

Is MZ 17 a Fragment of MZ 26?

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Abstract. A C Graham (**Divisions** 3-4) suggested that Mwòdž Book 17 非攻上 was not originally an independent chapter in the “Condemning Aggression” series, but rather part of the ending of MZ 26, the first of the Tyēn Jī 天志 (Heaven’s Intention) chapters. I argue that we have no reason to think Book 17 is a fragment of Book 26, but the position of Book 17 in the “Condemning Aggression” series does raise a question concerning the theory that the series represents the sequential development of the Mohist anti-war doctrine.

Graham’s Argument. Graham set out to explain why 17 is one of only three chapters in the extant triads that do not begin with the formula “Our master Mwòdž states” (子墨子言曰). He observed that the discussion in 26 runs roughly parallel to that in 28, the third “Heaven’s Intention” chapter, for about two thirds the length of the latter (to HY 47/28/46), after which 26 concludes. The remainder of 28 contains a passage (HY 48/28/56-69) that is similar in content to 17 but has no counterpart in 26. Moreover, one of the examples in 17 and 28 involves distinguishing the colors black and white, and although 27, the *second* “Heaven’s Intention” chapter, also mentions distinguishing black and white, 26 does not. Graham thought these observations supported the hypothesis that 17 is a fragment from the original, now lost ending of 26. Presumably, he took this hypothesis to explain three points. First, 17 does not begin with “Our master Mwòdž states” because it is not a complete *pyēn* 篇, or independent bamboo scroll. Second, 17 is similar to 28/56-69 because it originally was a part of 26, which at one time had an ending parallel to that of 28. Third, the extant 26 contains no passage analogous to 28/56-69 and no mention of the black/white distinction because these portions of the original essay are now in 17.

Critique. Graham’s hypothesis (GH) may explain the absence of the “Our master Mwòdž” formula from the head of 17, but at the cost of introducing other problems. Nor does GH provide the best explanation of the second and third points above.

(1a) Compared with the other twenty-two extant triad chapters, the most striking feature of 17 is that it fails to mention Mwòdž at all. GH does not explain this feature well, because if it were correct, we would expect that 17 would *include* a Mwòdž citation. The “Our master Mwòdž states” formula is used six times in 26, and it appears once in the middle of the passage in 28 that is supposedly the counterpart of the missing ending of 26.

(1b) Books 17 and 26 consistently use different phrases for the persons whose behavior they discuss: 17 uses “gentlemen of the world” (天下之君子) three times, while 26 uses “officers and gentlemen of the world” (天下之士君子) five times (once omitting the 之). GH cannot explain this difference between the two chapters.

(1c) If GH were correct, we would expect to find incomplete sentences or other evidence of broken bamboo strips in 17 or at the ending of 26, but we do not.

(2) GH explains the similarity between 28/56-69 and 17 by transposing 17 to the end of 26, which has many other similarities to 28. However, Graham failed to notice that another part of the ending of 28 (28/47-49), which also has no parallel in 26, shares several phrases with Book 18 (18/34-35) and is extremely similar to several lines in Book 19 (19/11-13). Thus we need to explain not only the parallel between 28 and 17, but also that between 28, 18, and 19. Unless we are prepared to suggest that 19 too was once part of the posited lost ending of 26, I think the simplest explanation for both sets of parallels is that the writers of 28 borrowed material from the “Condemning Aggression” series, including 17.¹ Thus, the similarity between 28 and 17 can be explained without transposing 17 to the end of 26.

(3) According to GH, the absence of a 26 passage analogous to 28/56-69 calls for explanation. The account GH offers is that MZ 26 and 28 originally ran closely parallel for the entire length of the latter chapter, and part of the missing ending of 26 can be found in 17. I propose a simpler explanation. The ending of 28 is different from that of 26 because the writers or editors of 28 chose to supplement the content of 26, their main source text, with an extended anti-war passage incorporating material from 17 and 19. They followed the basic structure of 26, but added the supplementary passage beginning at 28/46, with no serious attempt to integrate the main theme of the chapter into it. The lines immediately preceding the passage state that Mwòdž established “Heaven’s intention” to serve as a standard, “by which I know the officers and gentlemen of the world are far from morality.” The conclusion of the chapter returns to the theme of Heaven’s intention and again mentions standards. But the intervening passage does not illustrate or even mention the use of Heaven’s intention as a standard, and it discusses the behavior of rulers, not officers and gentlemen.

Finally, (4) the contexts in which the black/white distinction appears in 27 and 28 are so dissimilar that we have no reason to think that a reference to the distinction was originally a general feature of all three Tyēn Jī chapters. In 27, the colors are mentioned briefly in the final lines of the text as a simile for a distinction that is easy to draw. In 28, they are used in an extended example that highlights the inconsistency of those who condemn minor crimes but approve of military aggression.

Verdict. GH faces at least three serious explanatory obstacles and provides an implausible account of the relationship between Books 17, 26, and 28. I conclude that 17 is not a fragment of 26. Both this conclusion and my alternative hypothesis concerning the ending of 28 seem compatible with either a three schools theory of the triads or a sequential development theory.

¹I take this to be the direction of quotation, since it is more likely that writers adding an anti-war message to a text on Heaven’s intention would borrow from two anti-war tracts than that the writers of two separate anti-war tracts would both borrow from a single text on Heaven’s intention.

Implications

A New Problem. If my hypothesis about the relation between the “Condemning Aggression” chapters and 28 is correct, then at the time the ending of 28 was written, 17 was firmly associated with the “Condemning Aggression” theme. This raises a puzzle concerning the relationship between the three “Condemning Aggression” chapters. Books 17 and 19 both contain passages of philosophical interest, and both emphasize the immorality of military aggression. In contrast, in 18 the philosophical and ethical issues central to 17 and 19 vanish: the chapter presents only a pragmatic, philosophically uninteresting argument that the costs of war are greater than the benefits, without a single mention of the immorality of warfare. If the chapters were written in the sequence 17-18-19, why do they shift away from concern with morality and then back to it again? Moreover, having come up with arguments as good as those in MZ 17, why would the Mohists abandon them in a later text on the same theme?

One possibility is that the chapters were not written in the sequence 17-18-19. However, a sequential theory does explain a number of observations about the three chapters,² and an alternative sequence, such as 18-17-19, would raise even more explanatory problems than does the present sequence.

Another possible explanation is that the three chapters represent the views of three different Mohist schools.³ Rather than explaining the topical shift, however, this account just presents a new problem: If all three schools promoted moral doctrines such as universal care and conforming to Heaven’s intention, why would one school think there was nothing to be said against warfare other than that it is unprofitable?

The most promising explanatory route, I think, is to consider the implicit audience for each of the three chapters. As Taeko has suggested,⁴ the stance of Book 17 is that of a “critical outsider,” denouncing the gentlemen of the world for failing to draw the distinction between morality and immorality properly. The audience for the piece seems to be society in general. In contrast, 18 is directed specifically at those in a position to affect policy, presumably rulers or high-level officials. 19 is in some respects a synthesis of 17 and 18 and seems to address a wider audience than either, ranging from the general populace to rulers. So some of the concerns of 17 could have been omitted from 18 because they were not directly relevant to the narrower focus of that text, but then incorporated into 19, which combines themes from both 17 and 18.

This scenario is plausible, but only if we recognize that, in this case at least, the sequential theory does not entail that a newer text supersedes an older one. 18 is not a later, replacement version of the “same” text as 17; it was written for a different purpose and a different audience. My hypothesis is that the Mohists did not shift *from* the concerns of 17 *to* those of 18. Rather, they developed new, additional concerns and wrote 18 to deal with them. This new text could well have been read side by side with the existing MZ 17.

²See Brooks **Ethical**.

³See again Graham **Divisions**.

⁴Brooks **Mwòdž 17-19**.

Comment

A Taeko Brooks (2007)

That MZ 19 draws on MZ 17 and 18 seems evident, but is that observation really incompatible with the idea of a replacive sequence in the antiwar triplet? MZ 17, an outsider criticism of war, uses the state's own laws against murder to shame the state into abandoning what that essay chooses to define as mass murder. MZ 18, from a time when the Micians were more closely involved with the state, is framed in terms that civil servants would have found more comfortable, namely economic considerations (the cost-of-war argument is not limited to pacifists; the difficulties of financing war were known to the warmakers themselves, and are mentioned in Sūndž 2). Moral considerations would have been out of place in that context. But in further compliance with the standard statecraft outlook, which regarded war as an essential tool of the state, the Micians in MZ 19 moved to accept the concept of justified war, and used the verb "punish" (誅) rather than "attack" to describe a morally justifiable military action. In the process, they put themselves into a sphere where moral arguments – *in favor* of killing to right a greater wrong – might once again have been felt to be appropriate. From that viewpoint, which is that of the war state, morality now *supports* policy.

I do not see a regression here, but a movement from the stance of a critical outsider toward that appropriate to someone increasingly involved in government. At the end, the Micians move beyond personal morality, and ask another, not less urgent, question: What considerations apply *to the state* as a moral actor?

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