ABSTRACT

“Norm” (經) and “scaling” (權) are two essential concepts in the Confucian ethics. “Norm” refers to regulations which people are supposed to abide by in their daily life; whereas “scaling” refers to adjustments which people make in the light of specific conditions. Both concepts are indispensable when we are dealing with moral practices under a variety of day-to-day conditions.

For a long time, pre-Qin Confucian thought has been regarded as a set of strict rules which direct and restrict our daily behaviors. This has totally distorted the spirit of Confucian thought and has reinforced the impression that the Confucian doctrine is rigid and authoritarian.

Humans are living beings of high wisdom and initiative. In the face of changing circumstances, people adjust the rules on their own initiative. This adjustment is called “scaling.”

This academic exercise attempts to delve into the concept of “scaling” as defined in pre-Qin Confucian thought. It focuses its discussion on Confucius, Mencius, and Xun Zi, the three important pre-Qin philosophers, through an analysis of the Analects of Confucius (論語), the Book of Mencius (孟子) and the Book of Xun Zi (荀子), the three most important pre-Qin Confucian classics.

This thesis consists of three chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the Confucian norms (經) and the effects of observing such norms with regard to social etiquettes (禮), filial piety (孝) and political life (政治).

Chapter 2 discusses the adaptations and adjustments to the norms with the examples from the classics and it also explores the goals of such practices.

Chapter 3 concludes that the concept of “scaling” is but a different view on the significance and value of dao (道). According to this viewpoint, this thesis also examines previous scholars’ views on “scaling,” their merits and demerits, and simultaneously probes into the unchangeable central principle of “scaling”--righteousness (義).

This thesis does not apply any current research theories. It analyses numerous examples gleaned from the sayings of the three pre-Qin philosophers. These living examples are collated and pieced together to offer a complete picture of the pre-Qin Confucian notion of “scaling.”