

# Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy

*By Masayuki Sato*

## Lecture Six

### The Culmination of Ethical Discourse:

### *The Book of Mencius*

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- (2) Mencius' Life and the *Book of Mencius*
- (3) Main Ideas and arguments
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  - b) The idea of Benevolent government
  - c) Fate of tyrants
- (4) The relationship between Mohism and Mencius
- (5) Significance of Mencius' thought in the Warring States intellectual context

# The Historical Background

- A broadly accepted notion as a explanation for the advent of Mencius' thought:
- The Warring States have endeavored to enrich themselves and strengthen their state power over others. The social atmosphere of Mencius' time has materialistic in which ideal aspects of the human world (e.g. ethical matters) has less and less attracted the attention by feudal lords and aristocrats of his time.
- →Mencius argued the importance of morality.



# The Historical Background

- However, there is a gap between those explanation and actual situation of Mencius which can be found in the description about him. My questions are:
- (1) All Warring States' lords had felt obligation to pay high homage to those people who were conceived of as wise intellectuals, regardless of their intellectual accomplishment were in the field of ethical issues or more practical statecrafts(in fact, these two topics were in many ways inseparable in Chinese thought).
- → Mencius was very successful in obtaining huge

- 彭更問曰：“後車數十乘，從者數百人，以傳食於諸侯，不以泰乎？”（滕文公下）
- Peng Geng asked Mencius, saying, “Is it not an extravagant procedure to go from one prince to another and live upon them, followed by several tens of carriages, and attended by several hundred men?”
- (“Tengwenggong-II”)

# The Historical Background

- Questions and doubts to aforementioned explanation.
- (2) Mencius' were very welcomed to and even highly expected to deliver his policy advice to those feudal lords, not as their subordinates to a lord, but as a consultant to his host. The *Book of Mencius* even suggests that Mencius' advice “successfully” influenced the decision of the feudal lord of the almost strongest country of his time, i.e. King Xuan of Qi 齊宣王, on the issue of whether or not he should dispatch his army to attack neighboring country Yan.

# The Historical Background

- Questions and doubts to aforementioned explanation. Was Mencius the only moralist of his time?
- (3) Mencius advocated the importance of morality in statecraft. His contemporary thinkers such as Mohists and “Agriculturalists *nongjia* 農家” also strongly insisted that a ruler should take more consideration into his policy the situation that people was living in destitute condition. Sometime Mencius turned out to be “reactionary”, or stood rather for the position of rulers, in comparison with Mohists and Agriculturalists.

# The Historical Background

- Mencius and his contemporaries:
- (1) Mencius had grown up and been trained as a thinker in both a political and intellectual atmosphere in which ethical matters were seen as important for successful government.
- (2) However, there have been a great range of discrepancies on those issues such as what kind of government and social institution should be good or bad, as well as what kind of policy should be most helpful for the miserable people of that time.
- → Mohism was *both* a main source and a rival



# ■ *A Bird's eye view of the history of early Chinese thought*

## (1) Ethical discourse

From 6 to 4 century BCE

## (2) Analytical discourse

From 4 to mid 3 century BCE

## (3) Synthetic discourse

Mid-late 3 century BCE

# The Rise of Ethical Discourse

- (1) *Ethical Discourse*
- The first stage of the development can be called “ethical discourse” or “moral argumentation”. This mode of argumentative framework prevailed during the expansion of Confucian, and Mohist schools in the Chinese world (5<sup>th</sup> century) until the time around the death of Mencius (the end of 3<sup>rd</sup>). This discourse is prominent in its advocacy for the moral value in the realm of statecraft.

# Ethical Discourse

- In the mode of ethical discourse, thinkers advocate their ethical value in the way: “***If one ruler cannot embody this or that ethical value (e.g. ren), then that country cannot stand....***”
- The persuasiveness of this discourse is predicated on the subconscious belief of early Chinese people that the words and deeds of a ruler of upper people are to be followed by subordinates.
- In such an argumentative framework, thinkers competed in the validity and practicability of specific moral values such as “*ren*” and argumentations which were in accordance with

# The Life of Mencius

- As the case of other thinkers, most of part of Mencius' life can only be known vaguely from the descriptions in the *Book of Mencius* itself. The description of the Book of Mencius suggests that Mencius, who a native of Zou 鄒, a satellite state of Lu 魯, travelled Liang 梁 (Wei 魏), Qi 齊, Teng 滕, and Song 宋. The lord of Lu seemed to invite him, but fail to do so. Among these Liang and Qi were strongest countries of his time.

# The Life of Mencius

- There are few source on his family and scholarly background. Mencius' scholarship seemed to belong to the line of Zeng Shen and Zisi, a grandson of Confucius. After his apprenticeship, Mencius has been highly respected by those feudal lords: King Hui of Liang called him “my old master (sou 叟)”; the King Xuan of Qi has kept humble toward him inspite of Mencius provocative answers; Duke Wen of Teng has completely accepted Mencius' advice and practiced the funeral rituals of his father, despite the harsh opposition by his ministers.

# 孟母三遷 mèng mǔ sān qiān “Mencius’ mother, three moves.”

- A few anecdotes can give a hint to know how people of later age saw his accomplishment of his scholarship or/and his political career.
- Mencius’ mother is often held up as an exemplary female figure in Chinese culture.
- This saying refers to the legend that Mencius’ mother moved house three times before finding a location that she felt was suitable for the child’s upbringing. As an expression, the idiom refers to the importance of finding the proper environment for raising children.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mencius>

# The *Book of Mencius*

- Consisted of 14 chapters (seven groups of I and II, eg. King Hui of Liang I and II )
- Rich in “actual” dialogues with rulers, aristocrats, and his disciples as well as debates with rival thinkers of his time, (those thinkers includes Gaozi 告子 , Song Xing 宋鉞 , Chunyu Kun 淳于髡 )
- Thus, we can treat it as a “kind of records on dialogues and debates to understand an actual situation of the history of Chinese philosophy latter half of 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE ↔ fictitious dialogues in the *Zhuangzi* and the *Republic* of Plato.




# *The Book of Mencius,* Later elevation of its status as a canon

- Later, the *Book of Mencius* was selected as one of so-called “the *Four Books*” 四書 *Sì Shū* by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130 ~ 1200), the synthesizer of the Neo-Confucian doctrine, during the Southern Song Dynasty, They were expected to function as an introduction to Confucianism. They have become the core of the official curriculum for the civil service examinations in the rest of dynastic history of China. It also become a main philosophical source for the formation of Yangming Neo-Confucianism.



# Main Ideas and arguments

## Mencius' observation on the state of affairs

- Following Mohist idea, Mencius demonstrated the destitute condition of the ruled people of his time: 
- 狗彘食人食而不知檢，塗有餓殍而不知發；人死，則曰：「非我也，歲也。」是何異於刺人而殺之，曰：「非我也，兵也。」
- Your dogs and swine eat the food of men, and you do not make any restrictive arrangements. There are people dying from famine on the roads, and you do not issue the stores of your granaries for them. When people die, you say, “It is not owing to me; it is owing to the year.” In what does this differ from stabbing a man and  killing him, and then saying – “It was not I; it was the weapon?” (Liang-I) 

# Main Ideas and arguments

## Mencius' observation on the state of affairs

- 曰：「庖有肥肉，廐有肥馬，民有飢色，野有餓莩，此率獸而食人也。獸相食，且人惡之。為民父母，行政不免於率獸而食人。惡在其為民父母也？」
- Mencius then said, “In your kitchen there is fat meat; in your stables there are fat horses. But your people have the look of hunger, and on the wilds there are those who have died of famine. This is leading on beasts to devour men. Beasts devour one another, and men hate them for doing so. When a prince, being the parent of his people, administers his government so as to be chargeable with leading on beasts to devour men, where is his parental relation to the people?”
- (Liang-I)

# Main Ideas and arguments

## Mencius' observation on the state of affairs

- 今也制民之產，仰不足以事父母，俯不足以畜妻子，樂歲終身苦，凶年不免於死亡。此惟救死而恐不贍，奚暇治禮義哉？
- Now, the livelihood of the people is so regulated, that, above, they have not sufficient wherewith to serve their parents, and, below, they have not sufficient wherewith to support their wives and children. Notwithstanding good years, their lives are continually embittered, and, in bad years, they do not escape perishing. In such circumstances they only try to save themselves from death, and are afraid they will not succeed. What leisure have they to cultivate propriety and righteousness? (Liang-I)

# Main Ideas and arguments

## The Benevolent government

- Mencius has proposed a compound concept “*ren yi* 仁義” (benevolence and righteousness), which consists of two terms: the concept of *ren* was the essential idea of the early Confucianism, while the concept of *yi* was proposed as a justice/duty by Mohism.
- 惻隱之心，仁之端也； (Ggong-I)
- The feeling of commiseration is the principle of benevolence 📖
- 羞惡之心，義之端也
- The feeling of shame and dislike is the principle of righteousness 📖

# Artifice of benevolence (*renshu* 仁術):

## ~~To have a mind of commiseration~~

- King Xuan: “Indeed it was because I could not bear its frightened appearance, as if it were an innocent person going to the place of death, that therefore I changed it for a sheep.”
- 是乃仁術也，見牛未見羊也。君子之於禽獸也，見其生，不忍見其死；聞其聲，不忍食其肉。
- Your conduct was an artifice of benevolence. You saw the ox, and had not seen the sheep. So is the superior man affected towards animals, that, having seen them alive, he cannot bear to see them die; having heard their dying cries, he cannot bear to eat their flesh.

# The Benevolent Government:

- 五畝之宅，樹之以桑，五十者可以衣帛矣；雞豚狗彘之畜，無失其時，七十者可以食肉矣；百畝之田，勿奪其時，八口之家可以無飢矣；謹庠序之教，申之以孝悌之義，頒白者不負戴於道路矣。老者衣帛食肉，黎民不飢不寒，然而不王者，未之有也。

# The Benevolent Government:

Let mulberry-trees be planted about the homesteads with their five *mu*, and persons of fifty years may be clothed with silk. In keeping fowls, pigs, dogs, and swine, let not their times of breeding be neglected, and persons of seventy years may eat flesh. Let there not be taken away the time that is proper for the cultivation of the farm with its hundred *mu*, and the family of eight mouths that is supported by it shall not suffer from hunger. Let careful attention be paid to education in schools, the inculcation in it especially of the filial and fraternal duties, and grey-haired men will not be seen upon the roads, carrying burdens on their backs or on their heads. It never has been that the ruler of a State where such results were seen, the old wearing silk and eating flesh, and the black-haired people suffering neither from hunger nor cold did not

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# The Benevolent Government:

- (1) Persons of fifty years may be clothed with silk.
- (2) Persons of seventy years may eat flesh.
- (3) The family of eight mouths that is supported by it shall not suffer from hunger.
- (4) Grey-haired men will not be seen upon the roads, carrying burdens on their backs or on their heads.
- The old wearing silk and eating flesh, and the black-haired people suffering neither from hunger nor cold.



“It never has been that the ruler of a State where such results were seen, did not attain to the royal dignity.”  
= to attain the sincere support from the people.

# Mechanism of the Unification



National Taiwan University Masayuki Sato

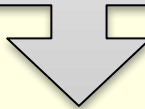


ruler



Ministers and officials

**Implementation of the  
“Benevolent government”**



People voluntarily come to him and observe his rule .

People



# Mechanism of the Unification

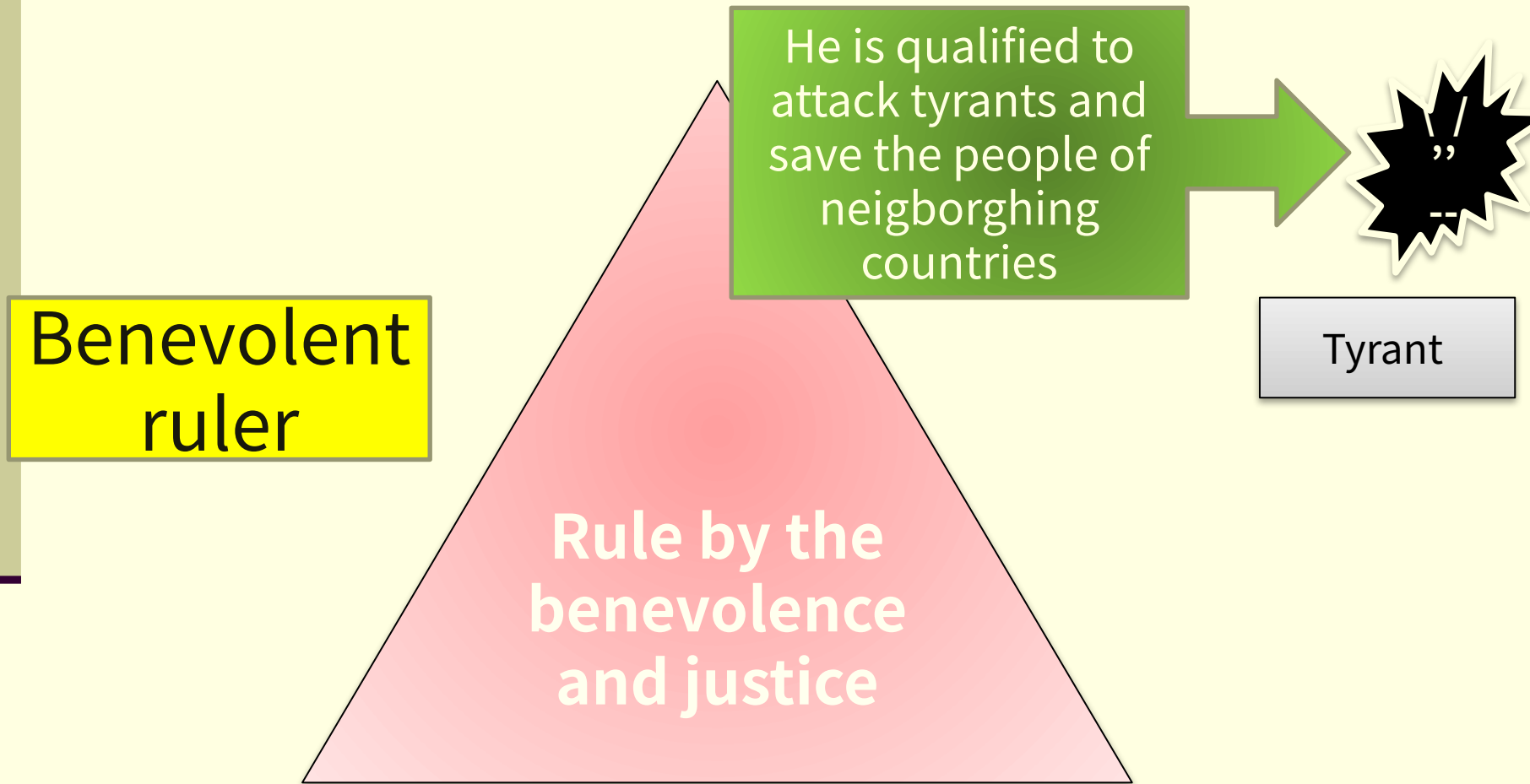
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**Government of  
tyrant**

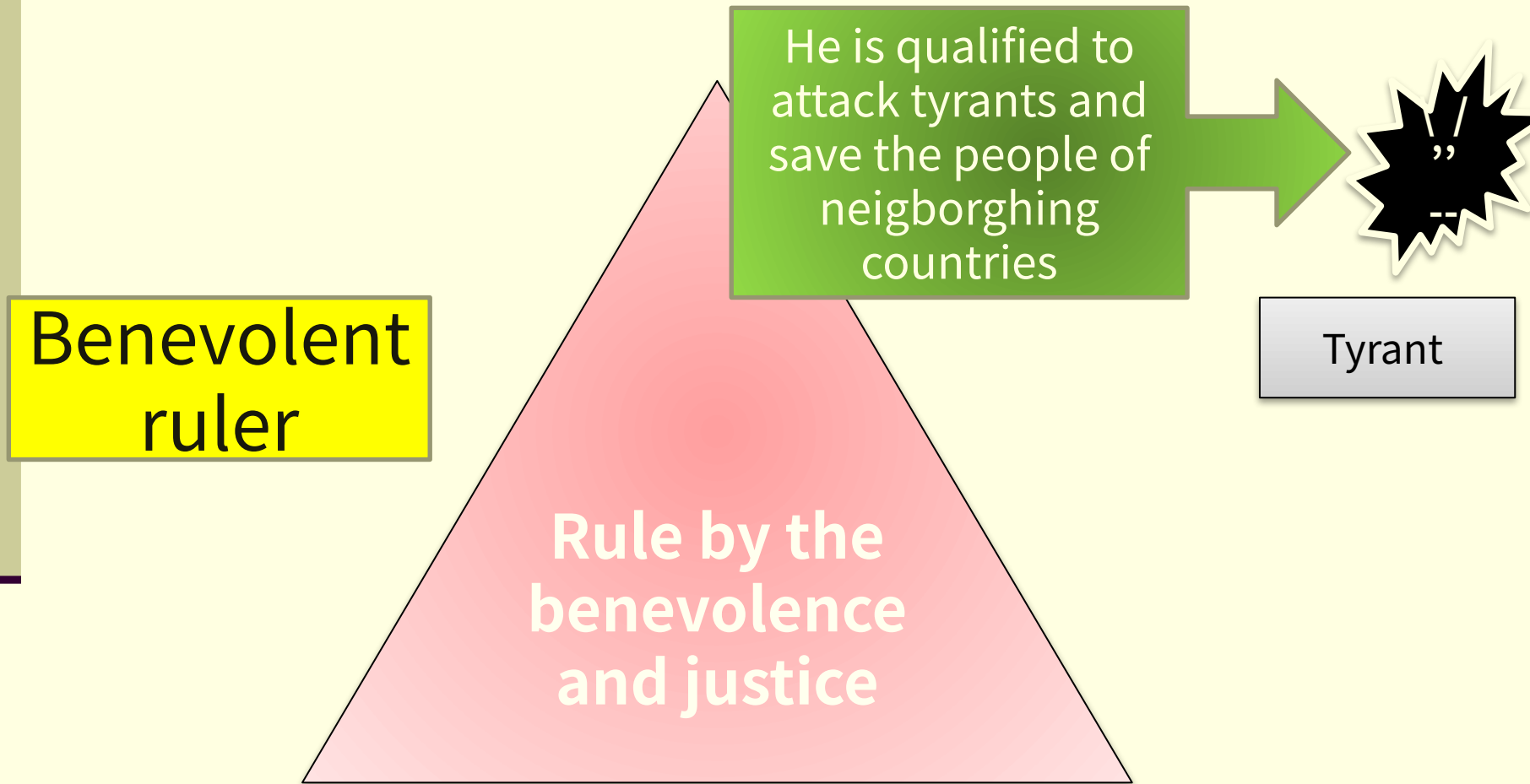
**Lost of  
support of  
his people**



# Mechanism of the Unification



# Mechanism of the Unification





Unification of the  
World !

# The fate of Tyrants

## Scenario one: perish by conquest

齊宣王問曰：「湯放桀，武王伐紂，有諸？」孟子對曰：「於傳有之。」曰：「臣弑其君可乎？」曰：「賊仁者謂之賊，賊義者謂之殘，殘賊之人謂之一夫。聞誅一夫紂矣，未聞弑君也。」

The King Xuan of Qi asked: “Was it so, that Tang banished Jie, and that king Wu smote Zhou?” Mencius replied, “It is so in the records.” The king said, “May a minister then put his sovereign to death?” Mencius said, “He who outrages the benevolence proper to his nature, is called a robber; he who outrages righteousness, is called a ruffian. The robber and ruffian we call a mere fellow. I have heard of the cutting off of the fellow Zhou, but I have not heard of the putting a sovereign to death, in such case.”

# The fate of Tyrants

- Scenario two: political subversion by member of royal family
- (齊宣王) 曰：「請問貴戚之卿。」曰：「君有大過則諫，反覆之而不聽，則易位。」王勃然變乎色。
- The King [Xuan of Qi] asked: “I beg to ask about the high ministers who are noble and relatives of the prince?” Mencius answered, “If the prince have great faults, they ought to remonstrate with him, and if he do not listen to them after they have done so again and again, they ought to dethrone him.” The king on this looked moved, and changed countenance... Will



# How can a man embody her/his good will to practice benevolent government?

- Mencius: “The human nature is good.”
- 滕文公為世子，將之楚，過宋而見孟子。孟子道性善，言必稱堯舜。
- When the prince, afterwards duke Wen of Teng, had to go to Chu, he went by way of Song, and visited Mencius. Mencius discoursed to him how the nature of man is good, and when speaking, always made laudatory reference to Yao and Shun. 📖





# “Four Germs” to manifest good quality of human nature

- 孟子曰：「人皆有不忍人之心。先王有不忍人之心，斯有不忍人之政矣。以不忍人之心，行不忍人之政，治天下可運之掌上。所以謂人皆有不忍人之心者，今人乍見孺子將入於井，皆有怵惕惻隱之心。非所以內交於孺子之父母也，非所以要譽於鄉黨朋友也，非惡其聲而然也。」

# “Four Germs” to manifest good quality of human nature

Mencius said, “All men have a mind which cannot bear to see the sufferings of others. 'The ancient kings had this commiserating mind, and they, as a matter of course, had likewise a commiserating government. When with a commiserating mind was practised a commiserating government, to rule the kingdom was as easy a matter as to make anything go round in the palm. When I say that all men have a mind which cannot bear to see the sufferings of others, my meaning may be illustrated thus: even now-a-days, if men suddenly see a child about to fall into a well, they will without exception experience a feeling of alarm and distress. They will feel so, not as a ground on which they may gain the favour of the child's parents, nor as a ground on which they may seek the praise of their neighbours and friends, nor from a dislike to the reputation of having been

# “Four Germs” to manifest good quality of human nature

- 惻隱之心，仁之端也；
- The feeling of commiseration is the principle of benevolence. 
- 羞惡之心，義之端也；
- The feeling of shame and dislike is the principle of righteousness 
- 辭讓之心，禮之端也；
- The feeling of modesty and complaisance is the principle of propriety. 
- 是非之心，智之端也。
- The feeling of approving and disapproving is the principle of knowledge. 

# “Four Germs” to manifest good quality of human nature

- 惻隱之心，**仁**之端也；
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- 是非之心，**智**之端也。
- The feeling of **approving and disapproving** is the principle of knowledge 

# “Four Germs” to manifest good quality of human nature

- 人之有是四端也，猶其有四體也。[...] 凡有四端於我者，知皆擴而充之矣，若火之始然，泉之始達。苟能充之，足以保四海。
- Men have these four germs just as they have their four limbs.[...] Since all men have these four germs in themselves, let them know to give them all their development and completion, and the issue will be like that of fire which has begun to burn, or that of a spring which has begun to find vent. Let them have their complete development, and they will suffice to love and protect all within the four seas.

# Practice of mind/heart

## Overwhelming vital breath

- Mencius conception of the “overwhelming vital breath (*haoran zhi qi* 浩然之氣)” as the method for moralizing one’s mind and deed.
- (孟子) 曰：「我知言，我善養吾浩然之氣。」  
「敢問何謂浩然之氣？」 (孟子) 曰：「難言也。其為氣也，至大至剛，以直養而無害，則塞于天地之間。其為氣也，配義與道；無是，餒也。是集義所生者，非義襲而取之也。行有不慊於心，則餒矣。」

# Practice of mind/heart

## Overwhelming vital breath

- Mencius said, “I understand words. I am skilful in nourishing my overwhelming vital breath.” Chou pursued, “I venture to ask what you mean by your overwhelming vital breath?” The reply was, “It is difficult to describe it. This is the breath: It is exceedingly great, and exceedingly strong. Being nourished by rectitude, and sustaining no injury, it fills up all between heaven and earth. This is the vital breath: It is the mate and assistant of righteousness and the rule of universe (*Dao*). Without it, man is in a state of starvation. It is produced by the accumulation of righteous deeds; it is not to be obtained by incidental acts of righteousness. If the mind does not feel complacency in the conduct, the nature becomes



# Practice of mind/heart

## Overwhelming vital breath

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■ Mencius assumed that moral cultivation of a person can be attained through the combination of mind (will to practice goodness) and emotion (moralized *qi* or breath to fill into the body to be a good person). However, Mencius himself did not explicate in detail on how a mind-emotion can be cultivated to reach the sphere of moral perfection. Rather, he advocated instant effect as the embodiment of benevolent government if a ruler decide to promote the virtue of benevolence and righteousness.

# Debates between Mohists and Mencius



## Mohists

Mohist  
Influence



## Mencius

- Kingly government by *ren and yi* Benevolence and righteousness
- Anti-aggressive war
- Promotion of the worthy
- Anthropomorphic conception of the Heaven who control the political order

# Debates between Mohists and Mencius



## Mohists

- Love others like your family member
- Promotion of *ji* (welfare of people)
- Anti-fatalism
- Anti-extravagant use of resources (especially music)



## Mencius

- Expand your love to family toward others

■ Criticism against the  
**Promotion *ren-yi* (welfare of people)**

- Acceptance of fatalism after his fail to materialize his idea
- Ruler must enjoy music with his people

# A hidden cause of intervention of Qi into Yan's civil war.

- A Mencius or agricultural line of thought of Yan's civil war.

Severe discrepancy in moral discourse of two schools has caused one of the biggest military campaign during middle Warring State period.

Tan He as anti-Qi alliance by other warring states.

Mencius' leave from state of Qi

# A hidden cause of intervention of Qi into Yan's civil war.

- A Mencius' or agricultural line of Yan's, wise

Severe discrepancy in moral discourse of two schools has caused one of the biggest military campaign during middle Warring State period.

Tan territory of Yan, yet  
Tian's anti-alliance by other  
warring states.

Mencius' leave from state of Qi

# Significance of Mencius' thought in the Warring States' intellectual context

- (1) Mencius set the welfare of the ruled people as the primary purpose of his political philosophy.
- (2) He has attempted to demonstrate that such policy would be certainly materialized by the goodwill of a ruler. In order to persuade the ruler into practicing benevolent government, he also claimed that human nature is good.
- (3) The scope of his political theory focused on the future possibility to unify the Chinese world. According to extant records, neither of the early Confucians and Mohist proposed

# Questions and further discussions

- (1) To what degree did Mencius succeeded the thought of Confucius, to the extent that Mencius did not seem to set the concept of Li (rituals and propriety) at the center of his thought?
- (2) Which doctrine do you think was really helpful for saving people from their destitute condition between Mohism and Mencius' thought, and why?
- (3) In what sense, or how much degree, can Mencius' political philosophy discussed in comparison with contemporary democratic

# Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy

*Thank you very much!*



## Lecture Six






The Culmination of Ethical Discourse:  
*The Book of Mencius*



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