



## Content of the Philosophical Term “Golden Mean” “中庸” in Confucius Doctrine

Nargiza Rasuljanovna Ismatullayeva

PhD in Philological Sciences, Lecturer, Department of Translation Studies and International Journalism, Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies, Uzbekistan

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### **Abstract**

Confucianism is one of the leading ideological teachings of ancient China. A number of publications have described Confucianism as both a religious, moral, and political doctrine. This article is devoted to the analysis of the lexical meanings of the word “中庸” zhōngyōng – “golden mean”, one of the social philosophical terms in the teachings of Confucius, and the philosophical content of the doctrine. The article examines the meaning of this philosophical term, such as the translation of wise sayings of Confucianism in such works as “Analects”, “Golden Mean”.

**Keywords:** "Golden Mean"; Confucianism; Morality; Ideology; Virtue; "Analects"; "The Book of Rites"

### **Introduction**

Just as each field has its own terminology, doctrines also have terms that are recognized as central categories. Although the terms in Confucian teachings were not developed by him, concepts such as "humanity", "destiny", and "the right path" that are directly related to his work have been scientifically refined and molded as doctrinal terms. We understand the spirit of the doctrine by studying the terminology in the teachings of Confucius.

One such term, 中庸, is the moral ideology and methodology of the Confucian doctrine of "golden mean" and "reasonable moderation". In Analects, although, this meaning is not expressed by the same term, but its content and essence are reflected in a number of paragraphs. Before moving on to this topic, let's focus on the lexical meanings of the term 中庸, both ancient and modern. The term has four main meanings, including:

1) average, mediocre; simple, primitive, retail.

“才能不及中庸。”（《过秦论》）[1, 3991]

“Ability will not be mediocre.”

2) The "golden mean" moral ideology of Confucianism. In this case, “中” zhong means neutrality, impartiality, and “庸” yong means simple, ordinary, applied.

“中庸之为德也，其至矣乎！民鲜久矣。”

“Keeping the golden mean is one of the best qualities and should be the highest among the qualities! "Unfortunately, people have not had this quality for a long time." [2, 37]

3) It is considered one of the sacred books of Confucianism and was originally part of the work 《礼记》. Traditionally known as belonging to the pen of Zisi [3]. During the reign of the Southern Sun Dynasty [4], the work was separated from 《礼记》 and included in the 《四书》 (“Four Collection”) collection, along with the philosophical works 《大学》, 《论语》, 《孟子》. The work is distinguished by its thematic diversity and complex composition.

4) It is the idea of the "golden mean" put forward by Aristotle [5].

## Discussion

In the work 《说文解字》 there are comments on “中 – wise, fair”, “庸 – to apply”. This means managing the interaction in the course of events on the basis of a fair (correct) principle [6, 1].

中庸 is also called “中道”, “中行” means “not to rise too high” and “not to fall too high”, as well as harmony, compromise, balance between the two opposite poles [7, 99]. In order to understand the meaning of this term in the teachings of Confucius, we consider it appropriate to cite as an example a few verses quoted in Lunyu.

“吾有知乎哉？无知也。有鄙夫问于我，空空如也。我叩其两端而竭焉。”

“Do I have knowledge? In fact, no. If a villager asks me a question, even if I know nothing about his question, I can look at the question from two aspects and tell him the answer.” [8, 54]. Here “两端” – these are exactly two aspects of the event, i.e. the beginning and the end, they have different, contradictory and opposite meanings. That is why Confucius promotes “允执厥中”, i.e. “to maintain reasonable moderation with sincerity” [9, 137] – the idea of the golden mean.

“尧曰：‘咨！尔舜！天之历数在尔躬。允执厥中。四海困穷，天禄永终。’”

“Yao said: T-t! Shun-a! According to the order established by heaven, the emperor's place fell on your side. Sincerely keep that reasonable moderation. If the people of the world fall into poverty, the career that heaven has given you will be annulled for a lifetime.” [9, 137]. Here the word “中” is “过” - exaggeration and “不及” – is the middle of inferior. Confucius also spoke of “exaggeration” and “inferior” in Chapter 11 of Analects.

“子贡问：‘师与商也孰贤？’子曰：‘师也过，商也不及。’曰：‘然则师愈与？’子曰：‘过犹不及。’”

“Zigong asked, "Which of them is better, Zijang or Zisya?" Confucius said, "Zijang exaggerates when he does work. Zisya doesn't have time to do it." Zigong said, "Then when is Zijang better?" Confucius said, "To exaggerate and not to be in time are bad the same" [10, 69].

Confucius's expressions with this meaning can be found in many other places in Lunyuy.

“君子惠而不费，劳而不怨，欲而不贪，泰而不骄，威而不猛。”

“A perfect man should not spend money for the benefit of the people. Encouraging people to work, but not to make them feel hatred for themselves. Striving for humanity and duty, but not for wealth and benefit. Nature is heavily tempered, but should not be arrogant. Be tough, but don't be cruel” [11, 139].

## Results

In the meantime, we have decided to review the definitions of this term in Confucian 《中庸》 ("The Golden Mean"). 《中庸》 ("Golden Middle") was originally a part of 《礼记》 ("The Book of Rites", "Memorandum of Ethics") [12]. This work is believed to have been written by Zisi, the grandson of Confucius. According to the "Confucius Family" section of the "Historical Records" [13], Confucius' son's name was Kong Li (Boyu) and Kong Li's son's name was Kong Fan (Zisi). After Confucius died, the Confucians split into eight streams. Zisi was one of those streams. Syunzi brought Zisi and Mengzi into a stream. Judging by the relationship between the schools, Zisi was educated by Zengzi, one of Confucius' proudest students. Mengzi was educated by Zisi. Future generations honored Zisi and called him a "wise storyteller". In order to gain a deeper understanding of the philosophical meaning of the term "golden mean", here are some translations of Confucianism from the "Golden Middle".

### Chapter 1

Man's natural innate ability is called “性” (nature). Acting in accordance with this nature is called “道” (way). The pursuit of perfection based on the principles of this path is called “教” (doctrine).

Way can't be left out for a second. If it can be left, then it is not the “way”. That is why a person of high morals takes care of himself even in a place where others do not see him. He stays awake even in a place where others cannot hear him. The more hidden the space, the more transparent it will be, the more insignificant the place, the more conspicuous it will be. Therefore, a person of high morals is careful even when he is alone.

When there is no joy, anger or delight grief on the face, it is called "moderation". It is called "conformity" if it conforms to the rule when it is displayed. "Moderation" is the nature of all human beings. "Compliance" is a universal principle. Reaching the limit of the "golden mean" will allow each of the heavens and the earth to take their place, and will create good conditions for all beings to multiply and grow.

### Chapter 2

The Master (Confucius) said, “A virtuous person follows the golden mean. The poor man does not follow the golden mean. The noble man's adherence to the golden mean is that he can always act in moderation. He does not go beyond the norm and does not stay. The fact that a poor person goes against the golden mean is that he is not afraid of anything and does not suffer from anything”.

### Chapter 3

The Master said, “The golden mean should be the highest among the virtues! "Unfortunately, people lacked it.”

### Chapter 4

The Master said, “I now know the reason why the golden mean cannot be realized: the wise man is overconfident, he knows too much. The fool, on the other hand, is mentally retarded and cannot understand it. I now know the reason why the golden mean path cannot be developed: the wise and the gifted will exaggerate it. And the incompetent cannot do it at all. Whoever eats and drinks every day. But those who can really tell the taste of food and drink are in the minority.

### Chapter 5

The Master said, "This is impossible way!"

## Chapter 6

The Master said, “Shun [14] is indeed a great sage! He liked to ask people questions. He was also adept at analyzing the content of others’ speech. He hid the negative aspects of people and praised the positive aspects. The idea of exaggeration and immaturity of these two opposing frontiers, which he had already mastered, was applied to the people. That’s what made him Shun.”

## Chapter 7

The Master said, “All men think they are wise, but they do not know how to escape when they are trapped. “Everyone thinks they’re smart, but they can’t keep the golden mean for a month.”

## Chapter 8

The teacher said, “Yan Hui is a man who has chosen the golden mean path and achieved his advantages. He embraced her and never let her go.”

## Chapter 9

The Master said, “It is possible to rule the Underworld (China). The title fee can be waived. A sharp razor can pass the blade. But the golden mean is not easy to follow.”

## Chapter 10

Zilu [15] asked what is the determination. The Master said, “The determination of the South? The determination of the North? Or the determination you think? If I teach people with kindness and treatment, if they don’t respond to me with arrogance, that is the determination of the south. A man of high morals has just such determination. It is the determination of the north not to sleep with arms and armor as a pillow and not to regret even death. A brave and militant man will have such determination. So, if he treats people with compromise, if he does not blindly follow others, that is true determination! If he stays neutral and doesn’t lean sideways, that’s real determination! If the country does not change its goals on the wrong path, this is real determination! It is a real determination if the country adheres to the moral purity when it deviates from the right path and does not change it to the last breath!”

## Chapter 11

The Master said, “They gain fame by doing foolish things in search of truth. The next generation will probably praise him, end his life story. But I can never do that. Some morally upright people act in accordance with the golden mean. But halfway through, they can’t give it up and hold it tight. But I will never stop. A truly perfect man follows the golden mean. Although he spends his whole life in ignorance, unknown to anyone, he does not regret it. Only a wise man can do that.”

## Chapter 12

The path of the perfect man is very wide and at the same time very perfect. Although they are ordinary male and female uncles, they can know the path of the perfect man. But there are aspects of this path that the highest and deepest boundaries cannot be understood in detail even by a sage. While the worldview of an ordinary man and woman is average, they can apply the path of a perfect man to life. But at the highest and deepest boundary of this path, there are edges that even a sage cannot accomplish. No matter how big the face of the world, people will not be satisfied. Therefore, if we talk about the essence of the path of the perfect man, there is nothing greater in the world that can hold this path on its shoulders. There is nothing in the world smaller than this path that can penetrate the path of the perfect man. There are verses in the Collection of Poems: “The hawk flies in the sky, the fish jumps into the pool.” These words clearly indicate the content above and below. The path of the perfect man derives its beginning from the ordinary man and woman, reaching up to the sky above, reaching down to the ground below.

## Chapter 13

The Master said, “The right path does not take away from human life. If a person follows the wrong path and stays away from human life, he will not be able to apply such a path to life.”

The collection of poems contains the following verses: “To cut a tree for an ax, to cut a tree for an ax. The ax in hand is close to the pattern for the stalk.” It can be said that there is no difference between them when cutting the handle for the ax while holding the handle of the ax in hand. But if you take your eyes off it, you can feel the size of the difference. That is why the perfect man governs people with personal truth.

When a person practices loyalty and tolerance, he does not deviate from the right path. What is loyalty and tolerance? What you don't like about yourself, don't like others.

There are four aspects to the path of the perfect man. Even I, Confucius, could not do in one of them: as a son, I could not do what a father should do; as a citizen I could not do what was necessary for a ruler; as a brother I could not do what my brother had to do; as a friend I couldn't do what I had to do before. There are some drawbacks to putting the average quality into practice and always sticking strictly to the word average. It is not to dare to be diligent, nor is it to dare to be too diligent. How can such a perfect person be conscientious if his words are in accordance with his deeds and his deeds are in accordance with his words?”

## Chapter 14

A perfect man is satisfied with doing the necessary work based on his current social status. He is not envious of things that do not relate to his social status.

## Conclusion

From the above, we can see that Confucius proved that his idea of the "golden mean" was of great importance not only for the ruling class, but also for the benefit of the people, as well as maintaining the path of balance in all areas and compromise will lead to peace, prosperity. According to his sayings, a man in the position of a rich man does what is necessary for a rich man; the poor man does what is necessary for the poor man; the extraordinary person does the work necessary for the extraordinary; the one left in distress will do what is necessary for the unfortunate. A perfect person feels at ease no matter what the situation.

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2. 《论语》 (“Analects”). 山东曲阜, 1985年./ “雍也” (“As for Yong”). p. 37, Chapter 29.
3. 子思 – Zisi (483-402 BC) was a descendant of Confucius.
4. 南宋 (Nan Song) – The reign of the Southern Sun dynasty lasted from 1127 to 1279.
5. Aristotle (384-322 BC) was an ancient Greek philosopher and encyclopedic scientist.
6. 《中华儒学精华画集》·《中庸》 (“A collection of Chinese Confucian paintings, the book “Golden Mean”). – 吉林: 吉林文史出版社, 1994 y. p.1.

7. 《哲学辞典》 (“Dictionary of Philosophy”). –吉林: 吉林人民出版社, 1985 y. p. 99.
8. 《论语》 (“Analects”). 山东曲阜, 1985 年./ “子罕” (“The master is rare”). p. 54, Chapter 8.
9. 《论语》 (“Analects”). 山东曲阜, 1985 年./ “尧曰” (“Yao says”). p. 137, Chapter 1.
10. 《论语》 (“Analects”). 山东曲阜, 1985 y./ “先进” (“Learn first”). p. 69, Chapter 16.
11. 《论语》 (“Analects”). 山东曲阜, 1985 年./ “尧曰” (“Yao says”). p. 139, Chapter 2.
12. 《礼记》 “The Book of Rites”, “Memorandum of Ethics” - m.a. It was formed by the second and third generation disciples of Confucius in the 4th-1st centuries. Since the collection consists of 19 chapters, each section belongs to a different author. In general, the play depicts a perfect Confucian model of the social mechanism. It reflects the basis of political administration, the nomenclature of officials and departments, the protocol from ceremonial procedures to the norms of interaction within the family and the rituals, customs, and more precisely, mourning rituals in the main life situations.
13. 《史记》 " Historical Records " – Written by Sima Qian (司马迁 145-87 y. BC), a historian of the Han dynasty in the 2nd-1st centuries. The work covers the semi-authentic, semi-mythical period of antiquity - the period from the reign of the legendary Huangdi (黄帝 – 3rd millennium BC) to Han Udi (汉武帝 140-87y BC). The play depicts historical events in the fields of politics, economics and culture.
14. Shun (舜) (XXIII century BC) - one of the ancient Chinese legendary heroes. The legendary ruler of China, Yao (尧), handed over power to Shu, famous for his good qualities. Shun, in turn, gave power not to his son Shang, but to the generous Yu (禹). Confucius considered Yao, Shun and Yu to be perfect human beings and exemplary rulers.
15. Zilu 子路 (Zhilu) or 仲由 (Zhong You) (542-480 BC) was from the Lu principality and one of the four authentic disciples of Confucius.
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