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Mencius 2A2 in Context

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In this paper, I will be concerned with text growth and with the development of ideas over time. I will attempt to relate Mencius 2A2 to its original context in contemporary meditation practice, and then follow that theme in the later Mencian writings, and in the later Gwǎngzǎ meditation texts.

I take for granted the following situation: (1) Mencius was a real person, who interviewed several rulers beginning in 0320; he died in 0303 (see Handout #1). (2) Half the interview transcripts in MC 1, and all the rest of the Mencius text, is the work of his followers. (3) The Mencians later split into a northern, philosophical group (MC 4-7), and a southern, more political group (MC 1-3). See Handout #2. This position has been published in the Singapore Mencius volume, and refined in later papers. I will not repeat that argument here.

1. THE DIVISION OF MC 2A2

There is an important division in this passage. At the beginning of MC 2A2, Gūngsūn Chǒu asks Mencius whether his mind would be perturbed (if his mind would be moved) if he became minister in Chí. This question makes most sense in 0316, when Mencius was on leave from Chí for his mother's funeral, and thus had a position in Chí, but had not yet become minister. He did become minister in 0315, in which role he presided over the Yēn disaster, which resulted in Chí being expelled from a state which it had occupied and had sought to annex, was disgraced, and soon left office. In 2A2, Mencius' answer to the unmoved mind question runs through Legge's section 17. The rest of 2A2 concerns his relation to the Confucian school. That question came up only after his death, when the Analects school rejected meditation as a way of knowledge (LY 15:31, c0300). This second portion, sections 18-28, I will call 2A2b. In it, Mencius refuses to compare himself with various disciples, of whom the most sensitive was Yén Hwéi.

Why Yén Hwéi? In the early Analects (LY 6:7), Yén Hwéi is famous for mental concentration leading to perception; he is the only disciple who can steadily contemplate the meaning of a basic term, the word *rén* 仁. In LY 5:9 (c0470), Yén Hwéi is the one who, on hearing one thing can get, ten things. That is, he so deeply understands words that he can work out their implications from only a minimal hint. This combination of mental concentration and understanding of words was ancestral to Mencius as a Confucian.

It is also important for our topic that Dzǎngdǎ was closely associated with Yén Hwéi. In LY 8:5, Dzǎngdǎ remembers a friend of his, "long ago," who among other things was "full, yet seemingly empty (*syw* 虛)." "Empty" is a word typically used to describe the mental state of one who has gotten rid of sensory distractions. In LY 11:19, Yén Hwéi is said to have been "often empty (*lǎ kǔng* 屢空)." The concept is the same. Then as late as the date of this passage (c0360), Yén Hwéi was remembered as one whose mental state was often such as is reached by meditation. At this time, Mencius would have been in his mid twenties.

2. THE NEI YE

This important text we must also divide into two parts: an early one, sections 1-15, which deal mostly with meditation and government, and the rest, sections 16-26, which focus more on personal well-being and tranquility.

By his own account, Mencius achieved an "unmoved mind" at forty (我四十不動心). This would have been in c0345, when the Dàu/Dǎ Jīng meditation school first came to public notice by beginning to issue the text which we know as the Dàu/Dǎ Jīng. At that time, Mencius would have been a student of Lǎudǎ's teacher, the person called Shāng Rúng in the Hwánándǎ. But he was also influenced by Mician teachings, and would have been uncomfortable with certain aspects of the DDJ position, such as its opposition to *rén* and *yì* in DDJ 18, and to knowledge as such in DDJ 19. He will have found more to like in the Nèi Yè, which differed from DDJ in its interest not only in the mind or thinking, but also in words.

The understanding of words by the mind appears in Nèi Yè 8, 10, and 14. The “unmoved mind” of Mencius is similar to the tranquil mind of Nèi Yè 3. Above all, the term *hàu-rán* or “floodlike,” a particular kind of breath, which is emphasized by Mencius in 2A2 as one of his special achievements, occurs in Nèi Yè 15. This approach to meditation closely links the two texts. The influence of the Nèi Yè on the Mencius of 2A2 thus seems to be both undeniable and important.

3. RIGHTEOUS CHI

Mencius in 2A2 holds fast to something. This is not the *jìng* or tranquility to which DDJ 16 holds fast (守闢篤). It is also not the *chì* 氣 or the inner power (*dé* 德) which in Nèi Yè 2 enables one to comprehend the myriad things. Instead, Mencius in 2A2 recommends holding to the essential (*shǒu ywē* 守約), which is explicitly superior to holding to *chì* (守氣). His example of this is *Dzṽngdž*. It is at this point that Mencius differs from the Nèi Yè: he ethicizes meditation. His kind of courage is not mere belligerence; it is moral courage.

Mencius made the floodlike breath (浩然之氣) the *chì* which fills Heaven and Earth (塞于天地之間) and also fills our bodies, the correlate or mate of righteousness and the *Dàu* (配義與道). For Mencius, in contrast to *Gāudž*, righteousness was in men. It did not come from outside.

This inner identification with righteousness enabled Mencius to understand words. As Nèi Yè 8 says, *chì* generates life, life generates thought, and thought generates knowledge. Nèi Yè 10 says that with a well-ordered mind within, well-ordered words issue from the mouth, well-ordered tasks are imposed on the people, and so the world comes to be well-ordered. Nèi Yè 14 continues, “Within the mind is yet another mind. In the mind within the mind is sound, which precedes words. After sound comes form, and then comes words, and finally implementation of the words (*shǐ* 言然后使).” Mencius adds that not all words are good or righteous; evil or depraved minds can produce depraved words or doctrines, and these can injure government.

4. RELATION TO CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT

The interest of Mencius in words was shared by the Micians. The logical Micians, in MZ 40:93 (c0322) said, “To grasp what is said and get its meaning, is seen in the mind’s discrimination (*syīn byèn* 心辨). The ethical Micians, in MZ 12:8 (c0322), quoting a lost *Shū*, said, “The mouth may say what is good, or it can promote war.” That is, it can utter either peaceful or belligerent words. MZ 39 (“Against Fatalism,” c0319) agreed with Mencius that bad doctrines harm the state. Earlier, MZ 40:7-14 (c0360) had redefined Confucian basic terms from a Mician point of view. For them, *rín* is “to love all,” *yì* is to benefit, *lǐ* (ritual or courtesy) is to respect. The DDJ, Nèi Yè, and Mencius are doing similar things with their basic concepts. Likewise, Mencius made *yì* the correlate or mate of the cosmic *chì* or breath, just as *Hòu Jì* is said in *Shī* 275 to be the correlate or mate of Heaven. Cosmologists like *Dzōu Yěn* were correlating earthly events with Heavenly or astronomical events. Along with a general interest in language and ways of knowing, this kind of explanation by correlation was very much in the air. Mencius too had his version.

5. THE FIRST INTERPOLATIONS

After Mencius died in 0303, his followers collected the 11 genuine ruler interviews, and added a 12th non-interview with *Lǚ Píng-gūng*, who had died in that same year. That passage explains that the failed meeting was due to Heaven, and not the result of human intrigue. It gave a suitable ending to a career not distinguished for its political successes, and was probably written to round off the record in that way.

The followers also added spurious interviews to the genuine ones. Why did they do this? I would say: to extend and clarify the doctrine of rulership, which was their stock in trade as a movement. They also tried to put the failure of Mencius in a better light, by suggesting that the King had not taken his advice.

In addition, the interviews of Mencius with *Tíng Wǐn-gūng* were not encouraging to other rulers: his only advice was for the ruler of a small state to die nobly in its defense (1B15). More optimistically, the new 1B3a says that “Those who with a state of any size serve another state will be protected by Heaven.” This guaranteed survival was an improvement for those preaching Mencius to the rulers of the day.

The next group of interpolations pick up the theme of identity with the people by emphasizing the idea of sharing. 1A2 began with the idea of sharing with the people (jyē 偕), as in Shū 10. The term used in 1B2, 1B4a, and 1B5 is túng 同, as in the genuine 1B1. The situation of 1B1, in which Mencius picks up on a liking of the King to recommend that he extend it to the people, was also the germ of 1A7.

6. MC 1A7

1A7 has two parts. The first, through §18, assumes innate virtues on the part of the people, who are ready to respond to the ruler's concern for them. The second part sees popular virtues as taught from above, by government schools. In the first part, the Chí King had "a heart sufficient to carry out the Royal Sway," while the second part adds an economic factor: the people need constant livelihood before they can have a constant heart; that is, a loyal heart. The moral relationship has been transformed into an economic one. This emphasis on the economic basis of morality would remain characteristic of the southern school.

The second part of 1A7 concludes with a paragraph copied from 1A3:4. This in turn differs from the genuine 1A3:3, where the people, given sufficient means, will spontaneously "nourish the living and bury the dead." 1A3:4, and 1A7:24 which copies it, go on to propose an elaborate system of rural economy. This is a step beyond the genuine 1A3:3, and marks new thinking among the disciples.

Ignoring this economic addition, 1A7a, the original invented interview, gives a theoretical underpinning to the theme of sharing with the people. It draws on the theory of the mind from 2A2, by assuming that moral qualities are not learned from the outside, but are there within, needing only to be developed. By working on one's mind as it is, one can reach a larger sense of righteousness. This is what 1A7a does. Unlike Lyáng Hwèi-wáng (who was already concerned for his people), the Chí King had no sense of commonality with them; he cared only for himself. "Mencius" proceeds to discover, in his behavior, a rudimentary prompting toward concern for others, in this case for an animal about to be sacrificed. The long exposition shows how this mind can be extended to include the sufferings of the people. In that exposition, the term syīn "mind" is used repeatedly, which makes 1A7a stand out from everything else in MC 1, since only this passage devotes itself, not to policy, but to the mind, the mental disposition, that must underlie a compassionate policy.

7. MC 2A6

In 2A2a we learned that Mencius was interested in the mind and in inner cultivation leading to the sense of a moral universe. He shared the confidence of the Nèi Yè in the value of thought, and words or theory, in practical politics. In 1A7a, we get the theory that the enlightened mind contains at least the beginning of practical morals. The moral trait mentioned in 1A7a is compassion, and in 1A7a, the theory was applied only to one ruler. In 2A6, that theory is generalized.

2A6 is one of a series of passages, 2A3-2B1, which break free of the old interview convention, and let Mencius make more general statements. Many of these passages develop points in the original interviews, and in the interpolated ones. They summarize the doctrinal improvements that had been made in those additions.

Within this summary, 2A6 develops 1A7 in two ways: (1) by having not one but four inherent rudiments or beginnings (dwān), and by asserting that they are possessed by everyone. This expands 1A7 into a more comprehensive Confucian psychology. It now includes qualities which at the same time are essential to society, and also intrinsic to man. These rudiments, such as the sense of compassion and the sense of shame, lead to the corresponding developed virtues of rín and yì. An obvious link with 1A7 is the 2A6 example of spontaneous concern for a child about to fall into the well. This more human and more universal example takes us out of the special case of King Sywān and his ox, and says something about human nature in general.

8. THE TWO SCHOOLS

The southern school developed the economic side of virtue theory, at least for the common people. They emphasized the need to teach the people, and did not assume, as Mencius had done, that the people were ready to respond to the ruler's concern. The southern school takes a top-down view of government, and of virtue itself. This was closer to the position of Sywándž, who believed that virtue was taught. By contrast, the northern, more philosophical school insisted that ethical values like rín are within us. It was with this school that Sywándž debated about human nature.

The southern school never picks up the meditative component in Mencius. But in the later northern writings, this aspect does surface again. In 7A4 we have this line:

“All things are complete in me.”

This makes most sense as reiterating the Nèi Yè identity of self and cosmos.

Thus the meditative influence which Mencius disclosed in the private conversation of 2A2, and which others developed in 1A7 and in 2A6, finds its last expression in this northern passage. At the end, the northern school felt free to acknowledge the double heritage of the Mencian movement: moral values going back to Confucius, and the Chí meditation-based universal insights of Mencius.

9. CONCLUSION: ONCE AGAIN CHI MEDITATION

As a footnote to these developments within the Mencius, the Nèi Yè shows influence from the Mencian idea of the ethical cosmos. This turns up in a line later added to the Nèi Yè, and in two lines in the next Gwändž meditation text, the Syīn Shù Syà. (For details, see Handout #3). The circle of influence from Chí meditation to Mencian thought was thus closed, and Mencius' debt to Chí was finally paid.