

# Study on the Role of Mencius' View of Justice and Interest in Cultivating the Bottom-Line Thinking Ability of College Students in the New Era\*

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**Abstract**—The basic spirit of Mencius' view of justice and interest is the same as that of Confucius' view of justice and interest, which represents the Pre-Qin Confucians' philosophy of valuing justice over interest. However, Mencius emphasizes people's interest more than Confucius in the debate of justice and interest. He believed that as long as the ruler could implement benevolent government and protect the interest of people, the people would keep benevolent and righteous, and the country would be prosperous and peaceful. Benevolence and righteousness are the common moral standards of officials and people, and also the moral bottom line of all members of society. The moral bottom-line thinking and the bottom-line thinking ability are increasingly prominent for the construction of social order. This paper focuses on the study of Mencius' view of justice and interest on the cultivation of the bottom-line thinking ability of college students in the new era.

**Keywords**—Mencius; view of justice and interest; college students; bottom-line thinking ability

## I. INTRODUCTION

In December 2012, General Secretary Xi Jinping's speech at the central economic work conference stressed: "it is important to be good at using the bottom-line thinking method, prepare everything from bad points, strive for the best results, be prepared for bad days, keep calm in trouble, and firmly grasp the initiative." General Secretary Xi's view of bottom-line thinking is rich in dialectics, that is, no matter in any field, at any time, as long as people keep the bottom line, give full play to people's subjective initiative and grasp the main contradictions of things, people can grasp the

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development direction of things. It can also be understood that if everyone can keep the bottom line, have the bottom-line thinking ability, and work hard to achieve the best results. Now that socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, it is needed to firmly "four self-confidence", especially "cultural self-confidence", which is the most basic, deepest and lasting force for the development of the Chinese nation. "Cultural self-confidence" requires the use of the bottom-line thinking method in the cultural field, especially in the moral field. It is more important to cultivate the bottom-line thinking ability of social members. This paper will study the current characteristics of the bottom-line thinking method and ability of college students in the field of morality, find out its shortcomings, and then find the theoretical basis from the traditional Chinese philosophy of Mencius, and finally put forward the bottom-line thinking method and the way to cultivate the ability of college students in the new era.

## II. THE CONNOTATION OF THE BOTTOM-LINE THINKING METHOD IN MENCIUS' VIEW OF JUSTICE AND INTEREST

The basic spirit of Mencius in the debate of justice and interest is inherited from Confucius' view of justice and interest, which generally emphasizes justice over interest. Mencius' view of justice and interest surpasses Confucius in many aspects, such as attaching importance to the people's interests, the choice of justice over interest, sacrificing one's life for righteousness and the way to realize the people's interests, all of which show its unique view of justice and interest.

### A. "Justice" (Including Benevolence and Righteousness), Taking Precedence over "Interest", and "People's Interest", the Target Bottom Line of Official Interest

Mencius' view of justice and interest is "attaching importance to benevolence and righteousness" and "neglecting utility". For example, the beginning of Mencius

records the dialogue between Mencius and King Hui of Liang on "interest": "your majesty, why do you stress interest when you speak? Just emphasize benevolence and righteousness. You assumed, 'how can it benefit my power?' The officials also said, 'what's good for my interest?' The ordinary scholars and even the common people also said, 'how can I benefit myself?' In this way, the country will be in danger if people pursue their own interests. However, if justice is ignored and self-interest is valued, the officials will never be satisfied if they do not take away the property of the monarch. People who are benevolent will not do things that do not support their parents. Similarly, official who are benevolent will not do things that harm the monarch. So, your majesty, it is better to stress benevolence and righteousness than interest" [1] This dialogue can be regarded as Mencius' idea that justice comes first and then interest, or even not speaking of interest, and that interest is an obstacle to justice. The king, the officials, the scholars and the common people all must put justice first and try to not to pursue interest. However, after reading the whole work of Mencius, it is known that Mencius did not never pay attention to profits, but "does not seek interest, but benefits come, which is Mencius' tenet of benevolence and justice" [2] Mencius was not bothered to talk about benevolence and righteousness with the rulers such as King Hui of Liang. In essence, it is to maintain the social order and stability, and there will be no such behaviors as "killing the monarch by breaking the law", which guarantees the official benefits to some extent.

Mencius was limited by the background of the class era, so his starting point of his political proposition was to maintain the official interest. However, he studied from the objective laws of social production and other aspects, and he had to admit the fact that ensuring the people's interest is the premise of obtaining the official interest, if the people's interest is not guaranteed; the official interest will not exist. Therefore, Mencius stressed that "the people are the most important, the gods of earth and grain are the second important, and the role of the monarch is the least. When one is accredited by people, he is then fit to be a king; when one is accredited by the king, he then becomes a lord; when one is accredited by the lord, he then becomes a minister." [3] It is the reason that keeping the people's interests can get the people's support. Although this simple people-oriented thought did not reach the height of Marxist historical materialism theory, Mencius' political thought of people's livelihood was precious under the conditions of that time.

Mencius not only attached great importance to people's livelihood and advocated people's interests, but also planned a specific plan to realize people's interests: "in a five-mu house garden, mulberry trees can be planted, so people over 50 can wear silk and cotton clothes. Do not miss the breeding period of domestic animals such as chickens, dogs and pigs, so people over 70 can have meat to eat. Do not hinder the production of a family with 100 mu of arable land, so a family of several people can eat their fill. Set up local education and teach them the principle of filial piety to their parents and respect for their elder brothers, so the white haired old people don't need to walk on the road with heavy

things on their heads and shoulders. People over seventy years old have clothes to wear and meat to eat. The common people are not hungry or frozen. There will never be anything like this that will not bring the heart of people back to them." [4] From the aspects of production, education and social ethical order, Mencius gave advice to King Hui of Liang, reminding him that only by protecting the property of the people, implementing benevolent government and ensuring the premise of people's interests can there be official interests.

*B. "Four Excellent Virtues from the Heart", the Source of Benevolence and Righteousness, and "Moral Character from the Heart of Sympathy for Others", the Bottom Line of Citizens' Moral Requirements*

In Mencius' view of justice and interest, benevolence and righteousness have always been in the priority. In the dialogue between Mencius and King Xuan of Qi, King Hui of Liang and others, Yao, Shun and Tang Wu must be mentioned, which is based on Mencius' system of benevolence inherited from Confucius. Mencius had a higher level of understanding of the interpretation of benevolence and righteousness, forming his unique theory of "the heart of four seeds", thus enriching his theory of "good nature". The core point of Mencius's "the heart of four seeds" is: "the heart of sympathy is the seed of benevolence; the heart of shame is the seed of righteousness; the heart of concession is the seed of propriety; the heart of distinguishing right from wrong is the seed of wisdom; people have these four kinds of seeds, just like he has four limbs." [5] Compassion is "the psychology of compassion for others", that is, the conscience and the best in human heart. It determines that the moral choice of the moral subject must "abandon evil to good", so it is "the start of benevolence". Anyone who sees "a child falling into a well" can rescue with a helping hand. Righteousness is the moral judgment of moral subject in moral practice. As long as people can stick to the "the seed of righteousness", they can accurately distinguish right from wrong and know shame and evil.

Confucius believed that human's "the heart of four seeds" is only the kindling of human's heart, which needs to continuously "keep goodness and adhere to self-cultivation" to ignite and expand. "All those who have these four kinds of sprouts, if they can expand them, will be like a fire just burning and a spring just pouring out. If they can expand these, they can stabilize the world. If they can't expand them, they can't even be filial to their parents." [6] Everyone is born with the "the heart of four seeds". It is the source of benevolence and righteousness. It is only a potential. This potential source of benevolence and righteousness needs to be expanded by moral practitioners day after day. Only by cultivating and practicing "the heart of four seeds", can people achieve real goodness. It can be seen that Mencius' theory of "the heart of four seeds" is to explain the origin of benevolence, righteousness, propriety and wisdom from the perspective of moral practice.

Compassion is the core of "the heart of four seeds". Mencius believed that "compassion" is "the start of benevolence", which is the first moral law in people's heart,

instructing us to abandon evil and turn to good, which is the most basic requirement of citizens' morality, and also the moral bottom line. If everyone makes good use of this moral bottom line, the social ethical order will be in order, and the ruler can "rule the world in the palm of his hand". It can be seen from Mencius' "the theory of four seeds" that everyone has "compassion", and "compassion" is only the bottom line of potential. In order to achieve the highest goal, it needs to be expanded and filled day after day, so that everyone can truly know the good and do well, so as to "stabilize the world" and maintain social stability.

*C. Benevolent Government, the Best Way to Combine Justice with Interest, and Also the Target Bottom Line of the Ruling Method of Rulers as Officials*

Although Mencius' view of justice and interest stresses justice over interest, Confucianism of Confucius and Mencius essentially stands on the position of ruler to safeguard the interests of the upper class of the society, such as the king and officials. Confucianism itself is a philosophy of entering the world, and advocating the king's way is to achieve hegemony. Mencius used the art of soft benevolent government to combine justice and interest. Mencius not only built a sound social moral system, but also achieved the double harvest of the people's interest and the official's interest.

Mencius' benevolent government is the concrete practice of Confucius' Benevolence Theory in the field of social politics. Benevolent government is a kind of politics that sympathizes with the common people. It originates from the "good heart" of anyone who has destiny. It is easy to implement the politics of sympathizing with others by means of sympathizing with others" [7] Starting from benevolence, the ruler expanded it to the political field, and combined with the positive and negative experience of ruling history, such as Yao, Shun, Shang Tang, etc., to achieve that "if there are princes who practice the benevolent politics like King Wen of Zhou, at most seven years, they will be able to control the political power of the world." [8] It can be seen that the implementation of King Wen's benevolent government of Zhou Dynasty can not only gain the hearts of the people, make the people simple, live and work in peace, but also build a good social moral order. The people develop production in the moral education of benevolence, and the scholar bureaucrats maintain a noble spirit in benevolence.

It is believed that in Mencius' moral system, no matter the emphasis on justice rather than interest, or the high-level "in order to achieve the goal of benevolence and righteousness at the cost of one's life", these moral goals require the basic moral quality of benevolence. The basic requirements of benevolent government and the bottom-line thinking ability of the ruling way are that the rulers have good thoughts, rule the country by virtue, and "get happiness together" with the people. As long as the rulers keep the bottom line of "benevolent government" and try their best to "make the common people have certain industries" and "make efforts to run the education cause", then such governance is Mencius' ideal model of government.

*D. "To Achieve the Goal of Governing the Country by Strengthening the Cultivation of the Mind", the Highest Level of Keeping Benevolence and Righteousness, and the Bottom Line of the Cultivation of the Mind of Citizens*

"Inner sage and outer king" is not only Mencius' basic requirement for the cultivation of the mind and character of the scholar officials, but also the bottom line of the ruler's moral cultivation, and also reflects Mencius' view of justice and interest from another perspective. The purpose of "inner sage" is to keep benevolence, and "outer king" is to keep righteousness, so as to realize the combination of justice and interest.

Mencius believed that the ruler with benevolent government can be the king of the world, with the rule of virtue can achieve its hegemony. To achieve such a political goal, the ruler of the personal character cultivation is highly required. The most basic requirement of the ruler is to keep benevolence and righteousness, and to achieve "self-cultivation" with benevolence and righteousness. The specific method of "keeping the spirit in heart" is to keep the noble spirit. "That kind of spirit is the greatest and strongest. Cultivate it with justice, and without any harm, it will be full of everywhere. That kind of Qi must be combined with righteousness and Tao; without it, there will be no strength. That kind of Qi is produced by the frequent accumulation of justice, not by accidental just acts. As long as you do something you are ashamed of, that Qi will weaken." [9] Noble spirit is matched with righteousness, and "accumulating justice" is to keep righteousness.

It is believed that Mencius' goal of cultivation of inner sage and outer king should be further expanded to the requirements of every member of society, except as the rulers and scholar officials. Although Mencius did not mention the view that "everyone is Yao and Shun", he believed that "Shun was born in a peasant family" and that any sage grew up from an ordinary family. As long as anyone can keep his inner "conscience and ability" good to the fullest, his mind will naturally be improved and perfected. As long as anyone can achieve "inner sage", expand the inner innate "good heart" and keep the moral bottom line, he can achieve Confucius style by "engaging in activities within the moral framework" in the external practice, achieve high-level moral self-discipline in the specific social practice, and realize self outer king.

**III. ENLIGHTENMENT OF MENCIUS' CONCEPT OF JUSTICE AND INTEREST ON THE CULTIVATION OF THE BOTTOM-LINE THINKING ABILITY OF THE NEW GENERATION OF COLLEGE STUDENTS**

Although Mencius's concept of justice and interest came from the traditional agricultural society in China, its purpose is to safeguard the management and stability of the rulers on agricultural production and life. However, the bottom-line thinking method contained in Mencius's justice and interest view is the essence of his ideological theory, which has some enlightenment for the cultivation of modern moral culture and the cultivation of dialectical thinking ability. College

students are a special group. The bottom-line thinking ability, especially the moral bottom-line thinking ability, is in a critical period. College students have a certain bottom-line thinking ability, but there is a large plastic space between the developed and the undeveloped. As moral educators in colleges and universities, they can strive to improve and mature their bottom-line thinking methods and abilities from all aspects.

*A. The Value Rationality of Bottom-line Thinking Needs to Be Emphasized in the Management System of College Students*

It is the most basic value orientation rationality of the university system that the original intention of making various management systems is to safeguard the interests of students on the premise of fairness and justice, so that all the work of the university can be carried out orderly. Fairness and justice are the concentrated embodiment of benevolence in Mencius' view of justice and interest. When Mencius chose between justice and interest, he could keep the bottom line of justice at the cost of losing his life. However, in reality, most colleges and universities violate their value rationality in the process of formulating and implementing the system, such as the lack of system, unfair system, not student-oriented system, which are common now, and even many system designs themselves violate the moral bottom line requirements of fairness and justice. For example, many colleges and universities in the design of various scholarships and other incentive systems require the necessary qualifications to serve as student cadres. If they do not meet the requirements, it means that they are not related to various scholarships. So many students in order to achieve this condition, using various means, even at the expense of breaking the bottom line to obtain the corresponding qualifications to achieve the goal.

Colleges and universities attach importance to the bottom-line thinking in the top-level management system design, which plays an extremely important role in the daily management of students and the cultivation of students' bottom-line thinking ability. First of all, the ethical connotation of fairness and justice contained in various systems of the university is the basis and bottom line for the daily management of college students. Once the system loses the rationality of value tendency such as fairness and justice, the students often can't hold the bottom line, and the no bottom line behavior that violates the rules in order to achieve private interests will appear frequently. Moreover, in the implementation and management of the university system students cannot be treated equally, often policies are changed day by day, etc., which is one of the reasons for the lack of bottom-line thinking of students. In terms of management system, if colleges and universities operate according to the law of the jungle, the behavior of the strong will have no bottom line, and the weak will have to lose the bottom line because of their own survival. Therefore, if colleges and universities realize the value rationality of fairness and justice at the management system, the instrumental rationality of cultivating students' bottom-line thinking is also available.

*B. Improving the System of Moral Education Mechanism in Colleges and Universities to Make College Students Abide by the Moral Bottom Line*

Moral education mechanism such as ideological and political education is the direct way to cultivate the bottom-line thinking of college students. Generally speaking, the moral education system in colleges and universities generally includes the student Party committee, daily work management of class counselors, ideological and political theory courses and other parts. Although these mechanisms have different responsibilities, they have the same goal and purpose. That is to cultivate students with both ability and morality. Moral perfection and personality perfection are the basic qualities of college students in the new era.

But nowadays, there are many problems in the system of moral education mechanism in many universities. For example, in various systems of recruiting and developing student party members by Student Party branches in colleges and universities, they are too formalized, lack of moral measurement standards; the team of college counselors is of varying quality; the academic principle of ideological and political theory courses is not strong, which leads to the decline of persuasion on students, and ultimately the decrease of students' moral identity. The existence of these problems may make students lose the ability of moral judgment, unable to distinguish right from wrong, and ultimately make students lose the moral bottom line in daily life. For example, some female college students buy high-end cosmetics and other items by "nude loan".

Colleges and universities need to improve the moral education mechanism system from multiple perspectives, including moral education approaches, moral education contents, moral education methods, etc. Through a comprehensive moral education system, college students in material diversity can have a complete moral judgment and aesthetic ability. When college students have a high degree of moral self-discipline and strive to meet the requirements of the moral standards advocated by Mencius, they should always use the moral platform of benevolence, righteousness, propriety and wisdom to measure their own behavior standards, so that they can become people with moral bottom line.

*C. Cultivating the Awe of Students with Excellent Teachers*

In the education and teaching system, the main source of students' awe is teachers. Teachers are to preach, impart knowledge and dispel doubts. Although college students have reached adulthood, their mental development has not been completely set, and sometimes they lack the ability to distinguish right from wrong. They also need to be guided by moral models to choose the right way of behavior, otherwise they will go astray.

In the daily life of college students, teachers are the only ones who can influence them with knowledge and personality charm. The teachers with knowledge and good quality are the vane for the university students to build and shape their moral edifice, and also the absolute moral law in their hearts, which is the content source for the students to

"keep their heart and cultivate their nature". However, in reality, the moral quality of many college teachers is not good, such as the calligraphy teacher of Jiangxi Ganzhou Normal University using the privileges of teacher to master students' academic resources, etc., and maintaining an improper relationship with a number of female students. Teachers' moral level is not proper, and they make behaviors without bottom line such as destroying social rules. This makes college students question the moral status of teachers as a whole and lose their awe to teachers. In some areas of the school, college students have no fear of teachers, and the consequences will be more serious than expected. For example, in the future, students may behave unjustly in order to achieve their own interests in work and life.

#### *D. Further Strengthening the Cultivation of Dialectical Thinking Ability of College Students*

The bottom-line thinking contains rich dialectics. The bottom line is the principle and boundary, which is the critical point of the development of things. At any time, as long as one knows the bottom line of things, one can grasp the critical point of things, correctly grasp the degree of things, and one can keep principles and abide by rules. If people deal with things actively within the critical point of things development, they can judge risks, take precautions, grasp the development direction of things, and turn passive into active.

The premise of cultivating the bottom-line thinking of college students is to study and cultivate their dialectical thinking ability. Dialectical thinking ability is the application of materialist dialectics in thinking. It refers to the ability to analyze contradictions, grasp key points, find key points and have an insight into the law of development of things from the relationship of things. Although the dialectical thinking in Mencius's view of justice and interest is not as good as that in *The Book of Changes* of Lao-tze and Zhuang-tze, it contains rich dialectical thinking methods when it expounds the principles of benevolence and righteousness, "the benevolent can get more help, while the brutal lose the support of people" (Those who stand on the side of benevolence and righteousness will get the people's heart and help, and those who violate the morality will fall into an isolated situation), and the principle of heart and nature. College students can understand and practice the essence of the theory of Mencius' justice and interest, and then consciously use dialectical thinking to analyze problems and solve problems, so the bottom-line thinking ability of college students can be formed and developed.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The bottom-line thinking ability is one of the thinking abilities of college students in the new era. It is also one of the contents of cultural self-confidence advocated by Comrade Xi Jinping as the core of the Party Central Committee that the essence of the Chinese nation's traditional culture is extracted and its reference to real social life is realized. Mencius' concept of justice and interest contains many bottom-line thinking methods. As a teacher of ideological and political theory in colleges and universities,

the author combines the bottom-line thinking theory of Mencius' concept of justice and interest with the specific practical characteristics of contemporary college students, and tries to find out the methods to cultivate the bottom-line thinking ability of college students, so as to offer suggestions for the construction of socialist moral culture with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

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