

## Chapter II

### THE WORLD AND LIFE OF THE PHILOSOPHERS

Mencius belongs to the Classical Era before the century while Imam Al-Ghazzali was a late 11<sup>th</sup> century man. However, it is on the ground of comparing one of the most profound and original philosophical thoughts in Islam and Chinese Civilization respectively on the concept of perfect man that this pair has been chosen. This chapter traces the lives of Al-Ghazzali and Mencius in their respective historical background. The social and political climax as well as the atmosphere of original thoughts in the respective era when Al-Ghazzali and Mencius lived will be unfolded.

#### 2.1 Al-Ghazzali's World and Life

Al-Ghazzali (1058-1111AD) was a serious thinker who once embraced the traditional Islamic studies such as *Jurisprudence (Fiqh)* and *principles of Islamic Jurisprudence (Usul al-Fiqh)*, later moved on to *Sufism* until the end of his life. It was said too that he has spend some serious effort in re-studying the *Traditions (Hadith)* of prophet Muhammad in his later years of public lecturing. A brief study of the historical circumstances and the social context in which Al-Ghazzali lived in will be necessary for one to understand his intellectual development and philosophical thoughts.

##### 2.1.1 From the Pre-Ghazzalian Era to the time of Al-Ghazzali

Two important development during the turn of the 11<sup>th</sup> c. AD were the rise of different powers pro or against the Muslim Caliphate and the flourish of various

thoughts especially the pantheistic Sufism. Such historical background did leave an impact on Al-Ghazzali's life and intellectual development.

The Caliphs who ruled during the life of Al-Ghazzali were Al-Qaim Bi-Amrillah (1074AD) followed by his grandson, Al-Muqtadi Bi Amrillh (1094AD). Al-Muqtadi Bi-Amrillah was followed by his son the Caliph Al-Mustazhir Billah (1117AD).<sup>10</sup> The central caliphate of the era was, however, disintegrated and rather powerless as it was generally the period of Turkish tutelage. The Turks became the holders of high offices in the State. The Caliphs thus turned out to be mere puppets in the hands of the Turkish guards. When it was so, many independent and semi-independent state sprung simultaneously.

In fact, by the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> c. AD, the authority of the Caliph had shrunk very much and it hardly extended beyond Baghdad. The Muslim Empire was generally divided under various powers i.e. the Buwayhids (932-1055AD), the Samanids in Khurasan (874-969AD), the Hamdamids in Syria (924-1003AD), the Umayyads in Spain (756-1030AD), the Fatimids in Egypt (969-1171AD) and the Ghaznawids (962-1187AD) in Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup>

The Buwayhids entered Baghdad in 945AD and were welcomed by the locals for they added powers to the resistance party towards the Turks. These Buwayhids, however, were Shias and treated the Sunni Caliphs with little respect. The Caliphs had

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<sup>10</sup> Mustafa, Abu-Sway, *Al-Ghazzaliyy: A Study in Islamic Epistemology* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1996) p. 2. A record of the presence of Al-Ghazzali at the inauguration ceremony of Al-Mustazhir Billah indicates Al-Ghazzali's support of the Caliph. Al-Ghazzali also wrote a book after the name of the Caliph.

<sup>11</sup> Umaruddin, M., *The Ethical Philosophy of Al-Ghazzali* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1991) p. 13.

to submit to the hands of Buwayhids who gave rooms to the revival of intellectual freedom and heresies. The presence of the Buwayhids thus changed the character of the Abbasid Caliphate.<sup>12</sup>

In other parts of the Empire, the Samnides in Khurasan for example, grew formidable. Al-Farabi, Al-Biruni, Ibn Sina and other scientist-philosophers emerged under their patronage. Not long after, the Fatimids in Egypt rose as the new power and they established a great university at Cairo, where all streams of heresies were taught. At the same time, the Ismailian propagandists who founded the Fatimid Caliphate managed to influence thousands of Muslim to turn heretical and skeptical.

The Ghaznawids (962-1186AD) in Afghanistan were Turks and Orthodox Sunni. When Mahmud reign in AD 1031, the Sunni faith was encouraged while the Ismailian and philosophical thoughts were suppressed. In addition, Persian replaced Arabic as the State language and Persian literature prevailed. In the era, the Muslim World still looked upon the Caliphate with reverence with the exception of the Umayyads of Spain and the Fatimids. The Caliphs of Baghdad recognised all powers that declared an independent state of their own that ruled over the Muslims.<sup>13</sup>

In 1055AD, Tugril Beg, the Seljuq expanded his power to Baghdad and freed the Caliph from the Buwayhids. He countered the power of the Fatimids and recovered Aleppo together with the holy cities of Mecca and Madina. His successors Alp-Arsian (who ruled between 1063-1072AD) and Malik Shah (who ruled between 1072-1092AD) conquered Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine to the remotest corner of

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

Transoxiana. The reign of Malik Shah is recognized as the most glorious days of the Muslim world.<sup>14</sup>

The Seljuqs were Sunnis and they contributed an era of unity and peace to the Islamic civilizations. The era when the Seljuqs reigned was the golden age of Islam. Nizam al-Mulk, a talented minister of Malik Shah engineered the blooming of mosques, colleges, universities, hospitals and other charitable institutions. Education became universal and in the name of Malik Shah, the foundation of the Nizamiya universities in Baghdad and other prominent centres was founded. Baghdad continued to be the centre of the Muslim world till the death of Malik Shah when civil wars broke out and the Hulagu put an end to the solidarity of the Muslim people in 1258AD.<sup>15</sup>

The rise of the different powers caused internal dissension within the Muslim world. By the early of the 12<sup>th</sup> c., external forces were gathering strength to threaten the world where Al-Ghazzali was. The Seljuqs had conquered Asia Minor, Syria and Palestine when Al-Ghazzali was eighteen years of age. In 1075AD, the Seljuqs increased the rate of the Christian pilgrim tax and irritated the Christians. When al-Ghazzali was engaged in writing his *Ihya* in Jerusalem, the city was ruled by the Crusaders.<sup>16</sup> It was altogether a time of clashes of armed powers and woes. It gave Al-Ghazzali further push to attempt in his writings to promote on ways that would save mankind and ensure happiness.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 19-20.

In the realm of beliefs and thoughts, the tradition of Islam was under great challenge from various forms of thinking in the era. In the pre-Ghazzalian era, there was already tendency to compile epitomes and encyclopedias. Ibn Sina summed up the results of Greek philosophy and medicine; Ibn Miskawah summarized research materials on ethics, etc. Learning of all the ages, both Islamic and non-Islamic was epitomized.

The effort expedited learning and stimulated works of original thoughts. The study of Greek philosophy and science gradually earned its place even among Muslim researchers. There were attempts of incorporating these thoughts into Islam <sup>17</sup> while some had apparently been carried away. Skepticism crept into the society. Jurists, traditionalists, *Sufis*, scholastic theologians were not working on the same ground ever when the faith was in concerned. Before Al-Ghazzali and even in his own days, the different sects of Islam often came to crash heads among themselves. Some theologians persecuted al-Ghazzali to the extent that his books were burnt in Spain.

In the social context, religious life was ambiguous. There was a complete severance took place between religion and morality. Religion watered down to mere rituals and formal practices. Their ethical significance was belittled and not put in practice. Al-Ghazzali addressed the many errors of the time in his many writings, e.g. *Tahafut*, *Munqidh*, *Tafriqa*, *Mizan*, etc. He tried to expose the false pretensions of different schools of thoughts as well as advocating practical guide to the perfection of

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<sup>17</sup> The sufi writers, for example, became active and attempted to assimilate Sufism into Islam. One of the sufist groups advocated formal ascetism practices that were derived from Islam. The other group was the pantheistic advocators, believing in the purification of human heart as the means to their ends. Masters like Al-Kalabadhi (995AD), Abu Talib al-Makhi (996AD) and Al-Qushayri (1073AD) were forerunners of Al-Ghazzali who laid down the principles of moderate form of

humanity. Despite his teaching of the arguable mystical practices, his call for man to return to the way of Islam was clarion and significant. Hypocrisy, searches for power, wealth or position were the common faults of the age, which a person of great conscience like Al-Ghazzali would preach against.

### 2.1.2 The Life of Al-Ghazzali (1058-1111AD)

Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazzali was born at Tus in Persia in 1058AD. His father died when he was quite young, but the guardian saw to it that he would be deprived of a good education. Al-Ghazzali thus was put under a *Sufi* guardian during his young age in order to receive spiritual training. At this period of time, he was already well versed with the *Quran* and *Traditions* as well as being exposed to various stories of the saints and their spiritual experiences.<sup>18</sup>

The learning process was followed by a formal study of jurisprudence in his native town of Tus under Ahmad ar-Radhkawi, and then at Jurjan under Abu Nasr al-Isma'ili.<sup>19</sup> In 1077AD, Al-Ghazzali went to Nishapur and then spent some years of study under the greatest theologian of the age, al-Juwayni, Imam al-Haramayn at the Nizamiyya College at Nishapur. Al-Ghazzali learned and excelled in the *Shafite Jurisprudence*, *Comparative Jurisprudence (Ilm al-Khilaf)*, *Fundamentals of Jurisprudence (Usul al-Fiqh)*, *Fundamentals of Religion (Usul al-Din)*, *Logic* and *Philosophy*. After the death of Al-Juwayhi, al-Ghazzali went to visit vizier Nizam al-Mulk, whose court was a meeting place of scholars. The college noted al-Ghazzali's

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Sufism. Refer to Umaruddin, M., *The Ethical Philosophy of Al-Ghazzali* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1991) p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> Quesem, Muhammad Abul, *The Ethics of Al-Ghazzali: A Composite Ehtics in Islam* (Petaling Jaya: Muhammad Abul Quesem, 1975) p. 16.

outstanding gifts in the academics and the vizier appointed him as a professor at the university in Baghdad. Hence, during the years between 1091-1095AD, Al-Ghazzali had already attained one of the most distinguished positions in the academic world of his day.<sup>20</sup>

While Al-Ghazzali was a disciple of the Imam al-Haramayn, he developed the habit of examining theological questions and controversies. He picked up the skeptical tendency under such training. At the same time, Al-Ghazzali was greatly impressed by his teacher who was a man of great depth of character.<sup>21</sup> Such seriousness in the search of true knowledge coupled with the acquiring of authentic belief brought about a "spiritual crisis" which ended Al-Ghazzali's career at the Nizamiyyah of Baghdad all of a sudden.

In fact, the change was unexpected. At the Nizamiyyah, hundreds of students used to learn under Al-Ghazzali. Scholars like Ibu Aqil and Abu Al-Khattab were among the heads of the *Hanbalite School of Jurisprudence* who attended Al-Ghazzali's lectures and incorporated his teachings into their writings.<sup>22</sup> In addition, Al-Ghazzali had apparently advanced all the others in investigating the various kinds of knowledge. In his quest of sure knowledge, he once engaged in the study of *Theology*, followed by *Philosophy*, then *Talim* and *Sufism*. Being a man well trained in jurisprudence, Al-Ghazzali was someone who had a great interest in finding the evidences and proofs to any truth-claiming thoughts. He believed that the truth must

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Montgomery W. Watt, *The Faith And Practice of Al-Ghazali* (London: George Allen And Unwin Ltd., 1953) p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> Quesem, Muhammad Abul, *The Ethics of Al-Ghazzali: A Composite Ehtics in Islam* (Petalang Jaya: Muhammad Abul Quesem, 1975) p. 17.

have lied with one of the four disciplines of *Theology*, *Philosophy*, *Ta'lim* and *Sufism*. He studied them with extreme attentiveness and earnestness.

His study on the dogmatic theology proved a dissatisfactory experience. He had no problem of accepting the doctrines proposed but was very upset with the methodology employed by the theologians of the time. He decided to move on to philosophy.

It took him less than two years to master the philosophy of his day. After having investigated the various schools of philosophy, he categorized them into three divisions, namely the materialist (*dahwiyyun*), the naturalist (*tabiyyun*) and the theists (*ilahiyun*). The theists were the modern philosophers including Socrates, Plato and Aristotle whom Al-Ghazzali was more impressed with. However, Al-Ghazzali did not find an answer in all the three groups of philosophical groups for none of them acknowledged the authenticity of God.

Al-Ghazzali then ventured into the learning of *Talim* or authoritative instructions by the Ismalites and Batinites. The Talimites held that truth is to be attained not by reason but by accepting the pronouncements of the infallible Imam. To his disappointment, the Talimites were rather inconsistent in logic and did not offer much insight beyond their accustomed formulae.

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<sup>22</sup> Mustafa, Abu-Sway, *Al-Ghazzaliyy: A Study in Islamic Epistemology* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1996) p. 19



Finally, Al-Ghazzali turned to the way of mysticism, being convinced that the mystics were among people who were more akin to the truth.<sup>23</sup> The years between 1095AD to 1106AD were regarded as Al-Ghazzali's years of seclusion. He left his teaching career at the Nizamiyyah at Baghdad and went through a long journey of seclusion until his return to public teaching again at the Nizamiyyah of Nishapur.

The account of his journey was recorded in his own writing, the *Deliverance From Error*. After leaving Baghdad, he visited a number of cities, namely Damascus, Jerusalem, Hebron, Makkah and Madinah before returning to his hometown, Tus. In many places, he paid visits to the tombs of the saints and prophets for it was the practices of a *Sufi* to do so in order to contemplate on the temporal and limited nature of this life.<sup>24</sup>

During the period of seclusion, he produced altogether twenty eight books, letters and treatises. Of the many books that he wrote during this period, only about seven of them related directly to his development in the theory of knowledge. They are *Ihya Ulum al-Din* (*The Revival of Islamic Sciences*), *Al-Maqsad al-Asna fi Sharh Asma Allah al-Husna*, *Bidayat Al-Hidayah* (*The Beginning of Guidance*), *Jawahir al-Quran* and *Al-Qistas al-Mustaqim* (*The Just Balance*), *Al-Risalah al-Ladunniah* and *Mishkat al-Anwar* (*The Niche for Lights*). These books formed a consistent unified whole with his idea of "unveiling" (*kashf*) which forms the highest source of knowledge for *Sufism*.<sup>25</sup> During this period, the discipline and self-mortification as in *Sufism* was emphasized as the way to true knowledge.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

Having spent more than a decade in seclusion, Al-Ghazzali realized that his withdrawal from public life could not change the society that was straying away from the right way. He was contemplating of taking the role of a reformer of the Muslim nation (*ummah*). In 1106AD, he was convinced that he was to be the expected reformer (*mujaddid*) as foretold by a *Hadith* of the Prophet. Al-Ghazzali therefore decided to venture back to public life. His decision was supported by a prominent *Sufi* and was somewhat confirmed by a timely official request from vizier Fakhr al-Mulk inviting him to teach at the Nizamiyyah of Nishapur.<sup>26</sup> During these years, he produced four books. The books were: his autobiographic work *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* (*Deliverance from Error*); a ruling (*fatwa*) on divorce *Ghayat al-Ghawr fi Dirayat al-Dawr*, *Al-Mustasfa min Ilm al-Usul* (*The Chosen from the Science of the Fundamentals of Jurisprudence*); and a defense of the *Ihya* named as *Al-Imla' fi Ishkalat al-Ihya* (*The Dictation on the Problems of the Revival*).<sup>27</sup>

Interestingly, after spending four years serving in the teaching career, Al-Ghazzali chose to end his public life again. Apparently, the attitude towards *Sufism* remained strong within him until the end of his life. Hence, in 1110AD, he left the Nizamiyyah and returned to Tus to establish his own school. He built a lodge for the *Sufis* who were described as the people of the hearts (*ahl al-qulub*). During this period, he produced three books, namely *Al-Durrah al-Fakhirah fi Kashf Ulum al-Akhirah* (*The Precious Pearl in Unveiling the Sciences of the Hereafter*); *Iljam al-Awam an Ilm al-Kalam* (*Preventing the Common People from Engaging in the Science of Kalam*) and *Minhaj al-Abidin* (*The Course of the Worshippers*).

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 101-103.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

### 2.1.3 Al-Ghazzali's major contributions

Al-Ghazzali undoubtedly has considerable influence in the succeeding centuries. His study on man and moral perfection takes one to ponder upon one's relationship with God, the Creator and Sustainer of mankind. For him, the concept a perfect man certainly ties to one who knows God, obeys Him and behaves accordingly.

Ethics, for Al-Ghazzali, is both the religious differentiation between right and wrong as well the moral commitment in one's action. In *Ihya Ulum Al-Din*, Al-Ghazzali's central discussions relating to man's moral perfection are: that human nature is a mixture of goodness and of evils; that human nature is changeable; that the *Behavioral or Relational Knowledge (Ilm al-Muamala)* and the *Intuitive Knowledge (Ilm al-Mukasafha)* are equally important to complete one's knowledge; that *Ilm al-Muamala* takes root in the state of one's heart or, the "*Qalb*"; and that the educating of the "*Qalb*" is thus necessary for one's moral perfection. By laying down the central ideas as such, Al-Ghazzali has actually suggested that that human nature is not entirely adorable by nature but human nature is also changeable and thus perfectible.

Commenting on Imam Al-Ghazzali, Montgomery Watt said,<sup>28</sup>

"Al-Ghazali has sometimes been acclaimed in both East and West as the greatest Muslim after Muhammad, and he is by no means unworthy of that dignity. His greatness rests above all on two things: He was the leader in Islam's supreme encounter with Greek philosophy – that encounter from which Islamic theology emerged victorious and enriched, and in which Arabic Neoplatonism received a blow from which it did not recover. Secondly, he brought orthodoxy and mysticism into close contact; the orthodox theologians still went their own way, and so did the mystics, but the theologians became more ready to accept the mystics as respectable, while the mystics were more careful to remain within the bounds of orthodoxy.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 145-146.

<sup>28</sup> Montgomery, W. Watt, *The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., n.d.) pp 14-15.

Yet perhaps the greatest thing about al-Ghazali was his personality, and it may yet again be a source of inspiration. Islam is now wrestling with Western thought as it once wrestled with Greek philosophy, and is as much in need as it was then of a revival of the religious sciences. Deep study of al-Ghazali may suggest to Muslims steps to be taken if they are to deal successfully with the contemporary situation. Christians, too, now that the world is in a cultural melting-pot, must be prepared to learn from Islam, and are unlikely to find a more sympathetic guide than al-Ghazali."

Such was the comment that describes the weight and contributions of Imam Al-Ghazzali, the greatest Muslim theologian of the 11<sup>th</sup> AD!

## 2.2 Mencius' World and Life

Mencius lived in an era of which he described as "... *Sage-kings* cease to arise, the feudal lords give rein to their lusts and unemployed scholars indulge in unreasonable discussions." The social context and philosophical climax of the era has a definite influence on Mencius' intellectual development and philosophical thoughts. The discussion here will start from a brief description of the historical background of Ancient China during the Zhou dynasty,

The Zhou dynasty (1122-221BC) saw the full flowering to the ancient civilization in China. During this period, the empire was unified and the economy advanced with the introducing of iron to the bronze-dominated agricultural society. The Zhou kings whose chief deity was 'Heaven' (*huangtian shangdi*, 皇天上帝) called themselves 'Sons of Heaven'. The Zhou kings also believed that the Heaven mandated them to rule. Zhou dynasty lasted for nearly nine centuries.

The Early Zhou (1122-771BC) territory was divided into about 200 princely domains. Its political system was similar to the feudal system of Medieval Europe.

The Zhou people combined hunting and agriculture for a living. Ancestor worship was developed and the people prayed to numerous nature gods for good harvests. The Early Zhou were invaded in 711BC by a less cultured, more militaristic people from the northwest. The capital was moved east to Luoyang and thus formed the Later Zhou (771-221BC).

The Eastern Zhou consists of two period: firstly, the Period of Spring and Autumn (771-481BC) and, secondly, the Period of Warring States (481-221BC). During the Spring and Autumn period, the use of iron led to an increase in agricultural output, growth of the population and warfare among the states. By the end of the period, i.e. 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, the princely domains or nation-states shrunk to seven. It was not long after that some princes of the states started adopting the title of “kings” to themselves and stopped paying homage to the Zhou king.

### **2.2.1 The Period of the Warring States in Ancient China**

The period of the Warring States was indeed an era of upheaval and power struggles among the seven nation-states of Ancient China. The prolonged warfare left behind some long-range consequences. The king of Zhou lost control over the nation-states. The once unified empire fragmented. The principle of right government faded away and the social code of ethics once guarded under the feudal system collapsed. Perverse speaking and oppressive deeds became rife. There were even extreme incidences of ministers murdering their sovereigns and of sons killing their fathers!

In a situation like this, a new social group, namely the scholars (*Shi*) emerged. They were forerunners of the scholar-officials of the Chinese Empire, who became the most influential group in China after the Han dynasty (206BC – 220AD). The *Shi* worked as tutors to the children of feudal princes and as political advisers to various states governments. The most famous of these scholarly *Shi* was Confucius.

In fact, the realm of philosophical thoughts became extraordinarily colourful with the rise of these scholars. According to Sima Qian, there were “*hundred schools*” of learning under six main headings, namely the *Yin-yang Five-Element School*, the *Confucianists*, *Mohists*, *Logicians*, *Taoists* and *Legalists*.<sup>29</sup>

Confucius was the precedent of Mencius and other Confucianists, who had wandered to many states with his political ideals but found himself of no real service in the courts. He finally gave up his ambition to initiate reform in politics and returned to his homeland to start the career of training disciples and canonizing Chinese classical literature. Even though he seemed to be an ineffective political adviser in a disintegrating post-feudalistic society, he had become one of the most prominent figures in the Chinese Classical history – the Master or Great Educator of the Chinese. The Confucianists in the later dynasties, as said in the previous paragraph, succeeded in organizing the nation into a highly bureaucratic imperial regime.<sup>30</sup>

Confucius, together with followers like Mencius taught that the sovereigns had duties to satisfy the needs of their people. The Confucian philosophers also examined and advocated with dedication for the improvement of reciprocal relationship between

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<sup>29</sup> Levenson, Joseph and Franz Schurmann, *China: An Interpretative History: From the Beginnings to the Fall of Han* (London: University of California Press, 1969) p. 56.

men. The Confucian *Five Ethical Codes* laid out the appropriate relationships between the ruler-ruled, the father-son, the husband-wife, the elderly brother-the younger as well as that between friends. The study on man, especially on the exercise of moral cultivation was regularly taught. Generally, a progressive ordering of society was sought in a formula that says: "Rectifying one's heart so that the person will be cultivated; cultivating oneself so that the family will be regulated; regulating one's home so that the States will be properly governed; governing the States well so that the entire kingdom will enjoy tranquility and happiness." <sup>31</sup> They advocated that inner self-correction will bring about a harmonious soul and the consequent would be the ordering of the world and harmony for all. <sup>32</sup>

### **2.2.2 The Life of Mencius (372 –289BC)**

Mencius was a great thinker, political-scientist as well as educator. However, as James Legge rightly observed, the materials for a memoir of Mencius are very scanty, especially when it was to be compared to the historical accounts of Confucius! <sup>33</sup>

Mencius was born in Zhou, which was located in the province of Shandong of today's China. He was born in an aristocrat family whose power broke during the reign of Duke Ai (494-469BC) and from then on diminished into insignificance. The year of Mencius' birth was probably the fourth of the sovereign Lie (372BC). He lived to the age of eighty-four, died in the year 289BC, the 26<sup>th</sup> year of the Sovereign Nan. The first twenty three years of his life synchronized with the last twenty three of

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>31</sup> Refer to "*The Great Learning, Chapter 5*" in Legge, James, *The Chinese Classics Vol. 1* (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 1994) p 359.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp 50-51.

Plato's, Aristotle's, Zeno's, Epicurus' and Demosthenes' as well as other contemporaries of the West as well as in Ancient China.<sup>34</sup>

Mencius lost his father at an early age. His mother raised him single-handedly and took serious concern on Mencius' upbringing. It was widely believed and recorded that she shifted her residence three times to ensure the young Mencius was raised with decent neighbours. They first stayed near a cemetery. Mencius was attracted to the funeral processions. So he imitated the various scenes he witnessed at the tombs to amuse himself. On realizing that, Mencius' mother decided to move to a new dwelling place. The move was not very satisfying for the house was in adjacent to the market place. The little boy soon imitated the gesture of a hawker, vaunting his wares and bargaining with customers. Finally, the mother managed to move to a house where it was within vicinity of a public school. Since then, the child picked up politeness and good manners.

It was popularly said that Mencius was placed under the tutorship of Zi Si, the grandson of Confucius. Some scholar, arguing on the time gap between both, doubted whether Mencius ever met with Zi Si. They believed that Mencius was actually studying under a disciple of Zi Si. Whatever account it is, Mencius had apparently trained under the school of thoughts of Zi Si. He was well versed with *The Five Classics of Ancient China* especially with regards to the poetry and the history. Mencius once expressed his indebtedness to have learnt from an authentic Confucian instructor. He wrote in "*Lilou, Part 2, 22*" that, "Although I could not be a disciple of Confucius myself, I have endeavored to cultivate my character and knowledge by

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<sup>34</sup> Legge, James, *The Chinese Classics Vol. 2* (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 1994) p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 16



means of others who were.” He said in the early portion of the writing, “The influence of a sage-king terminates with the fifth generation. The influence of an mere sage does the same.” Thus, Mencius was very proud of having learnt of the Confucian thoughts by means of others who had been in direct communication with the Master, i.e. Confucius.

There was account that Mencius, as a concerned political-scientist attempted to serve as a political advisor in one of the many warring states. He traveled from the state of Qi to Song, and then to Teng, Wei, etc., but was not well accepted by the courts. Even his service under King Xuan of Qi was not memorable for the king did not take his political views seriously. Mencius then settled with himself to the academic endeavor of writing and teaching. He was commendable for his vast contribution in ethics and metaphysics.

### **2.2.3 Mencius’ Major Contributions**

The career of Mencius was quite similar to that of Confucius. Like Confucius he was a professional teacher. Like Confucius, he idolized the legendary *Sage-kings*. Like Confucius, he lived in a period of political struggles, moral chaos, and intellect conflicts. Like Confucius, he had have a sense of mission and for this reason traveled around for forty years (from about 354BC) to offer moral and political advice to rulers. Like Confucius, he had a chance to serve a little while as an official -- in the state of Qi during between 319-312BC. Like Confucius, he was eventually disappointed, and retired.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Chan, Wing-Tsit (trans. and compiled), *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969) p. 49.

Despite his possessed talents and virtue, that of a sage, Mencius could only teach but hold no power in the post-feudal society. With all his earnestness, he spent most of his life in learning, examining and expanding on the Confucian teachings. It is due to Mencius' literature that Confucian ethics is preserved and revered until today.

The greatest difference between Mencius and Confucius, however, is in the central theme of their doctrines. Basically, Mencius' teaching were derived from that of Confucius but Mencius had taken a big step forward from the central doctrine of the Master's. For example, Mencius had deepened the psychological and idealistic dimensions of the doctrine of Benevolence (*Ren*) to the doctrine of the Heart/Mind (*Xin*).

Yang Guishan, a Song Scholar, said that the great contribution of Mencius in his writings is to rectify men's heart. Mencius believes that attributes of benevolence, righteousness, propriety and knowledge dwell naturally within man's heart. He believes too that vices that grow due to the bad influence from the surrounding environment can be rectified. In the Great Learning, the rectifying of heart becomes the main concern of self-cultivation, the regulation of a family, the government of a state and the tranquilization of the empire.<sup>36</sup> Hence, when he shows how a prince should be served, he says, "Correct what is wrong in his mind. Once rectify the prince, and the kingdom will be settled."

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<sup>36</sup> Legge, James, "The Work of Mencius" in *The Chinese Classics Vol. 2* (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 1994) p. 42.

While Confucius only implied that human nature is perfectible, Mencius declared openly that man's nature is originally good. Moreover, he built his entire doctrine on this tenet. His logic goes as such <sup>37</sup> : Since man is originally good, that he possesses the innate knowledge of the good and the innate ability to do good; that if one develops his mind to the utmost, he can serve the 'heaven' and fulfill his destiny; that evil is not inborn but due to man's own failures and his inability to avoid evil external influences; that serious efforts must be made to recover our original nature; thus the end of learning is none other than to seek the lost mind!

This thesis on the goodness of the human nature distinguishes Mencius from a mere follower of Confucius. Zhu Xi commented him as such: "Mencius, when compared with Confucius, always appears to speak in too lofty a style, but when we hear him proclaiming the goodness of man's nature, and celebrating King Yao and King Shun, then we likewise perceive the solidity of his discourses." It is clear that Confucius only spoke of benevolence but Mencius emphasized on both benevolence and righteousness. Confucius spoke of the will and mind, but Mencius enlarged on the nourishment of the passion nature. <sup>38</sup>

Mencius' disciples were much fewer in number and of less distribution than those of Confucius. However, it was by the dedication of some of his first generation disciples such as Youchang Gou, Wan Zhang, Gongsun Zhou and Gongdu that his thoughts and writings were preserved until the contemporary period. Among the many followers of Mencius in the contemporary China were Wang Yangming (1472-1529AD) and Dai Zheng (1723-1777AD). Wang adopted Mencius' doctrine of

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<sup>37</sup> Chan, Wing-Tsit (trans. and compiled), *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969) p. 50.

innate knowledge as the backbone of his idealistic philosophy. Dai walked in the footsteps set by the Orthodox Confucianists that advocates that a perfect personality is possible and should be sought after.

## **2.2 The Philosophers versus the Social Problems of the era**

Both Al-Ghazzali and Mencius lived in an era void of peace but rich in ideas and philosophical thoughts. The Ghazzalian period was one that when the Muslims, under the leadership of some prominent Sufis, fought the war with the Crusades. The clash of civilization between the Muslim world with the West resulted in the birth of different schools of thoughts. Externally, the influx of Western philosophy, science and mathematics and all streams of heresies challenged the Muslim scholarship. Internally, there were divisions among the traditionalists and rationalists. Al-Ghazzali, though persecuted by some theologians of the time, was committed to the spirit of inquiry within him throughout his life span. His life was dramatic, with many different phases varied from being a public figure to a total seclusion to the regular fellowshiping with the other Sufis. He stood as a genuine seeker of truth and far distinguished from many disillusioned others in an age of heresies and false teachings.

Mencius lived during the period of Warring States when clashes among the seven nation-states of Ancient China were rampant. The code of ethics of the feudal system was challenged and the people went astray with their own life-styles. The clashes between different communities coupled with the unethical issues of the entire empire prepared a bed for the so-called "Hundred Schools of Philosophers" .

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p 41.

Mencius was then the *Second Sage* after Confucius, widely acknowledged as the particular heir to Confucius' doctrine and its last transmitter. He taught that every man is capable of attaining sage-hood. He believed that the unrighteous monarchs would lose the mandate of Heaven for not observing the principle of humane government. His thoughts and writings were distinct in an age of general moral deterioration.

Briefly, the world of both Al-Ghazzali and Mencius were void of tranquility. However, both Al-Ghazzali and Mencius took up the role of being thinkers and advocates in their respective social context. Their contributions are commendable until today, among others is the advocacy that human beings are perfectible that will be given full attention in this dissertation.