

ARTICLE

## The Persistent Influence of “Zhong Yong” Philosophy on Chinese Thinking Patterns: An Analysis Based on Chinese Chengyu and Proverbs

Lan An 

Faculty of Foreign Philology, AL-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty 050040, Kazakhstan

### ABSTRACT

This study examines the persistent influence of “Zhong Yong” philosophy, a core Confucian concept also known as “The Doctrine of the Mean”, on Chinese thinking patterns through an analysis of Chinese Chengyu (idiomatic expressions) and proverbs. The research investigates how this ancient philosophical thought continues to shape contemporary Chinese cognitive frameworks and behaviors. A content analysis of 88 Chengyu and proverbs selected from authoritative dictionaries and widely used even today reveals three main manifestations of the “Zhong Yong” philosophy: (1) emphasis on non-forcing and allowing natural resolution; (2) recognition of moderation and harmony in life; and (3) application of dialectical thinking in problem-solving. The findings suggest that the Confucian cognitive framework and “Zhong Yong” philosophy has had a long-lasting impact on the Chinese mindset, influencing decision-making, interpersonal relationships, and ways of dealing with life’s challenges. The study underscores the role of linguistic elements in transmitting cultural philosophies, highlighting “Zhong Yong” thought’s relevance in contemporary Chinese society and its insights for modern complexities. The pervasiveness of “Zhong Yong” philosophy in Chinese expressions emphasizes its fundamental role in shaping Chinese cultural identity and worldview. This philosophical wisdom remains instructive and inspirational in modern Chinese society, and this study contributes to an understanding of how traditional philosophical concepts persist through language and continue to influence social norms and individual cognitive patterns.

**Keywords:** Zhong Yong; Confucian Cognitive Framework; Moderation in Chinese Culture; Chinese Chengyu and Proverbs; Chinese Philosophy; Language; Social Norms

#### \*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Lan An, Faculty of Foreign Philology, AL-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty 050040, Kazakhstan; Email: 602926052@qq.com

#### ARTICLE INFO

Received: 10 December 2024 | Revised: 29 January 2025 | Accepted: 3 February 2025 | Published Online: 26 February 2025  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i2.8434>

#### CITATION

An, L., 2025. The Persistent Influence of “Zhong Yong” Philosophy on Chinese Thinking Patterns: An Analysis Based on Chinese Chengyu and Proverbs. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*. 7(2): 1127–1136. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i2.8434>

#### COPYRIGHT

Copyright © 2025 by the author(s). Published by Bilingual Publishing Group. This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

Language is the carrier of culture and ideas. Chengyu and proverbs, as special linguistic phenomena, effectively carry culture and ideas, and the Confucian idea of “Zhong Yong” is fully reflected in Chinese Chengyu and proverbs.

By analyzing Chengyu and proverbs that are still widely used in contemporary society, this study examines the lasting impact of “Zhong Yong” thinking on Chinese mindsets. The study focuses on three core questions: first, what “Zhong Yong” thoughts are reflected in these Chengyu and proverbs and how they were formed; second, how they reflect the core principles of “Zhong Yong” thoughts as well as demonstrate Chinese ways of thinking and philosophies of dealing with the world; and third, how these expressions convey traditional values and influence the thinking patterns of modern Chinese people. By analyzing these linguistic forms, we can observe the specific manifestations of “Zhong Yong” thought in contemporary society.

As a unique and significant part of Chinese language and culture, Chengyu and proverbs have long been important research objects in linguistics, cultural studies, and folklore. These two language forms not only reflect the simplicity and expressiveness of the Chinese language but also carry rich cultural connotations and historical backgrounds, reflecting the wisdom of Chinese people’s lives and moral concepts. Rohsenow believes that Chengyu are more literary while proverbs are an oral, peasant-based cultural heritage that has been passed down for thousands of years, and there are many Chinese proverbs derived from Confucian Analects<sup>[1]</sup>.

Chengyu is usually defined as highly refined and stereotyped fixed phrases. Most Chengyu consist of four Chinese characters, while some consist of three or more than four characters. Its main features include fixed structure, profound meaning, and a high degree of summarization, often derived from historical stories, ancient literature, philosophical ideas, or folklore. In contrast, proverbs are defined as concise, figurative, and philosophical short sentences or phrases that originate from spoken folk language, are more flexible in structure, and can range in length from a few words to a dozen words.

Although Chengyu and proverbs are different in form and origin, they share some common features: both have

rich cultural connotations and historical backgrounds, both reflect national ways of thinking and values, both have educational and warning functions, and both are widely used in everyday communication and literary creation.

The origin of Chinese Chengyu can be traced back to the pre-Qin period, for example, the saying “欲速则不达” (Want something in haste, but cannot get there) in the Analects<sup>[2]</sup> is a common Chengyu still in use today. During the Han Dynasty, a large number of Chengyu had already been formed, such as the famous Chengyu recorded in the <史记> (Records of the Historian)<sup>[3]</sup>, such as “破釜沉舟” (Breaking the cauldron and sinking the boat) and “四面楚歌” (Surrounded by enemies, isolated and without help. On all sides, the songs of Chu). In the Tang and Song dynasties, the use of Chengyu reached a flourishing stage.

As for proverbs, their oral traditions are probably even older, and their use is often highly regional and time-specific. The earliest records of proverbs can be traced back to the <诗经> (Book of songs)<sup>[4]</sup>, such as “父兮生我，母兮鞠我” (My father gave birth to me, my mother gave birth to me). The Ming Dynasty’s <增广贤文> (Chinese Wisdom and Philosophy Through The Ages)<sup>[5]</sup> included a large number of proverbs, which enriched the literature base of proverbs. Many of these proverbs are very common in modern Chinese, such as “良药苦口利于病，忠言逆耳利于行” (Good medicine tastes bitter and is beneficial to illness, honest advice may be unpleasant to hear, but it is beneficial for action).

Nowadays we have many very authoritative and comprehensive dictionaries of Chengyu and proverbs. The number of Chengyu and proverbs in the Chinese language is enormous, both of them totaling more than 50,000, but the number of commonly used Chengyu and proverbs is only a few thousand each.

In general, both Chengyu and proverbs have gone through a long process of evolution and accumulation, from piecemeal records to systematic studies, and have become an important window into Chinese history, literature, philosophy, and folk culture, reflecting the profound accumulation of Chinese language and culture, while at the same time, proverbs and Chengyu have continued to evolve in modern society, generating new forms of expression.

In modern Mandarin, Chengyu and proverbs are still widely used, not only in everyday communication but also

in literary creation, news reporting, and academic research. Their use can make the language more vivid and powerful. By studying Chengyu and proverbs, we can better understand the characteristics of Chinese language and the essence of Chinese culture.

Confucius is one of the very famous Chinese Sages. He was a famous educator, statesman and philosopher during the Spring and Autumn Period, the founder of the Confucian school, and has a very high status in Chinese history. He is revered by later generations as the Confucian Sage, and is also one of the top ten most famous people in the world. During his life, he made many contributions to education, politics, thought, economy and culture, and his influence was far-reaching. Confucianism has continued for thousands of years and still influences the thinking and behavior of Chinese people. The works of Confucianism are also known as the “Bible of the East”, and Li Xinyi, Li Qun, Luo Yuanyuan, and Li Yaxuan believe that the “Zhong Yong” embodies the charm of Chinese culture<sup>[6]</sup>. Dong Yingjing compares Confucius with Aristotle and finds similarities between the “Zhong Yong” and the “Middle Way Thought”<sup>[7]</sup>. The “Zhong Yong” has also become a hot topic of research for many foreign scholars. Deng Qubai argues that the Confucian doctrine of the Mean can be understood as the universal wisdom of mankind<sup>[8]</sup>.

“Zhong Yong” thought originated in the pre-Qin period, and Confucius called it the highest moral code. The core concept of “Zhong Yong” consists of three basic principles: “Zhong” refers to impartiality and propriety, “Yong” stands for common and eternal, and “Zhong Yong” emphasizes the search for a balance between opposites. This philosophical proposition emphasizes the need to adapt to the times and to seize the moment. It advocates harmony among people and between human beings and nature, emphasizing the balance of relationships and a holistic approach to life. As the core concept of Confucian philosophy, “Zhong Yong” is closely linked to other Confucian core values such as “benevolence” and “propriety” and forms an important part of the Confucian moral cultivation system. Its influence extends beyond personal cultivation to social behavior and political thought, and is being passed on from generation to generation through language.

“Zhong Yong” thought is one of the key components of Confucianism. The “Zhong Yong” is also known as ‘The

Doctrine of the Mean’. It has been passed down for thousands of years and has been integrated into the daily life of Chinese people, influencing their way of thinking and behavior. The idea of “Zhong Yong” in Confucianism is embodied in all aspects of Chinese life, and is the basic methodology of the Confucian school of thought in dealing with the world as a whole. It is a dialectical thought that explores the interdependence of opposites. It has educational significance and aims to enable people to consciously improve their own cultivation, monitor their own behavior, exercise self-restraint, and educate themselves. According to Wang Rongjun, “Zhong Yong” is an important ideological theory that guides the behavior of ancient and modern Chinese people. “Zhong Yong” is not a middle way thought, it is a scientific and philosophical thought<sup>[9]</sup>. The “Zhong Yong” advocates to face life with a good attitude, not to force everything, everything should be moderate, too much is too little, not to act too extreme. Hao Jinlei believes that “Zhong Yong” also plays a positive role in regulating the workplace in China<sup>[10]</sup>. It also opposes a one-sided view of problems, and advocates a critical view of problems and a dialectical view of problems.

## 2. Materials and Methods

88 Chinese proverbs and Chengyu embodying the “Zhong Yong” were selected for this study. The criteria for selecting these 88 Chengyu and proverbs for this study are: firstly, these Chengyu and proverbs are still widely circulated in contemporary Chinese society; they are not limited to a specific historical period but have been used from ancient times to the present; they have transcended dynastic and epochal changes; they have retained their utility across time; and their sources and meanings can be verified in authoritative Chinese dictionaries. Secondly, these Chengyu and proverbs reflect the core contents of “Zhong Yong”: the attitude towards the world, the philosophy of life, and the way of dealing with people in the world. These Chengyu and proverbs are concise, easy to memorize, adaptable to the linguistic environments of different times, reflecting the constant wisdom of dealing with the world, and embodying the timeless philosophy of life. Their continuing popularity today shows that Confucianism, especially Zhong Yong, still profoundly influences modern Chinese people’s way of

thinking and attitude toward the world. This cultural inheritance is realized through the form of language, demonstrating the enduring vitality of traditional Chinese culture.

These proverbs and Chengyu are mainly selected from two authoritative dictionaries, the *Xinhua Chengyu Dictionary (2nd edition)*<sup>[11]</sup> and *The Dictionary of Chinese Proverbs*<sup>[12]</sup>. The *Xinhua Chengyu Dictionary (2nd edition)*, compiled by the Dictionary Research Center of the Commercial Press, is an authoritative tool widely recognized by Chinese academics and educators. The dictionary contains 10,481 Chengyu, arranging the entries of Chengyu in the order of Chinese pinyin letters and providing detailed explanations of their sources, meanings, and usages. The dictionary covers not only ancient Chengyu but also Chengyu commonly used in modern Chinese, which is of high practical value and can provide reliable source support for research. In November 2003, the first edition of the *Xinhua Chengyu Dictionary* was awarded the second prize of the Fifth National Dictionary Prize. In April 2015, the *Xinhua Chengyu Dictionary (2nd edition)* was published by the Commercial Press after being revised. The more comprehensive and accurate second edition is used in this study.

*The Dictionary of Chinese Proverbs*, compiled by Yang Yan and her team, is one of the most comprehensive and systematic dictionaries of proverbs in China. The dictionary contains a large number of Chinese proverbs with detailed explanations of their origin, meaning, and usage. The dictionary includes a wide representation of proverbs from all historical periods and regions. The detailed explanations and rich examples of proverbs in the dictionary can provide reliable source support for research. The dictionary contains more than 6,000 commonly used proverbs, which are classified into 11 categories according to their semantics, including national politics, economic production, social affairs, culture and education, interpersonal communication, life and family, value of life, ideology and emotion, physiology and health, opposition and unity, and natural weather.

Through consulting these two dictionaries, we selected 88 examples of Chengyu and Proverbs embodying the idea of the “Zhong Yong” as research materials. A qualitative research methodology was employed to conduct a detailed analysis of the selected proverbs. Each Chengyu and Proverb has been translated into its corresponding English version. Then, the selected Chengyu and Proverbs were

categorized according to the different aspects of the core idea of the “Zhong Yong” that they embodied, for example, proverbs and Chengyu involving “harmony and unity”, “moderation and balance”, “dialectical thinking”, etc. were categorized separately. The Chengyu and Proverbs in each category have been analyzed in detail, and we have explored their specific linguistic expressions and the medieval ideas they imply. The analysis process focuses on aspects such as ideological connotation and cultural background. Through comparative studies, we further reveal the diversity and universality of the “Zhong Yong” thoughts in Chinese Chengyu and Proverbs. By interpreting and analyzing the proverbs in-depth, we can gain insight into how they reflect the “Zhong Yong”. Finally, the results of the study are summarized to present the forms and characteristics of the “Zhong Yong” thought in Chinese Chengyu and Proverbs.

Existing research on the relationship between language and cultural modes of thinking has been organized around three main directions. Philosophy of culture studies have extensively explored the impact of traditional philosophical concepts on contemporary society, such as how Confucian concepts continue to shape modern Chinese ways of thinking. In the field of linguistics, research has focused on how idiomatic expressions reflect cultural values and cognitive patterns, such as how metaphorical language shapes thinking processes. In cognitive framing research, existing studies have focused on how cultural differences in thinking patterns are reflected in language use. However, studies specializing in how Chinese Chengyu and proverbs serve as vehicles for transmitting traditional philosophical concepts (especially the idea of Zhong Yong) to modern modes of thinking are still relatively limited. This study fills this research gap by analyzing how currently used Chengyu and proverbs reflect and perpetuate the influence of Zhong Yong philosophy in the contemporary Chinese cognitive framework.

This study utilizes a content analysis method to examine 88 Chengyu and proverbs selected from two authoritative dictionaries. The Chengyu in the *The Xinhua Chengyu Dictionary (2nd edition)* are sorted from A to Z according to pinyin, and the proverbs in the *The Dictionary of Chinese Proverbs* are sorted according to different thematic categories. The selected examples are real and can be traced back to their origins, and these Chengyu and proverbs are

still widely used today, so they are representative and better reflect the influence of Confucian culture and Zhong Yong thinking. Each Chengyu and proverb is ranked according to its meaning, origin, frequency of modern use, and corresponding Zhong Yong principles. Expressions that meet the selection criteria are filtered and then categorized based on the different contents of Zhong Yong thinking, and the correspondence between linguistic forms and philosophical contents is analyzed.

Although this method provides a systematic research path for analyzing how Chinese Chengyu and proverbs reflect Zhong Yong thought, there are some limitations. These limitations include the possibility of ignoring other relevant linguistic expressions by collecting materials from only two dictionaries, as well as the subjectivity inherent in the categorization process. In addition, the diversity and number of examples and the precise quantification of the frequency of modern usage are challenging. The use of a corpus may be of great help for future research and could greatly improve the efficiency of finding and summarizing examples.

### 3. Results and Discussion

For thousands of years, the Chinese way of thinking and code of conduct have been inextricably linked to the idea of the “Zhong Yong”. This worldview and methodology provides a perfect goal for people to pursue an unbiased approach to all things. In dealing with the world, Zhong Yong advocates neutrality, peace and harmony with others; in governing the country, it emphasizes harmony; and in moral cultivation, it attaches importance to both internal and external cultivation.

In real social practice, we are required to grasp the degree of harmony between opposing contradictions in things, and also to prevent ourselves from getting lost in front of the ever-changing world, and these ideas are also reflected in Chinese Chengyu and proverbs. Many scholars still believe that the modern significance of Zhong Yong lies in promoting family virtues, professional ethics, and social morality. We selected 88 typical Chengyu and proverbs that embody the idea of the “Zhong Yong” and divided them into the following three categories.

#### 3.1. Non-Forcing Resolution (Stress That Everything Should Not Be Forced, All Problems Are Resolved at the Time of Destiny)

The Chengyu “水到渠成”(When water flows, channels form naturally) embodies the principle of not forcing things, emphasizing the wisdom of letting things develop naturally rather than forcing results. This principle is still relevant in the modern context, especially when dealing with interpersonal relationships and problem solving.

“Zhong Yong” advocates maintaining an optimistic mindset and avoiding pushing things too hard, believing that there is a solution to all difficulties, that difficulties are fate and there is no need to be frustrated, and that one should approach people and things in the world with a tolerant and positive attitude.

- (1) 知足常乐 Be happy with what you have
- (2) 顺其自然 Let nature take its course
- (3) 随遇而安 Let it happen
- (4) 入乡随俗 Follow the customs
- (5) 乐天知命 Knowing your destiny
- (6) 顺应天命 Follow the order of nature
- (7) 适者生存 Survival of the fittest
- (8) 比上不足, 比下有余 It's not enough to be on top, it's not enough to be on the bottom
- (9) 既来之则安之 Take things as they come
- (10) 车到山前必有路 It'll be all right on the night
- (11) 天无绝人之路 As one door closes, another door opens
- (12) 信则有, 不信则无 Believe it or lose it

#### 3.2. Moderation and Harmony (Everything Has a “Degree”, Emphasizing Harmony and Moderation)

The concept of moderation and harmony is well illustrated by the Chengyu, “穷寇莫追”(Don't pursue a desperate enemy), which advocates knowing when to stop and leaving room for others to maneuver—a principle that is often applied in modern business competition and conflict resolution.

Many proverbs reflect the idea of the “Zhong Yong”, which stresses the importance of maintaining neutrality and equanimity in dealing with problems, analysing specific

problems, and learning to be flexible. They advocate finding a balanced way of dealing with the details of life, looking for a way of dealing with problems that is neither too much nor too little. This concept can help us better understand and cope with life's challenges.

- (1) 乐极生悲 The extreme of happiness brings sorrow
- (2) 物极必反 The extreme must be reversed
- (3) 过犹不及 The best is the worst
- (4) 欲速则不达 More haste, less speed
- (5) 树大招风 The highest branch is not the safest roost
- (6) 言多必失 He that talks much errors much
- (7) 日中则昃
- (8) 强扭的瓜不甜 The melon that is forced to twist is not sweet
- (9) 月盈则亏，水满则溢 The moon will be lost when it is full, and water will overflow when it is full
- (10) 人怕出名猪怕壮 Fame portends trouble for men just as fattening does for pigs.

### 3.3. Dialectical Thinking (Advocating the Dialectical View of Problems and Dialectical Solutions)

The dialectical thinking of Zhong Yong thinking is well illustrated by the Chengyu “塞翁失马焉知非福” (When the old man at the frontier lost his horse, who could have known it would turn out to be a blessing in disguise?), which reveals the relationship between good and bad and shows that seemingly unfortunate things can bring unexpected benefits, reflecting a dialectical understanding of the development of things. This wisdom of pursuing balance is still of great instructive significance in modern society, demonstrating the enduring influence of traditional philosophical thought in contemporary life.

Many Chinese Chengyu and proverbs in China have been influenced by the “Zhong Yong” philosophy, and there are some very typical and special examples that they seem to have completely opposite meanings, but in fact they are interdependent, harmonious and unified, reflecting dialectical thinking. When dealing with complex issues, “Zhong Yong” advocates adopting a dialectical way of thinking, considering both sides of the matter to make the most appropriate decisions. This approach helps us to understand the problem comprehensively and make wiser decisions.

- (1) 留得青山在，不怕没柴烧/识时务者为俊杰  
Leave the green mountains here, and don't be afraid of no firewood/Those who suit their actions to the times are wise
- (2) 士可杀不可辱/好死不如赖活着  
A gentleman prefers death to humiliation/A living dog is better than a dead lion
- (3) 万般皆是命，半点不由人/人定胜天  
All things are destiny, people can not decide anything/man can prevail over God
- (4) 苦海无边，回头是岸/开弓没有回头箭  
The sea of suffering is boundless, and you can turn back/There is no return arrow when you start a bow
- (5) 人往高处走/登高跌重  
People go to higher places/If you climb high, you will fall badly
- (6) 害人之心不可有，防人之心不可无  
Can not be harmful to others, but can not be without the defense of others
- (7) 兔子不吃窝边草/近水楼台先得月  
Rabbits don't eat the grass by their burrows/First come, first served
- (8) 三个臭皮匠，胜过诸葛亮/一个和尚挑水喝，两个和尚抬水喝，三个和尚没水喝  
Three ignorant cobblers add up to a genius / A monk carries water to drink, two monks cooperate to carry water to drink, three monks have no water to drink
- (9) 三百六十行，行行出状元/万般皆下品，唯有读书高  
Every profession produces its own topmost master/ All are useless, only reading is the right way.
- (10) 家事国事天下事，事事关心/事不关己，高高挂起  
They are all on our minds: the affairs of each household, the nation and the world/I don't care if it's not my business
- (11) 人不可貌相，海水不可斗量/人靠衣裳马靠鞍  
A man cannot be judged by his appearance, and the sea cannot be measured/ Clothes make the man
- (12) 青取之于蓝而胜于蓝/姜还是老的辣  
Indigo blue is extracted from the indigo plant, but is bluer than the plant it comes from/
- (13) 双喜临门/福无双进，祸不单行  
Double happiness at the door/There is no such thing as a double entry of good fortune, and no such thing as a

- single entry of bad fortune
- (14) 书到用时方恨少/百无一用是书生  
I regret that I have read too little when the book is in use/ Intellectuals are not useful at all
- (15) 明人不做暗事/兵不厌诈  
An honest man doesn't do anything underhand/There can never be too much deception in war
- (16) 迷途知返/一条道走到黑  
Lose one's way and get back on the right path/Only take this path, regardless of right or wrong
- (17) 出淤泥而不染/近朱者赤, 近墨者黑  
Out of the mud and not dyed/Near the vermilion is red, near the ink is black
- (18) 日久见人心/人心隔肚皮  
Time reveals a man's heart/Different hearts in different breasts, It's hard to tell what's going on in the minds of other people.
- (19) 善有善报/人善被人欺, 马善被人骑  
Kindness will be rewarded/Good people are bullied, good horses are ridden by others
- (20) 得饶人处且饶人/纵虎归山, 后患无穷  
Where it is possible to spare someone, one should spare them/Let the tiger return to the mountain cause calamity for the future
- (21) 兔死狗烹/吃水不忘挖井人  
When all hares are killed, the hounds will be stewed and eaten/ Don't forget the well-digger when you eat water
- (22) 瘦死的骆驼比马大/拔了毛的凤凰不如鸡  
A lean camel is bigger than a horse/A plucked phoenix is not as good as a chicken
- (23) 金钱不是万能的/有钱能使鬼推磨  
Money is not everything/If you have money, you can make the devil push the millstone for you
- (24) 在天愿作比翼鸟, 在地愿为连理枝/夫妻本是同林鸟, 大难临头各自飞  
Husband and wife are the winged bird in the sky and the connecting branch on earth/Husband and wife are birds of the same forest. They fly separately when they are in great trouble
- (25) 退一步海阔天空/狭路相逢勇者胜  
Take a step back and there will be a bigger world in front of you/Meet on a narrow road and the brave win
- (26) 宰相肚里能撑船/有仇不报非君子  
A prime minister can hold a boat in his belly/It is not a gentleman who does not take revenge
- (27) 一个好汉三个帮/靠人不如靠己  
An able fellow needs the help of three other people/It's better to rely on yourself than on others
- (28) 东山再起/一蹶不振  
Stage a comeback/unable to get up after a fall
- (29) 邪不压正/道高一尺, 魔高一丈  
Evil ways can never prevail/Virtue is one foot tall, the devil is ten foot tall
- (30) 不入虎穴, 焉得虎子/小心驶得万年船  
Nothing ventured, nothing gained/Caution is the parent of safety
- (31) 好马不吃回头草/浪子回头金不换  
A good horse will never turn round to graze on an old pasture/A prodigal who returns is more precious than gold
- (32) 人为财死/视金钱如粪土  
Human beings die in pursuit of wealth/Look upon money as dirt
- (33) 亡羊补牢, 未为迟也/亡羊补牢, 为时已晚  
It's not too late to mend your ways/It's too late to mend
- The influence of Zhong Yong on contemporary Chinese behavior is evident in a variety of real-life scenarios, demonstrating the enduring relevance of traditional wisdom in modern society. Xiaomi's business decision-making reflects the principle of “穷寇莫追” (Don't pursue a desperate enemy) to guide corporate strategy. After Xiaomi's smartphone market achieved a leading position, Xiaomi did not adopt an aggressive market-squeezing strategy but chose to coexist harmoniously with other brands, ultimately contributing to a positive market ecosystem. This approach is in line with the principle of moderation and harmony in Zhong Yong thinking, showing how traditional philosophical concepts can be adapted to the modern business environment.
- In career development, the wisdom of “水到渠成”(When water flows, channels form naturally) continues to play a role, such as Zhang Yiming, founder of ByteDance, who, before starting his own business, continued to accumulate technical experience and dig deep into the needs of the user. When the era of big data on the mobile Internet came, he naturally seized the opportunity of the development of short videos, creating the success of “TikTok”.
- The dialectical thinking embodied in the “塞翁失马

焉知非福” (When the old man at the frontier lost his horse, who could have known it would turn out to be a blessing in disguise?) provides a philosophical framework for corporate crisis management, as in the case of Pinduoduo, which faced enormous market skepticism about “low price and poor quality” in the early days of its founding but ultimately transformed this challenge into an impetus to establish a rigorous quality management system, which not only reversed the public impression but also led to a leapfrog development. These cases not only illustrate how traditional Chinese wisdom can provide practical guidance for the modern environment but also reveal the depth of adaptation of ancient philosophical principles to contemporary challenges. This continued influence suggests that “Zhong Yong” thinking remains deeply rooted in the Chinese cognitive framework, providing inspiration for modern decision-making processes.

Understanding the impact of “Zhong Yong” thinking on the Chinese mindset has important practical implications in a variety of fields. In a cross-cultural business environment, it provides valuable insights for international companies operating in China. For example, understanding the “Zhong Yong” principle helps foreign firms adjust their negotiation strategies, recognizing that Chinese partners often prefer to build relationships gradually rather than taking an aggressive approach to transactions. In the field of education, especially in international programs, understanding the “Zhong Yong” principle can enhance teaching and learning by incorporating a balanced perspective and dialectical thinking. In addition, in the context of global conflict resolution, the search for harmony and moderation in “Zhong Yong” thought provides valuable strategies for diplomatic negotiations and international relations. These applications demonstrate how traditional Chinese wisdom can contribute to responding to contemporary global challenges while promoting cross-cultural understanding.

## 4. Conclusions

Zhong Yong is an important part of traditional Chinese culture, and as one of the Four Books of Confucianism, Zhong Yong systematically elaborates on this idea. Zhong” refers to impartiality, and ‘yong’ refers to ordinary, eternal truth. Its core lies in the pursuit of the best state of things, without going to extremes, and at the same time emphasizes

the choice of appropriate ways of doing things according to the specific situation, and grasping the balance between opposites. In traditional Chinese culture, the idea of Zhong Yong has deeply influenced various fields such as politics, education and ethics, and it is not only a philosophy of dealing with the world, but also a kind of value and concept of governance.

Chengyu and proverbs in Chinese are the essence of traditional Chinese culture, reflecting the wisdom of the Chinese nation. Chengyu usually consists of four Chinese characters with a fixed structure, and its sources include historical stories, literary texts and myths and legends, etc. It is characterized by profound meaning and concise expression, and is mostly used in written language and more formal occasions. Proverbs, on the other hand, have a flexible structure, varying in length, mainly from the wisdom of folk life summarization, easy to understand, catchy features, mostly used in oral communication, vivid and graphic expression. Both forms of language play an important role in modern Chinese: they not only enrich language expression, enhance the vividness and convincing of language, but also carry rich cultural knowledge and wisdom of life, which is a unique and valuable language resource in Chinese.

Many Chinese Chengyu and proverbs embody the “Zhong Yong” of Confucianism, which has been passed down for thousands of years and has been integrated into the daily life of Chinese people, influencing their way of thinking and behavior. “It is a scientific, profound and philosophical thought that advocates a good attitude towards life, not to force everything, not to act in extremes, not to see things from a one-sided perspective, and to have a discerning mind and a dialectical view of things.

We have selected 88 typical Chinese Chengyu and Chinese proverbs that embody the thought of Zhong Yong from the two authoritative dictionaries of the Chinese language, *Xinhua Chengyu Dictionary (2nd edition)* and *The Dictionary of Chinese Proverbs*.

These Chinese Chengyu and proverbs reflect the “Zhong Yong” philosophy, which mainly embodies three aspects: 1. emphasize that everything should not be forced, and the mind determines fate; 2. there is a ‘degree’ in everything, emphasizing harmony; 3. problems should be viewed and solved in a dialectical way.

Although the “Zhong Yong” thought is a product of



several thousand years ago, it still has many advanced points that are worthy of our study and application. In nowadays, the wisdom of “Zhong Yong” will still bring us enlightenment. Zhong Yong is not only a philosophy, but also a methodology. Under the background of globalization, the wisdom of the “Zhong Yong” Thought has not faded, but has instead demonstrated stronger practical significance and universal value. In today’s era of uncertainty and rapid change, the “Zhong Yong” can provide us with the following insights:

First of all, the concept of harmonious coexistence advocated by the “Zhong Yong” is particularly important in international relations. It teaches us that when dealing with international relations, we should not only adhere to our own positions and principles, but also understand and respect the cultures and viewpoints of others, so as to find a point of balance and realize mutual benefits and win-win situations.

Secondly, in terms of personal growth, the philosophy of “Zhong Yong” can help modern people to better cope with pressure and challenges. In this highly competitive society, many people tend to go to extremes, either overworking themselves to the point of exhausting their bodies and minds, or avoiding them in a passive manner. “Zhongyong” reminds us to find a balance between striving and resting, and to maintain inner peace in the process of pursuing our goals.

Thirdly, when facing the opportunities and challenges brought about by the development of science and technology, the dialectical way of thinking of “Zhong Yong” is particularly valuable. It tells us to embrace the convenience brought by new technologies, but to be alert to their possible negative impacts, and to find the right balance between innovation and tradition.

Finally, on the issue of environmental protection and economic development, the “middle way” thinking can also give us important insights. It reminds us that economic development should be balanced with ecological balance, and that the pursuit of material wealth should not be at the expense of the environment.

These modern revelations show that the “Zhong Yong” thought is not simply a compromise or a compromise, but a wise method of decision-making and an attitude towards life. It teaches us to find the best balance between various difficult choices and to maintain a clear judgment in the complex

and changing modern society. Therefore, an in-depth understanding and application of Zhong Yong is of great practical significance for personal development and social progress.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization, L.A.; methodology, L.A.; writing—original draft preparation, L.A.; writing—review and editing, L.A.; supervision, L.A. The author has read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

## Funding

This work received no external funding.

## Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

## Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

## Data Availability Statement

The author confirm that all data generated and analyzed in this study are included in this paper.

## Conflict of Interest

The author declare no conflict of interest.

## References

- [1] Rohsenow, J.S., 2003. ABC Dictionary of Chinese Proverbs (Yanyu). University of Hawaii Press: Honolulu, HI, USA. pp. 2–5.
- [2] Confucius., 1980. Translation and Commentary on the Analects of Confucius, 2nd ed. Zhonghua Book Company: Beijing, China. pp. 25–75.
- [3] Sima Qian., 2018. Records of the Historian. CITIC Press Group: Beijing, China. pp. 233–280.
- [4] Jiang, L., Xia, C., Zhao, K., et al., 1998. Dictionary of Pre-Qin Poetry Appreciation. Shanghai Lexicographic Publishing House: Shanghai, China. pp. 9–82.
- [5] Li, Z., 2011. The Interpretation of Zengguangxianwen. Tianjin Ancient Books Publishing House: Tian-

- jin, China. pp. 7–54.
- [6] Li, X., Li, Q., Luo, Y., et al., 2022. The definition and interpretation of “Chinese middle story” in the perspective of international Chinese language education. *Chinese Character Culture*. (08), 80–82.
- [7] Dong Y., 2020. A comparative study of Confucius’ middle way thought and aristotle’s middle way thought. *The Chinese Language and Culture*. (22), 60–62.
- [8] Deng Q., 2000. On the middle way. *Journal of Capital Normal University (Social Science Edition)*. (06), 45–51.
- [9] Wang R., 2018. The embodiment of the idea of the middle ground in ancient Chinese culture. *Journal of Lanzhou College of Education*. 34(07), 85–86.
- [10] Hao J., Jiang S., 2017. A study on the influence of career success on the tendency to leave a job—the moderating role of the middle-aged thought. *Journal of Guizhou University of Finance and Economics*. (03), 44–50.
- [11] Dictionary Research Center, The Commercial Press, 2002. *Xinhua Chengyu Dictionary*. The Commercial Press: Beijing, China. pp. 2–911.
- [12] Yang Y., 2007. *Chinese Proverbs Dictionary*. China Encyclopedia Publishing House: Beijing, China. pp. 2–854.