

International Workshop “Revisiting Chinese Philosophy: From the Perspectives of Political Philosophy”

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Xunzi on Rulership: King, Hegemon, and the Way of a Lord

This paper articulates Xunzi’s ideal of good rulership and good government. Contrary to his conventional image as Mencius’s archrival, Xunzi championed the Kingly Way over all other forms of government, including the Way of the Hegemon, and he generally endorsed the Mencian ideal of humane government, central to which is the protection of the well-being of the people. What sets Xunzi apart from Mencius is his affirmation of rulership, not so much in terms of a government motivated by the ruler’s humane heart-mind but from a more general theoretical perspective of “the way of a lord” (*jundao* 君道) in which rulership is defined primarily in terms of effective social coordination. I argue that Xunzi’s institutional and instrumental understanding of the way of a lord led him to render the Way of the Hegemon close, quite ironically, to the Mencian humane government while making the Kingly Way rigidly hierarchical.