

Fictitious Extension of Familial Attitude in Mencius (孟子)

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The Confucian tradition is well known for what can be called “the familial extension,” which aims to integrate the entire society on the basis of the principle applied initially to family members. The people in the culture still regard this familial extension as an efficient way to cultivate social norms in society where family is still the most basic social unit. In spite of the merit, demerits of the familial extension are also often underscored. The Confucian tradition is occasionally criticized as the main cause of undemocratic aspects of East Asian societies. For instance, it is often pointed out that the people within the influence of the tradition tend to apply the way one forms private relations with immediate family members to establishing relations in the public sphere. This paper examines why the familial extension in the Confucian tradition has both of the merits and demerits simultaneously. Especially, I examine in what aspect of the familial extension inevitably produces the demerits. More particularly, I look at whether the problematic tendency mentioned above, namely the extension of private relations in the public domain, is actually rooted in the original thought of Mencius (孟子).