

# "Four Sentences of Hengqu" under the Perspective of Practical Studies

Hourui Ya

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

**Abstract:** *"Four sentences of Hengqu" include the ontology of Zhang Zai's philosophy, the theory of human nature and the academic pursuit and mission responsibility of Confucian scholars. Under the perspective of practical studies, "To set heart for Heaven and Earth; To secure life and fortune for the people" reflects that all things are born of Qi, from the perspective of Qi ontology shows that people can improve morality and become good by changing their temperament; "To inherit the ultimate truth for past sages; To establish peace for future generations" is intended to emphasize that everything are real and born in Qi, to clear and correct the name of Confucianism, follow this "right path" can realize the world peace.*

**Keywords:** Zhang Zai, Practical studies, Four sentences of Hengqu.

## 1. Introduction

Wang Tingxiang thinks in Shen Yan that "Zheng Meng is the practical study of Hengqu." [1] It is the first time to define Zhang Zai's philosophy as practical studies. Tang Enjia, a Hong Kong scholar, defined Zhang Zai's philosophy as practical studies from the perspective of his focusing on "practice" and "practical facts", and Zhang Zai's criticism of Buddhism's mind study and Taoism's emptiness [2]. From the height of the unity of body and application, Ge Rongjin thinks that practical studies should be the study of "entity and application", and then analyzes Zhang Zai's practical studies thought from two aspects: Qi ontology and the thought of practical application [3]. Starting from the characteristics of the practical studies, combining with Zhang Zai's "practicing Confucian code of ethics", "studying to be useful", "thinking deeply to know knowledge" and "studying to be a sage", Zhao Fujie believes that Zhang Zai's practical studies is a kind of academic values in essence [4]. It can be seen that scholars study Zhang Zai's practical studies from two aspects: Qi ontology and statecraft, namely entity and application. Along this path, the analysis of "Four sentences of Hengqu" from the perspective of practical studies can more accurately grasp the gist of Zhang Zai's philosophy.

## 2. The Hearth of Heaven and Earth: Ontological Qi

Erya Shitian said: the firmament, namely sky [5]. Think that universe is the vast and shaped space that we can see. However, in ancient Chinese philosophy, the sky generally refers to heaven in an abstract meaning. The same is true of heaven in Zhang Zai's philosophy. Although heaven and all other things are condensed from Qi, heaven is a special existence higher than other things. In his interpretation of the Qiangua in Hengqu Yishuo, Zhang Zai put forward "The four virtues of Qian are participate in the start and the end of all things...But as far as its essence, is the parent of all things." [6] Think that Qiangua's four virtues: Yuan, Heng, Li and Zhen, through the whole process of the growth of things, just like the parents of all things. Qian means heaven, Qian can be the parents of all things, that is, heaven can give birth to all things. Zhang Zai in Hengqu Yishuo Xici reconfirmed and discussed the relationship between heaven and all things, "Heaven is

only an athletic Qi, urge all things born" [6], and "Is universe consciously benevolent? only urge all things born." [6] Universe arise from the movement and change of Qi, and participate in the process of the production and development of all things. So the hearth of heaven and earth is summed up from the process of universe biochemical creation.

The notion of the heart of heaven and earth first proposed was Zhang Zai in the explanation of "To see the heart of heaven and earth from Fu?" Thinking that "Generally speaking the heart of heaven and earth, give birth is the great virtue of heaven and earth. So to the birth of all things is the heart of heaven and earth." [6] The symbol of the Fugua is Zhen under the Kun, meaning thunder accumulation strength in the underground, which is the image that all things will be born and emerge from the earth. In addition, the symbol of the Fugua is one Yang and five Yin, which is the image of one Yang coming back, indicating that the Yang is born and then all things will be born. From these two points of view, Fugua conforms to the virtue of all things born from heaven and earth, so Zhang Zai defines the heart of heaven and earth from Fugua. It should be note that the process of born all things in heaven and earth is natural, and the heart of heaven and earth has no creation and arrangement. "Heaven is unconscious and nothing to do, constant so, is there any rest?" [6] Only without deliberate, the heart of heaven and earth can be eternally. "Heaven can not all give birth to angelic people, just with the heaven has not intentional." [6] Therefore, Zhang Zai's heart of heaven and earth has the virtue of birth all things, without the meaning of affectation.

The heart of heaven and earth is the virtue of heaven and earth producing all things, which is the process of Qi condensing into all things, and also the process of the movement and change of Qi. Zhang Zai believes that "all things are born in heaven and earth, although they are different, there is not a moment without Gan." [6] Gan, refers to the interaction of Yin and Yang, and is the dividing point between Qi and all things. All things are born in Yin and Yang's interaction, its quantity may be different, but it has universality and permanence. In the philosophy of Zhang Zai's ontology, the interaction of Qi is the process of Qi "Hua" due to "Shen". Therefore, the virtue of heaven and earth can be known from the movement of "divine change". In short, the heart of heaven and earth give birth all things is the virtue of "Shengsheng", and the

interaction of Yin and Yang is the concrete implementation of heaven and earth give birth all things. Then, to understand Zhang Zai's "heart of heaven and earth", it is necessary to start with Zhang Zai's philosophy of Qi ontology.

According to Zhang Zai Qi ontology, "Taixu can't be without Qi, Qi have to concentrate for all things, all things have to scattered for Taixu." [6] This sentence summarizes the schema of the universe, that is, Taixu  $\leftrightarrow$  Qi  $\leftrightarrow$  all things, the gather and dispersion among these three things constitute the basic process of the universe. The so-called Taixu here is an ontological existence, is amorphous and extremely thin Qi which cannot be directly perceived. "Everything that has a shape is real, everything that exists is image, everything that has an image is Qi." [6] So, all things are born from Taixu's change, the essence of all things is Taixu. According to the above, the heart of heaven and earth refers to the process of all things generated by the changes of Taixu's fluctuation, rise and fall, stretch and bend. People understand and appreciate the divine change of Qi can "participate in the transformation of heaven and earth", and then can achieve the realm of "nature and man unity", which also is the process of set heart for heaven and earth.

### 3. The Life of the People: the Nature of Heaven and Earth

In ancient China, there is a tradition that officialdom is the natural outlet for good scholars. Scholars should have the feelings of taking the affairs of the people in the world as their own duty. The age of Zhang Zai, internal people are destitute because large landlords annexing land without restriction. Outside, there were ethnic conflicts and warfare in the Northwest China. Then, seeking a way for people to settle down naturally become a problem that the scholars with insight must face and think about. Zhang Zai expressed his salvation feelings through "To secure life and fortune for the people", that is, through research truth and change temperament to realize their values. He believes should be start with people's moral choice, so that people can be contented with "Life", and then spirit has its entrustment.

Mencius first put forward the idea of "Life", "There is no difference between longevity and short-lived, we should cultivate our body and mind in order to face the destiny." [7] Mencius' "Life" was limited to the scholars, but Zhang Zai "To secure life and fortune for the people" in order to the people in the world to make the right value choice while face to poverty or wealth, nobility or inferiority, longevity or short-lived, happiness or disaster, prosperity or adversity, survival or death, etc. [8] The correct value choice naturally refers to the moral qualities such as "benevolence", "righteousness", "filial piety" and "loyalty" respected by Confucianism, as to settle the soul. In the Northern Song Dynasty, the country was poverty and weak, people's heart were in peril and danger. "To secure life and fortune for the people" became a response to the social reality problems such as ethical principles disorder and moral norms disorder, which made the people all over the world have the possibility of establishing a secure life and grasping their own destiny [9]. Zhang Zai's way of "To secure life and fortune for the people" is to change temperament, so that the nature virtue of benevolence, righteousness, politeness, wisdom govern the

body.

Zhang Zai believes that people are condensed from Qi and humanity are endowed with the principle of Qi. Therefore, the nature of Qi is also the nature of human. And there are two kinds of Qi: the Qi of Taixu and the Qi of Yin and Yang, so there are two kinds of human nature. The nature of Qi from Taixu is called "nature of heaven and earth", and the nature of Qi from Yin and Yang is called "nature of temperament". The nature of heaven and earth is divided into the nature of "purest" and "aggressive". The nature of "purest" is clear and pure, reflecting in benevolence, righteousness, politeness and wisdom; The nature of "aggressive" is the natural attribute necessary for human survival and development such as eating and sex. The nature of temperament refers to the nature produced after the condensation of Qi, performance in people's integrity and softness, impatience and slow, talent and stupid. Due to the difference of people's physical conditions and their own particularity, people's nature of temperament are all different, so there are bighearted people and evil people. In a word, the nature of heaven and earth is purest goodness without evil, the nature of temperament mixed with goodness and evil.

Then, in order to "To secure life and fortune for the people" to make people turn from evil to goodness, it is necessary to change their temperament. Zhang Zai regard explore theory and pursuit goodness as the specific method of change temperament. "Explore theory and pursuit goodness can achieve Life." [6] Theory refers to the principles of Qi endless variation, and explore theory is to investigate these principles objective existing in things. Both the principles of things and humanity are come from Qi, explore more principle of things can naturally perceive humanity. There are two ways to explore theory and pursuit goodness, one is "Introspection", the other is "To learn". Introspection which means restoring nature, Zhang Zai believes that "after having a body, you will have the nature of temperament and be good at restoring nature, then the nature of heaven and earth will exist. Gentleman does not regard nature of temperament as his own nature." [6] Therefore, "Introspection" is turn from the nature of temperament to nature of heaven and earth, and restrain the evil produced by the nature of temperament with goodness. "To learn" refers to the fact that "to learn great benefits in the self-seeking change of temperament" [6] and "learning to overcome its habits" [6], "habits" in here refers to the desire, temper and other vices of the human after have a body. According to the above, changing temperament can overcome and eliminate the "evil" produced by the nature of temperament, make the nature of heaven and earth become the humanity, and make benevolence, righteousness, politeness and wisdom become the moral choice's criterion and the foundation of Ming, so as to achieve the ideal realm of life.

### 4. The Desperate Study of Sages: Confucian Practical Studies

In his early years, Zhang Zai read Zhongyong but thinks it wasn't enough. So he sought the theory of Buddhism and Taoism, but he gained nothing, therefore he turned to learning Six Classics. Zhang Zai's philosophical thoughts was closely related to his academic experience, and his Qi ontology was put forward on the basis of criticizing the theory of Buddhism

and Taoism. He refuted Buddhism and Taoism's emptiness ontology with Qi ontology, and held that the universe should be a state of "harmony" and "mixed". Buddhism talks about the emptiness nature of dependent arising, holds that the existence of everything in the world is only the result of people's subjective thinking. Zhang Zai thinks that the statement of "everything in heaven and earth is an illusion" means that Buddhism do not know everything is condensed by Taixu, so he criticizes: "If all things are the phenomenon seen in emptiness, things are not related to the emptiness, and the form is self-form, the nature is self-nature, the form and nature, the heaven and people are not treating each other...to define the world from the limited perspective of people." [6] According to Buddhism, emptiness has no connection with all things, then will not know how everything came into being, how humanity is generated, and then people's moral cultivation will lose direction. Taoism says that all things are born out of emptiness, Zhang Zai thinks that this saying means that Taoism does not know that "Taixu" is actually is Qi". He thinks that Taoism's "emptiness" is actually "Taixu", not the real emptiness, but just shapeless. "Knowing that Taixu is Qi, then nothing is emptiness." [6] Advocating that there is no absolute dividing point between existence and emptiness, and emptiness can not be born anything, existence and emptiness are "mixed" relationship.

Zhang Zai also further criticized the absurdity of the Buddhism and Taoism's view of life and death. Buddhism attempts to get rid of reincarnation, pursue "no life", and place its hopes on the enjoyment of the soul after death. Zhang Zai thinks that this is "things perish and no longer created", Buddhism pursuit the ethereal state of all things have dispersed into Taixu, is doesn't aware that Taixu will regathering into all things. Taoism attempts to live for a long time and pursue "no death". Thinks that one can become an immortal through cultivate the body and live forever in the world. Zhang Zai thinks that this is "be attached to survival and everything immutable", is doesn't aware that everything will eventually be dispersed into Taixu. Both Buddhism and Taoism attempt to transcend the limitations of life and death on life, and the pursuit of "no life" or "no death" is impossible and meaningless. The highest state of life should be to know the gathering and scattering of Qi and adapt to this change, that is, "focused Qi is my body, scattered Qi is also my body, aware that scattering is not dead, then can talk to him about humanity." [6]

The feudal rulers of the Song Dynasty held a supportive attitude towards Buddhism and Taoism, believing that "Buddhism and Taoism are useful for civilizing the world". However, monasteries and Taoist temple not only occupy a large amount of land and labor, but also "Monk households" and "Taoist households" enjoyed the privilege of tax exemption, which was harmful to the country. In this regard Zhang Zai thinks that: "Since Confucius and Mencius died, Confucianism doctrine has been lost for more than thousand years, the scholars who are not officials talk about current affairs and talk nonsense, practicing heresy among themselves." [6] Therefore, based on Qi ontology, Zhang Zai thinks that all things are gathering from Qi in essence, Taixu and all things are only the difference between intangible and tangible, so as to negate the ontology and the view of life and death of Buddhism and Taoism. The important reason of

Zhang Zai's criticism of Buddhism and Taoism is to construct Confucian orthodoxy, inherit and develop Confucian philosophy.

Since the inception of its emergence, Confucianism has established the tradition of "affection for one's kin" and "benevolence", and has the idea and belief that "improving personal cultivation and morality when he is destitute and frustrated, taking responsibility to society when he is successful and achievable." [7] However, Buddhism and Taoism advocated far from worldliness and cut off the ethical relations of family bonds and liege. In the view of Confucianism, this kind of behavior without father and monarch abandons the most fundamental blood relationship of human beings, which was not conducive to the division of social class and the implementation of political decrees. Some Monks or Taoists fled the world and lived alone in pursuit personal enlightenment, which was contrary to the Confucian idea of saving the world by "study hard and then become an official" and "have fun with the citizens". Therefore, Zhang Zai reiterated the Confucian thought of rule by virtue and etiquette, and held that "people must be growth by etiquette, what will be conscience if lose etiquette?" [6] so he advocates moral cultivation and ethical teaching. In addition, exposition the epistemology of "knowing by morality" and the theory of "all things are my countrymen", inheriting and carrying forward the thought of Confucian sages and constructing Confucian orthodoxy. Therefore, Zhu Xi thinks that Zhang Zai "is very meritorious for Confucianism, and useful for the afterlife" [10].

## 5. Eternal Peace: the Use of Practical Studies

The Confucian classic *The University* takes "to pacify the world" as the highest goal of the "eight items". Develop to the Song Dynasty, Zhang Zai's "To establish peace for future generations" is the continuation of this tradition. "To establish peace for future generations" is the ultimate ideal of "four sentences of Hengqu", which shows the traditional Chinese scholars' spiritual belief of great mind, ambition and responsibility, and shows strong humanistic care. In order to achieve this goal, Zhang Zai took etiquette as the core of his political theory, tried to rebuild the Confucian ethical and moral system with etiquette, and laying a moral and cultural foundation for "pacify the world". He once proposed the statecraft of "gradually restoring the generations" to Emperor Shenzong of Song Dynasty, and advocated governing the country by etiquette. The specific method of govern by etiquette is to implement the Hashtag-shaped-field system and Feudalism system, and carry out moral, rites and music education at the same time to make the people's life happiness and satisfaction. Zhang Zai attempted to solve the poor and weak situation in the Northern Song Dynasty through the peaceful reform of the economic and political system, and realize the politics of "kingly way" advocated by Mencius. However, different from Mencius' idealistic "benevolent government", Zhang Zai paid more attention to seeking the way for people's happiness from a practical perspective. To the idea that Zhang Zai's political philosophy is the practice and application of the practical studies.

The core issue of Confucian political thought is the relationship between family and country, that is, the

isomorphism of family and country. In addition, people are the subject of political action, and "self-cultivation" is the premise of "family regulating". Therefore, the research of the practical application of Zhang Zai's practical studies thoughts cannot be separated from his discussion on "self-cultivation" and "family regulating". From Zhang Zai's philosophy thought and his character, focus on practice, advocating integrity and seeking truth is the expression of Zhang Zai's "self-cultivation" thought. First, Zhang Zai paid attention to the social reality and practice, just as Feng Congwu put forward in Guan Xue Compilation that "Zhang Zai learning ancient idea and practicing diligently" [11]. The experiment of restoring the Hashtag-shaped-field system in Hengqu is the concrete manifestation of Zhang Zai's "focus on practice" and linking theory with practice. Therefore, Huang Zongxi pointed out that "Guan Xue has a origin that based on cultivate etiquette" [12]. Second, "Do not degrade own aspirations, do not humiliate own bodies" [13] and "Neither riches nor honors can corrupt him; neither poverty nor humbleness can make him swerve from principle; neither threats nor forces can subdue him"[7] are the spiritual belief of Confucianism. This is reflected in Zhang Zai's character is adhering to the truth and upright and outspoken. He was recommended to Beijing twice but resigning, that is the direct expression of this spirit. This kind of spiritual solar term of Zhang Zai had an important impact on the humanistic temperament and national character of later generations. Third, in the constant observation and research of all things in the universe, Zhang Zai tried to make a reasonable explanation for the changes of all things. This resulted in his contribution to natural science, which greatly enriched Zhang Zai's philosophical system and expanded its rationality. In the view of Marxism, practice is the criterion for testing truth and the source of social progress. Zhang Zai's thought of focus on practice and seeking truth is of great significance to the settlement of domestic politics and border wars in the Northern Song Dynasty, from which the country is rich and strong, and then can be achieve to "eternal peace".

Lv Dalin in Mr. Hengqu's Description describes that "managing the family and dealing with things, have to correct themselves to teach others, if people have not trusted, then reverse elevate themselves...the boy of family, must let him do the chore and deal with affairs, serving the elderly; the girl who is not married, must let her attend personally the sacrificial rites, learn to making liquor, cultivate the virtues of filial piety and fraternal love, and then realize the moral." [6] It can be seen that Zhang Zai's "family regulating" thought is the advancement of his "self-cultivation" thought, and also the application of practical studies thought in the family and clan level. By this path can also make the people's life happiness and satisfaction, and finally achieve "eternal peace". In addition, Zhang Zai pursued the rule of "three generations", believing that the country must start from Hashtag-shaped-field system, "talking about the first thing of governing, hurry up with the land system." [6] After this, screen the moral people out to participate in politics and govern the country, through this method achieve the "eternal peace". In a word, Zhang Zai's discussion of "to pacify the world" from the three aspects of "self-cultivation", "regulating the family" and "governing the country" is essentially centered on the application of practical studies, and then constitutes his political philosophy of "To establish peace for

future generations".

## 6. Summary

"Four sentences of Hengqu" is the core expression of Zhang Zai's philosophical thought, and also the concentrated embodiment of Zhang Zai's practical studies thought. "To set heart for Heaven and Earth" express that Taixu is the origin of the universe, and emphasizes that human beings study the change of Yin-Yang can participation in the transformation and breeding of heaven and earth, which is the basics of Zhang Zai's practical studies; "To secure life and fortune for the people" according on the causes of good and evil of human nature, emphasize change of temperament to seeks a way for people to settle down naturally, which is the application of practical studies' Qi ontology in humanity; "To inherit the ultimate truth for past sages" emphasizes Taixu and all things are existence really, criticizes the Buddhism and Taoism with practical studies, and then clear and correct the name of Confucianism, which can constructing Confucian orthodoxy; "To establish peace for future generations" expresses the Confucian ultimate pursuit of social ideal, the process of achieving this ideal goal is the application of practical studies.

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