

Mohism

By Maddalena Poli, University of Pennsylvania

Entry tags: Chinese Religion, Religious Group

community of people who identified themselves as following the teachings of Mo Di 墨翟, c. 479–381 BCE – "墨之所至，墨翟也" Hanfeizi 卷 19



Date Range: 400 BCE - 200 BCE

Region: Warring States China

Region tags: Asia, East Asia

Generated with guidance from Professor Armin Selbitschka. a) The eastern part of Gansu (especially the Fangmatan site near Tianshui; excavation report: Wenwu 1989.2: 1-11 and 31; for the sake of convenience, I will attach a digital copy of the report below) b) Shaanxi c) Shanxi d) Hebei e) Henan f) Shandong g) Jiangsu h) Anhui i) Zhejiang j) Hubei k) Hunan

Status of Participants:

✓ Elite ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

Sources

Print sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: Wu Yujiang 吴毓江 2006 《墨子校注》，中华书局出版
- Source 2: Carine Defoort, 2017, Mohism, Oxford Bibliographies
- Source 3: Angus Graham, 1978, Later Mohist logic, ethics and science, Hong Kong : The Chinese University Press

Notes: see also for a comprehensive overview of Mohism: Zheng Jiewen 郑杰文. Zhongguo Mo xue tongshi (中国墨学通史). 2 vols. Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 2006

Online sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1 URL: <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199920082/obo-9780199920082-0092.xml?jsessionid=FACC841715997CAC8971CF4495958D2A>
- Source 1 Description: Carine Defoort, 2017, Mohism, Oxford Bibliographies
- Source 2 URL: <https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/Mohism/53200>
- Source 2 Description: Mohism in Encyclopædia Britannica Online.
- Source 3 URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mohism/>
- Source 3 Description: Mohism in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy by Chris Fraser

Notes: see also Yuri Pines 2005, Moshin, in *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*. Volume 4, pp. 1490-1491

Relevant online primary textual corpora (original languages and/or translations):

– Source 1 URL: <https://ctext.org/mozi>

– Source 1 Description: Mozi on ctext.org

– Source 2 Description: "The Mozi: A Complete Translation", Translated and annotated by Ian Johnston, 2010, Columbia University Press

– Source 3 Description: John Knoblock, and Jeffrey Riegel. "Mozi: A Study and Translation of the Ethical and Political Writings", Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013

Notes: see also Helmott Vittinghoff 2001 "Mohists (Moja 墨家) and Mohist Teachings." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 28.1-2: 160-164 for a review of Mozi studies in Europe and US

General Variables

Membership/Group Interactions

Are other religious groups in cultural contact with target religion:

– Yes

Notes: Mohists are usually known as opposing the tradition of the Ru 儒 on several moral aspects (e.g., 仁 vs. 兼愛 below).

↳ Is the cultural contact competitive:

– Yes

↳ Is the cultural contact neutral:

– No

↳ Is there violent conflict (within sample region):

– No

↳ Is there violent conflict (with groups outside the sample region):

– No

Does the religious group have a general process/system for assigning religious affiliation:

– Yes

↳ Assigned at birth (membership is default for this society):

– No

↳ Assigned by personal choice:

– Yes

↳ Assigned by class:

– No

↳ Assigned at a specific age:

– No

↳ Assigned by gender:

– No

↳ Assigned by participation in a particular ritual:

– No

↳ Assigned by some other factor:

– Yes [specify]: ascription to values promoted by Mo Di 墨翟 and recorded in the text that takes his name. E.g., Mo Di is credited with the promotion of love without distinction *jian'ai* 兼愛 in contrast to the Ruist value of 'humanity' 仁

Notes: cf M. Nylan 2000, *Textual Authority in Pre-Han and Han*, page 243 no. 81 pointing out how only Mohists can be said to have constituted a cohesive group in pre-Qin times.

Does the religious group actively proselytize and recruit new members:

– Yes

Notes: Mohists promoted their cause, and hoped that the majority of people would endorse their position. In the *Huainanzi*, Mozi is said to have more than 180 followers, “墨子服役者百八十人” (淮南子, 泰族訓)

↳ Is proselytizing mandated for religious professionals:

– No

↳ Is proselytizing mandated for all adherents:

– No

↳ Is missionary work mandated for religious professionals:

– No

↳ Is missionary work mandated for all adherents:

– No

↳ Is proselytization coercive:

– No

Does the religion have official political support

– No

Is there a conception of apostasy in the religious group:

– No

Size and Structure

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (estimated population, numerical):

– Field doesn't know

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (% of sample region population, numerical):

– Field doesn't know

Scripture

Does the religious group have scriptures:

Scripture is a generic term used to designate revered texts that are considered particularly authoritative and sacred relative to other texts. Strictly speaking, it refers to written texts, but there are also “oral scriptures” (e.g. the Vedas of India).

– No

Architecture, Geography

Is monumental religious architecture present:

– No

Are there different types of religious monumental architecture:

– No

Is iconography present:

– No

Beliefs

Burial and Afterlife

Is a spirit-body distinction present:

Answer "no" only if personhood (or consciousness) is extinguished with death of the physical body. Answering yes does not necessarily imply the existence of Cartesian mind/body dualism, merely that some element of personhood (or consciousness) survives the death of the body.

– Yes

Belief in afterlife:

– Yes

Reincarnation in this world:

– No

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses:

– I don't know

Are co-sacrifices present in tomb/burial:

– No

Notes: Mohism promotes frugality in burials, 墨子 節葬 (上, 中, 下)

Are grave goods present:

– Field doesn't know

Are formal burials present:

– Yes

Supernatural Beings

Are supernatural beings present:

– Yes

Notes: Mozi says, almost in an utilitarian fashion, that if people believe spirits reward the worthies, they will behave and the world will be in order. "偕若信鬼神之能賞賢而罰暴也，則夫天下豈亂哉！" 墨子, 明鬼下

↳ A supreme high god is present:

– Yes

Notes: Mohism believes in Shangdi 上帝 and Tian 天, even though both of these cannot be unproblematically identified as "high god". Tian 天 especially is better understood as entity

↳ The supreme high god is anthropomorphic:

– Yes

Notes: Shangdi 上帝, spirits and ghosts are assigned agency: "古者上帝鬼神之建設國都" "in antiquity Shangdi, ghost and spirits established state and capitals ..." (Mozi 卷3) . It remains unclear to what extent they are identified as anthropomorphic

↳ Previously human spirits are present:

– Yes

Notes: the book Mozi refers to ghosts and spirits, 鬼神

↳ Non-human supernatural beings are present:

– Yes

Notes: Mohism believes in ghosts and spirits, both from deceased family members and natural entities. In the received version of the 墨子, these beliefs are exposed in 卷8

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge of this world:

– Yes

↳ Does the religious group possess a variety of supernatural beings:

– Yes

↳ Organized hierarchically:

– Yes

Notes: possibly reflecting the lineage

↳ Power of beings is domain specific:

– No

↳ Other organization for pantheon:

– No

Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present:

This refers to surveillance by supernatural beings of humans' behaviour and/or thought particularly as it relates to social norms or potential norm violations.

– Yes

Notes: ghost and spirits are believed to be powerful; even among woods one should at respectfully, because spirits are always watching, 「雖有深谿博林，幽澗毋人之所，施行不可以不董，見有鬼神視之」，墨子，明鬼下

↳ There is supernatural monitoring of prosocial norm adherence in particular:

Prosocial norms are norms that enhance cooperation among members of the group, including obviously “moral” or “ethical” norms, but also extending to norms concerning honouring contracts and oaths, providing hospitality, coming to mutual aid in emergencies, etc.

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about taboos:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of coreligionists:

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of members of other religions:

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of members of other polities:

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about gossiping:

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about proper ritual observance:

– Yes

Notes: 墨子，明鬼下: “古者聖王必以鬼神為，其務鬼神厚矣” In ancient times, the sage kings certainly took ghosts and spirits to exist and their service to the ghosts and spirits was profound. (Johnston 2010:291)

↳ Supernatural beings care about performance of rituals:

– Yes

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment:

– Yes

Notes: Cf M. Puett “Philosophy and Literature in Early China”. In: Mair V The Columbia History of Chinese Literature. New York: Columbia University Press ; 2001. page 75

↳ Is the cause or agent of supernatural punishment known:

– Yes

Notes: usually, either Heaven or spirits.

↳ Done only by high god:

– No

↳ Done by many supernatural beings:

– Yes

↳ Done through impersonal cause-effect principle:

– No

↳ Done by other entities or through other means [specify]

– No

↳ Is the reason for supernatural punishment known:

– Yes

↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence:

– No

↳ Done to enforce group norms:

– Yes

↳ Done to inhibit selfishness:

– Yes

↳ Done randomly:

– No

↳ Other [specify]

– No

↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in this lifetime:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural punishments in this life are highly emphasized by the religious group:

– No

↳ Punishment in this life consists of bad luck:

– No

↳ Punishment in this life consists of political failure:

– Yes

Notes: it can consist of Political Failure

↳ Punishment in this life consists of defeat in battle:

– No

↳ Punishment in this life consists of crop failure or bad weather:

– No

↳ Punishment in this life consists of disaster on journeys.

– No

↳ Punishment in this life consists of mild sensory displeasure:

– No

↳ Punishment in this life consists of extreme sensory displeasure:

– No

↳ Punishment in this life consists of sickness or illness:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of impaired reproduction:

– No

↳ Punishment in this life consists of bad luck visited on descendants:

– Yes

↳ Other [specify]

– No

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards:

– Yes

Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present:

– No

Norms and Moral Realism

Are general social norms prescribed by the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: Mohism emphasizes measuring the moral value of an action according to how the action contributed to the society overall.

Is there a conventional vs. moral distinction in the religious group:

– No

Practices

Membership Costs and Practices

Does membership in this religious group require celibacy (full sexual abstinence):

– No

Does membership in this religious group require constraints on sexual activity (partial sexual abstinence):

– No

Does membership in this religious group require castration:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require fasting:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require forgone food opportunities (taboos on desired foods):

– No

Does membership in this religious group require permanent scarring or painful bodily alterations:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require painful physical positions or transitory painful wounds:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of adults:

"Adults" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition of a human who is 18-years-old or older and who is legally responsible for his/her actions, then please specify that difference in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of children:

"Children" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition, please specify that different in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Does membership in this religious group require self-sacrifice (suicide):

– No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of property/valuable items:

– Yes

Notes: in the sense that Mohism promoted frugality and condemnation of wastefulness (e.g., sumptuous burials)

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of time (e.g., attendance at meetings or services, regular prayer, etc.):

– Yes

Does membership in this religious group require physical risk taking:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require accepting ethical precepts:

– Yes

Does membership in this religious group require marginalization by out-group members:

– No

Notes: they prompted people to subscribe to their value, and possibly recognized themselves as separate group, but nothing explicitly stated on marginalization

Does membership in this religious group require participation in small-scale rituals (private, household):

– No

Does membership in this religious group require participation in large-scale rituals:

I.e. involving two or more households; includes large-scale “ceremonies” and “festivals.”

– Yes

Are extra-ritual in-group markers present:

E.g. special changes to appearance such as circumcision, tattoos, scarification, etc.

– I don't know

Does the group employ fictive kinship terminology:

– Yes



Fictive kinship terminology universal:

– Yes

Society and Institutions

Levels of Social Complexity

The society to which the religious group belongs is best characterized as (please choose one):

– A state

Welfare

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized famine relief:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: in promoting jian'ai 兼愛, there is an implicit promotion of semi-egalitarian benefits (see Dan Robins 2012 Mohist Care, Philosophy East And West, 62.1, which refutes the idea that jian'ai rules out

preference for family members). All subjects should participate to varying for each other and benefitting each other. It is unclear to what extent this belief has been institutionalized (either with regard to famine or elderly care)

Is famine relief available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Field doesn't know

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized poverty relief:

– Field doesn't know

Is poverty relief available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Field doesn't know

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized care for the elderly and infirm:

– Field doesn't know

Is institutionalized care for the elderly and infirm available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Field doesn't know

Education

Does the religious group provide formal education to its adherents:

– No

Is formal education available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group:

– Yes

Bureaucracy

Do the group's adherents interact with a formal bureaucracy within their group:

– Field doesn't know

Do the group's adherents interact with other institutional bureaucracies:

– Yes

Notes: they interact with political systems in place during the Warring States and attempt to promote

their values

Public Works

Does the religious group in question provide public food storage:

– No

Is public food storage provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Does the religious group in question provide water management (irrigation, flood control):

– No

Is water management provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Does the religious group in question provide transportation infrastructure:

– No

Is transportation infrastructure provided for the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Taxation

Does the religious group in question levy taxes or tithes:

– No

Are taxes levied on the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Warfare

Does religious group in question possess an institutionalized military:

– No

Do the group's adherents participate in an institutionalized military provided by institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: On a theoretical level, Mohists might have participated to wars of defensive and punitive nature. 墨子 is one of the first sources to discuss different natures of warfare, and cases in which war is justified. See Chris Fraser, 2016, The Mozi and Just War Theory in Pre-Han Thought, *Journal of Chinese Military history*, 5.2

Are the group's adherents protected by or subject to an institutionalized military provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: theoretically, by the state they belong to

Written Language

Does the religious group in question possess its own distinct written language:

– No

Is a non-religion-specific written language available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Is a non-religion-specific written language used by the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Calendar

Does the religious group in question possess a formal calendar:

– No

Is a formal calendar provided for the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Food Production

Does the religious group in question provide food for themselves:

– No

Is food provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes



Please characterize the forms/levels of food production [choose all that apply]:

– Hunting (including marine animals)

– Small-scale agriculture / horticultural gardens or orchards

– Large-scale agriculture (e.g., monocropping, organized irrigation systems)