

# ***Zhong* 中 and Ideal Rulership in the *Baoxun* 保訓 (Instructions for Preservation) Text of the Tsinghua Collection of Bamboo Slip Manuscripts**

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**Abstract** *Zhong* 中 (variously translated as “middle,” “center,” “centrality,” “the mean,” and “equilibrium”) is an important notion in early Chinese thought. This essay offers a brief survey of the possible connotations of *zhong* found in the *Baoxun* 保訓 (Instructions for Preservation) text of the Tsinghua University’s Collection of bamboo manuscripts of the Warring States period (475–221 BCE). By making a preliminary textual analysis and philosophical interpretation of the concept of *zhong* in relation to ideal rulership as presented in this newly discovered ancient text it is hoped that it will shed some light on the continuing debate on the notion of *zhong* in early Chinese thought.

**Keywords** *Zhong* 中 · Rulership · Early Chinese thought · *Qinghuajian* 清華簡 · Warring States bamboo slip texts

## **1 Introduction**

The concept of *zhong* 中 is discussed in such ancient Chinese texts as the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*Doctrine of the Mean*)<sup>1</sup> and the *Shangshu* 尚書 (*Book of Documents*). Apart from the

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<sup>1</sup>The *Zhongyong* was selected by the Song (960–1279 CE) Neo-Confucian scholar ZHU Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200 CE) as one of the Four Books (*Sishu* 四書). The text is traditionally attributed to Zisi 子思 (KONG Ji 孔伋) (483–402 BCE), Confucius’s grandson, though the Qing (1644–1911 CE) scholar CUI Shu 崔述 (1740–1816 CE) doubted this, giving linguistic evidence for his opinion (Cui 1983: 398). There are different scholarly interpretations of the term “*zhongyong*.” Han scholars such as ZHENG Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200 CE) believed that “*zhong*” means “harmony” and “*yong*” means “to put into practice” or “to manifest,” which makes the title *Zhongyong* the “practice of the principle of harmony” (Zheng 1999: 1422); others, particularly such Song philosophers as CHENG Yi 程頤 (1033–1107 CE) and ZHU Xi, suggested that the meaning of “*zhong*” can be rendered as “the middle,” “the center,” “the mean”, or “leaning neither one way or another,” and that “*yong*” means “that which is constant, admitting of no change” (Zhu 1987: 1).

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*Zhongyong*, the term also appears in the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Confucian Analects*), in which Confucius affirms that the virtue embodied in the *zhongyong* is of the highest order. However, he did not elaborate on the term (*Analects* 6.29 in Lau 1992b: 53). More often than not, the term *zhongyong* or *zhong* has been translated as “the mean” or “the middle way [between two extremes].”<sup>2</sup> While this understanding of *zhong* is justified in the sense that restraint should be exercised in the attaining of objectivity, sincerity, and propriety, one should nevertheless be cautious of the possible incompleteness or even misrepresentation of the translation, through being unaware of the essential and yet complex and rich meanings of the character. Recently discovered ancient texts may help us to reflect upon this issue and reconstruct the possible meanings of the key notions in Chinese thought.

This essay is a textual study of the ancient bamboo manuscript of *Baoxun* 保訓 (Instructions for Preservation) discovered in 2008, in an attempt to provide a preliminary philosophical reading of ideal rulership found in the *Baoxun* bamboo manuscript.<sup>3</sup> In so doing it is hoped that some light could be shed on the continuing debate on the notion of *zhong* or “centrality” in early Chinese thought. The Chu bamboo corpus, of which the *Baoxun* text forms part, were acquired by Tsinghua University of Beijing, PRC, in July 2008. While its provenance is uncertain, it has been identified by scholars as ancient Chu scripts dateable to the mid to late Warring States (475-221 BCE).<sup>4</sup> Examining the concept of *zhong* in the *Baoxun* text will aid our understanding of the attitude of the author(s) toward this concept and thus the tendencies, if not the original qualities, of their ideas. It will also help us reconstruct the evolution of the concept of *zhong* in the Warring States period, to which the excavated bamboo texts have been dated.

The text is inscribed on 11 strips, each holding 22 to 24 characters.<sup>5</sup> The second strip is damaged, and the top half is missing. The average length of the strips is about 28.8 cm long. The thematic title *Baoxun* does not come with the text but has been adopted by scholars taking two characters from the first sentence of the text (see Li 2009). The admonitory style of speech in which the *Baoxun* text was narrated is a

<sup>2</sup> D.C. Lau used “the mean” (Lau 1992b: 53); James Legge had “the constant mean” (Legge 1994a: 194); Simon Leys translated it as “the middle way” (Leys 1997: 28). Other translations for “*zhongyong*” include “the middle use” (Waley 1971: 122), the “unwobbling pivot” or “pivot” (Pound 1951: 97), “centrality and commonality” (Tu 1976), and “focusing the familiar” (Ames and Hall 2001: 90). Like many Chinese terms that have multiple meanings and connotations, and for which it is difficult to find an English equivalent, the title “Doctrine of the Mean” commonly used in the English translation may not do full justice to the content of the text.

<sup>3</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, the transcription of the text is based on “Transcribed Text of the ‘Baoxun’ in the Tsinghua University Collection of the Warring States Bamboo Slip Manuscripts” (清華大學藏戰國竹簡〈保訓〉釋文), Tsinghua University’s Center for Research and Conservation of the Excavated Texts 清華大學出土文獻研究與保護中心, published in *Wenwu* 2009: 73-78.

<sup>4</sup> There are 2,388 bamboo slips comprising about 63 different texts, in the collection. Due to the enormous number of slips and the nature of the manuscripts, and to the fact that the slips have become separated from one another, it will take years to complete the task of joining, sequencing, and transcribing the whole collection. For these reasons it is not yet possible to make a comprehensive study of the content of the texts. Nevertheless, many remarkable observations and discoveries have been made since the process of cleaning and conserving the bamboo slips began in Tsinghua University’s Center for Research and Conservation of Excavated Texts. So far, nine texts have been read and identified, and preliminary titles have been assigned to these texts: *Yin’zhi* 尹至, *Yin’gao* 尹誥, *Chengwu* 程寤, *Baoxun* 保訓, *Qiyè* 耆夜, *Jinteng* 金滕, *Huangmen* 皇門, *Jigong* 祭公 and *Chuju* 楚居. See Li 2009 and Li 2010: 51-57.

<sup>5</sup> Some use the title *Baoxun* 寶訓 (Precious Admonition).

close parallel to that of *Shangshu*.<sup>6</sup> The manuscript is purported to be a record of a deathbed admonition by King Wen 文 of Zhou (1152?-1056? BCE) addressing his son and heir, Prince Fa 發, who later succeeded him to the throne as King Wu 武 (1087?-1043? BCE).<sup>7</sup>

## 2 The *Baoxun* Text in Chinese and its English Translation

As the basis of further discussion, I will translate the *Baoxun* text into English as follows (the number at the end of a passage represents the slip number and the sign □ denotes possible missing words). I will analyze the concept of *zhong* in the manuscript as we turn to the discussion of what *zhong* means in a broader context, and how well it corresponds with *zhong* in other sources such as the *Shangshu*. To make my discussion more coherent I will leave most references to other texts in the footnotes.

佳王五十年，不瘳，王念日之多鬲(歷)，恐墜保訓。……戊子，自贖。己丑，昧 1  
 [爽]，□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□，[王]若曰：發，朕疾适甚，恐不汝及 2  
 訓。昔前代(?)傳保，必受之以詞。今朕疾允病，恐弗念終，汝以書 3  
 受之。欽哉，勿淫！昔舜舊(久)作小人，親耕於歷丘，恐求中，自稽厥志，4  
 不違於庶萬姓之多欲。厥有施於上下遠邇，迺易立(位)設稽測，5  
 陰陽之物，咸順不擾。舜既得中，言不易實變名，身茲備惟 6  
 允，翼翼不懈，用作三降之德。帝堯嘉之，用受厥緒。嗚呼！發，祗之 7  
 哉！昔微假中於河，以復有易，有易服厥罪。微無害，迺歸中於河。 8  
 微志弗忘，傳貽子孫，至於成湯。祗服不懈，用受大命。嗚呼！發，敬哉！ 9  
 朕聞茲不舊(久)，命未有所延。今汝祗服毋懈，其有所由矣。不 10  
 及爾身受大命，敬哉，毋淫！日不足，惟宿不業(祥)。 11

It was the 50th year of the King's reign. Having not recovered from illness, the King, thinking that many days had passed, feared that the Instructions for Preservation would fall to the ground [without fulfillment]. On the day *maozi*, he washed his face.<sup>9</sup> On the

<sup>6</sup> The *Shangshu* is divided into "New Text" (*Jinwen* 今文) and "Old Text" (*Guwen* 古文). It is generally accepted that the chapters from the former are authentic and the chapters from the "Old Text" were forgeries from the early fourth century CE.

<sup>7</sup> While it has been suggested that the Tsinghua collection of the bamboo manuscripts is dated to the Warring States period, it is not within the scope of this essay to determine whether or not the text is the historical record of the original words of King Wen of the early Zhou. It is possible that the words have been handed down and edited to their present form. Likewise, scholars in China such as JIANG Guanghui 姜廣輝 are skeptical about the authenticity of this text as a genuine record of King Wen's words (JIANG 2009). Taking into consideration the background against which the current slip manuscript texts were dated, one may suggest that the advice on rulership from the founder of the Zhou to the future king is probably used to serve as a moral argument to the state ruler(s) from the composer(s) of the manuscripts, because in the Warring States period, the various states were struggling to establish a centralized administrative structure through the incorporation of alien lands and communities. The themes of historical change, of struggle and political strategies, were the central themes for the thinkers of this period. King Wen's speech thus could be an example of using historical events and a revered past for didactic purposes. But again, this deserves further discussion in future studies of early Chinese texts.

<sup>8</sup> I follow the reading of "迺易位迺稽測，陰陽之物咸順不擾" (Liao and Chan 2010: 5-13).

<sup>9</sup> The king's washing his face was a preparatory ritual before declaring his testament.

day *yichou* at dawn ... the King spoke thus: “Fa [personal name of the Prince], I am severely ill and I fear that I will not be able to pass on to you my instructions. In the past, when former kings set out their charges for Preservation (of the Mandate) they would do it with ceremonies connected with the publication of the exhortation (in the presence of the various administrative heads). Now my illness is very serious and I worry that [you] will not think of bringing your work to a (good) end.<sup>10</sup> Please receive my instructions by writing them down. Be reverent; guard against all excessiveness. Long ago, Shun was originally a commoner, and tilled the soil at Mount Liqiu. Anxiously, he sought *zhong*; he examined his intention, and did not depart from the many desires of the common multitude; and he was able to bestow his kind mercy on all, high and low, far and near. Thus his position was changed (that is, he was exalted), through which he constituted laws and regulations for examination.<sup>11</sup> All things, *yin* and *yang* were put in harmony and did not cause disruption.<sup>12</sup> Having attained *zhong*, Shun, through his words, accorded with the actualities of things and their names. He himself observed the [principle] with earnestness. Persistently and consistently,<sup>13</sup> he thereby brought into being the virtue of Sanxiang.<sup>14</sup> Emperor Yao approved of him, and passed to him his unfinished task (that is, his throne). Oh, Fa, simply take him (that is, Shun) as your example!

Long ago, Wei brought [the principle of] *zhong* in He to its highest level by which the Youyi tribe was instructed. The Youyi tribe accepted his punishment. Wei did not harm them and (the whole area of) He was brought to [the practice of] *zhong*.

<sup>10</sup> *Zhong* 終 means “good end” or “happy consummation.” For example, in the *Shangshu*, “Yueming Shang 說命上” (Charge to Yue I): “Oh! Respect this charge of mine; so shall you bring your work to a (good) end” (Legge 1994b: 253). In another book of *Shangshu* “Tang Gao 湯誥” (The Announcement of Tang): “Oh! let us attain to be sincere in these things, and so we shall likewise have a happy consummation” (Legge 1994b: 190).

<sup>11</sup> “迺易位(立)” probably refers to Shun being given the various charges by Yao for which he had fulfilled all of his duties and was eventually given the imperial throne. See *Shangshu*: “Shundian 舜典” (The Canon of Shun) (Legge 1994b: 29).

<sup>12</sup> The words *xianshun* 咸順 (all in harmony) also appear in *Yizhoushu* 逸周書 (*Lost Book of Zhou*): “In order that the whole nation can be harmonious, it first needs to cultivate a sense of respect, respect grows from deference, and deference grows from propriety. If a ruler cannot make this happen he would not be able to enjoy eternal prosperity” (Lau 1993b: 16; my translation).

<sup>13</sup> In the “Canon of Shun” in the *Shangshu*: “I appoint you to be the Minister of Communications. Early and late give forth my orders and report to me, seeing that everything is true” (Legge 1994b: 49), and the *Yizhoushu*: “Be respectful day and night, do not fight with one another, be fair and be submissive, keep to good company and stay away from bad company” (Lau 1993b: 16; my translation).

<sup>14</sup> It is not clear what “*sanxiang zhi de* 三降之德” means, although the term “*sande* 三德” has appeared in the early texts. In “Hong Fan 洪範” (The Great Plan) of the *Shangshu*: the three kinds of virtues are as follows: the first is uprightness, the second is firmness and the third is mildness (Legge 1994b: 333); in the *Senior Dao’s Book of Rites*: The Master said, “There is the virtue of Heaven, the virtue of Earth and the virtue of Man. These are called the three virtues” (Lau 1992a: 243). The *Shangshu* mentions Shun’s appointing Boyi 伯夷, Boyu 伯禹, and Houji 后稷 to look after the common people in three different areas, as recorded in the “Lúxing 呂刑” chapter: “And he charged the three chiefs to labour with compassionate anxiety in the people’s behalf. The baron E delivered the statutes of ceremony, to prevent the people from rendering themselves obnoxious to punishment. Yu reduced to order the water and the land, distinguishing by name the hills and rivers. Tseih spread abroad a knowledge of husbandry, so that the people could largely cultivate the admirable grains” (Legge 1994b: 595). There is also a text named “*Sande* 三德” in the Shanghai Museum Collection, dated to the Warring States period, in which the *sande* refers to the virtue of Heaven, Earth and Man (Ma 2005).

Wei's aspiration had not been forgotten and was transmitted to his descendants, as far as Cheng Tang, whereupon Tang came to rule all under Heaven. He was ever cautious and diligent so as to receive the Great (Heavenly) Mandate. Oh, Fa, be reverent! I know from now on, my own life will not be extended. You will have to follow [my instruction] with reverence and diligence. This is the only course that can be followed. I will not be able to see the day when you receive the Mandate. Be reverently attentive, guard against all excessiveness. There is not much time left. Wasting time in idle discourse will only bring misfortune!"<sup>15</sup>

As mentioned, the title given to the text is taken from the first line. The word *bao* 保 appears frequently in early literature. According to renowned palaeographer TANG Lan 唐蘭 (1901-1979), the archaic form of *bao* is a graphical depiction of a person "carrying a child on the back"; thus, etymologically the graph denotes "protection, nurture, and care for (a child)" (Qiu 1999: 164, Tang 1981: 58-59).<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the word has an extended meaning in many early texts to describe a ruler's responsibility of caring for the people in response to their desire for peace and harmony, in order to preserve the Mandate of Heaven.<sup>17</sup> *Xun* 訓, on the other hand, is one of the six literary styles used in the *Shangshu*, including *Dian* 典 (canon), *Mo* 謨 (counsel), *Xun* 訓 (instructions), *Gao* 誥 (announcement), *Shi* 誓 (declaration), and *Ming* 命 (assignment). *Xun*, as records of the instruction or advice of a king or senior official given to the new heir or successor to the throne, normally starts with the date(s) when the instructions are given. The text is normally made up of the presumed original words of the "instructor," who may be the king. In the *Baoxun* as King Wen reflected on the

<sup>15</sup> My own translation.

<sup>16</sup> This meaning appears in the following sentence from "Shaogao 召誥" (The Announcement of the Duke of Shao) in the *Shangshu*, a chapter attributed to the time of King Cheng (r.1042/35-1006 BCE): "The poor people, bearing their children on their backs and in their arms and leading their wives by the hand, cried out to Heaven" (Legge 1994b: 426; translation modified).

<sup>17</sup> According to the early Zhou ideology as found in the later chapters of the *Shangshu*, protecting and nurturing his subject people is what gives the ruler legitimacy. In the genuine chapters of the *Shangshu*, the "Wuyi 無逸" (Against Luxurious Ease) chapter describes King Wen as a king who cherished and protected his subject people and enjoyed 50 years on the throne: King Wen, dressed in simple, unadorned clothes, worked at ensuring peace and tranquility and took part in husbandry. Admirably mild and extraordinarily humble, he cherished and protected the ordinary people, and showed a kindly concern for widowers and widows. From morning till mid-day, and from mid-day till sundown, he did not allow himself the leisure of eating; thus he sought to secure the great harmony of the masses of his people. King Wen did not dare to indulge in excesses when it came to his excursions or his hunting, and from the various states he would receive only the correct amount of contribution. The appointment (of Heaven) came to him in the middle of his life, and he enjoyed the throne for 50 years (see Legge 1994b: 460-470). For example, in "Zhonghui Zhi Gao 仲虺之誥" (The Announcement of Zhonghui), which is considered to be a forged chapter of the *Shangshu*, it is said that "to revere and honour the path prescribed by Heaven is the way to preserve the favouring appointment of Heaven" (Legge 1994b: 183; translation modified). Conversely, "*zhui* 墮" generally means either "the people fell into disorder" ("Zhonghui Zhi Gao in Legge 1994b: 178) and/or "the Mandate of Heaven falls to the ground" as in "Jin Teng 金縢" ("The Metal-bound Coffer in Legge 1994b: 355). "Jin Teng" is generally regarded as a later creation, though it has been attributed to the time of King Wu (r.1045-1043 BCE). "Jiu Gao 酒誥" (The Announcement about Drunkenness) and "Shao Gao 召誥" (The Announcement of the Duke of Shao) are both genuine chapters from the reign of King Cheng. Throughout this essay, I have mainly used James Legge's translation for the *Shangshu* as well as other early texts, including the *Shijing* (*Book of Poetry*), and D.C. Lau's translation of the *Analects* and the *Mencius*. I have modified the translations where necessary as indicated.

exemplary sage kings before him, he issued his instructions to Prince Fa on how to uphold the Mandate conferred by Heaven on the Zhou.<sup>18</sup>

In his instructions to the Prince, the king refers to the notion of *zhong*, rendering as centrality, through stories of the historical sage king Shun 舜 and the Shang 商 ancestor Wei 微. He goes on to state that Wei subsequently transmitted *zhong* to his descendants, as far as Chengtang 成湯 (1675-1646 BCE), who came to rule all under heaven successfully. The theme of admonition is that in order to receive and preserve the Mandate of Heaven, the ruler and heir alike need to attain the principle of harmony and appropriateness. I will argue that *zhong* is a word of multiple meanings, but essentially it denotes complete virtue and a ruling principle that defines a ruler's authoritative personhood, which in turn will enable him to occupy the *zhong* (central) position, the center of authority.

### 3 *Zhong* and Ideal Rulership in the *Baoxun* Text

In the *Baoxun* text, the character *zhong* is written as 中.<sup>19</sup> In the first place, *zhong* was sought (*qiu* 求) by Shun:

Long ago, Shun was originally a commoner, and tilled the soil at Mount Liqiu. Anxiously, he sought *zhong* (昔舜舊(久)作小人, 親耕於歷丘, 恐求中). (*Baoxun* strip 4)

In the quotation above, *zhong* is the direct object of “seeking after” or “pursuing” (*qiu* 求). While it is not clear from this particular sentence what *zhong* refers to, we have Shun, who was said to have been cautious and diligent in attaining “*zhong*,” by cultivating his own mind in order to concentrate all attention and commitment (*zhi* 志) on the desired outcome:

[he himself] examined his intention (自稽厥志). (*Baoxun* strip 4)

<sup>18</sup> The *Yizhoushu*'s “Wenjing 文敬” records an event when King Wen was exceedingly anxious and concerned about the loss of *bao*, the preservation of the offerings of later generations, and called in Prince Fa on the day of *gengchen* to give him instructions (Lau 1993b: 10). If the record is correct, we at least could suggest that giving instruction to his future heir on how to preserve the Mandate of Heaven had always been King Wen's agenda. While the date of the *Yizhoushu* is hard to determine, it is agreed that the core chapters that include the “Wenjing” were already in existence by the third century BCE (Shaughnessy: 230). It is with the understanding of *bao* as “preserving the Mandate of Heaven” that I have translated the title “*Baoxun*” as the “Instructions for Preservation.”

<sup>19</sup> The question of what “*zhong* 中” refers to in this text is a subject of debate. Scholars from China have proposed different interpretations of the character *zhong* here. Some believe that it means a kind of document of jurisdiction, in particular when it comes to the story of Wei (Li 2009); others propose it means “*zhong* 眾” (the mass of common people) (Ziju 2009). Others like Li Xueqin tentatively suggest that *zhong* is an ideology meaning “the discourse of the mean” as in the Confucian Classic *Zhong Yong*, although no detailed argument in support of this proposal has been provided (Li 2009: 78). The major problem of the first two readings (that is, as a document of jurisdiction and a mass of common people) is that they cannot be taken as the definite readings for the whole text. To get a better understanding, it would be helpful to read *zhong* in relation to the rest of the text as well as making a comparison with the received texts. I will suggest that through the discourse of the concept of *zhong* from the Zhou King, the author/composer of the text presents a political ideology as to how to “receive the great Mandate” (*yong shou da ming* 用受大命) as in the original word of the *Baoxun* text.



*Zhong* is grasped through internal cultivation and introspection: *zhong* can only be achieved and attained when the actual process involves seeking or pursuing (*qiu* 求) it and making it a true target and commitment (*zhi* 志) as core principle in one's heart-mind, which ultimately serves as guidance for one's actions.<sup>20</sup> Composed with the radical heart 心 and the phonetic 止 (the ancient graph of *zhi* 之) meaning "foot," "to go," and "to stop," *zhi* is where the heart-mind tends, giving the meanings of "intent" and "purposiveness" (Chen 1951: 49). Significantly, the passage is about how the legendary sage king, Shun, who as a commoner of humble origin tilled the soil at Mount Liqiu (*Baoxun* strip 4), came to acquire *zhong* and, as the story moves on, eventually became a ruler. In this sense, *zhong* is about occupying a "central position" and, in Shun's case described in the *Baoxun* text, about how he, living in a remote (peripheral) area of Liqiu, attained a central position and become a ruler.

This meaning of *zhong* as symbolic of rulership goes back as early as the Shang (1766-1122 BCE) when *zhong* carried etymological implications in which it appears to be a symbol, namely, the flag that represents a group of related people and provides direction for their activities; it eventually came to incorporate a range of other notions, such as central guidance regulating the conduct and activities of the members of a tribe (be it at the level of the individual or the social organization, or in relation to the natural world). In his discussion of the character *zhong* as it appears in the Shang oracle bones, TANG Lan told us how *zhong* was conceived as a flagpole with the pole piecing through the flag, resembling a vexillum,<sup>21</sup>

The character *zhong* resembles a flag/vexillum .... It was originally a kind of clan flag with a blazonry. In ancient times when there was an important event, the flag was erected in the middle of an open area. Clansmen from every direction would assemble as soon as they saw the flag. The area where the *zhong* flag was erected had people coming together and was thus established as the central territory, that is, a capital city. (Tang 1981: 53-54)

According to this explanation, the flag and the place where it is erected play an important role in bringing together people belonging to the same clan, town, or city. It is also a significant symbol under which the military unit served and was closely defended in combat.<sup>22</sup> In other words, *zhong* is a semantic term containing abstract and symbolic meanings derived from the concrete object symbolized in its

<sup>20</sup> The phrase "*qiu**zhong*" cannot be found in existing early literature except for the "Sheyi 射義" (The Archer) of the *Liji*, in which the archer seeks to hit that he may decline the cup (*qiu**zhong* *yi* *chi* *jia* *ye* 求中以辭爵也) (Lau 1993a: 172). Here *zhong* means "hitting the bull's-eye." The meaning of "*qiu* 求" as "seeking what one aims for" can also be seen in the *Analects* 7.15: "They sought benevolence and got it. So why should they have any complaints?" (Lau 1992b: 61). On the other hand, *zhi* 志 has been frequently used in the early texts to show the importance of bending one's mind toward goals or what one pursues. In a recently discovered bamboo text, *Xing Zi Ming Chu* 性自命出 of the Guodian corpus, it is pointed out that "While all human beings possess *xing*, their heart/mind lack a fixed intention (*zhi* 志)," which affirms that the direction of the development of human nature depends on pre-commitment and on the attitude of the subject agent, and ultimately on repeated practice. Without a fixed purpose, the heart-mind is simply moved by external stimuli, becoming activated by pleasure or anticipated satisfaction (which can be morally positive or negative). For more detailed discussion see Chan: 361-382.

<sup>21</sup> The vexillum was a cloth banner hanging vertically from a horizontal edge, reminiscent of the shape of the object symbolized by the character *zhong* 中.

<sup>22</sup> The etymology of *zu* 族 in the archaic script is "clansmen fighting under the one flag" (Xu 1984: 424).

pictograph, just as a flag serves to identify and represent the values and beliefs that can unify a people.

*Zhong* is furthermore a relative term referring to the ruler's central position. TANG Lan's explanation continues:

The tribal head or the noble families always occupied the center of a territory surrounded by the rest of the people. This was the central land. The character *zhong* was originally derived from the pictograph of a flag. Since the place where the flag was erected was always in the center, later the character acquired the meaning of central, or the center of everything. (Tang 1981: 54)

If we follow Tang, before *zhong* became a general term referring to the center, it initially referred to the center of an area and more specifically to the place where a ruler resides, thus symbolizing the central power of a ruler or government.<sup>23</sup> Various ancient texts show that the early Zhou kings were preoccupied with instituting the central power of Zhou supported by the establishment of an administrative center of government strategically significant for military and political control of the central plain and the *sifang* 四方, that is, the different regions surrounding the central region; the Zhou kings performed sacrifices, issued orders, and later, received the feudal lords in the capital city or the central domain, which was of cosmological, religious, and symbolic importance. The *Shangshu* in chapters such as the "Zicai 梓材" (Timber of the Rottlera) records that it is from the capital in the central region that the Zhou king received the Mandate of Heaven to command the people living in all directions, with *zhongguo* 中國 referring to "the central domain."<sup>24</sup> In the *Shijing* 詩經 (*Book of Poetry*), "*zhongguo*" is mentioned as the central area in which the king resided in relation to the four quarters, *sifang*.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the inscriptions on the *Hezun* 何尊 bronze vessel of the Western Zhou are the earliest known literary record of the term "*zhongguo* 中或(國)" (the central state or central region) used as a reference to the administrative and socio-political center.<sup>26</sup> Inscribed on the vessel is a narrative concerning King Wu, who presented a sacrificial offering to Heaven after he conquered the Shang. In the *Hezun* inscription, King Wu declares that he has received the rank conferred by Heaven and plans to reside in the central state (region), and that he will continue to rule his people in the

<sup>23</sup> Xu Zhongshu 徐中舒 follows TANG Lan by pointing out that "establishing *zhong* enables (one) to bring together the populace" (Xu 1990: 40).

<sup>24</sup> "Great Heaven having given this central domain with its people and territories to the former kings, do you, our present sovereign, display your virtue?" (Legge 1994b: 418; translation modified); Legge had translated *zhongguo* 中國 as "the middle kingdom." However, *zhongguo* in this context means an established central state that served as the capital city commanding the four regions rather than "the middle kingdom" that imposes the meaning of "the center of the civilized world." I therefore have modified the translation.

<sup>25</sup> The *Book of Poetry*: "Let us cherish this centre of the state, to secure the repose of the four quarters of it" (*Shijing* Minlao in Legge 1994b: 495).

<sup>26</sup> This Zhou bronze wine vessel was discovered in the city of Baoji 寶雞, Shanxi, the interior of Zhou's homeland, in 1965. There are 122 characters inscribed on it. The inscription indicates that Zhou during King Wu's period was pre-occupied with moving toward the central region, which was politically and militarily strategic, and that CHENG Wang was involved in carrying on the project of constructing a new capital city, Chengzhou 成周 (Ma 1988: 14).



territories.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, wherever the term *zhong* means something concrete—that is, as flags (or as the erection of a flag), a central position or administrative center (or establishing a central government)—before or during the early Zhou, it relates to a symbolism of power, in particular to central rule and rulership.<sup>28</sup>

This relative concept of “center” can also be seen in the *Baoxun* text when Shun himself is being metaphorically portrayed, in the next sentence, as situated in the center of the cosmos and “able to bestow his kind mercy on all, high and low, far and near” (*Baoxun* strip 5). Let us examine *zhong* more closely in this context. The word “*xiaoren* 小人” carries a double connotation: it can mean a commoner or, in a Confucianized reading, it can refer to a petty man who is inferior in moral quality. In the first reading, *zhong* is something related to becoming a ruler (as opposed to being a commoner); and in the second reading of *xiaoren*, *zhong* should denote the moral qualities of an idealized personality (as opposed to a petty man).<sup>29</sup> In light of these two possible readings, we may trace the early development of the concept of *zhong* from the *Baoxun* text through the semantics of the character: from spatial central position to “centrality,” that is, the central position as a symbol of authoritative power (be it a flag or a ruler), and to the moral principles by which an idealized person (including the sage king) will abide by in order to become an authoritative person. Thus *zhong* not only means becoming an authoritative person but also denotes the principles or core values that Shun was seeking, and which define his exemplary leadership. I will show that this reading of *zhong* as both “becoming a ruler/ideal personality” and “possessing the principles/the way that define an ideal ruler” can be applied to the rest of the text as a coherent stretch of discourse.

As mentioned above, the passage seems to emphasize the process of attaining *zhong* in relation to *zhi* 志 (mindset, will, and determination). *Zhong* can only be achieved through self-examination and focusing attention on goal oriented activities. If *zhi* is an innate mental target then *zhong* would be the way we follow or the principle and

<sup>27</sup> The establishment of an administrative center and the occupation of the middle of the central plain is a political landmark of the Zhou. It is well known that before the establishment of the Zhou dynasty, the Zhou clan formed one of the vassal states of Shang living near the Rong 戎 and Di 狄 barbarians at a place called Bin 邠 near Shanxi. The Zhou fought constantly other clans in order to move eastward to the central plain. It was not until after the death of King Wen that his son King Wu finally defeated the Shang and became the first sovereign and ruler of Zhou. King Wen’s final wish was for his heir to establish a centralized government (in the geographical and socio-political sense) under Zhou rule, while expanding his control in the regions. Second, the valley of the Yellow River and its tributaries was regarded as the strategic base of the Shang and Zhou civilizations. In reading and understanding the text it seems useful to align it with the historical background as outlined above.

<sup>28</sup> In many of the pre-Qin early texts the character *zhong* has the following meanings: “innermost” (*Liji* “Wenwang Shizi 文王世子” in Lau 1993a: 56; *Shijing*: Gufeng, in Legge 1994c: 55), “middle, midst” (*Shijing*: Bo Zhou, in Legge 1994b: 73), “center” (*Shijing*: Minlao, see note 25), and, read in the departing tone, as a verb, “to hit (a bull’s-eye)” (*Liji*: Sheyi, in Lau 1993a: 170-172). Also see Ruan 1956: 2-3. Later, according to the *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字 (The Dictionary) compiled by Xu Shen 許慎 in the early 2nd century CE, *zhong* means “inner.” He then classifies the character under the “mouth” radical, combined with a vertical line down the center of the circle/mouth. He does not specify any further meaning (Xu 1985: 14).

<sup>29</sup> One may argue that the cherished ideals of cultivation are being read back into earlier materials, or we may assume that this is the intention of the composer(s) of these materials from the Warring States period. Again, I will not delve into this issue, although we need to be cautious here and not assume that the idea of “becoming a ruler through self-cultivation” was prevalent in early Zhou times.

action that we aim at in order to hit the target. In many early texts dated to the Warring States period, *zhong* was often discussed in terms of focusing attention in one's heart-mind. In "Pan Geng I," an early chapter of the *Shangshu*, these mental and physical activities are compared to an archer's focused intention to hit the target (*she* 射).<sup>30</sup> The reason for comparing the pursuit of a goal with the shooting skill of an archer is obvious. When shooting, aiming to hit the target accurately involves distance adjustment, correct form, the anchor point, focused intention, and last but not least, consistent practice, all of which depend on the perfection of the archer himself. This is what one must do in order to conduct oneself properly through self-examination.<sup>31</sup> In this sense, *zhong* 中 is an alternative character of *zhong* 忠, attached with the heart radical, meaning doing one's utmost, as expressed in the *Baoxun* in which Shun was described as "observing in earnest the principle, persistently, and consistently" (*Baoxun* strips 6 & 7).<sup>32</sup> In another passage relating *zhong* to *zhi*, the *Baoxun* reads, "Wei's aspiration had not been forgotten and was transmitted to his descendants" (*Baoxun* strip 9). In Wei's case, the intentional principle and aspiration was even remembered and passed on to his descendants, who obliged him to carry on his enterprise.

<sup>30</sup> It is said in the "Pan Geng I" chapter of the *Shangshu*: "I have announced to you the difficulties (of the intended movement), being bent on it, like an archer (whose only thought is the target)" (Legge 1994a, b, c: 231; modified). In the "Pan Geng" again, it is obvious that *zhong* is set in one's heart-mind and sometimes is a shared common interest and intention: "Oh! I have now told you my unchangeable purpose; perpetually respect (my) great anxiety; let us not get alienated and become distant from one another; share in my plans and thoughts, and think (only) of following me; let every one of you set up the true rule of conduct in his heart" (Legge 1994b: 241, modified). Again, one can put different interpretations on early material, and it is always a temptation to push cherished values anachronistically back into history, attributing them to people who might never have entertained them. For example, in this passage, while traditional interpretation and translation, in particular later (Confucian) commentators, will claim that *shezhong* 設中 means something like "set up the true rule of conduct," as translated by Legge, it may not have been the original meaning when "Pan Geng" was composed. *Shezhong* 設中 may have meant simply "establish (centrality) = balance."

<sup>31</sup> It shows that this sort of discussion can be more frequently found in late Warring States material. For example, in the *Liji*: "Archery is the way of benevolence. (The archer) seeks to be correct in himself, and then discharges his arrow. If it misses the mark, he is not angry with the one who has surpassed him, but turns around and seeks (the cause of failure) in himself" (Lau 1993a: 172; my translation). Also in the *Mencius* 2a7: "Benevolence is like archery: an archer makes sure his stance is correct before letting fly the arrow, and if he fails to hit the mark, he does not hold it against his victor. He simply seeks the cause within himself" (Lau 2003: 74-75). In the *Shangshu*, "Da Yu Mo 大禹謨" (Counsel of the Great Yu), a chapter that is probably forged, it is stated: "Yu was advised: The mind of man is precarious, prone (to err); its affinity to what is right is small. Be discriminating, be uniform (in the pursuit of what is right), so that you may sincerely hold fast to *zhong*" (Legge 1994b: 61, modified.) (Legge had again translated the word *zhong* in this passage as "the mean" which may well be justified in some sense, and yet the essential meaning, as I tend to understand it, is "correctness" or "rightness.") Like shooting, pursuing the goal involves both body and mind. As in the *Liji*: "Shooting means drawing out to the end, and some say lodging in the exact point. Drawing out to the end means every one unfolding his own idea; hence, with the mind in equanimity and the body correctly poised, (the archer) holds his bow and arrow skilfully and firmly. When he holds them so, he will hit the mark" (Lau 1993a: 170, my translation). RAO Zongyi 饒宗頤 has aptly connected *zhong* with *zhi* by relating to the connotation of the central pole: To set a goal and commit one's pursuit for the goal (*zhi* 志) is an essential step forward in carrying out a task or following a principle, the Way. This is like setting a flag pole in the center of one's heart to guide one's action (Rao 2000: 8-9).

<sup>32</sup> In parallel with the "Announcement about Drunkenness" in the *Shangshu*: "when you can maintain a constant, watchful examination of yourselves, and your conduct is in accordance with correct virtue, then you may present the offerings of sacrifice, and at the same time indulge yourselves in festivity" (Legge 1994b: 405, modified).

The question remains: what should one be targeting, or what is the intentionality of self cultivation within the context of rulership? Clearly, *zhong* is not a notion referring exclusively to inner realization in the sense of self-cultivation, but also to its outer manifestation. This notion of *zhong* as a guide to an individual's actions is extended to leadership in a state or territory, and derives from the emblematic character *zhong*. The *Baoxun* text states:

Anxiously, he [that is, Shun] sought *zhong*; he examined his intention and did not depart from the many desires of the common multitude; and he was able to bestow his kind mercy on all, high and low, far and near. Thus his position was changed (that is, he was exalted) through which he constituted laws and regulations for examination. All things, *yin* and *yang*, were put in complete harmony and did not cause disruption. (*Baoxun* strips 4, 5, & 6)

The above passage connects heeding the desires of the people with the consequence of receiving the award of the Mandate of Heaven by harmonizing and regulating the social order.<sup>33</sup> It affirms that Shun's position in the center is attained through bestowing kind mercy on all, the original words in the text being, "he was able to bestow his kind mercy on all, high and low, far and near" (*Baoxun* strip 5). In other words, *zhong* in this passage of the *Baoxun* text has been transformed into a philosophical term based on its earlier meaning derived from "flag": if the flag had the representative authority of gathering and uniting the mass of the people, this function is now fulfilled by the ruler or the subject himself; Shun's kindness—the radiating process of the moral efficacy of the ruler's or superior man's charismatic power—is displayed and extended farther outward so as to benefit all around him. The political implications of the narrative concerning Shun is that the intention of manifesting *zhong* is not only by rectifying his mind but also through setting up social institutions, regulations, and measurements,<sup>34</sup> the ruler's moral excellence which provides guidance to the people is the central source

<sup>33</sup> We can also see this in the "Zhonghui Zhi Gao" chapter of *Shangshu*: "Zhonghui made the following announcement: "Oh! Heaven gives birth to the people with *such* desires that without a ruler they must fall into all disorders; and Heaven again gives birth to the man of intelligence to regulate them. The sovereign of Xia had his virtue all-obsured, and the people were as if they had fallen amid mire and [burning] charcoal. Heaven hereupon gifted our king with valour and prudence, to serve as a leader of the myriad regions, and to continue the old ways of Yu. You are now only following the proper course, honouring and obeying the appointment of Heaven" (Legge 1994b: 178, modified).

<sup>34</sup> The affinity of the charismatic qualities of the ruler with the symbolic power of the flag is suggested not only in the received texts, but also in such recently discovered bamboo manuscripts as the "*Rong Cheng Shi* 容成氏" in the Shanghai Museum Collection of the Warring States Slip Texts, in which Yao "was made the Son of Heaven, setting himself up as leader in the center within a radius of 100 *li*." The "*Rong Cheng Shi*" in the Chu bamboo manuscripts contained in the Shanghai Museum Collections, also with similar dating to the *Baoxun* text, gives an example of the ancient sage king, Yao: "Long ago, Yao lived in the area between Danfu and Quelin. His bestowed kind mercy, even very slight, surpassed it when running against sun [His rule was lenient, but efficient]. Even without persuasion the people exerted themselves; even without punishment and execution there were no robbers or thieves; even without harsh rule, people submitted to him. Thereupon he was made the Son of Heaven, setting himself up as the leader in the center within an area of 100 *li*; in this way, he maintained a proper position. People from every direction flocked to him. Through harmonization and care, all people under heaven were attracted to him. His government ruled without reward; his officials worked without rank; even without applying pressure to the people, he ruled with order and without failure" (Ma 2002: 254-256; my translation).

drawing people around him. Thus Mandate of Heaven was passed onto Shun by Emperor Yao.

The second story concerns Wei. It is commonly accepted that Wei here refers to Shang's 商 high ancestor who is also known as Shangjia 上甲.<sup>35</sup> The records concerning Wei are rather scarce. With the discovery of the oracle bones and in conjunction with other texts such as the *Zhou Yi* 周易, *Shan Hai Jing* 山海經, and *Zhushu Ji'nian* 竹書紀年 (*The Bamboo Annals*), WANG Guowei 王國維 and other scholars have clarified some of the obscure historical record of Shang: The leader of the Shang people, WANG Hai 王亥, once led an ox cart to the Youyi area for trading but was killed by the Chief of the Youyi, MIAN Chen 綿臣. By coalescing with the River Lord (Hebo 河伯), SHANG Jia, WANG Hai's son, avenged MIAN Chen and defeated the Youyi.<sup>36</sup>

Based on Wei's expedition as recounted above, some Chinese scholars interpreted *zhong* in the two sentences in the *Baoxun*—微假中於河 and 歸中於河 (strip 8)—as a kind of document that Wei borrowed from the River Lord in order to justify his revenge against the Youyi tribe. The phrases *jiazhong* 假中 and *guizhong* 歸中 have led to the speculation that *zhong* is a thing or an object that SHANG Jia borrowed from He 河, the River Lord.<sup>37</sup> This reading tends to assume that the verb “*jia* 假” or “*gui* 歸” could only be connected with an actual object. However, it should be pointed out that “*jia*”<sup>38</sup> and “*gui*”<sup>39</sup> can

<sup>35</sup> See *Guoyu* 國語 (*The Discourse of the States*) (Lau 1999: 28).

<sup>36</sup> Apart from the *Shan Hai Jing* and the *Bamboo Annals*, other early materials such as “Tianwen 天問” in the *Chuci* 楚辭 also mention that Wei took revenge by attacking the Youyi tribe and killing MIAN Chen, the chief of Youyi, who had killed Wei's father WANG Hai. Also see Zhang 2008: 153. Whether the story of the Youyi tribe is relevant here or not, one possibility is that after Mianchen was executed, the Youyi tribe was then reconciled by Wei. If this is true, then *zhong* could be taken to mean that Wei later drew the tribe into his political orbit. Some scholars take He as Hebo 河伯, the prodigal demigod of the Yellow River. It is also probable that He could refer to the area around the Yellow River which is joined by various river branches between Shanxi, Shanxi and He'nan provinces, the region that was the socio-political center of the Shang and Zhou. The “Yugong 禹貢” (The Tribute of Yu) of the *Shangshu* has the following: “The Jing (mountain) and the He were (the boundaries of) YU Zhou. The Yi, the Luo, the Chan, and the Jian flowed into the He. The (marsh of) Rong-bo was confined within its proper limits. The (waters of that of) Ge were led into (the marsh of) Meng-zhu. The soil of this province was mellow; in the lower parts it was (in some places) rich, and (in others) dark and thin. Its fields were the highest of the middle grade; and its contribution of revenue was the average of the highest grade, with a proportion of the very highest. Its articles of tribute were varnish, hemp, fine cloth of dolichos fibre, and the boehmerea. The baskets were full of chequered silks, and of fine floss silk. Stones for polishing sounding-stones were rendered when required. They floated along the Luo, and so reached the He” (Legge 1994b: 99; translation modified).

<sup>37</sup> For example, Li Rui speculates that *zhong* here should be a document of jurisdiction to justify the war against the Youyi tribe (Li 2009).

<sup>38</sup> *Jia* 假 has the meaning of “to enlarge,” “to rectify,” “to follow,” and “to consolidate” (Zong 2003: 145). Also, *Hanyu Dacidian*, Vol. 1: 假, 嘉也。 Or 假, 大也 (“to excel” or “to enlarge”) (Luo 1997: 666-667). Also, *Erya* 爾雅: ... 假, 嘉也 (“to excel”) (Lau 1995: 20). The Character 歸 means “to turn toward to” or “to resume moral excellence” as in the *Analects* 20.11: “the hearts of all the common people will turn to you” (Lau 1992b: 200-201); in the “Questions of Yao 堯問” of *Xunzi*: “The gentleman delights in employing the Way and its Power so that he causes his people to turn to the Way as home” (Knoblock 1988: 267). Also in *Mencius* 1a6: “the people will turn to him like water flowing downwards with a tremendous force. Who can stop it?” (Lau 2003: 12-13). The *Analects* 19 also records what Zengzi says: “Conduct the funeral of your parents with meticulous care and let not sacrifices to your remote ancestors be forgotten, and the virtue of the common people will incline towards fullness” (Lau 1992b: 4-5).

<sup>39</sup> I have not come across the phrase of *guizhong* 歸中 in other texts. But a similar usage can be compared to “*guiren* 歸仁” as in the *Analects* 7.1: “If for a single day a man could return to the observance of the rites through overcoming himself, then the whole Empire would consider benevolence to be his” (Lau 1992b: 108-109).

respectively mean “to commend, by virtue of” and “to restore, to be attracted to.” Likewise, “he 河” could refer to the area around the Yellow River valley where both Shang and Zhou based their administrative and socio-political centers.<sup>40</sup> In this context, a possible reading is to take *zhong* as political aspiration or principle: Wei brought [the principle of] *zhong* in [the area of] He to its highest level, by which the Youyi tribe was instructed. The Youyi tribe accepted this punishment. Wei did not harm them and (the whole area of) He was restored to the practice of the principle of *zhong*.

As the core concept of the entire admonitory, discourse of *zhong* as the principles of ideal rulership collocates centrality with the harmonizing of things. The author’s jurisprudence in holding the ruler as the architect of the smooth operation of social institutions and the cosmic order is attested in the words “*buwei* 不違” (literally, not to contravene, not to repudiate or act contrary to) and “*xianshun burao* 咸順不擾” (all are managed so as to prosper without disruption). Harmony is to be achieved through satisfying the common people’s desires by ruling with humanity and providing care and regulations. As an ideal ruler, Shun represents the source of primordial order, responsible not only for social but also cosmic disciplines which are represented paradigmatically by *yin* and *yang*; his rule is the assertion that the world of man abides by the same rules as the world of nature and is structured by the same principles.<sup>41</sup> The ultimate function of social institutions is to bring harmony to all things between Heaven and Earth, in accordance to their natural characters so that all can coexist and endure.<sup>42</sup> Harmony is the source of all life and creativity; when things are harmonized, their nature and relationships with others are well defined and recognized, so that they can live, transform, and develop to their full potential without transgressing the principles of balance and propriety.

Second, *zhong* appears in the term “*dezhong* 得中” which could mean “becoming a ruler by occupying the central position” or “having attained the principles of what an ideal ruler should abide.” It is said, “having attained *zhong*, Shun, through his words, accorded with the actualities of things and their names” (*Baoxun* strip 6). This leads to the next

<sup>40</sup> See note 27. Also see Liao & Chan: 11-12.

<sup>41</sup> While the wording is different, this description of Shun’s politics of harmony is also evidenced in *Shangshu*. In “The Canon of Shun 舜典”: “The food!—it depends on observing the seasons. Be kind to the distant, and cultivate the ability of the near. Give honour to the virtuous, and your confidence to the good, while you do not reward the deceitful—so shall the barbarous tribes lead one another on to make their submission” (Legge 1994b: 42; translation modified). His regulation of rituals and music brings both spirits and men into harmony: “The eight different kinds of musical instruments were adjusted so that one would not take from or interfere with another; and spirits and men are brought into harmony” (Legge 1994b: 48; translation modified). Such tranquility is not limited to those around the ruler, but also is expected to extend beyond his own clan. Thus “Charge to Zhong of Cai 蔡仲之命” says: “Exert yourself to achieve your proper merit. Seek to be in harmony with all your neighbours. Be a protecting screen to the royal house. Live in amity with your brethren. Tranquillize and help the inferior people. Follow the course of *zhong*, and do not throw old statutes into confusion by aiming to be clear-minded. Watch over what you see and hear, and do not for deceitful words deviate from the right rule” (Legge 1994b: 490-491; translation modified). And in “Junchen 君陳”: “The king said, ‘Junchen, do you exercise to their fullest extent the great lessons of the Duke of Zhou. Do not make use of your power to be oppressive; do not make use of the laws to practice extortion. Be gentle, but with firm rule. Promote harmony by the display of an easy forbearance.’ When any of the people of Yin are in need of punishment, if I say “Punish,” do not you, therefore, punish; and if I say “Spare,” do not you, therefore, spare. Seek the proper middle course’ (Legge 1994b: 542; translation modified).

<sup>42</sup> In the Confucian tradition, putting things in order is closely related to harmonizing the relationship between things. As pointed out by Confucius’ disciple Youruo, the harmonizing functions of *li* is the [most valued] (*Analects* 1.12).

connotation of *zhong*. Underlying the ultimate goal of ensuring the harmony and coexistence all things require proper order and regulations. That is, “appropriateness” and “rectitude/correctness” (*zheng* 正). In the recently discovered *Guodian* corpus from the Warring States period, the significance of “flag” with its symbolism and meanings of “correctness, appropriateness” has also been stressed: “a flag of the armies should remain upright to give the correct direction” (三軍之旌也, 正也) (Jingmenshi Bowuguan 1998: 209). Such a connotation of correctness and uprightness (*zheng*) is demonstrated in ideal leadership symbolized by *zhong*. All things come into existence with forms, functions, and names assigned. The political corollary is that one is afforded perquisites and privileges consonant with one’s duties and position; for one to deviate from his proper post is anathema to social and political stability. Thus, naming (*ming* 名) must correspond to the true function and reality (*shi* 實) and vice versa. Without actually using the word *zheng* 正 (correctness, rectitude, true, just), it—rectification of things—is the very concept of *zhong*, which values proper order and appropriateness;<sup>43</sup> it was when Shun had grasped *zhong* that he could ensure that the names of things corresponded with their proper functions.

Reading *zhong* as political aspiration appears to be a reasonable interpretation particularly when it is mentioned later in the *Baoxun* that the descendants of Shang, including Tang, continued to uphold the ideal that ensured the Mandate of Heaven (*yongshou daming* 用受大命) and valid rule.<sup>44</sup> The reading of *zhong* as core value or political ideology does not exclude the possibility of understanding *zhong* as an object, that is, a flag, or even the subject people and the central position of the territories. It is by embracing the quality of grasping *zhong* that Shun became the sage king, whereas Shang Jia was able to receive the Mandate of Heaven by attracting people to him; he passed on to later generations his political ideology, thereby authenticating their power to rule. *Zhong* is

<sup>43</sup> The implication of *zhong* of putting things in proper order strikes a sympathetic chord with the concept of *zhong* in various chapters of the *Shangshu*. Compare this with the “Zhonghui Zhi Gao” in the *Shangshu*: “Exert yourself, O king, to make your virtue (still more) illustrious, and set up (the standard of) *zhong* before the people. Order your affairs by righteousness; order your heart by propriety—in this way you shall transmit a grand example to posterity” (Legge 1994b: 182; translation modified). In the “Jun Ya 君牙” chapter: “Diffuse widely the knowledge of the five invariable relations of society, and reverently seek to produce a harmonious observance of the duties belonging to them among the people. If you are correct in your own person, none will dare to be anything other than correct. The minds of the people cannot attain *zhong*; they must be guided by your attaining it” (Legge 1994b: 580; translation modified). Likewise, the *Yizhoushu* starts its first chapter by alluding to the relationship between *zhong* and *zheng*: “Heaven produces the host of people and regulates its measurements. It measures the small and the large to set up the regularities; it gives balance to the light and the heavy so as to constitute guides and patterns; it makes distinction between root and branch in order to establish a principle of *zhong*. Establishing *zhong* is to supplement what is lacking” (Lau 1993b: 1; my translation). Legge had taken *zhong* in most of the above passages as “the due mean” or “being about midway between the extremes.” Again this interpretation of *zhong* is incomplete and sometimes misleading. *Zhong* in those contexts is related to the implementation of the principles of correctness and rules of propriety as embedded in *yi* 義 and *li* 禮. It attaches importance to harmony and carries the connotation of putting things in proper order and regulating social relations, one of which is realized through rectification. This can be seen in the various passages in the *Analects*. See *Analects* 12.17: “Chi K’ang Tzu asked Confucius about government. Confucius answered, “Government (*cheng*) is being correct (*cheng*). If you give a lead in being correct, who would dare to be incorrect?” (Lau 1992b: 115). Indeed, Confucius believes that rectification is the task of priority for government. Also see *Analects* 13. (Lau 1993b: 120-121).

<sup>44</sup> In the *Works of Mencius*, it is also mentioned that “Tang held fast to the principle of appropriateness, and employed men of talent and virtue without regard to where they came from” (*Mencius* 4b20 in Lau 2003: 179; translation modified).



thus a ruler's prerequisite for occupying the seat in the center. In Confucian terms, this is the most esteemed position reserved for a ruler with personal excellence, who then can be compared to the steadfast Polaris towards which all other stars turn.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, the phrases "Be reverent! Guard against all excessiveness" (欽哉, 勿淫 and 敬哉, 毋淫) appear twice in the *Baoxun* text.<sup>46</sup> The heir is cautioned to remain reverently attentive and not to exert undue pressure nor interfere in the workings of the cosmos in a violent and disproportionate manner. His activities will only remain satisfactory so long as he conforms to the principles of *zhong*, bringing harmony and balance to the natural order of creation. He should reverently take positive steps to control violence and avert disruptive change. His sole intention is to maintain the balance between *yin* and *yang*, the two basic complementary forces permeating all aspects of the human and natural worlds, as exemplified by Shun; and this was enlarged by Wei. Careful reading can detect the progressive course of taking *zhong* as the ultimate principle in governing, starting with cultivating an attitude of *zhong* in the person through self examination, applying *zhong* in the socio-political realm, accomplishing great deeds in the world, and finally transmitting the teaching to later generations. This discourse is embedded in the words "qiuzhong 求中" (seeking *zhong*), "dezhong 得中" (attaining *zhong*), "jiazhong 假中" (enlarging *zhong*), and "guizhong 歸中" (returning to *zhong*), in the text.

#### 4 Conclusion

Starting with such semantic references as "flag in the center" and "central position," *zhong* in the *Baoxun* text has developed into an all-embracing term encompassing a series of philosophical meanings. Presented as a record of King Wen's deathbed admonition, the text provides a structured message about leadership and related political schema revolving around the concept of *zhong*. It is the core principle(s) serving to regulate the conduct of a ruler (represented by the future king, Prince Fa), and involves cultivating his mind, giving the correct names to things, and inculcating morality in his people through the urgent establishment of regulatory institutions. Connotating "rectitude" and "harmony," *zhong* symbolizes a holistic approach to establishing a kingdom with a central power that is no longer merely represented by a flagpole set up in the middle of the territory, but by the charismatic power of the ruler. This charismatic power allows the Mandate of Heaven to endure by attracting people from all directions, and it is what a ruler should seek in every aspect of his political activity. *Zhong*, as a symbol of power, is an abstraction representing ideal rulership, and it appears as the structural core of the different levels of affairs in the cosmos; *zhong*, therefore, in early Chinese socio-political thought, constitutes "the Way" and "complete virtue."

<sup>45</sup> As Confucius claimed, "The rule of virtue can be compared to the Pole Star which commands the homage of the multitude of stars simply remaining in its place" (*Analecets* 2.1 in Lau 1992b: 11).

<sup>46</sup> The character *yin* 淫 means "excess" which gives an extended meaning of "mistake" or "behaviors that do not comply with the rules of propriety" that resulted in disorder. For example, in the *Shangshu*: "罔淫於樂" (Do not go to excess in pleasure) (Legge 1994b: 55); the Little Preface of *Book of Poetry*: "不淫其色" (no excessive desire for sensual pleasure) (Legge 1994c: 37, my translation).

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