

The Fragment Theory of MZ 14, 17 and 20

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Abstract. A C Graham has suggested that the three shortest ethical triplet chapters, those which do not begin with the standard opening formula “Our Master Mwòdž says” 子墨子言曰, are not chapters, but fragments or summaries of other chapters; specifically, that MZ 17 (now titled “Against War” 非攻) is “a fragment from the lost ending of chapter 26” (“Will of Heaven” 天志), and that MZ 14 and 20 are “complete summaries of the Mohist doctrines of universal love and thrift in expenditures without illustrative quotations or answers to objections and almost without close parallelisms with chapters in the same triad.”¹ I have previously argued that these three chapters are early, and for that reason lack some rhetorical features that became standard in later chapters.² The triplet issue I will explore elsewhere.³ Here, I will try to show that MZ 17 is incompatible with MZ 26, and that MZ 14 and 20 are not literarily or philosophically plausible as summaries of their respective triplets.⁴

MZ 17 and MZ 26. Here is an overview comparison of these two essays:

	MZ 17	MZ 26
Audience	Owners of orchards and animals who carry arms as protection	Gentlemen of the world
Stance	Outside critics of war policy	Theoreticians of Heaven
Target	Those in charge of government, who don't know right and wrong	Rival doctrines
Content	Stealing, robbing, and killing; attacking other states	General societal disorder: large states attacking small, big clans harming little, strong plundering weak
Authority	Empirical observation, logic, agreed principles and facts	Master Mwòdž's knowledge of Heaven
Rhetoric	Open rhetorical Q; suppositions, repetitions	Self-asked and answered Q; quasi-dialogue
Structure	Tightly organized; logical and cumulative	Loosely organized; prolix and additive

The comparison shows that the two chapters are dissimilar in all the categories listed.

¹Graham **Divisions** 3-5.

²Brooks **Ethical**.

³Brooks **Mwòdž 17-19** and Brooks **Mwòdž 14-16**.

⁴See the compatible but independent results reached in Fraser **Fragment**.

It would seem strange to attach, to a long rambling essay addressed to government authorities, a short crisp indictment of the moral sensitivity of those same authorities. I believe that the strangeness of the mix refutes Graham's idea of their relationship.

MZ 14 and MZ 15-16. These are clearly on the same subject, as their titles reflect. The canonical arrangement invites the expectation that MZ 14 will be simpler, and the two other chapters more developed. Graham's proposal, that MZ 14 is a summary of the earlier MZ 15-16, creates the expectation that MZ 14 will be in recognizably the same tone and rhetorical key as MZ 15-16, and will bring them to a consistent and coherent conclusion. Here is a thematic overview in canonical order:

	MZ 14	MZ 15	MZ 16
Audience:	Ruling elite	Benevolent rulers, other courtiers, rivals	Benevolent rulers, other courtiers, rivals.
Stance:	Outside critics	Inside advisors	Inside advisors
Target:	Disorder	Calamities, strife	Partiality
Content:	Restrain hate, encourage love	Gain wealth and order	Promote benefits by rewards/punishments Enlightened ruler
Authority:	Common sense	Ancient rulers	Ancient texts
Rhetoric:	Simple exposition Cause/effect	Q/A dialogue Cause/effect minor	Self-answered Q Cause/effect minor

MZ 14 is shorter and simpler than MZ 15 and 16, and it is always possible to suppose that a short and simple conclusion could effectively end a long and complex discourse. But at 585 words (half as long as MZ 15), MZ 14 is too long to serve an ending function; it creates an atmosphere and a frame of reference of its own, which are stylistically discontinuous with MZ 15-16. Transition to MZ 14 would create a comedown effect; a regression to a simpler world and a less sophisticated rhetoric. That effect would be particularly jarring in the categories of Stance (where the social location of MZ 14 shifts from that of its supposed precursors) and Content (where the grandiose conception featured in MZ 16, that of a universalistic and benevolent ruler, is dropped for the more elementary one of MZ 14).

As a summary of the contents of MZ 15-16, on the other hand, wherever it is considered to be placed, MZ 14 appears to be notably deficient. Among the points prominent in those chapters which are not included or implied in MZ 14 are the Legalistic technique of social control by rewards and punishments, and the more transcendent (and more Confucian) picture of a populace transformed by the influence of an enlightened ruler. It might have been difficult to reduce these distinctly different MZ 15-16 ideas to one principle, but to summarize them by omitting both of them is not a plausible procedure. This argues against regarding MZ 14 as the last of the three.

By contrast, there are no obvious problems in seeing MZ 14 as the simple starting point from which there evolved, by assimilation to the current political climate, the more structured position of MZ 15 and the more transcendent one of MZ 16. In these ways, MZ 14 appears to be a plausible starting point, located outside of government, from which the writer, or the Mician tradition under other guidance, could later have moved on to acquaintance and advocacy of some of the familiar aspects and devices of the higher statecraft of the 04c.

MZ 20 and MZ 21-22. Since MZ 22 is lost, we have only to examine MZ 20 as a possible conclusion to a series which, on Graham's theory, began with MZ 21. This may take the form of the above comparison between MZ 17 and MZ 26. The problem reduces to one of simple directionality: which of the two is likely to be earlier than, and thus, whatever their placement, to form the background of, the other?

	MZ 20	MZ 21
Stance	Outside critic	Inside advisor
Authority	Laws of ancient sage kings	Laws of ancient sage kings
Content	Criticism of bad current policy Sufferings of people Sufferings in war Late marriage, reduced population [no counterpart] [no counterpart] Against collecting rarities	Advice from antiquity Solicitude for people [no counterpart] Separation of sexes Against elaborate funerals Against elaborate rituals Against edible delicacies
Rhetoric	Q and A Cause/effect	Sayings of the ancient kings

As before, but no less obviously than before, the stance of the two is different, and of the two, the migration from outside critic to inside critic is socially likelier. The lack of matching content in several places highlights the social difference, and again, the complaints in MZ 21 about extravagant court ceremonies, and not about mere expense as such, betokens a higher social membership that is implied in the frugal complaints of MZ 20. Either society itself has become more affluent by the time MZ 21 was composed, or else the writer of MZ 21 has made an advantageous social transition. Either way, MZ 20 would appear to be earlier than MZ 21.

Apart from their local failings, these Graham proposals have the effect of leaving some triplets without a full complement of three chapters (whether listed as present or missing in the table of contents of the oldest extant edition). They seem to be ad hoc efforts to account for the absence of an otherwise common formula in these chapters, a trait which their seemingly early date will itself sufficiently explain.

Conclusion. In all three cases, and also collectively, the Graham hypothesis fails. The likelier situation is that MZ 14, 17, and 20 are independent chapters, each of which, as their canonical listing order implies, is the first, and as this survey suggests, is socially, rhetorically, and formulaically the simplest, in their respective triplets.

Works Cited

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