

Blind Spots in Itô Jinsai's Account of the  
*Zhongyong* (*Chûyô*)  
伊藤仁齋詮釋《中庸》之盲點

Kirill O. THOMPSON  
唐格理\*

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**關鍵詞：**伊藤仁齋、中庸發揮、朱熹、中庸章句、中庸、中、理、氣、已發未發、天、天命、性、情、道、良知、孟子

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\* 臺灣大學外文系教授。

Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, National Taiwan University.

## Abstract

Itô Jinsai 伊藤仁齋 (1627-1705), a Tokugawa Confucian classicist, seeks to restore the "ancient meanings" of the original key terms in his commentary on the Confucian classic *Zhongyong*, *Chûyô hakki* 中庸發揮 (*Elucidation of the ZY*), by examining their uses in the ancient text. He forcefully "brackets" the metaphysical terms Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) had introduced in interpreting the text centuries earlier in *Zhongyong zhangju* 中庸章句 (*ZY*, in chapter and verse), denying that Zhu's "static abstract" philosophy of *li/ri* 理 (pattern, principle) has implications for "dynamic actual" existence or can guide human life practice. He seeks to show that, on the contrary, the original *ZY* is practical and has implications for the conduct of ethical human relations.

Jinsai's stance has local color and reflects Japanese understandings of Zhu's terminology, which viewed Zhu's key concepts, such as *li/ri* (pattern, principle), as wooden and artificial. Jinsai questions the coherence and relevance of Zhu's system, and develops a "common-sensist account" of human values to suit the formation of an actual society. Despite this background, Jinsai's argument in *Chûyô hakki* is based strictly on his classicist analysis of the text, so we can examine his argument straightforwardly.

The present study argues that Jinsai brackets too much of the Zhu Xi and Song Confucian metaphysical reading of the *ZY*, leaving him insufficient conceptual ballast to support Mencian notions he tries to inject into the *ZY* in his own reading. He boldly deconstructs Zhu's frame and only recognizes the hard reality and experience of everyday life, yet slipping Mencian notions in the backdoor. The futility of his approach is underscored by the fact that the *ZY* represents a tradition that antedates Mencius, one that Mencius tried to ramify if not replace.

The paper concludes when Jinsai views the *ZY* through the looking glass of his own culture and era, he reads the terms in the text very differently than they were read in classical and Southern Song China. Moreover, he associates *zhongyong* more with the norms of proper common practice than with the original Chinese notion of "utmost propriety." While his account is a departure from Chinese Confucianism, Jinsai does recover some of the humanistic spirit in the original text. By using his classicist method, Jinsai sets off on the right path, but his blind spots prevent us toward the desired authentic Confucian destination.

## 摘要

德川時代的古典儒學者伊藤仁齋，為儒家經典《中庸》所作的註釋書《中庸發揮》，檢視了原典中的術語在古文中的用途，企圖恢復這些術語的「古義」。數百年前，朱熹詮釋《中庸》的《中庸章句》，提出一些形上學術語，伊藤大力修訂朱熹的形上學術語，認定朱熹「靜態抽象」的理學對「動態真實」的存在沒有任何影響，也不能當作人生實踐的方針？相反地，他試圖證明原始的《中庸》不但實際，對人類倫常關係的行為也有影響。

伊藤仁齋的立場帶有地域色彩，也反映出日本對朱熹術語的理解，他們認為朱熹的重要概念（例如「理」）是呆板而造作的。伊藤質疑朱熹體系的一貫性和重要性，並發展出對人類價值觀的「常識論陳述」，以符合實際社會的形構。儘管有這樣的背景，伊藤仁齋在《中庸發揮》的論證，完全是根據他對文本的古典派分析，因此我們可以直接檢視他的論證。

本文認為伊藤過度修正朱熹和宋朝儒學對中庸的形上學詮釋，因此在概念上沒有足夠的基礎，來支持他在自己在解讀《中庸》時企圖注入的孟子觀念。他大膽解構朱熹的架構，而且只認知到日常生活具體的現實和經驗，卻悄悄注入孟子的觀念。《中庸》所代表的傳統比孟子更早，孟子企圖把這個傳統發揚光大，而非取而代之，顯示伊藤的作法只是白費力氣。

本文在結論指出，伊藤仁齋是透過本身的文化和年代的角度來詮釋《中庸》，他對原典術語的詮釋，和古典及南宋時代的中國截然不同。此外，他認為《中庸》指的是一般適當行為的典範，而非中國原本的「不偏不倚」的意思。儘管伊藤的陳述和中國儒學有所差異，他確實恢復了原典當中的某些人文主義精神。伊藤運用他古典主義的方法，一開始的作法是正確的，可惜他的盲點讓我們無法得知正宗儒學的目標。

## I. Introduction

In his commentary on the Confucian classic *Zhongyong* 中庸 (hereafter ZY), *Chûyô hakki* 中庸發揮 (Elucidation of the ZY), Itô Jinsai 伊藤仁齋 (1627-1705), a Tokugawa Confucian classicist, seeks to restore the "ancient meanings" 古義 of the key terms by examining their appearances and uses in the text.<sup>1</sup> He undertakes this task by "bracketing" the metaphysical terms Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) had introduced in interpreting the text centuries earlier in *Zhongyong zhangju* 中庸章句 (ZY, in chapter and verse). Jinsai denies that Zhu's "static abstract" philosophy of *li/ri* 理 (pattern, principle) has implications for "dynamic actual" existence or can guide human life practice, and seeks to show that, on the contrary, the original ZY is practical and has implications for the conduct of ethical human relations.<sup>2</sup>

At the outset, it must be observed that Jinsai's stance has local color and reflects Japanese understandings of Zhu's terminology, through which his key terms, such as *li/ri* (pattern, principle), appear wooden and artificial. Like many Japanese scholars of his time and afterwards, Jinsai questions the coherence and relevance of Zhu's system, and develops what we might term a "common-sensist

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1 The title of this classic is usually rendered as *Doctrine of the Mean*; my interpretation of the title, however, is *Utmost Propriety in Common Practice*. Originally, "zhong 中" meant "hitting the bull's eye" in archery and, by extension, "hitting the mark"; the ZY mostly considers "zhong" in the context of ritual conduct, for which attaining "utmost propriety" is "the mark to hit" (Kirill Ole Thompson, "English Translation of *Zhongyong*, with introduction and notes," Unpublished ms. Prepared in residence at Hamburg University).

2 John Tucker, *Ogyu Sorai's Philosophical Masterworks: The Bendo and the Benmei* (Honolulu: The University of Hawai'i Press, 2006). The Qing and Tokugawa Confucian scholars generally did not grasp Zhu's notion of *li* (pattern) and *qi* ariht. On Zhu's notion of *li* and *qi*, see Kirill Ole Thompson, "Lessons from Chinese Humanist Impulses," in M. Spariosu & J. Ruesen (eds.), *Exploring Humanity – Intercultural Perspectives on Humanism* (Goettingen & Taipei: V&Runipress & National Taiwan University Press, 2012). There is little if any scholarship on this text in any language. I could only find mentions of it.

account" of human values to suit the formation and life of an actual society.<sup>3</sup> Despite this general background for understanding Jinsai, his argument in *Chûyô hakki* is based strictly on his analysis of the text, so we can examine it straightforwardly.

I contend that Jinsai brackets too much of what he regards as the Zhu Xi and Song Confucian metaphysical reading of the *ZY*, leaving him insufficient conceptual ballast to support the Mencian notions he injects into the text in his own reading.<sup>4</sup> That is, he boldly deconstructs Zhu's frame and only recognizes the hard reality and experience of everyday life; yet, at the same time, he unaccountably slips optimistic Mencian notions in the backdoor. The futility of this approach is underscored by the fact that the *ZY* represents a tradition that antedates Mencius, one that Mencius likely had tried to ramify if not replace.<sup>5</sup>

Zhu Xi spotlights the *ZY* by including it as one of the essential *Four Books* (*Sishu* 四書) of Confucianism. Before him, the *ZY* was just a chapter in the *Liji* 禮記 (Record of Rites) which hadn't received particular attention in the commentarial tradition, such as in Zheng Xuan's 鄭玄 (127-200) early Han commentary on the *Liji*. However, the *ZY* starts to receive more attention in the Northern Song, and Zhu Xi treats it as an independent text. Jinsai too regards the *ZY* as an important early Confucian text, but accepts only the first 15 chapters as representative of the original pre-Qin text source text.<sup>6</sup>

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3 See "Introduction" (John Tucker, *Itô Jinsai's Gomo jigi and the Philosophical Definition of Early Japan* [Leiden: Brill, 1998]) for an in-depth discussion. It is tempting to classify Jinsai's approach as *qi/ki* based *vis-à-vis* Zhu's *li/ri* based approach; however Jinsai is a common-sensist who would not accept *qi/ki* as a reductive concept. Moreover, Zhu's account is a holistic, organic *li-qi* approach, not a one-sided *li/ri* approach.

4 To mix metaphors, Jinsai "throws out the baby with the bath water" and tries to "have his cake and eat it, too."

5 Discussed below.

6 John Tucker, *Itô Jinsai's Gomo jigi and the Philosophical Definition of Early Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 233-244, presents Jinsai's rationale for excommunicating the *Great Learning*.

## II. Zhu Xi's "Preface" and Itô Jinsai's "Preface" and "Forward"

In his "Preface" to the *ZY*, Zhu Xi presents "*zhong* 中" as the core transmission of the early Sage Kings in their effort to "continue Heaven to establish the ultimate, the transmission of the Way (*dao* 道)," writing: 'In the *Classics*, the line, "sincerely grasp *zhong*" is what Sage King Yao instructed Sage King Shun. "The human mind is precarious, the Way mind is subtle" is what Sage King Shun taught Sage King Yu".<sup>7</sup> This message was passed down through the Shang-Zhou ritual practices and classics, eventually to Confucius 孔子 (551-479 BCE). Confucius' second generation disciple, Zisi 子思 (c. 482- c. 403 BCE), wrote the *ZY* to ensure that the authentic Way (of *zhong*, hitting the mark) would continue to be transmitted to later generations. In closing, Zhu laments that the Way had been misunderstood and then lost after Mencius' passing, until Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032-1085) and Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107) recovered it a millennium later. In effect, Zhu seeks to demonstrate that the Cheng-Zhu philosophy is an authentic continuation of the early tradition.<sup>8</sup>

Jinsai regards Zhu's account of the transmission of *zhong* among the early Sage Kings as a fairy tale, as Zhu's attempt to smuggle his idea of *li/ri* (pattern/principle) into the narrative. In his "Preface," Jinsai insists that Zisi wrote the *ZY* simply to continue *Confucius'* Way, as based on practicing "Great Propriety and Utmost Rectitude 大中至正." For Jinsai, the *ZY* is not an esoteric

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7 Robert Fraser, "Zhu Xi, Introduction to the Redacted Centrality and Commonality," in V. Mair, N. Steinhardt & P. Goldin (eds.), *Hawai'i Reader in Traditional Chinese Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), pp. 426f.

8 The argument could be made that Xunzi (fl. 298-238 BCE) had undermined this naturalistic rationale for Confucius' teachings and replaced it with the argument that the teachings were, rather, effective human constructs by which corrupt human nature could be overcome and selfish human creatures could be artificially crafted into ethical social beings. Xunzi's notions of artificial learning, rites, and regulations underlay the Han-Tang examination system and an imperial officialdom that appeared increasingly shallow and careerist *vis-à-vis* rising Chan Buddhism in the Tang. Hence, many Song Confucians sought to revivify the Confucian tradition by recovering its lost rationale, the Cheng brothers prominent among them.

mystery and points to three terms that capture the gist of Confucius' Way: the Way (*dao* 道), the natural propensities (*xing* 性), and the instruction (*jiao* 教).<sup>9</sup> To Jinsai, the Way and *zhong* do not have ontological import or refer to cosmological processes. They indicate the "constancy of upright human practices."<sup>10</sup> Jinsai accepts the proposition that basic human "natural propensities" (*xing*) are endowed from Heaven (Nature) (*tianming*) to humanity, and holds that these propensities incline people to form ethical relationships, however at the same time he does not allow for any of the conceptual stage setting needed to sustain this proposition. He does not want to admit anything hidden or metaphysical into the discussion. So, *tian* becomes nothing more than physical nature, but then what could *xing* be beyond basic natural propensities? Consequently, Jinsai holds that the Way was constructed by the Sage Kings based on their observations of the people's upright modes of relationship and conduct, and for this reason the Way is easy for people to follow. Moreover, since the Sages observed a diversity of *qi*-endowments (*qizhi* 氣質) and behavioral proclivities among the people, they devised the uniform "instruction" to bring the people's modes of relationship and conduct into harmony under a common program of upright conduct.<sup>11</sup> Jinsai concludes that the Sages were chiefly concerned that "the instruction" would in fact nurture the people's ethical impulses, cultivate their conduct and, by extension, engender a harmonious society. Jinsai does not notice or admit that the Sages would have to go beyond empirical observation and appeal to ideals of relationship and conduct to devise a program of "instruction" that would qualitatively improve the people's character and social lives. Otherwise, the instruction wouldn't have provided sufficient

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9 "Instruction" is a more apt rendering of *jiao* than, say, "teaching" because whereas the term "teaching" signifies mainly orally transmitting information, "instruction" is holistic and can include inculcating attitude, deportment, and performance, as well as information.

10 Thus, Jinsai does not include the term Heaven (*tian* 天). As to people's native moral sense, he is more interested in their *manifest propensities* as expressed in emotion and overt conduct than in their putative implicit origin.

11 Zhu Xi also accounts for human diversity in terms of diversity of *qi*-endowment and psychophysical conditioning.

means for improving the *status quo*.

Zhu regards the received *ZY* as a coherent whole, but Jinsai admits only the first 15 chapters, taking the rest as interpolations from other early sources. He argues that when the Han scholars reconstructed the text, they inadvertently mixed in bamboo slips from other texts on rites and music. He considers the first 15 chapters as reliable because he finds them to be consistent with the *Analects* and the *Mencius*, and to contain "the extant sayings from the Zhu-Si river valley [in Shandong, homeland to Confucius, Mencius and Zisi, and thus representative of Confucius' original school]."

### III. Itô Jinsai's "Forward"

As noted, while Zhu Xi stresses that the *ZY* continues the core transmission of the early Sage Kings, Jinsai claims that the text only expresses the gist of Confucius' practical teaching. He discounts Zhu Xi's account of an esoteric early *zhong* transmission on the basis of a consideration of (1) Confucius' and Mencius' teachings and of (2) the early meanings of *zhong* and *zhongyong*. He urges that "the teachings of Confucius and Mencius do not go beyond *Ren* 仁 (humaneness) and *Yi* 義 (appropriateness)... Apart from these two virtues, the [idea of] *zhongyong* 中庸 is nothing."<sup>12</sup> He says the compound *zhongyong* means being "free of excess and of not going far enough," adding that for Confucius, "*Zhongyong* means doing one's utmost."<sup>13</sup> As to the single term "*zhong*," he asserts that it presupposes two or more extremities and refers to "the space midway between them." Hence, applying "*zhong*" in this sense requires a sort of *standard of measure* (*quan* 權) to weigh one's judgment and response. Jinsai further observes that Confucius and Mencius concentrate on humaneness

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12 That is, people's cultivated senses of "humaneness" and "appropriateness" were connected with what Jinsai regarded as the standard for assessing what was "*zhongyong*."

13 Confucius actually said that *zhongyong* was the utmost of virtues (*Analects*, 6.29).



and appropriateness but rarely mention *zhong per se* because *zhong* and *zhongyong* are crucial in the effort (*gongfu*) of cultivation and practice and not matters for book learning or oral instruction. That is, the other virtue terms have conceptual content, but *zhong* and *zhongyong* pertain to the subtleties of balanced and appropriate performance. Confucius' and Zisi's schools both stressed the rites and ritual action, and guided their students in cultivating *timely, appropriate* movement, gesture, and grace in interpersonal conduct, which involves *zhong*, with *shi-zhong* sensitivity. Notably, however, Mencius does not stress rites or ritual conduct; since he believes that the basic human propensities and their sprouts in human emotions are good, making the rites simply accompaniments to natural human impulses and not strict codes to rein in human impulses, as they are thought to be for the less optimistic Confucians. Jinsai does not see that his account both (1) cuts the ground out from under Mencius' notion of inborn human propensities to know and carry out the good and is (2) consistent with Mencius' less optimistic Confucian opponents, such as Xunzi.

Jinsai next makes the interesting claim that Han scholars had interpolated the 47 characters that climax *ZY*, chapter 1:

The pre-aroused state of joy and anger, sorrow and happiness is called tranquility 中 (equilibrium, equipoise, *zhong*). Their arousal, timely and in due proportion, is called harmony 和. Tranquility is the great root of the world. Harmony is the penetrating Way of the world. When tranquility and harmony are extended to the utmost, heaven and earth are properly positioned and the ten thousand things are nurtured therein.

from the lost classic the *Book of Music* (*Yuejing* 樂經). His rationale for suspecting these words are interpolated is that they "betray" the ethical teachings of the *Six Classics*, the *Analects*, and the *Mencius*, and "contradict" the rest of the

ZY by expressing an aesthetic view that is alien to the ethical intent of the book.<sup>14</sup> Why did the Song Confucians not notice this blatant inconsistency? Jinsai argues that the Song Confucians were so enthralled by Chan Buddhism that they had lost sight of Confucius' and Mencius' distinctive ethical teachings and couldn't see the discrepancy.<sup>15</sup>

He then proceeds to list ten reasons why this passage from the ZY, chapter 1 is a Han interpolation: (1) Mencius (371-289 BCE), who received his life "mission" from Zisi's school, never uses the expression "pre-aroused" (*wei-fa* 未發). (2) In earlier texts, "zhong" is always used in the sense of the "already aroused" (*yi-fa* 已發) state. Only in this passage is the expression "pre-aroused" used. (3) In the *Book of Documents*, "zhong" is used only in a sense like "aroused, timely and in due degree" (*fa er zhongjie* 發而中節). (4) Zhu Xi calls the "zhong" associated with "pre-aroused" "the substance" (*ti* 體), while the *Analects* and the *Mencius* only use "zhong" in the sense of "already aroused", i.e., "function" (*yong* 用). (5) The book is generally about *zhong* as "hitting the mark," so "zhong" in relation to "harmony" (*he* 和) is actually a different concept, i.e., equilibrium, equipoise, tranquility. (6) Nowhere else in the ZY does the "pre-aroused" state appear. (7) Even though "harmony" is mentioned several times in this passage, it does not appear elsewhere in the text. (8) The emotions of "joy and anger, sorrow, and happiness," as "aroused, timely, and in due degree" are the "penetrating Way of the world." Thus, it is still the proper conduct of ethical interpersonal relations that constitutes the penetrating Way of the world, inner mental states are not germane. (9) After speaking of "the great root and penetrating Way of the world," the text merely adds that the great root neither tilts nor leans and makes no further mention of it. Finally, (10) these ten points are related with Jinsai's focus on the internal consistency of the text. He

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14 Confucius' "ethics" has an essential aesthetic dimension (See Roger Ames & David Hall, *Thinking Through Confucius* [Albany: SUNY Press, 1987], pp. 22f).

15 He does not say why the Han Confucians, who hadn't been influenced by Chan Buddhism, created the alleged discrepancy in collating and editing the ZY in the first place.

concludes that the Song Confucians did not grasp these problems and were misguided in setting up "the pre-aroused state of joy and sorrow, anger and happiness" as the foundation of their learning of the Way.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, they distorted the original teachings of Confucius' school.

To underscore that Zhu Xi's account of the transmission of *zhong* by the early Sage Kings was a fairy tale, Jinsai argues that Zhu's citations of the Sage Kings in the "Preface" are from forged Han texts, about which many scholars had doubts, including Zhu Xi himself. Jinsai adds that the Sage Kings in fact had focused their instructions and admonitions on practical ethical relationships, conduct, and statecraft. They only cared about the proper conduct of daily affairs, not abstract notions of mind and nature, knowledge and principle, etc. Regarding the quotation, "Human mind is precarious; the Way's mind is subtle," Jinsai thinks that the human mind is not really so precarious because even though it might be carried away by desire, *it still bears its sense of appropriateness and propriety within*. And, the Way mind is not really so subtle for: *it is manifested directly in the inborn knowledge of the good (liangzhi 良知)*, as exemplified in the feelings of distress and concern that people feel when seeing a baby about to fall into a well (*Mencius*, 2A.2). Jinsai concludes that the illicit dichotomy of the human mind and the Way mind is first attested in Xunzi's (fl. 298-238) essay "*Jie bi* 解蔽" (Removing prejudices), three centuries after Confucius died and well after the *bona fide* early Confucian transmission. We may observe that while Jinsai strives to excise Zhu Xi's fairy tale about the early *zhong* transmission, he tries to slip in Mencius' notions of an inborn sense of appropriateness and inborn knowledge of the good after he has discarded their conceptual underpinnings. Such soft moral intuitions are inconsistent with his hard view of common sense reality and experience.

In concluding the "Overview," Jinsai reiterates that the genuine *ZY* consists

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16 Chan Wing-tsit, *Reflections on Things at Hand: The Neo-Confucian Anthology Compiled by Chu Hsi & Lü Tsu-ch'ien* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 8, par. 3.

in the first 15 chapters of the Zhu Xi edition, excluding the 47 characters from "joy and anger, sorrow and happiness" to "the ten thousand things are nurtured therein." He regards the genuine *ZY* as a single, continuous text without chapter divisions, and divides the text simply into A (*Shang* 上), original text, and B (*Xia* 下), interpolated text.

#### IV. Zhu Xi's and Itô Jinsai's Commentaries

Zhu Xi's and Jinsai's comments on the opening three propositions of the *ZY* are also of interest, for they reveal Jinsai trimming away some of the conceptual ballast he needs to support his injections of Mencius' thought into the *ZY*.

Again, Jinsai composes his *Explication of the ZY* against the backdrop of Zhu Xi's commentary. He maintains, accurately, that the opening three propositions, "What *tian* (heaven, nature) endues is called the *xing*; leading the *xing* is called the Way; cultivating the Way is called the instruction." define the basic terms and lay out the framework of the text. He then explains *xing* (natural propensities) in dynamic terms by illustrating them with Mencius' "four sprouts/beginnings" (*siduan* 四端) as opposed to Zhu's linking them to the constant virtues (常德). Jinsai insists that "the natural propensities" confirm that the initial good impulses are inborn rather than acquired, stressing nature over nurture. They are just what "*tian* endues in me." But, we observe that Jinsai already has gotten rid of the conceptual underpinnings of *tian* and *xing*, so they can no longer support Mencius' optimistic idea of the four beginnings. As to the Way, while Zhu construes it broadly as the patterned process of the world of *li* 理 (pattern, principle) and *qi* 氣 Jinsai presents it as the constancy of the daily conduct of human relationships, as devised by Sage Kings based on their observations of people's natural propensities. In his view, this Way flourishes and persists precisely because it is "consistent with human propensities." Hence, it

was by virtue of his exquisite mastery of the Way that Confucius was an "exemplary person" (*junzi* 君子), "perspicacious in propriety and appropriateness" and "vigilant in filiality and fraternity." Again, we feel that Jinsai has gotten rid of the conceptual underpinnings of *xing*, and wonder how this unsupported notion could support the Sage's construction of the Way.

As to "the instruction," Jinsai claims that the sages devised it in light of the Way as the guideline for the people to cultivate their natural propensities. The ultimate merit of the instruction is to facilitate cultivation of each person's talent and virtues to become a sage or worthy. Jinsai concludes that, "It could be said that the natural propensities belong to the self while the Way is what permeates the entire world." Everything bears "rectitude 正" in its perspective on the Way; hence one "cannot depart from the Way even for an instant" because the Way alone is what provides for the possibility of balanced, harmonious human life. Again, we observe that since Jinsai's account of *xing* is groundless, and wonder how it could support the Way and be the object of Confucian instruction and cultivation? One also wonders where this standard of rectitude is supposed to come from.

At this point, we arrive at the excluded 47 characters, starting from "the pre-aroused state." Jinsai regards this passage as a Han interpolation from the lost *Book of Music* since it praises the virtues of rites, music, equilibrium, and harmony. He argues that if "*zhong*" in this sense were really the substance of learning and inquiry, then the *Six Classics*, *Analects* and *Mencius* all should be dismissed as just discussing "function" to the neglect of "substance." We can only reply that Zhu Xi's terminology is more holistic and organically connected than Jinsai suggests. Zhu Xi uses the term substance in the sense of formation, and function in terms of expression and use. So his view does not invoke the sort of dualism that Jinsai charges, and Zhu could reply that the expressions discussed in those early texts reflected perfect formations/manifestations of virtue.

Zhu Xi takes a structural approach in summing up chapter 1. He maintains that Zisi wrote this section to "explicate the origin of the Way: it emerges from Heaven and is irreplaceable. Its formation is embodied in myself and cannot be parted from. Next, it discusses the essentials of cultivation and, finally, the utmost efficacy of the Sages' spirit." Hence, for Zhu, the Way, both as writ large in nature and writ small in humanity, is a natural given. In closing, addressing the individual reader, he stresses: "The learner must get it for himself by reflecting on it and seeking it within. He can realize his original goodness only by getting rid of his personal desires." Jinsai counters with a holistic summation, as an explication of the Way as a human construct preserved in the daily conduct of upright human relationships. He reiterates that the Way flourishes and persists precisely because the Sages designed it in accord with people's natural propensities so that it remains the nurturing element of the people's life, as water to fish and air to birds. Again, we observe that Jinsai tries to have it both ways: he insists on a hard common sense view of reality and experience but still wants to appeal to good natural human propensities.

## V. Assessment of Itô Jinsai's Textual Criticism

Itô Jinsai's commentaries get mixed grades. First, from a strictly historical point of view, his critique of the quotations that Zhu Xi attributed to the early Sage Kings is well-taken. However, regarding the early Confucian tradition, the first quotation, "sincerely grasp *zhong*," was in circulation quite early and regarded as a sentiment worthy of a Sage King. Jinsai notes that the earliest attestation of "the human mind is precarious, the Way mind is subtle" is in the *Xunzi* 荀子, which he regards as a heterodox text. In fact, Xunzi (fl. 298-238 BCE) was a serious Confucian scholar, well-versed in the classics. And, he, like Zisi, stresses the role and practice of the rites (much more than Mencius does). While presenting novel theses and arguments of his own, Xunzi bases his claims

on the classics, so this statement about the Way mind and the human mind is likely from a much earlier text. Thus, these two quotations from Zhu's "Preface" would be generally acceptable as classical Confucian rhetoric.

Regarding Jinsai's division of the text into an "original part" and "supplemental" part, he is in good company. Feng Yu-lan bases his similar division of the text on Wang Bo's 王柏 (1194-1274) *Explanation of the ZY* 中庸說 (*Zhongyong shuo*), which excludes chapter 1 as well as the other chapters excluded by Jinsai!<sup>17</sup> Wang and Feng make the case that the contents of ancient books tend to fall under the scope of their title and that only chapters 2-15 of the *ZY* discuss *zhong* and/or *zhongyong*. Moreover, they view those chapters as linguistically archaic. Feng and Wang conclude that the first chapter and the final several chapters were interpolated by followers of Mencius in the early Han.<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey Riegel presents several parsings of the *ZY* by traditional scholars, and concludes that the text was a compilation of Warring States materials that were supplemented, refined, and edited by a team or teams of Han scholars.<sup>19</sup> All such views are speculative because of the lack of independent evidence, as in the case of the Brookes' (1998) claims about the mixed provenance of the *Analects*. Contemporary translators Andrew Plaks (2003), Roger Ames & David Hall (2001), and Wing-tsit Chan (1963)<sup>20</sup> regard the *ZY* text as an integrated whole. Although Jinsai, Wang, and Feng only see *zhong* and/or *zhongyong* discussed in

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17 Feng Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), vol. 1, pp. 370f.

18 Texts, including the *Wuxingpian*, dating from a century before Mencius that were excavated at Guodian attest the three opening propositions of the *ZY*. Conceptually, they antedate Mencius in that they do not characterize *xing* (the natural propensities) as specifically good (or bad). Moreover, Mencius had been eclipsed by Xunzi in the Han.

19 Jeffrey Riegel, *The Four "Tzu Ssu" Chapters of the Li Chi* (Ann Arbor: University microfilms, 1978).

20 E. B. Brookes & Takeo A., *The Original Analects: Sayings of Confucius and His Followers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Andrew Plaks, *Ta Hsueh and Chung Yung: The Highest Order of Cultivation and on the Practice of the Mean* (London: Penguin Books, 2003); Roger Ames & David Hall, *Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001); Chan Wing-tsit, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

the early chapters of the text; more charitable scholars like Chan, Plaks, and Ames and Hall see the first chapter as laying out the conceptual framework of the rest of the text, and the later chapters as unfolding ideas and themes implicit in the concepts of *zhong* and *zhongyong*.

Regarding the first three propositions of chapter 1, while Zhu Xi is committed to associating the "natural propensities" endowed by *tian* with the relatively abstract virtues of humaneness, appropriateness, ritual propriety, and wisdom, Jinsai views them as biologically implicated in terms of Mencius' "four beginnings," i.e., as nascent emotive expressions of the virtues. In this, Zhu and Jinsai *both* impose their own philosophies on the first proposition because nowhere in the *ZY* are the "natural propensities" directly called "good"; they are simply natural propensities that Heaven endues in people, though they surely predispose people to be sensitive and responsive to others. The later chapters say that fully realized natural propensities are expressed as *ming* 明 (perspicacity) and *cheng* 誠 (sincerity, creativity), which are surely good; but Jinsai excludes these later sections of the text. As to "Leading the natural propensities is what is called the Way," considering that these propensities come from Heaven (Nature), and that the Way is the patterned processes comprising nature and human life, Zhu regards human life as part and parcel of the cosmic process while for Jinsai the Way indicates the constancy of the daily conduct of ethical human relationships. Zhu's reading is the more accurate one in that for the classical Confucians the Way does involve natural norms against which to weigh not only practices but also rites and institutions. Finally, as to "cultivating the Way is called the instruction," Zhu's and Jinsai's accounts are in basic accord. For both, what distinguishes the instruction of Confucius' school is that it conforms to the natural propensities and the Way so that the Confucian teachings not only are consistent with daily life practice but provide a good path of cultivation in family, school, and social contexts. Again, however, Jinsai has trimmed away the needed conceptual support for his optimistic Mencian reading of the natural propensities.



Zhu Xi regards the crucial 47 characters from "the pre-aroused state" to "penetrating Way" as describing the mind-set of the fully-realized person: Before the emotions are aroused, he is tranquil (*zhong*). And, once aroused, his emotions hit the mark (*zhong*), timely, and in due degree. Jinsai argues that *zhong* differs from the classical Confucian *zhong*, which the classics tend to express in the sense of aroused emotions, not in the sense of tranquility. For his part, Zhu interprets *zhong* as the necessary mental state for one's being set to hit the mark in conduct. That is to say, when tranquil, the mind is alert, sensitive, and in equipoise so that one is set to respond to situations appropriately. Jinsai argues that the Song Confucians incorporated this idea of tranquility because they were imbued with Chan Buddhism. I maintain, to the contrary, that this proposition is not particularly Channist. It describes a mental state that is a natural achievement in the Confucian cultivation effort, and a fitting climax to *ZY*, chapter 1. At the time when the *ZY* was composed, Confucians were pressured to show that their teachings and practices were not artificial but rooted in mind and natural propensities.<sup>21</sup> Although initially associated with *Laozi's* position and practice, this stress on *zhong* as equilibrium or tranquility very early becomes a core part of Confucian cultivation and realization and the view that those who do not achieve this mental state will not be adequately "composed" and equipped to respond to affairs and to act appropriately.

Finally, we have the indirect proof that Mencius builds on the *Zhongyong* theory of pre-aroused state of mind, and thus that the theory had existed before him in the formative period of early Confucianism. The 47 characters commencing from the "pre-aroused state" indicate that such a mental state is necessary for the well-cultivated person to be able to respond appropriately in a wide variety of situations and be a Confucian man for all seasons. I argue that Mencius innovates his teaching of the unmoved (imperturbable) mind (*budong*

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21 Mark Csikszentmihalyi, *Material Virtue: Ethics and the Body in Early China* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

*zhi xin* 不動之心 (*Mencius*, 2A.2) as a ramification of this notion of a "pre-aroused state" of the emotions. Mencius regarded the *Zhongyong* theory of mental states as too passive in involving automatic, perhaps habitual responses as well as not including the determination and decisiveness needed to fully carry out one's cultivation as well as to face daunting situations. Rather than criticize the theory overtly, Mencius insists that people cultivate their will power (*yizhili* 意志力) as a sort of *qi*-determination based on their incipient moral impulses and learning: one's imperturbability would be rooted in one's commitment to genuine values rooted in tradition and one's moral impulses. As with the pre-aroused state of the emotions, one's imperturbable mind would be clear, open, and receptive, but one's responses would be empowered by one's determination to further humaneness and advance the Way, and not merely cultivated moral reflexes. Accordingly, Jinsai is in all likelihood wrong in making the claim that the early Confucians had no theory of a pre-aroused state of the emotions. Indeed, this theory was incorporated and ramified by Mencius, whose ideas Jinsai approves and incorporates in his reading of the *ZY*. Here again he does not accept ideas that provide necessary conceptual backing for the optimistic Mencian notions that he approves and wants to appropriate.

## VI. Conclusion

Itô Jinsai is likely correct to charge that Zhu Xi reads abstract Neo-Confucian concepts, such as *li* and *qi* and naturalistic implications for the Way, propensities, and emotions, etc., into the *ZY*, thus loading the text with some stiff metaphysical terms that might interfere with its practical import.

Jinsai's own grasp of "*zhong*" and "*zhongyong*", however, is narrow and inadequate. He argues that the basic meaning of "*zhong*" was "the center of an area or midway on a scale," and concludes that features like "not tilting or

leaning" were secondary. In ancient China, the graph for "*zhong* 中" first depicted "an arrow hitting the bull's eye." Inasmuch as archery and archery contests were highly ritualized sports of the nobility, "*zhong*" came to signify "hitting the mark" in refined word and conduct generally. Knowledge and wisdom, which Confucians regards as performative in nature, were similarly conceived and associated with archery in early Confucianism.<sup>22</sup> The association with archery also illuminates the relationship between "*zhong*" as tranquility, equilibrium and "*zhong*" as "hitting the mark." That is, the archer's mind has to be clear, empty, and tranquil for him or her, not only to get a bead on the target but to be sensitive to the distance, topography, air currents, etc., in taking aim. As Zhu notes, the tranquil mind brings the situation into focus when things come up.

As noted, Jinsai distinguishes between "*zhongyong*" and "*zhong*," saying the former signifies "doing one's utmost" and "neither exceeding nor not reaching" while the latter simply means "the center" or "the middle." For Zheng Xuan and Zhu Xi, "*yong*" adds practical nuance to *zhong*: Zheng Xuan comments that the term "*yong*" was added to "*zhong*" to connote another character "*yong*" 用 (use, application); so he interprets the compound "*zhongyong*" as the "applicable *zhong*" or the "*zhong* in practice." For his part, Zhu Xi reads "*yong*" as common practice, so he interprets "*zhongyong*" as the "commonly applicable way."

My view is that early scholars coined the compound "*zhongyong*" not to distinguish it from "*zhong*" so much as to mark it off as a special term. "*Zhong*" alone does not stand out phonetically or visually, so its semantic weight could be lost, especially in oral instruction; by contrast, the compound would be marked by pauses in speech and in print both graphs are balanced and symmetrical in form, "*Zhong*" appearing above "*yong*" in traditional text layouts gives the impression of the value of *zhong* ("hitting the mark," i.e., "utmost propriety")

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22 Kirill Ole Thompson, "The Archery of Wisdom in the Stream of Life: 'Wisdom' in the Four Books with Zhu Xi's Reflections," *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (January, 2007), pp. 330-344.

standing over a walled city, as if *zhong* were the master key to a harmonious, close-knit city. Hence, it is fitting to take "*Zhongyong*" as expressing "utmost propriety in common practice."

As noted above, Jinsai weakens "*zhong*" and "*zhongyong*" by associating them with general social practices. Thinking of them at that level, he is right to assert the need for criteria or standards for applying and assessing them. For Confucius, Mencius and Zhu Xi, as well as the *ZY* itself, however, the terms "*zhong*" and "*zhongyong*" apply only to the bearing and conduct of highly cultivated exemplars, such as worthies and sages, with abundant learning, experience, and cultivation who can generate the most fitting responses based on their own attainment, without appeal to external criteria or standards. Moreover, they can fashion appropriate responses to situations that the received rites and customs do not cover or suitably fit. In fact, Confucius introduces a special term for weighing things up, "*quan* 權", which refers to the cultivated exemplar's sense of discretion or expediency. Although it is the same term that Jinsai uses for "standard", for Confucius and Zhu Xi, "*quan*" more often refers to weighing things up based on one's sense of discretion, especially in the absence of relevant standards or criteria.<sup>23</sup>

The *ZY* was never about common daily practices of the people. It is intended for accomplished Confucian exemplars, alert to rectitude in bearing, words, and conduct; thus, many of the sections of the text that Jinsai excludes, e.g., the 47 characters in chapter 1 about mental states, the arousal and pre-arousal of the emotions, and the chapters on utmost perspicacity and sincerity, discuss core features of "*zhongyong*" bearing and conduct. I venture to argue that Jinsai excludes those 47 characters and the later chapters because they are pillars of Song-Ming Confucianism and not because they are not from the *ZY* source text.

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23 Ibid.; Kirill Ole Thompson, "Ethical Insights from Chu Hsi," in Michael Barnhart (ed.), *Varieties of Ethical Reflection* (Lanham, Boulder, New York & London: Lexington Books), pp. 49-65.

Nonetheless, when Jinsai views the *ZY* through the looking glass of his culture and era, he reads the terms differently than they were read in classical and Southern Song China. Moreover, he associates *zhongyong* more with the (life enhancing) norms of proper common practice than with any ideal notion of "utmost propriety." While his account is a departure from Chinese Confucianism, Jinsai recovers something of the humanistic spirit in the original text. As he states:

The sagely Confucian way thus violates nothing inherent in the common people, nothing established during the three dynasties, nothing *produced* between heaven and earth, and nothing pertaining to ghosts and spirits. The sagely Confucian way does not violate grasses, trees, insects, fish, grains of sand, pebbles, not even scum and waste.<sup>24</sup>

And:

Grasses and trees are vivacious entities. Flowing water is an energetic, moving substance. Even a sprout can grow up to the sky if properly cultivated and not blocked by anything. Even the waters of a tiny stream can flow into the four seas if allowed to advance unrestricted. The human mind is similar: if properly cultivated and not injured by things, it can form a triad with heaven and earth....Students of the sagely Confucian teachings must be able to discern clearly and judge ultimately, on the basis of their penetrating knowledge, final matters of truth and falsity. Thus they must also determine which words should be accepted and which discarded.<sup>25</sup>

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24 John Tucker, *Itô Jinsai's Gomo jigi and the Philosophical Definition of Early Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), p. 99.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 132.

Although Jinsai sets off on the right path, his blind spots will not lead us toward the desired Confucian destination. ♦

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