

Thematic Relationships in MZ 8-10 and 11-13

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Abstract. Analyses of the Mohist triads tend to rely on linguistic or rhetorical features. In this study, I aim to supplement such research by offering observations about the thematic content of the Shàngsyén 尚賢 and Shàngtúng 尚同 triads (Books 8-10 and 11-13 of the *Mwòdž*). I argue that my observations are best explained by the hypothesis that the essays in both triads were composed in the order in which we find them in the traditional edition of the text – that is, 8-9-10 and 11-12-13. I also suggest that the writers of the later texts in each triad probably had access to the earlier ones.

The textual units on which my observations are based are given in the Appendices, which distinguish sections within each essay that lack counterparts in previous essays in the same triplet. I have grouped the following observations under four headings: basic concerns, detail and sophistication, new sections, and prominence of new issues.

Basic Concerns

One essay in each triad focuses on basic concerns noticeably different from those of the other two. In the first triad, Book 8 focuses on how to obtain worthy and capable personnel and emphasizes yì 義 (morality) as a standard of merit. The shortage of good officials seems acute, since the essay twice mentions that even farmers and artisans can be promoted if they are capable. The topic of attracting talent, the emphasis on yì, and the references to farmers and artisans vanish in Books 9 and 10, which are concerned instead with the issue of selecting only qualified people (10 in particular focuses on the dangers of nepotism). A plausible explanation for these differences is that 8 dates from an earlier period, in which the population was smaller and worthy or talented officials were scarce. Also, in the earlier stages of the Mohist movement, the writers may have been speaking as political outsiders with strong ties to the farmer and artisan classes, and they may have stressed moral considerations more than political realities.

In the second triad, Book 13 stands out. The core doctrine in 11 and 12 involves promulgating a unified morality by establishing a hierarchical social structure in which subordinates conform to their superiors' standards of shì/fēi 是非. The content of the standards is left vague (perhaps to be filled in by the "Heaven's Intention" essays). In 13 the doctrine is that subordinates must report on persons or events that "care for and benefit" the community at each level of society, from the clan to the empire. The emphasis shifts from educating people to obtaining feedback from them, and the basis for this feedback is not unspecified moral standards imposed from above, but "care and benefit," which apparently people are expected to recognize on their own.

The political hierarchy described in 13 also differs from that in 11 and 12, with the lowest level being the clan head, not the village head.¹ The differences between 13 and the other essays suggest that 13 was not available to the writers of 11 and 12, who probably would have mentioned “care and benefit” as moral standards if 13 had been a source for them. A partial if tentative explanation is that 13 is later than 11 and 12.

Detail and Sophistication

The doctrines in 8 and 11 are simpler and cruder than those in the other essays. If we compare parallel or analogous passages (eg 8:3 and 9:2; 8:5, 9:8 and 10:4; 11:5 and 12:5), 8 and 11 tend to include fewer details of political administration, historical events, or the concrete consequences of their policies. Also, Book 9 restates several ideas from 8 in a more sophisticated form.² For example, 9:1 converts a claim at the end of 8 – “elevating the worthy is the root of governing” – into a slogan that serves as the foundation of its presentation (it also appears in 10:1). The text supports this claim by citing the general principle that having the noble and wise govern the foolish and base yields order.³ Parallel passages in 8:4 and 9:4 argue that for the shàngsyén policy to work, the ruler must grant officials sufficient rank, emoluments, and power; but only 9 gives these elements of the policy a label (the “three roots” 三本). Similarly, the first two sections of 12 stress the notion of a unifying morality more than the corresponding parts of 11 do and provide more details about the political system.

New Sections

The second and third essays in each triad incorporate many additional sections, not shared with the first essay, that develop themes from the first one (9:3, 12:6, part of 12:7) or introduce new issues (9:5-6; 10:2-3, 8; 12:7-9; 13:1, 3, 7-8). Some of these “new” sections are related to each other in interesting ways. For example, 12 runs closely parallel to 11 until section 12:6, which expands the claim in 11:5 that failure to conform upward to Heaven (Tyēn 天) will be punished by natural disasters. The relatively brief 12:5 is then followed by a longer, new section, 12:6, which describes how the ancient sage kings led the people to sacrifice and serve Heaven and the ghosts (Tyēn-gwěi 天鬼), who rewarded them in turn (I will comment on the shift from Tyēn to Tyēn-gwěi below). Nothing in 11 parallels 12:6, but the latter has thematic and linguistic links to 9:3 and 9:9, two “new” sections of 9 that lack parallels in 8. So here we see connections between sections of hū 乎 series essays (the second essay in each of these triads), all of which lack parallels in the first essay in the respective triad.⁴

¹The number of “different moralities” in the myth of the origins of the state increases from 10 (essay 11) to 100 (essay 12) to 1000 (essay 13). The best explanation for this change is probably that the essays were composed in the order 11-12-13.

²The move toward more sophisticated, systematic doctrines seems to be a general feature of the essays in the hū 乎 series identified by Durrant **Consideration** and Graham **Divisions**.

³This idea also appears at the beginning of 27, the hū-series “Heaven’s Intention” essay.

⁴There are also parallels between 9:9, 12:6, and passages in 27, though some of the relevant parts of 27 do have parallels in 26. In addition, Maeder has pointed out parallels between 9:3 and passages in 32 and 37, two other hū-series essays (**Observations** 50).

Also, in the second and third essays of both triads, linguistic features which Durrant (**Grammar** 261) identified as distinctive of the Mwòdž essays and words which Graham (**Divisions** 3) tagged as characteristic of the hū series tend to cluster in the “new” sections, suggesting that they may be based on a source different from that of the sections with close parallels to the first essay in each triad. Thus, of ten instances of rwògǒu 若苟 in 9, 10, 12, and 13, all but two occur in passages that have no parallels in 8 or 11.⁵ Of the seven instances of wéiwú 唯毋 in these essays, none occurs in passages with parallels in 8 or 11,⁶ and of the five instances of gwānfǎ 官法 and Tyēn-gwěi 天鬼, none are in sections with close counterparts in 8 or 11.⁷

A plausible explanation for the change from Tyēn in 12:5 to Tyēn-gwěi in 12:6 is that the content of the two sections derives from different sources. The writers of 12 may have used 11 as a basis for the first five sections of their text and then composed the remainder afresh. Other hypotheses might be that 11 and the parallel stretch of 12 were based on a shared source (possibly an oral one), or that 12 was compiled from 11 and one or more other sources. But since the shift in terminology occurs precisely at the end of the parallel between 12:5 and 11:5, I think it unlikely that 12 was composed without access to 11 or a source that was extremely similar to 11.⁸

Prominence of New Issues

Last, I want to call attention to a pattern in both triads: Issues absent from the first essay are introduced in “new” sections of the second and become still more prominent in the third. The best example of this is the issue of ensuring that the system of rewards and punishments functions properly in encouraging good and discouraging bad behavior. In both triads, this topic is absent from the first essay, emerges in the second (9:2, 9:5, 9:9, 12:8), and is especially prominent in the third (10:2, 10:8, 13:1, 13:3). Another example, from the first triad, is the argument from professionalism: just as rulers hire specialists to handle their tailoring or butchering, they should hire qualified officials to administer their government (9:6, 10:3). This is absent from 8, introduced in 9, and expanded and placed in a more conspicuous position in 10. Similarly, in the second triad, two key concerns of 13 – grasping the situation (chíng 情) of subordinates (13:1) and understanding the benefits of the shàngtúng system for the ruler (13:7) – seem to be developments of themes introduced in 12:9 and not found in 11. A probable explanation for this developmental pattern is that the third essays are later than the second ones and may be drawing on them as sources.

⁵Rwògǒu occurs in 9:5 (twice), 10:1, 12:8 (thrice), 13:2, and 13:3; these account for half of all its occurrences in the entire Mwòdž. Of them, 10:1 is loosely parallel to 8:2 and 13:2 to 11:1. However, the particular lines in which rwògǒu occurs have no parallel in 8:2 and 11:1.

⁶Wéiwú occurs in 9:4 (twice), 10:2 (twice), 12:8 (twice), and 13:7.

⁷Gwānfǎ appears only in essay 9, in sections 9:2, 9:3 (thrice), and 9:5. Tyēn-gwěi appears in 9:3 (twice), 9:9 (twice), 10:10, and 12:6 (six times).

⁸An adequate textual theory for the Shàngtúng triad must also explain the relationship between 11:6 and 12:7, both of which mention the five punishments and the similes of the skein and the net. I think the hypothesis that 12 is reworking material from 11 probably offers the simplest explanation of the relationship, but the argument is beyond the scope of this study.

Implications for Chronology

The shifts in basic concern in both triads make it unlikely that essays 8 and 11 are later, more compact statements of the themes of 9-10 and 12-13, as suggested by Fāng (**Mwòsywé** 49-50). The increased detail and sophistication and the new issues treated in the second and third essays make it clear that these texts do not merely present different versions of the material of the first essay, but extend, modify, and supplement this material. If the first essays were written later, they ought to show some awareness of the additional topics treated in the other two. The best explanation for their failure to do so is that they are earlier than the others. This agrees with the conclusions of Forke (**Me Ti** 23), Watanabe (**Kodai** 506) and Taeko Brooks (**Ethical** 117).

In both triads, the third essay develops themes that are present in the second essay, but not in the first. One explanation, consistent with the proposals of Forke and Watanabe, is that the second essay is a later synthesis of material from the other two. However, this fails to explain why the content of the second essays is consistently more elaborate than parallel sections in one purported source, the first essay, but less elaborate than parallel sections in the other, the third essay. Thematic developments in the third essay seem better explained by taking the order of composition in both triads to be first-second-third, or 8-9-10 and 11-12-13, as Taeko Brooks has proposed.

Graham (**Divisions** 1) conjectured that each triad presents three versions of a common oral teaching, which were written down independently of each other. Against this, I think the many close parallels between passages in essays within the same triad (eg 11:5 and 12:5) suggest that the writers of some later essays probably consulted earlier ones. Also, the extensive amount of new material in the second and third essays, its concentration in certain sections, and the clustering of certain stylistic and linguistic features in those sections, seem better explained by the model of a brief core of oral material later augmented by new, written material than by the view that the essays as wholes are separate versions of a shared oral teaching.

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Appendix 1

Emphasized sections have no close counterparts earlier in the triplet

MZ 8			
Sec	HY 8 ⁹	Description	Compare
8:1	1/1-5/2	To achieve aims, rulers need to attract the worthy	9:1, 10:1, 35:1
8:2	5/3-8/17	Attract them by offering wealth, rank, etc	10:1
8:3	8/18-16/22	Make morality a prerequisite for wealth, rank, etc	9:2
8:4	16/23-21/4	Promote the capable; give high rank, salary, power, etc	9:4, 12:8, 13:2
8:5	21/5-25/11	Historical examples	9:8, 10:4
8:6	25/12-end	Conclusion: Shàngsyén is the dàu of the sage kings, the root of governing	9:11, 10:10
MZ 9			
Sec	HY 9	Description	Compare
9:1	1/1-3/19	Shàngsyén is the root of governing	8:1, 27
9:2	3/20-8/7	Impartial promotion of the worthy	8:3
9:3	8/8-14/30	Details concerning administration of the state	12:6
9:4	14/31-22/7	Promote the capable: give high rank, salary, power	8:4
9:5	22/8-32/2	Not applying shàngsyén properly leads to failure of the reward/punishment system	10:2, 10:8, 12:8
9:6	32/3-42/28	“Butcher/tailor” argument: putting unqualified amateurs in charge leads to disorder	10:3, 10:8, 12:8
9:7	42/29-46/31	All this isn’t only Mwòdž’s words. Textual citations	
9:8	46/32-51/23	Historical examples	8:5, 10:5
9:9	51/24-67/3	Shàngsyén is taking one’s model from Heaven.	12:6
		Historical examples: 3 sage kings, 3 tyrants	26:3, 27:2
9:10	67/4-70/23	Textual citations	10:9
9:11	70/24-end	Conclusion: A ruler can become a true king only by virtue and morality, not intimidation; why not examine that shàngsyén is the root of governing?	Mencius; 8:6, 10:10
MZ 10			
Sec	HY 10	Description	Compare
10:1	1/1-7/11	Rulers fail to achieve aims because they don’t apply shàngsyén policy	8:1, 8:2, 9:1
10:2	7/12-10/23	Shàngsyén encourages the good; discourages the bad	9:2, 9:5, 10:8, 12:8, 13:3
10:3	10/24-20/25	“Butcher/tailor” argument: putting unqualified amateurs in charge leads to disorder; attack on nepotism begins	9:6, 47:8, 10:7
10:4	20/26-28/3	Historical examples	8:5, 9:8
10:5	28/4-32/19	Textual citations	
10:6	32/20-35/21	Conduct of the worthy person	11:1, 11:2
10:7	35/22-40/9	Rulers today fail to apply shàngsyén (negative contrast with 10:4-6)	9:6
10:8	40/10-44-14	Failure to apply shàngsyén leads to breakdown of the reward/punishment system	9:5, 10:2, 12:8, 13:1, 11:1
10:9	44/15-46/25	Historical examples	9:10
10:10	46/26-end	Conclusion: To be benevolent, moral, and beneficial, apply shàngsyén, root of governing	9:11, 13:9, 28

⁹References are to line and character number in the Harvard-Yenching concordance.

Appendix 2

Emphasized sections have no close counterparts earlier in the triplet

MZ 11			
Sec	HY 11	Description	Compare
11.1	1/1-5/5	Different yì led to disorder (10 yì)	12.1, 13.2, 10.8
11.2	5/6-8/33	Disorder due to lack of leaders, so leaders were selected	12.2, 13.2
11.3	9/1-13/11	Tyēndž proclaimed: report and conform to superiors	12.3
11.4	13/12-22/29	Leaders at all levels led people to report and conform; unified their yì	12.4, 13.4
11.5	22/30-24/16	Conforming to Tyēndž without conforming to Heaven will be punished by natural disasters	12.5, 13.4d
11.6	24/17-end	Five punishments to rein in non-conformers	12.7
MZ 12			
Sec	HY 12	Description	Compare
12:1	1/1-5/21	Different yì led to disorder (100 yì)	11:1, 13:2
12:2	5/22-11/33	Disorder due to lack of leaders, so leaders were selected	11:2, 13:2
12:3	12/1-18/10	Tyēndž proclaimed: report and conform to superiors	11:3, 13:4c
12:4	18/11-31/16	Leaders at all levels led people to conform, unified their morality	11:4, 13:4
12:5	31/17-33/30	Conforming to Tyēndž without conforming to Heaven will be punished by natural disasters	11:5
12:6	33/21-41/3	Conforming to Heaven <i>and ghosts</i>	9:3, 9:9, 27:1c
12:7	41/4-44/12	Today there are leaders; why is the world in disorder? (Discusses five punishments)	11:6
12:8	44/13-61/13	Contrast sage-kings with rulers today who instal cronies leading to breakdown of reward/punishment system	9:5, 10:2, 10:8, 13:1, 13:3
12:9	61/14-68/23	Shàngtúg policy connects the ching of superior and subordinate, benefiting all (especially the ruler)	13:1, 13:7, 9:5
12:10	68/24-74/24	Ancient sages, textual citations	
12:11	74/25-end	Conclusion: For wealth, population growth, order, examine shàngtúg	13:9
MZ 13			
Sec	HY 13	Description	Compare
13:1	1/1-7/6	What brings order? Getting the ching of those below	12:9, 12:8, 9:5
13:2	7/7-17/18	To do this, apply shàngtúg; story about disorder and selection of leaders (1000 different moralities)	11:1-2, 12:1-2
13:3	17/19-22/8	Rulers today unsuccessful because morality not unified, causing breakdown of reward/punishment system	12:8, 9:5, 10:2, 10:8
13:4	22/9-42/22	To unify morality, have each level report on things that benefit or harm that level	11:3, 12:3-4
13:5	42/23-45/17	Shàngtúg leads to success at all levels; governing the world is like governing one clan	
13:6	45/18-48/1	Not only Mwòdž has this. Textual citation	
13:7	48/2-56/6	Benefits to ruler of the shàngtúg policy	12:9
13:8	56/7-58/2	To make the people conform, you must care for them earnestly, use rewards/punishments	
13:9	58/3-end	Conclusion: To be benevolent, moral, and beneficial, apply shàngtúg, root of governing	12:11, 10:10, 28