

**AN ANALYSIS OF DONG ZHONGSHU'S
PRINCIPLE OF BENEVOLENCE AND
RIGHTEOUSNESS**

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**AN ANALYSIS OF DONG ZHONGSHU'S
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RIGHTEOUSNESS**

by

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Dong Zhongshu said that the way of Heaven is to bestow, the way of the earth is to transform, and the way of humans is to uphold righteousness. He reminds people to revere Heaven and follow the principles of benevolence and righteousness. I am grateful to the Heavens for their benevolent gift of life, granting me a healthy body and a kind heart. I am thankful to the earth for nurturing me and providing me with wisdom. I am thankful to have been born and raised in the land of great Confucian scholars, which has endowed me with a resilient spirit. I am also grateful to my ancestors for passing down their virtuous character, which will accompany me throughout my life.

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ANALISIS PRINSIP KEBAIKAN DAN KEADILAN DONG ZHONGSHU

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneliti prinsip kebaikan (*ren*) dan keadilan (*yi*) menurut Dong Zhongshu dari perspektif hubungan antara diri dan orang lain. Penyelidikan mengenai prinsip-prinsip ini adalah luas, namun hanya sedikit kajian yang meneliti dari sudut hubungan diri dan orang lain, sedangkan ia merupakan kunci penting dalam menangani pelbagai isu. Hal ini menonjolkan satu jurang dalam penyelidikan akademik yang ingin diisi oleh kajian ini. Penyelidikan ini menggunakan kaedah kualitatif yang merangkumi analisis kandungan, analisis perbandingan, dan analisis filologi. Dapatan utama kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa Dong Zhongshu, dengan mewarisi pemikiran Konfusianisme dari zaman Pra-Qin, secara langsung mengaitkan prinsip kebaikan dan keadilan dengan konsep Langit (*Heaven*) serta menegaskan bahawa kedua-duanya berpunca daripadanya. Menurut beliau, prinsip kebaikan menekankan kasih sayang terhadap orang lain, manakala prinsip keadilan menekankan pembetulan diri sendiri. Dong Zhongshu membina asas teori yang kukuh bagi prinsip-prinsip ini melalui perspektif Langit, teori *Zhengminghao*, dan kajian *Spring and Autumn Annals*. Beliau kemudian mengaplikasikannya dalam amalan politik dan moral. Berdasarkan hubungan antara diri dan orang lain, Dong Zhongshu membentuk tiga dimensi iaitu hubungan antara Langit dan manusia, etika politik, dan etika moral. Ketiga-tiga dimensi ini mengintegrasikan prinsip kebaikan dan keadilan pada pelbagai peringkat kewujudan iaitu Langit, masyarakat, dan individu. Kesemuanya melahirkan konsep susunan politik, pentadbiran moral, dan kesatuan antara Langit dengan manusia. Kajian ini

memberikan sumbangan etika yang penting serta menawarkan implikasi yang berharga untuk masyarakat China kontemporari dan juga untuk tadbir urus global.

AN ANALYSIS OF DONG ZHONGSHU'S PRINCIPLE OF BENEVOLENCE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore Dong Zhongshu's principles of benevolence (*ren*) and righteousness (*yi*) from the perspective of the relationship between the self and others. Research on Dong Zhongshu's principles of benevolence and righteousness is extensive; however, very few studies examine them from the perspective of both the self and others, which is a crucial key to addressing various issues. This highlights a gap in academic research that this study seeks to fill. The research primarily employs qualitative methods, including content analysis, comparative analysis, and philological analysis. The main finding of this study is that Dong Zhongshu, while inheriting Confucian thought from the Pre-Qin period, directly linked the principles of benevolence and righteousness with Heaven and argued that both originate from it. According to him, the principle of benevolence emphasizes loving others, whereas the principle of righteousness emphasizes correcting oneself. Dong Zhongshu established a solid theoretical foundation for these principles through the perspective of Heaven, the theory of *Zhengminghao*, and studies of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. He then applied them in political and moral practices. From the standpoint of the relationship between self and others, Dong Zhongshu constructed three dimensions: the relationship between Heaven and humans, political ethics, and moral ethics. These dimensions integrate the principles of benevolence and righteousness at different levels of existence, namely Heaven, society, and the individual. Together they form the concepts of political order, moral governance, and the unity of Heaven and humanity. This research provides important ethical contributions and offers

valuable implications for contemporary Chinese society as well as for global governance.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Benevolence and righteousness are fundamental concerns in Chinese philosophy and have consistently been popular topics for scholars to research. Confucianism's concept of benevolence and righteousness is a system of philosophy that governs the human body, mind, and social order, and it is the Chinese people's most fundamental value tendency (Liang, 2021; Guo, 2009). Confucianism, developed by the mainstream culture of the ancient Three Dynasties (*夏商周三代, Xia Dynasty, Shang Dynasty, and Zhou Dynasty*), served as a vital guarantee of continuity and unity over the past 5,000 years (Kong & Kong, 1999; Yan, 2016). Confucius established Confucianism, which developed over a long historical process into a relatively comprehensive philosophical system (Fan, 2007). This system is rich in content and logically rigorous and serves as a spiritual symbol of Chinese culture (Hu, 1997). It establishes standards of value for society and human life.

Various social crises, moral dilemmas, and ecological challenges have reached unprecedented severity in today's world, leaving humans in confusion and adversity (Axford & Browning, 2015; Hong & Yang, 2024; Deng & Yao, 2024). The era calls for new forms of civilization to promote peaceful and sustainable human development. Benevolence and righteousness are the keys to resolving personal relationships and societal issues (Xu, 2001; Guo, 2006). Benevolence and righteousness stem from human nature and are full of intellectual insight and practical wisdom (Du, 2020; Chen, 2020; Yang, 2024). Compared to the paths of civilization and barbarism, the virtues of benevolence and righteousness advocated by Confucianism, which emphasize the expression of human nature and the

cultivation of moral character, are more in line with the development of human society (Li, 2006). In the face of the experiences and lessons brought by modernization and globalization, people are increasingly believed that only the power of morality and reason, rather than hegemony and force, can genuinely ensure human peace and development. The rejuvenation of the Chinese nation brings about a cultural revival, and Confucianism inevitably plays a leading role (Mou, 2017).

The Confucian values of benevolence and righteousness, the spirit of universal love, and the wisdom of harmony have drawn attention from countries worldwide (Tang, 2008). In the 21st century, Confucianism as a spiritual culture will have a new development in China and even in the world (especially in East Asia) (Tang, 2011; Cheng, 2017). Moreover, Confucianism must integrate with societal realities to manifest its intellectual essence and achieve theoretical transformation (Li, 2023). Therefore, instead of forgetting benevolence and righteousness, we should highlight their potential value and future significance (Jin, 1987; Wang, 2009). The most significant challenges facing humans today are the contradictions between humans and nature, between individuals and society, and the internal contradictions within humans. The Confucian philosophical concepts of “the unity of Heaven and humans” (天人合一, *Tianren Heyi*), “the unity of self and others” (人我合一, *Renwo Heyi*), and “the unity of body and mind” (身心合一, *Shenxin Heyi*) may offer valuable insights (Chen, 2017; Bai & Du, 2024). We should give particular attention to them as potential resources for addressing these three major contradictions (Tang, 2008; Feng, 2017).

Dong Zhongshu (198 BC - 114 BC) was the greatest Confucian scholar and politician of the West Han Dynasty, following Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi (荀子) (Li, 2019; Ma, 2010; Yu, 2012b;). He played a vital role in building on the past and

ushering in the future. In the history of Chinese thought, the position of the Han Dynasty is like a funnel (Ding, 1978). Pre-Qin theory converged here, and later, schools of thought originated here. Dong Zhongshu's philosophy shows such a characteristic (Luo, 2006; Cao, 2021; Zhang, 1980). His thought is exceedingly rich, concentrating on philosophy of Heaven, benevolence, love of things, respect for Confucianism and morality, education, righteousness, integrity and many other areas (Li, 2022; Li, 1990). Dong Zhongshu became a symbolic figure of that era (Zhou, 2008; Li, 2019; Xu, 2001). From the perspective of regulating the morality of rulers, he emphasized the relationship between the self and others and put forward the principle of benevolence and righteousness.

Dong Zhongshu emphasizes the value of human life and the meaning of existence (Lou, 2017; Feng, 2017; Hua, 1992; Sun, 1987). Humans realize their existence through interactions, which involve distinctions and boundaries between self and others. Only by integrating into society can human relationships be formed. if one is just an individual, there are no boundaries, relationships, or rules (Dong, 2020) Human existence, therefore, is essentially the existence of boundaries (Li & Zheng, 2010). Self-other understanding forms the backbone of social cognition. It is a central concept explored by research into basic processes such as social actions (Guo, 2022; Catmur et al., 2016). The order of boundaries leads to the overall harmony of communal life (Dong, 2020). Moreover, Dong Zhongshu established a system based on the perspective of Heaven, creating a unified world of Heaven, earth, and humans. This system guides the practical interactions between self and others, thereby achieving a harmonious order of the unity of Heaven and humans (天人合一) (Yu, 2006; Li, 1990). His thoughts not only had a significant impact on the state system and social order of the Han Dynasty but also had a profound influence on the

social system and moral ethics of China for the next 2000 years (Jin, 2016; Hua, 2024).

In this context, re-examining Dong Zhongshu's principle of benevolence and righteousness based on the relationship between self and others offers valuable insight into addressing contemporary crises. As China advances the revival of traditional culture, exploring such classical wisdom provides not only cultural continuity but also philosophical resources for fostering harmony among individuals, societies, and the natural world.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The world today is going through extraordinary change and globalization. Building a world of lasting peace is all people's simple and genuine desire (Hong & Zhao, 2004). However, economic and cultural globalization is facing unprecedented crises. Environmental pollution, disease pandemics, war, AI technology, and other global issues are continuously emerging, presenting serious challenges to international order and human survival (Nussbaum, 2003; Wang, 2024). These problems arise from excessive pursuit of resources, conflicting benefits, and differences in ideological perspectives (Huntington & Jervis, 1997). The deeper reason lies in the failure to deal with the relationship between humans and nature and between humans and humans (Lou, 2017; Gan, 2018; Martin, 2018; Xu, 2010). There is no denying that if we limit our conversation to hegemony and self-interest, we will inevitably lead to conflict, wipe off humans, and give up on benevolence and harmony (Mou, 2013). As a result, good human relations, social order, and ethics are significant in an era when increasingly intertwining their benefits and sharing their security and dangers.

Regarding the issue of equal dialogue and mutual learning among different civilizations, the topic of “respecting others, respecting differences” is increasingly receiving attention (Hong & Yang, 2024). The classical Chinese philosophical texts contain rich Eastern philosophy, which can provide Chinese wisdom for addressing the crisis (Lou, 2017). The foundation of Confucian thought lies in its historical accumulation of humanistic care, which has played a key role in connecting the inner and outer realms, the self and others, as well as the public and private spheres (Liang, 2016). The civilizational discourse shaped by Confucianism represents a more rational and feasible choice (Song, 2024).

During the Han Dynasty, Dong Zhongshu was the most important scholar of Confucianism (Yu, 2021; Wang, 2023; Arbuckle, 1991). He was born in a prosperous time, but he rationally and objectively saw the country’s crisis behind political stability, the polarization behind economic prosperity, and the ideological chaos behind diversity (Hua, 2024; Feng, 2017; Cheng, 2007). His perspectives on benevolence and righteousness were a collection of the tremendous pre-Qin Confucian concepts, with some advances and breakthroughs (Jin, 1987; Yu, 2003; Luo, 2006; Li, 2015). The Han Dynasty was the first highly centralized political system in ancient China, with the emperor’s centralized power. He created a system of political, economic, and cultural regulations for the Han Dynasty (Hua, 2024; Zhong, 1978; Ji, 2015).

Dong Zhongshu considered *the Spring and Autumn Annals* a classic work on studying the relationship between self and other, with the principles of benevolence and righteousness as the fundamental guidelines for managing this relationship. He was the first to clearly distinguish between benevolence and righteousness based on the intent of *the Spring and Autumn Annals* from the perspective of self and others

(Xiao, 2001; Wang, 1995; Chen, 2017). Dong Zhongshu addressed the rulers of his time, stating that the principle of benevolence is to love others, not love oneself; the principle of righteousness is to correct oneself, not correct others (仁之法在愛人, 義之法在正我) (Su, 1992).

Dong Zhongshu's principle of benevolence and righteousness is not merely a political moral requirement but a social practice that balances the relationships between the self and others, the self and society, and the self and the external world. Furthermore, he transcended the theoretical foundations of pre-Qin Confucianism by constructing a philosophical framework based on Heaven (Yu, 2012b; Cao 2002; Lai, 1966). He discussed the self-other relationship in the context of the relationship between Heaven and humans. He expanded the concepts of self and others to encompass family, state, and even *Tianxia* (天下, meaning the whole world), incorporating a rich political philosophy (Zhang, 1982; Chen, 2014). It was guided by the view of respecting Heaven and emulating ancestors (敬天法祖, *Jingtian Fazu*) (Dong, 1991; Cheng & Cheng, 1981). It represents a significant enrichment and innovation in the concept of benevolence and righteousness, marking an important development in the history of Confucianism. Although Dong Zhongshu's thoughts on benevolence and righteousness are rich in connotation and of great significance, in the contemporary academic circle, especially in the context of the current global crisis where the self and others, as well as humans and nature, are out of balance, the exploration of his thoughts on benevolence and righteousness is still insufficient.

This study addresses the following research problem: How did Dong Zhongshu construct his thought from the theory and practice of benevolence and righteousness based on the relationship between “self and others.” How did he argue about the relationship among Heaven, humans and benevolence, and interpret the

true meaning of benevolence and righteousness? In today's governance in China and around the world, what value does his idea of benevolence and righteousness still hold? This study is based on the gaps of the literature review and the need to address contemporary issues, aiming to enhance the understanding and application of Dong Zhongshu's thought on benevolence and righteousness. It is crucial to delve deeply into benevolence and righteousness from the perspective of the self and other relationships. This approach targets the core and root of the problems. It helps to understand the unique aspects of these concepts and provides significant insights and references for future and contemporary ethics.

1.3 Research questions

Based on sorting out and interpreting important ancient documents, this study probes into the inheritance and originality of Dong Zhongshu's perspective of benevolence and righteousness, as well as its role, status, and influence in the history of Chinese Confucianism. The study was carried out to answer the following research questions.

- i. What is the origin of Dong Zhongshu's thoughts on benevolence and righteousness based on the self and others?
- ii. What is the theoretical foundation of Dong Zhongshu's thoughts on benevolence and righteousness based on the self and others?
- iii. What is the political and moral practice of Dong Zhongshu's thoughts on benevolence and righteousness based on the self and others?
- iv. What are the Confucian innovations of Dong Zhongshu's thoughts on benevolence and righteousness based on the self and others?

1.4 Research objectives

The primary objective of this study is to analyze Dong Zhongshu's principle of benevolence and righteousness. It can be divided into some small objectives as follows:

- i. To examine the historical background and origins of Dong Zhongshu's thoughts on benevolence and righteousness based on the self and others.
- ii. To analyze the theoretical foundation of Dong Zhongshu's thoughts on benevolence and righteousness based on the self and others.
- iii. To study the political and moral practices of Dong Zhongshu's thoughts on benevolence and righteousness based on the self and others.
- iv. To evaluate the Confucian innovation and modern significance of Dong Zhongshu's thoughts on benevolence and righteousness based on the self and others.

1.5 Significance of the study

This study has the following academic value and important social significance. Theoretical exploration: This study will provide a new theoretical perspective and method for studying Dong Zhongshu's benevolence and righteousness thought, which has specific academic value. Discussing from the perspective of self and others contributes to the deepening and refining of the theoretical framework. This study re-examines traditional Confucianism from a modern perspective, which will provide new ideas for the research on the combination of modern Confucianism and contemporary reality.

Moral governance and leadership building: Dong Zhongshu's principle of benevolence and righteousness holds profound political and philosophical implications and practical significance. This principle is directed at national rulers, emphasizing the importance of managing the relationship between self and others to enhance leaders' moral standards and self-discipline. It provides insights for governance practice and serves as a reference and guidance for enhancing leadership and governance effectiveness. Its critical relevance extends to fostering effective governance, resolving conflicts, and advancing the vision of a community of human destiny.

Modern ethics and social problem solving: This study focuses on the relationship between self and others, exploring human interaction and establishing social order. It emphasizes virtues such as benevolence and righteousness in dealing with interpersonal relationships and correcting self-behavior. This exploration provides philosophical foundations and theoretical support for solving contemporary ethical problems and building a harmonious society. It enhances understanding, freedom, responsibility, kindness, integrity, and self-discipline. It helps to address various complex social issues from an ethical and moral perspective, fostering good interpersonal relationships and establishing a well-ordered society.

Cultural heritage and civilizational exchange: Benevolence and righteousness, a fundamental perspective of Confucianism, embody the ethics and norms of traditional Chinese society. This study contributes to disseminating traditional Chinese culture, thereby expanding academic research. This study emphasizes the unity of Heaven and humans, harmonious relationships, moral education, and the unity of personal values and social order, providing a moral framework of traditional Chinese society for cross-cultural ethics.

This study deepens academic theoretical understanding and offers valuable intellectual resources and practical guidance for cultural dissemination and addressing contemporary social issues.

1.6 Limitations of the study

The author admits that there are some limitations to this research. First, Dong Zhongshu's thought is rooted in many ancient Chinese texts, which are numerous and complex, requiring in-depth philosophical and theoretical interpretation and historical background analysis. The author must invest much time and energy in reading and interpreting the texts, and must have a particular theoretical foundation in philosophy and historical analytical ability. It places high demands on the author's academic ability and academic requirements.

Second, Dong Zhongshu's thought is broad and profound. Due to the limitations of ancient documentary records and the influence of historical changes, the understanding of specific details and backgrounds may be vague or missing. It may affect the comprehensiveness of the research.

Third, this study primarily relies on Chinese literature for content analysis and argumentation, with limited access to foreign-language materials. Cultural and language contexts may constrain the interpretation of Dong Zhongshu's thoughts. It requires the author to translate the ancient text into modern Chinese and then into English. This presents a big challenge, as foreign scholars may have different understandings and interpretations of certain concepts. It is not easy to find matching terms in translation, which affects the depth and accuracy of expression.

To address these challenges, the study adopts a multidisciplinary approach, integrating philosophical analysis with historical contextualization to ensure accurate

interpretation of ancient texts. Close reading of primary sources helps clarify ambiguities. To reduce gaps in historical records, the research cross-references multiple classical texts and secondary sources. The study primarily refers to authoritative translations and engages with relevant foreign-language literature to enhance cross-cultural understanding. For certain terms, a combination of literal translation and explanatory annotation is adopted to ensure the scientificity and credibility of the research results.

1.7 Methodology

This study adopts qualitative research methods, including content analysis, comparative analysis, and philological analysis. Qualitative research methods are widely utilized in social sciences, humanities, and related fields for collecting and analyzing non-numerical data (Kathy, 2016). Diverging from quantitative approaches, qualitative research emphasizes analysis, interpretation, and argumentation to elucidate the meanings, experiences, and social phenomena (Vincent & Norma, 2006).

1.7.1 Data collection

To objectively understand Dong Zhongshu's thoughts on benevolence and righteousness in the relationship between the self and others, the author extracts and analyzes many relevant texts from classical works. Key sources include his main works, such as *Chunqiu Fanlu* (春秋繁露) and *Three Strategies of Heaven and Humans* (天人三策, *Tianren Sance*), and annotated text, alongside historical texts like *Shi Ji* and *Han Shu* (See Appendix A and C). Confucian classics such as *the Spring and Autumn Annals*, *Zhou Yi* (周易), *Shang Shu* (尚書), *the Book of Songs*,

the Analects, Mencius, Xunzi, Zhou Li, and the Li Ji, as well as various scholarly commentaries spanning different times, serve as foundational references for this study.

Modern literature on Dong Zhongshu's thoughts on benevolence and righteousness can be primarily divided into three categories: Monographs on the history of philosophy and intellectual history, such as Feng Youlan's *history of Chinese philosophy* (2017), Zhang Dainian's *outline of Chinese philosophy* (1982), Xu Fuguan's *ideological history of the Han Dynasty* (2001), and Jin Chunfeng's *Han Dynasty ideological history* (1987). Works specifically studying Dong Zhongshu's philosophy, including Kang Youwei's *Dong Zhongshu's Study of Spring and Autumn* (2007), Zhou Guitian's *an exploration of Dong Zhongshu's Thought* (2008), Yu Zhiping's *Only Heaven is great: a study of Dong Zhongshu's philosophy based on belief ontology* (2003), Zeng Zhenyu's *new notes on Chunqiu Fanlu* (2010), Huang Pumin's *harmony between Heaven and man: Dong Zhongshu and Confucianism in Han Dynasty* (2013), Liu Guomin's *Dong Zhongshu's interpretation of Confucian classics and the philosophy of Heaven* (2007), Sarah A. Queen's *from chronicle to classics - Dong Zhongshu's hermeneutics from chronicle to canon* (2010), the English translation of *luxuriant gems of the Spring and Autumn* (2016), Loewe, Michael's *Dong Zhongshu: a "Confucian" heritage and "Chunqiu Fanlu"* (2017), (See Appendix A), and the work by Japanese scholar Shigezawa Junro's (重澤俊朗) *the Spring and Autumn of Dong's School* (2018). The third is works on the philosophy of benevolence or righteousness, such as Chen Lai's *ontology of benevolence* (2014) and Yu Zhiping's *loyalty and empathy, the way of kindness* (2012). These categories of literature form the scholarly foundation for studying Dong Zhongshu's thoughts on benevolence and righteousness.

To deepen the understanding of Dong Zhongshu's thoughts and to find solid textual evidence in the discussion, the author collected data using the Web of Science (WoS), Google Scholar, Scopus, and China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). To understand Dong Zhongshu's thoughts on benevolence and righteousness, the author searched relevant topics in CNKI. The search criteria are topic= "benevolence" OR "Dong Zhongshu," topic= "Heaven" OR "Dong Zhongshu," topic= "righteousness" OR "Dong Zhongshu," topic= "self and others" OR "Dong Zhongshu," and topic= "political philosophy" OR "DongZhongshu," topic= "*Spring and Autumn Annals*" OR "Dong Zhongshu," and topic= "five constants" OR "Dong Zhongshu," and topic= "*Chunqiu Fanlu*" OR "Dong Zhongshu" to filter out high-quality publications aligned with the research topic. To understand Dong Zhongshu's benevolence and righteousness thought, the author searched relevant topics in the Web of Science, for example, using keywords such as topic= "Heaven and human" OR "Dong Zhongshu," topic= "self and others" OR "Dong Zhongshu", topic= "*Spring and Autumn Annals*" OR "Dong Zhongshu," and topic= "yin-yang" OR "Dong Zhongshu" to filter out high-quality papers aligned with the research theme. The author also conducted similar searches in Scopus, ensuring ample high-quality references for the research. To establish a solid foundation for the thesis, the author also relies on the Chinese version of the master's thesis, doctoral dissertation, and journal articles, renowned for their excellence in exploring Dong Zhongshu's perspective on the self and others' relationship of benevolence and righteousness.

1.7.2 Data analysis

This study was analyzed using content analysis, comparative analysis, and philological analysis. Content analysis and comparative analysis explore the nuances and originality of Dong Zhongshu's perspective of benevolence and righteousness, and philological analysis is used to gain a deeper understanding of the concepts. These methods are used crosswise, particularly when analyzing historical and cultural contexts.

1.7.2(a) Content analysis

Content analysis is a research method mainly used to analyze and interpret various forms of content, like texts and images. The goal is to identify themes or tendencies within the content (Vartiak et al., 2023). In this study, content analysis is the foundational method for studying Dong Zhongshu's thoughts on benevolence and righteousness about the self and others. This method involves in-depth reading and analysis of Dong Zhongshu's original works, annotations, and later interpretations, systematically organizing his discussions on benevolence and righteousness. It particularly focuses on how to explain the roles and functions of these concepts in personal cultivation, social interactions, and state governance.

The content analysis method is widely used in this study. Chapter 2 primarily relies on Dong Zhongshu's major works, *Chunqiu Fanlu* and *Three Strategies of Heaven and Humans*, focusing on a deep interpretation of the main content from the perspectives of self and others. This study employed content analysis to study Dong Zhongshu's life and experiences, based on records in *Shi Ji* and *Han Shu*. Summarize his main thoughts from *Chunqiu Fanlu* and other literature. This study

used content analysis to study the context of *Ren Yi Fa* from *Chunqiu Fanlu*, focusing on a deep interpretation of the main content.

Chapter 3 involves a close reading of the texts, collecting and analyzing text data, and exploring the main elements of the text and thematic continuity. The key sources of the editions of *Chunqiu Fanlu* selected for this study include engraved texts from the Song and Ming Dynasties, annotations by Ling Shu and Su Yu from the Qing Dynasty, and more recent annotations by Zhong Zhaopeng and Lai Yanyuan. Based on the texts, this study delves into the relationships between Heaven and humans, between individuals, and the connection between the theory of *Yin-Yang* and the Five Elements and the Five Constants. This method not only examines the direct expressions and basic meaning of Dong Zhongshu's thoughts on benevolence and righteousness but also investigates the underlying logical structure, value orientations, and historical context, thereby revealing the profound connotations of his thoughts in the relationship between the self and others.

Chapter 4 employs content analysis to interpret the texts in-depth, thoroughly analyzing the different dimensions of the relationship between the self and others. It reveals their intrinsic meaning, structure, and characteristics, providing a deeper understanding of the connotations and applications of the perspective of benevolence and righteousness.

1.7.2(b) Comparative analysis

Comparative analysis involves comparing two or more topics to identify their similarities and differences (Heidenheimer, 1983). This approach helps to understand relationships, characteristics, or outcomes by contrasting different cases, cultures, or phenomena. Comparative analysis plays a key role in this study. This method

compares the similarities and differences in the concepts of benevolence and righteousness across different historical periods, cultural contexts, and schools of thought, exploring the inheritance and innovation of Dong Zhongshu's thoughts, as well as their impact on later generations. By comparing the perspectives of the self and others, the study investigates the changes and meanings of these concepts, examining their practical applications. This approach deepens the understanding of Dong Zhongshu's thoughts on benevolence and righteousness in the relationship between the self and others.

In Chapter 2, this study primarily employs comparative research to explore the inheritance relationship between Dong Zhongshu's philosophy of benevolence and righteousness and the pre-Qin Confucian concepts. By extracting key points from pre-Qin Confucian thinkers such as Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi and comparing their thoughts, a foundational framework for benevolence and righteousness is established, providing rich theoretical resources for the study. These key points are then compared with Dong Zhongshu's perspective on benevolence and righteousness, revealing the continuity and development of his thoughts. This approach clarifies how Dong Zhongshu inherited and innovated upon pre-Qin Confucian thought, adapting it to the context of his time and his philosophical system. It deepens the understanding of Dong Zhongshu's philosophy and helps to grasp the historical trajectory of Confucian thoughts on benevolence and righteousness.

In Chapter 4, comparative research is used to deeply explore the different dimensions of Dong Zhongshu's thoughts on benevolence and righteousness, revealing the richness and complexity of his thoughts. Based on the relationship between the self and others, the comparative study analyzes how Dong Zhongshu's principles of benevolence and righteousness were applied in political and social

ethical practices to construct a harmonious social order. This approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of the various dimensions of Dong Zhongshu's thoughts on benevolence and righteousness and their interconnections, offering an in-depth understanding of his philosophy's internal logic and modern value.

In Chapter 5, comparative research compares and connects Dong Zhongshu's thoughts on benevolence and righteousness with contemporary Chinese reality, clarifying their practical significance and inspiration. The aim is to reveal the value and relevance of this study in contemporary society.

1.7.2(c) Philological analysis

Philological analysis in this study is primarily used to analyze the etymology and evolution of key Chinese characters in Dong Zhongshu's thoughts on benevolence and righteousness. This approach, specifically Chinese etymological analysis, traces the character forms, meanings, phonetics, and their usage in ancient texts to reveal these concepts' historical origins, cultural connotations, and philosophical implications (Guo & Xing, 2000). Dong Zhongshu was good at using the method of Chinese Etymology to argue and discuss, so using philological analysis can help the author explore the meaning and the change of the key words to understand the connotations of his thoughts more accurately.

Chapter 3 of this study uses philological analysis methods, special using Chinese etymology (训诂, *xungu*, refers to the study of the meanings and interpretations of words in classical Chinese texts, often involving the analysis of etymology, historical usage, and context) to explore the origins and meanings of words such as benevolence (仁, *ren*), righteousness (义, *yi*), king (王, *wang*), human nature (性, *xing*), ruler (君, *jun*), and people (民, *min*), among others. This method

not only aids in accurately understanding the core concepts within Dong Zhongshu's thoughts on benevolence and righteousness but also uncovers their specific meanings and philosophical foundations in the relationship between the self and others, providing solid theories of philology support for a deeper interpretation of his thoughts.

1.8 Explanation of key terms

Many categories of Chinese philosophy have come mainly from Western modern rationalism, empiricism, and German classical philosophy (Mou, 2006; Ames, 2011; Yang & Tang, 2023). This theoretical philosophy emphasizes logical reasoning with epistemology at its center. However, many categories in traditional Chinese thought revolve around the meaning of life and its origins. Ludwig Wittgenstein noted that the limits of language are the limits of our world (Ambrose & Lazerowitz, 2014). Chinese philosophical cosmology, which focuses on change and the timeless dynamic view of the universe, is reflected in the connotations of language (Ma, 1998; Ames, 2011). Significant differences between the East and the West metaphysical concepts have led to serious category misplacement issues (Chen, 2015). For a better understanding, the following introduces several concepts in the philosophy of Dong Zhongshu that are relevant to this study.

Heaven: Heaven is an important concept in ancient Chinese philosophy and has multiple meanings. It includes the Heavenly Sovereign (*主宰之天, Zhuzai Zhi Tian*), Natural Heaven (*自然之天, Ziran Zhi Tian*), and Heavenly Principle (*義理之天, Yili Zhi Tian*) (Tang, 2011; Zhou, 2008; Li, 1990; Robin, 2012). In the Chinese concept, Heaven is not just the sky, nor is it equal to God, but it is the source and foundation of human beliefs (Cheng, 2022; Chen, 2019). Dong Zhongshu attributed

the faith to Heaven. Heaven is the origin of all things and the proper foundation of human life. Heaven is the theoretical foundation and premise of his philosophy (Huang, 2013; Yang, 2022). Heaven has emotion, will, and authority. He constructed an ontological system of Heaven for Chinese philosophy and justified it through *Yin-Yang* and Five Elements, and so on. He demonstrated the mechanism, intermediary, and method of interaction between Heaven and humans and explored its possibilities and realities (Liu, 2007). Dong Zhongshu fully and comprehensively demonstrated the unity of Heaven and humans. His concept of Heaven is not theology or mere theoretical reasoning or argumentation. All his conclusions ultimately related to humans, and his perspective of Heaven expanded to political, ethical, cultural, and historical levels, eventually realized in the real world and human life (Yu, 2003). Dong Zhongshu's genuine concern was only the ethical order of the human world. The theory of benevolence and righteousness also originated from the perspective of Heaven.

Heaven and humans (天人, *Tianren*): The relationship of Heaven and humans is the fundamental framework of Dong Zhongshu's philosophy. Almost all of his thoughts are based on this concept of *Tianren*'s philosophy (Xiang, 2022; Yu, 2014). His fundamental purpose in constructing *Tianren*'s philosophy is establishing the sacred foundation of Heaven for Confucianism, thereby ensuring the realization of the Confucian Way (Yu, 2003). This research also focuses on this aspect. In describing the relationship between Heaven and humans, he frequently employs the concept of the boundary of Heaven and humans (天人之際, *Tianren Zhiji*), with its core being the interaction of Heaven and humans (天人感應, *Tianren Ganying*). The term *Ren* (人, meaning humans) carries different meanings, including the person and human in a general sense. From a political philosophy perspective, it also refers

distinctly to rulers, ministers, and people. The term boundary (際, *Ji*) originally referred to the gap where walls meet, and later extended to mean intersection, connection, and boundary. Dong Zhongshu focused on the boundary or intersection of Heaven and humans (Dong, 2020). Dong Zhongshu focused on the boundaries or limits between Heaven and humans, approaching them with great caution and reverence. The concept of boundary is essentially a unique realm. Whether it is the relationship between individuals or the relationship between Heaven and humans, it is the different “boundary realms” that constitute the actual world of existence. However, identifying and confirming these boundaries is not the ultimate goal. The true purpose is connecting and communicating across these boundaries (Dong, 2020). To this end, Dong Zhongshu proposed the important perspectives of the interaction of Heaven and humans and the unity of Heaven and humans. First, Heaven and humans belong to the same category, and similar things can resonate. This resonance is not due to mystical forces but occurs when humans actively understand and grasp the laws of Heaven and earth, harmonizing with the way of Heaven. Here, *Ren* refers to humans in a general sense. Secondly, Heaven responds to human activities in its own way. It presents auspicious signs to commend and ominous signs to warn or punish humans. Here, *Ren* refers to sages and rulers who can resonate with Heaven, not ordinary individuals. Therefore, the relationship between Heaven and humans is not one-way and unilateral but interactive and mutual. Dong Zhongshu used the theory of *Yin-Yang* and the Five Elements, along with the principle of resonance through similarity, to establish communication between Heaven and humans. This mutual resonance led to his proposition of the unity of Heaven and humans. It is one of the most systematic and rigorous theories since the pre-Qin period.

Ren Yi Fa (仁義法): *Ren Yi Fa* is a chapter in the *Chunqiu Fanlu*, focusing on Dong Zhongshu's perspective of benevolence and righteousness. *Ren* means benevolence. *Yi* means righteousness. *Fa* means principle. Benevolence fundamentally means love, while righteousness means justified and appropriate. Dong Zhongshu's political philosophy emphasizes the practical application of benevolence and righteousness in societal realities. Particularly addressing those in power, he formulated the principle of benevolence and righteousness: benevolence is to love others, not just oneself; righteousness is to correct oneself, not others. Benevolence extends outward, ideally to the furthest extent. Righteousness involves introspection and self-discipline through ritual propriety, ideally starting with close personal conduct. It reflects Confucius' teaching that self-discipline and observing ritual propriety (克己復禮, *Keji Fuli*) (Xue & Li, 2003). Moreover, his perspective of benevolence and righteousness originates from *the Spring and Autumn Annals*. As an expert in *the Gongyang Studies of the Spring and Autumn Annals*, Dong Zhongshu adeptly used its examples and principles for his arguments. The rule of *Ren* and *Yi* in this study is as follows: in the analysis of words, *Ren* and *Yi* are written to represent them. When analyzing their meaning, it is written as benevolence and righteousness.

Gongyang Studies (公羊學): A school of thought focused on interpreting *the Spring and Autumn Annals* is Dong Zhongshu's research specialty. Confucius wrote *the Spring and Autumn Annals*, which are concise but carry deep meanings understood by people of his time. However, many years later, it became difficult for later generations to grasp its significance. As a result, scholars began to specialize in the study and interpretation of it, with three major schools of thought emerging: the *Zuo Zhuan* (左傳), the *Gongyang Zhuan* (公羊傳), and the *Guliang Zhuan* (穀梁傳).

The *Zuo Zhuan* focuses on historical stories and figures. At the same time, the *Gongyang* and *Guliang* emphasize the analysis of language, writing style, *Ci* (辭, Confucius used “subtle language” to express his approval or condemnation of events recorded in *the Spring and Autumn Annals*), and the broader principles of the text. The *Gongyang Studies*, in particular, strongly emphasize analyzing and applying the principles to contemporary politics. Dong Zhongshu and his disciples were the most significant achievements and influences in the *Gongyang Zhuan* in the Han Dynasty.

Tianxia: *Tianxia* in Dong Zhongshu’s philosophy is not merely a geographical concept but a political, philosophical view distinctly characterized by the principles of *the Gongyang Studies of the Spring and Autumn Annals*. Breaking through geographical limitations and cultural differences, he argues that the implementation of benevolence starts from the immediate surroundings and extends from one family and one country to *Tianxia*. It embodies the political and ethical identity of the passage of kingship. It embraces a people-oriented ideology and a broad humanistic sentiment. Dong Zhongshu was concerned with social governance and order in *Tianxia*. This study interprets it from the perspective of *the Spring and Autumn Annals*, including his proposal for implementing peace under *Tianxia* through governance based on benevolence and righteousness.

The way of Heaven (天道, *TianDao*): Dao was the core concept in Dong Zhongshu’s political philosophy. Arthur David Waley (1889-1966) believes Dao implies a way or path, translated as a way to signify a person’s manner, method, principle, or doctrine in doing things (Zhang, 2024). Gu Zhengkun translates it as Tao, thereby capturing both its conceptual and extended meanings while preserving the original cultural connotations of Tao (Gu, 1995; Chen, 2003). The way of Heaven is the foundation of Dong Zhongshu’s philosophical discussions. Both

principles and measures are developed based on the way of Heaven. The way of the Sage is his elaboration on moral education and practice. He constructed a highly refined interpretation system (He, 2024). Dong Zhongshu talked most about the way of Heaven (天道, *TianDao*), the way of humans (人道, *RenDao*), and the way of kingship (王道, *WangDao*) and the way of hegemon (霸道, *BaDao*), which abandons moral governance and relies primarily on military force and coercion to achieve dominance. Dong Zhongshu extended the way of Heaven to the way of Humans, emphasizing the rich and profound connection between the two. He argued that the way of Heaven serves as the ultimate foundation for the way of humans, with its most significant manifestations being *Yin-Yang* and the Five Elements. Using these concepts, Dong Zhongshu explained virtues such as benevolence, righteousness, loyalty, filial piety, and the Five Constants (五常, *WuChang*, the five virtues of benevolence, righteousness, ritual, wisdom and integrity were first proposed by Dong Zhongshu and have since become the core values of traditional Chinese society), as well as principles of benevolent governance, punishments, rituals, and music education. Dong Zhongshu believed that Heaven and earth embody benevolence and righteousness, and that humans should follow the way of Heaven. Only by practicing benevolence and righteousness could humans align with the proper way of humans. The way of kingship based on these virtues is rooted in benevolence and righteousness. In contrast, the way of the hegemon, which abandons these values and relies on military conquest, is considered inferior. He argued that only through the implementation of benevolent governance and the promotion of kingship can humans achieve the unity of Heaven and humans, thus realizing harmony between Heaven and humans.

1.9 Literature review

Dong Zhongshu is an important figure in the history of Chinese philosophy (Zhou, 1987). At present, most of the relevant research is focused on mainland China. Most foreign research on this topic comes from the East Asian Sinology community, including Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, as well as Western countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. Ivana Buljan summarized the current state of foreign research (Ivana, 2020; Miller, 2015; Buljan, 2020). Although the amount of foreign research is relatively small, the achievements are highly significant and of great reference value.

By searching and reading a large amount of literature, the outcome related to the study can be divided into 4 main topics. Table 1.1 shows the Main topic, Subtopic, and Sources of the literature review of this study. The main topic is categorized into the theory of benevolence and righteousness, the practice of benevolence and righteousness, self and others, and the history of Confucianism. Among them, the Subtopic of the theory is categorized into the *Zhengming* (正名, meaning correct the name of a thing to make it true to its name), the perspective of Heaven, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals Studies* (春秋學, *Chunqiu Xue*). The subtopic of practice includes political and ethical issues. The subtopics of self and others include social, political, and ethical. The subtopic of the history of Confucianism includes innovations and achievements.