Kongzi and Mozi, the Classicists (Ru 儒) and the Mohists (Mo 墨) in Classical-Era Thinking

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Zhongni sat perched and poised for action, 仲尼棲棲
Mozi felt pressed and agitated.1 墨子遑遑

I begin with the seeming conundrum presented by the biography of Mozi in the Shi ji: 當墨翟, 宋之大夫, 擅守禦, 為節用。或曰並孔子時, 或曰在其後。Probably Mo Ti was a court counselor in Song, skilled at defense and practicing frugality. Some say he lived at the same time as Confucius; others, that he lived after him.2

As many have noted before me, this Shi ji “biography” of no more than twenty-four characters (just a brief sketch, really) says surprisingly little about Mozi, except to state that the man’s dates and therefore his relation to Kongzi cannot be ascertained; also that Mozi is associated with one aptitude or skill (“he was good at defense”) and one practice that he urged upon rulers as policy, that of frugality.3 No mention is made of the many other teachings firmly associated with Mozi by the Han period (206 BC–AD 220), including Mozi’s commitment to the belief that conscious ghosts and spirits exist as underlying explanation or justification for other principles he purportedly propagated. Perhaps most surprisingly, the Shi ji biography, unlike the text of the Mencius that we hold in our hands, makes no attempt to associate Mozi with the jian’ai 兼愛 slogan.4 At the same time, other passages in the Shi ji suggest that the influence of Mozi was so great that it would in all probability continue after mid-Western times (ca. 100 BC), when the Simas, father and son, were writing.5

1 Hou Han shu 後漢書 30A.1046. [All Shi ji, Han shu, and Hou Han shu references are to the standard Zhong-hua shuju editions.]

2 Shi ji 74.2349–2350.

3 Other biographies of illustrious men (e. g., Zichan 子產 of Zheng and Yan Ying 晏嬰 of Qi) are surprisingly short as well. One good analysis of the hypotheses regarding Sima Qian’s cursory treatment of Mozi is provided by Xu Hua 徐華, “Shi ji lun Mo zhi yi” 史記論墨志疑, Guji yanjiu 古籍研究 2007, 上, 261–269. Xu does not believe that the Shi ji biography is truncated, and so he disputes the arguments of Zheng Jiewen (discussed below).

4 Mozi is associated in Han texts with jian’ai 兼愛, “love for all” or “inclusivity,” but that phrase is not mentioned in Mozi’s Shi ji biography, as seen above. NB: Mencius 3B/9; 7B/26, had identified Mozi’s chief “crime” as jian’ai, a phrase which Mencius sometimes took to mean that Mozi worked equally hard for everybody in trying to rescue people (regardless of merit); and sometimes apparently equated with an ideology “having no [special] feeling for one’s own father [or immediate family].” See Shi ji 9 下, jian shang (A), which says that “Mozi valued jian while Kongzi valued gong” (墨子貴兼, 孔子貴公), which comes close to meaning that Mozi valued the Everyman while Kongzi valued the duke (or possibly the public good). Cf. Lüshi chunqiu 呂氏春秋 17.7/107/3 (“Shen fen lan” 審分覽): (“Kongzi valued ren, and Mozi, jian 兼孔子貴，墨翟貴廉”). [All references to Lüshi chunqiu are to the CHANT citation index (no. 12, 1994).]

5 E. g., Shi ji 130.2074.
(completed ca. 139 BC), not only can we be sure that some version of the *Mozi* was still in circulation, but also that Mozi’s reputation was so well-established that “new books by sages were continually being hailed as the work of Kongzi and Mozi” (*新聖人書，名之孔、墨*). 

This makes the cursory treatment of Mozi by Sima Qian all the more puzzling, especially when one considers the longer treatment accorded Laozi and the *Laozi*, two comparable topics that surely confronted Sima Qian with even more questions of attribution and dating.

For us to pose the question, “What position did Mozi and the Mo experts really hold during the Han?,” we have to set aside Liang Qichao’s confident assertion that the Simas, father and son, intended to slight both Mozi and the Mohists, since their tradition was already moribund by Wudi’s (r. 141–87 BC) time.” Writing nearly a hundred years after the Simas, in late Western Han, Liu Xiang’s *Xinxu* saw the intense rivalries that plagued the careers of Mozi and Kongzi as central to the story of centralizing empires, since the rivalries had dramatically weakened both of their states in the pre-unification period. Up to now, the common wisdom has presumed an inverse relationship between the receptions of Kongzi and Mozi during Han times, with a rise in influence of the one inevitably spelling the decline in influence of the other. But can we even continue to assume that by late Zhanguo — not to mention Qin or Western Han — the followers of Mozi would have been so very distinct from those of Kongzi or the other masters? After all, several “Mohist” positions — including abdication in favor of the worthy, elevation of the worthy, the need for frugal burials, to name but a few — found different promoters among the Zhanguo advisers who had no clear “school” affiliation.

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6 *Huainan zi* (淮南子), *juan* 19 (“Xiu wu xun” 修務), 657. [All references are to *Huainan honglie jijie* 淮南鴻烈集解, ed. Liu Wendian 刘文典 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1989), 2 vols.]

7 Liang Qichao 梁啟超, *Zhongguo lishi yanjiu fa* 中國歷史研究法 (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1922), 123. Zheng Jiewen 鄭杰文, *Zhongguo Moxue tongshi* 中國墨學通史 (Beijing: Renmin, 2006) [hereafter Zheng Jiewen], 190, makes the entirely relevant point that *Shiji* 30.2066 allotts 129 characters to his description of the strengths and weaknesses of Mozi’s followers, whereas the Ru only are given 63 in the same narrative. Liang believed that most documents relating to Mozi and the Mohists must have disappeared by Sima Qian’s time (ibid.). That assessment ignores the fact that 71 *pian* of the *Mozi* were known to Liu Xiang and Liu Xin, when they were reorganizing and re-editing the holdings of the imperial library during the years 26–6 BC. For further information, see Zheng Jiewen, 190. Two other theories have been put forward often to account for the skimpiness of biography of Mozi in the *Shiji*: (1) that the present version is a truncated version; and (2) that the length of biographies in the *Shiji* seldom is determined by the historical importance of the biographical subject. Zheng Jiewen, 192, upholds theory no. 1, as Sima Qian claims that he has interwoven the “remaining texts of the Ru and the Mo” in his work (*Shiji* 130.3314), but those texts appear now to be missing.

8 Liu Xiang, *Xinxu* 新序 3.7/16 ("Zashi" 詫事) [Reference to CHANT (1992) citation index.] One may wonder whether this sort of rivalry did not exacerbate the sort of rivalries among the classicists from the northeast that Wang Baoxuan 王葆玹 describes in his *Jin gu wen jingxue xin lun* 今古經學新論 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue, 1997; rpt. 2004), esp. 19–25.

9 Sarah Allan, “Not the *Lunyu*: The Chu Script Bamboo Slip Manuscript, *Zigao*, and the Nature of Early Confucianism,” *Bulletins of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72:1 (2009), 115–151, typifies the continuing insistence on clear identities for the Confucian and Mohist “schools,” contra the available evidence. From scraps of unreliable evidence (unreliable because it is culled from documents compiled centuries later), Allan claims not only to be able to discern the social status of Kongzi’s disciples, but also to define what no scholar to date has ever yet been able to define: the nature of the Ru commitment (see below), arguing, “On a popular level [sic], the *ru* would have been defined principally by their adherence to the figure of Confucius, rather than their ideas” (See Allan, 125). A more nuanced view can be found in Zufferey, *To the Origins of Confucianism*: the *Ru* in pre-Qin times and during the early Han dynasty (Berlin: Peter Lang, OE 48 [2009])
Given the paucity of the evidence we have for the classical era in China, and more importantly, the methodological problems generated by easy equations trying to map textual content neatly onto social realities, this paper seeks only to review the present evidence for the frequent coupling in writing of the names of the two masters, Kongzi 孔子 and Mozi 墨子, which may have prompted some conflation of the terms Ru 儒 (classics) and Mo 墨 (Mohist). As we will see, for every statement that the influence of either Mozi or the Mohists was waning during the latter half of the classical era, there exist counter-statements from the same period. For example, Wang Chong's 王充 (27–97), *Lunheng* 論衡 testifies to the fact that the Way of Kongzi is alive and well in his own day, in contrast to the Way of Mozi – a “fact” that Wang ascribes to the “easier” and “more humane” character of Kongzi’s Way, in contrast to Mozi’s grim insistence on frugal burials. But the *Han shu* 漢書 bibliographic treatise (“Yi wen zhi” 藝文志), which was compiled during Wang Chong’s own lifetime, catalogues several books that criticize or extol the teachings of Mozi. The existence of polemics devoted to the analysis of teachings associated with a major figure is sufficient to attest the figure’s continuing influence, and thus the “Yiwen zhi” catalogue’s inclusion of texts like the Wozi 我子, and the Suichaozi 隨巢子, in 6 pian, the latter reportedly authored by a disciple of Mozi, raises questions about the accuracy of Wang’s statement.

Rather than postulate a chronological sequence designed to trace the rise and fall of Mohist influence, a fall which presumably occurred long after the classical era was over, this paper – in stark contrast to works like Zheng Jiewen’s *Zhongguo Moxue tongshi* [A Comprehensive History of Mohist Learning in China] concerns itself with a seemingly smaller topic, the characterizations of Mozi and his followers in relation to Kongzi and the Ru, with the sole aim of generating specific evidence relating to the larger question of periodization for Mohist influence. Underpinning the main discussion here is an awareness that many credited Mozi, like Kongzi, with being “cultivated in the techniques and arts of the former kings, and thoroughly versed in the arguments of the great men throughout the known world.”

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relating to the Six Arts [Classics or aristocratic polite arts] \(^{13}\) 儀先聖之術，通六藝之論; \(^{13}\) that both the classicists and the Mohist experts were said to be “thoroughly versed in the teachings that have been handed down from the former sages” \(^{14}\) (tong xiansheng zhi yijiao 道先聖之遺教). \(^{14}\) Once we see how difficult it is to isolate the Ru as a group with unique claims to “learning,” even classical learning, we will be better prepared to envision the complex interplay between Kong and Mo, and between the Ru and the Mo. Readers will also find it useful to recall the proximity of Song (where early accounts put Mozi as counselor) to Lu and Qi, the two Zhanguo kingdoms most closely associated with Ru learning.

I Comparisons and contrasts in the extant sources

Simply to start the discursive ball rolling, it may be helpful to outline the most obvious points of comparison between Kongzi and Mozi as supplied by the classical-era texts still extant today: Points of comparison include the following:

1. Both Kongzi and Mozi in legend are supremely wise and/or worthy men – a statement that underlies many, more specific assessments made about the two semi-legendary figures. \(^{15}\) More specifically, both Kongzi and Mozi are thought of as moral exemplars and men of learning and cultivation. \(^{16}\)

2. Both Kongzi and Mozi are less idealists than men with practical abilities. Therefore, in both cases, when rulers disregarded their advice, the states of those rulers were quickly imperilled. \(^{17}\)

3. Both Kongzi and Mozi demonstrate concern for the world in decline. \(^{18}\)

4. Both Kongzi and Mozi are concerned about the finances and outlays for the state. \(^{19}\)

\(^{13}\) Huainan zhi, juan 9 (“Zhu shu xun” 主術訓), 303; cf. Shi ji 130.2063, which mentions the Mohists venerating the Way of Yao and Shun.

\(^{14}\) For the first assertion, see Huainan zhi, juan 9 (“Zhushu xun”), 303; for the second, ibid., 438. Cf. the statement that both Kongzi and Mozi are botong 博通 (“broadly learned”) in ibid., 278.

\(^{15}\) Shi ji 87.2550, for example, where both are cynically cited for their wisdom in a long speech addressed by Zhao Gao to Li Si.

\(^{16}\) See, e.g., Xunzi 43/10/47–55 (“Fu guo” 富國) [All references cited according to the Harvard-Yenching index series Xunzi yin de Huainan zhi, juan 2 (“Shu zhen xun” 訴真訓), 66, which has Kongzi and Mozi stepping into the breach when the Zhou Way declines. Cf. Hou Han shu 30A.1046; Yantie lun 6.1/39/14 (“San bu zu” 散不足) [All references, unless noted, are hereafter to Yantie lun, cited according to Yantie lun zhuzi suoyin (CHANT 14, 1994).]

\(^{17}\) See, e.g., Xunzi 43/10/47–55 (“Fu guo”).
5. In the early legends, Kongzi and Mozi both suffered repeatedly from slander, despite their good counsel, with the result that neither received their just deserts and a fair hearing, regardless of their extraordinary talents and learning.20

6. They both represent models for those who make civil concerns and literary pursuits (both *wen* 文) their main preoccupation, as distinct from those who are preoccupied with the military or *wu* 武 arts.21

7. Both worked hard to promote a unity of thought. Mozi, therefore, is famously said to have shed bitter tears at the divergences in thinking among smart people with access to power.22

8. Both reportedly disliked artfulness, craftiness, and duplicity. Purportedly, Mozi, for example, denounced court musical programs as seductive entertainment, and, while Kongzi upheld the importance of rites and music in a civilized society, he, too, was thought to be wary of the dangers attendant upon the merely ingenious.23

9. Both men are credited with teaching "a sense of ritual propriety and duty" (*li yi* 礼义) to the world,24 despite Mozi's famous opposition to musical performances.

10. Both Kongzi and Mozi were said to be equally well-versed in both the “civil and military” (*wen wu* 文武) of the Three Dynasties period of Xia, Shang, and Zhou (i.e., the distant past and their own contemporary society).25 (NB the seeming contradiction with comparative point no. 6.)

11. As men of impressive learning and cultivation, they were both consulted for details of historical events.26

12. As men of learning and cultivation, both were asked about the true aims and purposes of learning.27

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20 See *Huainan zi*, juan 9 ("Zhushu xun"), 313; cf. *Wenxuan* 51/17a, citing Wang Ziyuan’s 王子渊 “Four Masters Discuss Virtue” (四子議德論). One text, the *Liezi* 列子, juan 8 ("Shuofu* 說符"), has Kongzi and Mozi both preoccupied with the use of force, thinking that what makes a state great will eventually undermine it, if it the use of force.

21 See Yan Kejun 严可均, *Quan shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 (1836, rpt 1893; all references to the modern rpt., Beijing: Zhonghua, 1958), "Hou Han wen," juan 43.434 (Fu Yi’s 傅毅 傅毅 “Mingdi lei” 明帝誄). [All references to Yan cite the Shangyeu 1999 ed.] Here, of course, it is relevant that Mohist defensive strategies, especially for siege warfare, are legendary; see, e.g., *Shiji* 93.2466. Note, too, that Lu Jia 陸賈 (tradit.), *Xinyu* 新語, juan 12 ("Siwu” 思務), contrasts Kongzi and Mozi on this front, saying Mozi’s disciples were all military strongmen, whereas those of Kongzi were interested in the polite arts. See *Xin yu jiaozhu* 新語校注, ed. Wang Liqi 王利器 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1986), 173.

22 See *Wenxuan* 25/15b (盧子諒贈劉琨一首并書), for the phrase “Mo Di chui ti” 墨翟垂涕. Cf. Jia Yi 賈誼, *Xin shu* 新書 ("Shen wei” 審微) 2.4/15/19 ("Mozi saw a fork in the road and bewailed it.”: 故墨子見衢路而哭之). [Reference to *Xin shu zhuzi suoyin* (CHANT 13, 1994).]

23 See *Wenxuan* 42/20a (曹子建與吳季重書), for the phrase “Mo Di chai ti” 墨翟悲哀). Cf. Jia Yi 賈誼, *Xin shu* 新書 ("Shen wei” 審微) 2.4/15/19 ("Mozi saw a fork in the road and bewailed it.”: 故墨子見衢路而哭之). [Reference to *Xin shu zhuzi suoyin* (CHANT 13, 1994).]

24 *Huainan zi*, juan 9 ("Zhushu xun"), 303.

25 *Huainan zi*, juan 13 ("Fan han xun” 試論訓), 432.

26 *Shunjing zhu* 水經注 (cited by e-Siku), juan 7/23a, has Mozi identifying a place mentioned in the “Tribute of Yu” chapter in the *Documents*. That the Mozi of legend was supposedly as liable to get into minutiae as any other Ru is made plain in *Shuijing zhu*, juan 24.

27 See Liu Xiang, *Xinxu* 新書, fragment, recorded in *Beitang shuchao* 北堂書鈔 83/7a *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 607/6a [both cited by the e-Siku].
13. Both supposedly knew well and propagated the stories and legends about the ancient sage-kings, as both were profoundly interested in the Way of Antiquity.  

14. Therefore the sayings ascribed to them and their followers, the classicists and Mohists, about even the very distant past are considered trustworthy.

15. Both were purportedly tireless workers, which helps to build their moral authority (see above), as does their desire, to “save the world” from itself.

16. Both Kongzi and Mozi were interested in the role that habit and convention play in forming a person’s inclinations. Mozi, like Xunzi, uses the metaphor of dyeing undyed silk, and both supposedly acceded to local conventions when having audiences with those in power.

17. Both trained their followers to be intrepid and consistent in their defense of the right values and priorities.

18. Both are described as master persuaders and rhetoricians.

19. Kongzi and Mozi are two figures whose authority stems not from their possession of territory nor of high rank, but from their moral authority (i.e., extra-territorial and extra-legal authority), with the results that (a) their disciples would “go through fire” at their bidding or in defense of their principles and hence (b) they and their followers constituted a potential threat to normal channels of hereditary authority.

28 See, e.g., Yan Kejun, “Hou Han wen,” juan 66.676 (Zhao Zi 趙咨, “Yi shu” 遺書): 墨子勉以古道. For Mozi’s citation of the Odes and other old texts, see CHANT database: 墨子引逸詩; 墨子引古語; and 墨子引周詩. For both Kongzi and Mozi as men who “cherished the Way of antiquity but were unable to see it put into practice” (懷古道而不能行), see Wang Liqi 王利器, ed., Yantie lun xiaozhu (鹽鐵論校注) (Wang Liqi ed. Tianjin: Tianjin guji, 1983), 253. I suspect that the adulation of the ancient sage-kings is a stronger rhetorical feature of the Mohist discourse initially, though the Han Ru eventually saw the wisdom in upholding the same line. Zheng Jiewen, 197, assumes that both the Ru and Mo experts adulated the ancient sage kings with equal fervor from the beginning. That, and the proper attribution of the source for an emphasis on the “Will of Heaven” (天志) remain to be sorted out.

29 Shuijing zhu (說文解字), 1/23b speaks of the theories of Ru and Mo (儒墨之說, 諸家)...

30 See Hsiaot'uo 蕭穎, chap. 8 (“Ziran” 自然); also Wang Chong's Lunheng (論衡). [All references to the Shuo yuan cite CHANT 1992 index.]

31 See, e.g., Li 13.7/68/17 (“Yu da” 喻大); Lüshi chunqiu 15.7/88/17 (“Shenda lan” 慎大覽): 無地 (而) 為君, 無官 (而) 為長; Huainan zi (說苑), 12 (“Daoying xun” 道應), 386.


33 For (a), compare Hsiaot’uo (蕭穎) 15.7/88/17 (“Shenda lan” 慎大覽): 無地 (而) 為君, 無官 (而) 為長; Huainan zi, juan 12 (“Daoying xun” 道應), 386. Wang Chong’s Lunheng (論衡) is particularly likely to lump these two figures together as “experts” without the advantages of birth. See Zheng Jiewen, 206, for examples. It is particularly puzzling that Wang Chong once seems to imply that Liu Xiang is a Mohist adherent.
20. Given their immense authority, new works by aspiring sages were often given the attribution of Kongzi or Mozi.\(^{37}\)

21. Both were said to be “teachers or models of [the techniques of] how to be true kings” (wang-zhe shi 王者師).\(^{38}\)

Before turning below to other, less prominent ways the names of Kongzi and Mozi were routinely coupled, it may be worth noting at this juncture that the legends about these two illustrious men bespeak the governing elite’s profound anxiety in the centralizing and centralized empires about fame’s relation to power. If the entire realm of empire increasingly was seen as the de facto personal property of the ruler, then the so-called “elite” men were little more than slaves, in that they enjoyed little or no discretion over the disposition of their own affairs. Enter on the historical stage the figures of Kongzi and Mozi, who became authorities because they recked of authenticity based in autonomy: the two figures reputedly said what they thought, rather than acting like the many craven men in service who merely accepted, promoted, and transcribed their rulers’ version of events. To be a “great man,” in the classical era, meant to capture the gaze of others among the powers-that-be, to have been duly evaluated by them, and to have received a favorable reputation on the basis of that evaluation.\(^39\) These two men, then, somehow in history came to stand for those who had managed to occupy that treacherous middle position between “precipitous defiance and disgraceful compliance”: they were faithful men in service who nonetheless maintained their personal integrity. Still, even as they were dispelling the common herd’s stupendous ignorance on the subject of how to evaluate men’s true value to the community, their obvious merits left them all the more liable to the envy and slander of lesser talents. This constellation of basic dispositions associated with the most highly respected “masters” – independence of mind and deed, discipline in training, a willingness to eschew the pleasing word or gesture, resoluteness in the face of unjust assaults on one’s person – should not escape the modern reader’s attention, for the underlying anxiety that persisted throughout the classical era was of greater historical and philosophical consequence than any single “fact” imputed to the lives of these two famous men at a distance of several centuries.

If we accept the foregoing, the secondary set of claims coupling the names of Kongzi and Mozi become all the more interesting:

1. The names of Kongzi and Mozi appear together in a given critique when both are accused of “bringing chaos to the world,” as Han Feizi and Zhuangzi charged.\(^{40}\) That both the Ru and the Mohists are “avaricious inside, while respectful outside” is a charge laid by the modernist debaters depicted in the Yantie lun 益統論.\(^{41}\)

\(^{37}\) Huainan zi, juan 19 (“Xiu wu” 修務), 657.

\(^{38}\) Shiji 121.3116.

\(^{39}\) Cf. Dylan Sailor, Writing and Empire in Tacitus (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2008), esp. 18, 30, speaking of Rome under the princeps.

\(^{40}\) For Han Fei’s criticism of Mozi, see, e.g., juan 50, 342, 351–52 [All references to Han Fei cited according to Wang Xianshen 王先慎, Han Feizi ji jie 韓非子集解 (Taipei: Shijie, 1962); for Zhuangzi’s, see Shiji 63.2144. Cf. Xu Gan’s Zhonglun 中論, juan 11 (“Kaowei” 考偽), which lists Mozi among a total of five great Zhanguo masters who “imposed chaotic judgments on the former king’s Way” (niluan yu xianwang zhi dao 汩亂乎先王之道); Makeham trans., Balanced Discourses, 139].

\(^{41}\) Yantie lun 4.3/25/13 (“Hui xue” 毀學 chap.).
2. The names of Kongzi and Mozi can be coupled – and this will surprise many – because Mozi is sometimes called a “Ru” along with Kongzi.42 (Readers should note that sometimes quite surprising people are described as Ru, such as Yang Zhu 杨朱, which suggests that the term “Ru” meant little more than “men of learning” in a culture that tended to equate “learning” with “learning about past exemplars.”)

3. The names of Kongzi and Mozi can be coupled because both urged self-restraint and societal constraints, as well.43

4. The names of Kongzi and Mozi can be coupled because they define the two opposite ends of the spectrum of thought on any given issue.44 For instance, Xunzi’s chapter 21, “Dispelling Obsession” (Jie bi 解蔽), contrasts the one-sided approach of Mozi (who is “preoccupied with utility and uncomprehending when it came to the advantages of formal patterns) with the breadth of Kongzi’s approach, which is said to be “humane, wise, and free of obsession.”45

5. Mozi was a critic of Kongzi’s teachings on three grounds (elaboration of rituals; lavish burials; and protracted mourning), while Mozi’s teachings were themselves subject to reformist criticism in four main areas (jian ai 建安; employ the worthy; belief in ghosts; and disbelief about fate).46 Yet all the reformers from Kongzi on were said to have gained insights about the relation of individuals to society and state.47

6. In both cases, after Kongzi and Mozi died, their disciples split up into many groups, which quarreled over the best way to follow their masters, without ever being able to agree upon the “real” way of the ancient sage-kings, Yao, Shun, and Yu.48

What the tales would have you see is not what actually happened, the critics of Kongzi and Mozi charge in some anecdotes. By definition, the acts of exemplary men should prove consequential for the community, improving or reconstructing it in some way. But men who parade their principles can actually bring destruction to their states and those of others. They may be “avaricious inside, while respectful outside”; their advice may be one-sided and “uncomprehending,” despite its loud

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42 See, e.g., Hanshi waizhuan 韓詩外傳 5.5/35/12–17, which calls those who follow Mozi’s teachings “vulgar Ru” (su Ru zhe 俗儒者). [All references to that text are cited according to the CHANT 1992 (annum.) volume.] Mencius 7B/26 also implicitly relates Mozi to the Ru, with their Middle Way.

43 See the Shiji 63.2144, for Zhuangzi “flaying” the Ru and Mo experts.

44 Shiji 23.163 (“Treatise on the Rites”), when speaking of rites and music, credits the Ru with “getting two good things” (兩得) while the Mo get “two losses” (兩失), in this following the Xunzi 71/19/13 (‘Li lun” 礼论) closely; compare Xin yu 新语 12 (‘Si wu” 思務 chap.), 173, where Mozi defines the excellent in the military sphere and Kongzi in the civil.

45 Xunzi 79/21/21 (mod), to which Shangjun 20.6/174/11ff. (“Fanzi”), has Mozi answering that it’s a question rather of setting priorities, such that provision of the basic necessities comes before attention to ritual and formal patterns: “Therefore, one must eat one’s fill before one seeks fine tastes; one must have warm clothes to wear before one seeks beauty; one must have a secure livelihood before one seeks music and pleasure . . . One puts first the plain necessity and later the elaborately patterned. This is what the sages take as their main task” (故食必常飽,然後求美;衣必常暖,然後求麗;居必常安,然後求樂。…先質而後文,此聖人之務).

46 Huainan zi, juan 12 (“Fa lun xuan”), 436.

47 Ibid.

48 HFZ, juan 50 (“Xianxue” 鑑學), 342, 351–352.
claims to erudition; they may ask too much of their followers, so that those anxious to throw off unnecessary constraints come to reject their teachings, with the result that even their second-generation disciples cannot agree even on the main contributions of their supposed leaders. Again, after just a little thought, a pattern about anxiety emerges that allows us to make sense of what otherwise would strike us as a motley assortment of complaints about two heroes of old. Not even one’s nearest associates, allies, and descendants can be trusted to safeguard a person’s memory. And what if many of the most famous hardly deserve commemoration, so that faithful adherence to the models ascribed to them may do more harm than good? Such suspicions surely dash any pious hope that good deeds and honest intentions grounded in successful emulation of heroic figures will inevitably earn a person just requital, either in this life or after death.

There is more in these couplings to consider than the apparent discourse of elite anxiety. As these two lists citing numerous points of comparison amply demonstrate, the received literature from Western and Eastern Han so routinely pairs the names of Kongzi and Mozi that modern historians of the distant past cannot reasonably claim to know how thinkers and persuaders of the Han period viewed the opposition between Kongzi and Mozi, or if, indeed, there was much opposition. Certainly, the contrasts between the teachings of the two seems stark enough when viewed through the single lens of the *Mencius*’ rhetoric, but the question is, were such clear distinctions made uniformly or often between the two masters in the long centuries after their deaths? And if they were, then what did Zhanguo, Qin, and Han thinkers perceive to be the main points of difference between the teachings and actions of the two thinkers? (These two questions become fair game once we concede the obvious: that by Han times, many supposed “experts” seemed very unclear about aspects of pre-Qin ritual and thought.)49 If clear differences were commonly posited, did the growing respect for theoretical unity – so evident in some chapters of the *Mozi*, the text of the *Xunzi*, and such Western Han texts as Jia Yi’s *Xin shu* (d. 169 BC) – make it nearly inevitable that the differences between Kongzi and Mozi, between the Ru and the Mo, would be glossed over by the prominent Han synthesizers?50 Odd as it may seem to modern readers attuned to political schisms and religious sects, Xunzi’s labelling of Mozi as a “vulgar” Ru need not reflect total condemnation of Mozi and his teachings as much as Xunzi’s desire for all men of learning and cultivation to accept the manifest superiority of theoretical unity.51 And what are to do with the tradition current in Han times that Mozi was the disciple of Kongzi, who saw the necessity of reforming some abuses after the Master’s death?52 Did Sima Qian’s brief notice regarding Mozi allude to this relationship between...
Kongzi and Mozi or implicitly deny it? Sima Qian’s language is ambiguous, perhaps because he wished to preserve plausible deniability with respect to this fraught issue. But, if the early accounts are true (a major caveat), Mozi almost certainly lived long after Kongzi, since he and his followers appealed to an earlier distant past, the Xia, than the first adherents of Confucius.53

At this remove, we can but try to delve a bit deeper to ascertain provisional answers to the foregoing questions. The late Zhanguo, Qin, and Han texts articulate some of the main contrasts between Kongzi and Mozi, the wise men, and between the Ru and Mo policies, even if we cannot always know how much nuance or weight was accorded such policy differences. One intriguing statement often overlooked is drawn from the Huainan zi, which says that the Ru, for all practical purposes, cannot exist outside of court, so thoroughly are they attuned to it, while the good Mohist cannot find it within himself “to blow the flute at court” — and not only because of Mozi’s famous opposition to court musical extravaganzas.54 This statement I take this to mean that the Ru feel comfortable in court, and are ambitious for a place there, in contrast to the Mohists, who may concede the necessity to work under certain rulers, but whose main preoccupation remains the welfare of the subject population, regardless of the centralizing ruler’s interests.

Of course, to highlight this characterization is not to imply anything so silly as that the alleged Mohist discomfort with courts reflects the lowly class or status backgrounds of Mozi and his followers as artisans or convict laborers.55 No good evidence exists by which to ascertain the class and status backgrounds of Mozi or his followers. Rather, the ready ascription of a specific class background and occupation to Mozi underscores the point that historical or semi-historical figures often acquire attributes because of the figure’s alleged determination to distance himself from the autocratic rulers of his time.

53 Gu Jiegang’s 顧颉剛 (1893–1980) brilliant hypothesis still stands, despite all the Sandai 三代 efforts to overturn it by the vociferous xingu/xinzhong 信古/信中 [國] voices: the older the authority cited, the later the citation is likely to be. For Gu’s arguments, see Gu shi bian 古史辨, edited by Gu and others, 6 vols. (1926–1936), passim; also Shilin zashi chubian 史林雜識初編 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1963), passim.

54 Huainan zi, juan 17 (“Shuo shan xun” 說山訓), 530.

55 Probably Mozi and his band of followers were just as much members of the governing elite as Kongzi and his band, contra the Cultural Revolution attempts to cast them as a reflection of “popular” ideas. The remark that Mozi was “counselor in Song” says as much. Needless to say, I find even more ridiculous the assertions that Mozi was somehow more “democratic” than Kongzi or the Ru, since Mozi clearly advocates obedience to authoritarian rule for all. The (some?) Mohists, as in Mozi 9 ("Fei Ru 非儒 B"), 177–189, accused the classicists of many acts of wrongdoing, among the most serious of which was wasting their time mourning their many relatives, including women, and treating their wives as well as their parents. See Mozi zhuzi suoyin (CHANT, 2001). Moreover, the main ideas associated with the Mohists (opposition to luxurious display, plus the promotion of ideas mandating impartial treatment of subjects, respect for the spirit world and divination, and honouring “worthies”) were gaining strength within the ranks of the governing elites in Zhanguo and Western Han, including segments of the classicist groups.
There are further surprises in the received literary record, including the following statement about Xunzi:

荀卿 [...] was contemptuous of the Ru (men of learning?) arguing over minutiae. In addition, people such as Zhuang Zhou [i.e., Zhuangzi] were disordering convention with smooth talk. And so he then drew inferences and arguments from the conduct and policies advocated in the Ru, Mo, and Daode teachings to bring new life to what had fallen into decay, putting in order writings many tens of thousands of phrases long before his death, when he was buried at Lanling.56

Xunzi’s opposition to the “vulgar Ru” (meaning Ru not like himself) is famous. What surprises is the bald statement that Xunzi, in devising his formulations as correctives to “people such as Zhuang Zhou” (i.e., the thinker most resembling Xunzi in many respects), resorted to drawing upon the “conduct and operation” (i.e., deeds and words, with no particular emphasis on writings) of the Mo experts, among others – a characterization with which several roughly contemporaneous texts concur.

Another surprise to me: I could find no early authority imputing different notions regarding the spirit world to Kongzi and Mozi. Many surmise with far greater confidence than I can muster that while both figures support the notion of a spirit world that is deeply implicated in human affairs as a sanctioning or punishing voice,57 a slightly different emphasis in their modalities exists, with the ancestral spirits more highlighted by Kongzi, in contrast to the supra-lineage spirits promoted by Mozi. Regrettably, things are less clear to me, and I would be willing to think this failure a function of my own muddleheadness or of the limited number of genuinely early sources that have survived58 were I not mindful of other possible reasons for this lack of clarity. As it is, plenty of appeals to an impartial Heaven (formulaic or not) appear in works assigned to both legendary masters and their adherents, in part because the thorny topic of fate and its inevitable constraints assume a large place in the surviving works.59 Readers will doubtless recall that Kongzi is seen castigating the preferences for the family and ancestors in an impeccably canonical work, the “Liyun” 禮運 chapter of the Liji 礼記.

56 Shiji 74.2348.
57 Hence Kongzi’s confidence that he will not be killed, lest the Way die with him, or his discouragement, supposedly, when the dead Duke of Zhou no longer appears in his dreams (Analects 9/5, 7/5). But while Kongzi is sometimes made to speak as if he is operating under the watchful eyes of Divine Providence, many of the references to Heaven and spirits (e.g., Analects 7/22) are as formulaic as the phrase often on my lips, “Heaven help me!”
58 For the Shanghai mss., “Gui shen zhi ming” 鬼神之命 (the title devised by Cao Jinyan 曹錦炎), found in Ma Chengyuan 馬承源, ed., Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu, vol. 5 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2005), 149–159 (plates), 307–320 (transcription).
59 The two best works on fate in the extant philosophical works remain Fu Sinian 傅斯年, Xingming guxun bianzhen 性命古訓辨證 (comp. 1940); Mori Mikisaburō 森三樹三郎, Joku yori Kandai ni itaru seimeikan no tenkai: jinseiron to unmeikan no rekishi (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1971). English-only readers may consult The Magnitude of Ming: Command, Allotment, and Fate in Chinese Culture, ed. Christopher Lupke (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 2005).
60 On this very issue, Roel Stereney asks in a private communication to me (June 25, 2009) that “Am I mistaken that Mozi’s position on spirits does not draw anywhere near the same kind of criticism by Mencius and Xunzi than his condemnation of music or his moderation in expenditures?” I find it exceedingly diffi-
II Problems with Zheng Jiewen’s Zhongguo Moxue tongshi

Some thirty years ago, Benjamin E. Wallacker proposed a simple explanation for a historical trend that he took for granted: a decline in the influence of the Mohists beginning by the end of the Zhanguo period and continuing during Han, until such point as the Mohist influence became negligible.61 By his explanation, the very gradual displacement of Mohism by Kongzi’s version of the Way came as a result of the appropriation and consequent dilution of Mozi’s teachings by the Ru in power. As evidence for this appropriation Wallacker cites a single pronouncement made by Gongsun Hong (d. 121 BC), chancellor under Han Wudi, who conflated the “Confucian” notion of ren (love and concern expressed according to graded kinship obligations) with the Mohist notion of “universal love” (jian ai). As Wallacker believed that the latter concept was much more suited to a centralized government “demanding equal obeisance from all” its subjects, regardless of kin obligations,62 Wallacker was left to explain how and why the Ru eventually “triumphed” over the Mohists.63 Wallacker went so far as to speak of an absorptive and even “content-free Confucianism” [my italics] being the norm in mid-Western Han times among the most prominent court policy-makers,64 a group in which Wallacker put Gongsun Hong and Dong Zhongshu (d. 104 BC).65 The main premise of Wallacker’s essay – that the Ru “triumphed” over the Mo, may be faulty, as it relies overmuch not only upon the outdated vision of competing “schools” in Han, but also upon a single assertion made by the polemicist Wang Chong in his Lunheng (comp. AD 97) to the effect that Mohist influence is on the wane in Wang’s own day.66 Much counter-evidence has been painstakingly gathered over the course of a cult to imagine that there was a separate Mohist pantheon, although Mozi’s followers would have offered cult to him.

61 Benjamin E. Wallacker, “Han Confucianism and Confucius in Han,” in Roy, David T. and Tsuen-hsuin Tien, eds. Ancient China: studies in early civilization (Hong Kong: The Chinese University, 1978), 215–228. Wallacker cites Fukui Shigemasa, “The Resusitation of Moxia in the Former Han Dynasty,” Tōhōgaku 29 (1970), 1–18, which also argues that Mohism was absorbed into the Ru teachings before and during Han.

62 Wallacker, 228.

63 Wallacker ignored the importance of the twenty or twenty-one grades (jue, called by Loewe “orders of honor”) in penal, administrative, and civil law. For the most succinct summary of these “orders,” see Michael Loewe, “Social Distinctions, Groups and Privileges,” and “The Laws of 186 BCE,” in China’s Early Empires: a reappraisal, conceived as supplement to The Cambridge History of China, vol 1, ed. by Michael Nylan and Michael Loewe (publication: October, 2010).

64 Wallacker, 222, focuses particularly in the figure of Gongsun Hong, who seems to him to combine Mohist commitments with those toward the Ru school. He mentions that Gongsun Hong was notorious for penny-pinching also for his idea that the Han subjects ought to be disarmed; finally, he expressed “a view of Heaven more consonant with the theism of Mozi than with the agnosticism of Confucius.”

65 Wallacker sees Gongsun Hong as “the chief agent of the central government in the construction of the new educational and training facility.” Wallacker believes that Confucius and his followers had three valuable skills to offer the Han state: (1) they had a greater command of ritual and protocol than other groups; (2) they placed a higher value upon literacy than did competing schools [sic]; and (3) their devotion to historical texts gave them the ability to quote classical precedent with facility. The extant sources do not necessarily support hypotheses 2 and 3, however, as most of them make the Mohists well-versed in the traditions concerning the antique sage-kings.

66 Lunheng, 83/358/22.
the last twenty years, the cumulative effect of which has been to lower the probable place of Kongzi and the Ru in early Han times.\textsuperscript{67} Nevertheless, Wallacker’s attention to Gongsun Hong’s conflation of \textit{ren} with \textit{jian ai} compels our attention.\textsuperscript{68} The idea that the Mozi’s main prescriptions for “saving the world” are simply incorporated into the mainstream discourse in Han, obviating the necessity for their continued existence as a discrete set of teachings – this seems plausible enough to account for certain phenomena in the historical record.

Ostensibly, the first volume of Zheng Jiewen’s \textit{General History of Mohism in China} presents something of a challenge to Wallacker’s portrait of the distant past, for Zheng sketches a historical trajectory by which Mohist influences – very strong in the pre-Qin period – begin an exceedingly slow, if inexorable decline over the course of the four centuries of Han, so slow a decline that “Mohist learning [even] in late Western Han was not really cut off.”\textsuperscript{69} Indeed, in Zheng’s narrative, Mozi’s influence remains more or less constant throughout the four centuries of Han. Unfortunately, Zheng has forgotten some of the basic laws of writing history: First, Zheng claims to be able to provide a broad overview of important societal and intellectual trends when the present evidence precludes confident formulations about the distant past, while meanwhile forcing upon us two uncomfortable realizations: that the individual printed books that we hold in our hands today neither precisely match those available during the classical era nor do they represent the compilations of men with identical views on key issues. Zheng Jiewen nonetheless mistakes a line-up of texts that he has dated for a schematic chart of the shifting social realities in the world outside the text. Zheng has yet to see a text whose accounts he doubted.\textsuperscript{70} Zheng’s book includes many egregious examples of anachronistic dating of texts, blithely dismissing cases of post-facto compilation, not to mention literary prosopopeia, by assigning dates of the books he surveys to the period when the putative events occurred or the putative author lived (even when anomalies and contradictions complicate the picture we have inherited about one and the same person). Naturally, this haphazardness badly throws off attempts to analyze trends within any single time period. For instance, the \textit{Zhanguo ce} \textit{戰國策} compiled by Liu Xiang \textit{劉向} (79–8 BC) in late Western Han is presumed to be a reliable guide to the standing of the Mohists in the \textit{Zhanguo} period, more precisely, the years 454–209 BC, which are “covered by” the anecdotes in Liu Xiang’s book.\textsuperscript{71} However, many scholars would prefer to read the contents of that compilation

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{}\textsuperscript{68} Sato Masayuki, a participant at the 2008 conference in Leuven, seems to have come to the same conclusion in his own work. See his article “The Idea to Rule The World: The Mohist Impact of Jian 兼 on the \textit{Xunzi}”, in this issue.
\bibitem{}\textsuperscript{69} Zheng Jiewen, 202. Since Liu Xiang in all his corpus only quotes the \textit{Mozi} four times, and Yang Xiong, thrice, we may question the basis for Zheng’s statement anyway. See more on this below.
\bibitem{}\textsuperscript{70} See his analysis of what is clearly an enjoyable anecdote (Zheng Jiewen, 163), which he treats as a matter whose historicity “cannot be doubted.”
\bibitem{}\textsuperscript{71} See \textit{Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide}, ed. Michael Loewe (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China, 1993), pp. 1–11, on the \textit{Zhanguo ce} (entry by Tsuen-Hsuin Tsien). With respect to the \textit{Yanzi chunqiu}, Zheng ignores Wang Gengsheng’s noting of twenty-odd serious anachronisms. See Ilid., p. 485 (entry by Stephen Durrant). Zheng also believes that he can parse the “school affiliation” of recently excavated texts that demonstrate considerable eclecticism; see Zheng Jiewen, 167–175, on the Guodian manuscript “Tan Yu zhi dao” 唐虞之道, and he launches a rather ill-informed argument against Gu Jiegang’s \textit{pi-} pio-neering work on the \textit{Mozi} in \textit{Gushi bian 古史辨}, which is followed in the main by Sarah Allan in her essay
\end{thebibliography}
as a record of late Western Han attitudes toward Zhanguo and Qin figures and events, taking into account Liu Xiang’s official position as zongzheng (imperial clan leader) at the Han court.

Second, Zheng believes that he can ascertain the key doctrines associated with Huang-Lao theory and practice, when no responsible scholar in recent years has spoken confidently about the place of Huang-Lao based on the extant sources. And, in company with most mainland China scholars, Zheng Jiewen does not hesitate to date to the beginning of Wudi’s reign (r. 141–87 BC) a dramatic rupture in what he thinks of as the “academic world” at court, whereby the Ru masters are catapulted to prominence far above the other experts specializing in the other “schools” (a serious, if widespread misreading of events in the distant past). Had Zheng been more conversant with the latest scholarship, he might have hesitated before saying that Wudi’s ascendancy to the throne prompted a tilt in the court’s favor toward the Ru and away from the other “schools”; he would also wonder why the Huang-Lao proponents, supposedly so very strong in early to mid-Western Han, suddenly cannot defend themselves from the attacks launched against them and the Mohists. Finally, and most troubling of all, Zheng identifies no standard by which to measure the degree of influence exerted by either Mozi or the Mohists.


73 Zheng Jiewen, 187, takes Dong Zhongshu, Gongsun Hong, Sang Hongyang, and Ni Kuan all to be Ru. But the compilers of the Yantie lun would hardly characterize Sang (not to mention some of the others) as a Ru representative. To give two other examples, Zheng erroneously dates the Yantie lun to 81 BC, the date when the debate is recorded to have taken place; ignoring the internal evidence that points toward authorship by Huan Kuan, who served at the court of Emperor Xuan (r. 74–49). For this, see Michael Loewe’s essay on the Yantie lun in Early Chinese Texts, 477. Zheng also, contra much accepted work, dates all the Chunqiu fanlu to the time of Dong Zhongshu. See Zheng Jiewen, 195. In repeated personal communications with me, Loewe has been inclined to stress that the Yantie lun is a rhetorical exercise written decades after the court conference it supposedly reports upon. In any case, that text puts Kongzi and Mozi on a par with one another no fewer than 10 times. Regarding the Chunqiu fanlu, Sarah Queen’s From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, according to Tung Chung-shu (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996); and Anne Cheng, “Review of Sarah Queen, From Chronicle to Canon,” Early China 23–24 (1998): 353–366, ably summarize the recent objections to the traditional dating. Michael Loewe is soon to publish with Brill a monograph examining the place accorded Dong in Han through Tang times. Fukui Shigemasa has painstakingly listed the main Republican-era textbooks that promoted a coherent narrative about the Ru, but the picture is coming together from a number of other historians as well.
thereby failing to distinguish routine adulations of “wisdom bags”\(^75\) from assertions about figures exerting a transformative influence upon public policies and social realities.

Because Zheng’s portrait of the distant past is likely to be mistaken by so many non-specialists for an admirable summary of complex social and political realities, I think it worthwhile to outline and refute his main arguments about the place of Mozi and his followers in the classical era. With those arguments in mind, this essay will then attempt to formulate a less anachronistic portrait that still recognizes a host of unresolved puzzles that Zheng seems to ignore. This is not to discount the enormous debt that all scholars owe Zheng for the monumental effort he has expended in marshalling the very texts that historians must now review, if they are ever to arrive at a more accurate view of the place of Mozi and the Mohists in reception history. In short, Zheng has undertaken the preliminary spadework, and it is up to us who follow him to read the sources gathered by him in a more critical way.

Zheng Jiewen takes for granted the huge influence of Mozi and the Mohists during the late Zhanguo period, an assumption that he does nothing to test but one that is nevertheless probably warranted. He then takes a look at the four centuries of Han, which he divides roughly into two periods, with the first up to Han Wudi’s reign (141–87 BC) and the second after Han Wudi. As mentioned above, Zheng dates the growing influence of Ru or “Confucian” ideas to Han Wudi’s decisions (ca. 135 BC) to nominate Academicians for the Five Classics and to exclude other “schools” of thought. Fukui Shigemasa has neatly demolished every single premise underpinning Zheng’s rather haphazard analysis, most crucially with regard to the following: (1) that Ru influence escalated because of Han Wudi’s decisions early on in his reign; (2) that the other streams of thought as “rivals” to the Ru were from that time forward virtually excluded by policy-makers; and (3) that Han Wudi substantially elevated the Academicians’ roles, rather than reorganizing their roles. Having noted Fukui’s objections to the conventional Republican-era narrative adopted wholesale by Zheng Jiewen, let us explore Zheng’s suggested scenario in greater depth.

Zheng Jiewen notes that Mozi is mentioned some 32x in early Western Han, playing an especially prominent role in the *Lüshi chunqiu* \(^{76}\) and the *Huainan zi*. His explanation for that prominence verges on the tautological because of its circularity: Mozi is prominent because the Ru in early Western Han for some reason did not usually see Mozi as an enemy, and instead viewed both Kongzi and Mozi as courageous fighters against the biggest rulers (*zheng wancheng zhi jun* \(^{76}\)). Zheng apparently sees the Ru and Mo as allies in the fight waged against proponents of Huang-Lao, though he never states this clearly. Indeed, at points, Zheng tends to ascribe a “live and let live” attitude to the early Huang-Lao adherents, whom he believes dominated the court until Wudi’s time. In any case Zheng’s narrative asserts that only from the time of Han Wudi on did the Ru come increasingly to see Mozi and the Mohists as rivals or threats.

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75 “Wisdom bags” (*zhi nang*) is the term applied, in praise or blame, in Han texts on those of vast erudition. See, e.g., *Shiji* 71.2307; 101.2746; *Hanshu* 49.2278; *Lunheng* 47/214/9; 59/260/14. See also the description of “wisdom bags” in Yang Xiong’s *Fayan* 6/14/4: (*Shi zhi gui ye, zhi da zhi ye* 師之貴也,知大知也). References to the *Fayan*, here and below, are to the *Fayan zhuzi suoyin* (CHANT 18, 1995).

76 *Huainan zi* juan 9 (“Zhu shu xun”), 313. This assessment seems to run counter to an explicit statement in Liu Wendian, 530, that both Kongzi and the Ru feel comfortable with the court and with centralizing rulers, in contrast to Mozi and the Mohists, whose main concern is always the welfare of the subject population, as opposed to the ruler’s interests. Zheng Jiewen, 183, also notes (correctly) that the *Hanshi waizhuan* is not enamored of Mozi; see *Hanshi waizhuan zhuzi suoyin* 4.22/31/1; 5.5/35/6. Zheng assumes this is because the text is a Confucian text following Mencius.
Turning to Wudi's reign, Zheng curiously ignores the counter-evidence that he himself presents. Zheng then discusses the *Shiji* and the *Hanshu*, dangerously reading the latter as but a mere “continuation” of the former, while noting how seldom the historians invoke Mozi or the Mohists in their analyses. Of course, Sima Tan’s famous “On the Six Types of Experts” urges members of the governing elite to select the “best points of the Ru and Mo experts” (cái Ru Mo zhī zhān 采儒墨之善), along with those of the logicians and would-be social engineers, to devise a truly improved way of operating in the public sphere.

From Wudi’s time onward, Zheng insists, Mozi and the Mohists retain a measure of their influence, even as he concedes that their names are seldom invoked in discussions on relevant policy questions, including taxes, monetary policy, and food distribution. To corroborate his picture of barely diminished influence for Mozi and the Mohists, Zheng cites the *Yantie lun* passages where Kongzi and Mozi both come under equal attack, on the grounds that “neither could carry out public policy when they got power, nor could they practice the Antiquie Way they so cherished.” Zheng then constructs the case that the Mohist influence continued to be strong through Eastern Han, mainly because Wang Chong’s *Lunheng* mentions either Mozi or the Mohists a total of twenty-five times. Thirteen of those citations pair Kongzi with Mozi as proverbial “wisdom bags” or pair the Ru with the Mohists. One wonders what, then, to do with Wang’s bold assertion that Mohist influence is on the wane, not to mention the fact that nearly all the remaining citations relate to Wang’s pronouncements on the nature of death. Zheng insists that Wang Chong’s writings attest his detailed knowledge of Mozi’s teachings, and since the Han bibliographic treatises, including the *Yiwen zhi* in the *Hanshu*, list a handful of polemical texts devoted to the *Mozi* in addition to a lengthy text of the *Mozi* itself, Zheng finds no reason to suspect that Mohist teachings were not in wide circulation during Eastern Han and thus easily accessed, especially by those studying in the capital.

However, such an exposition of Wang’s citations mainly serves to demonstrate that Wang Chong’s understanding of Mohism was not terribly rich or sympathetic, as Wang’s *Lunheng* reduces Mohist teachings to two potentially contradictory teachings (the dead are conscious and burials should be frugal). Admittedly, Wang Chong gives this internal contradiction within Mohist teachings as “the probable reason why the Mohist arts and techniques are not transmitted” (cǐ gài moshu suò yǐ bù chuán 此蓋墨術所以不傳) in Wang’s own day. If we accept Wang’s assertion as fact, three supplementary questions still remain: (1) Do Wang’s writings illustrate a broad historical trend or do

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77 Zheng Jiewen, 183, describes Huang-Lao in terms of five policies: (1) the simplification of Qin laws; (2) the simplification and adaptation of Qin ritual; (3) frugality in state expenditures; (4) fixing the monetary system; and (5) lowering taxes. For Zheng, the Huang-Lao proposals all favor the poorest subjects of the Han realm at the expense of its aristocrats. Some of the evidence that Zheng ignores includes Xiao He’s insistence that Gaozu build lavish palaces in Chang’an. Zheng also presumes that Legalist influence is on the decline – something not altogether apparent from the extant sources. Finally, Zheng presents some counter-evidence, for example, that the Mohists’ teachings are deemed “unworkable” by the people he calls Huang-Lao adherents.

78 *Shiji* 130.2064.

79 Zheng Jiewen, 185–86.

80 *Yantie lun* 5.1/29/9 (“Xiang cì” 相刺).

81 Most of the *Biélu* is missing, of course, but “Mohist learning” (Mozi zhī xué 墨子之學) is cited in Yen Kejun, “Quan Han wen,” *juan* 38.395. As scholars in late imperial China noticed, this meant that the “sayings of Mohists could be reconciled with those of the Ru.” See Xu Yunwen 徐允文 (fl. 1163), “Zun Meng bian Bielu” 尊孟辨別錄 (上 /8a) [e-Siku].
they represent his own idiosyncratic views? A bit of both, if other essays by Wang are a guide, since the deeply conventional Wang is trying extremely hard to convince others of his unique abilities to analyze all kinds of phenomena. (2) How much was the Lunheng in circulation in Eastern Han before the last decades, when Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–192) seems to have established its reputation? Not much, if we trust the Hou Hanshu account; and (3) How can the Lunheng be construed as verification of the continuing influence of Mozi and the Mohists, if the Lunheng itself mainly criticizes Mozi for what it perceives to be an inherent contradiction in that master’s teachings? Playing the numbers game, in other words, is not at all that helpful to establish the lasting influence of a person or a group. To raise a hypothetical: a given persuader might find it more politic to attack one group when his real target is another.

In arguing that the Mohist influence continues unabated during late Western and Eastern Han, Zheng has undercut some of the evidence that he himself has marshalled. That evidence suggests that, beginning in late Western Han, Mozi and the Mohists, with rare exceptions, either disappear from the standard accounts or they appear as subjects of critiques penned by the Han authors. Yang Xiong’s 楊雄 (53 BC–AD 18) Fengyan 中論, for example, mentions Mozi only twice, each time as an obstruction to right thinking and right conduct.83 Ying Shao’s 應劭 Fenzhong 風俗通義 (comp. ca. 203) mentions Mozi only three times, in the stock ways, which seem after centuries of use entirely perfunctory. Xun Yue’s 許穎 (149–209) Shenzhong 中論 and Xu Gan’s (171–218) Zhonglun 中論 virtually ignore Mozi and the Mohists as well, evidently because the Eastern Han writers feel that they can afford to. To bolster his shaky arguments about continuing Mohist influence, Zheng resorts to the methodologically indefensible ploy of tracing all ideas about immortality, frugality, or an interventionist Heaven straight back to the Mohists, despite the fact that these ideas enjoyed lives of their own before, after, and outside the circles of Mozi’s admirers. Following Zheng’s logic, one would have to believe that Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 was a Mohist, along with all the fangshi 方士 and omen prognosticators. We must never forget that counting explicit references, not to mention alleged "connections," is a very poor measure of societal influence. Han historians should instead consider the abundant evidence showing that the all-important court debates on ritual expenditure in particular and on the economy in general Han tend to perpetuate themes and concerns articulated in the Zhanguo Mozi without giving evidence of a perceived need centuries later to label these as particularly Mohist.87

When it comes to the post-Han period of Disunion (220–581), Zheng Jiewen’s chronological outline becomes still more incoherent. On the one hand, Zheng states that the Ru and Mo teachings remained the “core” curriculum for learned men. On the other, he argues that those same two

82 This does not appear to be a question that Zheng ever confronts. Quite often, Zheng, on the basis of a single book, believes that he can map chronological change; here (see Zheng Jiewen, 210), as is usual in his treatment of authors, Zheng ignores the sheer idiosyncrasy of many, if not most of Wang’s views. One passage by Liu Xiang attributes the collapse of state power in Qi and Lu at least partly to a supposedly intense rivalry between Kongzi and Mozi. See Zheng Jiewen, 202–203.
83 See Hou Han shu 49.1629, citing the Hou Hanshu compiled by Yuan Shansong 袁山松 (Jin dynasty) and Ge Hong’s 葛洪 Baopuzi 抱朴子.
84 As Zheng Jiewen, 208, notes.
85 Fengyan 2/5/22; 8/21/17.
87 As Roel Stercyx observes, again in a private communication with me, this is “a bit like debating democracy without citing the Greeks.”
traditions were being relegated to the 杂 (miscellaneous) category in bibliographic terms, as the fashion for Lao-Zhuang teachings became something like a “cultural fever” and the Buddhists “sometimes suppressed and sometimes promoted Ru and Mo teachings.” In Zheng’s view, after the North and South split in AD 316, responses to Mozi and the Mohist teaching begin to vary dramatically according to location, with the Northers more inclined to repeat the old Han formulations and the Southerners more inclined to seek for commonalities between the Mohist teachings and those of the organized religions of Buddhism and Daoism, presumably because of the undeniable religious fervor which the Mohists brought to their teachings. But Zheng has far too few sources on which to base any respectable analysis — or so it seems to me.

A much more plausible narrative that is truer to extant sources found in Zheng Jiewen’s treatment would posit the very gradual displacement of Mohism through a process by which the specificity of Mozi’s teachings is gradually diluted (a process to which Wallacker’s essay points), until the eventual submersion of the discrete Mohist traditions, aside from the ranks of readers of the Mozi, the breadth of whose circulation cannot be taken for granted. At this point, Mozi and the Mohists appear to have suffered most substantially from the “classical turn” that took place in late Western Han in conjunction with the 好古 (“loving antiquity”) movement promoted by Yang Xiong, during Chengdi’s reign (r. 33–7 BC). It can hardly be coincidence that neither Yang nor his mentor, Liu Xiang, were laudatory about Mozi; both Yang and Liu Xiang treat Mozi rather dismissively in a few brief passages. Beginning in late Western Han, then, if my own cross-reading of the very same passages collected in Zheng’s work can be trusted, the range of Mozi’s teachings seems to be effectively reduced to (1) mere advocacy for frugal burials; and (2) the view that the dead – possibly limited to the royal dead -- retain consciousness. During this lengthy process, Mozi the master remains a tireless advocate on behalf of a set of generally unspecified ideas ascribed to the ancient

89 Ibid., 227–228.
90 Ibid., 235.
92 Glen Dudbridge, 239.
93 Ibid., 155. However, Zheng, 235, cites evidence that some in the Wei-Jin period took Kongzi and Mozi to be providing solutions for ordering the age (治世), while the Buddhists were seen as the best teachers for whatever lies beyond mundane existence.
94 Before 316, the received literature registers little of the “strong reaction” that supposedly accompanied the downfall of Eastern Han in AD 220.
95 Fuyan 8/21/17 says, “Mo Di and Master Yan urged frugality but they rejected ritual.” The context for this line puts Mozi as part of a group of policy-makers, most of whom Yang Xiong de- piles. Ibid., 2/5/22 condemns Mozi as someone who “blocked the road” (i.e., impeded the spread) of Confucius’s teachings. The movement, see the forthcoming monograph by Michael Nylan for the American Oriental Society.
96 Mozi is mentioned a sum total of three times in Yang’s writing (with two assessments quite negative), and four times in the vast corpus attributed to Liu Xiang.
sage-kings. Frugal burials, the belief that the dead are conscious, and a reverence for antiquity—none of these ideas would have been distinctive enough to keep Mozi constantly before the mind’s eye of the Eastern Han and post-Han thinkers. So whereas the text of the Mozi seems to have remained in circulation throughout the Han period, the figure of Mozi became more and more a stock device fashioned as a useful model of diligence and integrity for right-thinking people of any persuasion.

III Tentative Conclusions

The first part of this essay places question marks around the often assumed clear-cut identity split between Kong and Mo in Han, while the second offers a critique of the possibility that we should draw any confident conclusions on the socio-political context in which Mohist ideas were cast in Han and developed thereafter. (The essay takes Zheng Jiewen to task, not because his work is unusually bad, but because the sloppy methodology he employs is typical of vast numbers of academic writings relating to Han thought.) While the Han and immediate post-Han sources may be too paltry to allow the formulation of strong hypotheses about the fate of Mozi and the Mohists during the classical era in China, what they indisputably show is the ease, verging on abandon with which Han thinkers lump together figures that modern sectarian views once assigned to separate “schools.” Because both advocated frugality in state expenditures, Han texts show Mozi likening himself to Yan Ying, the famous minister of Qi whom legend blamed for destroying Kongzi’s career. Similarly, the name of Mozi is frequently coupled with that of Zengzi, an exemplar of filial duty who appears in ritual texts as an ideal Ru, and anything but a proponent of frugal burials. Then, too, Mozi early on appears as a student, along with Kongzi, not just of Yao and Shun, but also of King Wen and the Duke of Zhou. Most talk about Mozi or the Mohists meanwhile reveal deep-seated anxieties about the inherent difficulties of establishing an independent voice at the centralizing and centralized courts of Zhanguo through Wei-Jin Nanbeichao, and the right ways to achieve sufficient social standing to make that voice be heard.

Like their Roman counterparts, thinkers in Han and the immediate post-Han period tended to be pragmatists. Even the metaphysician Yang Xiong let it be known that the Great Mystery [Taixuan] was no great mystery at all, insofar as the ineffable cosmic processes in no way interfered with the governing elite’s duty to display the usual roster of virtues in public life. Thus it did not take long for the distinctive characters ascribed to Kongzi and Mozi, not to mention other masters, to be taken as “proof” that each person whose attainments had earned him the

97 Note the perfunctory treatment of Mozi in Ying Shao’s Fengsu tongyi, which mentions Mozi a mere three times. Zheng seems to believe that if a figure like Mozi is mentioned at all, his influence on contemporary culture can be taken for granted. Nothing is further from the truth.
98 Shunyan 20.6/174/11 (20.6/174/11 ("Fanzhi") has Mozi promoting frugality along with Yan Ying, prime minister of Qi under Duke Huan.
99 See Shi 112.2x56; Wuciuela 39/15h, letter sent by Zou Yang to the emperor while Zou is in prison; Shi 83.4278; and Taiping yulan 912/4040. Two sources tie the Mozi text with the Jingzhou thinkers Song Zhong and Liu Biao, if the sources cited in Zheng Jiewen, 215, can be trusted. Both Song and Liu were followers of Yang Xiong, as shown in Nylan, “The Legacies of the Chengdu Plain,” Ancient Sichuan: Treasures From a Lost Civilization, ed. Robert W. Bagley (Seattle, Wash.: Seattle Art Museum, 2001), 307–328.
100 Lüshi chorqiu, 24.5/158/13–15 (20.6/174/11 ("Bo zhi") has noted this in his Mozi xiangyu, 407–408.
title of “master” displayed strengths and weaknesses, which should be taken into consideration when trying to make sense of the state of the world. To my mind, the most interesting rhetoric found in such Eastern Han compendia as the Fengsu tongyi discusses the changing contexts that establish memorable deeds, though that type of rhetoric is easily traced back to Han Fei’s account of the sagely inventors of primeval times. With this synthetic tendency propelling a great deal of the theorizing in Han, the tradition that Mozi was once a devoted disciple or follower of Kongzi, who was nonetheless dismayed by the over-elaboration of some rituals mandated by the “Confucian” Way, portrays Mozi as a safe (if somewhat innocuous) hero to invoke, particularly after budgetary shortfalls propelled the haogu movement thinkers to propose paring back imperial expenses on the “basis” of pseudo-classical restraints. But even this scenario remains speculation at this remove, for we lack sufficient evidence to say anything for sure.

More work remains to be done on the subtexts lurking right under the surface of our philosophical texts. References to the elite anxiety discourse are not only relevant in the context of Mozi and his followers. They also constitute one way of making sense of an enormous body of writings from the late Western Han period through mid-Eastern Han, after which this particular discourse is often supplemented by another fashionable line pitting talent against virtue. John Dewey once remarked that “anyone who begins to think places some part of the world in jeopardy.” Work on this essay has reminded me of how arduous an effort is entailed to recast the distant past along lines in greater conformity with the evidence at hand, even when the principals rethinking that past don’t mind shaking up old bits of common wisdom. To date, no excavated manuscript says much about Mozi, more’s the pity. Until one does, the foregoing analysis may be about as far as historians can go with the story of Mozi and his later followers, absent more digging in the Mohist canon itself.

101 For the Fengsu tongyi, see esp. chapter 5 on “Ten Contradictory Exempla” (“Shi fan” 十反); for Han Fei, see the opening lines to juan 49, “Five Vermin” (“Wu du” 五蠹).
102 Huainan zi, juan 13 (“Fanlan xun”), 432; ibid., juan 21 (“Yao hae”): 墨子學儒者之業，受孔子之術，以為其禮煩擾而不悦【侻】，厚葬靡財而貧民。Cf. Fayan 8/28 with Shuoyuan 20.6/174/11, as noted above.
103 On this, see Étienne Balazs, Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy (New Haven: Yale University, 1964). I would like to thank the KU-Leuven conference organizers Carine DeFoort and Nicolas Standaert, my fellow conference participants, and Roel Stercyx, my discussant, for two days of heady conversation relating to Mozi and reception history.