

Mohist Theoretic System: The Rivalry Theory of Confucianism and Interconnections With the Universal Values and Global Sustainability

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Mohism was established in the Warring State period for two centuries and half. It is the third biggest schools following Confucianism and Daoism. Mozi (468 B.C.-376 B.C.) was the first major intellectual rivalry to Confucianism and he was taken as the second biggest philosophy in his times. However, Mohism is seldom studied during more than 2,000 years from Han dynasty to the middle Qing dynasty due to his opposition claims to the dominant Confucian ideology. In this article, the author tries to illustrate the three potential functions of Mohism: First, the critical/revision function of dominant Confucianism ethics which has DNA functions of Chinese culture even in current China; second, the interconnections with the universal values of the world; third, the biological constructive function for global sustainability. Mohist had the fame of one of two well-known philosophers of his times, Confucian and Mohist. His ideas had a decisive influence upon the early Chinese thinkers while his visions of meritocracy and the public good helps shape the political philosophies and policy decisions till Qin and Han (202 B.C.-220 C.E.) dynasties. Sun Yet-sen (1902) adopted Mohist concepts “to take the world as one community” (*tian xia wei gong*) as the rationale of his democratic theory and he highly appraised Mohist concepts of equity and “impartial love” (*jian ai*). Liang Qichao and Lu Xun appreciated Mohism. And early Chinese Communist Party leaders, such as Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao, Zhang Tailei, and Mao Zedong had highly complimented Mohism, including the dialectic materialism. To some extent, Mohism had big impact on the theories of Chinese Communist Party.

Keywords: Mohism, impartial love (*jian ai*), Confucianism, the universal values

Mohist Critical Rethinking of Confucianism

Mozi focused on three benefits of “heaven, spirit and individual” (*tian, gui, ren*), which concern the heaven/nature, and society and individual levels. Mohist moral system is based on “impartial love” (*jian xiang ai*) and “mutual benefits” (*jiao xiang li*). Mohist righteousness (*yi*) is classified into the natural righteousness first and the benevolent righteousness second. Mohist benefits (*li*) are classified into the public benefits, other benefits and private benefits in ranking. However, the core value system of Confucianism is “the family-governed monarchic nation” (*jia tian xia*) which highlights on the differential/preferential love. In contrast, the core value system of Mohism is the “impartial-treated nation” (*jian tian xia*) which highlights on

the universal love. Confucianism focused on righteousness (*yi*) and looked down upon benefits (*li*), and the former and the latter are opposite to each other. Mohism focused on both righteousness and benefits, and the former and the latter should be well-integrated and highlighted both theoretically and practically.

Mohist Human Nature Assumption

Confucianism took the assumption of “good nature of human beings” (*xing ben shan*) that they are inborn good, while the philosophers Han Feizi and Xun Zi took the assumption of evil nature of human beings (*xing ben e*). However, Mohist took the complex nature of human beings that is determined by the Heaven Will/nature driven (*tian zhi*) but he was prone to evil nature of human beings due to his worries and advices of “to brighten ghosts” (*ming gui*)/original spirits to control both the king and the society. Besides of it, he was strongly against any interpersonal, group/social and state/national aggressions and fighting (*fei gong*).

Mohist Heaven/Natural Belief System: What Is the Truth and How to Seek for the Truth

To Mohist, the truth was from “the will of heaven” (*tian zhi*). Mozi took the natural worship religion which determines the order of space, sky, nature, social groups and individuals. The instrumental means of the natural religion is “to brighten ghosts” (*ming gui*) which is the original spirit at the ancient time. So seeking for truth is to follow the heaven/natural priority of a variety of sub-beliefs.

Mohist World View System

The relationship between heaven/natural (*tian*) and individuals (*ren*). The holistic structure of Mohist humanism is composed of four levels: the Heaven Will/nature, spirit, king, and individuals. The instrumental means of Heaven Will/nature and spirit support the king and individuals social structure, the ruler and the ruled. The Heaven Will/nature (*tian*) absolutely determines the king and individuals (*ren*). He thinks the will of heaven (*tian zhi*) is a personal deity that rewards the good and punishes the wicked, which is the criterion of what is morally righteousness (*yi*). Mohists distinguished themselves from Confucians, and the former took heaven will as a moral and mysterious force that does not intervene directly in human affairs. We are the people under the heaven, whatever the elder and younger, the noble and the humble. In his idea, all people should be equal and all nations should be equal as well. For brightening ghosts/spirits (*ming gui*), he claimed that people lost the beliefs in the existence. The power and providential character of spirits, the supernatural agents of the heaven, will enforce its sanctions. Otherwise, the widespread immorality and social and political chaos will happen. However, the ghosts he mentioned are not the pure religion but the only necessary tools for implementing Heaven Will. He said that “Heaven Will is sure to protect the person who loves and benefits other people, the Heaven Will is sure to punish the person who damages and robs other people” (*from ming gui*).

The Relationship Between Individual and Societal Groups

The Universal Love (Impartial Love) of the Society

What Fei Xiaotong found the Confucian morale structure as “the differential circles of ethics” (*cha xu lun li*) from the core extending to peripheries, from the parent-son, to brotherhood, to other family members, to clan, to groups, and to the state, and to the world like water wrinkles. The love mode of the ethic is from small love to the big love, from the private to the public, from the small family (such as five family circles, *wu fu*) to the bigger family (the state) to the biggest family (the world).

Mohists argued the causes of the world's conflicts resulted in people's action attitudes only being prone to their own benefits and welfares rather than considering the benefits of others, not speaking of strangers. As a result, they do not feel uneasy when they only benefit themselves and their associates at the costs of others. Mohist claimed that people ought to concern for the benefits of others without partial distinctions of the circles of himself, his associates and strangers. Mohist thinks that common people's attitude to impartial love and mutual benefits is like the fire being upward and like the water being downwards. This cannot be prevented in the world. So, the impartial love is holy king's great theory, and ministers can be safety and the masses can be satisfied under it. So, it is better that the noblemen reflect the implication of impartial love and try to implement it. If noblemen would like to be the benevolent King, the royal ministers, the kind father, the filial son, the friendly elder brother, the obeyed young brother, they have to implement impartial love (from *jian ai III*). "Impartial love" is opposite to the Confucian benevolent love which is treated with differential loves, such as private love, family love, clan love, group love, state love, and the world love in ranking. He took the view that the king and ministers, father and sons, elder brothers and young brothers, should love each other based on the equal basis rather than the unequal one. It is a holistic, impartial, and loving your neighbors as yourself, which is connected with the universal value.

The Core Values of Social Equity: "Mutual Benefits" (*jiao xiang li*)

The fundamental reason of social chaos is that people do not love each other. So, the holistic solutions of Mohism is "impartial love" (*jian xiang ai*) which does not make distinctions between self and others, and the doctrines often described more simplistically as "impartial love" and "mutual benefits" (*jiao xiang li*). He suggested not only love ourselves, but also love others. He admonished that we should take others' bodies as our bodies, treat other families as our families, and take others' states as our states. He proposed to love others first and then they return their love to us, such as we should love others' parents first and they love our parents in return, which is opposite to Confucian ranking of love.

Mohist said that if we let people do their best, the things in the world will be settled down; if everyone takes his responsibility and the match of duties-and-responsibilities, the things in the world will be settled down properly; if the assigned job is what they love to do, the things in the world will be completed; if the advantages and the disadvantages are well defined, the things in the world will be left out (from *za shou*). Thus, everyone can contribute to the society regardless of their social status. The key is how to have a good governance to realize their potentials for mutual benefits of different people.

He said that "Sins is generated from the partial treatment, so the chaos is terminated by impartial treatment (*zui sheng yu bie, luan xi yu jian*). "Mutual benefits" is the consequential equity of the society that is fundamental reason of harmonious society, and it will result in a conflicting society if it is partial treatment.

Mohist self interests is a reasonable and legitimacy for the grassland level of people. This is the surpass Confucian non-self-interest view. The logic of Mohism intended to extend self interests first to the fair interests of groups, to justify overall interests of the world finally.

The Core Values of Social Justice: No Fighting!

Mohism cried out for "non-attacking/fighting" (*fei gong*) as social justice in the warring time. They condemned the military attacking for both profitable and unprofitable that is immoral. Mohist clearly defined unjustified wars and clearly claimed the justified wars, which were actively participated by the righteous ancient sage rulers to overthrow brutal tyrants. This is the put-into-action justice of Mohist beliefs.

Mohism tried to propose an integrating scheme for revolving social chaos and conflict. Furthermore, it is potential to integrate Mohist core values with the universal values, such as equity, justice, love, human right, and law (*tian zhi*). Mohism thought that the basic human rights are the right of lives, the right of their fortune, the right of equal opportunities/impartial treatment, which can be guaranteed by impartial love and non-fighting of society. What is the biggest evil in the world? Mohist said,

the big state invades the small state, the big clan attacks the small clans, the advantage forces the disadvantage, the majority bully the minority, the cunning people plots the silly people, the noble persons look down upon the humble persons. These are the curse of the world. (*from jian ai III*)

So, Mohist social justice can be taken as freedom of life safety, the freedom of aggression/attack, the freedom of personal equal right (*fei ming*) and the disadvantage should be specially protected.

The Relationship Within Individuals

Mohism proposed “non-fatalism” (*fei ming*) of common people. Common people can determinate their fates through their efforts. In contrast, he was against Confucian fixed social ladder or the basic social structure of “king, minister, father and sons” (*jun, chen, fu, zi*). This is the connection with freedom or autonomy of life in the universal values and individualism. He pointed that “the fatalism is created by tyrants” (*ming zhe, bao wang suo zuo*) to cheat common people. Confucianism took the priority of group value rather than individual value in the social order. In contrast, Mohism takes the priority of individual value rather than group value in the society. Confucianism and Han Feizi took the priority of the State with centralized power in contrast that Mohism took the priority of decentralized power and dispersive small states. Confucianism took the priority of nation integrity in contrast that Mohism took the priority of common people, civilian, and democracy.

Public Ethics of “The Whole World as One Community”

The order and mission of Confucianism ethic disciplines are following “self cultivation, family harmony, the state governance, and the world peace” (*xiu shen, qi jia, zhi guo, ping tian xia*). The ethics is from internal self first, then family harmony process. It takes the private ethics at the core and extended it further. The ultimate goal is the world peace. “The Whole World as One Community” (*tian xia wei gong*) is the highest core value of Mohism rather than Confucianism contribution (Xiao, 2015). Mohist public ethics put “the Whole World” first rather than private and family ethics. The Confucian ontology is “Benevolent” (*ren*) or conscientiousness (*liang xin*). In contrast, the Mohist ontology is “The Whole World” (*tian xia*) and “Heaven’s Will or Natural Will”.

Mohist Administrative Identifying Theory: Identifying With The King (*shang tong*)

Both the Confucian administrative theory and Mohist administrative theory are from bottom-up integrated, and the administrative organizations are top-bottom approach that adopted a unified notion of what is morally right (*yi*) implemented by a hierarchy of rulers is a necessary condition for social and political order. Confucianism focused on internalization while Mohism highlights on identifying with the superiors according to the natural and individual benefits. However, Identifying with the King (*shang tong*) is not the absolutely same as the king. What’s more, the king also should identify with the Heaven Will. So, the belief structure is to integrate the variety of stakeholders. Mohist vision was “The Whole World as One Community”, which was consisted of a single moral-political hierarchy with the common people at the bottom.

Mohist Excellence Leadership Theory: Promoting Talents (*shang xian*)

Confucian leadership puts the ethic characters first, and the capabilities second. Mohist leadership promotes talents first without the prior to leadership ethic. In his view, whoever has talent will be official. The leadership selection system is spoken for itself. Mohism was against social hereditary system. He said that “the official cannot always be in high social status, and common people cannot always be in lower social status”, and “if the official has capability, he should be promoted; otherwise, he should be resigned from office”. He hates to appoint people by favoritism. He advised that whoever is excellent who should be the leader. The policy of elevating worthy and capable people to government positions whatever their social levels is the fundamental principle of good governance. The proper implementation of this policy requires that the rulers attract the talents to government by offering them honor, the reward of wealth and the delegation of responsibility. Besides of it, the ruler’s appointing their kinsmen and favorites to government not by their abilities is condemned.

The Interconnection With Global Sustainability

The Societal Goals of Natural Resource Savings and Pro environment Protection Are Realized by the “Means of Frugality in Expenditures” (*jie yong*), “Frugality in Funerals” (*jie zang*), and “Against Music” (*fei yue*)

Frugality in expenditures (*jie yong*) argued that good governance requires the thrift of the ruler’s spending, and the unnecessary luxuries are firmly condemned. Frugality in funerals (*jie zang*) is against the funeral rituals and the biggest family spending, in the ancient time it continued for more than 2,000 years. The aristocratic luxurious funerals and consuming time mourning are condemned as “not morally right” (*bu yi*). Mozi said that they cannot solve the world’s problems; what’s more, it increases the people’s big burdens. “Against Music” (*fei yue*) condemns the musical displays of the aristocracy as immoral on the same reason.

The Goal of the World Peace Is Realized by the Means of Impartial Love (*jian ai*), Against Wars (*fei gong*), Will of Heaven (*tian zhi*), and “The Whole World As One Community” Vision (*tian xia wei gong*)

Today, peace and development are still the world's main themes. To actively advocate universal love and non-aggression is of positive significance to global sustainability. In particular, it can help to eliminate the inequality of world war, famine, autocracy, power and poverty, and to establish a fair, just, harmonious and orderly social environment. The world should resist the unjust war of the strong nation bullying the weak and the big nation bullying the small. Mohist thought that reflects the fundamental interests of the workers is “Heaven Will”, and its core thought is “to benefit the common people” , not ideological despotism, nor the dogmatism of the politicians. The world is for the common good which is to maintain that “the world is a community” with a common destiny for mankind. The mankind should not be threatened by social injustice, disaster or war because of poverty, nation size, race, religion or country. Instead, we should uphold the values of the community of human destiny and realize the ideal of a world of peace and justice.

Some Implications of Mohism

The Critiques of Mohism to Confucianism

Mohist raises the social critical theory that challenges the five Confucian cardinal virtues: humanity (*ren*),

righteousness (*yi*), propriety (*li*), wisdom (*zhi*) and trustworthiness (*xin*), which are taken as the cornerstone of traditional Chinese culture. The Confucian humanity (*ren*) is the partial/differential love of people, from the core of family blood to the outer layers of society, such as in one's mercy, understand and sympathize with, benevolence, goodness of human nature, sympathy, coterie, lack of public spirit, lack of conscience. The Mohist related solution is impartial love (*jan ai*) in the world that is social sympathy and social love instead of family concerns centered.

The Confucian righteousness (*yi*) is also from the core family to clan, to the outer layers of society. That is from small righteousness family (*yi*) to the bigger righteousness nation, to the biggest righteousness the world (*yi*). The Confucian righteousness criteria are family or groups-centered, such as righteousness between the monarch and his ministers, enlightened despotism, patriarchy, paternalism, absolute obedience, compliance, not against the government. The Mohist related solution is "The Whole World as One Community" (*tian xia wei gong*) instead of group's differential righteousness ethic. This is social responsibility, rule by law, humanity and individual right.

The Confucian propriety (*li*) is constructed by the prolonged funeral rituals and the music rituals. The complexity of the behavior rituals include 300 big rituals and 3,000 trivial rituals, which focuses on normal rituals and the right motivations, such as courtesy, ceremony, rigid stratification, psychological control, code of conduct and the ceremony of king and minister, code of conduct and the ceremony of father and sons, order, seniority, filial piety, ostentation and extravagance, face, shows, formation, etiquette, impressive and dignified manner, differential pattern, trivial formalities, clinging to outdated customs and following the beaten track. The Mohist is strongly against aristocratic behavior conducts and claims of "frugality in funerals" (*jie zang*) and "against music" (*fei yue*) on the value stance of common people.

The Confucian wisdom (*zhi*) focuses on the personal relationship by strategies which is dominated by rulers (*ren zhi*) and using differential criteria instead of dominate by law (*fa zhi*), such as tactics, plot, trickery, power tactics, tricks, having one's wits about one, making an exception in sb.'s favor, integrating harmony, adapt oneself to changing circumstances, sophisticated, compromise, the fence-straddler, tolerance and compromise, endure, be worldly wise and make oneself safe, the middle path way, hypocrisy, dual personality, 36 stratagems and the thick black theory. The Mohist related solution is "Heaven Will" (*tian zhi*) and "Brightening the Spirits" (*ming gui*). The personal and group relationships are solved by universal rule of heaven and spirit.

The Confucian trustworthiness (*xin*) focuses on differential layers of trustworthiness, which starts from family trust to outer circles. The trustworthiness depends on how closely the relationships (*guan xi*) and differential love are, such as talking in a roundabout way, making reasonable excuse, deceive oneself as well as others, under meaning, guessing the meaning, mincement, implication, be false of heart, adore the genius. The Mohist related solution is the universal trustworthiness, such as "impartial love" (*jan ai*) and "non-fighting" (*fei gong*). The requirement of it is the universal trustworthiness.

In a word, the Confucianism promotes family/group/difference/centered criteria and means to build a harmonious society. In contrasts, the Mohism promotes the world/individual/impartial centered criteria and means to build a harmonious society. Both of them are to stop the wars and conflicts and to build a harmonious society.

Table 1

The Theory Difference Between Mohism and Confucianism

Mohist universal trust vs. Confucian family/clan/circle/group/private trust
Mohist heaven/natural culture vs. Confucian Secular culture
Mohist ghosts and Gods vs. Confucian non-ghosts and Gods
Mohist individualism vs. Confucian groupism/collectivism
Mohist social justice vs. Confucian moral justification
Mohist rule of heaven vs. Confucian Rule of man
Mohist impartial love vs. Confucian differential/partial love
Mohist mutual benefits Confucian shyness of talking benefits
Mohist non-fatalism vs. Confucian innate fates
Mohist simplicity in funerals vs. Confucian lavish burial
Mohist saving expenditures vs. Confucian Ritualism
Mohist non-music instrument vs. Confucian rituals and music
Mohist very simple life style vs. Confucian extravagant life style
Mohist the lowest level of society vs. Confucian aristocratic level
Mohist populism vs. Confucian aristocratism

The Interconnection of Mohist Values With Universal Values

Social equity. Social equity is the result of social distribution. Mohist takes that equity of the poor and any discriminations of different levels are not accepted.

Mohism insists on the mutual benefits (*jiao xiang li*) and non-fatalism (*fei ming*). The ultimate goal of Mohist society is “the world is one community”.

Social justice. Mohism is against the all kinds of invasion, and maintain the world human peace. He highly claimed to protect the small states (*xiao guo gua min*) and strongly opposes the injustice wars that are the aggression, invasion and merging wars (*fei gong*). Mohist and followers put into the justice war to directly fight against the injustice wars. The Mohist social justice theory has some implications to the current conflicting world.

Universal love. Mohism suggests love all the people of the world without considering the hierarchic levels, far and near relationship, close and distant relationship. It is surpassed of private love, family love and group love, even State love. Mohism said to love others’ parents at the first circle of love, and others love my parents in turn, which is different from Confucian first circle love of family (*jian ai III*). He also mentioned that the impartial love is from the holy king Wen’s impartiality in Zhou dynasty that is like the sunshine and the moon light without any impartiality (*jian ai III*).

Individualism. Mohism raises that everyone can make efforts to change his life, so he was against the fatalism (*fei ming*) that is family or group determined. His individualism idea is also supported by impartial love (*jian ai*). His optional social structure starts from individual, to family, to many small states with small population (*xiao guo gua min*), to the holy king. What he fundamental concern is individual rather than the nation’s premium.

Spiritual will (*tian zhi*). Mohism promoted that there is “Heaven Will” (*tian zhi*), the highest dominant of spirit. The spiritual will takes the roles of promoting all kinds of benefits and the punishment of evils in society.

Political consensus (*shang tong*). Mohism promoted the consensus and integrating of policy, thinking, speech, and behaviors with the holy king. He took that all kinds of conflicts resulted from no consensus and all kind of conflicts.

Honest. Mohist claims “to live up to your words” (*yan bi xin*) and “to act/implement firmly” (*xing bi guo*). This is different from Confucian dichotomy/gap/bi-characters of what is said and what is done. For Mohist,

what is said and what is done is consistent with, the core value of honesty.

Democratic selection. Mohist claims that the talented officials with high ethics should be recommended, selected and appointed regardless of what their family backgrounds were (*shang xian*).

Spiritual contracts. Promise must be kept and action must be resolute (*yan bi xin, xing bi guo*).

From the social control theory of Confucianism to the social ideal theory of Mohism

The hesitating principles of Mohism are to follow the Will of Heaven, the high priority of morality, and mutual benefits. Impartial love (*jian ai*) and non-fatalism (*fei ming*) are at the core of Mohist theoretical system to solve differential love and the fixed Society of “King, Ministers, Father, and Sons” hierarchy. In general, Mohism includes the universal values shared by the world, such as equity, freedom, justice, democracy, social justice, human right, the universal love, independence, collaboration, identification, spirit of contract, honest, dedication, obey the law, etc. The ideas can be the potentials to reinvent Chinese traditional culture and have great contributions for current China and other countries.

The Limitation of Mohist Theory

Mohism does not mention of the participation of common people and mainly depends on the talented rulers that are the neglect of democratic driving forces. Mohism is composed of materialism and spiritualism. Mohist said, when we go to a nation, the most important thing is to persuade. If a nation is dazed and confused, let us tell them the implication of “promoting talents” and “identifying with the King”. If a nation is very poor, let us tell them “to save expenditures” and “to have simple funerals”. If a nation is intoxicated with music and indulge in alcohol, let us tell them the benefits of “non-music” and “non-fatalism”. If a nation is dissolute and eccentric and bad behaviors, let us tell them to worship “the Heaven Will” to benefit your futures and “to brighten the ghosts” to avoid the punishment. If a nation bullies, robs, invades, insults other nations, let us tell them the benefits of “the impartial love” and “non-fighting” (*from lu wen*).

In sum, Mohist is too much faith in persuading rather than participation, which is quite similar to Confucianism.

Conclusion

1. It is traditionally believed that Chinese culture is the cultural tradition of Confucian Patriarchal clan system, ethical hierarchy, autocratic monarchy, and formalism (rites, music, funeral) . However, the top ten ideas of Mohist system are critical and competitive cultural traditions of Confucianism, and have historically been on an equal status with Confucianism. Mohist thought has great potential as a dominant theoretical resource in Chinese culture.

2. The theory of universal love, non-aggression and world harmony has the reasonable core of modern democratic values and modern democratic theory. It can be regarded as the connection or bridge between the contemporary democratic thought and the democratic theory with the democratic cognition of the originality, potential or simulacra of Chinese culture.

3. Mohist school's view of impartial love, non-aggression and Heaven Will (*tian zhi*) is in sharp contrast with Confucianism's view of difference-order ethics and autocratic monarchy. It has the value of priority or alternatives for the value integration and remolding of the excellent Chinese traditional culture in the new era.

4. Mohism is of guiding value for the harmonious development of human and nature to set up an environment-friendly, resource-saving society, and the natural and universal operation rules of the globe.

5. In today's world, developed countries focus on environmental protection and poor countries on poverty reduction. Mohist Grave-saving, Non-music and Heaven Will (*tian zhi*) are of instrumental value to environmental protection. Impartial Love and Mutual Benefit have instrumental value in eliminating poverty and social inequality. The premise of the world community is the value of social justice and human justice.

6. Mohist "the world is for the public" is the highest ideal of the community of human destiny. This is the best social ideal for solving the fundamental conflicts and social problems in the world. Solving the world's social inequalities and conflicts can provide a realistic claim of a clash of cultures or civilizations.

In a word, Mohist theoretic system has the theoretical resource value of Chinese Cultural Renaissance remolding and value reinventing and has the theoretical resource value of world democracy, human peace and sustainable development. It has the theoretical resource value of mutual reference and dialogue between eastern and western cultures and civilizations, and the value of remolding ideas and integrating theories.

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