

# Analysis of Zeng Shiqiang's Opinions about the Management Principles in the Chinese Context ---Inspiration Acquired from *The Great Learning*

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**Abstract.** This paper discusses Prof. Zeng's opinions on the Chinese management which have got their inspirations mainly from *The Great Learning*. First, the paper discusses six steps which must be paid attention to the guidance of making plan. Second, the paper discusses how to become a qualified manager by carrying out the principles based upon the philosophical thinking acquired from *The Great Learning*. Prof. Zeng argues that only well-cultivated persons can bring about a well-regulated family, analogously, a well-governed country and a peaceful world. Third, starting from the principle of "Gewu" put forward in *The Great Learning*, Prof. Zeng thinks that policy-makers should take an honest and healthy attitude in doing everything and raises three things for the policy maker to pay heed to. Only being an honest and upright person can he be a qualified manager and work out a reasonable and feasible plan.

## Introduction

*The Great Learning*, the first management book in China, clearly presents that the way of great learning lies in promoting people's ideological and ethical progress and encouraging people to strive for moral perfection. When applied in management, it means that the manager should first of all pursue self-cultivation by raising his morality levels, and attempts to provide a peaceful and relaxing environment for his colleagues and employees. To fulfill this aim, the general manager has to draw up a reasonable management strategies and policies, and at the same time he has to make, and meanwhile allow the superiors at middle management levels to make constant adjustments and modifications of the strategies according to constantly changing conditions to make the policy and decision perfect.

The Chinese management supports the idea that the decision-making is the key element of management, which is in agreement with the modern decision theorists' theory, "The main process of management is the decision making." Some scholars even absolutely claim that decision-making equals management. Decision-making involves two elements, one is how to make decision or plan, and the other is the decision maker who is responsible for making the decision or the plan. This paper is to discuss and analyze Prof. Zeng's opinions on these two problems which are carried out by relying on the philosophical thinking acquired from *The Great Learning*.

## Towards the Six Steps of Decision-making

Under the inspiration of the idea in *The Great Learning*, decision-making, as the essence of management, may be also divided into six stages. The first stage is that of "Orientation" (zhi) which can be regarded as the goal or target a company makes and exerts itself to reach.<sup>[1]</sup> "Knowing Orientation" means that all employees, including carders and average staff, must be clear about the goal of the company policy: to provide a relaxing and harmonious environment for employees so as to have their skills and initiative wisdom fully exploited and brought into full play for the success of the enterprise. Before the policy is to be carried out, there is no way to predict to whether the policy can stand the trial, to what degrees the policy may satisfy the employees at all levels or to what extent the employees can get the feeling of relaxation and security, but if the policy-makers are selfless, open

and aboveboard, doing everything for the public, not for themselves, they are sure to be understood and appreciated. The purpose of “Orientation” (zhi) stage is to acquaint employees with the objectives of the enterprise for them to have the thriving direction.

The second stage is “determination” (ding), which means making up minds to realize the goal of the business.<sup>[1]</sup> As mentioned in this book, earning money is not the only purpose the employees want to realize. Another more important thing for them is to devote all their time and energy to reach the destination cherished in their minds. Since the goal is clear, the next thing for the decision makers to do is determine to find out the root causes of hindering the fulfillment of the aim by making modifications of the policy accordingly; the next thing for employees to do is determine to give play to their initiative, and spare no effort to finish their duty, so as to be able to enjoy the sense of success.

The third stage is “Calmness” (jing), which leads to the fourth stage “peaceful conscience”.<sup>[1]</sup> This is an information era, and it is inevitable for people to receive all kinds of information, from both inside and outside. Without inner peace, the policy-maker and the managers would probably be at a loss as what to do and may even act rashly, which is a warning signal for the policy-maker to stay calm and serene, and make a careful study of overwhelming information to choose out the proper and helpful information, so as to help him make several rather than one reasonable plans to build up an relaxing environment for the staff, for example, the manager can make three plans simultaneously, and then select one which is universally consentient. Or if the general policy plan appears to be too ambitious, the policy-maker or the general manager can divide it into several intermediate targets for the staff to fulfill by phases, or he may classify them from different perspectives, such as from the perspective of manufacture, market, finance, personnel, etc.

The fifth stage is “cogitation”.<sup>[1]</sup> Now that the policy-maker is able to keep his composure in a relaxing environment, he is able to devote himself entirely to deep cogitating about many questions, such as whether the policy is reasonable enough to and the practical trial; what kind of adjustments have to be made to meet the practical challenges; what kind of obstacles they are to overcome, and how to surmount them, which information is more necessary and helpful, etc. cogitation helps the policy-maker avoid making mistakes caused by hasty and rashness. Besides, it can also help him put his attention not only on the decision making but also on the company affairs, so that he can obtain some more tangible detailed experience and information to build up a far-sighted view and make more comprehensive and appropriate plans for realizing the goals and objectives of the company.

The last stage “De” refers to reaching a satisfactory perfect ending.<sup>[1]</sup> Once a sensible policy is made at the top, the managers with the collaboration of the managers and superiors at different middle levels have to seek decisions and make plans for the following phases, which involve constant alternations and modifications according to the changing situations within the framework of the goals and objectives. Once a rational policy and decision at one phase is made, the superiors have to seek policies and decisions for the next phase, and so on, until the ultimate goal and target has been completed.

### **The “Priority Principle” for a Qualified Manager**

*The Great Learning* also states that “Just like the tree, there are roots and branches for every thing; and there is a beginning and an ending for every event. So the priority will be taken into account. Those who know this rule will get close to the truth.”<sup>[1]</sup> In the light of this “priority principle”, the administrative staff ought to have a good understanding of the nature of things they will have to do<sup>[1]</sup>. Thus, managerial staff can follow the “priority principle” in the sequence as follows: set up a plan, execute the plan, make timely assessment, find out the possible errors in time, and put them right promptly. As every process is done in priority, the work is much easier to do.

In fact, making a decision is a choice, which involves choosing out a rational one from several initial scheduled plans or decisions. *The Great Learning* tells us that the highest aim of the management is to create a peaceful and harmonious environment for the whole human beings.<sup>[1]</sup> But Prof. Zeng thinks that people are now living in a world where bullying and violence are not uncommon, then how can we bring about peace and harmony to the world?<sup>[2][3][4]</sup> To answer this

question, *The Great Learning* is supposed to make an insightful explanation in the following way: If a state ruler wants to keep the universe in order, he must first of all manage his country in order; if he wants to manage his country in order, he must manage his family in order; for those who want to manage their families in order, they must at first keep their body fit; for those who want to keep their body fit, they must at first keep his mind in peace; for those who want to keep their mind in peace, they must at first be true to their hearts; for those who want to be true to their hearts, they must at first enrich their knowledge; for those who want to enrich their knowledge, they must explore and discover the truth of everything.<sup>[1]</sup> So we can say that self-cultivation is the starting point on the way to achieve the final aim of creating a peaceful and harmonious world for the people.

Following the sequence of cultivating ourselves, regulating families, governing country and keeping the world in peace, we can attempt to explain the Chinese management from two perspectives, one is from inside to outside, namely to take self-improvement as the starting point, and then try to spread its positive effect step by step to all people; the other is from outside to inside, namely the policy-makers have to cherish at heart a grand view of providing a peaceful universe to people, make a detailed analysis of the situation in order to be clear about what kind of modifications and adjustments should be made from the perspective of the international view without affecting the future prospects of the world. What's more, everyone should keep in mind that there is only one earth for human beings to live on, and universal peace and harmony of the world relies on the relentless efforts of everyone of us. Therefore, the decision makers in modern world, to Prof. Zeng, should try to strike a balance between globalization and localization in order to reach a perfect state.

The decision makers' international view should be based on the world standard, to seek equality among the countries by eliminating inequality, in other words, to take universal peace and the international equality as their ultimate objective. To do this, each country must, first of all, try to govern their country well.

The strategy of governing a country varies for different countries. China starts its governance strategy from managing family well, since family harmony is considered to constitute the foundation of Chinese culture. This philosophical idea, which has been cherished and followed from generation to generation for almost 5000 years, helps China standing successfully in the east of the world after going through various capricious situations. The concept of family harmony, based on filial piety and brotherhood friendship as its fundamental principle, has been expanded from "obliged duties between family members" to those between the patriarchal clan. Under its guidance, Chinese people are able to settle many personal important issues without depending on the government, and can successfully bear various external pressures when experiencing the natural calamities and man-made misfortunes. In fact, no matter meeting any kind of difficulties, a harmonious family would never be disintegrated, on the contrary, would be more domestically-cohesive.

Such a special strategy of regulating families still takes self-cultivation as the starting point. It can be explained as follows: If each family member can accept his position in the family and can properly perform his duty, the family would be regulated well, and so can the family harmony be realized. Now that well-cultivated persons can bring about a well-regulated family, analogously, well-regulated families can build up a well-governed country and help create a peaceful world. Such wisdom and morality as discussed here will contribute a great deal to the reasonable policy decision-making of an enterprise. Similarly, if the decision maker deviates from the above discussed morality and ethics, namely the principles put forward in *The Great learning*, he would fail to realize the important objective of the business: to provide a relaxing and harmonious environment for its employees in order to bring their subjective initiative into a full play. Therefore, it is a must to review the important viewpoints put forward in *The Great Learning*, and make policies and decisions under its guidance. In a word, the cultivation and improvement of an individual person can lead to the cultivation and improvement of their organization, and thus bring about the peace and harmony to the whole world.

## Taking into Account of Three Things in Making Policy and Plan

Management, with making the plan as the starting point, is a process of self-cultivation, which aims at creating peace and harmony for the whole people. So the realization of self-cultivation in the management is of great importance. As far as cultivation is concerned, *The Great Learning* puts it as follows, “To cultivate himself, he has first to set his heart right; to set his heart right, he has first to be sincere and honest; to be sincere and honest, he has first to perfect his knowledge and the perfection of his knowledge depends on making a thorough study of the truth of things.”<sup>[1]</sup> The policy and decision maker can draw a lot of inspiration from this passage. Unfortunately, after the Qin and Han Dynasties, people always explain it in a deviated manner.

Starting from the principle of “Gewu” put forward in *The Great Learning*, “Ge” means “making a profound exploration”, “Wu” refers to social events and things in general,” “Gewu” means “discover the truth of the things by making a thorough exploration of social events and a profound study of objects in the world,”<sup>[1]</sup> which can be regarded as the foundation of the principles of *The Great Learning*, and also the starting point of practicing the way of great learning. However, the research methods to discover the truth of things must be in conformity with what is talked in *The Doctrine of the Mean*, “Learn extensively, inquire thoroughly, ponder prudently, discriminate clearly, and practice devotedly.”<sup>[5]</sup> But even if people have a good understanding of the doctrines, these doctrines cannot actually take them to omniscience. So policy-makers should take the attitude that “If you know it, it is all right for you to say ‘yes’. If you do not know it, it is all right for you to say ‘no’. That is the true wise.”<sup>[6]</sup> Besides, policy-makers ought to hold a humble attitude and consult all kinds of experts before bringing up a reasonable judgment.

Confucius has advocated only after things are thoroughly investigated can one acquire extensive knowledge and deep insight. This is the knowledge acquisition process. Confucius also stresses the importance of the lifelong learning and learning strategy. In *The Analects*, Confucius says the epigram, “to study and not to think is a waste, to think and not study is dangerous.”<sup>[6]</sup> This epigram is considered to be especially important in the era of knowledge-based economy, and deserves careful pondering. All the people, no matter policy-makers or ordinary employees, ought to cherish Confucius’s words in their heart, and maintain a positive attitude to learn just as the ancient philosopher says. Only in this way can they not only enlighten their own wisdom, but enrich the knowledge as well.

A thorough investigation and study of things in the world can help people acquire extensive knowledge, which in turn brings people a better judgment between right and wrong. Thus people are beginning to know how to persist in good virtues, and become more and more honest and confident without self deception. This is what is called “sincerity” or “honesty”.

If a policy-maker does everything with sincerity and prudence, he will surely have a healthy attitude towards the world. It is stated in *The Great Learning* that the one who has anger, fear, prejudice and anxiety in heart, can not have a positive attitude towards the work. In other words, if the policy-maker whose heart is filled with negative emotions such as anger, fear and anxiety, he is inclined to be partial and biased in making a plan, since he cannot put an unbiased heart on the work. Therefore, those negative emotions mentioned above must be taken under control or even entirely got rid of in a proper way through the means of self-cultivation and self-improvement.

Inspired by the principles advocated in *the Great Learning*, three things must be paid great attention in making the policy and plan.

The first one is the holistic thinking. Focus is to be placed on the combined interests of the integrity instead of individual interests. For example, the policy-maker should not only take into consideration the factors which directly exert influence on their market, including customers, market, horizontal competition, different industries, etc., but also the factors which throws indirectly influence on their market, such as society, government, economy, technology, etc. for the sake of the interests of shareholders, customers, employees and society. Based upon the overall goals set up by the general policy, the concrete plans of each department can be made.

The second one is that the policy-maker ought to have the ability to harness the whole market, break through the barriers caused by the unfavorable market orientation, and build up a bright and agreeable situation for the enterprise, which will in turn make customers realize the strength of the company and help create the new market for the company. In fact, there is nothing to blame about the existing market orientation, but more firm confidence is needed to exploit the potential market, which can be successful as long as both the managers and employees can make concerted efforts to explore the needs of customers from different perspectives with sincerity.

Thirdly, do not develop the habit of deception. An upright person will neither deceive himself nor others. If we do a thorough research on the behavior of deception, we will easily find that those who cheat others tend to cheat themselves first. For example, a department store makes a promotion plan to celebrate its anniversary, but valuable goods are not included in the scope of the discount and have been temporarily removed during the discount period. This is a kind of deceptive behavior, because the department store did not state it explicitly in advance. Thus, the decision-maker has deceived himself before deceiving customers, for he wrongly thinks the deceptive plan can not cause customers' dissatisfaction, nor hurt the company's reputation, it can work. However, the result will often turn out to be just the opposite of their expectation.

Nowadays, people are suffering from three lethal evils: overpopulation, overproduction and over-consumption, all of which are the result of ill-conceived plans. The policy-makers hastily draw out the plans without careful thinking, which lead to many a disastrous consequence. However, overproduction and over-consumption are often misunderstood as having provided a road to economic growth and prosperity, and are still being promoted and encouraged. The fact is that here people ignore the invisible ensuing environmental pollution and resource wasting which are bound to devastate the economy.

A scientific plan should be like a good medicine which can deal with both the symptoms and root causes. To come up with such a plan, one must spare no efforts to study the relevant cases and have a thorough understanding of the current situation. Besides, he should perseveringly hold the principles he believes and work out the plan reasonably and attentively. Only in this way is he able to take both the goal and the actual situation into consideration simultaneously. Without the goal and expectation to guide people forward, they can't foresee the future and may probably stray from the destination. Nevertheless, without the actual situation as the basic point the policy cannot cope with the changeable situation. By having both the goal and actual situation cherished in mind, the policy-maker can work out the satisfying plan. As the policy-maker, he is supposed to be honest and upright, and attach importance to the requirements raised in the book of *The Great Learning*, namely he has to cultivate his mind, get on well with family members, devote themselves to building a prosperous country and peaceful world where all men can enjoy a easy and harmony life. Only being an honest and upright person can he work out a reasonable and feasible plan.

## **Conclusion**

This paper discusses Prof. Zeng's opinions on the Chinese management. First, the paper deals with Prof. Zeng's idea on plan making and plan implementation in the management, which is considered to be of great importance for the success of the enterprise. Professor Zeng Shiqiang believes that *The Great Learning* puts forward quantities of insightful opinions for the managers to learn in making plans, and based upon it, Prof. Zeng raises six steps which are supposed to be used as the guidance for the management: "First, know the goals one should achieve (the first step), which will lead people to making determination to realize the goals (the second step). During the process, people must be patient and calm down without being interfered by any anxious and irritable feelings (the third step), so as to have an easy and peaceful conscience (the fourth step), in which people can have a deep and intellectual cogitation (the fifth step), to make preparations for the harvest of the success (the sixth step)." [3][7][8]

Second, the paper analyzes the importance of the policy-maker, who is also considered to occupy a significant part for the success of an enterprise. Based upon the philosophical thinking in *The Great*

Learning, Prof. Zeng believes that Chinese management is closely related to Chinese ethics. <sup>[3][7][8]</sup> Whether the management is effective or not often depends on the manager's moral quality. The Great Learning tells us that the highest aim of the management is to create a peaceful and harmonious environment for the whole human beings. To fulfill this goal, the policy maker must start from the self-cultivation as the beginning on the way to achieve the final aim of creating a peaceful and harmonious world for the people, and then try to spread its positive effect gradually to all people. China starts its governance strategy from managing family well. Now that Well-cultivated persons can bring about a well-regulated family, analogously, well-regulated families can build up a well-governed country and help create a peaceful world.

Third, starting from the principle of "Gewu" put forward in *The Great Learning*, Prof. Zeng thinks that policy-makers should take an honest and healthy attitude in doing everything and pay attention to three things in making the policy and plan. <sup>[3][9]</sup> The first one is the holistic thinking by putting focus on the combined interests of the integrity instead of individual interests. The second one is that the policy-maker should have the ability to harness the whole market, break through the barriers caused by the unfavorable market orientation, and build up a bright and agreeable situation for the enterprise. The third one is that a scientific plan should be like a good medicine which can deal with both the symptoms and root causes. As the policy-maker, he is supposed to attach importance to the requirements raised in the book *The Great Learning* to be honest and upright. Only being an honest and upright person can he be a qualified manager and work out a reasonable and feasible plan.

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