

The "People-Oriented" Theory of Dong Zhongshu

Chunmin Dai^{1, 2} | Suhaila Abdullah^{1*}

¹School of Humanities, University Sains Malaysia, 11800 Penang, Malaysia

²Dong Zhongshu and Traditional Culture Research Center, Hengshui University, HEKRI, 053000 Hengshui, China

*Corresponding Author: aila@usm.my

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Abstract:

This study uses qualitative research method to analyze *Dong Zhongshu's* philosophy of "people-oriented". The scholar examined relevant literature from a variety of perspectives, focusing primarily on *Chunqiu Fanlu* (春秋繁露) and commentary. Use images to assist examine and comprehend *Yin-Yang* theory. The major findings of this study demonstrate that his people-oriented philosophy focuses on the relationship between heaven and man, reflecting deep compassion and righteousness notion. The king's virtue and the relationship between ruler and subjects are crucial in the practice of governing a country. *Dong Zhongshu* inherited pre-Qin Confucianism's people-oriented perspective, built the philosophy of heaven and man for demonstration, and expanded the thought of benevolence and righteousness as the core, bringing the thought to an unprecedented height and depth. This study requires in-depth research in terms of research methodology and social governance practices. The major objective is to clarify *Dong Zhongshu's* "people-oriented" concept, highlight the improvement of leaders' morals and self-discipline, and give a useful reference for dealing with interpersonal relationships and better country government.

Keywords: People-Oriented; *Dong Zhongshu*; Benevolence; Virtue; Punishment

Introduction:

During the Western Han Dynasty, *Dong Zhongshu* stated that power was highly centralized in the king alone. The king's virtue was crucial to the survival and development of the state (Sima, 1959; Gao, 2022). According to *Dong Zhongshu*, the *Spring and Autumn Annals* was best at dealing with the relationship between the other and the self, and that the historical events chronicled demonstrated the

righteousness of the Way of Kingship (Su, 1992; Kong, 2022a). Social governance is nothing more than "managing people" and "being managed", which appears to be a political relationship, but is actually a relationship between self and others (Zhou, 2001). Good social governance lies first and foremost in the relationship between people, especially the relationship between ruler and subjects. The core and standard of this relationship

is benevolence and righteousness (Jiang, 2023).

Zhou Guidian referred to *Dong Zhongshu's* intellectual framework as "the political philosophy of seeking the good" (Zhou, 2001). His humanistic thought not only reflects this type of "good", but it also reflects his deeper views on benevolence and righteousness (Wang, 1994). This essay begins by discussing his people-oriented approach from the theoretical standpoint of the philosophy of heaven and humanity. His perspective of benevolence and righteousness is based on the Way of Heaven's relationship with human is an inside interdependence rather than an exterior conflict. Heaven is the origin of Tao, the entity with position, thought, and will personality. Heaven is also the origin of benevolence. In the second part marks the transition from the Way of Heaven to the Way of Human. *Dong Zhongshu's* investigation into the relationship between heaven and human sought to recognize and explain the external world, as well as to better direct human activity. He proposed the "Virtue is fundamental and punishment is auxiliary (德主刑輔, *Dezhu Xingfu*)" political ideology, which embodies the concept of people-oriented. *The Way of Kingship* (王道, *Wangdao*) is essential for achieving national stability. Ritual, music, government decrees, and punishments are all necessary comprehensive of effective state governance. However, their roles and functions differ. Ritual and music represent moral instruction at its most fundamental, whereas government decrees and punishments function as secondary punitive measures. The enduring peace and stability of a state depends on the moral education facilitated by ritual and music. Rites and music is the content and method of educate, and it is also an important carrier of the Way of Kingship. The goal of education is to nurture virtuous behavior and turn people into commonplaces. The final section presents *Dong Zhongshu's* proposal for particular people-oriented benevolent government policies.

He proposed specific measures for governance, including establishing the Imperial College to cultivate talents, selecting and supervising officials, advocating economic equality, refraining from competing with the people for profits, and promoting Confucianism to constructing the Five Constants of Thought.

Literature Review:

Humanism, in simple terms, is people-oriented, with the ultimate concern for the holistic development of human beings (Wang, 2017). It permeates all levels of life and society, reflecting the universal care and respect for people. *Dong Zhongshu* was a master of Confucianism and the most important political philosopher in the Western Han Dynasty. He inherited the essence of Confucianism, and the humanistic thought was also an important part of his thought. The word "humanities" first comes from *Zhou Yi*, "reconciling rigidity and flexibility is astronomical feature. Showing perfect humanity is human characteristic. Investigate astronomy to observe the changes of season; Observe humanities to transform the Tianxia (剛柔交錯, 天文也。文明以止, 人文也。觀乎天文, 以察時變, 觀乎人文, 以化成天下)" (Li, 1999, p.105). All things in heaven and earth have their own characteristics and attributes. *Confucius did not speak of weirdness, of force, of confusion, of spirits* (子不語怪力亂神). Confucius instructed *Zi Lu*, who was concerned about how to reverence ghosts and gods, to first learn how to honor people. Confucius said that comprehending others is wisdom. Confucius valued human life. When the stable caught fire, Confucius only concerned about people being hurt, not cattle or horses (Zhu, 1983). Confucius valued the lives of the people, in the historical era at that time, enough to show the advanced nature of Confucius thought. Confucius once stated, the one who started it all has no posterity (Zhu, 1983). Because the human terracotta sculptures were so lifelike, Confucius saw them as a violation of human dignity and a disdain for the worth of human life (Wang, 2020). Confucius' perspective on valuing human beings influenced later Confucian beliefs regarding heaven and earth (Li, 2009). Mencius championed the perspective of

benevolent government and people-oriented, which are both in the same line (Li, 2024). Mencius emphasized human rights, which is of pioneering significance, designed to be people-centered (Yu, 2022; Li, 2024). Mencius fought for human beings' most basic right to survival and believed that the implementation of benevolent governance should first be represented in the land distribution system (Yang & Han, 2002). The "well-field" system was considered the best system to ensure that the cultivator had his own land (Kong, 2022b). Mencius pushed for the equality of human dignity, which includes an equal connection between ruler and subjects, both with their own responsibilities

(Zhu, 1983). *Xunzi* divided all things in the world into four classes and believed that man was the most expensive. *Xunzi* believes that water and fire have *Qi* (氣) but no life, grass and trees have life but no knowledge, and creatures have knowledge but no righteousness, whereas humans have *Qi*, life, knowledge, and righteousness, and hence are valuable to the world (Wang, 1988). According to the book of *Bai HuTong* (白虎通), humans are the world's most valuable resource (Chen, 1994). The *Shuowen Jiezi* (說文解字) has the same record (Xu & Duan, 1981). Confucian gentlemen prioritize people-oriented values. The relevant research results are very rich.

Table 1 Literature review of this study

Topic	Keywords	Sources
Heaven and Man	heaven-human unity; humanistic value; oneness of heaven and humanity; great unification; heaven; good; loving people; loving things; <i>renxue</i> (仁學); relation of nature and man; <i>Yin</i> ; <i>Yang</i> ; man and nature; truth; the five elements;	Bai, (2021), Li, (1990); Xiang, (2022); Yao, (2012); Feng, (2022); Zhou, (2001)
Benevolence (<i>Ren</i>)	heaven; <i>ren</i> ; <i>Yi</i> ; integrating righteousness; rituals and music; benevolence; reign; good nature; the benevolence of <i>Yang Qi</i>	Cui, 2008; Kong, 2022a; Li, 2022; Wang, 2017; Yang, 2002; Zeng, 2015
People-oriented	benevolent government; people's heart; popular Sentiment; human-oriented; humanistic spirit; thought of people; reverence for heaven; kind to people; virtue; <i>Yin</i> ; <i>Yang</i> ; five constants	Lou, 2017; Li, 2024; Li, 2009; Wan, 2004; Wang, 1994; Wang, 2020; Wei, 2011; Yu, 1994
Political philosophy	politics; benevolent governance; modern political; moral education; <i>the Spring and Autumn Annals</i> ; politics; civilization form; policy of benevolence; benevolent loves people; great unity; <i>Tiaojun</i> (調均); political philosophy	Gao, 2022; Jiang2023; Liu, 2022; Xu, 2023; Yu, 2022

Table 2.1 shows the literature review of this study classified by topic, including keywords and sources. There are four themes: "heaven and man",

"benevolence", "people-oriented" and "political philosophy".

Bai (2021), Li (1990), Xiang (2022), Yao (2012), Feng (2022) and Zhou (2001) point that humanistic thought emphasized the in-depth exploration of the nature of man, the relationship between man and nature, man and man, and man and society. Therefore, the concept of people-oriented is not only the inheritance and development of traditional values, but also a response to the challenges of the times. It encourages the perfection of individual human nature, as well as the harmonious and healthy development of human relationships and society. The humanistic spirit in his thought is the affirmation and praise of human value, the respect and concern for human life. Confucius disciples recorded this incident in order to show that Confucius valued human life above all else (Yao, 2012).

Cui (2008), Kong (2022a), Li (2022), Wang (2017), Yang (2002) and Zeng (2015) point Confucianism emphasizes the importance of human dignity and value. The highest virtues in paradise are compassion and righteousness. People should follow the route of heaven and love one another. The king should manage the land through the promotion of ceremonies and music, rather than just punishing people. Some scholars explain *Dong Zhongshu's* beliefs on compassion and justice via the lens of Qi.

Lou (2017), Li (2024), Li (2009), Wan (2004), Wang (1994), Wang (2020), Wei (2011) and Yu (1994) discusses Chinese traditional humanistic thought in light of the dichotomy between East and West, as well as historical context. The authors point humanistic thought attaches importance to and protects human life, freedom and dignity. It advocates the free development of personality. Theological philosophy dominated during the *Xia* (夏), *Shang* (商) and *Zhou* (周) Period, with people following heaven's commandments and disregarding human status and value. The perspective of "humanism" refers to a

people-oriented tendency of thought. points this perspective also advocated for an educational system imbued with the spirit of humanism, which was later gradually unified into a cohesive theory. The modern western humanism emphasizes the value of the individual and encourages full and complete growth. The Chinese theory of people-oriented is different from the Western thought of democracy, which is combined with the perspective of worshipping deities for the purpose of protecting the power of the king. The highly modernized society overly relies on science, technology, and material means. It is prone to fall back into "materialism". Confucius regards self-knowledge, understanding of others, and kindness to others as the basic requirements of benevolence. People-oriented humanistic spirit is the most fundamental and important feature of Chinese culture. It has always been an important basis and content of Confucianism. People-oriented is to put people in the most important position and respect the value of people, which is the core of the humanistic spirit.

Gao (2022), Jiang (2023), Liu (2022), Xu (2023) and Yu (2022) point *Dong Zhongshu's* ideology is a political one. All of his views were ultimately applied to realpolitik. *Dong Zhongshu* investigated the concepts of kindness and justice through the great meanings of Spring and Autumn, and argued for the establishment of benevolent governance. His ideas contained a number of particular political measures.

Dong Zhongshu's people-oriented approach is still founded on the Confucian concept of benevolence and righteousness, which is similar to that of pre-Qin Confucius and Mencius (Zhao, 2018). Using the relationship between heaven and human as a theoretical basis, he expanded the concept of people-oriented thinking with benevolence at its core (Li, 1990; Wan & Lin, 2004). The new system of Confucianism he created went beyond that of the

Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods, reaching as high as this concept could go, and played an important part in the development of primordial Confucianism to Han Dynasty Confucianism (Li, 1990; Wang, 2017).

Methodology:

This research adopts a qualitative approach, including text interpretation methods and comparative research. This study focuses on *Dong Zhongshu's* people-oriented benevolence and righteousness philosophy. The literature is organized and examined from the standpoint of the philosophy of heaven and man, the relationship between Kings and subjects, political philosophy, and governance measures. The main references are *Chunqiu Fanlu* and its commentary. Comprehend and grasp the concept of people-oriented as represented in the perspective of benevolence and righteousness. This consists of the following steps:

- i. Collect valuable literature, pay attention to the domestic and foreign literature on *Dong Zhongshu's* benevolence and righteousness thought and the latest research results.
- ii. *Dong Zhongshu* inherited the Confucian thought of people-oriented. Based on abundant and reliable literature materials, this paper discusses his important exposition of "humans are the world's most valuable resource" in the relationship between heaven and humanity and between ruler and subjects.
- iii. Analysis and summary: *Dong Zhongshu's* people-oriented approach on ceremonies, music education, and moral governance exemplifies his philosophy of compassion and righteousness.

This study uses the qualitative literature method to reveal *Dong Zhongshu's* people-oriented thought in his philosophy and political views of heaven and human, as well as to investigate the concept of

benevolence and righteousness contained within it, which has important implications for resolving interpersonal conflicts, political contradictions, and disputes.

Findings and Discussion:

1. The perspective of people-oriented thought in the philosophy of heaven and human

The Confucian view of life based on natural "birth" holds that humans, heaven, and earth are the foundation of all things. Humans are a product of the nature of heaven and earth, and they are unquestionably a part of nature with which they share an intrinsic life link. *Dong Zhongshu* considers human life to be the most valuable form of natural life. According to *Chunqiu Fanlu*, the universe is made up of ten elements: heaven, earth, Yin (阴), Yang (阳), wood, fire, soil, metal, water, and humans. Outside of the 10, are all things that prove that human is above all things, and human is the most valuable in the world (Su, 1992).

First and foremost, in terms of human physiology, *Dong Zhongshu* felt that humans are similar to heaven and earth, implying that human life is valuable. Heaven is high above, but it governs the world benevolently and justly. Heaven represents the spirit of compassion and morality, and it serves as an example for humans, who must replicate Heaven's values in their own activities. The number of heaven creates human form; the intention of heaven and benevolence creates human blood and Qi; and the reason of heaven and righteousness creates human virtue and behavior (Su, 1992). Including the reason why there is a system of benevolence and righteousness in the human world, it is also because it is commanded by heaven and received from heaven.

From the two dimensions of number and category, *Dong Zhongshu* repeatedly demonstrated that heaven and human are of the same kind, that heaven and number are interrelated, and that life is

connected (Xiang, 2022). According to *Dong Zhongshu*, humans have twelve large bones, which correspond to the twelve months; 360 little bones, which correspond to the 360 days of the year; and four limbs, which correlate to the seasons. Man's muscles correspond to the earth's thickness; man's ears and eyes represent the sun and moon; man's blood represents mountains and rivers; and man's grief and joy represent cold and warmth (Su, 1992). For those that cannot be compared with numbers, *Dong Zhongshu* uses categories, such as human behavior and temperament, and even disease, which echo the *Yin-Yang* of heaven. When analyzing human nature, he noted that humans have natural impulses toward greed and charity, which stem from *Yin-Yang Qi* (阴气 & 阳气).

Table 2 shows the distinctions between *Yang* and *Yin*: *Yang Qi* represents Heaven's virtue, while *Yin Qi* represents Heaven's punishment. *Yang Qi* is warm and comfortable, whereas *Yin Qi* is cold. *Yang energy* gives, while *Yin Qi* takes away. *Yang Qi* is benevolent, while *Yin energy* is fierce. *Yang Qi* is expansive, while *Yin Qi* is urgent. *Yang Qi* is good, while *Yin Qi* is evil. *Yang Qi* increases, whereas *Yin Qi* decreases. In the human body, these correspondences from Heaven mean that the tendency towards greed originates from Heaven's *Yin Qi*, while the tendency towards benevolence originates from Heaven's *Yang Qi*. According to *Dong Zhongshu*, the "heart of heaven" is benevolence.

Table 2 Distinctions of Yang Qi & Yin Qi

Projects	Distinctions						
<i>Yang Qi</i> (陽氣)	Virtue	Warm	Give	benevolent	Expansive	Good	Increases
<i>Yin Qi</i> (陰氣)	Punishment	Cold	Take away	Fierce	Urgent	Evil	Decreases

Dong Zhongshu's conceptual relationship between heaven and human is one in which man actively participates rather than passively accepts and senses heaven. The first is that the celestial and human senses finally interact with staff to serve the public. Applying these facts to state governance is tied to the king's virtue as well as the state's rise and collapse (Yu, 2022). Secondly, the key to the connection between heaven and human lies in the fact that human must exert his initiative and be wise and knowledgeable in order to be aware of the connection that causes similar things, of the invasiveness of human, and of the subtle truth. Third, he encouraged people to give full play to their initiative, emphasizing that they should not only rely on the destiny of heaven and ignore human efforts. This is *Dong Zhongshu* to give

human the highest praise and absolute affirmation of value.

2. The relationship between ruler and subjects represents the principle of the people-oriented.

Dong Zhongshu focused on the relationship between heaven and human, which served as a warning and limit on the ruler's power. He felt that the king should follow the rules of Heaven and not act arbitrarily. The king is called *Tianzi*, which means the son of heaven. The king was just a proxy for Heaven in managing the people. If the people lived in peace and happiness, Heaven granted the king Mandate of Heaven; if the people lived in suffering, the king was denied the Mandate of Heaven. For example, *King Zhou of the Shang*

Dynasty (商紂王) was cruel and immoral, and although being the king, he could only be known as the lonely commoner and eventually self-defeating.

Dong Zhongshu consistently emphasized the importance of the king's virtue to state authority. The king is the Lord of a country, and the people are the body of the country, his virtue has a direct impact on the civilizing customs of all people and the governance of the country. The nation will perish if the king is in jeopardy, as injured roots also affect their branches (Su, 1992). Like the cycle of the four seasons, the alternating warmth and cold, the king has the power to decide on people's life and death as well as their rewards and punishments. However, he must use these powers wisely. In the same way that every one of the five components has unique qualities, the king has to know individuals and select officials based on their diverse skill sets. *Dong Zhongshu* highlighted the importance of the king's moral behavior because, before the Western Han Dynasty, society was riven by unrest and perpetual conflict. Human relationships were governed by moral rules and conventions that people had distorted and perverted. Particularly, the king often treated himself with benevolence and demanded righteousness from others, blurring the distinction between benevolence and righteousness. To prevent the recurrence of chaos that had persisted since the Spring and Autumn Period, and to maintain political stability and national security, he addressed the king who had confused the distinction between benevolence and righteousness. He proposed that benevolence is love other, and righteousness is rectifying oneself (Su, 1992). There is a clear difference in the objects and scope of application between benevolence and righteousness. Benevolence extends beyond oneself, reaching outward as far and wide as possible, while righteousness focuses on rectifying oneself, closer to one's own behavior. *Dong Zhongshu* particularly warned the king to discern carefully between

benevolence and righteousness. Misapplication of benevolence and righteousness could lead to great disorder throughout the realm. Therefore, his doctrine of benevolence and righteousness was intended for the king, guiding them to govern with virtue and to conscientiously reflect on whether their actions aligned with benevolence and righteousness.

Dong Zhongshu made the observation that the king, in order to rule his people well, had to rigorously cultivate himself in five areas: his speech should be conciliatory, his gaze should be discerning, his listening should be attentive, and his thoughts should be composed. These characteristics control perception, hearing, speech, behavior, and attitude. To rule the people was the ultimate purpose of the king's cultivation. He goes on to say that the people are like the limbs and the king is like the heart; when the limbs are injured, the heart gets hurt too, and when the people are hurt, the king gets hurt too.

3. The politically people-centered viewpoint of *Dong Zhongshu*, "Virtue is fundamental and punishment is auxiliary"

Confucianism emphasizes that four components are necessary for a nation's governance: music, ritual, politics, and punishment. Confucius promoted virtue-based government, moral leadership by setting an example for the populace, and law and ritual-based restraint. *Dong Zhongshu*, on the other hand, believed that ritual, music, governance, and punishment each serve different functions in governance, with some playing primary roles and others supporting roles. He proposed a benign approach in which virtue is fundamental and punishment is auxiliary. He drew on the philosophy of the Way of Heaven and *Yin-Yang* theory to argue for the relationship between virtue and punishment, detailing how they interact within the governance framework (Xu, 2023).

Dong Zhongshu believed that the operation of the

Way of Heaven relies on the interaction of the *Yin Qi* and *Yang Qi*. It is through their mutual influence that the world functions. However, *Yin-Yang* has distinct roles and statuses. Figure 1 shows the operating diagram of Yin-yang. *Yang* is esteemed while *Yin* is considered subordinate. *Yang* is primary and *Yin* is secondary. *Yin-Yang* operates in distinct fields. *Yang* operates in the south and *Yin* in the north. They move in opposite directions: *Yang* travels from northeast to south, while *Yin* moves

from southeast to north, each seeking its rightful place. *Yang* is associated with virtue and when in its proper place in the south, it brings about intense summer heat, fostering growth and nurturing. In contrast, *Yin* is associated with punishment and when in its proper place in the north, it brings severe cold, representing solemnity and death. *Dong Zhongshu* emphasized that even though *Yin* contributes to the cold, it is because *Yang* retreats underground rather than *Yin* taking active effect.

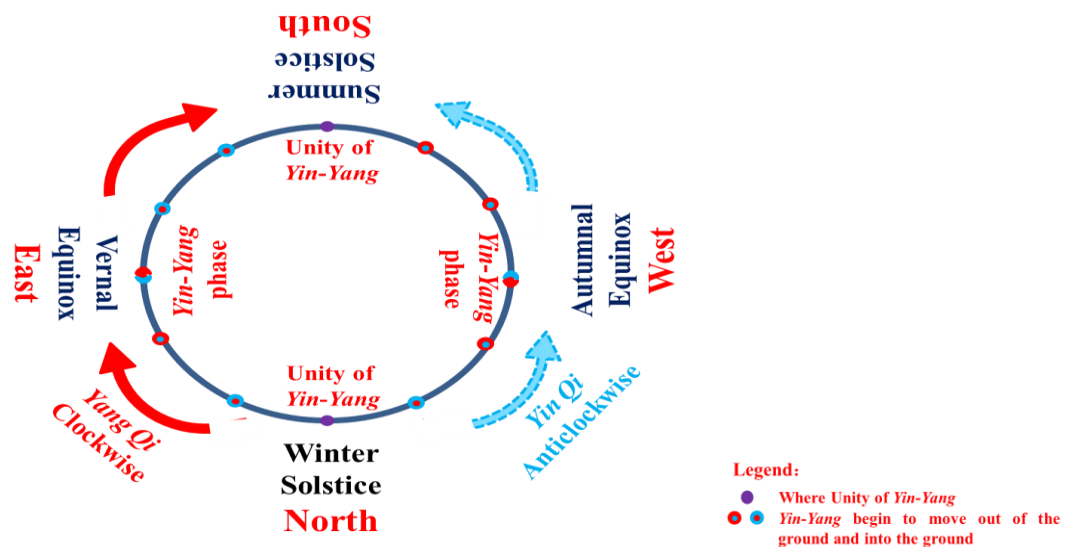


Figure 1: Yin-Yang Operation

Thus, *Dong Zhongshu* argued that the operation of *Yang* is substantial both in its coming and going, while the operation of *Yin* is insubstantial, contributing neither when it comes nor when it goes (Su, 1992). This demonstrates that the Way of Heaven places *Yang* as primary and *Yin* as secondary. However, despite the emphasis on *Yang*, he noted that without the assistance of *Yin*, the yearly cycle could not be completed. Governing the world should also operate like the interaction of *Yin-Yang*: emphasizing *Virtue is fundamental and punishment is auxiliary*. Despite its auxiliary role, punishment is deemed essential; without it, the task of governing a nation cannot be fulfilled (Zeng, 2015). He believed that the vital energies of *Yin-Yang* constitute the essence of Heaven and Earth. Heavenly intentions favor *Yang* over *Yin* and virtue over punishment. Rulers should align

themselves with these celestial intentions, practicing benevolent governance rather than oppressive rule, thereby upholding the righteous path of Heaven and Earth.

Dong Zhongshu further elaborated using the attributes of *Yin-Yang* and their relationship to the four seasons. He stated that *Yang* operates during the spring when the year begins, while *Yin* operates during the autumn as the year nears its end. Observing the cycle of the seasons, the Way of Heaven follows a pattern: it first brings warmth, benevolence, and a willingness to help all things grow; then it brings cold, severity, and leads to the decline and decay of all things. Therefore, ancient Chinese laws stipulated that the harshest punishments were generally executed after autumn, in accordance with the Way of Heaven. Moreover,

out of the four seasons, three are conducive to growth and only one leads to the death and withering of things. There are more warm days than cold days, so hence benevolent governance should prevail over punitive measures. The changing temperatures throughout the seasons ensure the growth of all things. Rulers should be adept at understanding these natural cycles, appropriately expressing joy, anger, grief, and happiness, with the primary emphasis on moral education through benevolence and virtue, and laws and punishments serving as secondary measures. This approach ensures stability and prosperity for all people. *Dong Zhongshu's* analogy of the Way of Heaven to human affairs not only suited the societal and political needs of his time but also fundamentally represented the interests of the populace.

4. The "people-oriented" implementation measures

Dong Zhongshu's attitude towards war is primarily reflected in his interpretation of events recorded in *the Spring and Autumn Annals*. Through his analysis of the *Ci* (辭, means the writing and use of words) concerning war in the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, he emphasized his regard for human life and his sympathy towards the suffering of the people (Yu, 2013). He believed that the principles of benevolence and righteousness in *the Spring and Autumn Annals* demonstrate that during years of famine or disaster, it was avoided to levy taxes on the people for repairing palaces and temples. This was aimed at preventing further hardship for the people, as they already found suffering distasteful, let alone harm. The suffering inflicted upon the people would deeply distress the ruler of the state, and even more so the slaughter and death brought about by war (Su, 1992). Such harm was considered the most severe. Therefore, *the Spring and Autumn Annals* vehemently condemns and denounces rulers who, disregarding the life and death of their people, recklessly initiate wars to seize land and wealth for

personal gain.

In terms of economic policy, *Dong Zhongshu* advocated for "*Tiaojun*" (調均, harmonious and balance), opposing severe difference between affluent and poor, but did not support pure egalitarianism (Yu, 2022). This view comes from Confucius' perspective of "*concern not about the lack of material wealth but about unequal distribution, and not about poverty but about instability*" (不患寡而患不均, 不患贫而患不安). *Dong Zhongshu* emphasized the need to establish a comprehensive system to regulate the adjustment and distribution of social resources and wealth in *Chunqiu Fanlu*. This included restraining desires and achieving a state of balance. Addressing officials of high status, he argued that those who already received state salaries and enjoyed a secure and affluent life should not engage in agriculture, handicrafts, commerce, or other activities that could compete for the interests of the people. Instead, ordinary people should engage in various activities to sustain their livelihoods. This approach aimed to ensure a more equitable distribution of resources and benefits across the nation, allowing the privileged to display their wealth and status without becoming arrogant, and enabling common people to support their families without falling into despair. *Tiaojun* economic strategy also drew inspiration from the Way of Heaven. He believed that *Heaven does not give repeatedly* (天不重予). For instance, animals have either legs or wings but not both, or have horns but not sharp teeth. According to *Dong Zhongshu*, this demonstrates Heaven's benevolence, ensuring that all entities have sufficient means for survival and development without competing for interests. Therefore, rulers must govern in accordance with the way of heaven, which ensuring officials do not both enjoy substantial salaries and compete for the interests of the people, thereby guaranteeing stability and security in people's lives.

Dong Zhongshu proposed a series of practical initiatives aligned with the interests of the people. Firstly, addressing the serious issue of land consolidation in society at that time, he opposed such practices. He emphasized limiting the amount of land individuals, especially wealthy clans, could possess to safeguard vital land resources for the country and its people. Secondly, he advocated that the rights to salt and iron production should belong to the people, opposing government monopolies on these enterprises. Thirdly, he proposed reducing taxes, cutting expenditures, and lightening the burden on farmers. He cared deeply for the welfare of the people, advocating for minimal imposition on farmers' time, limiting conscription to no more than three days a year. Government officials were urged to respect the time needed for agricultural production and refrain from disturbing the people unnecessarily. He also advocated from a perspective of respecting the dignity and value of human life. He proposed abolishing the privilege of arbitrary killing of slaves, thus safeguarding the rights to life and survival of the lowest strata of society (Ban, 1999). Additionally, he placed significant emphasis on cultivating and selecting talents. He suggested establishing academies and schools from the central government to local levels to nurture talent for the state, appointing capable individuals through examinations. These suggestions for benevolent governance in actual approaches exemplified *Dong Zhongshu's* people-oriented philosophy. Although not fully adopted by the emperor at that time, they played a constructive role in shaping the political and social systems of Western Han society and subsequent Chinese societies. Through these initiatives, he revealed himself not just as a visionary thinker and statesman but also as a scholar deeply committed to the well-being of the people.

Conclusion:

Dong Zhongshu revered the Way of Heaven but placed even greater emphasis on humaneness, reflecting his profound ethical views centered on human beings. His philosophy of heaven and human serves as the theoretical foundation for prioritizing humanity. He did not limit himself to purely theoretical philosophical inquiries; instead, he applied these principles to political practice. The orderly and regular operations of Heaven and Earth, governed by constant laws, demonstrate Heaven's bestowal of benevolence upon all things. Benevolence and righteousness represent the most perfect virtues according to Heaven. Heaven gives people life and puts humans on par with Heaven and Earth. *Dong Zhongshu* emphasizes the highest worth of human life above all else, and the principle of benevolence and righteousness stem from Heaven itself. The king receives their mission from Heaven, and they must accept and follow Heaven's benevolent virtues. The governance of the country with benevolence aligns with the laws of heaven, earning recognition and praise from above. This assertion is intimately tied to his beliefs about benevolence and righteousness. The seemingly cryptic relationship between heaven and human is actually people-oriented, emphasizing the two entities' togetherness. Similarly, the seemingly hostile interaction between ruler and subjects emphasizes the people-oriented of the relationship, emphasizing the value of human life and human subjectivity. Even the seemingly frigid methods of ceremonies, music, government, and punishment incorporate the people-oriented concept of compassion and morality. From philosophical theory to political practice, *Dong Zhongshu's* emphasis on "people-oriented" illustrates the profound foundations of the concept of benevolence and righteousness.

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