



## STUDY ON MENCIUS' THEORY OF HUMAN NATURE AND MORAL CONCEPTS

Jiafu Deng

School of Marxism, Guangxi Normal University, Guilin 541004 – China.

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3957-892X> |  [gldc2023@126.com](mailto:gldc2023@126.com)

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**Abstract:** The concept of morality is an essential aspect of moral education and cultivation, which has been the focus of attention for philosophers throughout history. As the culmination of Confucian thought, Mencius contributed significantly to the moral concepts that form an integral part of Confucianism and traditional Chinese culture. This article focuses on Mencius' moral philosophy, explicitly examining his theory of human nature and the concept of an ideal personality. By exploring these ideas, the paper aims to elucidate the contemporary relevance of Mencius' moral philosophy.


**Keywords:** Mencius' moral concepts. Confucianism. Theory of human nature. Ideal personality.

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**Resumo:** O conceito de moralidade é um aspecto essencial da educação e cultivo moral, que tem sido foco de atenção de filósofos, ao longo da história. Como culminação do pensamento confucionista, Mêncio contribuiu significativamente para os conceitos morais que constituem parte integrante do confucionismo e da cultura tradicional chinesa. Este artigo se centra na filosofia moral de Mêncio, examinando explicitamente a sua teoria da natureza humana e o conceito de personalidade ideal. Ao explorar essas ideias, o artigo visa a elucidar a relevância contemporânea da filosofia moral de Mêncio.

**Palavras-chave:** Conceitos morais de Mêncio. Confucionismo. Teoria da natureza humana. Personalidade ideal.

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## STUDY ON MENCIUS' THEORY OF HUMAN NATURE AND MORAL CONCEPTS

*Jiafu Deng*<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The concept of morality is an essential aspect of moral education and cultivation, which has been the focus of attention for philosophers throughout history. As the culmination of Confucian thought, Mencius contributed significantly to the moral concepts that form an integral part of Confucianism and traditional Chinese culture. This article focuses on Mencius' moral philosophy, explicitly examining his theory of human nature and the concept of an ideal personality. By exploring these ideas, the paper aims to elucidate the contemporary relevance of Mencius' moral philosophy.

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### INTRODUCTION

During the turbulent period of social transformation in which Mencius lived, the traditional principles of good governance, represented by kingship, were no longer effective, and the feudal lords engaged in power struggles. Mencius believed that the solution to these chaotic times lay in the “sage kings” and “virtuous ministers” emergence, who could transform governance. In this context, Mencius developed his moral concepts and corresponding theories of ideal character. Confucius' moral philosophy directly influenced Mencius' moral views, and Mencius further expanded upon these concepts and ideas of character. During the Spring and Autumn periods and the Warring States period, scholars engaged in intense debates on the human beings' nature. Mencius proposed that human nature is inherently good, based on the belief that the heart is the human nature's foundation and that conscience is intrinsically good. He advocated that individuals are born with the potential for empathy, shame, respect and discernment, which are the foundations of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom. One can achieve a virtuous character only by expanding and nurturing these qualities through the trend of goodness. From a theoretical perspective, Mencius' theory of the human nature's goodness laid the foundation for studying the mind and character, creating a rich and profound theoretical framework. From a practical perspective, Mencius' theory of the human nature's goodness served as the basis for his moral views. It significantly influenced

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<sup>1</sup> School of Marxism, Guangxi Normal University, Guilin 541004 – China. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3957-892X>. Email: [gldc2023@126.com](mailto:gldc2023@126.com).

the formation of the Chinese national psyche and the development of moral education in later generations.

## 1 THE FOUNDATION OF MENCIUS' MORAL VIEWS: THE THEORY OF HUMAN NATURE

### 1.1 THE ORIGINS OF THE THEORY OF HUMAN NATURE

The theory of human nature focuses on the human beings' essence of human beings and reflects a humanistic spirit. Unlike the Western humanistic spirit that emphasizes the humans' rational power and the establishment of human subjectivity in cognition, the humanistic spirit in ancient China, during the pre-Qin period, highlighted the ability to reflect on and introspect one's behavior. Xu Fuguan's book, *A History of Chinese Theories of Human Nature*, starts its narrative from the Zhou Dynasty. On the one hand, it is based on the "Yin people's affairs with gods and spirits," as the culture of the Yin Dynasty belonged to the realm of religious spirit. On the other hand, it is also due to the historical consciousness that arose from the reflection on the downfall of the Yin Dynasty during the Zhou Dynasty. This consciousness drove rulers to reflect on their political behavior and gave birth to the initial humanistic spirit (Xu; Liu, 2020, p. 47).

During the early Zhou period, there was not yet a deep exploration of human nature, but it laid the cultural foundation for later theories of human nature. Firstly, it established "Heaven" as the source and legitimacy of "virtue." Secondly, it connected heaven and humans in the moral realm, using "virtue" as the standard for judging behavior. However, at this time, "Heaven" still had a personal god's image, and "human" primarily referred to the ruling class, indicating that the culture of the early Zhou period still had a predominantly religious nature. Thirdly, the Zhou Dynasty retained many rituals and ceremonies from the Yin Dynasty. Although the rituals were still activities to worship gods, based on the previous two characteristics, the rituals were also endowed with moral significance and gradually evolved into the most crucial concept of "li" in the Confucian theoretical system (Ren; Chen, 2019, p. 86).

Compared to the early Zhou period, discussions on human nature developed further during the Spring and Autumn periods. Firstly, "Heaven" began to detach from a personal god's image and appeared to represent some innate and normative qualities in the context of ethics and morality. Secondly, thinkers consciously paid attention to the human beings' uniqueness and introduced the concept of "xing" to describe the human beings' inherent characteristics. Thirdly, Confucian scholars of the Spring and Autumn period established an intrinsic connection between the "Mandate of Heaven" and "xing." In addition to being heaven's creations, humans were also inherently governed by the "Mandate of Heaven" and the "Way of Heaven." Based on these foundations, scholars of the Spring and Autumn Period

and the Warring States Period delved deeper into exploring human nature and developed the theory of human nature.

## **1.2 MENCIUS' THEORY OF THE HUMAN NATURE'S GOODNESS**

During the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, discussions on human nature never ceased. Cultivating an ideal character is closely related to understanding human nature in the Confucian school of thought. The issue of human nature occupies an essential position in the field of philosophy because it forms the starting point for achieving an ideal moral character. Different schools of thought have their views on human nature. For example, Gaozi's theory of human nature is based on the proposition that "human nature is neither inherently good nor inherently bad." On one hand, it acknowledges the "human nature's" dual nature, with both good and evil aspects. On the other hand, it emphasizes the human beings' innate moral inclination in their moral practice. When examining the human "nature's" good and evil aspects," Gaozi does not focus on a relationship of dominance or subordination, nor does he base it on a transformative relationship of mutual constraint and reliance. Instead, he focuses on the correspondence between the self and the external world. Mencius, in contrast, advocates the human nature's inherent goodness. Using a comparative cognitive approach, he takes the differences in "nature" among different species as a starting point to elucidate that the human nature's inherent goodness is a natural boundary that distinguishes human "nature" from the "nature" of other existences, thereby affirming the human life's intrinsic moral value (Shen, 2023, p. 61).

The issue of human nature is one of the critical domains in Mencius' philosophy, laying the foundation for developing an ideal moral character. Mencius believed that every individual has the potential to cultivate a perfect moral character through their efforts because he thought that humans are inherently good. Mencius primarily explained and interpreted his theory of the human nature's goodness three aspects: filial piety, the sense of affinity with others and the feeling of compassion.

Mencius believed that the loving parents' and respecting elders' affection embodies benevolence and righteousness, and this affection is inherent in everyone, even infants, who understand it. Mencius said, "There is no child who does not know to love their parents, and when they grow up, no one does not show respect to their elder siblings. Loving one's parents is benevolence, and respecting elders is righteousness" (Mencius, 2014, p. 67). This familial bond does not need to be learned; it is an innate moral instinct that does not require careful consideration. Therefore, it can be said that people are born with the essence of benevolence and righteousness, possessing the attribute of goodness (Xu, 2022, p. 66).

The second perspective is based on the idea of commonality among individuals. Mencius believed that there are many shared characteristics among people. For example, all humans have eyes, ears, noses and mouths. Since everyone has these features, Mencius concluded that the human heart's essence is also the same. He said, "As for the heart, is there anything that does not have the same nature? What is it that the heart has in common? It is called reason and righteousness" (Zhang 2021, p. 5). Here, "same nature" is equivalent to "same kind." Therefore, since the heart is of the same kind and possesses reason and righteousness, it can be concluded that benevolence, righteousness, propriety and wisdom are inherent and that human nature is inherently good.

The third perspective is based on the concept of "compassion" as a starting point to discuss the human nature's innate goodness. "Compassion" is Mencius' important theoretical viewpoint, referring to the shock, fear and sorrow people experience when witnessing others' suffering and persecution. Mencius repeatedly provided examples to argue that every person, whether a king or an ordinary citizen, possesses this compassionate heart. This compassionate heart originates from the human nature's goodness, which is inherent from birth. Therefore, the human heart is inherently good. Mencius' theory of the human nature's innate goodness serves as the theoretical foundation for his moral concepts. Based on the theory of innate goodness, Mencius developed the ideas of "sage kings who are of the same kind as me" and "all people can become as virtuous as Yao and Shun," making the ideal character image in his moral philosophy more attainable and realistic (Xu, 2022, p. 11).

### 1.3 THEORY OF THE MIND AND HEART

The core expression of Mencius' philosophy is the theory of innate goodness, which further expands into his theory of the mind and heart. The "heart" that Mencius talks about is different from the heart's organ as commonly understood today. Mencius proposed the viewpoint that "[...] external objects easily deceive the sense organs of the ears and eyes due to their inability to think" (Wang, 2019, p. 26). He believed that these sense organs, in contrast to the heart's organ, possess a different nature or function. The sense organs are not the human beings' thinking organs. They are naturally attracted to external objects and often become obscured by them. They lack the requirement of choice and self-control, similar to animals. However, humans cannot be like this. According to Mencius, one needs to preserve their original heart to become a true human being. This distinction between humans and animals, and between the noble and the base, lies in protecting the original heart. Based on this, Mencius judged that "the organ of the heart thinks," considering the heart as the organ capable of thinking. Mencius emphasized that people need the thinking of the heart to pursue goodness. Although Mencius judged that "the organ of the heart thinks," fundamentally, his emphasis is not on regarding the heart as a thinking organ, but instead on emphasizing a

morally significant “heart.” Furthermore, the “heart” that Mencius talks about is not the same as the “heart” as referred to in modern terms, which relates primarily to the internal cognitive function and moral consciousness in Mencius’ philosophy (Zhao, 2017, p. 78).

Mencius believed that the heart is inherently good, and he considered the heart as the basis for the human nature’s innate goodness. The judgment that “the organ of the heart thinks” allows the heart to think about goodness and pursue it. By considering the heart as a thinking organ, Mencius also endowed the heart with the connotation of moral will. This understanding allows for converging the “original heart” and “original nature” in human beings. Therefore, human nature’s inherent goodness is essentially the heart’s inherent goodness. When we study the theory of innate goodness, we analyze the inherent the heart’s goodness, which is a major guarantee for Mencius’ moral philosophy (Shen, 2022, p. 71).

#### **1.4 THEORY OF THE FOUR ENDOWMENTS**

The “Four Endowments” concept in Mencius’s philosophy is considered a central concept for understanding the Confucian philosophy of emotions, moral philosophy and political philosophy. Mencius utilizes the notion of the Four Endowments to support his theory of inherent goodness. The term “Four Endowments” is derived from the chapter “Everyone Possesses the Heart of Compassion” in Mencius’s work, particularly from a specific passage that states:

Mencius said, “Everyone possesses the heart of compassion. Ancient kings could govern with benevolence when they had a heart of compassion. By acting with the heart of compassion and implementing a benevolent government, the world could be governed effortlessly. When we say that everyone possesses a heart of compassion, we mean that when people see a child about to fall into a well, they all experience a feeling of alarm and sympathy. It is not because they are acquainted with the child’s parents, seek praise from their neighbors and friends, or dislike the sound of the child’s cries. Therefore, we can observe that compassion is the endowment of benevolence, shame and dislike are the endowment of righteousness, deference and compliance are the endowment of etiquette, and wisdom is the endowment of discerning right and wrong. Just as every person possesses these four endowments, they also have four limbs” (Wang, 2019, p. 33).

The heart of compassion, as the first of the Four Endowments, is also a crucial factor influencing moral behavior. Mencius believed that every individual can find the seeds of goodness within their heart without seeking it externally. Contemporary philosophers also consider this a foundational point, asserting that the “heart of compassion” is a human nature’s innate aspect with profound ontological significance. Feng Youlan argues that the heart of compassion is the fundamental basis of Mencius’s Four Endowments, and correspondingly, benevolence occupies the first place among the Four Virtues, serving as their foundation.

The relationship between the Four Endowments and the Four Virtues is not parallel. Li Minghui suggests, “The heart of compassion is internally connected to the hearts of shame and dislike, deference and compliance, and discerning right and wrong, while also possessing more fundamental ontological significance for these three” (Chen, 2018, p. 159). Chen Lisheng goes a step further by interpreting the “heart of compassion” as “[...] the feeling that the benevolent person resides harmoniously between heaven, earth and all things, and is in communion with them,” considering it as the “existential tone” of human existence (Zhang, 2012, p. 109).

Building upon the foundation of the heart of compassion, Mencius identifies three additional moral sentiments: the hearts of shame and dislike, deference and compliance, and discerning right and wrong. The heart of shame and dislike represents the endowment of righteousness. “Shame” refers to the feeling of inadequacy, while “dislike” refers to detesting the others’ weaknesses. Mencius asserts that benevolence provides security for humanity while righteousness guides individuals on the correct path. “Righteousness” signifies the world’s most appropriate course of action, where shame guides conduct and dislike towards one’s and others’ inadequacies.

In the opening of the *Book of Mencius*, King Hui of Liang asks Mencius about his purpose in coming from afar. Mencius responds, “Why must the king speak of benefits? There is only benevolence and righteousness”. This exchange sets the tone for distinguishing between righteousness and self-interest. Mencius believes that people of his time prioritize self-interest, resulting in rulers and subjects pursuing personal gain. This leads to incessant wars among states driven by power struggles over territory and population (Yun, 2021, p. 156). However, the essence of righteous governance, as prescribed by the royal path, lies in ensuring the people’s well-being and prosperity. If rulers lack the heart of shame and dislike, they will not feel ashamed of their or others’ pursuit of personal gain. Consequently, they will fail to extend their compassion to the people through benevolent governance (Zhou, 2013, p. 71).

The heart of deference and compliance is the endowment of propriety. Deference and obedience mean willingly yielding something to others. It expresses a sense of respect. Deference and submission have a long-standing cultural tradition and are praised by Confucianism. Yao’s, Shun’s and Yu’s virtuous governance, which was highly acclaimed, included the practice of abdication. Confucius also highly praised Wu Taibo’s “thrice offering to resign” for the world’s benefit. Among Confucian scholars is Zengzi’s example firmly declining an appointment to a lucrative position and living a modest life, refusing the land that the King of Lu offered. When summoned by the King of Qi, Mencius excused himself from attending the court due to his illness. In the “Gongsun Chou II”, chapter of the book *Mencius*, it is mentioned: “There are three things esteemed in the world: rank, age, and



virtue” (Wang, 2019, p. 46). While social rank is highly valued in the court, virtue takes precedence when it comes to assisting the ruler in governing the people. Therefore, “If a ruler can achieve great things, there must be ministers who are not called upon. If he desires counsel, they will come forward” (Wang, 2019, p. 47). This demonstrates the respect for virtue that a ruler should exhibit. Zengzi’s and Mencius’ acts in declining the ruler’s summons reflect the Confucian scholars’ esteem and reverence for their moral character. It can be seen that the core of the spirit of yielding lies in the respect for “virtue.” Thus, Yao’s, Shun’s and Yu’s abdication can explain the nature of yielding. Although Zengzi’s and Mencius’ refusal to respond to the ruler’s call may appear arrogant and discourteous, the underlying principle is still the value placed on virtue. The “rites” arise from the spirit of yielding, and while the execution of rituals is undoubtedly essential, its essence lies in wholehearted dedication and sincerity (Fan, 2023, p. 29).

The heart of discerning right and wrong represents the endowment of wisdom. It entails distinguishing between “right”, as knowing the good and considering it as right, and “wrong”, as recognizing the evil and viewing it as wrong. This moral discernment is an innate emotional inclination that enables individuals to judge good and evil. Mencius describes this inclination as a metaphysical and universal moral sentiment, known as the heart of discerning right and wrong. It is a human nature’s part, a conscience that operates without conscious deliberation.

Mencius argues that, even from early childhood, every child instinctively knows to love their parents and to show respect to their older siblings (Ren, 2023, p. 114). This innate understanding and behavior demonstrate the heart’s presence of discerning right and wrong. Consequently, the heart of discerning right and wrong encompasses two levels of meaning. On one hand, it involves recognizing emotions, such as “knowing to love one’s parents” and “knowing to respect one’s older siblings,” which reflect the emotional bonds of familial respect and affection. On the other hand, it goes beyond mere awareness of these emotions and encompasses their practical implementation, actively demonstrating love for parents and respect for older siblings (Wang, 2018, p. 106).

## **2 THE PRACTICE OF MENCIUS’S MORAL PHILOSOPHY: THE IDEAL PERSONALITY**

Mencius inherited and elaborated on Confucius’ ideal personality concept, which mainly consists of the Junzi’s (gentleman) personality, the Great Man’s personality and the Sage’s one. Firstly, the Junzi ideal has always been emphasized in Confucianism. Discussions on moral cultivation and attainment are closely related to the Junzi’s purpose, an essential figure in Confucian ideal personality theory. The outstanding personalities, designed by ancient sages, have a hierarchical order, with the Junzi belonging to the upper-middle level. They embody the moral ideals pursued by Confucianism and serve as realistic role models



that can be learned from and emulated. Secondly, the Great Man's personality is a unique and prominent feature of Mencius's ideal personality paradigm, complementing the other personality types. According to Mencius, willpower, integrity, dignity and broad-mindedness are the shining qualities of the Great Man's personality. Lastly, Mencius explicitly states that the Sage is the pinnacle of human relationships and all generations' teacher. Mencius established and promoted the models of sages, such as Yao, Shun and Yu, for people to emulate. He boldly proposes that "everyone can become like Yao and Shun." The concept of the Sage, in Mencius, is lofty and extraordinary, but based on the premise of innate goodness, the state of being a Sage is not unattainable. Suppose the Junzi represents the preliminary and perfected moral personality in Mencius's ideal personality theory. In that case, the Great Man represents the embodiment and symbol of Mencius's perfect character, and the Sage represents the most outstanding and highest level of moral personality goal.

## 2.1 THE JUNZI'S PERSONALITY

The term "Junzi" is frequently mentioned in both the *Analects*, by Confucius, and the *Mencius*, indicating that the Junzi's personality is essential in Confucianism. It is the ideal model of personality pursued by Confucian scholars. Mencius said, "The nature of the Junzi encompasses benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom rooted in the heart" (Liu, 2020, p. 18). According to Mencius, the Junzi's inherent nature includes the qualities of benevolence, righteousness, propriety and wisdom because these qualities are rooted in their nature and inner being. Norms inherently guide the Junzi's behavior. Benevolence is the Junzi's first and most crucial moral quality and, therefore, it is the core of the Junzi's personality. Both Confucius and Mencius emphasize the element of "benevolence" and consider it the distinguishing factor between the Junzi and the petty person. Mencius said, "Benevolence is human. Combined, it becomes the Way" (Xiang, 2023, p. 50). When benevolence and humans are combined, they form the Way. The essential characteristics of the Junzi's personality are prioritizing others, putting others first and showing compassion towards others. In other words, the ultimate goal of Junzi's practice of benevolence and righteousness is self-cultivation and the society's betterment, based on benevolence and guided by justice. For rulers, practicing benevolence means embodying the principles of the Way in their governance. However, Mencius does not advocate persuading and influencing rulers individually, but through practicing benevolence and righteousness.

Another critical aspect of Mencius's Junzi path is the pursuit of upward progress. The core of this aspect lies in the fact that the Junzi is not satisfied with a lower level of material life, but constantly strives for spiritual enrichment at a higher level. Junzi incessantly refines moral fiber, aspiring to transcend the realm of ordinary individuals and ascend to the stature of Junzi, then to that of the Great Man, and ultimately, to a sage akin to Yao and Shun

(Zhou, 2019, p. 28). Therefore, we can judge that a true sage's life's essence is to naturally and spontaneously strive for progress with a strong sense of positivity and without any elements of decadence or absurdity. This is Mencius's "Junzi path," and those who can achieve this kind of life possess a true Junzi personality. This is the essence of cultivation of an ideal character of Confucianism.

Furthermore, a clear distinction between the Junzi's personality and the ordinary people's personality lies in the Junzi's ability to preserve and nurture a benevolent heart. Humans are born with the Four Endowments, including the hearts of benevolence and righteousness and the innate nature of goodness. However, the benevolent beginning is initially fragile and easily influenced and damaged by external factors. It requires careful cultivation and nurturing. On the other hand, the ordinary people's personality lacks the knowledge of how to preserve and nurture the benevolent heart. They may even lose it without realizing it or make no effort to retrieve it. Over time, the benevolent heart naturally ceases to exist. At certain times and under certain circumstances, individuals may unintentionally lose or weaken their benevolent hearts. The Junzi's personality is characterized by the ability to rediscover the lost original heart consciously.

## 2.2 THE "GREAT MAN'S" PERSONALITY

The "Great Man's" personality is a distinctive paradigm proposed by Mencius. Compared to Junzi, Mencius's concept of the Great Man emphasizes a character with resilience, integrity, fearlessness and a strong sense of righteousness. Mencius not only promotes the spirit and value of the Great Man's personality, but also embodies the Great Man's independent character through his own life and teachings (Han, 2014, p. 17).

What is a "Great Man"? Mencius states,

He dwells in the broad world, stands in the rightful position of the world, and follows the great Way of the world. When he succeeds, he does so with the people; when he fails, he remains steadfast in his path. Neither wealth nor power can corrupt him, nor can poverty or lowly status sway him. This is a "Great Man" (Li, 2019, p. 41).

The Great Man abides by benevolence, upholds propriety and acts with righteousness. When victorious, in victory, he walks the path of righteousness alongside the people. When facing adversity, he remains steadfast in his way. External factors, such as wealth, status, and power, cannot sway his heart, change his principles, or dampen his aspirations.

Mencius's concept of the Great Man's personality has three main characteristics. Firstly, it possesses an independent character. A separate character is a personality that adheres to personal ideals and beliefs without being influenced by external factors. The Great Man's

relentless spirit originates from the outward manifestation of their moral conscience. It is cultivated through benevolence, righteousness and propriety rather than relying solely on an imposing external demeanor. Mencius also emphasizes the role of willpower. Regardless of their circumstances, the Great Man should be guided by a firm will to withstand the tests of the external environment, temper their will in times of adversity and forge their character. This is the righteousness and integrity that every individual should possess, known as the “magnanimous spirit,” and the Great Man’s image, portrayed by Mencius, embodies this essential aspect of character.

Secondly, the Great Man takes the world as their responsibility. Mencius advocates that regardless of their political status, individuals should take action. When successful, they should be concerned about the people and benefit them. When facing setbacks, they should adhere to their principles and remain independent. By doing so, they can impact society and demonstrate their charismatic personality. The Great Man empathizes with the people and possesses a strong sense of social concern and high social responsibility. Mencius’s concept of “cultivating oneself in times of poverty” is not merely about preserving one’s character in turbulent times, disregarding the people’s and the nation’s well-being. Mencius’s spirit of salvation lies in the aspiration to govern the world with a selfless attitude, to save the people from adversity with the ambition of “taking on the weight of the world” and to share the people’s joys and sorrows, who have a broad mind. This is not limited to a single aspect (Wan, 2010, p. 138).

Thirdly, the Great Man reaches the realm of sacrificing oneself for righteousness. When an individual’s life and moral principles come into conflict and cannot be reconciled, Mencius believes that the Great Man should unhesitatingly choose to sacrifice his life for righteousness, using their energy to uphold moral principles. Mencius’s concept of “sacrificing oneself for righteousness” can be traced back to Confucius’ idea of “dying for the sake of virtue.” Later, these two phrases from Confucius and Mencius were combined and referred to as “Confucius said ‘achieving virtue,’ Mencius said ‘pursuing righteousness’”. Confucian culture has always emphasized the life’s value and the importance of living in the present world. Choosing death is to fulfill the principles of righteousness and demonstrate the life’s eternal value.

### 2.3 THE SAGE’S PERSONALITY

The Sage is the highest level of ideal personality that the Chinese people have shaped and admired throughout history. It serves as the epitome of a perfect character. Unlike the heroes and saviors revered in Western culture, the Chinese concept of the Sage encompasses moral, intellectual and practical achievements that all admire and celebrate. Mencius advocated the idea that “everyone can become Yao and Shun,” referring to the

Sage's ideal personality. Mencius did not view the Sage as mysterious and unattainable, but instead expressed, "Shun was a human, and I am also a human". Furthermore, Mencius's theory of innate goodness elucidates the inherent similarity between ordinary individuals and the Sage. He acknowledges that ordinary people and the Sage share the exact origin. He believes that, as long as individuals expand their capacity for goodness within their hearts and continuously elevate their moral cultivation and realm, they can ultimately reach the pinnacle and attain the Sage's moral kingdom (Chen, 2015, p. 104). Although ordinary individuals have the potential to achieve the Sage's personality, in reality, it remains an ideal aspiration. Throughout history, there has never been a period where "everyone is like Yao and Shun". So, what positive impact can the Sage's ideal personality or the concept of the Sage have on ordinary individuals? Mencius answers that the Sage is the "teacher of a hundred generations." After hearing about the deeds of the "sages of old" and experiencing the charisma of the Sage's moral qualities, individuals are inspired and "aroused" to approach the Sage's moral virtues. This leads to establishing moral goals and ultimately translates into practice, manifesting as the inner strength of moral willpower and outward moral behavior. This is the significance of the Sage's personality.

## CONCLUSION

Mencius's theory of "human nature" is the foundation of his moral philosophy. In Mencius's theory of human nature, the four endowments of compassion, shame, deference, compliance, and right and wrong are the endowments of benevolence, righteousness, propriety and wisdom. The "four endowments" are emotional qualities inherent in every individual, characterized by their moral nature, practicality, specificity and purposefulness. Mencius explains the human nature's innate goodness through these "four endowments" and emphasizes that they are not only the source, but also the content of morality. Building upon the theory of human nature, Mencius establishes the "Great Man's", the "Junzi's" and the "Sage's" moral ideals, as well as his ideal vision of a harmonious society as moral goals. Mencius's moral theory forms a relatively comprehensive theoretical system, encompassing the theoretical foundation, ideal destinations and paths to realization. It has significant positive influences and inspirational significance for individuals in the modern world. In the context of the new era, it is still necessary to clarify the starting point, primary path and goals of moral development. Mencius's moral philosophy provides valuable insights and guidance in this regard.

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