AN ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to analyse the differences between Xunzi’s and Mencius’s theories of human nature and examines in particular Xunzi’s critiques of Mencius’s theory.

This study was initiated by the argument on the theories that has persisted for more than two thousand years. Xunzi advocates the theory that human beings are by nature evil, whereas Mencius subscribes to the thinking that it is by nature good. This dissertation investigates in reasonable depth the perspective taken by Xunzi and the reasons giving rise to his misunderstanding of Mencius’s theory.

The results show that both look at human nature from different aspects. Xunzi defines human nature as lust or desire while Mencius looks at the moral qualities of human nature. As Xunzi does not see the difference between the two aspects, he mistakes Mencius for looking at the issue from the same angle. He thus thinks that Mencius’s theory is untenable. This is reflected in all his critiques on Mencius’s theory.

This dissertation throws some light on Xunzi’s theory in an attempt to do justice to Mencius’s theory. Further studies should be done on the limitations of each of the two theories for a better understanding of Xunzi’s and Mencius’s thinking.