

ZHONGDAOLOGY: HOW SHOULD CHINESE PHILOSOPHY ENGAGE WITH AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY?

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ajct.v2i1.4>

Submission: January 31, 2022 Accepted: June 28, 2022

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Abstract

Zhongdaology is the core of Chinese traditional Confucian philosophy. The zhongdaological way of thinking represents the Chinese philosophical thinking mode, with Confucianism as the main body, and has deeply influenced many aspects of Chinese culture. It is different from the traditional ontological thinking in the West. However, for a long time, due to the influence of the dominant position of Western ontological thinking in the field of philosophical research, the characteristics of zhongdaological thinking have not been fully elaborated and promoted. This essay briefly exposes the historical origin of the doctrine of zhongdaology and its significance in Confucianism. Like the situation of traditional Chinese philosophy, African philosophy also has long been overshadowed and ignored by western philosophy to some extent. To this end, it can be safely stated that the dominance of western tradition is why the interaction between Chinese philosophy and African philosophy and other underrepresented philosophical traditions in the south have not taken firm roots. This essay makes some preliminary comparisons between

Chinese Confucian zhongdaology with some African philosophical ideas such as Ezumezu and Ubuntu, to show, first, the significance of broader dialogue and exchange among different philosophical traditions in the south, second how zhongdaology itself could serve as a veritable framework for doing philosophy across borders.

Keywords: Zhongdaology, Ezumezuology, Chinese philosophy, African philosophy, Western philosophy

Introduction

Just as the trend of economic globalisation is irreversible, the globalisation of culture and ideology is also an inevitable trend. However, in the process of globalisation, there are always tension and conflicts between regionalism and universalism. If the so-called globalisation in the colonial era mainly means the spreading and expansion of the ideology that originated from the West to various parts of the world, then in the post-colonial era, with the awakening of the subject consciousness of various nationalities around the world, globalisation may also mean the rediscovery and reverse transmission of non-western ideologies and value systems. Philosophy, as the core of culture and ideology, has always been developing in the vortex of the convergence of universality and national characteristics in the era of globalisation. For years, philosophy has been almost the special academic domain for white male westerners, but this situation is now changing. In today's world, although there are still a few people who insist that the so-called 'philosophy' should only be about Plato or be Plato's footnotes, it is now not uncommon to teach Chinese philosophy, Indian philosophy, African philosophy, Arab philosophy and so on in some western university philosophy departments.

On the one hand, for a long time, the concept of western philosophical tradition originating from Plato and Aristotle as the only philosophy is still deep-rooted, and many regional philosophical studies tend to be unconsciously reduced to using the western philosophical conceptual system to arbitrarily exploit and dispose of

the ideological materials generated in different regions. On the other hand, qualifying ‘philosophy’ with terms such as ‘Chinese’, ‘Indian’, ‘African’ and ‘Western’ also risks reducing philosophy, which is supposed to be the universal wisdom of humankind, to a local ideology. In this case, it is of special significance to put the philosophical traditions of different regions in the cross-cultural context for communication and dialogue so as to promote the progress, development and improvement of the common philosophy of humankind.

Although China did not experience full colonisation by westerners as many parts of the world have experienced, it nevertheless has been westernised to a great extent in terms of academic culture and ideology. In fact, in China, ‘philosophy’ as a discipline is established under the influence of the western academic system. This does not mean that there was no philosophy in ancient China or that ‘philosophy’ in China only centres on western philosophy, but that the study of philosophy in China, including the study of traditional Chinese philosophy, is often conducted under the categories, logic, concepts and stereotypes of western philosophy. However, in recent decades, many scholars have begun to reflect on this situation, questioning the monopoly of western philosophy and holding that philosophy has never been and should not be identical to western philosophy. There are many different philosophical traditions, not just one philosophical tradition. In China, many philosophers and philosophical researchers have been returning to the original ancient Chinese materials to rediscover and further exploit the original characteristics and values of Chinese philosophy and try to reconstruct the subjectivity of contemporary Chinese philosophy with its original categories and concepts. The proposal of the philosophy of ‘zhongdaology’ or the ‘Way of *Zhong*’ is one of these attempts.

Zhongdaology is an attempt to rediscover and reconstruct the core spirit of traditional Confucian philosophy. It is characterised by bridging and surpassing the binary opposition and gaps between Heaven and human, subject and object, self and others. It emphasises

the convergence, compatibility, complementarity and balance of different ideas, opposing meanings and values. It represents the Oriental characteristics of the middle way (*zhong dao*) of thinking, which on the one hand, sharply contrasts with the traditional western ontological thinking, and on the other, resembles the complementary thinking of the African systems of thought.¹ In this essay, I draw the similarity between the Chinese and the African framework using *Zhong* and *ezumezu*. These two traditions demonstrate that opposed variables can complement and rectify each other.

The philosophy of *zhongdaology* has its deep root in the long history of Chinese culture and philosophy for more than two thousand years, and it is also closely relevant to the unique path of development of contemporary China. At the same time, as the embodiment of the spirit of practical reason of Confucianism, *zhongdaology* can also carry on logical and rational dialogue and communication with other philosophical traditions, especially the African tradition. In the first, second and third sections of this essay, I will discuss the etymological, semantic and historical development of the concept of *zhongdaology* and its roots in Confucian philosophy.

In today's China, considerable progress and achievements have been made in the dialogue, comparison and creative construction between Chinese and Western philosophical traditions. Comparatively speaking, however, the dialogue, comparison and communication between Chinese philosophy and other philosophical traditions, such as African philosophy, are very weak. According to the view of openness, compatibility, justice and balance advocated by the *zhongdaological* philosophy, Chinese philosophy should also actively engage with other philosophical traditions, especially African philosophy. Such dialogues and exchanges are bound to produce unexpected positive results for both sides and provide new space and opportunities for the in-depth understanding of the wisdom of human philosophy and the development of the common philosophy of humankind. In fact, through preliminary dialogue and conversation,

¹ See Chimakonam (2019); Asouzu (2004, 2007); Oluwole (2014).

we have already found a lot of common discourse between the Chinese philosophy of zhongdaology and the African philosophies of Ezumezu and Ubuntu. In the last section of this essay, I will show the significance of zhongdaology in an intercultural context and employ the concept as a framework to show how Chinese philosophy should engage with African philosophy by making some comparisons between zhongdaology and some ideas in African philosophy, such as Ezumezu and Ubuntu.

The Issue of Legitimacy of Chinese Philosophy and the Introduction of the Concept of “Zhongdaology”

In China, philosophy, or in its Chinese name ‘*zhe xue* 哲学’, is a concept imported from the western academic system in modern time. Similarly, most of the modern Chinese concepts of the sub-branches of philosophy, such as ‘metaphysics’, ‘ontology’, and ‘epistemology’, were also imported from western philosophy. Although the modern Chinese equivalents of these words are all made of some old Chinese vocabulary, which has its own rich and deep historical and cultural roots in ancient Chinese texts. As the names of the new concepts representing the western categories of the discipline and sub-disciplines of philosophy, they were never known by those great ancient Chinese philosophers, such as Lao Zi, Confucius, Mo Zi, Mencius, Zhuang Zi, Xun Zi, Han Feizi, who lived roughly in the same time with those fathers of western philosophy, such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

Of course, if we understand philosophy in its original and general meanings, i.e., ‘love of wisdom,’ we cannot deny that those ancient Chinese thinkers were lovers and pursuers of wisdom, and their scholarship did cover and penetrate those fundamental philosophical problems, just as their ancient Greek counterparts did. Therefore, it is not difficult to pick up here and there from the works of ancient Chinese thinkers some propositions and thesis which are more or less relevant to those topics and issues in the Western tradition of philosophy and compose a graceful history of Chinese philosophy,

just as many modern scholars have done¹. However, since in the modern time, the academic realm, especially the international academic realm, has been dominated by the western academic and discourse systems, the original Chinese thoughts have been cut apart into fragments and re-assembled according to the western categories of philosophy in order to adapt those structures into the dominant western philosophical framework. As a result, the original, rich, vivid ancient Chinese philosophical thoughts have been reduced and represented as an inferior replica of western philosophy. This kind of re-assembling and adaptation has distorted or shaded much of its originality and uniqueness.

For many contemporary Chinese scholars, this kind of narrative of the history of Chinese philosophy shaped by western philosophical categories and patterns is far from being satisfying. On the one hand, some traditional scholars who deeply indulged in reading the original ancient Chinese texts have found that the original Chinese philosophy or traditional Chinese spirit as they understood it has lost its consistency and integrity in this kind of narrative and has become something alienated to its original self. On the other hand, scholars who are used to western philosophical terminologies, speeches, disputes and discourses also despise this narrative of the history of Chinese philosophy, either because the narrative looks more like an imitation of western discourse or because there is nothing pertinent in rehashing those exact topics and questions put forward in the history of Western philosophy.

As a result, we have witnessed in the past decades quite some academic disputes on the issue of the legitimacy of Chinese philosophy among contemporary Chinese scholars of philosophy, as well as among some Western Sinologists. Some scholars suspect that in ancient China, there may be nothing that can be considered exactly

¹The first of such endeavor was made by Hu Shih (1891-1962), one of the most famous scholars in modern China, whose *The Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy* (the first edition published in 1919) is the first academic work which tried to reorganize and reinterpret the Chinese traditional intellectual resources according to the Western philosophical ideas and categories.

as “metaphysics”, “ontology”, etc., in its original Western philosophical sense. Or, more frankly, there might be nothing that can be called philosophy in ancient China at all since, according to the patterns and criteria of Western philosophy, metaphysics or ontology etc., are so fundamental and so essential to the discipline of philosophy that without them, philosophy will not exist anymore.

In responding to the above concerns in order to mount a defence of the legitimacy of Chinese philosophy as a discipline, scholars of Chinese philosophy insist that ancient Chinese philosophy did inquire about ontological issues similar to that in Western philosophy, only sometimes with its own different set of concepts and terms; or perhaps, ancient Chinese philosophy has its own different kind of ontology.¹ Some modern Neo Confucian philosophers have made great efforts to elucidate or reconstruct a Confucian ontology or metaphysics. For instance, patterned on Kantian and Buddhist metaphysics, Mou Zongsan, one of the most important representatives of modern New-Confucianism, has suggested his “moral metaphysics” which is composed of “two-level ontology” (MOU 1975, 37-45). Influenced by both traditional Western ontology and modern Western Hermeneutics, Chung-Ying Cheng, the founder of the International Society of Chinese Philosophy and one of the most enthusiastic advocates of Chinese philosophy in the international academic circle, has produced his theory of “onto-hermeneutics” and suggested a concept of generative “*benti* (noumenon)” (CHENG 2000, 2004). Li Zehou, another famous contemporary Chinese philosopher and esthetician, established his ‘historical ontology’ or ‘anthropo-historical ontology’ based on his understanding of the feature of Chinese philosophy with reference to Kantian and Marxist theories (LI 2001, 2008). Chen Lai and Yang Guorong, two other famous contemporary Chinese philosophers in mainland China, have also proposed their ‘Benevolence Ontology’ (CHEN 2014) and ‘Concrete Metaphysics’ (YANG 2011), respectively. These efforts are all trying to reveal or rebuild a Chinese ontology that is different from

¹For a general survey of the discussion on this issue, see Jia Yuming (2011).

the ontology in Western philosophy. Nevertheless, in my view, these efforts, no matter how eloquent and elaborated, have only enhanced the impression that Chinese philosophy is only an inferior analogue of its Western version. They are not able to fully demonstrate the unique features, particular concerns such as background logic and methodology, and other special values of ancient Chinese philosophy.

The question then is: is it possible for Chinese philosophy to get rid of the methodological influence of Western philosophy and express itself with its own terms and categories? My answer to this question is yes! It is not only possible but also necessary. It may provide a chance for Chinese philosophy to directly demonstrate its original, vivid life form and unique way of philosophical thinking and change its long-time status of an object which has always been analysed, discussed and evaluated according to the Western standards and criteria of philosophy. This structural adjustment will restore the subjectivity of original Chinese philosophy, enabling it to express itself with its own terminologies and categories. In this way, Chinese philosophy will make some contributions to philosophy in general by revealing that besides the Western philosophical categories, concepts, logics, terminologies, and methods, there are some other approaches to philosophical thinking which can enrich philosophy as a general human intellectual activity.

For this consideration, I introduced the concept of “zhongdaology”. It is a word I coined from the combination of Chinese words ‘*zhong, dao*’ (the way of zhong) and the Greek word ‘logos’. The equivalent Chinese word for it should be ‘*zhong dao lun* 中道论’. I use this word to represent the basic logic and methodology, as well as the core spirit and essence of Confucian philosophical thinking, and I also believe that it is the core spirit of Chinese philosophy in general. In other words, in Chinese philosophy, I argue that the most important issue, or the main realm or category is not ontology, epistemology, etc., it is zhongdaology. I first introduced this word in a panel session at the 23rd World Congress of Philosophy in Athens, Greece, in 2013. Afterwards, I have discussed it at several

other international conferences or used it in some of my English papers. It seems that it can be well understood by scholars from other philosophical traditions, such as the African tradition, which has similar ideas as I will show later.

My basic ideas and opinions are as follows: Due to the differences in language, ontology in its original Western sense has not been conceptualised in ancient China. As the etymological origin of the word ontology indicates, it is the philosophical study of the nature of being, which is based on the predicate verb “to be” in Western languages (Greek *εἶμί*, *ont*, German *ist*, *sein*). The root ‘*onto-*’ in the word ontology originated from the predicate verb ‘to be’ in ancient Greek. The semantic meaning of *being* refers to the general existence of things and indicates that the existing things have transcendent permanent essence and logic. Thus, ontology enquires into the fundamental and ultimate reason or logic that determines all existing things in the world. It addresses fundamental philosophical issues such as “What is or what exists?” “What kind of thing exists primarily?” etc. (BUNNIN & YU 2001, 108). However, it might be unbelievable to some Western language speakers that in the early ancient Chinese language, there was not a similar predicate verb as ‘to be’ at all. The modern Chinese equivalent of ‘to be,’ i.e., ‘*shi* 是,’ began to be used as a predicate verb no earlier than in the later Han Dynasty (25–220 B.C.). Therefore, it is understandable that the Western ontological concept of being was not the focus in the philosophical thinking of ancient Chinese philosophers. Although ancient Chinese philosophers did discuss some ontological issues which might be similar to those discussed in traditional Western philosophy, ‘ontology’ in general was not an important concern of classical Chinese philosophy¹.

¹Actually some scholars have point out more frankly that there was no “ontology” in ancient China at all. In Zhang Dainian’s Outline of Chinese Philosophy, there is not a section of “ontology”,

Therefore, for Chinese philosophy to struggle with the issue of ‘ontology’ is just like ‘scratching one’s heels from outside one’s boots.’ At the same time, the absence of a clear concept for “ontology” is not necessarily a defect in ancient Chinese philosophy. Rather, it may be one of the unique characteristics of Chinese philosophy, which could provide a different approach to many of the fundamental and perplexing philosophical problems. In my view, at least in early Confucian philosophy, the essential philosophical issue, instead of the inquiry about ‘being’ or ‘existence’, was the question of ‘*Zhong*’ or “*Zhong Dao*”. The study of the way of dao can be called ‘Zhongdaology.’ The most prominent and unique feature of Chinese philosophy, primarily that represented by early Confucian philosophy, can be described as Zhongdaology instead of ontology.

Zhongdaology is the philosophical study of the way of ‘*Zhong*,’ which, in a certain sense, can be understood as the principle approach to a contextual and balanced ‘rightness’ in any given situation. It is based on all the primordially related semantic meanings embodied in the Chinese character ‘*zhong* 中’, which is a very commonly used word in the Chinese language and an important philosophical concept in early Confucian philosophy. Both the received ancient Confucian classics and the newly discovered ancient bamboo manuscripts tell us that adhering to the principle of *zhong* was a crucial political admonition which had been inherited and transmitted among the early ancient Chinese political leaders from generation to generation. Since then, *zhong* has evolved into a very fundamental idea or concept in Confucian philosophy. A series of important concepts in ancient Confucian philosophical thoughts are composed with the character *zhong*, such as *zhong yong* 中庸 (usually translated as ‘the doctrine of the mean’), *Zhong he* 中和 (zhong and harmonious), *zhong zheng* 中正 (being just and correct), *shi zhong* 时中 (timely correct or timely appropriate), *zhong jie* 中节 (fitting the due degree), *zhi zhong* 执中

(holding on the principle of *Zhong*), *cheng yu zhong* 诚于中 (being honest at heart), *yong zhong* 用中 (applying the principle of *Zhong*), *zhong dao* 中道 (the Way of *Zhong*).

Zhongdaology can be considered the essence or spirit of Confucian philosophy. The centuries-old historical and cultural background of Zhongdaology enriches it with profound philosophic significance and makes it a fundamental logic of thinking in Confucianism. Zhongdaology provides not only a Confucian way of approaching some philosophical issues but also a philosophical methodology or premise for establishing ethical norms, moral standards, social justice and political principles. Zhongdaological philosophy indicates an association between human beings and their world, a coincidence between subjectivity and objectivity, a harmony between the internal and external worlds, an intersubjective perspective between self and other, and equilibrium among different ideas and divergences. Zhongdaology advocates inclusiveness and harmony when dealing with conflicts and contradictions. Zhongdaological way of thinking is a basic logic of Confucianism. It runs through the traditional Confucian theory of ethics and politics. In a sense, it can be called the Confucian meta-ethics and meta-politics.

As a general philosophical methodology or way of thinking, zhongdaology also has a wide and profound influence on many aspects of Chinese culture and the Chinese way of life. Many unique or seemingly complicated phenomena in Chinese culture can be reasonably explained with the framework of zhongdaology. Furthermore, its deep influence has modelled a kind of national character that has existed since early ancient times until the modern era. Its profound philosophical significance can provide an important resource for the general world of philosophy. Zhongdaology, thus, is relevant and vital in the current global philosophical context.

In order to further understand the philosophical meaning and significance of the theory of zhongdaology, it is necessary to trace the

origin and evolution of *zhong* as an important philosophical concept in early Confucian texts and doctrines.

The Semantic Meaning of The Character “Zhong” and The Inheritance of The “Way of Zhong” In Early Confucian Political Legendary

Just like in Western ontological theories where concepts such as being and existence originated from the frequently used words in natural language, *zhong* 中 as an important Confucian philosophical concept also originated from a very commonly used word. Whether in ancient Chinese or in modern Chinese, the character *zhong* is among the most frequently used Chinese words. It is a polysemous word with multiple parts of speech. As a sophisticated philosophical concept in Confucianism, it has undergone a long history of evolution.

The character *zhong* 中 can be identified in the earliest batch of ancient Chinese texts. According to the studies by some experts of ancient Chinese writings, the character *zhong* appeared in the earliest extant Chinese texts, namely, the inscriptions on the oracle bones or tortoise shells of the Shang Dynasty (c.1600-1046 BCE) totaling 419 times in slightly different writing forms. It also appeared in the existing inscriptions on the bronze wares of the Shang and Western Zhou Dynasties (c. 1046-771 BCE) about 304 times (DAI 1995, 2919-2938). According to the contexts in which this character appears, we can find that even in these earliest ancient texts, the character *zhong* has already demonstrated itself as a polysemous word. Sometimes it indicates a flag, sometimes it means center (contrast to left and right), sometimes it means noon (midday), and it also appears in names of persons or places. Yet in some other contexts of these earliest inscriptions, the exact meanings of this character are not very clear even to the experts today (YU & YAO 1999, 2932-43). Since most of the earliest mono-form Chinese characters are originally pictographs, it is quite likely that the character *zhong* originally referred to a concrete and tangible object. But researchers have different observations and explanations on what the original object

represented by this character could be. Some believe that it originated from a pictograph of a flag, which was used to mark the center of a place to call together the tribe members (TANG 1981, 49-54). Others believe that it may have originated from the image of an ancient meteorological instrument used by ancient people to test wind speed (YU & YAO 1999, 2932-2943), etc.

While it is very difficult to find out the earliest original meaning of this character, it is comparatively easier to discuss the subsequent semantics of *zhong* as a frequently used Chinese word in the natural language. In everyday speech, whether in ancient Chinese or modern Chinese, *Zhong* is a polysemous word which has multiple meanings depending on the contexts in which it appears. According to the major dictionaries of ancient Chinese, we find that there is some basic semantics of the character *zhong*:

1. *Zhong* means inside (contrast to outside), interior (contrast to external). This is the only definition of this character that appeared in *Shuowen Jiezi* (说文解字)¹, the earliest Chinese dictionary which was completed in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25AD-220AD). From this meaning, it has been further extended to indicate people's internal feelings, unexpressed heart-mind or the innermost being.
2. *Zhong* can be used as a verb, which means to achieve exactly an intended aim, or having succeeded in doing something, or having done something exactly right. For example, an arrow which is shot right through the center of the target is called *zhong di* 中的. This meaning has been further extended to the adjectival uses of *zhong*; describing the correctness, appropriateness, justness of things. As a result, *zhong* has a semantic meaning of usefulness, suitability, applicability, etc. In the oral language in some areas of northern China today,

¹ Some versions of *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* explain *zhong* as *he* 和 (harmony), some researchers believe that this could be a change to the original version made by some smug scholar in later generations. See Duan (1981, 22).

zhong is also an expression of confirming and accepting, quite similar to the meaning of ‘good,’ ‘OK’ and ‘all right,’ etc.

3. *Zhong* means middle and average, referring to a moderate or appropriate degree contrasting with the two extreme ends. It indicates a value of mean or average. From this meaning, it has been extended to indicate a balance between opposites and status of equilibrium among different or contradicting factors. Since keeping in the middle does not incline to either side, *zhong* is further extended to mean neutrality, impartiality, and unbiasedness. Also, since *zhong* needs to keep a balance between different, sometimes opposing factors, it also means fairness and justice.
4. *Zhong* also means centrality and authority. As we have mentioned earlier, the pictographic origin of this character can indicate a banner or flag of a clan or a tribe, used to mark the centre place where the clan or tribe members should come to or assemble. As a centre, *zhong* is compared with border, edge or margin. Therefore, it also has the extended meaning of a centre of power or authority. It is just because of this that in ancient Chinese hermeneutics, the character *zhong* and the character *ji* 极, which means ‘top’, ‘pole’, ‘highest’, ‘supreme,’ etc., sometimes can mutually explain and interpret each other¹.

However, this commonly used word *zhong* had been endowed with rich philosophic meaning and gradually evolved into an abstract and important philosophic concept in early Confucian philosophy. Studying and applying the principle of *Zhong* or *Zhong dao* (the Way of Zhong) has been repeatedly emphasised in early Confucian classics

¹For instance, in the annotations of the word *huang ji* 皇极 in chapter *Hong Fan* 洪范 of the *Shang Shu* 尚书, the supposed Han Dynasty commentator Kong Anguo explains: “‘*huang*’, means ‘great’; ‘*ji*’, means ‘*zhong*’.” (“极，中也。”) The Tang Dynasty commentator Kong Yingda says: “‘*Ji*’ explained as ‘*zhong*’, this is a general explanation.” (“极之为中，常训也。”) See Kong Anguo and Kong Yingda (2000, 355); James Legge (1992, vol 3, part 2, 328).

and has been continuously discussed and advocated by later Confucian scholars.

In one chapter of the *Shang Shu*, one of the most important five Confucian classics, we are told the story of the legendary hero Da Yu who had led the people successfully to fight a huge flood and finally inherited the throne from his predecessor Shun and, thus, founded the Xia Dynasty (c. 2070-c.1600 BCE). Also, we can find the records of some important political talks between Shun, Da Yu and the chief officer of judiciary named Gao Yao. In these talks, Shun referred to the principle of *zhong* at least two times. In the first place, Shun praises Gao Yao's excellent job by saying that: "Using punishment with the expectation that there may come to be no punishment at all, and let people accord with the way of *zhong*, that is your merit. Continue to be strenuous!" (KONG & KONG 2000, 58-59). In the second place, Shun, who intended to abdicate as emperor and to hand over his power to Yu, gave Yu the following admonition: "The determinate appointment of Heaven rests on your person; you must eventually ascend the throne of the great sovereign. The mind of man is risky; its affinity for the Dao is weak. Be discriminating, be undivided, that you may sincerely hold fast the principle of *zhong*!" (KONG & KONG 2000, 61-62). This admonition of Shun has been highly valued in the tradition of Confucianism. It has been considered by the neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming Dynasties as the 'secrete pass-on-person teaching' of Confucianism. The similar records of the importance of the 'way of *Zhong*' in the early Confucian legendary also appeared in Confucius *Analects* (HE & XING 2000, 350), in the book of *Mencius* (ZHAO & SUN 2000, 326), as well as in Sima Qian's *Records of the Historian* (SIMA 1959, 13-14), the earliest general history of ancient China.

Furthermore, it a newly discovered bamboo script of the Warring States Period (475BCE–221 BCE), among the so-called "Tsinghua University Collection of Bamboo Slip Manuscripts" and entitled *Baoxun* (保训), also records a deathbed admonition by King Wen

(1152BCE -1056 BCE), the founder of the Zhou Dynasty, to his son and heir, King Wu (1087BCE-1043 BCE), the then Prince Fa. In his admonition, King Wen mentioned *Zhong* 4 times, by telling the story of how Emperor Shun had searched with awe for the *Zhong* and eventually got the *Zhong*, as well as the story of one of the Shang people's ancestors Wei 微 who employed *Zhong* as a way in dealing with the relationship between the Shang people and an ancient tribe called *Youyi* 有易 in the Yellow River area, in which *Youyi* admitted its guilty without being harmed by punishment, and how all the people in the Yellow River areas at the time were following the *Zhong*¹.

The above evidence indicates that, during the Spring-Autumn and the Warring States Period, or the period of Chinese 'philosophical breakthrough,' an effort to construct a narrative of the tradition of imparting and inheriting the 'way of *zhong*' among the ancient sage kings is quite obvious. According to all these documents, the *zhong* has already become the most important historical experience and heritage the ancient sage Kings and other politicians tried to pursue and insist on, as well as a political principle they then wanted to transmit to their successors. The later Confucian philosophical discourse of the orthodox tradition of *ZhongDao* is based on this legendary-historical narrative.

The Evolution of Zhongdaology in Early Confucian Philosophy

The man who made the greatest contribution to the philosophy of *zhong* is Confucius himself. As the founder of Confucianism, or the 'school of *ru*', Confucius adopted the concept of *zhong* and further developed it into a sophisticated doctrine called *zhong Yong* 中庸, which is traditionally translated as 'the doctrine of the mean', and it actually means the constant, general and universal application of the 'Way of *Zhong*.' Confucius's philosophy of *zhong* is demonstrated in many of his teachings, such as his dialogues with disciples and his

¹The transcription of the *Baoxun* text was first published on the journal of *Cultural Relics* 文物 (Centre for Research and Conservation of Excavated Texts, Tsinghua University, 2009). Afterwards, many researches have been conducted. For a full-length English translation of this text, see Chan (2012).

personal behaviours, recorded in *The Analects* and in some of his quotations cited in the book of *Zhongyong*¹.

According to Confucius, applying *zhong* is a super moral virtue, advanced wisdom, and a philosophical methodology. Confucius thinks that possessing or not possessing the virtue of *zhong yong* is one of the differences between a superior man and a trivial man. He says: “Application of *zhong* as a moral virtue is supreme indeed. It has been rare among the common people for quite a long time” (LAU 1983, 54-55). It is rare among people since the wise and talented go beyond it and the imbecile and incompetent do not come up to it. He criticises that some people who happen to choose the way of *zhong*, are unable “to hold on it for even only a round month” (LEGGE 1992, 388). Thus, it is not easy for people to adhere to the standard of *zhong*, or keep the virtue of *zhong* for long. This is because applying *zhong* is unlike employing a fixed formula, rule or regulation. It is compared, by Confucius, to some ability of ‘tasting flavour’. According to Confucius, all men eat and drink, but only a few may be experienced chefs, have a subtle tasting ability and can distinguish flavours (LEGGE 1992, 387).

This analogy is reminiscent of a famous dialogue between two Western Zhou ministers about the concept of “*he* 和” (literally means reconcile, harmony) recorded in the book of *Guo Yu*², in which one minister also uses the analogy of seasoning “five flavors” to explain the concept of “*he* 和” (XU 1981, 470-472). In Confucian philosophical terminology, *zhong* and *he* are closely related, sometimes called *zhong he* (中和). In a sense, *zhong* can be understood as the result of *he*(reconcile), or analogically, *zhong* can be compared to the best taste of a dish which appropriately mixed the

¹The book of *Zhong Yong*, one of the “Four Books” (the other three are *The Analects*, *Mencius* and the *Great Learning*) among the most important Confucian Canon, was originally a chapter in the *Li Ji*, an anthology of discussions on rituals. Traditionally the author of *zhong yong* is believed to be Zi Si, the grandson of Confucius.

²*Guo Yu* 国语 is a collection of histories of the Kingdoms from the Western Zhou Dynasty to the Spring and Autumn period. It includes many political dialogues and discourses of rulers and prominent politicians of that time.

“five flavours” and put them together in harmony. This depends not only on the chef’s personal taste and judgment but also on his understanding of the different natures and functions of the “five flavours”, as well as the features of specific dishes, etc. Therefore, the application of *zhong* is a dialectic and dynamic wisdom, which needs an all-around consideration of different factors out of which one can make the best possible choice. This is evident in Confucius’s praise of the legendary emperor Shun. Confucius said: “Shun indeed was greatly wise! Shun loved to question others, and study even those seemingly shallow speeches. He concealed what was bad in them, and displayed what was good; He took hold of the two extremes and applied what is *zhong* in his governing of people” (LEGGÉ 1992, 388).

In Confucius’s view, Shun is obviously a role model for applying *zhong*. If we understood correctly, Shun’s application of *Zhong* is based on a dialectic consideration of different factors on different coordinates. At least there are two coordinates, one is between the ‘two ends’ or ‘two extremes’, and the other one is between Shun’s innermost and the objective condition, including his people. Commentators usually pay attention to only one of the two coordinates, i.e., the *zhong* on the coordinate of two ends or two extremes. Yet there is another coordinate that should not be neglected, i.e., the coordinate between Shun’s innermost judgment and the opinions of ‘others.’ He broadly collects the ideas and opinions from others, but also uses his own judgment to decide what is ‘bad’ which should be ‘concealed’, and what is ‘good’ which should be ‘displayed.’ So, the *zhong* is not only a result of equilibrating between those two extremes but also a ‘coincident’ between his own innermost and the innermost of others. Shun is neither a self-righteous subjectivist nor a softheaded copycat. He knows that there should be a right thing to do, but it can only be found through a balanced and dialectic perspective between himself and others, and between the two extremes. That is the *zhong*. At the same time, *zhong* does not always mean a half-to-half division between extremes or opposing ends. It should be

the most suitable and appropriate degree for a given situation. Application of *zhong* also means mastery of the appropriate degree.

Confucius inherited and carried forward the idea and principle of *zhong* and applied it in many aspects of his thought, including education, self-cultivation, personal behaviour in society, political theory and even art aesthetics, etc. For instance, concerning the ideal personality of a superior man, he thinks an appropriate degree of *zhong* is important. The degree of *zhong* here means neither ‘going beyond’ nor ‘falling short.’ Consequently, in teaching his students, Confucius would try to guide them to that appropriate *zhong* state, by giving them different instructions in line with their different aptitudes. Therefore, in responding to the same question asked by different students, Confucius may not give a fixed answer, rather, he always composed the right answer to address a particular issue in a specific context. This is one of the principles in Confucian education, and it is also an application of *zhong*, because *zhong* also means aiming at a specific target and hitting the mark.

Furthermore, the spirit of zhongdaology is also embodied in two core concepts in Confucian ethics, namely ‘*ren*’ and ‘*li*.’ *Ren* (benevolence) means love and compassion between ‘I’ and ‘others,’ which can also be called *zhong shu* 忠恕, and the function of *li* (rites and rituals) is just to maintain the *zhong* in social order and people’s behavior. The zhongdaological way of thinking is also vividly demonstrated in Confucius’ theory of aesthetics, especially his theory of poetry. According to Confucius, the function of poems is to express one’s internal aspiration or *willing*. However, the expression must be handled appropriately and moderately according to a specific situation, avoiding excessiveness. That is why Confucius appreciated some ballads in the *Book of Songs* for their being “joy but without wantonness, and sorrow but without self-injury”(LAU 1983, 24-25). He also thinks that poetry has the function of expressing complaints and resentments, yet it should not go to the extreme and become angry. In general, Confucius thinks that it is necessary to express an author’s inner feelings, such as joy, sorrow and hate, in a poem, but the feeling

expressed should be moderated and contained to an appropriate degree, namely *zhong*. Poems with such an appropriate degree of feeling and expression will be considered as having the ‘beauty of *zhong* and harmony’.

After Confucius, his disciples and later followers further developed the philosophy of *zhongdaology* with enriched connotations. In the book of *Zhongyong* (中庸), which is believed to have been written by Confucius’ grandson Zi Si, a kind of quaternity relation among the Heaven, the human nature, the Dao, and the education of Confucian doctrines (LEGGE 1992, 383) is discussed at the very beginning. This indicates that there is a link between Confucian Dao and the Heaven via the connection of human nature. That is why some scholars like Tu Wei-ming believe that there is a religious dimension in the text of *Zhongyong* (TU 2008,117-156). But the religious or transcendental origin of Dao is not a revelation directly coming from the ‘Heaven’, or announced by some mysterious saints or prophets sent by the “Heaven” to this secular world, rather, it is demonstrated in the nature or the humanity of ordinary human beings. That is why *Zhongyong* emphasises that the Dao cannot be separated (from a human being) for an instant. If it could be separated, it would not be the Dao. That means that the origin of the Dao is Heaven, but it also dwells in the innermost being (*zhong*) of every individual, presented as the unexpressed internal state of pleasure, anger, sorrow and joy in every human heart.

According to *Zhongyong*, the fundamental issue of *zhongdaological* philosophy is to “*zhizhong he* 致中和” (reach the *zhong* and realise the harmony), which means a convergence of subjectivity and objectivity, a harmony of both internal world and external world, because the character *zhong* 中 here refers, or links both the internal *zhōng*(the unexpressed innermost being) and the external *zhòng* (the appropriateness or applicability in the practice and in reality). When the internal *zhōng* is appropriately expressed out, and it is expressed all exactly to the point with neither ‘over-doing’ nor ‘not doing enough’ (i.e., *zhòng jie* 中节, which

means hit the right target or meet the due degree), then the ‘harmony’ will be realised and the way of *zhong* will be completed (LEGGE 1992, 384-385). The internal or the unexpressed *zhōng* indicates a unity between Heaven and human nature, while the externally expressed *zhòng* suggests a combination of emotion and rationality. Tu Wei-ming explains that the Confucian Way of *Zhong* is “professing the unity of man and Heaven”, and according to *Zhongyong*, “in a strict sense, the relationship between Heaven and man is not that of creator and creature but one of mutual fidelity” (TU 1989, 10).

In my understanding, the unexpressed internal *zhōng* is such a ‘unity’ or a “mutual fidelity” relation between humans and Heaven. As Chung-Ying Cheng points out: “At the center of the Chinese tradition Confucianism comes to see human existence as a unity of body and mind and to further see the human mind as a unity of reason and feeling” (CHENG 2000, 34). The concept of *zhong* in *zhongdaology* is a kind of “unity” which links or combines the internal and external, Heaven and human, mind and matter, subjective and objective, reason and feeling, etc. The Way of *Zhong* runs through the process from the beginning root (the internal *zhōng*) to the final end (the external *zhòng*), thus it realises the harmony and ensures the normal order of the world under Heaven and prosperity of all things on the land. The whole text of *Zhongyong* is just repeatedly elaborate such a way of *zhong* which runs through the internal and external world, links the Heaven and the human world, interacts between subjects and objects, and communicates among self and others. It is obvious that there are always some tensions, contradictions or even conflicts between the opposite sides. However, it is the function and goal of *zhongdaology* to release the tension, moderate the contradiction and avoid the conflicts.

During the Warring States Period, two leading representatives of Confucianism, namely Mencius and Xun Zi’, also contributed greatly to the theory of *zhongdaology*. Mencius says that a Confucian superior man should “stand firmly on the way of ‘*zhong*’ and let those

who are able to follow him” (LAU 2003, 306-307). Mencius also thinks that moral education is to let “those who are morally *zhong* to look after those who are not *zhong*; and those who have the talent to look after those who have not talent” (LAU 2003, 174-175). Mencius has contributed two critical ideas to the theory of Zhongdaology, one is called “timely *zhong* (*shi zhong* 时中)” (LAU 2003, 216-219), the other is called “constancy and flexibility (*jing quan* 经权)” (LAU 2003, 162-165). “Timely *zhong*” means that the *zhong* happens only in certain circumstances in time, it is not a fixed, unchangeable and timeless principle or stance. In other words, since the circumstance and conditions always change in time, *zhong* should also change along with time. “Constancy and flexibility” refer to the dialectic relationship between the constant or categorical moral principles and their flexible and weighing application in reality. It means that although there exist certain constant, categorical, or even absolute principles, yet when applying these principles in dealing with practical problems, you have to treat the concrete situations in reality on a case-by-case basis.

After Mencius, Xun Zi, another master of pre-Qin Confucianism, also emphasises the importance of the way of *zhong*. He says: “The Way of the Ancient Kings lay in exalting the principle of humanity and in following the *zhong* in their conduct. What is meant by the ‘*zhong*’? I say that it is correctly identified with ritual and moral principles” (KNOBLOCK 1990, 74). The spirit and principle of ‘*zhong*’ were applied throughout Xun Zi’s moral and political theories, in his view of law and ritual practices, as well as in his theory of literature and arts.

In the later generations, *Zhongyong* has become one of the most important Confucian classics and a must-read for almost all ancient Chinese scholars. The discussion or exploration of the meaning of *zhong* has been one of the most important subjects in the immense number of books in the tradition of Confucianism, even in the works

of the so-called modern new-Confucianism. Indeed, besides the tradition of Confucianism, in some other philosophical traditions in China, such as Daoism (Taoism), Legalism, and even Chinese Buddhism, we can also find some impacts of the philosophy of zhongdaology. And its influences permeate many fields of Chinese culture and Chinese ideology, as well as into many Chinese people's personalities and ways of life. Therefore, we can say there has been a long-standing tradition which we here describe as zhongdaology in Chinese history of philosophy and culture.

How should Chinese Philosophy Engage with African Philosophy: The Inter-Cultural Significance of zhongdaology

Just like the issue of the legitimacy of Chinese philosophy in contemporary China, the issue of self-definition or identification of African philosophy also exists in the field of contemporary African philosophy studies. African philosophy has long been ignored and denied by Westerners, especially European colonialists. Georg Hegel not only belittled ancient Chinese philosophy with great contempt, he also described African culture with contempt. For Hegel, Africa had no philosophy at all. In fact, Hegel believed that the philosophy of pure thought and freedom exists only in Europe, the only *historical* continent. This bias persists even into the post-colonial era, with some western-educated Africans joining in the denial of African philosophy. Peter O. Bodunrin, for example, in a paper published in *Philosophy* in 1981 blatantly asserted that there was no such thing as an "African philosophy" (BODUNRIN 1981). Of course, this view has successfully been refuted by many people. In essence, philosophy is the display of human rational thinking and the ability for logical judgment. All human beings have the ability for rational thinking and logical judgment, but people living in different historical and cultural traditions have different approaches and ways of expressing this great human ability. The self-sealing and exclusive view of Western philosophy, which takes only their own criteria, standard, logic and conceptions based on their own cultural tradition and epistemic

category to deny or disparage other philosophical traditions, should be abandoned. This is because it does not help the development of human common wisdom or world philosophy. The philosophical traditions of different nationalities and regions should all be respected and valued, and their connotations and characteristics should be thoroughly studied, explored and presented to enrich and develop the common philosophy of humanity through equal dialogue and exchanges among different philosophical traditions. We can see that more and more scholars have researched the history and current situation of African philosophy, exploring the “Africanness” of African philosophy and many other problems and themes in African philosophy (ETIEYIBO 2018).

From the foregoing, both Chinese and African philosophies face the irresistible influence of Western philosophy, which is bent on marginalising the two traditions of philosophy. Building a bridge of interaction or intercultural exchange between Chinese and African traditions seems a necessary course of action at this stage. But the foremost challenge of intercultural philosophy has always been about methodology. We are talking of two philosophical traditions inspired by two different cultures, what method of thinking would best suit an intercultural exchange between the two? In other words, how should the two traditions engage? Here, I wish to propose the method of ‘critical balance’, the way of *Zhong* or *the zhongdaological way of thinking*. It is critical because, it highlights the importance of rigorous consideration and logical justification in assessing and discussing ideas from each tradition, and it is a balanced approach because it recognises that ideas from the two traditions can be mutually complementary. Each tradition has something important to offer the other, and the harmony of the best ideas from both could create a mutual pool of values and ideologies.

The spirit of openness, tolerance, balance and justice advocated by the Confucian philosophy of zhongdaology also points to the importance of dialogue and conversation between Chinese philosophy and other philosophical traditions. Historically, Chinese philosophy

has greatly enriched its connotation through the conversation and exchange with Buddhist philosophy. Since modern times, Chinese philosophy has also engaged with Western philosophy through extensive and in-depth dialogue and exchange. But the dialogue and exchange between Chinese philosophy and African philosophy is still a new field waiting to be richly explored. From the existing preliminary studies, it has been shown that the dialogue and exchange between Chinese philosophy and African philosophy may produce unexpected rich results. For example, some scholars compare the concept of Ubuntu in Africa with the '*ren* (benevolence)' and 'Kingly Way' thought of Chinese Confucianism and find that both traditional Chinese philosophy and African philosophy emphasise group solidarity and community in human social life rather than placing individual freedom at the highest position (BELL & METZ 2012). This indicates that the dominant philosophical tradition of individualism and liberalism since modern times in the West may be more like a local philosophical tradition rather than a universal value with universal significance, or at least cannot fully represent the universal value of all humankind. More dialogues and exchanges between philosophical traditions in the south can find more evidence that some Western philosophical concepts and theories, which have been generally regarded as the principles of universalism since modern times, are actually the ideological achievements of Western culture in a particular period.

As an attempt to engage and communicate with African philosophy, I would like to discuss the correlation between the idea of *zhongdao* in Chinese Confucianism and the concepts such as *Ezumezu* and *Ubuntu* in African philosophy. As I have pointed out, Chinese Confucian philosophy from its very beginning is not concentrated on the issue of ontology or 'being,' rather it emphasises the search for the '*zhong*,' which is neither a substantial entity nor a permanently fixed idea or form. *Zhong* in certain sense can be understood as a third value, which is mediation or integration of the contradicting or opposing 'two ends'. It is not an absolute and fixed

‘being’ of something; it is contextual, historical, and dynamic along with the changing situation and condition. Yet it is not arbitrary, because it is mutually relying on the opposing ‘two ends’ and other subjective and objective elements. This is the logic of zhongdaology.

Confucianism considers finding and maintaining such a *Zhong* or balance as the main task of philosophy since it will provide a basic practical reason for human behaviours and social activities. This logic of zhongdaological thinking is different from that of the traditional Western ontological way of thinking, which features the unremitting inquiry into the absolute being or truth and the fixed rules or principles. Since the time of the ancient Greeks, this Western approach to philosophy has been devoted to finding the absolute and abstract theoretical clearness and does not accommodate a mid-way between two seeming contradictions. Thus, the laws of identity, contradiction and excluded-middle are the basic laws that govern the Western philosophic approach since the time of Aristotle. The ontological way of thinking is inclined to deny or neglect the sensational multiformity and mutability of the living world, which can easily lead to ‘rational hegemony’ and ‘conceptual domination’. As a result, philosophy became more and more detached from human experience and alienated from the living world of humans. It has also led people to be overwhelmingly possessed by their faith in self-supposed ‘truth’, which can easily lead to absolutism and dogmatism.

As already explained, ontological questions, such as “what is there” or “what exists”, were not the focus or main concern of the philosophical thinking and theories of ancient Chinese. Rather, ancient Chinese were more interested in the question of how things in the world are functioning and how different things are related to each other. Hence, their attention was not focused on the absolute being, or absolute truth or fallacy, good and evil, etc., but rather on the between-ness or the mutual relationship among different things. The different or even contradicting and conflicting elements are considered Yin and Yang; they are contradicting but also mutually

reliant on each other and transforming. Only when Yin and Yang interact with each other does the Dao come into being. In a certain sense, *Zhong* is a specific case of a dynamic Dao between or among different things.

Interestingly, in African philosophy, there is a strand developed by Jonathan O. Chimakonam, which is termed “Ezumezu.” It is a logic and a philosophy. Its philosophical doctrine is discussed as Conversational Philosophy. In it, we can find a logic similar to Confucian *zhongdaology*. The concept of *ezumezu* derives from an African Igbo language meaning “the collective, the aggregate or the totality of all that is most viable, most potent and most powerful”(CHIMAKONAM 2019, 94). According to Chimakonam, *Ezumezu* represents a three-valued, complementary logic, with three supplementary laws of thought, namely *Njikọka*, *Nmekọka* and *Ọnọna-etiti*. Like in *zhongdaology*, it is different from Western logic, because the laws of thought in Western logic (identity, contradiction and excluded-middle) are insufficient to cover the epistemic mappings in the African approach to philosophy. As he puts it:

In *Ezumezu* model... the two standard values are treated as sub-contraries rather than Contradictories... This is because the *ezumezu* is a distinct value in itself where the two standard values converge and complement. Its interpretation is ‘it is known that it could be both true and false’. It is strictly true or false when *ezumezu* is disintegrated once more into a two-valued system. One readily questions the realistic status of *ezumezu* that could be both true and false. Semantic evaluations in Igbo African thought are read contextually similar to situation semantics where statements of formal systems are interpreted as true or false relative to situations. In contextual semantics, that which is true, is true only in a context, it could be false in another. This is a realist rather than an epistemic reading of the three-valued thought model. (CHIMAKONAM 2014, 3-4)

Here we can find that the African Ezumezu logic or Ezumezuological approach shares some ideas in common with the Chinese Confucian zhongdaological way of thinking. The *zhong* in zhongdaology sometimes also represents a proper intermediate value between the contradicting ‘two ends’. The *zhong* value is not fixed or absolute, it is dynamic and contextual, yet Confucianism regards *zhong* as the constant and perpetual Dao in the universe. Like in Ezumezu, Zhongdaological way of thinking usually tries to bridge the gap between the opposing and conflicting things by creating a mediating *zhong* between or among those things involved. It takes the Yin-Yang philosophy as its background, which means it considers different things or even sometimes sharply contrasts things as mutually related and interdependent. So, it is always possible to constitute a temporary mediation or balance between them. Zhongdaology does not arbitrarily exclude or try to replace different values, but it does not take an ‘either-or’ attitude towards opposing sides of things in the world. There are differences in the world, but the differences are not just confrontations between truth and false, or good and evil; they are just mutually interdependent and complementary. This way of thinking contrasts with the traditional Western way of thinking, which persists in the law of absolute difference and absolute identity in which things are mutually exclusive. I think the ways of zhongdaology and ezumezuology more accurately reflect the nature of things in the real world. In fact, any absolute, ultimate and universal conception of ‘being’ or ‘truth’, which is actually conceived by a human being, expressed in a human language and in human history, is contextual and dependent on the particularities of a given culture. In this way, Simon Blackburn explains that the history of Western metaphysics is a history of dependency on other fundamental concerns and that in spite of its claims to ultimate authority and objectivity, metaphysics can best be understood as tracing out the presuppositions and implications of our most fundamental concerns in a given historical context (BLACKBURN 1996, 64-89). In other words, although being declared as absolute, ultimate and universal,

‘being’ in Western metaphysics is actually an occurrence in a particular historical context. Its absoluteness, ultimacy and universality are only presumed by philosophers working in such a historical context.

The traditional Western ontology intends to trace the original source of “being” from the extremely ultimate ends, which causes the dualistic conflict between various pairs of opposing ‘two ends.’ But, in fact, there is always the possibility of a third, intermediate or integrative value formed on the association between those contradicting and conflicting ‘two ends.’ The Aristotelian law of excluded middle holds that either a thing is or it is not. In other words, if a thing is equal to itself it cannot be unequal to or different from itself. This law implies absolute difference and absolute identity in which things are mutually exclusive. However, both Chinese *zhongdaology* and African *ezumezuology* advocate a kind of ‘included middle,’ which means confirming the existence of a value between opposing ‘two ends’ and things that come to the middle.

Zhongdaology also provides a different approach to epistemology. Just like in ontology, the Western philosophical discussion of epistemology usually focused on the issue of how does a subject come to know that a certain proposition is true? Or how can one justify what they believe to be the absolute truth? Confucianism never denies the objectivity of knowledge, it presents objectivity as a kind of *Zhong*, which happens in a certain historical context and time, rather than some ultimate, absolute and permanent ‘truth’ that is only knowable by God. Confucius has a famous saying: “To say you know when you know, and to say you do not when you do not, that is knowledge” (THE ANALECTS 2:17). Obviously, he thinks that knowledge should be objective, you cannot pretend to know when you actually do not know. But the objectivity does not mean absoluteness and ultimacy. Everything is dynamic and changing, and so does people’s knowledge about it. Therefore, Confucianism suggests the concept of “*shi zhong*”, meaning “timely correct” or “timely appropriate” to rectify the concept of “constant *zhong*”. It means that “*zhong*” as the

Dao is always in a dynamic and self-improving process, which makes it historical and contextual. Similarly, the African philosophy of ezumezuology also suggests contextual semantics, meaning “that which is true, is true only in a context, it could be false in another” (CHIMAKONAM 2014, 4). “Truth is a complex construct of multiple experiences crystallised as a specific temporal and changeable perspective on a particular aspect of reality” (RAMOSE 2018,186). Such a dialectical epistemological viewpoint is helpful to correct the erroneous impression of absolutism and dogmatism that epistemology in the West creates.

Zhongdaology is not only an abstract rule or principle, it is a practical reason which Chinese people widely carry out in various aspects of human thinking and social life. For instance, in the realm of ethics and moral philosophy, Confucian zhongdaology considers that codes of conduct can only be constructed and justified in mutual human relatedness. One of the purposes of the Way of *Zhong* is to discover and establish moral standards and ethical principles based on a ‘self-other’ perspective. Morality is not something that is only initiated from the heart or ‘nature’ of an isolated individual; it also emerges from mutual human relations and in human social practice. The moral categories, standards and principles must be established from a self-other related perspective. Morality is not just a property that belongs to an isolated individual. It can only be experienced and demonstrated in the relatedness between and among human beings. Mencius believes that there are “four sprouts” of human goodness in every man: the sense of sympathy and commiseration, the sense of shame and disgusting, the sense of modesty and yielding, the sense of what is right and what is wrong (LAU 2003, 72-73). All four senses concern a relation between self and other. It is unimaginable that any of these senses can be preserved in a biological human who has never had any connection with other people and human society. As a result, Mencius’ theory of the origin of morality cannot simply be understood as positing that morality is a natural property of all humans. True morality is not only based on sincere innermost being in ‘self’ but

should also be testified to and proved in moral practice with other people in society.

Accordingly, the Confucian theory of ethics is not a kind of moral unilateralism. It means that true morality is not only based on my sincere *Zhong* (innermost being) but should also be testified and proved in moral practices with other people in the society. A moral principle is moral only when it is not only sincerely acceptable to the *zhong* in my own heart but also acceptable to the hearts of others as well. Moral standards and norms must be mutually acceptable and mutually applicable between the self and the other. Similarly, African philosophical ideas such as *ezumezu* and *Ubuntu* hold the same view of morality. These philosophical ideas are rooted in the more communitarian African society, where the individual does not exist in isolation but in a group. For instance, in Igbo-African society, people take an integrated and complementary view of individual and group relationships. On the one hand, the individual finds his/her identity and improves his/herself in the group to which he/she belongs; on the other hand, the individual also needs to lose his/herself in the group to generate group power (CHIMAKONAM 2014, 10). As a result, morality should not be based only on the interests of individuals and conform only to the logic of individual liberty and freedom. Similar ideas are also embodied in the African concept of *Ubuntu*. As Ramose explains:

Human-ness is the core meaning of *ubu-ntu*. It is the condition of leading an ethical life through moral acts affirming oneself as a human being through the affirmative recognition of other human beings as ontological equals of oneself....To live ethically is to be constantly engaged in learning to be human by sharing goodness and the necessities of life with others in pursuit of mutual well-being. (2018, 187)

This view of morality from the south helps avoid moral unilateralism and deduce the negative effect of the isolationist Western modern individualism. It may also enlighten individuals to self-cultivate a more sociable moral personality, reduce conflicts among individuals or people, and create a more harmonious community and society.

Zhongdaology philosophy has a basis in some political stories or political myths of those ancient Sage Kings in Chinese antiquity. So, the social-political significance of zhongdaology is obvious. *Zhong* is defined in terms of justice, uprightness, righteousness, fairness, impartiality, equity, balance, etc. Zhongdaology indicates that the foundation of political authority is fairness and justice. The zhongdaological fairness and justice are based on the inclusive and all-round epistemology of the diverse peoples and communities involved. It also has the orientation of impartiality when dealing with opposing sides in disputes and conflicts. Being inclusive of different and even opposite groups, ideas and components in society, and maintaining equilibrium and balance among the different interests and social sections are some of the cardinal purposes of zhongdaology. Zhongdaology advocates an inclusive and tolerant attitude towards different and even opposite components in society and tries to create a balance between the interests of different social groups. As I have discussed, the character *zhong* means correct and appropriate, but it also means moderation and the point between opposing extremes. The implication here is that the so-called ‘correctness’ or ‘appropriateness’ is a result of mutual communication and compromise, a fusion of views and co-construction among different factors or members in a common ground or community. It is usually the moderated or the mean value of all the available different ideas or opinions of the people in a certain time and inside a certain territory. If in a certain society, all the social members had been included in the development and were able to benefit from the development, then the fairness and justice of this society would have been realised. So, the way of “*Zhong*” is also a political way of coordinating between opponents,

resolving contradictions and seeking equilibrium and harmony in a society.

In other words, the legitimate center of political power must be based on the way of *zhong* and represent as many people as possible in a society. Similarly, African philosophy also provides some wisdom and reason in resolving political, social, and economic problems facing the contemporary world. As Chimakonam has pointed out, social, economic and political justice would not be realised without epistemic justice, which means an inclusive accommodation of different cultural epistemic visions and the recognition of their epistemic canons based on the principles of Ezumezu complementary thinking (CHIMAKONAM 2019, 85). Both the ideas of zhongdaology and ezumezuology suggest that the long-dominant Western ideology, logic and values are not necessarily universal in the sense of representing the ideas of every culture, it may just be a prevailing cultural particularity developed in a particular historical context and period. To be specific, no social-political rule or system is absolute and sufficient for all societies and nations and for all time. Real universalism must be constructed on a full, thorough and inclusive comprehension of all cultural particularities. This, in a way, is the goal of intercultural interaction and *zhong* or the zhondaological approach of critical balance is a veritable way to negotiate an intercultural engagement like the one between Chinese and African philosophic traditions, which is proposed in this work.

Conclusion

The world today is undergoing major changes unprecedented in centuries. In the past few centuries, human beings have mainly experienced the rise and expansion of the Western world, accompanied by the dominance of Western ideology-based social, economic and political systems. Western ideology has its philosophical foundation, which has its roots in ancient Greece. Based on abstract rational speculation and metaphysics, this philosophical tradition is characterised by a binary opposition between form and

material, spirit and matter, nominalism and realism, rationalism and empiricism, subject and object, self and other, etc. The speciality of Western philosophical ways of thinking is the clarity of logic and speculation, the fixed concept of category and the obstinacy of principle and truth. To a large extent, these specialities have led to the progress of modern science and technology and promoted the establishment of modern social, economic and political systems based on individual rights and contractual relations.

However, everything has its other side. According to ancient Chinese Yin-yang philosophy, any positive trend developed to the extreme will turn to its negative opposite. Or, according to zhongdaological thinking, over-doing, which surpasses the due degree, is just as bad as not doing enough. Some of the new trends in the world today, such as anti-globalisation, populism and trade protectionism, in a sense can be said to be the inevitable reflection of the emergence of various internal contradictions and conflicts and unsustainable development after the extreme development of Western-led liberal democracy and capitalist market economy. In the Western philosophical tradition, the disconnection between theory and reality, the bigotry on absolute rationality and universality, the overemphasis on individual existence and individual rights, and other defects are increasingly exposed in the realistic development of history. Relying solely on the philosophical wisdom derived from a single tradition seems no longer enough to guide humankind in the direction of progress. With the development of social economy and culture in the third world, the epistemologies of the south, which originally belong to “the other” for the Western-dominated philosophical discourse and ideology, will more consciously present its subjectivity and power discourse.

From the above analysis, we can see the philosophical ideas from two epistemologies of the south, such as ‘zhongdaology’ and ‘ezumezuology,’ which have long been neglected, are embodied with a more dialectical, inclusive way of thinking. This emphasises the organic connection and harmony between man and nature, self and

other, individual and group, and among different things in a diversified world, taking a more intuitive, dynamic and contextualised grasp of the living world as a whole. All these can provide a necessary supplement, correction and even challenge to the Western philosophical mode of thinking and ideology, thus providing important ideological resources for enriching the common philosophical thinking of humankind and the construction of true universalism, if such is possible.

Conflict of Interest: No conflict of interest was declared for this article.

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