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The Two Mencian Schools

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1. The Mencius

This paper is meant as background for the one to follow. Both together hope to answer a question which many have about Mencius 5, a chapter which does not seem to fit the rest of the text.

One reason people find MC 5 disappointing may be that they are looking for the wrong thing. They want philosophy, and Mencius does not contain philosophy, at least not of the individualistic Western type. Mencius was not a philosopher in that sense (Handout #1); he was the salesman for a system of government. This system was meant to strengthen the state for the wars of conquest. The followers of Mencius inherited that program, and continued to develop it in the first half of the 3rd century, until both Mencian schools were obliterated in the Chǔ conquest of 249. The unification wars ended with the victory of Chín in 221 and the establishment of the unified Empire thereafter.

2. The Mencian Schools

Our view of the text was set forth in a paper at the 1998 Singapore Mencius Conference, and developed in several later ones, including a contribution by Manyul Im to *Warring States Papers v1*. The gist of it is that most of the text stems from Mencius' successors, and that these were divided into two schools, a theoretical northern one and a political southern one (references in Handout #1). The separation of the schools came after a failed attempt to reconcile competing disciple ideas in c300. The two remained in touch afterwards, and the writings of each were available to the other. The late northern Mencians developed in a more personalistic direction, based on the idea of the person as explored in meditation, which is perhaps why they are of interest to modern readers.

3. Stylistics

There is a stylistic test, based on high-frequency connectives and independent of subject matter. The results of that test can add further detail to the above picture. Here are some of those results.

The BIRD test compares two passages, and gives the result as a D or Difference value. This ranges from zero (when the two are identical) to as much as 2 or more. We find that D values of 0.5 or less indicate strong similarity, as of an author writing consecutively, or of one author having the other text in mind. Values of 1.0 or more indicate significant dissimilarity, and the hypothesis of a different author becomes more likely. In between is a gray area, compatible with both options but not requiring either (Handout #3). It's the similarities which mostly interest us, and to make them stand out, values of 0.5 or less are shown in **bold** on crosstables such as the one at Handout #4.

What is a crosstable? It's a summary of the results of comparing each passage in a set to each of the others. This crosstable compares all the Mencius half chapters with each other. I should emphasize that BIRD is not an authorship test, though it permits inferences about authorship. Low D values indicate only what the writer of one of the passages had in mind. Sometimes his own previous paragraph, as when he is writing a continuous story or delivering a consecutive argument. Sometimes at the end he will turn his thoughts back to his beginning, to round things off in a satisfactory way. This shows up on the crosstable as what we call a lookback: a similarity of a late passage to one occurring at or near the beginning of the text.

Some details from the crosstable are summarized at Handout #5. We ask, Did the same person write all the text? The table does not support this. Looking down the long diagonal, we see bold numbers between consecutive half chapters only at 2A and 2B, and then again from 6A through 7B. The segment 6A-7B is of special interest to modern persons; the sourcebooks include very little else. The table confirms that this sequence is special. It probably had the same author or presiding figure.

There is also a lookback: The last three of these half chapters are closely similar to what directly precedes them, but also to many earlier half chapters. The last, 7B, is close to almost everything in the earlier northern school. So are its predecessors, especially 6B. We may be reminded of the valedictory nature of the final saying, 7B38. But 6B through 7B also look back further, to the primary Mencius of 1A. The earlier northern chapters, 4AB and 5B, also have a strong relation with 1A. The self-awareness of the northern school then seems to have comprised the northern school itself, and also the founding figure, Mencius. These people knew where they came from.

In the southern school, the same close awareness of MC 1A is seen with both parts of MC 2. These too identified as Mencian. But MC 3, the last southern chapter, is different. Stylistically, it is close to almost nothing else in the Mencius, as though it were operating on its own. This may imply a lack of institutional continuity. The question needs study which is beyond the scope of this paper.

4. Details of Context

First comes date. I give a summary at Handout #6. The successor schools operated in the half century from 0300 to 0249, at which date they were extinguished by their rival Sywǎndž, with the conquering Chǔ army behind him. The northern writings must be placed along that span. We find that MC 5 occupies the zone 0282-0275, just after the Chí conquest of Sùng (0284), and its expulsion and the death of the Chí ruler shortly afterward. The opportunity of a new ruler, and a new regime, may have moved the northern school to review its position. Might the new ruler be open to Mencian ideas? If so, how might those ideas be most effectively advanced? MC 5 may come out of that preparatory thinking. The exact nature and content of MC 5, I leave to my colleague.

Authorship (Handout #7). It will now be obvious that Mencius wrote little of the text, and probable that more than one successor figure was responsible. The Shǐ Jì lists Wàn Jāng and Gūngsūn Chǒu as the leading disciples. Can they be associated with any part of the text? The most important document to come out of the period of argument following the death of Mencius in 0303 was a sort of joint position paper, preserved as 2A3-2B1. It represented a compromise between the two main tendencies among the disciples. Gūngsūn Chǒu is not mentioned in that document, but he **is** named as the interlocutor in 2A1 and in several later passages, both southern and northern. It may then have been he who put the compromise platform together. If so, it was natural that he continued to be held in respect by both sides. Who did the rest of 2B we do not know, and 3AB are a mystery.

Now for the northerners. The first breakaway chapter was MC 4. Wàn Jāng is not mentioned there, but he does appear frequently in MC 5, and once, very respectfully, in MC 7. All this suggests that he was the breakaway leader, and wrote or supervised MC 4.

For MC 5, we need a figure who is not named until MC 6, but appears there as asking good questions of Mencius. There seems to be no such figure: those mentioned in MC 6 all appear earlier elsewhere. For MC 5, then, we unfortunately cannot make a good guess about the leader's name. What he thought, and what he did, are questions which will be taken up in the next paper.