

Theoretical Terms in the Mencius

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Introduction. My aim is to contribute to the distinguishing of layers in the Mencius text by analyzing the uses of theoretical terms. I begin with some thoughts on how we might expect to find such terms used and distributed in a philosophical text. I will then turn to four specific points: (1) the uniqueness of Books 4, 6, and 7; (2) the connection of 1A7, 2A2, and 2A6 to Books 4, 6, and 7; (3) terms specific to Books 1-3; and (4) terms found throughout the text.

What to Expect From Terminology. Not all terms are theoretical terms. By “theoretical terms,” I will mean terms either coined or consciously used in special ways by members of a specific group to refer to ideas, capabilities, categories, or abstractions particular to the group’s teachings. Examples of theoretical terms in the Mencius are rén 仁 and xìng 性.

Distribution. Suppose we had a record which we knew to be the accretional writings of a philosophical group over a period of several decades. How might we expect theoretical terms to be arranged? Here are some possible patterns:

- [A] Introduced early, then discussed and commented upon throughout.
- [B] Introduced early, then dropped.
- [C] Hit upon later; becomes new topic of conversation. An innovation.
- [D] Tried later but quickly dropped as confusing or obscure.

Any or all of these makes good sense, and we should not be surprised to find them mixed together. Now suppose we turn to another group’s accretional record, one that has been shuffled so that its original order is no longer intact. If we identify key theoretical terms, we should be able to make hypotheses about the proper ordering of the texts by looking for patterns [A]-[D]. In addition, we would – at least provisionally – reject an ordering that followed this pattern:

- [E] Introduced early, then dropped, then actively discussed much later.

There *could* be circumstances that explain why [E] was the right pattern. Given evidence of such circumstances, or strong independent evidence that the order reflecting pattern [E] was correct, we could change our minds and accept [E]. But all else being equal, it is less plausible.

Clearly, terminological ordering will not carry us very far on its own. There are too many situations in which odd patterns like [E] could be correct. Still, a hypothesis which interprets a body of data so as to meet expected patterns is more compelling than one that violates such patterns. Combined with other types of data, this can lead us to accept a particular hypothesis as the best alternative.

The Terminological Uniqueness of MC 4, 6, and 7. Every book of the Mencius contains theoretical terminology. While some terms are used throughout – either often, like *rén* 仁, or less often, like *lì* 利 – many appear only in specific books or groups of books. Perhaps the most striking thing about the text’s terminological arrangement is the large number of terms whose theoretical uses cluster in Books 4, 6, and 7. Table One contains a summary of these terms, indicating where they appear as theoretical terms in those chapters (“positive”) and in non-theoretical senses *outside* those chapters (“negative”), and whether there are any exceptions or qualifications.

Term	Positive Uses	Negative Uses	Qualifications
chéng 誠	4A12 (w/chain)	many, eg 5A2	interpolations?
xìng 性	4B26; 6A-7B	none in 1, 2, 5	3A1
dà rén 大人	4A20; 4B6, 11, 12; 6A14, 15; 7A19, 33	3A4 (social, not moral)	7B34 (social)
quán 權	4A17; 7A26	1A7 (literally weighing)	
shù 恕	7A4		cf chéng 誠
zì dé 自得	4B14 (w/chain)	3A4	cf also 7A9 (得己)
cún 存	4A15; 4B28; 6A8; 7A1, 13, 18; 7B35	2A1	4A1, 3, 7; 7A20, 21; 7B32
xiū 修	6A16; 7A1; 7B32	1A5?; 1B4	1A5; 4B31

• Table One •

The terminology unique to these books is largely devoted to describing abstract psychological or ethical phenomena. It is here, for instance, that we find *dà rén* 大人 used to refer to those *ethically* superior to others (rather than socially superior, as in previous books), and *cún* 存 used in the abstract sense of nurturing one’s character so as to preserve one’s ethical predispositions. In terms of the patterns discussed above, these books – ignoring Book 5 for the time being – fit neatly into [C]. They read like later developments or rethinkings of earlier material, perhaps under the influence of new currents of thought. For the most part, Table One is self-explanatory; I will comment here only on a few particularly interesting cases.

Chéng. It has been noticed before that *chéng* 誠 occurs as a theoretical term meaning something like “sincerity” in only two chapters, 4A12 and 7A4. Bryan Van Norden has observed to me that 4A12 also contains a “chain argument” which makes him suspect that the passage is an interpolation. MC 7A4 might be thought suspicious on other grounds: it contains the text’s only use of *shù* 恕, which, given its symmetry with some of the text’s core doctrines, we might have expected to see more of, had it been an accepted bit of group terminology. On the other hand, note that 4B14 also contains a chain argument. Given the significant terminological innovation in Books 4, 6, and 7, these appearances of *chéng* in an unexpectedly theoretical role begin to seem like part of a pattern, rather than surprising exceptions.

Xìng. There are only two occurrences of xìng 性 prior to Book 6A. The second, in 4B26, is not a problem for the “uniqueness of 4, 6, and 7” theory, but is worth noting as discussing xìng in terms that are not picked up on in the rest of the text, and which sound, at least to my ear, to be provisional or experimental.

The occurrence in 3A1 is another matter. It is an explicit statement of the “nature is good” doctrine of a kind found elsewhere only in 6A2 and 6A6. The passage also explicitly identifies a specific period in Mencius’ career: while Wén was crown prince of Téng. When these characteristics are combined with its placement at the head of Book 3A, the possibility that it is a later interpolation aimed at suggesting a reinterpretation of (competing) doctrines of Book 3, cannot be ignored. Continuities between 3A1 and 3A2 make this far from a simple matter, though. Another possibility is the Brooks hypothesis that Book 3 might be contemporary with and thus share some of the orientation of Books 6 and 7, on which see also below.

Term	Positive Uses	Negative Uses	Qualifications
chì 氣	2A2; 6A8; 7A36		hàorán zhī qì 浩然之氣 only in 2A2
shǒu 守	2A2; 7B32; 4A19 (守身)	1B4, 13, 15; 2B5; 3A3; 3B4	4A1; 4B31; 6B5, 8; 7A36 (all negative as well)
búdòng xīn 不動心	2A2		cf Gàozǐ in 6A; 4A12; 6B15, dòng (xīn)
bù rěn 不忍	1A7; 2A6; 4A1; 7B31		4B24; 5B1; 7B36 (all specific)
cè yīn 測隱	2A6; 6A6		same with other hearts except cí ràng 辭讓 2A6

• Table Two •

MC 2A2, 1A7, and 2A6, and Books 4, 6, and 7. MC 2A2 stands out by its length and unique subject matter. It is also distinct terminologically. Neither of its central terms, hàorán zhī qì 浩然之氣 and bú dòng xīn 不動心, appears elsewhere in the text. It does have connections to the 4, 6, 7 strata, which contain the only other mentions of qì 氣, and the only other psychological/theoretical uses of shǒu 守. Then it is possible that 2A2 is a later interpolation. Hàorán zhī qì and bú dòng xīn could be examples of pattern [B] above, but later recurrences of qì and shǒu argue against this.

Two other passages from early books bear connections to the later strata. 1A7 and 2A6 both emphasize one’s inability to bear the suffering of others (忍); the only other point where the term is used in this abstract way is 7B31. Other uses – all in 4, 6, 7 – are specific and non-theoretical. The “hearts” of 2A6 also occur only there and in 6A6, where all save one are repeated.

An interesting challenge to the connection between 1A7 and 4, 6, 7 is the pair of terms héngchǎn 恆產 and héngxīn 恆心, which also occur in 3A3. In fact part, but only part, of 1A7 is there repeated verbatim; the remainder of the passage says substantially the same thing as 1A7, but phrased quite differently.

Perhaps, then, we have evidence that 2A2 belongs to a later stratum. For 1A7 and 2A6, the evidence is even less clear. The fact that their key terms are picked up later could be examples of pattern [A], though some explanation of why the terms are not discussed in so much of the text would be helpful. On the other hand, if we had an independent reason to assign them later dates, the current data (assuming that *héngchǎn* and *héngxīn* are dealt with) would support that as well.

Terminology Specific to Books 1-3. The term that jumps out as largely specific to the early books is *wàng* 王, used as a verb “unite [under a true king].” It is used 11 times in the first three books (six times in 1A and 1B alone) but only twice (4A9, 7A20) in the remaining four. It thus seems to exemplify pattern [B].

Terminology that Appears Throughout. One term that appears in *almost* all parts of the text is *lǐ* 禮. The exception is 1A and 1B, where it is absent. If these are the only parts of the text reliably connected with the historical Mencius, then *lǐ*'s appearance represents an important but almost immediate shift by his students. Other terms found throughout the text include *jūnzǐ* 君子, *tiān* 天, *rén* 仁, and *yì* 義. We also find *lì* 利 in various places, almost always used in a derogatory sense.

Conclusions. As I have indicated, I do not think these data can carry us very far on their own. Still, they are suggestive. First, the uniqueness of 4, 6, 7 demands explanation. The Brooks hypothesis that they (together with 5) were written by a different group from 1-3 clearly satisfies this demand; alternative hypotheses should be judged, in part, on whether they meet it as well. Second, the *lack* of terminology in Book 5 needs explanation. Third, if the Brooks scenario (Book 3 being later, like Book 7) is correct, we might expect affinities between these two strata. That has not yet been convincingly demonstrated, though it does bear mentioning that *jiān ài* 兼愛 occurs only in 3B9 and 7A26.

Comment

E Bruce and A Taeko Brooks (2004)

We welcome the chance to comment on Steve's interesting set of theoretical terms. Our most general comment is that we find it revealing to graph such sets on the Mencius Worksheet (see Brooks **Mencius** 273) which gives our Mencius theory in miniature. Though that diagram has since been revised in some details, the use of it will still give a quick overview of the distribution of a theme or a term within the text. That graphic picture of the evidence can be very suggestive in itself.

Beyond this, a few specific points:

MC 2A2. When did the two posthumous schools split? We do not believe that it was *directly* after Mencius's death. If the two were still together when the intimate conversations from Mencius's last years were edited together in 2A2, then their content would have been available equally to both schools, as a common remembered heritage, no matter who later had charge of the text record. It thus seems to us not problematic if the northern or philosophical school developed the mental techniques mentioned in 2A2, and the southern or statecraft school, even though they had physical custody of all the original text, neglected these inner techniques in favor of a more political emphasis.

MC 4, 6, 7. We are pleased to find in Steve's data support for our suggestion, not only that MC 4-7 are distinct from MC 1-3, but that the difference is a philosophical versus statecraft emphasis. It seems natural to us, for instance, that a term common to both, like 大人, should have an ethical sense in MC 4-7, but a social sense in MC 1-3.

MC 5. The strangeness of this chapter (the seeming gap between MC 4 and 6-7) has been noted by the commentators, but on inspection one may detect points of continuity between MC 5 and the adjacent part of MC 4, that is, MC 4B. One MC 5 concern is to combat erroneous traditions about antiquity (see especially 5A4-9), and a concern for knowledge *about* antiquity is already present in the 4B21 mention of ancient chronicles. Shùn figures in these MC 5 disputes, and also in 4B1, 19, and 28. The issue of conflicting duties is developed in 5A1-4, but is already present in 4B6, 23-24, 27, and 30. The protocol of the serving official, 5A8-9 and 5B, is also discussed in 4B3-6, 11, 16, 23, 27, and 31. These issues are not ones which are signaled by the theoretical terms on which Steve is here concentrating. It may help to say that for the northern group, "philosophy" does not wholly exclude "statecraft," especially those aspects of statecraft which concern the *servant* of the state.

Convergence of MC 3 and 7. We regard MC 2-3 as having been compiled in parallel with MC 4-7. Several echoes across the two strands appear to support this idea. If we are right that MC 3 and 7, the respective ends of the two text sequences, are in part the output of the two Mencian schools in the period affected by the propinquity of Sywǎndž, namely, in the period 0254-0249, we might expect a degree of convergence, since both schools were being pushed by a common enemy. This is exactly what we find. To Steve's observation that the only cases of 兼愛 are in MC 3 and 7, which supports the idea of contemporary date, we add further evidences of common milieu: (1) this is a Mician term, and both passages are anti-Mician; (2) the sense of controversy is uniquely high in these chapters (see further Im **Tensions**); and (3) the hostile term Yáng/Mwò is also unique to these chapters. These similarities need not imply a merger of the two Mencian schools. They do suggest to us that, somehow or other, the two schools had come to share more common ground at this period than had been the case in previous years.

Works Cited

- E Bruce Brooks and A Taeko Brooks. The Nature and Historical Context of the Mencius; in Alan K L Chan (ed), Mencius, Hawaii (2002) 242-281
 Manyul Im. Tensions in Mencius 3 and 7. WSP v1 (2010) 158-159