



Postgraduate Dissertation coversheet & feedback form:

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<i>For completion by student:</i>		
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I confirm that this is my original work and that I have adhered to the University policy on plagiarism. Signed Huimin Lyu..... Email submission: if you are submitting this form via email, please tick this box ☐ (as a substitute for your signature) to confirm that you agree to the above declaration.		
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English Review of Dissertation

Currently, my master's degree research dissertation, "A preliminary study on Zhou Dunyi's (周敦頤) thoughts on 'Cheng' (誠) — taking *Tongshu* (通書) as an example", has been successfully submitted. Looking back on the past, the writing process of this nearly 10,000-word essay has been going on for half a year. During this period, I experienced the pain of standing still in the face of difficulties. Still, I also experienced the joy of learning new knowledge, the sense of harvest and accomplishment after perseverance. I also sincerely appreciate all the people and things around me who helped me with gratitude. This paper has witnessed my efforts and growth along the way, as well as the school's and my mentors' help and support. Maybe many years later, when I reread this paper, I will inevitably see how immature it is today. Nevertheless, the story behind it transcends the meaning of the dissertation itself and is something I will never forget.

How I determined the research direction for the dissertation

During my two-year master's degree study, with the help and guidance of my teachers, I came into contact with a large number of Confucian cultural classics. The excellent sentences, precise wording, dialectical philosophical thoughts, and profound life wisdom in these classics have profoundly affected me, which made me hopeful that through my efforts and accumulation to complete a deep and thoughtful dissertation and use this as proof that I have completed my studies. However, as my study progressed and time passed, I still could not determine my research direction. Until August last year, when the college asked me to submit a proposal for a preliminary research direction, I hastily selected the traditional scholar class group in ancient China as my research object, which was always regretful when I thought about it.

At the end of November last year, I officially entered the writing time for my dissertation. During this period, I followed the guidance of my thesis advisor and began to collect and read relevant materials to prepare for my essay. In the process of extensive reading, I also collected some papers and journals on philosophical thoughts, hoping to get some inspiration from them so that I could add some dialectical cognition and analysis to my papers and use this to Improve the ideological depth of my paper. After much time and energy, I finally completed my preliminary preparations. In early February, I wrote a detailed outline of nearly 5,000 words and prepared to have in-depth discussions with my instructor. I think I will be able to complete the thesis writing easily and comfortably with sufficient preparation.

However, the night before I was about to send the detailed outline to my tutor, with the support of preliminary reading, study and accumulation, I made a new decision - I re-drafted the thesis outline and used ideological analysis as the main objective of the thesis research. Now think of it, my decision was risky and reckless, and it was a rash act. However, this choice gave me an unforgettable experience in the dissertation writing process, enabled me to meet challenges and surpass myself, and allowed me to discover problems and make up for my shortcomings.

In mid-February, the remaining time was already extremely nearly up. I hurriedly submitted a new outline to the teacher, hoping my thesis supervisor could further guide my research direction. Under the professor's step-by-step guidance and inspiration, after careful thinking, I finally turned my attention to Zhou Dunyi (周敦頤), the founder of Neo-Confucianism in the Song and Ming Dynasties, and took the core "Cheng" (誠) in his philosophical thoughts as the primary research object to write a new thesis.

Although the research direction has been determined, "Cheng" (誠) contains too much content, and the scope is too broad. I still need to think carefully about determining the specific research goals. For me, the biggest challenge was not only the lack of time but also the need to smoothly

change my research methods quickly, from studying the specific scholar class to a more detailed study of ideas. In-depth exploration made me feel anxious, irritable, and no longer calm and composed. Nevertheless, the goal has been set, and I began to collect and read the parts I needed from the vast amount of literature, hoping to get inspiration and help from previous research results. As the studies progressed, my state stabilised again, and I focused all my energy on writing the thesis. Finally, under the guidance of the teacher, the title of my thesis was determined to be “preliminary study on Zhou Dunyi’s (周敦頤) thoughts on ‘Cheng’ (誠) — taking *Tongshu* (通書) as an example”. Through this research, I hoped to have a deeper understanding of the connotation of Zhou Dunyi’s (周敦頤) thoughts and the wisdom and charm of traditional Chinese thought and culture.

How I completed the dissertation

After finalising the dissertation title, I began to write the relevant text. However, although I read a lot during the preparation process for the preliminary materials, I still needed in-depth thinking and exploration of relevant philosophical ideas, which put my essay writing work into a bottleneck — I could not use clear and precise language to express my understanding of the thesis of “Cheng” (誠). I need more than my current knowledge base and academic level to complete this complex research work, especially when it only requires 10,000 words.

After the initial panic, I calmed down and returned to the first and most crucial text, *Tongshu* (通書), hoping that through it, I could gain a new understanding and elaboration of the concept of “Cheng” (誠) instead of just limiting it to Traditional aspects such as “honesty”, “loyalty”, or “consistency in words and deeds”, Which means that I need to understand the connotation of “Cheng” (誠) proposed by Zhou Dunyi (周敦頤) in his ideological system. For example,

“Cheng is the foundation of saints and sages” (誠者，聖人之本), “Things that remain in a state of silence and motionlessness are Cheng” (寂然不動者，誠也), “Cheng means nothing Do” (誠，無為) and so on.

Fortunately, I could refer to and study not only *Tongshu* (通書) but also other annotations, supplements, development and research on it by many scholars. For example, Zhu Xi (朱熹) was in the Song Dynasty, Cao Duan (曹端) was in the Ming Dynasty, and Mou Zongsan (牟宗三), Qian Mu (錢穆), Du Weiming (杜維明), and others in modern times. Their relevant works have helped me better write the dissertation and conduct academic research. In the process of reading and studying these reference materials, I found that if I wanted to understand the content of *Tongshu* (通書) better and to interpret and analyse the idea of “Cheng” (誠) in it, it was necessary to combine another academic work, *Taiji Tushuo* (太極圖說) by Zhou Dunyi (周敦頤) and explored the concept of “Tai Ji” (太極) in it. *Taiji Tushuo* (太極圖說) is a book that I once refused to read. I mean, it is complex and profound, which made me feel intimidated. Therefore, even though I have learned that Zhou Dunyi’s (周敦頤) only two related academic works are *Taiji Tushuo* (太極圖說) and *Tongshu* (通書), I still had a fluke mentality, and hoped to ignore the connection between them and only learned from the more simple text, made the process of completing my essay easier, even though it means that my dissertation may not be as rigorous and professional. This mentality was obviously wrong and should not appear in an academic researcher who hopes to climb the academic peak. Now, I had paid the price for my escape - I needed to get rid of my resistance to *Taiji Tushuo* (太極圖說) in the short remaining time, reread and study it in order to form a more systematic and complete knowledge system and write my academic paper. It was hard, but I still succeeded. After two full days of hard work, and with the help of many relevant research papers and reference materials, I finally gained a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the fundamental and core concept

of “Tai Ji” (太極), which gave me significant encouragement and a sense of accomplishment.

Based on the above learning process, I was finally able to return to the original research direction and re-invest in the study and exploration of *Tongshu* (通書). In the process, I gained a deeper understanding and interpretation of Zhou Dunyi (周敦頤). I had a clearer understanding of the idea of “Cheng” (誠) and a preliminary and systematic structure for my essay’s content and discussion method. More importantly, I had a new interpretation of ideas that I was not familiar with before and had a deeper understanding of the charm of philosophy.

With a solid knowledge base, I have an appropriate starting point for the academic dissertation. During the writing process, I finally decided to use *Tongshu* (通書) as the primary reference material and *Taiji Tushuo* (太極圖說) as an auxiliary text. Through the concept of “Tai Ji” (太極), I conducted a clear and in-depth discussion of the ideological connotation of “Cheng” (誠) and used this as a starting point, extending the idea of “Cheng” (誠) from a philosophical concept to specific life practices, future influences and modern and contemporary social values, formed research and writing direction from theory to practice and enriching theory with practice. Based on previous research, I added my understanding and experience, and the writing process gradually improved. With continuous efforts, I finally submitted my dissertation to the college before the deadline and completed my academic research tasks.

What I learned while writing the dissertation

While writing the dissertation, I gained much new knowledge and insights.

1. Philosophy is not an empty and tedious discussion but a discipline full of charm and wisdom that explores the world. In the process of reading Zhou Dunyi's (周敦頤) "*Taiji Tushuo*" (太極圖說) and "*Tongshu*" (通書), I gradually came into contact with Zhou Dunyi's (周敦頤) philosophical ideological and theoretical system, understood Zhou Dunyi's thinking and views on the universe and life, and saw the law of the circulation of heaven, earth and man in his philosophical thoughts, and gradually comprehended the fundamental principles and ultimate pursuit that people should abide by in the universe, that is, work towards becoming a virtuous person and a saint. In Zhou Dunyi's (周敦頤) philosophical thoughts, I felt his respect and love for the world and the universe and his thinking and exploration of the world, nature, human groups, and other aspects. These thoughts are projected onto the text and into the eyes of every reader through Zhou Dunyi's (周敦頤) works. Even today, when Zhou Dunyi (周敦頤) has passed away, everyone who can calm down to read and think can still dialogue with this great thinker who lived nine hundred years ago through these works and resonates with their souls. Philosophy is not a boring, long-winded speech; it is the endless questions and answers of philosophers, thinkers, and even every ordinary human being behind the words about the origin and truth of the world and universe.

2. The content of the work is often the author's thinking and exploration of the universe, the world and himself and is a presentation of the essence of the author's thoughts and soul. As for Zhou Dunyi (周敦頤), before starting the formal dissertation research, my understanding of him was limited to one of his works, *A Tale of Lotus Lover* (愛蓮說), which I had learned. *A Tale of Lotus Lover* (愛蓮說) is a short work that praises the lotus for not being affected by the external environment. Lotus grow in the mud but insist on themselves, maintaining their integrity and eventually blooming into beautiful flowers. Therefore, initially, I did not directly understand the connection between Zhou Dunyi (周敦頤), the author, and his works until I began systematically studying his academic work *Tongshu* (通書). In this book, Zhou Dunyi

(周敦頤) took “Cheng” (誠) as the basis and advocated that people should correct their mistakes, respect teachers and friends, practice in actual activities, pay equal attention to learning and thinking, be fair and pragmatic, and so on, and use this as a way to learn from the saint until reaching the highest moral realm. After studying *Tongshu* (通書), the image of Zhou Dunyi in my mind is no longer empty and illusory but gradually full and substantial, demonstrating his excellent personal character. I completed a spiritual dialogue with Zhou Dunyi (周敦頤), who lived hundreds of years ago, through his works. I hope to learn from him, achieve self-improvement and transformation, and become an equally excellent and upright person.

3. Good personal time management and mentality adjustment are the first steps to conducting rigorous academic research. While writing this paper, I made a big mistake in the time arrangement. In the early stage, my daily study schedule was not tight enough because of my relaxed mentality. I could not decide on the topic and spent too much time looking up materials, which directly led to my anxiety and busy in the later stage of writing the dissertation. My whole person's mental state was poor, and my learning efficiency dropped significantly. This experience made me clearly feel my shortcomings. It made me realise that the first step in conducting academic research is to plan and arrange my time reasonably, pay attention to self-management and restraint, and adjust and restore my mentality promptly. This way, we can only clarify our learning tasks, move towards the ultimate goal, and finally submit a qualified answer sheet to complete self-challenge and transcendence.

4. Perseverance is a necessary condition for achievement in learning. During this essay writing, my research direction has changed significantly and moved to a field I needed to re-familiarise, which was a challenge to my ability and a process of achieving self-transcendence. Although the paper writing process was full of twists and turns and difficulties, with my instructor's encouragement, guidance and inspiration, I persevered and finally completed my dissertation and successfully submitted it before the deadline. Looking back on this period, I always have

had a sense of urgency about lack of time and anxiety about lack of ability. However, I have also had a sense of satisfaction in learning new knowledge and a sense of accomplishment in overcoming difficulties. The joy of gaining knowledge is more than encountering difficulties and pain in learning. I also finally realised: “Effort never betrays the willing”.

Who I was grateful to during the writing process

1. I am grateful for the help provided to me by the college, teachers and classmates. During my studies at school, I gained not only knowledge but also attitude and wisdom in life. The college has provided me with a good learning environment and rich learning resources in the past two years. These have laid a solid foundation for my final dissertation writing and are the source of the courage for me to choose to challenge myself. Of course, I would also like to thank every teacher at the college. They led me to study various classics and thoroughly learn more extensive knowledge. At the same time, they were full of love for every student and were patient with our questions, which were never perfunctory. The teachers are wise, humble, compassionate, and lead by example. Every word and deed makes me realise the meaning of “learning to be a teacher and acting as a model for the world”. At the same time, I would also like to thank Professor Chen Fengyuan, who was my advisor during the writing of my dissertation. He was both my Confucian Classics Studies course teacher and my dissertation advisor. When I encountered difficulties that prevented me from moving forward, the teacher always gave me patient guidance, encouragement, and support, allowing me to complete my essay successfully. Finally, I would also like to thank my classmates. They also helped me a lot during my studies. They provided me with many ways to access information, encouraged me when I was not in good condition, and comforted me when I was anxious. The successful completion of my dissertation would not have been possible without everyone’s help, for which I am forever grateful.

2. Thanks to the *Photocopying of Wenyuange Siku Quanshu* (景印本文淵閣四庫全書) published by Taiwan Commercial Press for providing information. While writing my dissertation, a considerable part of the difficulty was obtaining data. Many ancient books and materials from hundreds or even thousands of years ago are extremely difficult to obtain today, and even a few have been lost, which virtually added many difficulties to my study and research progress. However, the *Photocopying of Wenyuange Siku Quanshu* (景印本文淵閣四庫全書) issued by the Taiwan Commercial Press provided me with a search channel from which I could obtain many needed text materials as references, which brought unprecedented Convenient and a massive help to me. I am grateful for the compilation of *Siku Quanshu* (四庫全書), grateful to the predecessors who have worked hard for the publication of this book, grateful to the Taiwan Commercial Press, and also grateful to all the excellent works handed down by Chinese traditional culture and all those who have worked hard to preserve these works.

My expectations for the future

In the process of writing my dissertation, I consulted and referred to a large number of classics, papers and journals. These research results and treatises inspired me, which helped me complete the research and writing of the essay quickly. During the writing of the thesis, I deeply realised the meaning of “the article is to illustrate the truth” (文以載道), and this sentence just comes from the *Tongshu* (通書) that I studied and researched. I first chose to study at the Sinology College because I loved classical literature. However, during the two years I studied at the college, I learned more about the connotation behind it from literature. While studying Zhou Dunyi’s (周敦頤) thoughts on “Cheng” (誠), I gained a deeper understanding of the meaning behind culture. I understood that the significance of carrying forward the excellent traditional culture of China and the world lies in carrying forward and inheriting the wisdom of the predecessors, imitating the behaviour of the ancient sages, and ultimately striving to

improve ourselves and make the world better.

The road is obstructed and long, persistent, success is in the card. In the days to come, I will continue to study hard, improve myself, and contribute to the inheritance and promotion of the excellent traditional culture of China and the world with a heart of gratitude and exploration.