Comparison of the Confucianism in the Pre-Qin Period

Confucianism is founded by Confucius and developed based on the rites of *Zhou* Dynasty. At the end of Spring and Autumn period, the political system had collapsed. The social status of the duke of *Zhou* had dropped, and the *li* of *Zhou* Dynasty had been greatly violated. He was unsatisfied with the currently corrupted *li* rituals and decided to reform and bring new energy into *li* to re-establish the order under the duke of *Zhou*. Mencius developed Confucius’ idea and ranked only second to Confucius, he was called as the “Second Sage”. Xunzi sees himself as the true successor of Confucius. He was seen as the great scholar in Confucianism. There are a lot of similarities in these three scholars’ theory.

## Ren

According to Confucius, the notion of *ren* is a necessary quality to achieve the ideal personality. According to Confucius, the notion of *ren* is a necessary quality to achieve the ideal personality. The second notion is *li*, includes things from political systems to personal moral practices. *Ren* and *li*, in Confucius’s teaching, complement each other. If Confucius’s ideal as a person is to achieve *ren*, then *li* is an important means to become *ren*.

In Confucius’ theory, *ren* is the heart of loving others. However, *ren* must be applied unconditionally, without differentiating good or evil. (Dubs, 34) Mencius improved Confucius’ theory by adding another factor, *yi*,to regulate the boundary of *ren*. The goal is limit *ren* to people who should be loved.

In conclusion, Confucianism emphasizes human relations, filial piety, and love through *ren*.

#### Human Nature

Mencius thinks the fundamental distinction between humans and animals are the human nature. Based on this belief, Mencius thinks that the human nature is essentially good. Mencius’ good human nature theory is a further development of “the practice of perfect virtue from a man himself” (Confucius, 12:1) proposed by Confucius. People have the human nature of “Benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom”. Everyone has the heart of “feeling of commiseration, shame and dislike, reverence and respect, approving and disapproving”, (Mencius, 2A:6) People who have these four kinds human nature will not let others suffer. The following is a quote from Mencius. “Everyone has the feeling of concern for the well-being of others; everyone has the sense of shame and disgust at their own evil; everyone has the sense to treat others courteously and respectfully; everyone has the sense of right and wrong.” (6A). It clearly shows that Mencius’ belief that human nature was essential good. (Scarpari, 324) But why people behave poorly? Mencius thinks that some people were obsessed by the desire or allured by the environment so that they behave badly. It is not caused by their human nature. It builds the theoretical foundation of people’s self-cultivation. The notion that human nature is essentially good plays an important role in the development of Confucianism. Xunzi develops his idea based on the belief that the human nature is essentially bad. Xunzi says: “Human nature is evil, its kindness is fake”，(Xunzi, 23:1) thinks it is necessary to use extraneous moral rules to regulate the “Evil” part of the human nature. So human nature can be changed by li. (Behuniak, 97, 105)

#### Politics

Confucianism sees the people as an important part of the society.

Confucius advocates “Rule of virtue”. He thinks that if a country does not advocate moral cultivation and only uses power and violence to rule people, the country will not last long. Mencius advocates “humane government” (*renzheng*)”. Mencius says: “To a state, the people are the most important thing. The state comes second. The ruler is the least important” (Mencius, 7B:14)，He ranks people at the highest position while ranking the ruler at the lowest position. Mencius emphasizes the need of people, so ruler should “make people wealthy”. It is because that the whole process of political turbulence is based on people’s will. He thinks if the ruler is able to rule with benevolence, he will be able to govern his country. As for Xunzi, he emphasizes *li*, he thinks *li* is enough to correct one’s mind to make one a junzi. In order for people to follow li, it is necessary to use discipline. If everyone follows the *li* and the discipline, he can become a kind sage. Thus, the country remains in peace. So Xunzi uses li as a basis and discipline as a supplement.

Confucius advocates meritocracy. He wants to reform the society according to the previous rulers. So, Mencius thinks it is necessary to model after former kings (*Xia* and *Shang* Dynasties). Mencius sees the former kings as an exemplar in both politics and ethics. Xunzi thinks it is better to model after model after latter kings (*Zhou* Dynasty). Xunzi does not think it is wrong to model after former kings. He thinks it is difficult to find relevant documents that record the ancient system.

#### Mandate of Heaven

Confucius avoids talking about the mandate of heaven or supernatural. (Confucius, 7:21) The reason for that is to divert people’s concern about mandate of heaven and supernatural. He thinks the heaven dictates the mandate of heaven, it is a thing that cannot be altered. People should acknowledge the mandate of heaven but not discuss it. Confucius wants to focus on the current world. Confucius’s elaboration on the rightful act is expressed through his discussion of *ren*. Mencius thinks the heaven dominates the mandate of heaven. Mencius says: “If you know your nature, you know Heaven. To preserve your mind and nourish your nature is to serve Heaven.” (Mencius, 7A:1)

Xunzi thinks the mandate of heaven is the natural mandate of heaven. One should not overly inquire. Thus, it is necessary to establish the rule by men.

#### True Successor

The biggest difference between Mencius and Xunzi is the nature of human. Mencius thinks that human nature is essentially good. Xunzi thinks that human nature is evil. The latter scholars of Confucianism almost all think human nature is essentially good and propose “saint inside and king appearance”. Regulating people’s act using the power of *de*. Standardizing people’s speech using the power of *li*. It is a typical example of rule by human and rule by *de*, which is an important concept proposed by Confucius.

Xunzi proposes the idea of using rules and king’s power to regulate people’s behaviours and using rules to regulate the greediness and desire in human nature. “When dealing with cases, if there is a law to comply with, ruler should comply with the rule. If there is not a law to comply with, ruler should compare the case with the existing laws, deliberate over the case and then judge.” (Xunzi, 9:3) It is an example of rule by rules.

Thus, Mencius carries more ideas from Confucius. The latter scholars of Confucianism in China see Mencius as the true successor of Confucius despite the fact that Xunzi’s idea is more practical.

Some scholars argue that Xunzi is supposed to be the true successor of Confucius. John N Williams argues that Confucius did not explicitly states that the nature of human is good. Thus, it is safe to say that human nature is not necessarily to be good. It is not appropriate to call Mencius the successor of Confucius based on the untenable assumption. In this sense, Xunzi is closer to the original teaching of Confucius. (Williams, 170)

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