

Politics, Language, and Mind in Early Chinese Legalist Ideas



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Abstract

This talk attempts to overcome the traditional understanding of "shu (術)" and "xingming (形名)" in analyzing the relationship between Shen Buhai and Han Fei. It instead tries to study their relationship from a perspective of politics, language, and mind. Shen Buhai emphasized the significance of ming (名, language), and pointed out that politics is one of the human behaviors run by language. Han Fei criticized Shen Buhai's overconfidence in language because he had some distrust of communication by means of it. When we try to persuade others, we need to catch what our conversational partner think, not deliver what we think to them. However, it is hard to find out their mind. In particular, the communication between a ruler and his ministers is even harder because there tends to be a sharp collision of interests between them. Therefore, Han Fei advised the ruler to maintain emptiness and quietism in order to minimize the arbitrariness of his interpretation of the symbol of language.

Short Biography

Soon-ja Yang is professor in the Department of Philosophy at Chonnam National University in South Korea. She received her Ph.D in the department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations from University of Pennsylvania. She has co-authored *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Han Fei* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 2012) and *Adventures in Chinese Realism* (New York: SUNY Press, 2022), and published several articles on early Chinese philosophers with a focus on Xunzi and Han Fei. Her current research interests include values, self-cultivation and law in ancient Chinese tradition.

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