

Contemporary Chinese Studies of Mencius in Taiwan*

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In this article, I shall review contemporary Chinese studies of Mencius in Taiwan. In order for this review to be more focused, I shall not attempt to include all the books and articles published on Mencius. Instead, I shall focus on material that follows these two approaches: (1) philosophical and (2) intellectual-historical. Contemporary scholars who take the first approach see the *Mencius* as a philosophical text independent of social, political, and economic changes. Consciously or unconsciously, they assume that ideas in Mencius' philosophical system are independent of these forces. Those who take the second approach examine Mencius' thought in historical and cultural context, and are particularly interested in the ways Mencius' thoughts are viewed in different historical and cultural backgrounds. Although these two approaches are methodologically different, they are also complementary. In the following, I shall examine some main studies done using these two different approaches, focusing on the main issues identified and main contributions made.

I. Philosophical Approaches

The main issues contemporary scholars of the *Mencius* are interested in include: (1) the basis for Mencius' view of the goodness of human nature, the relationship between human nature and heart/mind, and the contemporary significance of Mencius' view of the goodness of human nature; (2) the essence of the heart/mind in Mencius' philosophy and the relationship between heart/mind and body; and (3) the implication of Mencius' conception of the cultivation of *qi* (*yang qi* 養氣) and the relationships between *qi* and heart/mind and between *qi* and *xing* 形 (material form).

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I.1. Goodness of Human Nature

The goodness of human nature is one of Mencius' most important ideas. We are told that "when Mencius talked about the goodness of human nature, he always cited Yao and Shun as examples" (*Mencius* 3a1). However, scholars do not agree on what Mencius meant by the goodness of human nature. In his *Essentials of Mencius*, QIAN Mu 錢穆 argues that the goodness of human nature is one of the three most important ideas in Mencius (the other two being "cultivation of *qi*" and "insight into words (*zhi yan* 知言)" (Qian 1978: 155-158). In Qian's view, the best way to understand the original meaning of Mencius' view of the goodness of human nature is to study the original text of the *Mencius*: to use the words that Mencius used himself to explain his ideas and to use the examples that Mencius used himself to prove Mencius' own intention. Following this methodology, Qian concludes that Mencius' view of the goodness of human nature means: (1) to build our confidence to improve ourselves, and (2) to encourage our efforts to improve ourselves (Qian 1980: 103). Therefore, anyone who lacks such confidence and makes no such efforts cannot claim to have understood the true meaning of Mencius' view of the goodness of human nature. From a different perspective, Qian also argues that this view of Mencius indicates the ideas of human equality and freedom in the highest senses. Humans are all equal because they all have the natural tendency to goodness; and humans are all free because everyone is able to reach this goal (Qian 1980). This insight, that Mencius' view of the goodness of human nature implies equality and freedom, can be appropriately seen as Qian's unique contribution to the study of Mencius, as no one else has ever seen this connection.

MOU Zongsan 牟宗三 made the most spectacular study of Mencius' conception of heart/mind. His original thoughts on Mencius can be summarized with his eight words: *ren yi neizai, xing you xin xian* 仁義內在，性由心顯 (humanity and righteousness are internal and human nature is manifested by heart/mind). According to Mou, Mencius' view of the goodness of human nature cannot be separated from his conception of heart/mind: the essence of his view of the goodness of human nature is that morality is inherent in human heart/mind. Thus, Mou stated:

The reason that Mencius insists on the goodness of human nature is, negatively, to argue against Gaozi's view that "what one is born with is human nature;" and, positively, to show that "humanity and righteousness are internal." "Internal" means "internal to heart/mind." "Internal to heart/mind" means that one does not absorb humanities and righteousness into mind and make them into one; rather, it means that

heart/mind is the heart/mind of humanity and righteousness, and humanity and righteousness originate from heart/mind.... This heart/mind is what Mencius called "original heart/mind" (*benxing* 本心).... Here the original heart/mind is not a psychological one but a transcendental and moral one. (Mou 1979: 216-217)

There are many other contemporary scholars who have tried to argue that Mencius' view of the goodness of human nature cannot be separated from his conception of heart/mind, but Mou's ideas are the most original.

In recent years, YUAN Baoxin 袁保新 and LI Minghui 李明輝, both students of Mou, have made important contributions to the study of Mencius' view of the goodness of human nature. In his *A Historical Examination of Mencius' Three Debates and Their Contemporary Interpretations* (Yuan), particularly in chapters three and four, Yuan points out that Mencius' view of the goodness of human nature was developed primarily to counter other views of human nature against the Confucian moral cultivation (such as those of YANG Zhu's and Gaozi's). Yuan argues that the debate between Mencius and Gaozi was due, on the one hand, to their different understandings of human nature and, on the other hand, to their different views of whether humanity and righteousness are internal or external. For this reason, we cannot have an appropriate understanding of Mencius' view of the goodness of human nature in isolation from his fundamental view of humanity and righteousness as internal. In Yuan's view, Mencius' theory of human nature gets rid of the traditional conception that "what one is born with is human nature" and its empiricist model of understanding and establishes a transcendental model of understanding that approaches human nature through heart/mind. Such a new model of understanding is intended to show that, unlike animals, humans have distinctive moral experiences and lives. When Mencius argues that human nature is good, he affirms the goodness of human nature from the tendency to do good that is inherent in human nature, and not from an external goal of goodness at which humans should aim. At the same time, Yuan argues that Mencius' idea of goodness of the original heart/mind is not contradictory to his view of freedom of the existential heart/mind. People today are often skeptical about Mencius' view of the goodness of human nature on the basis that humans sometimes do immoral things. These people do not realize that Mencius' theory is not an empirical theory but a transcendental theory of human moral life. From this perspective, Mencius did not change the traditional belief that heaven and man share the same virtue and the organistic world-view associated with such a belief. What Mencius did was to disclose the infinite *dao* of heaven in the self-realizing process of authentic human nature, so that not only the tran-

scendental nature of *dao* is maintained, but humans are also encouraged to realize this *dao* by realizing themselves. In this sense, the Mencian metaphysics of morals is more acceptable to contemporary people.¹

LI Minghui has also made a very detailed and fine study on Mencius' theory of human nature. As Li is also an expert on Kant's philosophy, he has made some comparative studies of Kant and Mencius. Many of his essays in this area are now collected in his *Confucianism and Kant* (Li 1990). In these essays, Li provides a thorough analysis of the idea of autonomy in Kant's philosophy and then argues that Confucian morality is fundamentally a morality of autonomy; he compares Mencius' four beginnings of heart/mind and Kant's moral sentiments to show the fundamental difference between Mencian and Kantian ethics; he also argues that the Confucian view on the issue of righteousness (*yi*) and benefit (*li*) represents a deontological ethics in Kant's sense. Li argues that such an ethics emphasizes the priority of moral goodness over non-moral goodness but does not necessarily exclude the latter. Li's special study of Mencius' theory of human nature appears in his *Kant's Ethics and the Reconstruction of Mencius' Moral Ideas* (Li 1994).

Li's central concern is how traditional Confucianism can become a universal morality that goes beyond the particular cultural differences in a pluralistic society. In his view, Confucianism can reach this goal by going through some self-transformation without giving up its essence, i.e., inner sageliness and outer kingliness. In this process of self-transformation, it is important to use some Western philosophical ideas to reconstruct, reinterpret, and reorient Confucian tradition. It is from this background that Li approaches Mencius' theory of human nature. Particularly he argues against the misunderstanding of Mencius' theory as "human nature oriented toward goodness." In Li's view, such a misunderstanding is based on the assumption that if we think moral knowledge (*liangzhi* 良知) in human nature is sufficient, then moral education and cultivation become superfluous. However, Li argues that although Mencius maintained that everyone originally had moral knowledge, this does not make everyone a sage. Here moral *knowledge* is only implicit and unreflective (*yinmo zhi zhi* 隱默之知) for most people, and therefore it is necessary for us to cultivate ourselves and become

¹ There have been many other Chinese studies focusing on Mencius' theory of human nature in the context of his debate with Gaozi and Xunzi. Here we may mention those done by HUANG Zhangjian 黃彰健 (Z. Huang) and CHEN Daqi 陳大齊 (D. Chen 1968). However, the basic ideas developed in these studies have been well synthesized in Yuan's discussion.

aware of this knowledge. Here the effort to cultivate ourselves not only does not deny, but also relies upon, our moral knowledge.

In his book, *A Re-examination of the Mencius* (Li 2001), LI Minghui continues to be concerned with the central issue he discussed in his two previous books (see Li 1990, 1994). In the “Preface,” Li asks: “how can Mencius’ theory of human nature and heart/mind do justice to contemporary psychology?” This question reminds us of the word “psychology” used by the English literary critic, Ivor Armstrong Richards (1893-1979) in his *Mencius on the Mind: Experiments in Multiple Definition*. Richards regards such Mencian concepts as human nature (*xing* 性), heart/mind (*xin* 心), will (*zhi* 志), humanity (*ren* 仁), righteousness (*yi* 義), and psycho-physical power (*qi* 氣) as psychological ideas. Such a psychological understanding is, of course, quite different from Mencius’ teachings on heart/mind and human nature. However, during Richard’s time, psychology was still in its infancy. Also, sinologists’ understanding of Confucianism was rather limited at that time. Thus, it is understandable that he adopted a psychological approach. After seventy years, Li returns to this approach. However, there is a significant difference. What Li really wants to ask is what contribution the rich resources in Mencius’ teachings on human nature and heart/mind can make to contemporary psychology. This can be clearly seen in Chapter Two, “A Re-examination of Mencius’ Distinction between the Leader of Feudal Lords (*ba* 霸) and a True King (*wang* 王)” and in Chapter Five, “Goodness of Human Nature and Democratic Politics.” In Chapter Two, Li points out that Mencius acknowledges the relative value of the leader of feudal lords and therefore allows politics to have its relatively independent role. However, ZHU Xi (朱熹) ignores this aspect of Mencius’ thoughts (Li 2001: 63). In Chapter Five, Li criticizes ZHANG Hao for “unconsciously identifying the historical development of an idea with its logical inference” (Li 2001: 156), and uses the Kantian theory of democracy to argue for the “relevance between the doctrine of goodness of human nature to political democracy” (Li 2001: 57-8).

Generally speaking, in this book Li basically continues along the same lines he pursued in *Confucianism and Kant* (Li 1990), where he argues that the Confucian discussion about righteousness and benefit (*yi li zhi bian* 義利之辨) represents a deontological ethics. He insists that goodness in its moral sense is independent of its non-moral sense and so argues against the reduction of the former to the latter. In Li’s view, such a deontological ethics does not have to exclude goodness in its non-moral sense; rather it opposes the

view that regards moral value as the only or ultimate value. Thus, in a secondary sense, it can still accept the utilitarian principle as a derivative moral principle. Such a view reappears in his *A Re-examination of the Mencius*. For example, he points out that the Mencian distinction between the leader of feudal lords and the true king represents an ethics of heart/mind. Such an ethics insists that, although moral goodness is of a different kind, it can still absorb utility as a derivative moral principle. Thus, Li argues that in their debate ZHU Xi understands the distinction between the leader of feudal lords and the true king better than CHEN Liang (陳亮). The only regrettable thing is that ZHU Xi, unlike Kant and Hegel, failed to see the positive value of human desires (versus heavenly principle [天理]) in history. Thus, Zhu has not only been unable to relieve people of previous doubts, but has also obscured an important aspect in Mencius' political thought (Li 2001: 41-68). Li's book is a significant contribution to contemporary Mencian scholarship in terms of its consciousness of Mencius' contemporary relevance, its sophisticated arguments, and its grasp of the Mencian text and later commentaries.

I.2. Relationship between Heart/Mind and Body

The second focus in Mencius study in the last few decades has been the Mencian theory of heart/mind and its relationship to body. The most important work in this area has been done by contemporary Confucians. In various volumes of his *An Essay on the Origin of Chinese Philosophy*, TANG Junyi 唐君毅 explores Mencius' theory of heart/mind extensively. His main theses are: (1) Mencius' philosophy is a philosophy of heart/mind and Mencius' heart/mind is a primitive one: "The heart/mind that Mencius talked about is the one that directly responds to humans and events.... It is not the heart/mind that reflects and retrospects" (Tang 1974: 82); (2) the essence of Mencius' philosophy is to form a determination to establish oneself: "I have recently suddenly understood why Mencius talks about goodness of human nature: his intention is to teach people to form a determination on the basis of this original goodness.... His *dao*, to put it simply, is the *dao* of 'establishing oneself'" (Tang 1976: 212); (3) the point of Mencius' distinction between humans and animals is not to show that humans and animals belong to different species, but to call upon people to become aware of themselves as human beings.

In this area, MOU Zongsan made two important contributions to Mencius scholarship. First, he has repeatedly claimed that Mencius' philosophy is nothing but a philosophy of heart/mind and human nature, and that Mencius' heart/mind is nothing but "moral subjectivity." Thus, in Mou's view, "only when the moral subjectivity stands up proudly can a person stand up proudly" (Mou 1965: 66-67). Second, he argues that heart/mind in Mencius has the feature of self-legislation. It is both a subjective and objective heart/mind that is identical to principle. Thus, Mou states:

In Mencius, autonomy (self-legislation) is nothing but heart/mind, and will is the function of the essence of heart/mind. The autonomy of heart/mind is its freedom. Originally heart/mind means activity, and the activity of self-consciousness (the activity without activity) actually proves that it is free.... This both objective and subjective heart/mind, which is also principle, is precisely our human nature. (Mou 1985: 31)

In comparison to Tang and Mou, XU Fuguan's unique contribution is his view that, in Mencius, goodness of heart/mind is the foundation of goodness of human nature. In Xu's view,

Having got rid of the threat from one's physiological desires, the heart/mind naturally displays its activities of four beginnings. Moreover, although these four models of activities are present in empirical events, they are not limited by such events. Because we don't know where it comes from, we feel that it is "given by heaven." This is also human nature as "what one receives when one is born." This is how Mencius actually talked about the goodness of human nature through the goodness of heart/mind. In other words, Mencius discovered independent and autonomous activities of heart/mind from life-experiences and realized that this is where moral subjectivity resides. This then becomes the foundation of Mencius' theory of goodness of human nature. (Xu: 173-174)

HUANG Junjie (Chun-chieh) 黃俊傑 approaches Mencius' heart/mind from the idea of righteousness, which originates from the heart/mind. Confucius related righteousness to superior person (*junzi* 君子) so that righteousness becomes a virtue. In Mencius, righteousness becomes one of the four beginnings and thus obtains its internal, social, and cosmological meanings. Other philosophers, such as YANG Zhu, Mozi, and Xunzi, all discussed righteousness extensively. However, in Huang's view, they are all one-sided and only in Mencius are the three dimensions, internal, social, and cosmological, integrated in a dynamic unity (see J. Huang 1991: 111-160).

As to Mencius' conception of heart/mind—in addition to the traditional approach from the heart/mind itself, recent scholars have also adopted an

approach from philosophy of the body and arrived at many interesting conclusions. I shall now turn to such an approach.

1.3. Philosophy of Body

The recent interest in Mencius' conception of body largely comes from the following discussion in the *Mencius*:

Gongdu Zi asked: "Though equally human, why are some greater than others?"

"The one who follows one's great body (*da ti* 大體) is a great person, while the one who follows one's small body (*xiao ti* 小體) is a small person."

"Though equally human, why do some follow the great body and some follow the small body?"

"The organs of hearing and sight are unable to think and can be misled by external things. When one thing acts on another, all it does is to attract it. The organ of heart can think. But it will find the answer only if it does think; otherwise, it will not find the answer. This is what Heaven has given me. If one establishes oneself on the great body, then the small body cannot displace it. In this way, one cannot but be a great person." (*Mencius* 6a15)

What Mencius meant by "great body" and "small body" has caused disagreements. However, scholars have now basically accepted ZHU Xi's interpretation: great body refers to one's heart/mind, while small body refers to the sense organs.

YANG Rubin 楊儒賓, among contemporary Chinese scholars, has made the most important contribution to the study of Mencius' conception of body. In Yang's view, there are several important insights on body in pre-Qin Confucians and Daoists: that body, heart/mind, and qi are three different elements and yet essentially identical; that one's spiritual cultivation will be clearly manifested in one's body; that the human body is made of yin and yang, the two qi that cause movement in the universe and human society, and so the human body is both cosmological and social; the human body has the ability to "think without thinking" (*wu si zhi si* 無思之思), which can be called body thinking; *qi* is both a pre-conscious tendency at the very bottom of human heart/mind and what connects human body and nature and, therefore, is neither a materialist nor an idealist conception. Yang claims that Mencius was the most important thinker who developed the above insights in his main theses on morality, body and heart/mind relationship, and *qi* and *dao* relationship. Yang further claims that the idea of *jian xing* 踐形 (bodily

manifestation of the heart/mind) is most important in Mencius (see R. Yang 1993: 24-25). In his view, although Mencius makes a distinction between great body and small body and argues that the latter should be guided by the former, he believes that after going through the process of holding up one's will and cultivating one's *qi*, the small body can be completely transformed by the great body. After this, the small body will become something through which the great body can manifest itself so that one's body or bodily movements will be full of humanity and righteousness. For this reason, we can experience a person's internal spirit from the person's external body. At this time, since one's whole body is full of *haoran zhi qi* 浩然之氣 (flood-like *qi*), which is where human consciousness merges with nature, after *jian xing*, one will enter the realm in which humans and myriads of things become one. In other words, the spiritualization of one's body and the cosmologization of one's consciousness are realized in the same process (see R. Yang 1996: 129-172).

So Mencius' conception of *jian xing* really means that, after some efforts at self-cultivation, one's inner spirit can be fully manifested in one's external bodily movements. Yang argues that this assumes that one's body, as it is, is incomplete. It becomes complete only when the inner spirit is manifested in it. Thus, the body of a superior person of virtue is not morally neutral, because the reason such a person is a person of virtue is not that the person blindly and coercively follows some external moral rules but that the person's external bodily movements follow the internal moral qualities. That is why Mencius claims that a person of virtue has a shining body: "that with which a superior person follows one's nature, that is to say, humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom, is rooted in one's heart, and manifests itself in one's face, giving it a sleek appearance. It also shows in one's back and extends to one's limbs, rendering their message intelligible without words" (*Mencius* 7a21). Thus, Yang claims that even movements of one's eyes, changes of one's tones, ways of one's speaking and behaving, all have moral implications and spiritual dimensions (see Yang 1993: 25). In Yang's view, the focus of the Mencian view is to internalize our moral practice, which can be done in two overlapping processes. One is to deepen our moral practice so that external virtuous actions can become internal virtuous characters; and the other is to spiritualize the small body so that the external body can become the manifestation of the internal moral characters (see R. Yang 1996: 253-292).

HUANG Junjie points out that many of Mencius' ideas related to the body were developed further by his followers, including the authors of the *Five Activities* (五行篇). They emphasized that the body is guided by heart/mind; they further divided the heart/mind into the central one (*zhongxin* 中心) and peripheral one (*waixin* 外心), with the former more fundamental, universal, and necessary than the latter. Here, we see a turn from Mencius' equal emphasis on inner sageliness and outer kingliness to his followers' emphasis on the self-reflective action of the heart/mind (see J. Huang 1991: Ch. 3). In Huang's view, the idea of "manifestation within" (*xing yu nei* 形于内) in the *Five Activities* is the most important one developed by the followers of Mencius and Zisi. Here manifestation (*xing*) is a self-reflective and not a bodily manifestation, and "within" (*nei*) refers to the central heart/mind. The authors of the *Five Activities* believe that one has to reflect on the *dao* of heaven in order to internalize the moral practice so that one will not be disturbed by the external body and then become one with the *dao* of heaven (see J. Huang 1991: 501-514). From this "turn inward" by followers of Mencius, Huang further explains the reason why Xunzi is against the school of Mencius. Although Xunzi also focuses on the heart/mind, his heart/mind is a social and political one, while the heart/mind of the Mencian school is a subjective and transcendental one. The latter is idealist, while the former is realistic (see J. Huang 1997: Ch. 3).

In a more recent article, YANG Rubin has developed a more systematic account of the Confucian conception of body. In his view, the development of this conception has taken four stages in the pre-Qin period: (1) Before Mencius, the Confucian conception of the body focused on the social dimension of the body, emphasizing the relationship between body and rituals; (2) Mencius' conception of the body focused on the unity between body and heart/mind, regarding body as essentially a spiritual one; (3) the followers of Mencius developed the idea of "fine or virtuous *qi*" to unify not only body and heart/mind but also everything in the world. This fine or virtuous *qi* can be seen as the bodily dimension of moral consciousness; (4) Xunzi's conception of the body emphasized the regulative function of heart/mind and rituals over the body. In Yang's opinion, Mencius' view focuses on the spiritual dimension of the body; Mencius' followers' view focuses on the natural dimension of the body; and Xunzi's view focuses on the social dimension of the body. However, in the pre-Qin period, there is no dialectic relationship between these three dimensions (see R. Yang 1996: Ch. 1).

“Having insight into words” and “cultivation of *qi*” are Mencius’ two important ideas. LI Minghui argues that both of these efforts are guided by heart/mind (*xin*) in Mencius. “Having insight into words” is to use heart/mind to know words, and “cultivation of *qi*” is to use heart/mind to control *qi*. This is in direct contrast with Gaozi. In Gaozi, words are primary, with their own objective standard, and therefore do not need heart/mind to determine whether they are right or wrong. Here heart/mind is not the source of moral standards but is merely an instrument to know the objective standards. In Mencius’ view, however, because Gaozi does not know that the heart/mind is one that can legislate moral laws and knows what is right and what is wrong, he loses sight of the great root (*benxin* 本心). For this reason, Gaozi can neither have insight into words, nor can he cultivate *qi*. Thus, although Gaozi could succeed in keeping his heart/mind from being stirred even before Mencius, in Li’s view, this is merely a temporary phenomenon (see Li 115-158).

II. Historical Approach

The historical approach to the *Mencius* is to put Mencius and his thoughts in a historical or cultural context, to examine their significance in intellectual history. Thus, contextualization is what distinguishes this approach from the philosophical one. Central questions of recent scholars adopting this approach to the *Mencius* include: (1) In what historical context and with what cultural resources did Mencius pursue his philosophical thinking? What is his conception of history and its possible problems? (2) What is the historical background of the prosperity of Mencian scholarship in the Song Dynasty? What are the main issues in the debate among Song scholars of Mencius and their intellectual-historical implications? (3) How did Zhuzi interpret the *Mencius*? Why did Zhu’s interpretation invite so much criticism from later generations of Confucians? (4) What are the unique contributions of Mencian scholarship in the Qing Dynasty?

II.1. The Historical Context of Mencius and His Thought

Almost all general studies of Mencius have something to offer in this respect. In his *Mencius*, HUANG Junjie argues that there were three things that affected Mencius’ thought most profoundly: (1) the near-sighted utilitarianism of his society; (2) the decline of government according to the standards of

the ancient kings (*wangdao* 王道); and (3) frequent wars. Living in such a time, Mencius could not help but criticize society and through such criticism develop his ideal of a good society (see J. Huang 1993: 16-17). From this historical context, Huang argues that there are two distinctive features in Mencius' modes of thinking. The first is "concrete thinking." Mencius' abstract principles are often developed in his concrete thinking. He examines human beings and their activities in their particular temporal-spatial contexts, and therefore human historicity is disclosed particularly clearly in Mencius' thought. The second is "co-relative thinking." In Mencius' view, human life is not a one-dimensional entity. There are multiple relations between the natural and the human worlds, between macro-universe and micro-universe, between one's physical body and moral heart, and between the individual and the community (see J. Huang 1991: 3-4). In Huang's view, this co-relative conception of the universe is the one that Mencius inherited from ancient China and so Mencius' thought can be seen as a continuation of this ancient tradition, while Xunzi's ideas represent a break from this tradition.

Contemporary Chinese scholars have also paid attention to several important issues in Mencius' historical interpretations, one of which is Mencius' conception of the sage. ZHONG Caijun 鍾彩鈞 argues that the idea of the sage is central to Mencius' thoughts, and he examines three ways in which Mencius uses this idea: (1) he objectively describes the words and deeds of sages; (2) he cites the words of sages to support his argument; and (3) he states his own views in the spirit of the sages. In Zhong's view, there are three most important sages in Mencius' tradition of Dao (*daotong* 道統): Shun 舜 is exemplary for his doctrine of human nature as good; King Wen is the example of feudal lords (*zhuhou* 諸侯); and Confucius is the example Mencius modeled himself (see Zhong: 1-22).

In this connection, CHEN Xiyuan 陳熙遠 has recently made a careful examination of the Confucian conception of sages, providing a new perspective on the idea of "inner sageliness and outer kingliness" (*nei sheng wai wang* 內聖外王). In Chen's view, Shun exemplified "inner sageliness and outer kingliness" not because he was both a sage and a king, fulfilling the inner moral cultivation and external political achievement respectively; nor because he became king due to his sageliness, governing the world with his moral perfection. It is rather because he is a sage-king in whom individual moral perfection and universal human goodness co-exist and co-develop. The quality of sage-king exemplified by Shun, of course, has something

particular and unique to him and therefore cannot be realized by everyone. The reason that Confucius and Mencius claim that “every one can become Yao and Shun” is to emphasize that everyone can realize “inner sageliness and outer kingliness” in one’s particular temporal-spatial-cultural context (see X. Chen: 23-68).

HUANG Junjie (Chun-chieh) has also noticed two unique features in the historical thinking of earlier Confucians represented by Mencius. The first is analogical thinking. They often interpret and contextualize themselves through historical interpretations. They believe, on the one hand, that history and their contemporary “selves” are not connected; and, on the other hand, that the distance between the historical self and actual self can be significantly reduced. The purpose of such a way of thinking is to create contemporary meaning from historical experiences. The second is counter-factual thinking. They tend to show the absurdity of the society in which they lived through the contrast between the idealized and therefore counter-factual three dynasties and the actual contemporary situation within which they found themselves. This is a way Mencius and other early Confucians used to combine the retrospective and the prospective and to unite fact with value (see J. Huang 1996: 1-34; 2001a).

Huang recently examined Mencius’ attitude toward the classics and his method of interpreting them. He argues that Mencius often used the classics within both the “affirmative” and “demonstrative” contexts. Huang indicates that Mencius’ attitude toward the classics is rather liberal. Mencius used them within his own context of discourse without many restraints by the classics themselves. Mencius moved freely back and forth between the ancient and the present, used the former to serve the latter, and constructed a coherent system of his own. However, because Mencius excessively used his own understood meaning to trace the original intention of the author, there are frequent misunderstandings of the classical texts. Mencius really did not adhere to his own two methods of interpreting classics (see J. Huang 2001b: 15-30).

II.2. Studies of the Mencian Scholarship in the Song Dynasty

Mencian scholarship was fully developed in the Song Dynasty. CHENG Yi 程頤 was the first who emphasized the importance of the *Mencius* along with the *Analects*. The political reformer WANG Anshi 王安石 cited *Mencius* for his reform movement, which initiated a debate among Song scholars

on Mencius' political thought. XIA Changbu 夏長樸 has recently examined the elevation of *Mencius* in the Song Dynasty, but does not put it in the context of intellectual history and so fails to give a full picture (see Xia 1989: 175-212; 1985, and 1987).

In his study of the Mencian scholarship in the Song Dynasty, HUANG Junjie raises the question: Why did Mencius' thoughts and deeds which showed such disrespect for King Zhou cause an extended debate only during the Song and not during any previous dynasties? In Huang's view, the answer can only be found in the particular background of political history in the Northern Song. Mencius' disrespect for King Zhou implies a distinction between "true king" and "hegemons" (*ba* 霸) and also implies relativity of kings and ministers to each other. This raised a serious question about absolutism since the Northern Song. Since WANG Anshi appealed to the *Mencius* in his reform movement, the *Mencius* became the natural target of attack by those who were against Wang's reform. It is in this context that we can understand the debate surrounding Mencius' attitude to King Zhou. Huang points out that three main issues arose here: (1) The debate between the King and hegemons was a debate between political idealism and political realism. Those who praised Mencius' attitude were idealists, represented by WANG Anshi. They regarded the idealized three dynasties as criteria. Those who were against Mencius' attitude were realists, represented by SIMA Guang 司馬光. They looked at the three dynasties as in line with the Qin, Han, Rui, and Tang Dynasties. (2) The issue about the relationship between king and minister originated from Mencius' statement that "a king who is to achieve great things must have ministers he does not summon" (2a2). This view of Mencius' was developed in the historical context when most kings sought wars and benefit. The Song Confucians, however, criticized Mencius' view from their own historical context, which is very different from that of Mencius. (3) Both those who praised and those who criticized Mencius appealed to Confucius as the highest authority to support their respective arguments. However, their understandings of the *dao* that is transmitted by Confucius are very different. Those who criticized Mencius understood the *dao* as one for king to be king and for minister to be minister in order to maintain the hierarchical order of the Song Dynasty. Those who supported Mencius understood the Confucian *dao* as one of *ren* and *yi*, which can be practiced by everyone (J. Huang 1997: Ch. 4).

The third issue mentioned above surrounds Zhuzi's interpretation of the *Mencius*. QIAN Mu points out that "those who are against and attack Zhuzi

are mostly not from other schools. They are rather Confucians themselves. Therefore, since Zhuzi, Confucianism has not only prospered, but also become the state ideology” (Qian 1971: 1. 2-3). In one of his recent essays, YANG Zuhan 楊祖漢 focuses on Zhuzi’s interpretation of Mencius’ views on (1) righteousness (*yi*) and benefit (*li*); (2) the four beginnings and the “search for the strayed heart” (*qiu fangxin* 求放心) (6a11); and “insight into words” (*zhiyan* 知言) and “cultivation of *qi*.” In Yang’s view, Zhu’s interpretation of the *Mencius*’ view on the distinction between righteousness and benefit is largely loyal to Mencius and consistent with the traditional Confucian interpretation: truly moral actions must be those that are performed from righteousness and not merely consistent with it. However, in his interpretation of Mencius’ view of human nature (the four beginnings), Zhu often distorts the related texts of the *Mencius*. Even in some places where Zhu uses words very similar to Mencius’, he means something very different. Finally, on the issue of “having insight into words” and “cultivation of *qi*,” although Zhu’s interpretation is not consistent with the original text of the *Mencius*, it has the merit of further developing Mencius’ ideas. So Yang’s conclusion is that Zhu’s interpretation of the *Mencius* has all three dimensions. It is: consistent with Mencius; inconsistent with Mencius; and inconsistent in appearance but coherent in development and substance (see Z. Yang 1995: 129-152).

Zhuzi’s interpretation of *Mencius* 2a2 has been a much disputed topic among Confucian scholars during the last seven hundred years. As HUANG Junjie points out, through his commentary on this chapter and his detailed interpretation of “having insight into words” and “cultivation of *qi*” in his *Classified Sayings (Yulei)*, Zhuzi was able to develop some new meanings from the ancient classics, which became part of his own philosophical system. What is unique to Zhu’s interpretation is that he proceeds from “grasping the principle” (*qiong li*), through insight into words, to reach the realm of cultivated *qi*. He basically adopts the standpoint of investigation of things and grasping the principle from the *Great Learning* in his interpretation of the *Mencius* to revive Confucianism in his time. Zhu’s dualism between principle and material force and between heart/mind and external things is characteristic of his interpretation. However, such a dualism has received much serious criticism from East Asian Confucians, and it has been gradually replaced by modern monism since the sixteenth century. The reason is that Zhu’s Confucianism became the official ideology, and so anyone who

wanted to attack the corruption of the government would naturally attack Zhuzi (see J. Huang 1997: Ch. 4).

Zhuzi's Mencian scholarship is a further development from brothers CHENG Hao and CHENG Yi and is further developed by his followers, most prominent among whom is ZHANG Jiucheng 張九成. Recently JIANG Qihua 蔣秋華 has made a study of Zhang's *Biography of Mencius*. He concludes that, although Zhang's interpretation of the *Mencius* basically follows Zhuzi on the distinction between heavenly principle and human desire and is therefore not very innovative, it makes a great contribution in expanding Zhuzi's influence (see Jiang: 153-190).

II.3. Studies of Mencian Scholarship in the Qing Dynasty

Another focus of contemporary Chinese studies of the *Mencius* is Mencian scholarship in the Qing Dynasty. Scholars are particularly interested in the interpretations of the *Mencius* provided by DAI Zhen 戴震 (1724-1777), JIAO Xun 焦循 (1763-1820), and KANG Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927).

DAI Zhen was a representative figure in the Chinese intellectual history of the eighteenth century. His *Explorations in Words and Meanings of the Mencius* 《孟子字義疏證》 is a central piece of Mencian scholarship in the Qing Dynasty. In recent Chinese studies, CEN Yicheng 岑溢成 argues that the idea of human nature as good is the foundation of Dai's interpretation of the *Mencius*, while the idea of one root of the "is" and the "ought" is the foundation of his conception of human nature as good. According to Dai's interpretation of Mencius' conception of human nature, one's natural endowment takes rituals and righteousness as the ultimate standard of its development, while the latter is regarded as the full realization of one's natural endowment. Therefore, in order to act according to rituals and righteousness, one must fully develop and not reject or deny such natural endowments. Such a view can be examined from both the material aspect and the formal aspect. In the material aspect, this view emphasizes that rituals and righteousness are the realization and completion of one's natural endowment. This is the idea of human nature as good. In the formal aspect, this view emphasizes that rituals and righteousness are the ultimate standard of the development of one's natural endowment. This is the idea of one-root of the "is" and the "ought". These two aspects, the material and the formal, constitute DAI Zhen's theory of human nature (see Cen).

HUANG Junjie agrees with Cen that the idea of one root of the “is” and the “ought” is the starting point of Dai’s interpretation of *Mencius*. However, in Huang’s view, such an interpretation is not entirely consistent with Mencius’ view of human nature, being closer to Gaozi’s idea of nature as what one is born with. Dai’s emphasis that one has to search for principles (humanity, righteousness, rituals, and wisdom) in one’s natural desires diverts from Mencius’ distinction between humans and animals and from Mencius’ idea that the *dao* of heaven and the *dao* of humans are connected by sincerity (*cheng* 誠). Generally speaking, Huang points out that Dai’s interpretation of the *Mencius* is strongly apologetic. Within the Confucian tradition, Dai attempts to provide an interpretation of the original meaning of the *Mencius* to replace the interpretation provided by Song Confucians; in relation to Buddhism and Daoism, Dai attempts to reject these two doctrines by rejecting Song Confucianism. In both cases, Dai claims to reconstruct the classical philosophical system of the *Mencius* as he understood it (see J. Huang 1997: ch. 8).

JIAO Xun’s *Correct Meaning of the Mencius* 《孟子正義》 is another important achievement of Mencian scholarship in the Qing Dynasty. In his study, LIN Qingzhang 林慶章 points out that Jiao’s work is based on ZHAO Qi’s 趙岐 *Chapters and Sentences of the Mencius* 《孟子章句》, while adopting views of many other schools. It combines both evidential studies and philosophical approaches. It is for these reasons that his book occupies such an important role in the interpretive history of the *Mencius* (see Lin 1995: 217-242). However, as HUANG Junjie points out, Jiao’s introduction of the *Book of Change* to his interpretation of human nature and heaven in the *Mencius* is not consistent with Mencius’ original teaching (see J. Huang 1992: 99-122).

KANG Youwei’s *Exploration of the Mencius* 《孟子微》 (1901) was written when the Western powers invaded China and China faced a crisis. In this book, Kang adopts a world view to interpret the *Mencius* in order to reconcile Chinese and Western intellectual traditions. In HUANG Junjie’s view, the fusion of Chinese and Western, the old and the new, characteristic of Kang’s thought, is clearly reflected in his interpretation of the *Mencius*. According to Kang, the modern Western ideas of democracy, liberty, equality, social Darwinism, and commercialism can also be made consistent with the Mencian tradition.

From the above survey, we can see clearly that Mencius' thought has been deeply immersed in historical changes. For this reason, the intellectual-historical study is an important approach to Mencius' thought.

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