

‘Wholeness’ in Confucian Thought – Zhu Xi on *Cheng*, *Zhong*, *Xin* and *Jing*

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1. *Cheng*, *Zhong*, *Xin* and *Jing*

The Daxue refers to *cheng yi* as one of four aspects of self-cultivation, and describes how *cheng* on the inside will inevitably take shape on the outside (chap. 6). In this connection, it refers to how the superior person always *shen qi du*. *Yi* refers to the thoughts of the heart/mind and *cheng*, often translated as “sincerity” or “wholeness”, refers to a certain orientation of the heart/mind. The interpretation of *du* in *shen qi du* (watchful over *du*) requires further investigation.

Among texts up to the early Han, *cheng* as a key term occurs in passages 4A:12 and 7A:4 of the Mengzi; 4A:12 contrasts *cheng*, described as the way of Heaven (*tian*), with focusing on *cheng* (*si cheng*), described as the way of humans. The Zhongyong contains a passage (chap. 20) bearing similarity to Mengzi 4A:12, and the beginning of the text (chap. 1) also refers to the idea of *shen qi du*. The expression *shen qi du* also occurs in the “Li Qi” chapter of the Liji (7/16a-b), as well as in the “Bu Gou” chapter of the Xunzi, which describes *cheng* as a way to nourish the heart/mind (2/4a-5a). The Zhongyong contains an elaborate discussion of *cheng* as an attribute of a person, and other texts such as the Yijing also refers to *cheng* as a personal quality (1/3a).

*Cheng* is also related to a number of other key terms in early Chinese texts. It is used in conjunction with *xin* (trustworthiness) (e.g., Xunzi 9/7b, Liji 14/18b), and *xin* in

turn is often paired with *zhong* (loyalty, doing one's best) in the combination *zhong xin* (e.g., Lunyu 1:8, 9:25). *Zhong xin* in turn is related to *jing* (reverence, seriousness) (e.g., Lunyu 15:6); in connection with one's attitude in sacrifice, the Liji also links *cheng* of the heart/mind to *jing* (14/19b). Thus, in early texts, *cheng*, *zhong*, *xin* and *jing* are apparently related in some intimate way.

These four terms come together in the thinking of Zhu Xi (1130-1200), who discusses their interconnections as well as the aspect of self-cultivation related to *cheng yi* and *shen qi du*. In what follows, I will discuss these terms and ideas as they occur in early texts, and explore their interconnections in the context of Zhu Xi's thinking. I will show that, while carrying different emphases, the four terms exhibit a certain commonality that, for convenience, I will refer to as "wholeness". This commonality has to do with the idea of things coming together in entirety, without discord or discrepancy of any kind.

## 2. Cheng and Shen Qi Du

*Cheng* is used in early texts with the meaning of what is truly so (e.g., Lunyu 13:11, Mengzi 1A:7), and is often contrasted with *wei*, what is false (e.g., Liji 11/17a, Xunzi 14/3a). We have already noted its use in early texts to refer to a personal attribute and in connection with self-cultivation. The term plays an important role in the thinking of Li Ao (eighth-ninth century), who follows the Zhongyong in relating *cheng* to *xing* (nature), which for Li Ao is a perfectly good nature that is contrasted with *qing* (emotions), which can lead it astray (2/1a-3b). For Li Ao, the task of self-cultivation is to

eliminate this influence of *qing* and restore one's *xing*. Zhang Zai (1020-1077), also following ideas in the Zhongyong, relates *cheng* to Heaven (*tian*) and sees humans as *cheng* only to the extent that they model themselves on Heaven (2/17a). Zhou Dunyi (1017-1073) characterizes *cheng* in terms of an absence of *wang* (deviance), an idea that he takes from the Yijing (3/5b) and that he interprets to refer to any activity that is not good (p. 38). The brothers Cheng Yi (1033-1107) and Cheng Hao (1032-1085), in addition to explicating *cheng* in terms of the absence of *wang*, also relate it to *zhen*, what is genuine (Yishu 21b/1b).

Zhu Xi continues to characterize *cheng* in terms of *zhen* and the absence of *wang*, and in addition relates it to *shi*, what is real and has substance (Zhongyong Zhangju 11a, 17b-18a). *Shi* is used in early text to refer to what is truly the case, and Zhu takes *cheng* to mean that *li* (principle, pattern) is truly (*shi*) in oneself (Yulei pp. 102, 1544). *Shi* can mean “being filled” by contrast with *xu* (vacuous, empty) and “being real” by contrast with *wei* (false, fake). Zhu draws on both connotations of *shi*; *cheng* involves one's being filled with *li*, which is really in oneself. The *cheng* person is consistent both inwardly and outwardly (Yulei p. 543) and follows the Way (*dao*) with ease and without effort (Commentary on Zhou Dunyi's Tongshu p. 14).

*Cheng* is also related to oneness, which is contrasted with being two or being mixed (Yulei p. 304), where being mixed is seen as a form of *wei* (Yulei p. 338). The state of being two or being mixed involves a discrepancy between what is on the inside and what is on the outside (Yulei p. 304); it is like having two people within one's heart/mind, pulling one in different directions (Yulei p. 1721). So, for Zhu, *cheng* is a state of the heart/mind in which the heart/mind is fully oriented in accordance with *li*,

without any internal division and without any discrepancy between one's outer behavior and inner dispositions.

To further understand *cheng*, let us turn to the idea of *shen qi du*, which is related to an attitude of caution at the beginning of the Zhongyong:

“As for *dao* (Way), it is not something that one can depart from for a slight moment; what one can depart from is not *dao*. For this reason, the superior person is cautious (*jie shen*) about what he does not see and fearful (*kong ju*) about what he does not hear. Nothing is more visible than the subtle or more manifest than the minute. For this reason, the superior person *shen qi du*.” (Zhongyong chap. 1)

Of the four terms *jie*, *shen*, *kong* and *ju*, *jie* and *kong* describe an attitude toward an undesirable occurrence and can take such an occurrence as object. *Jie* is often directed toward some undesirable occurrence that is already conspicuous, either having already occurred, is imminent, or is likely. For example, it describes one's response to the presence of powerful enemies (Hanfeizi 1/4b), to neighboring states plotting against one's state (Mozi 4/5/4), or to dangers associated with various stages of life (Lunyu 16:7). *Kong* is used to emphasize the possibility of certain undesirable occurrences taking place, though such occurrences are by comparison to objects of *jie* more 'distant' in that they are just possible and are not yet imminent or even likely. For example, it describes one's attitude toward possible occurrences such as: losing what one has learnt (Lunyu 8:17), disgracing one's ancestors (Xiaojing 8/1b), one's incompetence (Xunzi 19/3a), being attacked by another state (Mozi 88/49/1), or the honest village man being mistaken for the virtuous (Mengzi 7B:37).

*Ju* is sometimes used in the sense of fear (e.g., Mengzi 2A:2), but can also describe one's attitude toward possible undesirable occurrences with an emphasis on one's conscious awareness of such occurrences, such as one's awareness of the aging of parents (Lunyu 4:21). Often, it is used in connection with how one proceeds to pre-empt undesirable occurrences, such as being aware of incorrectness in deliberating about what is correct (Xunzi 15/10a), consciously staying away from disgrace (Xunzi 1/12b), or being very careful in approaching affairs (Lunyu 7:11). *Shen* can also be used in relation to undesirable occurrences, such as one's words bringing disaster and one's conduct bringing disgrace (Xunzi 1/3a), or one's imposing punishment, something that ideally should not be necessary (Zuozhuan 12/9a-9b). It emphasizes one's caution in pre-empting such occurrences or in handling them if they occur. *Shen* can also be used to describe an attitude of caution generally, without specifying the undesirable occurrence that one should avoid. For example, it can be used in relation to such things as one's words (Lunyu 1:14, Mozi 59/36/16), one's conduct (Mozi 12/9/65), the end of life (Lunyu 1:9), or the shaping influence one is exposed to (Mozi 2/3/2).

The character *du*, literally meaning "alone", is open to different interpretations. The Daxue describes how the inferior person acts unethically when alone by himself and then put on an ethical appearance in the presence of others (chap. 6). The idea of *shen qi du* occurs in this context, and it has sometimes been interpreted to mean that one should be watchful over oneself even when alone, in the absence of others. However, a survey of the occurrences of the expression in early texts suggests that it probably refers instead to a kind of inner self-management. In the "Bu Gou" chapter of the Xunzi, it is used in the context of a discussion of how one nourishes one's heart/mind (2/4a-5a). In the "Li Qi"

chapter of the Liji, it is mentioned in connection with what is inside the heart/mind (7/16a-16b). At the beginning of the Zhongyong, it is mentioned in connection with what is hidden and minute, again suggesting that *du* has to do with the inner workings of the heart/mind (chap. 1). Even in the Daxue passage just mentioned, its occurrence is preceded by a reference to how *cheng* on the inside takes shape on the outside, an idea bearing a similarity to the Zhongyong observation about how nothing is more visible than the hidden and more manifest than the minute. The Xunzi passage presents a complication, though, as *du* is sometimes used by itself to refer to a certain kind of achievement. But aside from this complication, *du* as it occurs in *shen qi du* in early texts probably refers to the inner workings of the heart/mind. This interpretation is quite broadly shared up to the time of Zhu Xi. Li Ao, for example, takes *shen qi du* to mean guarding what is inside the heart/mind (2/7b).

Zhu Xi interprets *du* in this manner, explicating it in terms of what others do not know but one oneself alone (*du*) knows (Daxue Zhangju 6a-6b, Zhongyong Zhangju 2a, Zhongyong Huowen 3/10b-11a). It has to do with the thoughts of the heart/mind that others do not know about, even when such thoughts arise when one is in others' company (Yulei pp. 567, 1504). Zhu further takes the observation in the Zhongyong about caution and fearfulness regarding what one does not see and hear to refer to one's attitude when one's heart/mind has not yet been activated (Yulei 1499, Zhongyong Huowen 3/13a-13b). By contrast, *shen qi du* refers to one's attitude when one's heart/mind has already been activated; one should be cautious toward the minute and subtle workings of the heart/mind that are known only to oneself (*du*) and not yet to others (Yulei pp. 1502, 1503, 2469). This attitude relates to *cheng yi* since it is a way of making real (*shi*) one's

thoughts (*yi*) (Yulei p. 326), thereby ensuring that one is thoroughly good both inside and outside (Yulei p. 335).

As further elaboration on *du*, Zhu relates it to another term *ji* (Daxue Zhangju 6a-6b, Zhongyong Zhangju 2a). *Ji* is explained in the Yijing as the subtle aspects of activity (8/5a), and Zhang Zai explains it as what has started to be visible but has not yet fully taken shape (2/15a). Zhou Dunyi explains it in terms of what has been activated without having fully taken shape and what lies between being there and not yet being there (pp. 16-17); for Zhou, it is at this point that the distinction between good and evil emerges. Zhu Xi adopts Zhou's explication of *ji* (Commentary on Zhou Dunyi's Tongshu pp. 15-16; Yulei pp. 2393-94), and takes *du* to also refer to this kind of incipient activation of the heart/mind (Yulei p. 1949).

From this discussion, we see that *cheng* has to do with the heart/mind's being wholly oriented in an ethical direction. This involves the absence of any internal division or any discrepancy between one's outward behavior and inner dispositions; to accomplish this, one needs to attend carefully to the inner workings of the heart/mind. One should always be on guard against any potential deviations, whether one's heart/mind has been activated or not. To the extent that the heart/mind has already been activated, one should attend to the subtle and minute movements of the heart/mind as they emerge, even before they start taking shape outwardly and become perceivable by others. This idea of complete orientation, without any deviation or discrepancy, is also embodied in three other concepts, *zhong*, *xin* and *jing*, though with different emphases.

### 3. Zhong and Xin

In early texts, *zhong*, when directed toward superiors (and often translated as “loyalty” in such context), is not a matter of blind obedience but is guided by a sense of what is proper. The Lunyu speaks of serving a ruler with *dao* (11:24) and the Guoyu speaks of following what is proper in serving a ruler (7/5b). Remonstrance is in order when appropriate (e.g., Lunyu 14:7, 14:22), and it may even involve disobeying the ruler (e.g., Xunzi 9/2a-b). Thus, *zhong* in government is a matter of following *dao* rather than the ruler (Xunzi 9/3a). *Zhong* is also mentioned in governmental contexts without reference to superiors (e.g., Lunyu 5:19, 12:14), and this involves one’s doing one’s best in serving the public (e.g., Guoyu 8/7a, Zuozhuan 5/16b). In addition, *zhong* is mentioned in relation to one’s dealings with others, not necessarily in a governmental context (e.g., Lunyu 13:19), such as in working for another’s interest (Lunyu 1:4), in guiding others to goodness (Mengzi 3A:4), or in guiding one’s friends (Lunyu 12:23). In these examples, *zhong* involves one’s doing one’s best or fully devoting oneself to these activities.

The Cheng brothers explain *zhong* in terms of fully devoting oneself (Jingshuo 6/4b, Yishu 23/1b) and in terms of the absence of *wang* (deviance) (Yishu 11/5b, 21b/1b). Zhu Xi follows them in so explicating *zhong* (Yulei pp. 692, 1355, Zhongyong Zhangju 8b, Mengzi Jizhu 4/26b). He relates *zhong* to *cheng*, *shi*, and the absence of deception (Yulei pp. 358, 675), and characterizes *zhong* in ways similar to *cheng*, such as in terms of the absence of discrepancy between the inner and the outer (Lunyu Jizhu 6/16a). An example of the lack of *zhong* is a failure to fully devote oneself to certain appropriate activities, such as being only partially filial in the practice of filial piety (Yulei p. 358). What causes the lack of full devotion is presumably some inappropriate



concern for oneself (Lunyu Jizhu 3/6a-b), and that is the kind of inner discrepancy that makes one not *shi*.

As for *xin*, it has the meaning of “truly so” and “to believe” in early texts, and as an attribute of a person it is often mentioned in connection with words (e.g., Lunyu 1:7, 1:13). *Xin* in one’s words is often related to evidence (e.g., Zuozhuan 22/1b), and to the match between words and action (e.g., Lunyu 5:10; cf. 13:3, 14:27). However, *xin* is not just a matter of a correspondence between one’s words and the facts or one’s actions. A passage in the Lunyu talks about how an official should have *xin* before working the people hard and before remonstrating with the ruler; otherwise, he would be regarded by the people as harsh and by the ruler as slanderous (Lunyu 19:10). Here, *xin* has to do with the reliability of not just what one directly says, but also of what one indirectly represents. By working the people hard or remonstrating with the ruler, one represents this as something in the interest of the state even if the point is not directly stated, and *xin* involves one’s being worthy of trust in such representation. So, *xin* is a matter of being worthy of trust generally in one’s representation of things, though being worthy of trust does not necessarily entail being trusted (Xunzi 3/12a). It involves the reliability of one’s representations, and *xin* is often related to *qing*, what is genuinely the case (e.g., Lunyu 13:4, Liji 17/4a). In Mengzi 7B:25, the person with *xin* is described as someone who genuinely has goodness in oneself.

The Cheng brothers relate *xin* to *shi* (real, having substance) (Yishu 2a/2a), and Zhu Xi follows them in doing so (Lunyu Jizhu 1/3b, 4/11b). Commenting on Mengzi 7B:25, Zhu describes the *xin* person as someone who truly (*shi*) has goodness in a way like hating bad odors and loving beautiful colors (Mengzi Jizhu 7/23b-24a). This

characterization of *xin* is similar to the characterization of *cheng* in the Daxue (chap. 6), and Zhu also directly relates *xin* to *cheng* (Lunyu Jizhu 10/2b, Yulei p. 595). He relates *zhong xin* to *cheng shi* (Yulei pp. 1712-14) and on one occasion, when asked if *cheng* is the same as *zhong xin*, he even answers in the affirmative (Yulei p. 489). Though this answer might have been exaggerated, it at least confirms the impression that he sees a close link between *zhong xin* and *cheng*. How then do these three qualities differ?

The Cheng brothers characterize the difference between *zhong* and *xin* by saying that, while *zhong* has to do with fully devoting oneself, *xin* has to do with following things without deviation (Yishu 11/12a). Zhu Xi endorses this characterization of the difference (Daxue Zhangju 12b, Lunyu Jizhu 1/2b), emphasizing that *zhong* has to do with oneself (Yulei p. 486) and one's own heart/mind (Yulei pp. 482, 503), while *xin* has to do with things (Yulei p. 486) and affairs (Yulei pp. 482, 503). An example of *zhong* is to fully assist someone deliberate about the pro's and con's of that person's affair as if it were one's own affair, and an example of *xin* is to say exactly what is the case (Yulei pp. 482, 2868). Another way to bring out the contrast is to consider how the two play out in one's talking to another person – *zhong* has to do with fully conveying all that is relevant, while *xin* has to do with being truthful in what one conveys (Yulei p. 487). The emphasis of *zhong* is on what emerges from the inside, while that of *xin* is on the match with how things are out there (Lunyu Huowen 6/18b-19a).

As for the difference from *cheng*, the Cheng brothers characterize *cheng* as 'having a single heart/mind', while *zhong* has to do with fully devoting oneself and *xin* with correctness in relation to affairs (Jingshuo 6/9b). This characterization of *cheng* is endorsed by Zhu Xi (Yulei p. 486), who regards *cheng* as the basis, referring to the

entirety of one's heart/mind, and *zhong* as the function or manifestation of *cheng*, having to do with how the heart/mind responds to things (Yulei p. 486; cf. p. 103). So, *cheng* is a more fundamental quality of 'having a single heart/mind' in the sense of being completely oriented in an ethical direction, without discord or discrepancy of any kind. It will lead to *zhong* in that one who is so oriented will fully devote oneself to activities of the appropriate kind, and to *xin* in that the *cheng* person's representation of things will always be reliable. Thus, *zhong* and *xin* are natural offshoots of *cheng* (Yulei p. 2445).

#### 4. *Jing*

As in the examples from early texts mentioned earlier, Zhu Xi also relates *cheng* to *jing* (Yulei p. 2878) and *zhong xin* to *jing* (Yulei pp. 122-123). *Jing* is used in early texts to refer to an attitude directed not just toward deities or persons (in which context it is often translated as "respect" or "reverence"), but also toward affairs (e.g., Lunyu 1:5, 13:19, 15:38, 16:10). It is related to both *jie* (e.g., Zuozhuan 16/23a) and *shen* (e.g., Zuozhuan 19/23b, citing Shijing), and so involves an attitude of being on guard and being cautious. It is presented as a way to cultivate oneself (Lunyu 14:42) or to straighten what is within oneself (Yijing 1/7a), as well as a quality of the superior person (Lunyu 12:5).

The Cheng brothers likewise see *jing* as a way to cultivate oneself, describing it as the basis for entering into *dao* (Way) (Cuiyan 1/10b) and *de* (virtue, power) (Cuiyan 1/17b). They view it as a quality that one should have prior to interacting with things, and goodness as what results when one acts from *jing* (Cuiyan 1/17a). This quality they characterize in terms of having oneness as master within so that one stays centered

without being moved (Yishu 15/5a; cf. Cuiyan 1/3b, Yishu 15/20a). Zhu Xi endorses these views of the Cheng brothers. For him, having oneness as master means the heart/mind is not divided (Yulei p. 2635), so that one is not distracted by other things when focused on one thing (Yulei pp. 2464, 2467). One should be like this whether active or inactive (Yulei pp. 2465, 2875). He relates *jing* to the attitude of caution and fearfulness and to the idea of *shen qi du* found at the beginning of the Zhongyong (Yulei pp. 2471, 2767), and characterizes it as a posture of being constantly alert (Yulei pp. 494, 2788, 2936). For Zhu, *jing* involves a focus of attention, concentration, freedom from distraction, caution and alertness.

So, *jing* is a posture that one should have, whether when interacting with things or not, that also involves a form of ‘wholeness’. It has to do with being fully in control of one’s mental attention and being fully alert so that one is not vulnerable to distractions. When directed to something one is interacting with, whether a person or an affair, it involves a full devotion of attention, caution, and alertness to possible distraction or incorrectness. It is unlike *zhong* in that the emphasis of *jing* is more on one’s attention and mental concentration, while that of *zhong* is more on one’s efforts. *Jing* involves focus of attention and alertness, while *zhong* involves fully devoting efforts to what is at hand. It is unlike *cheng* in that the emphasis of *cheng* is on the full presence of something in oneself, while that of *jing* is on full attention and alertness (Yulei pp. 2471, 2878; cf. p. 103), and unlike *xin* in that *xin* has more to do with reliability of outward representation.

##### 5. ‘Wholeness’ and ‘Purity’

Still, common to all four of these ideas is a shared phenomenon that we have labeled “wholeness” and that has to do with the idea of completeness or full presence of something. *Cheng* involves the complete orientation of oneself in an ethical direction, which for Zhu Xi involves the real and substantive presence of *li* in the heart/mind. *Zhong* is a matter of total devotion of effort, while *xin* has to do with a complete reliability of outward representation. *Jing*, on the other hand, is a posture that involves complete focus of mental attention and full alertness.

Completeness or full presence of something entails the absence of factors that can detract from such completeness. So, ‘wholeness’ also entails a kind of ‘purity’, understood in the sense of the absence of deviant factors, or factors that might be at discrepancy with that whose full presence is at issue. This complementary phenomenon, which focuses on the absence of deviant factors and which we have labeled “purity”, is embodied in another cluster of key terms in Chinese philosophical texts. These terms include *xu* (vacuous, empty), *jing\** (still, inactive) and *wu* (not have, nothing), which are also prominent terms in Zhu Xi’s thinking. The linkage between ‘wholeness’ and ‘purity’ can be seen in the way he relates the corresponding terms.

Following the Cheng brothers (e.g., Cuiyan 1/7b, Yishu 15/11a), Zhu Xi regards *jing* as leading to *xu jing\** (Yulei pp. 1146, 2466); on one occasion, he even compares *jing* to a mirror, an imagery that he often uses in relation to *xu* (Yulei p. 1739). *Jing*, as we have seen, is a posture involving full mental concentration and control; it prevents the intrusion of factors that can potentially disturb the heart/mind, and so enables *jing\** in the sense of stillness of the heart/mind (Yulei p. 2617; cf. Cheng brothers Yishu 15/5b, 15/9a). The linkage between ‘wholeness’ and ‘purity’ can also be seen in connection with

*cheng*. Following the Zhongyong (chap. 21), Zhu Xi regards *cheng* as resulting in *ming* (brightness, clarity) (Zhongyong Zhangju 19b). At the same time, he also sees *ming* as resulting from *xu jing*\* (e.g., Yulei p. 204). As another example, in the Daxue, *cheng yi* is supposed to lead to rectification of the heart/mind. For Zhu, this rectification of the heart/mind enables the heart/mind to be not moved (Yulei p. 306), and thus *cheng yi* is also related to the imagery of stillness (*jing*\*) of the heart/mind.

What, then, is this phenomenon of ‘purity’, and how exactly should we understand the link between it and the phenomenon of ‘wholeness’? These subjects will require further investigation that goes beyond the scope of the present paper.\*

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Glossary

<i>Cheng</i>	诚
<i>Cheng yi</i>	诚意
<i>Dao</i>	道
<i>De</i>	德
<i>Du</i>	独
<i>Ji</i>	几
<i>Jie</i>	戒
<i>Jing</i>	敬
<i>Jing*</i>	静
<i>Ju</i>	惧
<i>Kong</i>	恐
<i>Li</i>	理
<i>Ming</i>	明
<i>Qing</i>	情
<i>Shen</i>	慎
<i>Shen qi du</i>	慎其独
<i>Shi</i>	实
<i>Si</i>	思
<i>Tian</i>	天
<i>Wang</i>	妄

<i>Wei</i>	伪
<i>Wu</i>	无
<i>Xin</i>	信
<i>Xing</i>	性
<i>Xu</i>	虚
<i>Xu jing*</i>	虚静
<i>Yi</i>	意
<i>Zhen</i>	真
<i>Zhong</i>	忠