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## วรรณคดีและวรรณคดีเปรียบเทียบ ครั้งที่ 2

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*Intellectual Debates and Modes of Literary Expression in the Mengzi*

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# Intellectual Debates and Modes of Literary Expression in *The Mengzi*

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*The Mengzi* (孟子), an ancient literature in the form of prose, is one of the most significant and influential literatures in the cultural history of China. It has been used to refine conception and spirit of children of birth and breeding to become ideal and civilized intellectuals. The said writing, named after Mencius (371-287 B.C.), is believed among the recent scholars to have been composed in the third century BC by the apprentices, who had accumulated and recorded the remarks of Mencius. There is quite enough evidence that the said record is in accordance with Mencius's remarks<sup>1</sup> despite the fact that it was composed by his students. Also, it is assumed that Mencius must have reviewed and checked it by himself as well. Unlike most ancient Chinese philosophical texts which have problems of authenticity, *The Mengzi* is considered a thorough and reliable one which the studies and analyses of Chinese local wisdom can well be based upon.<sup>2</sup>

The contents in *The Mengzi* include the guidelines of how to peacefully administrate the country, the theme of which is based mainly on Confucianism, reflecting the orderliness and prosperity of the city in Western Zhou period. Having studied Confucianism, Mencius had constant faith in the way of thinking of this cult that it was the only way to bring the miserable and suffering Chinese society back to the peaceful and moral one. Meanwhile, Mencius realized that the social conditions and factors had varied so much that it was necessary to adapt the contents and reasons thereof as well as the methods of presentation in order to make it more reliable and suitable to the new social context. Besides, there were new concepts and values different from those in the era of Confucius. As a result, within the philosophy of politics of Mencius were created intellectual debates with wide intercourse between Confucian thinking, which was to be changed as the time passed by, and other new trendy concepts. Accordingly, *The Mengzi* is abundant with convincing details that enable the readers to realize the local wisdom and spirit of the Chinese at least in a certain period.

The Confucian political thought focuses on benevolence of individuals in the society, guiding how to behave appropriately based on the relationship with others in different classes; for example, how to behave as a father or as a son, how to behave as a master or as a subordinate, etc. To behave oneself that properly, it is essential to understand Ren (benevolence) and Li (propriety), most of which must be gradually blended by discipline and industriousness. Above all, Confucius believed that when the relation system of individuals in the society was well developed and organized, the society would become orderly tacitly. Therefore, the rulers were required to educate or persuade their people to retain themselves in splendid benevolence. Upon the era of Mencius, the said concept was resorted to emphasize on the class of rulers with the fundamental belief that the rulers were major factors to bring the country in peace; the good rulers led to the good country. Hence, it is necessary for such rulers to be equipped with great virtues and high responsibility for their people's welfare. In contrast, the unqualified masters could not do any favor to their country.

It is obviously seen that Mencius chose to place an emphasis on merit of the rulers instead of all individuals in the society. Mencius probably thought that the power of each

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<sup>1</sup> Lau, D.C. (tr.), *Mencius*, New York: Penguin Books. 1970. P.220.

<sup>2</sup> A.C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*. La Salle, Illinois. 1989. P.111.

citizen did not have as much influence on the society as that of the empowered. Furthermore, Mencius had an idea that the achievement of moral conducts should be seriously considered; it was no use sticking to the types or models regardless of their consequences. At this point, the emphasis of Mencius is different from that of Confucius. That is, the former stressed on Li (propriety) instead of Yi (righteousness). This change is considered as a combination of flexible compromise and the in-trend concepts, rather than the blind and persistent adherence to the conventional ideas.

The compromise and the combination of differing concepts in Confucianism, both theoretical and practical, can be noticed in the contents of *The Mengzi*, especially the outstanding traits of literary expression in this philosophical work. According to the composition process, the story not only proceeds as to the norms and typical styles of writing, but it also employs various modes of literary expression. As a consequence, there exists the attractiveness of language use, in which the implication and complexity are employed to tell the stories. These modes of literary expression help relieve the tension of contents for which the careful consideration and interpretation are needed. Also, the said modes help decrease the violent clash of concepts in certain extent. Moreover, they offer aesthetics originated from imagination, which not only entertains and delights the readers, but also convinces them to comply with the concepts hidden therein. This literary work, therefore, has been acclaimed as a precious piece of literature as well as a significant philosophical masterpiece.

The modes of literary expression frequently used by Mencius are as follow:

1. Dialogue Construction
2. Past Reference
3. Analogy

Mencius could effectively blend together these modes of literary expression; for instance, he often inserted some past references and analogy in most of his dialogues. Anyway, the said three modes are not at all new styles of Chinese literature because the preceding literary works had widely used these modes. Yet, the art of writing of Mencius is more attractive and unique in that there are more witty hidden meanings, which are paradoxically obviously noticeable.

Here, only Dialogue Construction will be examined since this kind of mode is the most practical tool Mencius employed to interact with different ideas in the society of that time. Mencius also used dialogue construction to criticize the then society, explain controversial troubles and present his ideal methods of solving the said social problems.

The use of dialogue can convey the willingness to negotiate better than the method of explanation to the passive listeners. In addition, the purpose of instruction is wisely hidden within this means. Above all, the conversation is regarded as a sign of intellectual because this practice was common only among the well-educated and the elite, who were thought to drive the country. General people rarely discussed on these complicated issues. For Mencius, who was in the age of rapid transition from one society to another, he might have desire to create compromise between ideal and reality, past and present, benefits and justice and the elite and the subordinate. Consequently, the mode of dialogue construction is completely suitable to that situation. Once combined with other literary expressions, such as the language use and the styles of narration, which Mencius could use to efficiently entertain the readers, the dialogue construction became highly convincing and popular.

Nevertheless, upon some close analyses, it is evident that most of the conversations in this philosophical writing of Mencius are not interactive ones indeed. Instead, they are just set-up dialogues in which Mencius could solely present his opinions; and he is usually the one who summarized and ended the talks. There are only a few dialogues that end with the words or the reactions of other partners, and all of them seem to totally agree with the resolutions of Mencius. Some of them responded, both willingly and forcedly, with acceptance of Mencius's reasons. Furthermore, all dialogues herein were created with the status of Mencius, in terms of credibility and wisdom, above all other partners, including even the rulers of the country who still had absolute power. Mencius, in conversation, always explained, described and criticized anything directly, not afraid of offending the others. Besides, most of the dialogues seldom let the readers hear any reaction or opinions of other partners, especially the voices that reflect or summarize the true ideas of them.

Though there are very few responses from the conversation partners, the interaction within the debates of *The Mengzi* can be heard all the time but in the form of serious argumentative voice against the questions concerning social situations asked by other partners. In other words, the dialogue construction herein is not only the conversation among different characters, but it is also regarded as reaction against the call for development and revision of social norms. The said conversations are believed to respond to the dramatic change of society that mostly affected the traditional beliefs, and to the existing problems at that time, such as the ideal administration of vassals or social values which had changed from moral faith to the search of concrete benefits. Instead of direct speech showing a standpoint while debating about current affairs of the country, Mencius chose to hide witty eloquence within the said dialogues.

Considering superficially, the interaction within this conversation may present the atmosphere of severe conflict and non-reconciliation. However, it is found in certain extent that the dialogues of Mencius convey the hidden intention to create the reconciliation among different ideas based on differing and various wisdom backgrounds, as analyzed from the conversation between Mencius and some characters.

### **The main characters in the dialogues**

There are over 50 characters appearing in *The Mengzi*; some are conversation partners or Mencius while the others are not. Moreover, there are about 150 characters referred herein, most of which existed in the past times. All of the aforementioned characters are in different social classes, ranging from vassals, bureaucrats, intellectuals to normal folks. It is believed that these distinct characters represent different and variant ideas; for instance, the idea of sudden revolution, the idea of gradual reformation and the idea of escaping from the society.

The conversation partners of Mencius can be categorized into 3 main groups:

- A. The vassals: King Hui of Liang (梁惠王), King Hsüan of Ch'i (齐宣王), and Duke Wen of Teng (滕文公)
- B. The disciples: Kung-sun Ch'ou (公孙丑), Kung-tu Tzu (公都子), and Wan Chang (万章)
- C. The philosophers of different ideas: Kau Tzu (告子)

## A. Conversations between Mencius and some vassals

### 1. King Hui of Liang

King Hui of Liang is the King of Wei (魏), which was a large and powerful region. However, this region was gradually deteriorating under the reign of this vassal. So, Mencius established King Hui of Liang as a character of disgrace and as an example of an unreliable ruler, as stated in the excerpt below.

*Mencius said*

*'How ruthless was King Hui of Liang! A benevolent man extends his love from those he loves to those he does not love. A ruthless man extends his ruthlessness from those he does not love to those he loves.'*

*What do you mean?' ask Kung-sun Ch'ou.*

*'King hui of Liang sent his people to war, making pulp of them, for the sake of gaining further territory. He suffered a grave defeat and when he wanted to go to war a second time he was afraid he would not be able to win, so he herded the young men he loved to their death as well. This is what I meant when I said he extended his ruthlessness from those he did not love to those he loved.'*

(7B: 1)

In the opinion of Mencius, King Hui of Liang lacked of fundamental but indispensable qualifications of a good ruler. That is he had no benevolence (Ren). His behavior and ego were not based on those of an ideal leader. He did not care about the welfare of his citizens. Instead, he would prefer to conquer and dominate other territories so eagerly that he chose to sacrifice his own people.

The idea of seeing “territory” more important than “people” is a main point Mencius debated with the values of administration at that time, in which benefits, security and wealth of the nation were mainly focused. Mencius thought the said idea was not correct and he reflected this opinion through the conversation with King Hui of Liang.

*Mencius went to see King Hui of Liang,*

*'You, Sir' said the King, 'have come all this distance, thinking nothing of a thousand li. You must surely have some way of profiting my state?'*

*'Your Majesty' answer Mencius. 'What is the point of mentioning the word "profit" ? All that matters is that there should be benevolence and rightness.'*

(1A: 1)

Mencius refused to show interest in the talks of country's profit, which were on the basis of economic prosperity and military power. Rather, he tried to demonstrate the

significance of his people's well-being, which was much more essential and required understanding as well as benevolence (Ren 仁) of the rulers.

It is clearly seen that Mencius used the best-known character, who failed to govern the country, to reaffirm the feelings of readers. Then, he convinced the readers to see that the failure of King Hui of Liang was caused by ignoring his citizens.

In reality, the failure of King Hui of Liang or Wei also stemmed from some other factors, such as politics, economy and social cultures, not only from the lack of virtues of the ruler as Mencius stated herein. However, the readers had already been easily convinced, by effective oratory of Mencius, to believe in his ideas which were further supported by the image of King Hui of Liang, who was fond of but always failed in the battle.

However, although King Hui of Liang was a symbol of pervasive values in which profit of the nation was the must, Mencius, who adhered in benevolence, was still willing to discuss with him with no sign of absolute objection to the said values.

*“All that matters is that there should be benevolence and rightness.  
What is the point of mentioning the word ‘profit’?” (1A:1)*

The voice of Mencius shows that he accepted in certain extent that the country's profits was one of the main objectives, but it was not necessary to search for it desperately. He stressed that the benevolence would bring about the desirable profit tacitly. It is evident herein that Mencius avoided discussing on the definition of profit, but he set it as an “End” of virtuous methods. The emphasis that the “Means” are of greater significance than the “Ends” is also displayed in the dialogue below.

*Mencius went to see King Hui of Liang. The King was standing over a pond. ‘Are such things enjoyed even by a god and wise man?’ said he, looking round at his wild geese and deer.  
‘Only if a man is good and wise,’ answered Mencius, ‘is he able to enjoy them. Otherwise he would not, even if he had them. (1A:2)*

The conversation with King Hui of Liang is regarded as a negotiation to find out the compromise between virtues and benefits; both are not contradictory to each other. Both can also be well blended if there is a clear understanding of which one has priority over the other.

## **2. King Hsüan of Ch'i**

“Ch'i” had long been an important state since the beginning of the Western Ch'ou dynasty. Its time-honored awe was said to stem from not only geographical and economic factors, but also from historical and cultural backgrounds.

While Mencius established King Hui of Liang as a character who failed to rule his own country due to too much emphasis on armed force development rather than the welfare of people, he portrayed King Hsüan of Ch'i as a hope of ideal and virtuous ruler, as depicted in Confucianism. The vassal of such a great state as Ch'i was more likely with the highest potentiality to become a “True King”.

The conversation between Mencius and King Hsüan of Ch'i is somewhat like that with King Hui of Liang; it is mostly about the administration of the country. The emphasis in this dialogue is mainly on the wrong ideas of rulers, who focused merely on the expansion of power. However, the tone of conversation Mencius used with the king of Ch'i is so different from the voice he talked to King Hui of Liang that his partiality toward the former is easily noticeable.

The longest dialogue in *The Mengzi* is the one between Mencius and King Hsüan of Ch'i. The main point therein is about the attempt of Mencius to change the attitude of the latter toward administration. Mencius encouraged the vassal to pay interest in the ways of True King instead of the power. Also, Mencius often said several words of compliment to this conversation partner, believing with utmost certainty that this man was able to successfully follow the ways of True King.

*'How virtuous must a man be before he can become a true King?'*  
*'He becomes a true King by tending the people. This is something no one can stop.'*  
*'Can someone like myself tend the people?'*  
*'Yes.'* (1A: 7)

The reason why Mencius had great confidence in King Hsüan of Ch'i is that, as he had said, the King had sympathy toward the animals that were about to be slaughtered. Mencius, therefore, inferred that whoever had sympathy usually had benevolence (Ren) too; and accordingly, they were qualified to be a True King (1A: 7). In another dialogue, Mencius also inferred from the King's preference of music that this leader was suitable to be a True King (1B: 1). The vassal must have known that sharing happiness in music with others was much more pleasant than enjoying it all alone. Whenever King Hsüan of Ch'i denied having any qualification to become a True King, Mencius could always refer to the sound reasons to object the said idea. For example, when the King admitted that he still preferred music and hunting, Mencius said it was all right if he shared these with his people. Again, once the King said he was fond of atrocity and power, Mencius explained positively that these two things were acceptable if they could finally bring in peace. Hearing the King still had greed and passion for treasures, Mencius defended him by saying that the search for treasures to fulfill the royal granaries or cater the army meant that the leader shared those treasures with people. And when King Hsüan of Ch'i said that he still enjoyed sexual entertainment, Mencius assured again that the said habit was the way to share merriness with his people, if it could create new young couples (1B: 5).

The conversation between Mencius and King Hsüan of Ch'i clearly shows that the former neither criticized nor blamed the latter severely in spite of the fact that King Hsüan of Ch'i inclined to choose the way of "Hegemon King" (霸道), which stressed on the expansion of military power. Rather, Mencius concentrated on the qualification and potentiality of his partner to become an ideal True King of Confucianism. Accordingly, the personality opposed to the ideal dismissed as trivial things, not hindrance to the ways of good governance. Since the critical criteria to be a "True King" is benevolence or "Ren", Mencius hastily concluded from superficial or unintentional manners of the King that this man really had the said qualifications. So, it can be said, considering the tone of conversation, that the partiality herein is quite evident and cannot be perceived in the dialogue with King Hui of Liang.

Unfortunately, the hope of Mencius to see his ideal “True King” in the Ch’i finally collapsed. This is because the state policy of King Hsüan of Ch’i was not in line with that of the “sage”. The event that may have disappointed Mencius so much is when Ch’i conquered and dominated the state of Yan (燕). Later, the people in Yan rose up all at once with fury. Moreover, Mencius was further disappointed with King Hsüan of Ch’i who did nothing to solve the problems just because of the instigation from people around him. Even though the King of Ch’i possessed high potentiality to be a True King, his subordinates or people around had more influence on his decision. Disheartened from this, as can be felt from his tone of voice, Mencius eventually decided to leave Ch’i. According to the dialogues between Mencius and King Hsüan of Ch’i it can be assumed that the King was the last hope of Mencius to see the Confucian model of administration in his era.

King Hsüan of Ch’i is symbolized as a passion of many vassals in that time; that is, they were greedy for power and desired to be Hegemon King. Referring to Confucianism, this burning ambition is not approved. Still, Mencius tried to convince that the overwhelming power popularity could be achieved regardless of being in a royal family of Chou if one had qualifications of a True King; benevolence toward his people. The clue that hints an attempt to compare oneself with the Chou King as well as the voice of compromising from Mencius can be noticed from the dialogue below.

*King Hsüan of Ch’i asked, ‘Is it true that the park of King Wen was seventy li square?’*

*‘It is so recorded,’ answered Mencius*

*‘Was it really as large as that?’*

*‘Even so, the people found it small.’*

*‘My park is only forty li square, and yet the people find it too big. Why is this?’*

*‘True, King Wen’s park was seventy li square, but it was open to woodcutters as well as catchers of pheasants and hares. As he shared it with the people, is it any wonder that they found it small?’*

*‘When I first arrived at the borders of your state, I inquired about the major prohibitions before I dared enter, I was told that within the outskirts of the capital there was a park forty li square in which the killing of a deer was as serious an offence as the killing of a man. This turns the park into a trap forty li square in the midst of the state. Is it any wonder that the people find it too big?’*

*(1B: 2)*

The conversation with King Hsüan of Ch’i is regarded as negotiation between principles of the destined king and the truth that the Chou clan was no longer in power. In other words, Mencius accepted that the ruler could be anybody regardless of conventional statement, but the said ruler must possess ideal qualifications of benevolence and good governance.

### **3. Duke Wen of T’eng**

**T'eng** is a small state located to the southwest of Ch'i. This region has no significance in terms of Chinese history except in the philosophical works of Mencius. Here, the political status of this region is depicted, whereby it was threatened by the more powerful regions, especially Ch'i and Ch'u, which bordered at the north and south. (*1B: 13-15*)

Mencius specially underscored this region, much more than any other small ones, because he had composed such a number of dialogues concerning Duke Wen of T'eng, who was the ruler of this region, that this man was regarded as one of the most important characters herein.

Unlike the vassals of Wei and Ch'i, who had taken over power from the predecessors, it is noticeable that Duke Wen of T'eng's family name is Chi(姬) which succeeded directly from a son of King Wen. Besides, Mencius portrayed Duke Wen of T'eng as the one who believed in and practiced the doctrines of Mencius quite successfully. As a consequence, while reading the dialogues between Mencius and Duke Wen of T'eng, the readers would feel as if they were back to the ancient and conventional period of Confucianism. The example best explaining the said atmosphere is the mourning period for father of three years, which this vassal had tried to revive amidst the objection of his subjects. (*3A: 1*)

Most ancient traditions and practices were almost completely dismissed, even in the state of Lu (魯) which was believed to be the most conservative one. Therefore, the revival of these extinct traditions by some vassals of time-honored Chou clan satisfied Mencius so much that he guaranteed the positive consequences thereof, which would bring about a great deal of admiration. (*3A: 1*)

Once the Duke of T'eng asked for some advice about the administration, Mencius did not hesitate at all to point out that the emphasis should be placed on the creation of stability based on economic administration. The well-field system (井)", which was a land allocation method invented on the basis of sociopolitic of ancient Chou was proposed. As a result, the Duke of T'eng accepted, without mentioning other methods of expanding his power, that he would support and conduct the aforementioned policy so as to bring prosperity in his state. (*3A: 3*)

The policy of administration recommended by Mencius to such a small state as T'eng would take quite a long time to see its results. That is it would take at least three years for the people to realize and praise the policy's efficiency. Not only that, it was unable to expect when The well-field system to the people would be successful. Also, the said practice was somewhat out of date because, in the era of Mencius, the social and economic structures had been changed from those with propriety to the ones with enforcing laws. Above all, the social classes of rulers and laymen, which had been clearly separated from each other, were highly susceptible to the sudden and unexpected changes. In other words, there were several factors enabling the laymen to finally become the rulers, whereas the formidable rulers could fall and become normal people. According to the aforementioned, Mencius did not provide any solution to the frightful problems waiting ahead, which might occur from the expansion of military power among the larger states.

When Duke Wen of T'eng asked Mencius how to solve the problems of invasion from Ch'i of Ch'u, the latter replied with the feelings of surrender to the situation; his answers did not give any concrete hope at all. He advised the vassal to protect his land with his best. Were

he to fail doing so, he ought to leave his land and find out the new place together with his people (*IB: 15*), as stated before that people were much more important than any piece of land.

*‘This is a question that is beyond me’ answered Mencius. ‘If you insist, there is only one course of action I can suggest. Dig deeper moats and build higher walls and defend them shoulder to shoulder with the people. If they would rather die than desert you, then all is not lost.*

(*IB: 13*)

Even though Mencius did not give Duke Wen of T’eng any concrete ideas to solve the problems of colonization from other regions, his answers concerning the administration of the country clearly represented the stable adherence to the ways of King, who showed no fear of destiny. For instance, Mencius always suggested the Duke to keep faith in propriety (Li) and use it to run the country, whereby the leader himself had to take action on his duty with no fear of the consequences or destiny. Furthermore, he also advised the vassal to take great care of his people and share with them both misery and blessedness.

*If a man does good deeds, then amongst his descendants in generations to come there will rise one who will become a true King. All a gentleman can do in starting an enterprise is to leave behind a tradition which can be carried on. Heaven alone can grant success. What can you do about Ch’i? You can only try your best to do good.’*

(*IB: 14*)

His advice also represented the ancient propriety system calling for the security of those who believed in propriety but were still threatened. No matter how much he realized the stream of changes against the old system, Mencius insisted on following the ways of administration based on moral principles, rather than power. The leaders should do their best and let the final results determined by destiny. They should be aware that there were some matters beyond our control, such as life cycle, death, senility, fate, luck, etc. Once understanding “Proper Destiny”, one would not be afraid of the aforementioned uncontrollable events but would do his best on the things he could destine. Anyway, Mencius assured that the awful predicaments were just temporary; good governance would finally lead to the absolute peace. The consolatory dialogues toward Duke Wen of T’eng, therefore, were regarded as the confirmation that the ways of righteousness, though time-consuming, would endure endlessly.

## **B. Conversations between Mencius and the apprentices**

There are only a few apprentices of Mencius and either of them is rather insignificant. Besides, their characters, personality and ideas are not quite evident; especially once compared with those of Confucius in *The Analects* they were neither remarkable nor lively at all. However, considered as characters herein, these apprentices were created with absolutely distinguished roles.

In addition to Duke Wen of T'eng, a vassal who was acting as if he were an apprentice of Mencius, there are other three apprentices frequently appearing in the dialogues.

#### 4 . Kung-sun Ch'ou

Kung-sun Ch'ou showed up immediately after the dialogue between Mencius and the important vassals terminated. This character also turned up in other 14 conversations; therefore, it was considered one of the main characters. Kung-sun Ch'ou was also involved in the philosophy of politic; nevertheless, the focus thereof was shifted from qualifications of an ideal King to those of a competent subject who could assist the king to run the country.

Confucianism says that the assistance from the king's subjects plays a vital role, as much as that of the king himself, to keep the nation in peace. Only the virtuous king could not complete the cycle of administration. It is also necessary to have intelligent subjects to help administer the country. Mencius was aware of this importance as stated in the dialogue below.

*'Yu was annexed for failing to employ Po-li Hsu, while Duke Mu of Ch'in, by employing him, became leader of the feudal lords. A state which fails to employ good and wise men will end by suffering annexation. How can it hope to suffer no more than a reduction in size?'*

(6B: 6)

In the dialogue, Mencius employed Kung-sun Ch'ou as a character that conveys the qualifications and duty of the good subjects. This character also asked some questions about role-model subjects in the past, such as Kuan Chung and Yan Tzu, who had led Ch'i state to the height of power. Also, he mentioned Prince Pi Kan, Chi Tzu and Chiao Ko, all of whom were bureaucrats responsible for the administration of the country in the age of King Chou of the Shang dynasty. These three noblemen were able to sustain the throne of a tyrant king for quite a long time before it finally collapsed. Kung-sun Ch'ou also asked about Po Yi and Yi Yin, who had such faith in aspiration and principles to serve their master that their good deeds were finally engraved in the history. Confucius was also acclaimed as one of the most intelligent subjects who were equipped with the superior principles of government service. (2A: 2)

As a conversation partner, Kung-sun Ch'ou asked Mencius whether his qualifications as a sage could help administrate the country. This provided a chance for Mencius to claim his own superb qualities.

*'May I ask what your strong points are?'*

*'I have an insight into words. I am good at cultivating my "flood-like Ch'I"'*

(2A: 2)

The said two qualities, an insight into words (知言) and good at cultivating my “flood-like Ch’I (浩然之气), were instrumental to assist the king in running the country. Yet, Mencius explained the meanings of these so little and so vaguely that the thinkers of new generation have still seriously interpreted and examined them. The qualities of Mencius herein aimed at serving and administering society with peace and on the basis of his pure merit and virtues. Since the qualities must be clearly shown to all, Mencius chose to eminently demonstrate the use of words and the responsibility for what he had said. Meanwhile, the demonstration of words must consist of tough spirit with no fear. The sage who could help administer the country had to be equipped with high qualification, high vigilance and high sense of aspiration.

The qualified sage should be self-assured. In some cases, the subjects may have to offend their masters’ power or dignity if that could eventually lead to the greater success as to the aspiration. In fact, the problem in which the subjects might disregard their boss’s authority was so delicate that the Confucianism had tried hard all the time to make it clear. This is because the Chou tradition, which Confucianism was based on, was established from the said method. However, when Mencius tried to point out this issue, he had Kung-sun Ch’ou, who was in charge of all duty of the subordinates, make this question and “listen passively” to the analysis of his master with serenity.

*Kung-sun Ch’ou said, ‘Yi Yin banished T’ai Chia to T’ung, saying, “I do not wish to be close to one who is intractable”, and the people were greatly pleased. When T’ai Chia became good, Yi Yin restored him to the throne, and the people, once again, were pleased. When a prince is not good, is it permissible for a good and wise man who is his subject to banish him?’*

*‘It is permissible,’ said Mencius, ‘only if he had the motive of a Yi Yin; otherwise, it would be usurpation.’*

(7A: 31)

In summary, Kung-sun Ch’ou is a character supporting and giving Mencius a chance to demonstrate qualities of the sage who came to save the country. Also, Mencius affirmed that the subjects with the said qualities should be self-confident, prestigious and virtuous enough to express their right opinion and criticism, if they saw that their masters neither lived an ethical life nor had any proper qualification. As seen herein, the qualities of the workmen are so high-standard and significant that they have a great deal of influence on the country’s destiny. Likewise, in the Chan Kuo period, most regions authorized absolute power administration to the hands of councilors and chief ministers. On the other hand, in the earlier Ch’un Ch’iu period, the vassals themselves had run their own countries. It is quite obvious that Mencius wanted to compromise that the subjects might play an important role to destine their country instead of their masters. The said subjects, however, had to possess enough virtues, knowledge, good governance and self-confidence to interact or negotiate with their vassals. As in many dialogues with Kung-sun Ch’ou, Mencius tried to explain that the vassals must treat their subjects well enough with benevolence, or else, the latter might disapprove of them.

## 5. Kung-tu Tzu

This character was created to let Mencius have a chance to point out his own image and behavior, which were doubtful and controversial among public. For instance, when there was a rumor that Mencius was absorbed in debate, which rather humiliate the image of Mencius, he had Kung-tu Tzu ask this question and explained that he had necessity to debate against any streams of ideas that could mislead the whole society to the wrong ways (3B: 9). At the meantime, he took that opportunity to counter the said adverse ideas in order to show his competence as an expert of debate.

In another case, there was a scandal that Mencius had behaved himself quite improperly, at least in the eyes of the public. Then, he did not hesitate to explain, via Kung-tu Tzu, the principles and reasons why he had to behave like that. (2B: 5)

Again via the dialogues with Kung-tu Tzu, Mencius not only defended himself against the gossips from the people, but he also helped protect those who were in the same situation as his. In case of K'uang Chang, who was blamed as an undutiful son, Mencius defended him with detailed reasons and guaranteed that this man was not an undutiful son at all (4B: 30). In addition, Mencius was also suspicious-looking when he neglected the people who were accepted as good men by the public. So, he employed the conversations with Kung-tu Tzu to make himself clear. As in case of T'eng Keng, who was depicted as "appeared to *deserv your courtesy*", Mencius gave the sound reasons why he had not replied the questions of T'eng Keng. (7A: 43)

The above attribution about ways of conduct of Mencius, if considering closely, has hidden some complexity affecting the faith of those who listened to his elaborate explanation. According to some scholars who have been analyzing Mencius's attribution, the first main objective thereof is to convince the people that the violation of some ethics, which was deemed as trifling, was likely to happen due to the force majeure, in which the priority had to be placed on the other more important ones. As a result, one should neglect the tarnish of trivial image in order to maintain the higher codes of Dharma. The other main objective of Mencius's attribution is to imply that people sometimes disapprove certain behaviors only because they were limited to very little understanding of Dharma and stuck to the narrow border of ethics. Those who could perceive the real essence thereof must be the ones with profound discernment in Dharma like Mencius. Therefore, the conducts criticized severely by the laymen could be considered compliant with codes of morals.

According to analyses by the scholastic, especially about the latter objective, Kung-tu Tzu acted as a spokesman of Mencius to roughly imply that only some competent individuals could understand the deeply-hidden subjects.

*Kung-tu Tzu asked, 'Though equally human, why are some men greater than others?'*

*'He who is guided by the interests of the parts of his person that are of greater importance is a great man; he who is guided by the interests of the parts of his person that are of smaller importance is a small man.'*

*'Though equally human, why are some men guided one way and others guided another way?'*

*'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 the 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 makes one's stand on what is of greater importance in the first instance, what is of smaller importance can no usurp its place. In this way, one cannot but be a great man.'*

(6A: 15)

To summarize, Kung-tu Tzu is a character created only to act as a medium for Mencius to debate against certain moral standards of the then society. The apprentices of Mencius in the dialogues did not ask him for any knowledge of virtues, but they were used only for the amendment of Mencius's image. Perhaps, Kung-tu Tzu is also regarded as a representative of the society that varied as to the wind of change. Without profound understanding of conventional propriety and behavior of the sage, there might exist skepticism as well as misunderstanding of the true conducts and intentions of gentlemen. Mencius often indicated through the dialogues with Kung-tu Tzu that some principles could be ignored in certain circumstances so as to attain the greater achievement. Also, some delicate principles might not have been accepted by those who were not enlightened in Dharma. Hence, most of the conversations with Kung-tu Tzu are believed to correct the controversial image of Mencius, with some hidden implication that images could be humiliated in certain extent so as to deal with some critical situations.

## **6. Wan Chang**

Wan Chang is an apprentice very close to Mencius; so, there are as many as 15 dialogues between Mencius and this student, most of which are about the legends and stories in the ancient times. As a matter of fact, Wan Chang is a character served to describe the ancient scriptures or to analyze the past events and then elaborate the Confucianism.

The initial roles of Wan Chang, therefore, are to make questions and allow Mencius to point out that most people usually heard twisted information of ancient legends; for instance, the stories of *Yi Yin* or *Po Li*, the sages and the bureaucrats, and even those of the indecent behavior of Confucius (5A: 7-9). Once Wan Chang mentioned the said stories, Mencius immediately affirmed that the said stories were not true or perhaps did not exist.

In another case of dialogue between Mencius and Wan Chang, Mencius accepted that the stories he had heard were true. Yet, he argued that the interpretation thereof was not quite right or it was intentionally twisted. The good examples thereof are the succession of Shun from Yao (5A: 5), and the offer of throne to the son of Yu (5A: 6). Mencius did not deny the facts or existence of the stories, but he insisted that these stories had often been misinterpreted.

The attempt to explain "the correct meaning" of the old stories reflects that there were some troubles of interpretation while passing on the said stories; this may have led to some doubts which in turn would adversely affect the ethics of Confucianism. Hence, there should be correction to bring about mutual understanding. The said troubles must have partly been caused by the changes of time, along which the criteria of morals got varied and varied. Thus, the stories told in order to idealize some virtues of certain ancient sages were facing new common senses just occurring in the society. This results in paradox which raises suspicion whether the rightfulness of one ethic was opposed to that of another. As seen in the story of Shun, he was acclaimed as a son of great gratitude and a brother of high generosity. Later in the period of Mencius in which the relationship in family decreased in significance, the

people began to acknowledge the broader relationship; that is, the people from different classes, families and races could live in the society together. Then, there were some doubts to what extent the virtues sustaining family relationship, such as gratitude, should be limited so that they would not overlap those sustaining society. The old ethics of Confucianism, such as the father hid the son's offense and vice versa ( *The Analects 13: 18*), which were not in compliance with the social ethics, were still in doubt in the era of Mencius and was expected to be more and more complicated. As a consequence, Mencius had to debate about the gratitude again and again by referring to the story of Shun, who had a lot of emotional inner conflicts.

Wan Chang is a representative of the past and old time which were regarded as instances or role models of ethical formats. Thereby, Mencius presented the non-adherence to the old standards quite frequently. For example, he exhibited the denial of facts based on the old stories, the correction of misunderstanding, the misinterpretation of the old stories and the caution of believing in ancient scriptures without any discretion, etc. Meanwhile, Mencius was clever enough to pick out the stories that could serve his purposes. That is, he always invented new meanings for the old words so as to support his attributions; or he would resort to tell some parts of the stories that sounded very convincing to the readers. It can be said that the dialogues made up with Wan Chang reflect the intention to compromise the sacredness of the past with the situations at that time, helping maintain the original essence of Confucianism within the transitional society.

### **C. Conversations between Mencius and philosophers of different ideas**

In the “debate” with philosophers of different ideas, it is noticeable that Mencius rarely used the face-to-face conversations. Therefore, there is only one conversation partner, Kau Tzu, who was really an owner of philosophical ideas; and he appeared in the four brief conversations with Mencius in chapter 6A:1; 6A:2 ; 6A:3 and 6A:4. This is because most of the “school masters” did not exist in the same period of Mencius<sup>\*</sup>; so it is impossible to make up any direct conversation among them. To mention other different philosophical ways of thinking, Mencius preferred to insert his comments thereof into the conversations with others or mention them nonspecifically. Even when he was debating with the “heirs” or apprentices of other philosophical schools, Mencius still relied on an interaction via the third person, as obviously seen in the two main conversations. In the first one, Mencius showed his objection to the ideas of school of Agriculture (农家) (3A: 4) and the character of Hsu Hsing was portrayed as an heir of these ideas. Mencius took too many steps of introduction and lengthy dialogues with “Duke Wen of T’eng” and “ลูกศิษย์ของเงินเหลียง” before entering the main points of debate. Eventually, it seems the conversation partners of Mencius had “distance”, in terms of time and space, from the sources of the said ideas<sup>\*\*</sup>.

In the other conversation, Mencius debated against the ideas of Mohism, which was his main opponent (3A: 5). Again, Mencius made up a dialogue of debate with some distance from Mo Tzu; that is, he employed a character of Hsu Pi as a tool for him to exchange opinions with Yi Tzu, who was an apprentice of Mo Tzu. Thereby, the two conversation

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<sup>\*</sup> The important thinker in the same era of Mencius include Chuang Tzu, but the works of them did not appear to refer to each other. Hence, it is still in doubt among general scholars.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Hsu Hsing was introduced to follow the conception of “Sheng Nung”, who was only mentioned in the myth; therefore, the distance thereof seems to get farther and farther.

partners never talked to each other directly. Consequently, the dialogue here in appeared to be unnecessarily lengthy.

The attitude of Mencius in his debate against different ideas by means of keeping distance in the dialogues can be interpreted in several ways. Considering Mencius as a self-confident and aggressive person who had no fear of anybody, even the vassals, it is assumed that Mencius simply overlooked and disregarded the said different ideas. Thus, he did not care to demote himself to argue with them. On the other hand, due to the broader chances of people in the then society to exchange their views freely, it is believed that the distance within the said debates is regarded as a form of propriety or “*禮*”, which prevented the likely overlaps and offenses among the different ideas. No matter what interpretation it is, Mencius still had some limitation while using his words of argument against other philosophical grounds. The comments of Mencius toward other different philosophical ideas are usually in the form of single-handed criticism, not a face-to-face conversation.

### **7. Kau Tzu**

The only one conversation partner of Mencius that talked to him face-to-face is Kau Tzu. Though there are only a few dialogues between Mencius and Kau Tzu and most of them are quite brief, the said dialogues are so remarkably important that they have been widely discussed among the scholastic. As a result, Kau Tzu is such an important character, though a few roles, that the readers of this philosophical writing should not miss.

The reason why the conversations between Mencius and Kau Tzu are of this high significance is that they all involve the Nature (Hsing 性) of human being, which is the most important subject in the philosophy of Mencius. It can be said that the message that clearly symbolizes him is “Mencius believed that every man had his own innate good nature”. And the said message was exhibited evidently through the dialogues with Kau Tzu.

The debate with Kau Tzu about the nature of human being is an exchange of ideas toward the following 4 issues:

- a. Ethics of human being such as humanity or justice, etc. These ethics were originated from the Nature without any resistance or modification. (6A: 1)
- b. The Nature of human was completely directional. With no interference or resistance, the Nature would direct to the only meritorious ways. Like the nature of water, it always flew downwards. (6A: 2)
- c. The Nature did not refer to only innate qualities. Otherwise, there would be a wrong summary that the different things with some qualities in common had the same Nature. Mencius affirmed that the Nature of human was absolutely different from that of animals. (6A: 3)
- d. The righteousness (Yi 義) was an ethic originated from inside, not outside, of an individual. (6A: 4)

The four dialogues above are seen as debates full of many different philosophical issues, which are to be further analyzed and interpreted. Since all of them are very ambiguous, the said issues are still being widely discussed among the scholars to see what the real purposes of Mencius are in these debates. The reason why these issues cannot be finally settled is that, as indicated by some scholars, the evidence available at present is so scarce that it cannot confirm or even hint the background or existence of Kau Tzu. Nor can it tell

what school his ideas belonged to<sup>3</sup>. Despite the fact that there have been some scholars trying to present their opinions and assumptions that Kau Tzu must have been an apprentice of Confucianism, of Mohism or of Taoism\*, there has not yet been any settlement. Since it cannot affirm that Kau Tzu had some ideas against those of Mencius, it can be noticed that Mencius, while debating in all dialogues with Kau Tzu, did not dismiss or deny any opinion of the latter. Instead, he just said against them with an aim to add or broaden the latter's vision. Furthermore, the tones of conversation here are rather soft, like those used in Dharma discussion, not an explicit argument at all.

All ambiguity and notices above make it possible that Kau Tzu is not a representative from any school of different philosophical ideas, and all dialogues between Mencius and Kau Tzu may be regarded as just friendly debates of those who were studying in the same field, not at all a clash of different beliefs. If so, it is more interesting to observe that Mencius, who was renowned as one of the greatest debaters, did not attempt to debate against other different ideas by means of face-to-face conversation.

Thus, Kau Tzu is a character representing the atmosphere in which the debates were widely popular among the well-educated and savants. Mencius just appeared to join the said debates so that he could show off his wisdom and particular ways of thinking. All dialogues with Kau Tzu are intended to convince the readers that the arguments of Mencius are more reliable. Still, Mencius did not deny or say against the explanation of Kau Tzu. Instead, he just showed that there were still other reasons and ideas that were more favorable and more accurate. And these would lead to different conclusions. Therefore, it is evident that the debates of Mencius with philosophical problems in the form of dialogues are neither aggressive nor offensive to any conversation partners. He just wanted to present and make his intelligence reputable as much as possible by means of compromising and exchanging different ideas.

The seven conversation partners of Mencius mentioned herein are the main characters in *The Mengzi*. They also clearly reflect the dynamics of ideas and purposes of propagating ideal administration of Mencius. The construction of dialogues between Mencius and other characters has portrayed many significant meanings. First, it is assured that Mencius was an elite who could even talk to the class of rulers, and he was also a great sage with some close followers. In addition, Mencius was an intellectual equipped with ready wit, who was able to solve or analyze any problem. Hence, maturity of those who presented any idea and the essence of dialogues are all worth studying. Next, each character herein could convey the situations and backgrounds in that period of time. It brings to light the values and desires among the rulers, trends of society and the controversy thereof, and the transition of conventional ways of conducts, which have provoked new questions and broader views. Finally, the variety of these main characters helps the dialogues cover comprehensive contents, including ideal ways of administration as well as the enhancement of each individual in terms of both judgment and Dharma quotient. To summarize, the construction of dialogues with different characters in *The Mengzi* is regarded as ingenious and interesting mode of literary expression. Above all, this intriguing method significantly satisfies the need to debate or discuss intellectually against all social problems.

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<sup>3</sup> Bloom, Irene, "Mengzi an Arguments on Human Nature," in Essays on the Moral Philosophy of Mengzi, Liu Xiusheng & Philip Ivanhoe, eds ( Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), p. 80.

\* See more details about the explanation from the scholastic who did researches about what conception Kau Tzu is likely to follow in Shun, Kwong-loi, Mencius and Early Chinese Thought (Stanford: Stanford University press, 1997). p.123.