

Doctrinal Developments in MZ 14-16

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Abstract. A number of theories have been proposed to explain the relationship between the essays that make up the Mohist triads. These include:

- The three-factions theory: The essays in each triad represent the divergent doctrines of the three Mohist factions mentioned in HFZ 50 and JZ 33 (due to Yǐ Ywè; see his preface to Sūn **Jyēngǔ**).
- The digest theory: Three of the shorter essays are digest or fragments and not the canonical texts of any faction. (Graham **Divisions**; Graham **Disputers** 35f).
- The one-school theory: Each triad is the same doctrine, recorded by different disciples of Mwò Dí (attributed to Chǎn Jù 陳柱 in Fāng **Mwòsywé** 41).
- The sequential theory: The essays are from different periods in the history of the Mohist school, the shortest generally being the earliest in each triad (proposed by Alfred Forke, Watanabe Takashi, and Taeko Brooks).
- The reverse sequential theory: The essays are from different periods, but the shortest is a later, more concise formulation of the ideas in the other two essays (Fāng Shòuchǔ).

In this study, I examine the differences in doctrine and exposition between the three Jyēn Ài 兼愛 (Inclusive Care) essays, Books 14 through 16 of the Mwòdǔ. I suggest that the differences between these essays are best explained by the sequential theory, in which 14 is the earliest of the essays and 16 the latest. Thus I endorse Taeko Brooks's conclusions as to the chronology of the three essays,¹ and aim to complement her work by arguing to the same end from a different set of observations.

Book 14 Versus 15 and 16

Two prominent doctrinal differences between Book 14 and the other Jyēn Ài chapters are signaled in the first line of the essay. The model held up for emulation is the sage, and the essay is concerned primarily with achieving social order. In contrast, in 15 and 16, the exemplar is the more down-to-earth figure of the humane person (rǎn rǎn 仁人), and the leading concern is with promoting benefit to the world and eliminating harm from the world. These differences represent a striking shift in the focus of the essays: The term rǎn (humaneness, goodheartedness) does not occur at all in 14, and the term lì 利 (benefit) is used only in the negative sense of selfish benefit, and not as a criterion or element of moral goodness. Also absent from 14 are the key terms hài 害 (harm) – in Mohist texts typically contrasted with lì – and fǎ 法 (model). These terms are used repeatedly in 15-16 and many other Mohist essays.

¹See Brooks **Mwòdǔ 14-16**.

Another difference between the chapters is the sequence in which social problems are discussed. Book 14 first treats problems at the level of the family or individual and then works its way up to the issue of interstate warfare. Books 15 and 16 begin with interstate warfare and then work down to disorder involving families or individuals.

Book 14 presents no theory of how inclusive care (jyēn ài 兼愛) can be achieved in practice, a topic treated in both 15 and 16, and it shows no sign of debate with doctrinal opponents. By comparison, 15 considers two potential objections to the doctrine of inclusive care, and 16 is deeply engaged in controversy: the essay answers five objections, four of which are introduced by the claim that the words of the Mohists' critics "still haven't ceased."

Finally, the conclusion of 14 again refers only to the conduct of the ideal sage, without mentioning either "officers and gentlemen," as in 15, or "kings, dukes, and great men," as in 16.

Book 15 Versus 16

Two interesting differences between these essays have already been mentioned: 16 treats more objections than 15 and addresses not merely gentlemen, but rulers. Let me now highlight three further points.

The term byé 偏 (excluding, partial) is used sixteen times in 16 to contrast exclusive concern for oneself or one's kin with the Mohist ideal of all-inclusive concern, and the chapter answers several objections related to partiality and filial piety. In contrast, the term byé does not appear in 15, and the chapter shows no awareness of objections to inclusive care premised on special concern for one's kin.

The term fǎ 法 (model, standard) is used three times in each essay, but in a slightly different way. In 15, fǎ is used twice to refer to the doctrine of jyēn ài ("the fǎ of inclusively caring about each other and mutually benefiting each other") and once at the end of the essay in the claim that this doctrine is "the fǎ of the sage-kings." In 16, fǎ is used only in the parallel claims that "what Mwōdž calls inclusiveness" is based on the model (fǎ) set by the sage-kings Yǔ, Tāng, Wǔn, and Wǔ.²

Both 15 and 16 appeal to the theory of "identifying upward" to explain how inclusive care can be realized in practice, but only 16 mentions the theory by name, informing us that the people can be changed because they will seek to "identify with their superiors." 16 also presents a fuller account of the theory, mentioning the amount of time needed to realize the Mohist ideal ("within a generation") and the use of rewards and punishments to encourage conformity. To emphasize the naturalness and ease with which superiors can lead the people to practice inclusive care and mutual benefit, the essay uses the similes of fire turning upward and water turning downward, which also appear in the Mencius.³

²15 cites only three sage kings – Yǔ, Wǔn, and Wǔ – but 16 adds Tāng to the list.

³For instance, at MC 1A6, 2A6, 4A9, and 6A2.

Discussion

The differences between 14 and the other two essays pose serious problems for the digest theory, the one-school theory, and the reverse sequential theory. If 14 were a digest, distillation, or contemporary variant of the doctrines expounded in 15 and 16, as these theories hold, we would expect the three essays to address the same central issues and use key terms in a roughly consistent way. In fact, however, the essays differ both in their main concern (achieving order versus practicing humaneness and promoting benefit) and in their use of terms such as *lì*, *hài*, *rén*, and *fǎ*. None of these theories can explain these differences well. Thus at least with respect to the Jyēn Ài triad, I suggest we reject these theories without further consideration.

That leaves us with the three-factions theory and the sequential theory. A rigorous evaluation of these theories will be one that judges them on the basis of their explanatory power. We seek a theory that is not merely consistent with, but explains, observations such as the differences I have cited.⁴ As I see it, the most promising strategy for explaining these differences along the lines of the three-factions theory is to present a historical scenario in which different issues would have been relevant to the three different Mohist groups. For example, perhaps the faction that produced 14 was located in a region in which the problem of social disorder was especially pertinent, so the essay focuses on this problem. The groups that wrote 14 and 15 could have been active in areas where they lacked opponents who argued for special concern for oneself or one's kin, so these essays do not address the issue of "exclusion" (*byé*). The writers of 16 might have been the only faction to win the attention of all levels of society, including rulers, so only 16 discusses rewards and punishments and mentions "kings, dukes, and great men" in its conclusion.

The problem with this "different groups, different issues" approach is that it is hard to explain convincingly how the circumstances and concerns of three roughly contemporary factions could have diverged so widely, given the compact land area of Warring States China, the general cultural homogeneity of the central states, and the extensive intellectual and commercial contact between states. Moreover, since each of the essays expresses an interest in governance, I think we can assume that all three hypothetical Mohist groups would have sought political influence in their home state, and in doing so, they would probably have encountered philosophical rivals, against whom they would have had to defend their doctrines. I think the three-factions theory has difficulty explaining, for example, why 14 considers no objections to Mohist doctrine at all and provides no sketch of how inclusive care can be put into practice, and why only 16 has a term for the converse of the Mohist universalism, "exclusion."

⁴Conceivably, the explanations offered by the three-factions theory and the sequential theory might complement each other, such that the combination of the two yields a theory with greater explanatory power than either alone. This might be the case if, for example, the three essays of a particular triad contained historical references that suggested they were written many years apart, but also had features that suggested they were written in different geographical regions. I do not think we need such a joint theory to account for my observations about the Jyēn Ài triad, but I leave open the possibility that further features of the essays – their linguistic peculiarities, for instance – might be best explained by a joint theory.

Like the three-factions theory, a sequential theory will attempt to explain disparities between the three essays, by showing how the writers could have had different concerns. On the sequential theory, however, it is much easier to formulate a plausible scenario in which this would be the case, because we can distribute the essays over a long historical period, during which the Mohists' circumstances could have changed considerably. Thus the sequential theory can account for differences between the essays by appealing to the gradual internal development of Mohist doctrine, increasing contact and debate with the Rú and other opponents, and changes in the Mohists' social status or political prominence.

For example, we might explain the differences in the treatment of the “identifying upward” theory by suggesting that 14 predates the theory, 15 follows it and sees that it complements the doctrine of *jiyēn ài*, and 16 recognizes that the theory is crucially important to the success of *jiyēn ài* and that rulers need a more detailed account of it than 15 provides. We can explain the disparity in the attention the essays devote to objections by the hypothesis that 14 predates extensive contact between the Mohists and intellectual opponents, 15 was written after it had become necessary to defend *jiyēn ài* against critics, and 16 is the product of an extended period of intellectual controversy. We can account for the different issues mentioned in the conclusions of the essays by supposing that in the early 14, the writers are addressing an audience of outsiders, to whom they can only articulate a sagely ideal; by the time of 15, they are in a position to offer positive proposals to “officers and gentlemen;” and by 16 they have achieved enough status to address all levels of society, including those in power. I suggest that hypotheses such as these provide more plausible explanations of the differences cited than those available from the three-factions theory.⁵

Implications

On the sequential theory, many differences between the essays can be explained as responses to increased contact with intellectual opponents. The concept of *byé* (“exclusion” or “partiality”) in 16, for example, was probably introduced in the context of a debate with opponents who rejected inclusive care. An intriguing if speculative explanation for the shift in the incipit concern of the essays from social order in 14 to benevolence and benefit in 15 and 16 is that contact with the Rú stimulated the Mohists to assign a central place to *rún*, an important Rúist virtue, which the Mohists proceeded to elucidate in their own terms. The fire and water similes in 16 might also be interpreted as signs of Rú/Mwó controversy. Since one Rúist criticism of Mohism seems to have been that inclusive care is unnatural or counterintuitive,⁶ it is tempting to view these similes as a response to the Mencians or like-minded opponents.

⁵On doctrinal differences in the *Jiyēn Ài* triad, see too now Defoort **Growing**, which shows how the scope of concern for others grows throughout the triad, from treating others well and refraining from harming them in 14, to concern for the weak and oppressed in 15, to concern for those without families to care for them in 16. This development too seems best explained by the hypothesis that the essays were composed in the order 14-15-16. [Note added 2008].

⁶I have in mind Mencius 3A5, where Mencius expresses incredulity that a person could be as concerned for the welfare of a neighbor's child as for a relative's.

Finally, the shift in the use of *lì* from negative, selfish benefit in Book 14 to positive, inclusive benefit in Books 15 and 16 raises the possibility that *lì* may initially have had a negative connotation for the Mohists. (Another presumably early essay, Book 17, also uses *lì* only in a negative sense). The emphasis on *lì* as a criterion of benevolence and morality may have emerged only gradually, as a result of the Mohists' interest in developing objective, constant standards of conduct.

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