mystical
- Mystical aspects similar to the Book of Mencius

The Way to Neo-Confucianism

- Appealed to Taoists and Buddhists
- Ushered the way toward the Neo-Confucian movement
- 'Human nature' and the 'way of heaven'

2 main subjects of the book

Human Nature

- Endowed by heaven
- Revealed through equilibrium & harmony
- Conditions of the world & universal path

The Way of Heaven

- Transcends time, space substance & motion
- Unceasing, eternal & evident

A Philosophical Work

- Perhaps the most philosophical of all Confucian literature
- **Called 'Chung-yung' in Chinese**
 - Chung – 'mean' (moderation or centrality)
 - Refers to human nature
 - Yung – 'universal' & 'harmonious'
 - Relations to the universe

Chung-yung

- Harmony in human nature underlined by moral being prevailing throughout the universe
- Man & nature for a unity
 - A dominate concept in Chinese thought throughout history

Sincerity (Ch'eng)

- Sincerity = truth or reality
- Sincerity is an active force
 - Transforming
 - Completing
 - Draws man & heaven together
- Conceptual discussion of sincerity is mystical & transcendental
 - Psychological
 - Metaphysical
 - Religious

Practical & to be
practiced
through ordinary
words and deeds

21 (p.107)

It is due to our [human] nature [temperance/self-control/the mean] that enlightenment results from sincerity [truth/reality].

It is due to education that that sincerity results from enlightenment.

Given sincerity, there will be enlightenment, and given enlightenment, there will be sincerity

22 (p.107) – **Trinity of Man, Heaven & Nature**

Only those who are absolutely sincere can fully develop their nature.

If they can develop their nature, then they can fully develop the nature of others.

If they can develop the nature of others, they can then fully develop the nature of things.

If they can fully develop the nature of things, they can then assist in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth.

If they can assist in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth, they can thus form a trinity with heaven and earth.

Major Topics

- Heaven & Man 13,20,22
- Human relations 13,17,19,20
- Knowledge & Conduct 14,20, 27
- Mean & Harmony 1-4, 6-11, 20, 27
- Moral virtues 13, 17, 19, 20, 25
- Nature & Destiny 1, 14, 21, 22, 25, 27
- Sincerity 16, 20-26, 32
- Universe 22, 23, 26, 30
- Way (Tao) & Education 1, 5, 12, 13, 20, 21, 23

Concluding Thoughts

THE DOCTRINE OF THE MEAN

- Spiritual Confucianism!
- Represents an advance over Confucius
- A majestic philosophical work
- 14th — 20th Century required reading in Chinese education
- Religious & mystical – yet highly practical

Concluding Quote

“Love of learning is akin to wisdom.

To practice with vigor is akin to humanity.

To know to be shameful is akin to courage.

He who knows these 3 things knows how to
cultivate his personal life...”