

Mo Tzu

Biography / Overview

Mo Tzu (Mozi, Mo Di, Micius, c. 470–391 BCE) was a Chinese philosopher and the founder of Mohism, a school of thought that emerged during the tumultuous Warring States period. Born in the State of Lu (present-day Shandong province), Mozi likely received a Confucian education before developing his own philosophical system. He traveled widely, offering counsel to rulers and advocating for social reforms based on impartial care and practical benefit. Mozi's followers formed one of the earliest organized philosophical communities in China, emphasizing meritocracy, anti-aggression, and universal love. His teachings were compiled by disciples into the *Mozi*, a foundational text of ancient Chinese philosophy.

Mohism has been interpreted by modern scholars as a proto-scientific and rationalist philosophy. However, its focus on moral uniformity and meritocracy was relatively similar to competing philosophies, often intersecting with Chinese Legalism. Mozi's philosophy stood in opposition to Confucianism and Taoism, ultimately disappearing by the early 1st century CE. Surviving Mohist traditions integrated into Taoist sects.

Sources:

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Mozi (Mo-tzu) – <https://iep.utm.edu/mozi/>

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Mozi – <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mozi/>

World History Encyclopedia: Mo Ti – https://www.worldhistory.org/Mo_Ti/

Bibliography / Primary Sources

Major Published Works:

Mozi (墨子, Book of Mozi)

Compiled c. 4th–3rd centuries BCE by Mozi's disciples.

Survives in 58 chapters, covering philosophy, ethics, logic, and military science.

Original language: Classical Chinese.

Key Manuscripts and Editions:

Chinese Text Project: Mozi (Original Text & Translations) – <https://ctext.org/mozi>

Johnston, Ian, trans. *The Mozi: A Complete Translation*. The Chinese University Press, 2010 – <https://cup.cuhk.edu.hk/product/the-mozi-a-complete-translation/>

Birth Date / Death Date

Born: circa 470 BCE, State of Lu, Ancient China

Died: circa 391 BCE

Source: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Mozi – <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mozi/>

Notable / Best-Known For

Founder of Mohism: Established a major philosophical school advocating for social equality, meritocracy, and universal love.

Doctrine of Universal Love (Jian'ai): Promoted impartial care for all people, challenging the familial partiality of Confucianism.

Practical Consequentialism: Emphasized evaluating actions by their social utility and benefit to the people.

Critique of Confucian Ritual: Argued against elaborate rituals and music as wasteful, focusing instead on practical governance and frugality.

Sources:

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Mozi – <https://iep.utm.edu/mozi/>

Fraser, Chris. *The Philosophy of the Mozi* (Columbia University Press, 2016) – <https://cup.columbia.edu/book/the-philosophy-of-the-mozi/9780231177452>

Famous Quotes

“If everyone regarded the states of others as they regard their own, who would incite his own state to attack that of another?”

– Mozi, “Universal Love III” (Chinese Text Project – <https://ctext.org/mozi/universal-love-iii>)

“To benefit all under heaven and eliminate harm—this is what the sage aims to do.”

– Mozi, “Universal Love I” (Chinese Text Project – <https://ctext.org/mozi/universal-love-i>)

“If everyone in the world would love universally, states would not attack one another, families would not disturb one another, thieves and robbers would not exist, rulers and ministers, fathers and sons would all be filial and kind.”

– Mozi, “Universal Love II” (Chinese Text Project – <https://ctext.org/mozi/universal-love-ii>)

Major Works / Textual Contents

Mozi (Book of Mozi):

Books 1–7: Miscellaneous essays, anecdotes, and summaries of Mohist doctrine.

Books 8–37: Core essays on the “Ten Mohist Doctrines,” including universal love, opposition to aggression, frugality, honoring the worthy, and condemnation of fatalism.

Books 38–39: Critiques of Confucianism, especially ritual and music.

Books 40–45: Later Mohist writings on logic, epistemology, geometry, and optics.

Books 46–51: Dialogues (some fictional) between Mozi and various figures.

Books 52–71: Military treatises, especially on defensive warfare and fortification.

Source:

Chinese Text Project: Mozi Table of Contents – <https://ctext.org/mozi>

Influences / Intellectual Context

Confucianism: Mozi was initially educated in Confucianism but rejected its focus on ritual and familial hierarchy.

Ancient Chinese Tradition: Draws on ideals from the Xia and early Zhou dynasties, emphasizing the welfare of the people and the role of the sage-king.

Contemporary Philosophical Schools: Mohism arose alongside Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism, directly challenging their core tenets.

Mohist School: Mozi's followers developed rigorous methods of logical reasoning and debate, influencing later Chinese logic and science.

Sources:

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Mozi – <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mozi/>

Graham, Angus C. *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science* (Chinese University Press, 1978) – <https://cup.cuhk.edu.hk/product/late-mohist-logic-ethics-and-science/>

Legacy and Modern Significance

Historical Decline: Mohism was influential during the Warring States period but declined after the Qin unification, as Confucianism became state orthodoxy.

Intellectual Influence: Mohist logic and consequentialism influenced later Chinese thinkers and contributed to the development of Chinese logic and scientific thought.

Modern Reappraisal: Since the 20th century, scholars have re-examined Mohist texts, recognizing their early articulation of consequentialism, anti-war ethics, and logical analysis.

Ongoing Debates: Mohist ideas are discussed in comparative philosophy, ethics, and political theory, especially regarding impartiality and utilitarianism.

Sources:

Fraser, Chris. *The Philosophy of the Mozi* –

<https://cup.columbia.edu/book/the-philosophy-of-the-mozi/9780231177452>

Hansen, Chad. *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought* (Oxford, 1992) –

<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/a-daoist-theory-of-chinese-thought-9780195073169>

Modern Moments / Impact on 21st Century

2010: The Chinese University Press published *The Mozi: A Complete Translation*, translated by Ian Johnston, providing the first comprehensive English edition of the text for modern scholars and general readers (Publisher Announcement – <https://cup.cuhk.edu.hk/product/the-mozi-a-complete-translation/>).

2016: Columbia University Press released Chris Fraser’s *The Philosophy of the Mozi: The First Consequentialists*, a major monograph that brought renewed academic attention to Mohist thought in the Anglophone world (Publisher’s Page – <https://cup.columbia.edu/book/the-philosophy-of-the-mozi/9780231177452>).

Ongoing (2006–Present): *The Mozi* is available in full, with original text and English translations, on the Chinese Text Project, a leading digital humanities platform for Chinese classics (<https://ctext.org/mozi>).

Ongoing (2010s–Present): Philosophy, Asian Studies, and comparative ethics departments at universities worldwide regularly include Mozi and Mohist thought in core course syllabi, as evidenced by publicly available university syllabi (e.g., University of British Columbia, Harvard University, National University of Singapore).

Ongoing (2010s–Present): The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy and Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy maintain detailed, peer-reviewed entries on Mozi and Mohism, ensuring reliable and accessible reference for students and researchers (IEP – <https://iep.utm.edu/mozi/>, SEP – <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mozi/>).

2021: Columbia University Press published a new scholarly edition of Chris Fraser’s *The Philosophy of the Mozi*, further solidifying Mozi’s place in contemporary philosophical discourse (Publisher’s Page – <https://cup.columbia.edu/book/the-philosophy-of-the-mozi/9780231177452>).

Ongoing (2020s): Mohist concepts such as “universal love” and consequentialism are referenced in contemporary ethical debates, academic conferences, and interdisciplinary research, as documented in proceedings of the International Society for Chinese Philosophy and related scholarly organizations.

Suggested Reading and Resources

A. Secondary Literature (Scholarship)

Fraser, Chris. *The Philosophy of the Mozi: The First Consequentialists*. Columbia University Press, 2016 – <https://cup.columbia.edu/book/the-philosophy-of-the-mozi/9780231177452>

Graham, Angus C. *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science*. The Chinese University Press, 1978

– <https://cup.cuhk.edu.hk/product/later-mohist-logic-ethics-and-science/>
Johnston, Ian, trans. *The Mozi: A Complete Translation*. The Chinese University Press, 2010 –
<https://cup.cuhk.edu.hk/product/the-mozi-a-complete-translation/>
Ivanhoe, Philip J., and Bryan W. Van Norden, eds. *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*.
Hackett Publishing, 2005 –
<https://www.hackettpublishing.com/readings-in-classical-chinese-philosophy-second-edition>
Hansen, Chad. *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought: A Philosophical Interpretation*. Oxford
University Press, 1992 –
<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/a-daoist-theory-of-chinese-thought-9780195073169>

B. Archival or Online Sources

Chinese Text Project: Mozi (Original Text & Translations) – <https://ctext.org/mozi>
Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Mozi (Mo-tzu) – <https://iep.utm.edu/mozi/>
Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Mozi – <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mozi/>
World History Encyclopedia: Mo Ti – https://www.worldhistory.org/Mo_Ti/