

A Preliminary Study on the Thought of "Sincerity" in Zhengmeng

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Abstract:As one of the classic expressions in the ontology of Confucian philosophy, "sincerity" is not only mentioned repeatedly in the pre-Qin classics, but also plays an important role in the development of new Confucianism after the Tang Dynasty. As a representative of this tradition, "Zhengmeng" inherits this tradition. It interprets "sincerity" at the ontological level as "continuous and uninterrupted" and "no deception and no deception", and uses it to explain the changes in the universe and various phenomena in people's daily lives, and derives the ultimate value destination of the whole existence. In this regard, "sincerity" also has two meanings at this level of effort: "When sitting in meditation and cultivating, keep the inner goodness uninterruptedly" and "When interacting with others, keep the purpose simple without selfishness." The former is the inevitable product of the maturity of ontological thinking, and the latter is the specific operational wisdom in a specific situation. Finally, when the individual's effort reaches perfection, he will reach the corresponding realm. The state of the realm will be manifested at the two levels of "ontology" and "universe". "Zhengmeng" pays less attention to the former, but has a wonderful discussion on the latter.

Keywords: Zhengmeng; Sincerity; Theory of Effort; Theory of Realm

“There are three approaches to the metaphysical problems of Chinese philosophy: the first is to discuss the ontology of conceptual categories, the second is to discuss the ontology of value consciousness, and the third is to discuss the cosmology of specific time and space.” As far as Confucian philosophy is concerned, the most developed part of its metaphysics is ontology. In the long

history of Confucianism, its highest ontology has been expressed as "benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, sincerity, kindness, and life", etc. The connotation and extension overlap with each other while having their own characteristics, showing the different directions of Confucianism development in different periods. Among them, the idea of "sincerity" is not only regarded as the ontology in "The Great Learning", "The Doctrine of the Mean" and "Mencius", but is still highly valued in the new Confucianism after the Tang Dynasty. "Sincerity" as a metaphysical ontology has two meanings: one is continuity and uninterrupted, and the other is no deception or deception. This is clearly reflected in the literature of the pre-Qin period, especially in "The Doctrine of the Mean". As the Doctrine of the Mean says: "So the utmost sincerity is without rest. If it is without rest, it will last long. If it lasts long, it will eventually conquer." Zheng Meng comes from the interpretation of The Doctrine of the Mean and Yi Zhuan, and naturally inherits the two meanings of the essence of "sincerity". For example, it is said in the Zheng Meng Chapter 6: Sincerity and Enlightenment, "The reason why Heaven lasts forever is because of its sincerity." The reason for the eternity of Heaven is attributed to "sincerity." Wang Fuzhi commented: "The transformation of qi is orderly and has never ceased since ancient times. This is actually the truth." It is said that the great changes can be orderly and last for a long time because they are based on the essence of "sincerity". "Order" such as "the four seasons are not wrong, and all things are in their proper order" belongs to the second level of being free from delusion and deception, while "unceasing" means that it does not stop, which belongs to the first level of continuity and uninterruptedness. Other similar sentences include "Heaven does not speak, yet the four seasons go on; the sage

teaches through the way of the gods and the world obeys. Sincerity here moves there; this is the way of the gods!”, “Heaven does not speak, yet it is trustworthy; the gods are not angry, yet they are awe-inspiring; sincerity leads to trust; selflessness leads to awe-inspiring”, etc. I will not repeat them here.

1. Sincerity in the Context of Gongfu

"Sincerity" as the ultimate value destination of the whole existence world not only runs through various phenomena of the great changes, but also manifests itself in the efforts made by individuals towards "sincerity". At this level, "sincerity" can be summarized as "pure good thoughts that continue without interruption". "Zhengmeng" has two aspects of this explanation: first, when sitting in meditation and cultivating oneself, one should continuously and purely keep the goodness in one's heart. Second, when interacting with others, one should be free of selfishness and keep the purpose pure.

The former is a practice that is directly oriented towards the ontology, and mainly relies on the subject's control over his own thoughts. The fourth chapter of the Zheng Meng book "Shenhua" states: "Ghosts and gods are immortal, so their sincerity cannot be concealed. If a person has such a mind hidden in the dark, it will surely show up when the opportunity arises. Therefore, even if a gentleman is in solitude, he should never let up his guard."^[3] The images of ghosts and gods are used to illustrate the hidden thoughts in people's hearts, thus warning people to always examine their own psychological activities and prevent them from being influenced by evil thoughts. Wang Fuzhi has a brilliant commentary on this: "Ghosts and spirits are invisible and soundless, yet they are clearly visible in things. If they actually exist, they can be seen without needing to take shape or to be heard without needing to make a sound. A single thought of good or evil moves in a place where one is not aware of it. If one is allowed to make it known, then the flow of qi will definitely manifest itself... We are not afraid of its manifestation, but we are afraid that it actually exists and cannot be stopped. If a single thought is evil and not carefully examined, even if one can control it and prevent it from manifesting, the spirit and qi will be burdened by it and manifest itself in

actions. It will become evil without one's awareness. One cannot predict where it came from, but it cannot be stopped."^[3] The thoughts in people's minds are like ghosts and gods, invisible but real. Once they arise, even if they are subtle at first, they will eventually become obvious. If people fail to examine their evil thoughts, although they can barely stop them from happening, it will also harm their mind and body and hinder their daily work and life. Therefore, individuals need to always face the ontology so that their good thoughts can continue uninterrupted.

In contrast, the latter is more directed towards the subject in interpersonal interaction, guiding them on how to play their own role well, which is the specific operational wisdom in a specific situation. "The Sixth Chapter of Chengming in Zhengmeng" says: "If sincerity exists, then it has an end and a beginning; if falsehood does not exist, how can there be an end or a beginning! Therefore, it is said that 'without sincerity, there is nothing!'" "Things are events"^[3] refers to specific events in a specific situation, which have their own starting point and end point due to their relationship with other things. When the subject has no selfish motives in this process and keeps the purpose pure, he will play his role well and make choices. The whole event will proceed in an orderly manner until it ends. Even if it is unsuccessful, it will not cause any accidents due to the randomness and purposelessness of the process. However, when the subject is mixed with selfish desires and generates additional purposes in the process, the mentality of "doing it when the intention arises and stopping when the intention is exhausted" often results in the result of "no foundation at the beginning, and the end is bound to be wrong". This passage in the fifth chapter of Zhengmeng's Animals can explain this: "Things have a beginning and an end before they are complete. If there is no interaction between sameness and difference, existence and non-existence, then we cannot see their completion. If we cannot see their completion, then even if they are things, they are not things. Therefore, it is said that bending and stretching interact with each other and benefit life. If one sees or hears something alone, even if it is slightly different, it is strange and comes from illness and delusion. If one sees or hears something together, even if it

is very different, it is sincere and comes from the correctness of yin and yang."^[3]The "matter" here also refers to a specific event in a specific situation. Its perfect ending requires "flexion and extension", that is, the harmony of multiple factors such as beginning and end, similarity and difference, existence and non-existence. Otherwise, "even if the matter is fortunately completed, but I don't know why it is completed, I feel uneasy and cannot be content, and the thing is not what it should be."However, those who see and hear things on their own are motivated by "anger and delusion" and "do not look up and down to learn from the past and understand the present, but only rely on what they have gained by chance"^[3]. At the beginning, their selfish desires of "anger and delusion" have shaken their original purpose and destroyed the necessary conditions for the formation of "things". In the end, they are unable to become "things" and go astray - "strange".Furthermore, if one regards the successful conclusion of a matter as a benefit, then a selfish desire with a deceptive tone will not only lead to "nothingness", but will even sow the seeds of disaster. "'Benefits arise when sincerity and honesty are in harmony', this is because sincerity is in harmony; 'benefits and harms arise when falsehood and affection are in harmony', this is because falsehood is mixed in".If one is sincere, one can stick to the original purpose, "bend and stretch together", so that the event can be successfully concluded and the expected benefits can be obtained. If one is false, one will disregard the laws of the development of things, "not caring about the unreasonable reality, starting things with things, seeking fame with names, and calculating profits with profits", even if "one is lucky enough to gain benefits, harm will also be hidden"^[3]. While grabbing benefits, one will also slide life into the abyss.

2. Sincerity in the Realm of Mind

When the effort reaches the highest level, the individual achieves an ideal and perfect personality and reaches the corresponding realm. The state of the subject can be expressed from two levels: "ontology" and "universe". In terms of the former, the subject is in harmony with the highest value concept, "purely guarding it without slipping"^[1], and reaches the state of "harmony between heaven

and man". In terms of the latter, the subject understands the highest principles of the universe, controls the world, and participates in the creation of heaven and earth.The realm of sincerity displayed in Zheng Meng also contains these two aspects, but it places more emphasis on the latter. Its ontological expressions include: "The unity of nature and the Way of Heaven lies in sincerity" and "The saint is the one who is sincere enough to obtain the favor of Heaven"^[3]. It clearly defines sincerity as the common essence of the Way of Heaven and human nature, and proposes the ideal and perfect personality of the saint. On the cosmological level, Zheng Meng combines concepts such as "knowledge" and "destiny" to make a brilliant discussion on this. See below for details.

The Doctrine of the Mean defines the subject's "effort" and "realm" respectively as "self-knowledge and sincerity" and "self-sincerity and enlightenment". "Knowledge" refers to self-education such as learning and thinking, and "honesty" refers to conforming to the ontology and completing human nature. "Self-knowledge and sincerity" means "from understanding the truth to achieving sincerity of heart"^{[2]334}, so it refers to the subject's effort when facing the ontology. "Self-sincerity and enlightenment" means "from sincerity of heart to naturally understanding the truth of things"^{[2]334}, so it refers to the realm after the subject conforms to the ontology.Zheng Meng inherited this thought, as he said: "'Self-knowledge and sincerity' means to exhaust one's nature by exploring the truth; 'Self-sincerity and enlightenment' means to exhaust one's nature by exhausting one's nature"^[3]. In the process of further development, he made a new interpretation of the two stages of knowledge: "The knowledge gained through sincerity and enlightenment is the knowledge of heaven's virtue and conscience, not just the knowledge of hearing and seeing"^[3]. He called the knowledge of the effort stage "the knowledge of hearing and seeing", and the knowledge of the realm stage "the knowledge of heaven's virtue and conscience".The former is as its name suggests, while the latter means that the subject clearly understands the "benevolence and righteousness" that is "inherent in nature" and "all good"^[3], and has a thorough grasp of the highest value in the universe. Zhang Zai described this state as

"unseen and yet clear, unmoved and yet changing, and accomplished without action"^[3]. "Unseen and yet clear" means that one has a sense of the principle of "sincerity", "like the ears, eyes, mouth and nose on the face, knowing where it is in the dark, without the need for hearing or seeing."^[3]Change without moving" means that sincerity can move nature, so that all things can "get what they deserve" and produce the magical effect of "things changing by themselves". "Achievement without doing anything" means "selflessness", doing things without any thoughts other than the things, so that things can be successful in the end.

In connection with this, after obtaining "Heavenly Virtue and Conscience", the individual must understand the direction of Heaven's progress, and then obtain his own mission. Zhang Zai made a distinction between fate, one is the fate of "good or bad", that is, fate in the secular sense. The other is the "right" fate, which is usually called mission. The former is related to the popular worldview of Qihua, which refers to the clarity or turbidity of Qi received by people during the process of pregnancy. If the Qi is clear, it is auspicious, and if the Qi is turbid, it is ominous. The latter refers to the ideal of life established by people after they are in harmony with the highest entity. He concluded that when the subject reaches the realm of "sincerity", he will clarify his "mission" and will not be burdened by "fate".The following statement in the sixth chapter of Zheng Meng's Cheng Ming chapter can serve as proof: "If one is sincere, then he will follow the principles and benefit; if one is false, then he will not follow the principles and suffer harm. If one follows the principles of life and death, then the so-called good and bad luck will be the right thing; if one goes against the principles, then the bad luck will be brought upon oneself, and the good luck will be the result of a dangerous accident."^[3] When the subject reaches the state of "sincerity", he will

be able to achieve success in everything because he follows the principles of heaven. This does not mean that his fate will be smooth sailing, but that he will transform the "good luck" and "bad luck" he encounters into the resources to complete his mission. Because he understands the direction of his struggle, even the "bad luck" is nothing more than hardship for him.

Undoubtedly, the discussion of "sincerity" in Zhengmeng was influenced by Zhongyong, such as the perspective and materials of its discussion. But this does not mean that it remains unchanged, but that it has developed in inheritance. For example, Zhongyong also talks about the relationship between "sincerity" and "effort", but it discusses it more from the perspective of effort. For example, it says: "Some people do it with ease, some do it for profit, and some do it reluctantly, but when they succeed, they are all the same."In contrast, Zhengmeng begins to look at this from the perspective of realm. The sixth chapter of Chengming says: "Sincerity and solemnity come after effort, which is not innate." It means that after reaching the advanced stage of kung fu, the subject can be "sincere and solemn without effort" in the realm state, so that kung fu and realm are organically combined. Its development of the relationship between the two shows that the theory is constantly developing in a clear and complete direction.

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