ABSTRACT

Wang Yang-ming (1472-1529) was a famous philosopher in the Ming dynasty. He was the main figure of the Xin Xue (the study of xin (mind)) during the Confucian renaissance of the Song-Ming Period. His teaching of Liangzhi (intuitive knowledge), originated from his belief of “Xin is Li (principle)”, has been regarded by many as a successor to the teaching of Mencius.

Although scholars of different generations have done some researches on the succession relationship between Wang Yang-ming and Mencius, they have yet to do it systematically. I have tried to give a systematic study on Wang Yang-ming’s understanding and interpretation of Mencius’ teaching. In the process, I will try to illustrate the point that on the topic of Neisheng (sageliness within), Wang Yang-ming firmly stood by Mencius’ teaching on moral mind, which centered on the belief that human nature is good. When correcting Zhu Xi’s misunderstanding of the human nature, Wang Yang-ming showed in a better way the greatness of human nature. At the same time, he enhanced and glorified the essence of traditional Confucianism. However, when it comes to the study of Waiwang (kingliness without), Wang Yang-ming did not truly understand the weight that traditional Confucianism placed on politics. He failed to develop Mencius’ exquisite theory on Waiwang, which based heavily on the principle of Minben (primacy of the people). This shortcoming has not only created a loophole in Wang Yang-ming’s own teaching, it also shows that Wang Yang-ming did not totally inherit the teaching of traditional Confucianism.

This dissertation consists of six chapters. I will cover Wang Yang-ming’s ideas on the relationship between heaven and man, the content of Xin and Xing (human nature), the method of self cultivation and politics, from chapter two to chapter five. The first three can be classified into Neisheng category while the fourth belongs to the Waiwang category. The first chapter is meant for introduction while the last conclusion. Through the critical analysis of the various essential points mentioned in the paragraph above, this dissertation aims to systematically evaluate and completely show the accuracy of Wang Yang-ming’s succession to Mencius’ teaching.