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Mo Zi seems to have had many disciples in his own time, and his school of thought flourished for several centuries, from before 400 BC until about the turn of the Christian era. Thereafter it seems to have died out more or less completely. Little interest was shown in the surviving writings of the school of Mo Zi until the general revival of studies of the thought of this period in comparatively recent times.

MENCIUS

After about 400 BC philosophy became fashionable in China. The rulers of each of the various surviving states entertained philosophers at their courts and listened to their ideas, hoping to learn something of benefit. King Hui of the state of Liang, for example, invited a number of philosophers to his court, treating them with great respect and offering rich presents. Among those who accepted the invitation was Meng Ke, known in the west as Mencius (c. 372–c. 289 BC). He came from the small state of Zou, just south of Confucius' native state of Lu (both states lay within the boundaries of modern Shandong) and had studied under a disciple of a grandson of Confucius. He became the second great Confucian philosopher.

Like Confucius himself, Mencius insisted on moral principles. The virtues which he considered fundamental were benevolence and righteousness. When he first appeared before King Hui of Liang, the king remarked that since he had taken the trouble to come such a long distance, he must surely have to offer some means of profiting the king's state. Mencius replied that 'profit' should not be considered; what he had brought was benevolence and righteousness and nothing more.

The point which Mencius tried on many occasions to convey to the various rulers to whom he spoke was that considerations of profit would inevitably lead to strife. If a king wished to profit his state, the nobility would wish to profit their clan and the rest of the people would wish to profit themselves. Thus there would be contention for profit and the state would be endangered. On the other hand, if a king were to practise benevolent government, ensuring prosperity for the people, then he would win popular support and even those outside his state would turn towards him. He might thus win the allegiance of all the Chinese people, and conquer all the Chinese world without even having to fight for it.

Compared with Confucius, Mencius seems to have been rather arrogant and contentious. This was probably partly a real difference in personality, and partly due to the different conditions of the times when they lived. Mencius seems to have been more successful than Confucius in gaining audience with rulers, though like Confucius he failed ever to gain any high administrative office. But as we have seen, in the time of Mencius there were many philosophers with many different ideas, who were frequently admitted to audience with rulers. Mencius' success in this respect was not exceptional in his period; he had to contend with all these rival theories, and therefore developed a more argumentative style of discourse based on the assumption that the ideas of the Confucian school were right and superior to those of other schools. His recorded discourses rarely show the rather attractive humanity and humility often found in the words of Confucius.

YANG ZHU

The two major schools of thought against which Mencius had to contend were those of the followers of Mo Zi and of Yang Zhu. While we have considerable information about the ideas of Mo Zi, of Yang Zhu we know only very little, most of which is found in the writings of his opponents from other schools of thought. Mencius said, 'Master Yang chooses egoism. Though he might benefit the whole world by pulling out one hair he would not do it.' This may well be a distortion of Yang's teachings – it seems more likely from other evidence that in reality he taught that it was not worthwhile to forfeit one hair in exchange for rule over the whole world. His philosophy was one of self-preservation in a dangerous world. There was no point in striving to be good and noble, or to gain wealth or fame, for any results achieved would be no more than transitory and often illusory. The best way was to take life as it came, free from fear and worry.

Daoism

Yang Zhu seems to have developed many ideas which were later incorporated into the philosophy called Daoism (Taoism). The early history of Daoism is very obscure, and the traditional supposition that

its first major exponent, Lao Zi, was an older contemporary of Confucius cannot be accepted. Indeed, there is no good evidence that he ever existed. The name could be translated 'Old Master', and may well have been applied to several people, both real and legendary. The book supposedly written by Lao Zi, known as the *Dao De Jing* ('The Book of the Way and its Virtue'), is certainly a composite work assembled from the writings of several different authors. Its date is unclear, and indeed different sections may be of different dates, but it is likely that it was compiled at some time around 300 BC. The other major early Daoist text, the *Zhuang Zi*, is of about the same date or even slightly earlier (though it includes much material added later).

There are differences between the ideas expressed in the *Zhuang Zi* and the *Dao De Jing*, and even between the ideas of different sections of the latter work, but they also have features in common. The Daoist ideal is to accord one's way of life with the operations of the *Dao*, the Way, which is a more or less mystical concept, an absolute embodying the principles by which all things in the universe operate. Any kind of strenuous human action is likely to run counter to the Way, so the Daoist embraced inaction (*wu wei*). This did not mean literally doing nothing, but never acting unnecessarily and always harmoniously and naturally. 'The Way never acts yet nothing is left undone', and likewise 'the sage knows without moving, identifies without seeing and accomplishes without taking any action' (*Dao De Jing*).

There are those who are lofty though without intense thoughts, who are cultivated though lacking benevolence and righteousness, who govern though without either achievements or fame, who find leisure though they do not withdraw to remote places, who live long though they do not indulge in esoteric practices. They divest themselves of everything, but lack nothing. . . . This is the Way of heaven and earth. (*Zhuang Zi*)

Unlike philosophers of other schools, Daoists did not strive to gain high office and govern states. 'It is always through not meddling that the empire is won', says the *Dao De Jing*, and a story in the *Zhuang Zi* tells how Zhuang Zhou refused an invitation to become chief minister of the state of Chu. He was fishing in a river when two high officials came to convey the message. Without bothering to put down his rod

or turn round, he replied that he had heard that in Chu there was a sacred terrapin, already dead for 3,000 years, which the king kept in a place of honour in a temple. 'Do you think', he continued, 'it would rather be dead and have its bones kept and honoured thus, or rather be alive and dragging its tail in the mud?' The officials replied that it would rather be alive. 'Go away then!' said Zhuang. 'I am dragging my tail in the mud.'

But there was another side to Daoist thought. 'Heaven and earth are ruthless, and treat the myriad creatures like straw dogs; the sage is ruthless, and treats the people like straw dogs', says one passage in the *Dao De Jing* (straw dogs were used as offerings for the dead, treated with great care before the offering but discarded afterwards). There are, indeed, many passages in this text which deal with how a ruler should act, saying, for example, that the common people should be kept ignorant in order to make them easy to govern. This authoritarian streak in Daoism no doubt helped to recommend it to the rulers who patronized Daoist scholars. It was a strain of thought which became rather widely accepted in the later Warring States period in China, affecting other schools as well as Daoism.

There were in fact many schools of thought apart from those discussed above, but only fragmentary information has survived about most of them. Some of the scholars of the time specialized in argumentation, seeking to prove, for example, that 'a white horse is not a horse'. The fundamental proof of this is that 'a horse' is not limited by colour, so that a brown or a black horse can be accepted as 'a horse', but 'a white horse' carries an exclusion on colour grounds, so that a brown or black horse will not do. Thus, the terms 'a horse' and 'a white horse' are not the same. This kind of argument may seem specious, but it was an important step for the Chinese to examine their language and try to attain precision in its use.

LEGALISM

We do have considerable information about one other important philosophy of this period, however. It is called Legalism, because one of its characteristics was an insistence on the use of strict laws as a basis for keeping order in society. The aim of the Legalists was to ensure



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