Abstract

Since the seventies, Chu Hsi (朱熹, 1130 -- 1200) has been awarded the position of the grand master in the branch of Confucianism moulded by Hsun Tzu. However, few studies had explored thoroughly the various aspects in which Chu Hsi succeeded his predecessors such that he differed from mainstream Confucianism. This study sought to unveil in depth the extent to which Chu Hsi had inherited from Hsun Tzu and his unconscious follower Cheng Yi-ch’uan, and the fullness of the system that Chu Hsi developed from this line of thought.

Chu Hsi’s deviation from mainstream Confucianism advocated by Confucius and Mencius most fundamentally surfaced as his comprehension of the moral subject as merely existing, silently directing but never capable of creating the existence of any universal beings. This is opposed to the central belief as postulated by mainstream thinkers that the moral subject is not only existing but also creative. Chu Hsi’s astray understanding resulted in his portrayal of the mind to assume a learning role in order to achieve morality creation from external resources, since the moral subject could not undertake the creation spontaneously itself. As a result, Chu Hsi emphasized the importance of the investigation of things and the attainment of knowledge. However, in the philosophical system of his, there inevitably lie some severe flaws, the most important of which is that the morality of human beings depended solely on external resources (which in itself was questionable) such that the ability of human beings to create his own moral behaviours was completely lost. These ideas originated from or were embedded in the thoughts of Hsun Tzu and Cheng Yi-ch’uan. Thus, when Chu Hsi inherited and further developed their theories, these ideas emerged as the main conspicuous characteristics of his philosophy, causing his system to vary immensely from mainstream Confucianism.

In view of the above, Chu Hsi’s status in the history of philosophy could then be rightly and unbiasedly assessed.