Abstract

This study is an attempt to give a definitive interpretation of the views of Mencius on Ren (仁) and Yi (义). Mencius, born during the Warring States, had witness the striving for hegemony among the various feudal princes and the suffering and sacrifice of the innocent people. He traced the cause of such social and political turmoils and found Li (利), that is, gain, was the principal factor. More importantly, the excessive emphasis on Li had prevented the natural expression of human nature, Ren and Yi, the only qualities of man which make him different from other animals. To Mencius, the only way to remedy such malpractice of society and to achieve a peaceful and prosperous society was to practise Ren and Yi. Therefore, he spared no effort in promoting Ren and Yi.

The study focuses on three aspects, namely, Ren and Yi in relation to humanity, gain and wealth, and Ren Zheng (仁政), the policy of benevolence. The findings show that Mencius is not purely an ideal moralist. His advocation of Ren and Yi as humanity has affirmed the dignity and value of man; his promotion of Ren and Yi has, in fact, included the rightful acquisition of gain and wealth; his encouragement of the practice of Ren Zheng has maintained its significance in modern politics.

Structurally, this academic exercise is divided into five chapters. Chapter one gives a brief background of Mencius and traces the use of Ren and Yi prior to Mencius. Chapter two discusses Ren and Yi as humanity and the contrary views on human nature. The next chapter
deals with the misconception as well as the clarification of Mencius' concept of gain and wealth by means of Ren and Yi. The following chapter explores why Ren Zheng is a natural outcome of the practice of Ren and Yi and show how it could make a ruler supreme. The final chapter evaluates as well as concludes Mencius' views on Ren and Yi.

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