

# A Brief Discussion of Changing Temperament Which is the Core of Zhang Bingzhi's Cultivation Theory and Efforts

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**Abstract:** Zhang Bingzhi, as a Qing Dynasty scholar of science, emphasized work in his thought and presented a distinctive color of science. In Zhang Bingzhi's rationalist thought, the concept of "rationality and qi" provides a metaphysical basis for human nature and destiny, and provides a basic explanation for the principle of the development of the world's movement. "The theory of cultivations and efforts, on the other hand, takes the "theory of qi" as its foundation, the "theory of heart" as its basis, and the "theory of destiny" as its guide. It explores how to realize the Divine Principle and how to "know one's destiny as the beginning" and then "attain one's destiny" in the process of the operation of reason and mind. Zhang Bingzhi's theory of cultivations and efforts is centered on "changing temperaments"; he regards "changing temperaments" as the means and goal of scholars' cultivation efforts, and regards "setting ambitions" as a means of "changing temperaments" and a goal of scholars' cultivation efforts. He regarded "changing temperament" as the means and goal of scholars' cultivation efforts, and regarded "establishing the will" as the starting point of "changing temperament" and "single-minded conviction" and "cultivation of mind" as the guarantee of "changing temperament". His emphasis on "changing temperament" established the basic tendency of "work" as the main focus of his scientific thought, and revealed the basic theoretical characteristics of his emphasis on work in the already developed.

**Keywords:** Theory of cultivations and efforts, Changing temperament, Setting ambitions, "Single-minded conviction" and "Cultivation of mind."

## 1. The Change of Temperament Should be the First Step in the Work of Learning

Why do people learn in order to learn? How to study? Zhang Bingzhi's "View of Reason and qi" and "Theory of Mind" are the basic principles of cultivation. It is true that, as mentioned above, the purity of one's qi is the possibility of "changing qi," and "changing qi" is also the fundamental path, and the way for "saints to learn to change temperament" is also the fundamental path and the true meaning of "the saint can be learned and attained. Therefore, Zhang Bingzhi puts forward "the original purpose of establishing the doctrine, the original desire to transform the bias of temperament and return to the Middle Way" [1], indicating that the purpose of establishing the doctrine is to "transform the bias of temperament" and "return to the Middle Way". In other words, the meaning of the teaambitionsng is to "change the temperament," that is, to "restore nature. In this way, "changing one's temperament" is the purpose of "establishing teaambitionsng as learning. In fact, "changing one's temperament" is not only the "purpose" of cultivation for learning, but also the process and means of "restoring one's nature" by "removing obscurations. In fact, "changing one's temperament" is not only the "purpose" of cultivation, but also the process and means of "removing obscurations" and "restoring nature. It can be seen that both the reason and the method of learning lie in "changing one's mind.

In the Song and Ming philosophies, Zhang Zai was the first to propose the concept of "change of temperament," asserting that "the great benefit of learning is to seek to change the temperament" [2]. Zhang Zai underscored that the "nature of the temperament" in the "attack and take the nature" and the gas of the rigidity and flexibility of the gas caused by the bias of the temperament of the clear and turbid, is the human

nature of the root of the "evil". To aambitionseve the transformation of "evil" into "good," it is essential to remove the veil of "temperament nature" and restore the innate "nature of heavenly destiny." This process of "removing obscurations" is termed "changing temperament" by Zhang Zai. According to Zhang Zai, the crux of this endeavor lies in the cultivation of "manners" and the adoption of a "humanitarian disposition," wherein individuals interact with others in a manner that eradicates malevolence and fosters benevolence, thereby attaining sainthood. Er Cheng, a student of Zhang Zai's, built upon his teacher's theory of "changing temperament" by integrating it closely with his own ontology, which was based on "reason." Er Cheng proposed that "respect is necessary for cultivation and knowledge is necessary for advancement" [3], underscores the necessity of cultivating respect and knowledge as a means to "change the temperament." Zhu Xi, a renowned philosopher, emphasized that the "material," "right mind," "force to do," and "keeping and maintaining" are the primary means to "change temperament."

Inheriting the ideas of Zhang Zai and Cheng Zhu, Zhang Bingzhi advanced the cultivation work centered on "changing temperament" and elucidated the reasons and importance for scholars to "change temperament." Primarily, he underscored that the rationale behind prioritizing "change of temperament" stems from the inherent difficulty in rectifying "temperament bias." He adopted Mengzi's assessment of Bo Yi, Yi Yin, and Liu Xiahui, highlighting that "Yi's Qing, Yin's Ren, Hui's, and, but also under the temperament endowed with bias, they do not consciously focus on the flow to the side of the bias to go" [4]. This indicates that even individuals such as Bo Yi, Yi Yin, and Liu Xiahui, who were successful in their governance, still exhibited a "self-biased phenomenon of self-prejudice." This phenomenon is attributed to the notion that refuting

“temperament bias” is a persistent challenge faced by scholars [4]. The solution proposed is to “cross the channel to teach people to change their temperament first” [4]. It has also been noted that “crazy and not straight, Dong and unwilling, Simple-minded and do not believe” (“Analects - Tai Bo”) is a result of the “customary guile decorative pseudo,” which is present in the social atmosphere of hypocrisy and cunning. Therefore, it is essential to “first change the temperament for learning, and first tidy up the customs for ruling.” Governance must first tidy up the customs” [5]. The notion of “changing one’s temperament” is not merely attributed to the “temperament bias” that is obstinate and resistant to transformation, but also acknowledges the susceptibility of scholars to the influence of social mores. Consequently, scholars are enjoined to “change their temperament.”

Conversely, Zhang Bingzhi underscored the significance of modifying temperamental biases, invoking the paradigm of an intractable disease, positing that recovery is contingent upon the eradication of its underlying causative factors. Zhang further invoked the words of Xie Liangzuo (1050-1103), who asserted, “To study, one should start from the place where it is difficult to overcome the bias of temperament,” to demonstrate that “to change temperament” constitutes the essence of study. Moreover, Zhang proposed that “the initial step in the study process should be to alter one’s temperament.” He further proposed that “the initial step in learning should be to change one’s temperament.” He contended that, with the exception of Yan Yuan and Zhong Gong, the remaining scholars in the Sacred Sect exhibited “biased temperaments.” Consequently, the sages imparted their teaambitionsngs in accordance with these biases and adapted their pedagogical methods. This assertion underscores the significance of “following the good advice.” The complexity of temperament modification is not merely a theoretical construct for Zhang Bingzhi; it is a concept deeply intertwined with his personal experiences. In his youth, Zhang Bingzhi exhibited an intense preoccupation with disciplines such as calligraphy, painting, and other artistic pursuits. It was only after reaambitionsng the age of fifty that he managed to disengage from these interests. This shift, according to Zhang Bingzhi, was precipitated by his growing age, which led to a decline in his energy levels, thereby making it difficult to sustain his interest in these pastimes. This transition led Zhang Bingzhi to recognize the complexity of altering his “temperament,” a concept he articulated through the acknowledgment of his own deficiencies in the domain of “learning.”[6]

According to Zhang Bingzhi’s conception of “rationality and qi,” it is evident that human “qi” is malleable, and that “saints” can be emulated and aambitionseved. Concurrently, Zhang Bingzhi’s theory of learning and practicing utilizes “changing qi” as a means, and more significantly, “changing qi” as an end. Moreover, “changing temperament” is elevated to the status of an end in itself. Upon understanding the rationale behind Zhang Bingzhi’s cultivation work theory, which prioritizes “changing temperament” as its focal point, it becomes imperative to shift our perspective from a macro to a micro level to elucidate the specific trajectory of his cultivation work.

In the theory of cultivations and efforts, Zhang Bingzhi takes the concepts of “single-minded conviction” and “cultivation

of mind” to show that “setting ambitions” and “cultivation of mind” are the basic efforts for “changing temperament”. indicate that “establishing the will” and “keeping the mind” are the basic work for “changing temperament”. If the ambitions are not clear, there is no way to aambitionseve; if the heart is not stored, there is no way to actualize. “Setting ambitions” is the starting point for scholars to make a difference. Remove selfishness is the root of the disease. Only “ambitions” can be “set up”, “heart” can be “stored and nourished”, other materialism and knowledge, the main respect and hold their own, forgive to receive things, etc., will have a point of focus.

## 2. The Starting Point for Changing Temperament: Setting Ambitions

Since the pre-Qin Dynasty, the discussion of ambitions has never stopped. In the Song and Ming dynasties, the discussion of ambitions became more and more mature. The rationalists put “ambitions” into the system of work theory, so that “ambitions” has become an important part of the work of cultivation for learning. Zhu Zi once said: “Scholars must set ambitions. Nowadays, people are so leisurely, just the learning has not done a thing to see, when things go through the motions. This is just ambitions do not stand [7].” It can be seen, Zhu Zi will be “set ambitions” as a scholar “concentrate” as a prerequisite, only “set ambitions”, they can be determined to concentrate on the heart of learning. In Song and Ming Confucianism, not only Zhu Zi, Zhang Zai and Er Cheng also attach great importance to the role of ambitions. Zhang Zai pointed out that “ambitions is the first major event in teaambitionsng and ethics” [2], indicating that the ethics of education should cultivate and correct the “ambitions” of scholars. It is also said that “the ambitions of learning can overcome temperament and habit.” He emphasised that through ambitions to learn, one could change one’s qi and habits, so that “the nature of heaven and earth” could be restored. Er Cheng regarded ambitions as the foundation of human beings, and believed that if one set ambitions, there would be a foundation to rely on, and that “when ambitions are set, there is a foundation” [3]. Hu Hong also took “setting ambitions” as the basis for the knowledge of things, proposing that “the way to set ambitions must be set to set its own foundation, and live in respect to hold its ambitions” [8], and his ideas greatly influenced Zhu Zi.

Zhang Bingzhi also attaches importance to the role of “setting ambitions” in the work of learning, and believes that what Zhu Zi said, “Ambitions must be set first” is “the most beneficial to scholars” [1]. And through elaborating the role of ambitions, the importance of setting ambitions, and how to set ambitions, he stresses that “scholars must set ambitions first. “[1], calling for scholars to learn should first “set ambitions”.

First, Zhang Bingzhi based on Zhang Zai said “ambitions can also move the qi” [2], and further proposed “ambitions enough to hold the qi, it is not chaotic; the heart for the reason for the servitude, it is not mixed” [6], stressing that the “ambitions” on the “qi” control role as “reason” to ensure that the “heart” does not receive interference, fully affirmed the “ambitions”. The role of “Zhi” is fully affirmed. As Zhu Zi said, “Ambitions are clear, reasons are notorious”[9], “ambitions” can make “qi” clear, and “reasons” can be

revealed. In this way, both Zhu Zi and Zhang Bingzhi believe that ambitions can “change of temperament” and are characterised by “reason”.

Secondly, Zhang Bingzhi shows that setting ambitions is very important for scholars. He pointed out that it is a disease of the mind to be afraid to do anything and to do nothing. And those who know that things should be done but do not do it, resting in laziness, it is because they have no ambitions. These two are small people, even if the latter have knowledge of the heart of the gentleman, its ambitions, “will eventually become despicable people” [1]. Therefore, he proposed “scholars should first set ambitions” [1]. He also to the emperor and generals and heroes as an example, pointed out that the ambitions of the past and present, women and filial piety, sages, are because of their “ambition” to set, in order to have this ambitionsevement. Therefore, even if they are weak, they can still be stable and unruly, and will not be robbed of their ambitions, and finally ambitionseve something. If the “set ambitions” to learn sages, even if they reach the status of sages will not know enough, that is, “the scholar’s life ambitionsevements, but depending on the set ambitions” [6]. He also “set ambitions” into the king’s policy of governance, put forward “learning from the saints of the learning, the emperor’s rule, there is not based on the set ambitions” [10], indicating that the rule of the country should be the ambitions of “two emperors, three king”, and only after the possibility of “two emperors and three kings” of the rule, “no saints happy to benefit the world’s ambitions, how to do the cause of the king” [6].

Thirdly, based on the theoretical tone of “setting ambitions” as the “starting point” of ambitionsevement, Zhang Bingzhi also elaborated on how to “set ambitions”. He believes that “setting ambitions” should be sure, should be courageous, with firm beliefs and strong action, and should be through learning to expand knowledge, so as to set ambitious “ambitions”. He pointed out that there is no such thing as a person who ambitionseves something without ambitions, but rather there are people who have ambitions but do not ambitionseve anything, and people who have ambitions but are not strong enough. The former disease lies in the ambitions set ambitions are not “sure”, not firm, these people although follow the road, but often give up halfway, so no ambitionsevement. The disease of the latter lies in setting ambitions that are not “courageous” and do not have sufficient power and courage to take action. For example, even though Xia Qi inherited Yu’s career, he did not realize Yu’s ideal of ruling the world due to his lack of ability; for example, although Wu Ding, the Shang Emperor, had some political ambitionsevements, he failed to solve the internal turmoil; for example, although Ji Chanting, the King of Zhou, had a lot of ambitionsevements, he relied on the Duke of Zhou, Ji Dan, to assist in his administration, which showed that he lacked the ability to do so. Therefore, scholars should not only set ambitions, but also be “serious” and “courageous”, so that they can not rely on others and really ambitionseve something. At the same time, the establishment of the “ambitions” of the grand and narrow with the person’s own knowledge, the more knowledgeable, the establishment of the “ambitions” natural grand, the more shallow knowledge, the establishment of the “ambitions” will be narrow. The more knowledgeable you are, the narrower your ambition will be.

Therefore, scholars need to persist in their efforts to learn, in order to establish a grand ambitions.

Zhang Bingzhi on the “ambitions” of the importance of the “ambitions” from its exposition of the importance of the “set ambitions” role can be seen. He not only thinks that ambitions have a controlling and changing effect on qi, which is one of the ways to “change temperament”, but also the basis for “changing temperament”. It is one of the ways to “change qi”, and it is also the place where “changing qi” is based. He also believed that “setting ambitions” was the starting point for scholars and monarchs to ambitionseve success in their lives. He not only emphasized that “setting ambitions” should be firm and courageous, with determination and power of action, but also stressed that people should study hard and accumulate knowledge, so as to set up ambitious ideals. The later scholar He Ruilin also inherited Zhang Bingzhi’s view on “setting ambitions” and believed that “setting ambitions for scholars is a starting point and a lifelong matter [11]”.

### 3. Guarantee of “Changing temperament”: “Single-minded conviction” and “Cultivation of mind”

The aim of cultivation is the realization of one’s own virtue, and the process of recognizing the virtue in one’s heart is the process of cultivation. As mentioned in the theory of the nature of mind, “the spirit of the human heart knows and understands everything”, and “the heart” possesses “perception” and therefore the ability to recognize, so people’s knowledge of “reason” can only be realized through “the heart”. Therefore, people’s cognition of “reason” can only be realized through the “heart”. And because people are born with qi bias, and have selfish desires that do not conform to “reason”, this requires that people need to control the “heart” through self-consciousness. This kind of control over the mind and the curbing of selfish desires is the essence of “single-minded conviction” and “cultivation of mind”. Therefore, “single-minded conviction” is the basis for ambitionseving virtue and “changing temperament”.

Since scholars need to “single-minded conviction” and “cultivation of mind” to ambitionseve virtue and “change temperament”, what kind of mind is cultivated? How to “single-minded conviction” and “cultivation of mind”? This is the question that comes to mind. Zhang Bingzhi gave a clear answer to this question. He suggests that the heart one needs to cultivate is the “moral mind”. At the same time, “restraining desires” and “introspection” are the keys to single-minded conviction and cultivation of mind.

First of all, Zhang Bingzhi pointed out that “single-minded conviction is based on moral mind” [4]. He inherited Zhu Zi’s basic idea that there are “single-minded conviction” and “moral mind” in the mind, and believed that keeping the mind is keeping “moral mind”, while “human mind” is often in the state of “following orders”. According to Zhu Zi’s stipulation of “human heart” and “moral mind”, both of them are known and realized by human beings, and he thinks, “The spirit of this heart, which is aware of reason, is the moral mind; and which is aware of desire, is the human heart.” [7]. He also said, “It is only this one mind that perceives from the desires of the ears and eyes, which is the human mind; and perceives from

the righteousness and reason, which is the moral mind.” [7]. This indicates that the perception that is in accordance with moral principles is the “moral mind,” while the perception that is governed by one’s own selfish desires and emotions is the “human heart. No matter “human heart” or “moral mind”, they are all “perceptual mind” of human beings. Confucianism often speaks of “seeking peace of mind,” “single-minded conviction,” “exhausting all those mental constitutions,” and so on, all of which refer to the “moral mind. Zhang Bingzhi shows that since the “human heart” is always subject to the “moral mind”, the “moral mind” must be used to rule the human heart, and the moral consciousness must be used to guide and control personal desires. He also emphasized that “single-minded conviction” and “cultivation of character” should not be neglected, and that “single-minded conviction” is to “guard against the selfishness of human desires” [4]. The mind kept is the “moral mind”, which is the exhaustion of the whole of the mind that can be utilized for the purpose of clarification, and it is the work of turning from the outside to the inside. On the other hand, “nourishing the nature” emphasizes the preservation of the natural goodness, and is a work from the inside to the outside. Each of the “single-minded conviction and cultivation of nature” has its own emphasis and direction, and must be aambitionseved in both directions, and must not be neglected.

Secondly, Zhang Bingzhi clarified the importance of “single-minded conviction”, indicating that “single-minded conviction” means to keep the “mind” in the “reason”. He pointed out that Mencius and other sages teach people to single-minded conviction, in order to make a person’s “moral mind” is always there, the control of the heart of the blood, in order to be able to recognize everywhere, to study the principles of heaven. The core of Confucianism’s thought is “reason”, the human heart and mind are on the reason. In Zhang Bingzhi’s opinion, this is also the difference between the heretics such as “Lu Wang” and Cheng Zhu’s single-minded conviction. The heretics did not know that there was reason in their hearts, so their hearts were “hearts of blood”, not “moral minds”. Zhang Bingzhi emphasized that “the single-minded conviction of scholars is to make the mind always on reason, and only then is it a real effort”. How to make the “heart” always on the truth? This not only requires people to get rid of their own selfish desires, but also requires scholars to introspection of themselves in time, but also rely on studying things to acquire knowledge and the main respect and cultivation. This shows that “single-minded conviction” is not solely rely on “meditation with eyes closed, virtual intake of quiet understanding” [6] can be completed, which is not very different from the Buddhist meditation, and ultimately will flow into nothingness.

Finally, Zhang Bingzhi elaborates on the path of “single-minded conviction” and “cultivation of mind”, pointing out that the macroscopic “cultivation” relies on “single-minded conviction” and “introspection” to accomplish, and the microscopic “cultivation” relies on “single-minded conviction” and “introspection” to accomplish. As I said before, “moral mind” is undoubtedly originated from “reason”, and the human heart and mind are all on reason, which affirms the reasonableness of human desires, pointing out that not all human hearts are “evil”.

Although Zhang Bingzhi said, “the scholar’s disease is no greater than having my selfishness not removed.” [1] He pointed out that “selfishness” is the major disease of a scholar’s life, but it is important to note that what needs to be eliminated is not the whole of the human heart, but the selfish desires that do not fit into “reason”, that is, the desires that are over-amplified by the bias of the qi endowment. Therefore, he also said: “The heart of the saint is purely heavenly, although the scholars can not be purely heavenly. However, the heart of the person, this is all the reason of heaven, in particular, has not exhausted their own heart.”[5]. It is pointed out that the heart of the sages is purely the Divine Principle, and the scholars also have the Divine Principle in their hearts, and the scholars need to exhaust all those mental constitutions in order to realize the Divine Principle. This requires “restrain desires” and “introspection” efforts.

Mencius once said, “There is no better way to cultivate the mind than to restrain desires.” (Mencius, Under the Exhaust All Those Mental Constitutions). Zhang Bingzhi further elaborated on this. He inherited Mencius’ idea that “restraining desires” is the optimal solution for the cultivation of mind and explained it. It is suggested that “restraining desires” means “single-minded conviction”, while an increase in desires will affect “moral mind”. The moral mind can be restored by removing selfish desires. This is the cultivation of mind by Confucian scholars. If the mind is biased, then it is “selfish desire”, and so “desire” is something that harms the moral mind. However, if all human desires are reasonable and rational, they cannot be called “desires”; “desires” are the bias of the human heart, which is not rational. This requires scholars to moderate the desires of people’s mouths, noses, ears, eyes, what they see, hear, say, and practice, so that they are reasonable.

Can not be like some extremism, misinterpretation of the real meaning of Zhu Zi “the survival of the Divine Principle, extinguish human desire”. It seems that “restraining desires” is the fundamental requirement for “single-minded conviction” and “cultivation of mind”. But rely solely on “restrain desires”, is not able to ensure that the heart all the time in the rationale, but also need to “introspection” to play the supervision. Zhang Bingzhi inherited Zhu Zi’s argument, proposed that people in the matter of “reason” to the realization of the “reason” is not enough, so that the “heart” is wrong, is due to the “poor reason introspection work” [6] is not enough. The work of “single-minded conviction” and “cultivation of mind” that relies on “introspection” must be based on “few desires”. By “restraining desires,” the root of desires is eliminated, so that one can introspect in everything.

If “setting ambitions” is the starting point of a scholar’s life aambitionsevement, then “single-minded conviction” and “cultivation of mind” are the guarantees of the effective implementation of the scholar’s work in the process of learning and cultivation of knowledge, the main respect for oneself, and forgiveness to receive things. In other words, in Zhang Bingzhi’s theory of efforts, “single-minded conviction” and “cultivation of mind” are the starting point and guarantee of “changing temperament”. “Setting ambitions” establishes the starting point for scholars to “change temperament”, and “restraining desires” ensures that there are no desires in the heart. “Introspection” guarantees the continuity of the

realization of the Divine Principle, so that the heart can be “rational” in all matters.

#### 4. Conclusion

Taking “setting ambitions” and “single-minded conviction” as the starting point, Zhang Bingzhi built up a practical path for both internal and external cultivation. Inheriting the Confucian tradition of attaching importance to “ambitions”, he regarded “setting ambitions” as the spiritual foundation for becoming a saint and a sage, and emphasized the dominant role of “ambitions” over “qi”. The practice of “single-minded conviction” is in fact a way of keeping the “moral mind”, which requires the realization of the clarity of the mind through “restraining desires” and “introspection”, emphasizing the need for moral rationality to control the passions and desires. He criticized Lu Jiuyuan and Wang Yangming’s single-minded conviction, and advocated that through the practical work of “understanding things” and “respecting and cultivating things,” the mind should be “always on reason”.

Zhang Bingzhi’s philosophy is based on Cheng Zhu’s philosophy, and at the same time, it reflects the distinctive academic characteristics of Qing dynasty Guanxue, which emphasizes practice and opposes emptiness. Zhang Bingzhi’s theory of cultivations and efforts is centered on “changing temperament” and emphasizes the parallel progress of knowledge and introspection. In Zhang Bingzhi’s theory of cultivations and efforts, “changing temperament” is not only the fundamental purpose of cultivations and efforts, but also the essence of cultivations and efforts. He believed that the bias of temperament not only originated from the difference of innate endowment, but also affected by the social customs of the acquired society, so “changing temperament” is not only the way for individuals to become virtuous, but also the foundation of the social governance of “rectifying the customs”.

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