

# The Essentials of Zhang Bingzhi's Theory of Cultivations and Efforts

Rui Yang, Wenyi Chen\*, Wenyao Cao

School of Political Science and Law, Baoji University of Arts and Sciences, Baoji, Shaanxi 721013, China

\*Correspondence Author

**Abstract:** *Zhang Bingzhi, a late scholar of Guanxue in the Qing Dynasty, based on Zhu Zi's theory of human nature, indicated that "temperament is exhausting" and proposed that "changing temperament should be the first thing to do in the beginning of learning". Moreover, it also combines "changing temperament" with Cheng Zhu's "advocated principles of self-control and extension of knowledge" and develops it from both internal and external, dynamic and static aspects, reflecting Guan Xue's inheritance and integration of Zhu Zi's work. However, compared to "no stirrings", Zhang Bingzhi emphasizes the need to work on what has been stirred at all times and in all places, reflecting the characteristic of "emphasis on practice".*

**Keywords:** Changing temperament, Advocated principles of self-control and extension of knowledge, Combining movement and quiescence.

## 1. Changing Temperament

All the words of the sages are to teach people to change temperament and to realize virtue in the process of learning and cultivation. Zhang Zai's theory of moral cultivation centered on "changing temperament" greatly influenced later scholars. Zhang Bingzhi, a later scholar of Guanxue in the Qing Dynasty, based on Zhu Zi's theory of human nature, indicated that "temperament is exhausting" and inherited the core of Zhang Zai's theory of cultivation of "changing temperament", proposing that "changing temperament should be the first thing to do when starting to learn" [1], and also regarded "changing temperament" as "the first thing to do when starting to learn" [1].

Zhang Bingzhi inherited Zhu Zi's view of "human nature" and believed that "nature" is only "reason" and that people are endowed with heavenly reason to become nature, which is the "nature of the Mandate of Heaven". This is the "nature of the Mandate of Heaven", which also indicates that "the nature of the Mandate of Heaven is purely good and free from evil" [1]. On the one hand, Zhang Bingzhi believes that "nature" is obtained from the Divine Principle, and that it has the Divine Principle as its essence, which is "the nature of righteousness (character endowed by heaven)", and that "the nature of righteousness" is obscured by "temperament". "The character endowed by qi is covered by qi, which is manifested in human beings as the character of qi. The "character endowed by qi" actually expresses the "character" of "qi", that is, the "character of righteousness" under the cover of "qi". character endowed by qi", that is, under the cover of 'qi', rather than the 'character' of 'qi', which has no 'character'. "nature" of 'temperament', rather than the 'nature' of 'temperament', which has no 'nature'. On the other hand, Zhang Bingzhi further shows that human nature itself is good, but when one speaks of "nature", one is already influenced by "temperament", so the "nature" spoken of at this time is no longer the "nature of heaven". "Reason" is confused by 'qi' and becomes 'character endowed by qi'. "The character endowed by qi is at the metaphysical level, manifesting itself in sight, hearing, speech, and movement, etc. It is different from the natural state, and therefore it is not all good. As Cheng Yi said, "'Life and quietness' is not to be spoken of

above, and when one speaks of nature, it is no longer nature [2]."

It can be seen that Zhang Bingzhi inherited Zhu Zi's basic idea that the "character endowed by qi" is actually the "character endowed by heaven" which is obscured by "qi". He once said, "The bias of temperament is a major disease in a scholar's life [3]." He also said, "Temperament is exhausting [4]." This indicates that the obscuring of the character endowed by heaven by qi is the "major disease" that weighed down scholars throughout their lives. If people want to achieve virtue and return to their character endowed by heaven, they must "remove the obscurations". Only when the covering of qi is removed can the character endowed by heaven be fully revealed. Thus, Zhang Bingzhi proposed that "the first step in learning should be to change temperament".

Zhu Zi once explained the nature and means of "changing temperament". He said, "One seeks to change temperament. However, after changing temperament, the character endowed by qi will be restored to its original nature, which is not added outside" [5], indicating that people 'change temperament' in order to 'return to their original nature'. Also said: "for learning to be able to change temperament" [5], "most of the learning to change temperament for the work" [5]. It is pointed out that learning can "change temperament". Zhang Bingzhi inherited this point of view, and further put forward "temperament bias is a scholar's life disease" "temperament tired people", indicating that "temperament bias" is the fundamental source of evil and driving force. But "what is valuable is that scholars can change temperament", that is to say, scholars can "change temperament" to "get rid of the disease", so "a gentleman must change temperament first for learning" [1].

It is worth noting that although both Zhang Bingzhi and Zhang Zai attach great importance to "changing temperament", the "temperament" they "change" is not the same. The "changing temperament" advocated by Zhang Zai is to change the "character endowed by qi", while the "changing temperament" advocated by Zhang Bingzhi is to change the "qi". The "changing temperament" advocated by Zhang Bingzhi is to change "temperament". As mentioned

above, Zhang Zai's character endowed by qi refers to an existence independent of the nature of heaven and earth that is influenced by qi endowment, which is confused with the nature of heaven and earth, and is embodied in human beings as "nature". On the other hand, the character endowed by qi, which Zhang Bingzhi learned from Zhu Zi, is the character endowed by heaven under the cover of qi. Therefore, when the former talks about "changing temperament", he is actually referring to reducing the "evil" part of the "character endowed by qi" caused by the "bias of qi", thus changing the "evil" part of the "character endowed by qi". Thus, changing the "character of qi" and restoring the "goodness" of human nature to its place of dominance. The latter's talk of "changing temperament" actually means to minimize the obscuring of "reason" by "temperament". The "character endowed by qi" changed by the former is an existence opposite to the "character endowed by heaven". The "temperament" of the latter is a cover-up of the "nature of the Mandate of Heaven". Since Zhang Zai and Zhang Bingzhi have two different interpretations of the character endowed by qi in terms of human nature, the "changing temperament" advocated by the two is also rooted in differences.

## 2. "Knowledge and Practice Advance Together, Combining Movement and Quiescence"

Learning for the sake of learning" is a necessary way to 'change temperament'. At the same time, the process of "changing temperament" also promotes the development of "learning by doing". In Zhang Bingzhi's view, the work of "learning" is divided into two levels: internal cultivation and external characterization. He also suggests that "to learn, knowledge and practice advance together, combining movement and quiescence, so that what one knows and what one does will naturally materialize [4]."

### 2.1 "Extend and Acquire Knowledge" and "Experience Everywhere"

"To study things to acquire knowledge is the beginning of learning [1]." Zhang Bingzhi attached great importance to the work of "studying things to acquire knowledge" and regarded it as the starting point of study. He said, "the heart is the beginning of the work of learning. Although it is said that: 'the heart is stored in the reason from the', but must study things to acquire knowledge in order to complete the full of this reason, and then the reasoning of the heart through, to be able to complete the amount of the heart" [1]. This indicates that "study things to acquire knowledge" is the foundation of "single-minded conviction". Between "studying things to acquire knowledge" and "single-minded conviction", "studying things to acquire knowledge" must take precedence.

Zhu Zi once said: "The spirit of the human heart knows nothing" [5]. The "heart" is "the essence of qi", the body of the heart "possesses a multitude of rationalities", the use of the heart can "respond to all things". It has the characteristic of "virtual and spiritual perception" and can perceive from the outside as well as introspect from the inside. Zhang Bingzhi pointed out that "mental interrelationships, contracts and transformations are the basis of learning" [1]. "Study things to acquire knowledge" is to establish a connection with the

"heart" on the basis of "extending knowledge through things", so that "the spirit of my heart" can be linked to the "the spirit of my mind". In other words, "Zhi Zhi" is the purpose and result of "poor reasoning", i.e., it is the knowledge obtained after the subject has investigated the reasoning of things, and this kind of "knowledge" is the result of "the spirit of my heart" and "my mind" and "my mind". In other words, "studying things to acquire knowledge" is the purpose and result of "extending knowledge", and it is the knowledge acquired by the subject after studying the reasoning of things, and this kind of "knowledge" is a combination of "the spirit of my heart" and "the spirit of my mind" and "the spirit of my mind". It is only when the "reason of things to me" is well integrated that one can truly "study things to acquire knowledge". At the same time, "to know by reasoning" is an accumulative and gradual process, and repeated "to know by reasoning" is the only way to dilute the obscuring of the natural reasoning by qi, and to understand the principles of heaven. This is "changing temperament".

It is worth noting that Zhang Bingzhi realized that although "the spirit of my heart does not know", but also need to use the sage's precepts to enlighten my heart, set up the basic standard of understanding, so as not to fall into selfishness or fall into the countryside wish, which is also a clue to the scholars' initial learning. It can be seen that Zhang Bingzhi emphasized that the initial study should start from the "basic learning". Not only because "the knowledge of my heart" must be guided by the right direction, but also because "focusing on the basic learning" can be gained for the scholars themselves, and the main body of their own constraints, to do "self-restraint".

"Sacred learning is based on both knowledge and practice." [1] Zhang Bingzhi believes that "a gentleman should learn by knowing before he acts, and it is appropriate to know first" [1] and "this is the order of learning" [6]. He also said, "The work of a scholar is more important than knowledge." [7] It can be seen that Zhang Bingzhi relative to "know" more important "line", that knowledge in the logical order of the first line, because the reason based on my heart know; in the relationship between the weight, line is heavier than knowledge. If we only work on "knowing", even if we exhaust the theory of the world, "it's just scattered money" [4]. The logical order of "knowledge and practice" is different from the order of time. It is not that the knowledge of the world, and then put into practice, but the two go hand in hand, interpenetration, "the more extensive knowledge, the more certainty of practice" [4], "knowledge" and "practice" to promote each other. He has reflected on his own daily work for the study, always "study things to acquire knowledge of the work of the majority, the practice of the work of less", issued a "Sacred Science Kung Fu is light a no gain, not courageous, and then to the aging of the shape, self Yiqi, who will be blamed for the" [4] sigh! And the main work of the gentleman's study of the landing point attributed to "must be on the road and right" [1]. Obviously, in Zhang Bingzhi, "practice" as "knowledge" of the purpose and help, the importance of its self-evident, my heart to get the knowledge ultimately necessary to apply in practice.

Here, Zhang Bingzhi suggests that in "understanding the truth" and "dealing with things", one should emphasize one's own

subjectivity and “experience”. As a practical subject, scholars should base their daily practice on the reality of life, and often experience their own body and mind in life, connecting themselves with others. In this kind of object I connection, get enlightened, constantly in practice, improve their own quality, long time, temperament since the change.

## 2.2 “Single-minded Conviction and Advocated Principles of Self-control” and “Meditation Without Desire”

In order to truly “change temperament”, we cannot only rely on the acquisition of external “knowledge” and moral practice, but also need the subject to start from themselves and carry out the work of inner cultivation. This makes the subject more specialized in studying things to acquire knowledge and provides a good spiritual foundation for “changing temperament”. As Zhu Zi said, “The work of extending knowledge is in the process of cultivation, and the knowledge that is cultivated is what is being explored; the work of cultivation is also in the process of extending knowledge, and the knowledge that is explored is what is cultivated, and cultivation and cultivation are not separated from each other.” Therefore, “cultivation and poor reasoning cannot be abolished [1].”

In explaining the work of inner cultivation, Zhang Bingzhi places great emphasis on “keeping one’s heart in one’s mouth”, calling it “the work of beginning to learn”.

On the one hand, Zhang proposed that the actual work of “keeping the mind” is to make “this mind always on the rational”, that is, in dealing with things, always follow the moral rationality and constantly correct one’s mistakes, so as to make the “mind” stay awake and wise for a long time. To keep the “mind” in a clear and wise state for a long period of time. At the same time, one must always be vigilant to prevent one’s heart from being disturbed by selfish desires and distractions, thus deviating from the track of moral reason. This not only depends on the subject to regulate itself, but also requires the subject’s long-term maintenance, so “keeping the heart” is also the work of “keeping”.

However, as the subjects are different, they have different temperaments and will inevitably be influenced by their selfish desires. Therefore, Zhang Bingzhi mentioned the word “reluctance”, which means that the work of “keeping the mind” is extremely important, and the work of “keeping the mind” is not easy. On the other hand, he also clarified the role of “keeping the mind”. He believed that the “heart” should not just be stored in the “cavity” as the “heart of blood and energy”, but should be in a state of purity and wisdom for a long time, “always teach this “always teach this mind to be pure and wise [5].” When the “brightness of my heart’s wisdom and illumination” is revealed, we can have a “lively” atmosphere when dealing with things and practicing knowledge - “experiencing it everywhere” and “examining it at any time.

As to how to do a good job of “keeping the mind”, Zhang Bingzhi puts forward two points: “meditation” and “main respect”.

First of all, he put forward the weekday reading leisure time to

“meditation”, so that the mind is clear, in order to better reading, handling to create a good state of mind. And that, if the human heart is dedicated to stagnation, in dealing with things, can “not lose my wise light”. Zhang Bingzhi showed that daily reading must be set aside “meditation” time, so that the “heart” relaxed and generous, clear and quiet, not involved in thinking, the “heart” will not be filled with distractions, return to the most original state. When you read again, your ability to think and perceive will be improved, and your thoughts will become flexible when you understand what you read. When you engage in practical activities, you will be able to do so in a calm and restful manner. Just as the rapid flow of water can not reflect a clear image of the object, and no fluctuations in the water surface is like a mirror, can clearly reflect the true appearance of things, and extend to the human heart, is also the same reason.

So how can we ensure the state of “quiescence”? Zhang Bingzhi proposed that the subject must be “self-removal of the positive solid”. The “positive” means “unbiased”, the “solid” means “unchanging”, and the “positive and solid” is the “positive and solid” in heaven, it is “chastity”, and in human beings, it is “no desire” and “keeping”. “Be free of desire, and then see the heart of heaven and earth [1].” The subject must abandon his selfish desires, “not disturb his mind with selfish thoughts” [1], and hold on to something, only then can this mind be “calm” and “my mind” not lose “the brightness of wisdom and illumination”, and only when extending and acquiring knowledge and dealing with things can it not be troubled by distracting thoughts and maintain a state of concentration.

Human beings are by nature “quiet”, but in the present world they need to reach a state of “desirelessness” in order to be able to return to a state of “quietness”, but only the sages can do so. According to Zhang Bingzhi, “A heart that is free of desires is close to a sage’s style of having no intention, no necessity, no fixation, and no ego. That is why all the sages at that time emphasized the status of desirelessness, and desirelessness can lead to happiness. However, without the actual work of Confucius and Yan, their happiness only came from what they saw, so it was ultimately a biased study, not a transmission of the Sage’s teachings.” [1] Visible to achieve the realm of “no desire”, you need to do the actual work, otherwise it is just a partial study. Zhu Zi also said: “There are people who are born with less materialistic desires, it seems that selfish desires are a matter of temperament.” [5] It can be seen that desirelessness is also an important part of changing temperament.

In fact, Zhang Bingzhi doubted the usefulness of cultivating “Jing”, “fearing that it might lead to Zen Buddhism”, and thought that the word “Jing” was smoother. However, after reading what Zhu Zi said, “If we just keep on giving birth, our vital energy will be exhausted, so we say, ‘We will see the heart of heaven and earth again. This is to realize the benefits of movement in the stillness.’” He suggested that “the main quietness is exactly the most important work for the sages and above,” and that “the main quietness” is “not something that a person below the level of a human being can take on”. He put the perspective on the middle-aged and below, and suggested that in “meditation” one should “advocate principles of self-control” and thus “single-minded conviction”. In other

words, he believed that, in order not to fall into a bias, the middle-aged and below needed to do a good job in the practical work of accumulation of character, at the same time, in the “meditation”, the “main respect” is to make the “mind” concentrated and free from distractions, and to do a good job of cultivating and keeping the “mind”, so as to provide a good foundation for the “practice of gezhi”, and to change temperament by harmonizing both the internal and external aspects of the mind. At the same time, in the “meditation”, the “main respect” is to make the “mind” concentrated and free from distractions, and to do the work of cultivating and keeping, so as to provide a good foundation for the “character”, and to change temperament by harmonizing both the inside and the outside. Zhang Bingzhi advocated that the mind should be clarified in “meditation”, so as to keep the mind free from selfish desires and achieve a state of desirelessness.

How can the mind be kept free from delusions in “meditation”? He pointed out that “meditation” in the “main respect”, “the main no suitable”, so that the “heart” has a master, will not be taken advantage of by delusions. Zhu Zi once said: “When it comes to things, I do not dare to be light, I do not dare to be slow, and that is ‘the Lord is not suitable’.” Do to “fear” word in mind, the behavior is truly for their own cultivation accumulation.

Zhang Bingzhi discusses the work of learning from two levels: external knowledge and internal cultivation. From “acquiring knowledge by studying things to knowledge, the beginning of learning” to “cultivating oneself with ease and waiting for its completion, the end of learning”, he summarizes that the work of study is “to advance in knowledge and action, and to cultivate one’s mind in a static and dynamic manner”. As a matter of fact, Zhang Bingzhi did not regard the two as two kinds of work that have a sequential relationship in time. In his view, “knowledge and action” and “cultivation” are interrelated and influence each other. While extending knowledge, scholars should also cultivate themselves. To recognize the heavenly reason, to achieve “the whole of my heart, all the great use of all clear”, to ensure that the mobilization of emotions and external practice are on the reason. This requires not only the practice of “extending knowledge” but also the cultivation of “single-minded conviction and cultivating it”. If you do not “extend knowledge” and only favor the study of cultivation, it is inevitable that you will end up going to the Buddha’s way of nothingness; if you do not add “cultivation” and only “extend knowledge”, it is inevitable that you will be affected by the distractions of selfish desires. Therefore, Zhang Bingzhi believes that it is necessary to cultivate in the daily practice, in the “meditation” in the “main respect”, to achieve “no desire”, in order to “single-minded conviction”. Always single-minded conviction, my heart of wisdom and illumination of the Ming can be found, “extend knowledge” when the concentration, benefit more, “experience” the more refined.

It was on the basic structure of the theory of cultivations and efforts that Zhang Bingzhi perfected his thinking about “changing temperament”. In other words, in order to “change temperament”, we have to do the work of “acquire knowledge” and “Cultivation”, which interact with each other, so that “my

mind is always on the rationale”, “my behavior is always in line with the reason”, in the long run, “temperament” can be changed. However, relative to the “main respect” Zhang Bingzhi more focused on “extend knowledge” of the work, focusing on having been stirred to do the work. Although “cultivation” has the effect of expelling distracting thoughts in extending knowledge, if one does not make more efforts on “having been stirred” but emphasizes more on “cultivation”, one will inevitably fall into the stream of “mad Zen”. Therefore, Zhang Bingzhi emphasized more on working on “having been stirred”.

### 3. Remarks

Based on the basic structure of Cheng Zhu’s theory of cultivations and efforts, Zhang Bingzhi inherited and developed Zhang Zai’s idea of “changing temperament” and put forward the theory of “changing temperament” as the focus of his efforts. Although his idea of “changing temperament” is fundamentally different from Zhang Zai’s idea of changing the character endowed by qi, they share the same goal of eliminating the evils of qi and accomplishing virtue.

In the concrete implementation of the work of “changing temperament”, Zhang Bingzhi inherited Zhang Zai’s ideas and, on this basis, integrated Cheng Zhu’s doctrine of “main respect”. Zhang Bingzhi advocated that scholars have been stirred to do more work, emphasizing the need to “Zhi Zhi” “cultivation” and each other. However, compared to “no stirrings”, he emphasized more on the concrete practice of “having been stirred” - “studying things to acquire knowledge”, and regarded it as the foundation of “cultivation”. It can be seen that, in his view, the “moving” time is predominant, so scholars should be more based on the present life, to establish the connection between things and me, and attach importance to the daily “experience” of practice, in order to actually gain, and advocate the application of righteousness at the practical level. This is consistent with the basic direction of science in the middle of the Qing Dynasty.

As a matter of fact, Zhang Bingzhi’s advocacy of “main respect” based on “main tranquility” in the section on “cultivation” is also a method of moral cultivation generally advocated by scholars of Guanxue. This is also Zhang Bingzhi’s new development of Zhang Zai’s “changing temperament” theory of cultivation. It can be seen that in the development of Guanxue’s thought, philosophers not only took Zhang Zai’s thought as the “source of living water”, but also integrated with Zhu Zi’s theory, reflecting the distinctive characteristics of the times. In this regard, Zhang Bingzhi’s inheritance and development of Zhang Zai’s doctrine of “changing temperament” is sufficient proof.

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