



Order Reconstruction and Discipline: The Internal Logic and Contemporary Interpretation of Mozi's Communication Thought of "Shang Tong"

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ABSTRACT

During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, freedom of expression contributed to intellectual flourishing, but also gave rise to a crisis of meaning and social disorder. In response to this social phenomenon, Mozi proposed a communication theory centered on Exalting Unity, which aims to rebuild social consensus through an institutionalized communication order. Grounded in an analytical framework built around five core categories—Way, Virtue, Speech, Resonance, and Harmony—this paper systematically explicates the internal logic of Mohist communication thought from five dimensions: ontology, axiology, epistemology, mechanism, and teleology. By establishing Heaven's Will as the authoritative discourse source, standardizing the ethical qualifications of communicators, formulating speech validation standards, and introducing a reward-punishment mechanism, Mozi's system links communicative authority with the construction of social order. The analysis interprets these mechanisms as contributing to the construction of communicative order and the regulation of conduct. This intellectual system illustrates a shift in early Chinese communication thought toward a stronger emphasis on institutionalized normative coordination, and provides critical clues for understanding the formation mechanism of order orientation in indigenous Chinese communication thought.

Keywords: Mozi; communication order; communicative discipline; social coordination

INTRODUCTION

The Spring and Autumn and Warring States period marked the "Axial Age" in Chinese history — an era of unparalleled intellectual vibrancy and freedom of expression. As the Zhou royal court declined and the ritual-musical order collapsed, the power of cultural transmission, once the exclusive monopoly of the aristocracy, shifted down to broader social strata. Private schooling thrived, the Hundred Schools of Thought blossomed, and itinerant persuaders and political rhetoricians traveled freely across the various states. The precept, "They might be spoken without giving offence, and the hearing of them was sufficient to make men careful of their conduct" (Legge, 1960, p. 35), became the defining norm of the age. Discursive activities in this period transcended mere information delivery and developed into a profound vehicle for political practice, value formation, and order reconstruction.

Yet this unprecedented freedom of speech, while generating intellectual flourishing, also gave rise to a deep-seated social crisis. When traditional authoritative discourse dissolved and every person gained a voice, society slid into disunity of opinion and loosening of established order. At the opening of the Exalting Unity (shangtong 尚同) chapter, Mozi paints a picture of disorder in which "if there was one person, there was one principle; if there were two people, there were two principles; and if there were ten people, there were ten principles" (Johnston, 2010, p. 91). He contends that chaos in thought and speech is the root of all turmoil under heaven: each individual takes their own will as the measure of justice, everyone regards themselves as correct and pursues their own course. This situation brought about the breakdown of social consensus and the intensification of centrifugal forces. In Mozi's view, to resolve the strife caused by divergent notions of righteousness, it was essential to establish a single, unified standard of judgment and construct a vertically ordered communication mechanism, such that the entire society would exalt unity upward. Yet this upward orientation remains



incomplete, Mozi warns, if “the world exalts unity with the Son of Heaven, but does not yet exalt unity with Heaven” (Johnston, 2010, p. 105) .

This is precisely the core of the Mohist concept of Exalting Unity: using unity to curb disorder and responding to strife with order. The formulation of this doctrine marks a pivotal theoretical turn in early Chinese communication thought—a relatively pluralistic discursive environment to a more order-oriented from emphasis on unified standards. To conduct an in-depth analysis of this sophisticated intellectual system, this paper introduces an analytical framework consisting of Way, Virtue, Speech, Resonance, and Harmony, and systematically unpacks Mohist communication thought across five dimensions: ontology, axiology, epistemology, mechanism, and teleology.

Within the genealogy of communication thought among pre-Qin masters, the Mohist theory of Exalting Unity is both distinctive and highly controversial. In the existing scholarship, it has been read through at least four interpretive lenses: as a model of political hierarchy that consolidates the authority of the Son of Heaven; as an ethical coordination device that aligns individual conduct with universal moral norms; as an epistemic mechanism for standardizing judgments of right and wrong across a dispersed population; and as a form of social organization that integrates diverse communities under a single normative order (Tong, 2011; Huang, 2005; Hu, 2022). Of these readings, the political-hierarchy and authoritarian readings have been particularly influential. Previous studies have often directly identified Exalting Unity as the embryonic form of an “authoritarian communication model” (Tong, 2011). However, while this characterization captures its outward features, it risks oversimplifying its internal intellectual logic and historical context. The present study takes a communication-theoretical approach, reading Exalting Unity not as reducible to political hierarchy alone, but as an integrated system of communicative authorization, discursive verification, and behavioral regulation. This reading does not deny the insights of the political-hierarchy or ethical-coordination interpretations; rather, it seeks to reconstruct the internal logic through which those political and ethical functions are achieved by communicative means. In fact, the doctrine of Exalting Unity is not an isolated political proposition, but a critical component of Mozi's broader utilitarian and empiricist philosophy of communication, closely interwoven with his core concepts such as Heaven's Will (tianzhi 天志), Illustrious Ghosts (minggui 明鬼), and Exalting Worthiness (shangxian 尚贤). More importantly, it lies at the heart of several core debates in pre-Qin communication thought.

From the perspective of philosophical methodology, Huang (2005) explains Mozi's view of communication effects through the metaphor of dyeing silk. Grounded in the logic of Universal Love (jianai 兼爱), Mozi held that communication exerts a powerful homogenizing effect, much like dye permeating and unifying the color of silk. This stands in sharp contrast to Han Feizi's line of thought, which is built on the logic of contradiction and emphasizes the adversarial and fraught nature of communication. The two perspectives respectively address the two opposing extremes of communication: seamless connectivity and inherent disconnectivity.

Meanwhile, Hu (2022) identifies the foundational question of Chinese communication as the mutually constitutive relationship between communication and order—that is, how communication gives shape to order and how order in turn governs communication. This framework provides a broad historical and theoretical coordinate for understanding the doctrine of Exalting Unity. Furthermore, Shao & Yao (2013) propose a root-seeking research approach that emphasizes extracting “cultural genes” from traditional Chinese culture to construct indigenous communication theories. Mozi's thought of Exalting Unity stands as a key embodiment of precisely this order-oriented cultural gene.

Political hierarchy explains the institutional structure; ethical coordination explains the normative orientation; epistemic standardization explains the criteria of judgment; social organization explains the integrative function. What remains less explicit is how these dimensions are connected through processes of authorization, transmission, verification, reception, and behavioral adjustment. This study therefore does not replace these interpretations, but reconstructs the communicative relations among them.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Methodological Rationale

This study employs a qualitative, text-based conceptual analysis of the doctrine of Exalting Unity in the Mozi. Three commitments shape the design. First, the analysis is reconstructive rather than attributive. It does not assume that Mozi formulated a theory of communication in the modern disciplinary sense, and it therefore does not treat the Mozi as a proto-treatise on the subject. Rather, it reconstructs from the textual record those concepts, relations, and mechanisms that bear on questions recognizably central to communication inquiry: the authorization of speakers, the evaluation of discourse, the channels through which normative judgments travel, and the sanctions attaching to their reception.

Second, the analysis is contextualist. Pre-Qin utterances are treated as interventions in a specific polemical field rather than as free-floating propositions, and interpretive claims are constrained by the questions Mozi's contemporaries were in fact contesting. This precaution guards against the projection of later problematics onto earlier texts — what Skinner (1969) terms the “mythology of doctrines” — which constitutes the principal methodological hazard in any attempt to read indigenous communication concepts out of classical Chinese materials.

Third, the analysis is comparative in its final movement. The Mohist conception of order is clarified against the Confucian alternative, in which harmony was prized over enforced uniformity, on the methodological ground that the distinctive content of a concept often becomes visible only when set against its rivals within the same tradition.

Procedurally, the study corresponds most closely to directed (deductive–inductive) qualitative content analysis: an initial category matrix derived from the research question is applied to the corpus, while residual material is permitted to generate new subcategories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Mayring, 2000). Close reading supplies the interpretive unit; the category matrix supplies the comparative discipline. The study does not use quantitative coding, and term frequency is not treated as an index of doctrinal weight.

The Analytical Framework: Five Categories and Five Dimensions

The analysis proceeds through five categories — Way, Virtue, Speech, Resonance, and Harmony — organized along five analytical dimensions: ontology, axiology, epistemology, mechanism, and teleology.

The five categories are not imported arbitrarily. Each names a locus of concern that pre-Qin thinkers themselves recurrently addressed when discussing discourse and its social effects, and each is attested in the Mozi or in the wider classical vocabulary on which the text draws. They are adopted here in accordance with the “root-seeking” program for constructing indigenous Chinese communication theory, which treats such recurring conceptual loci as the “cultural genes” from which local theory may be articulated (Shao & Yao, 2013; Shao & Yao, 2016; Hu, B.J., 2022).

The five dimensions, by contrast, are analytical constructs of the present study, not categories formulated by Mozi. They serve to distribute the five categories across a coherent explanatory sequence running from the ground of authority to its intended outcome:

Category	Dimension	Question addressed	Principal textual locus
Way	Ontological	From what source does communicative authority derive?	Heaven's Will ; the Exalting Unity chapters
Virtue	Axiological	What qualifies an agent to speak with authority?	Universal Love ; Exalting Worthiness



Speech	Epistemological	By what standard is a claim judged true or valid?	The Three Criteria, in the Against Fatalism chapters
Resonance	Mechanistic	Through what operations are judgments transmitted and internalized?	The Exalting Unity chapters; reward-and-punishment passages
Harmony	Teleological	What order does the system aim to produce?	The Exalting Unity chapters; contrast with Confucian harmony

Two clarifications qualify the use of this matrix. First, it is heuristic: a scaffold for organizing evidence, not a claim that Mozi held a five-part theory of communication. Second, the mapping is one of emphasis rather than exclusivity. A single passage may bear on several dimensions at once — the Heaven's Will passages are simultaneously ontological and axiological, since the source of authority and the qualification of its bearers are there intertwined. Where this occurs, the passage is discussed under the dimension it most directly serves and cross-referenced where its other bearings are material to the argument.

Corpus and Sources

Primary corpus. The core evidence comprises the chapters of the Mozi most directly bearing on the research question: Exalting Unity I, II, and III, which set out the doctrine itself; Universal Love II, which supplies its ethical ground; and Anti-Fatalism I, II, and III, which formulate the Three Criteria. These are supplemented, where they provide the legitimating ground for Exalting Unity, by Exalting Worthiness, Heaven's Will, and Exalting Ghosts, together with scattered passages on reward, punishment, praise, and censure.

Chapter titles are given in the English equivalents used by the translations consulted, and are cited throughout in the form Mozi • Exalting Unity I; the Chinese title is retained so that readers working from the received text can locate the passage without mediation. The same convention governs citations from the Confucian corpus, as in Analects • Zilu and Mencius • Jin Xin Shang.

A textual feature of the Mozi requires explicit methodological handling. Its core doctrines are transmitted in sets of up to three parallel chapters, conventionally numbered I, II, and III, which established textual scholarship regards as parallel transmissions associated with different Mohist lineages rather than as successive drafts by a single author. This study accordingly treats divergences among the three versions as data rather than as noise: where they differ in wording, the divergence is recorded and considered for what it may indicate about how the doctrine was formulated, standardized, and transmitted within the school. Where a divergence is immaterial to the argument, version I is cited as the reference text.

The received text is used as the working basis. Where variants, doubtful characters, or punctuation problems affect interpretation, the reading is checked against the standard critical collation of Sun Yirang's Mozi jiangsu (Sun, 1986) before a conclusion is drawn.

Secondary literature. Chinese-language scholarship on Mohist and pre-Qin communication thought was consulted systematically, together with philosophical-historical treatments of Mohist ethics and methodology. Works were selected on three grounds: (a) they address the relationship between communication and order in the Chinese tradition; (b) they offer explicit methodological reflection on the indigenization of communication theory; or (c) they provide textual or doctrinal analysis of the specific concepts employed here. Secondary literature is used to situate the analysis and to test the plausibility of readings, not as evidence for what the text says; textual claims are anchored in the primary corpus alone. Where this study departs from an established reading — most notably from the unqualified identification of Exalting Unity with an “authoritarian communication model” (Tong, 2011) — the grounds for departure are stated in the relevant section.

Inclusion Criteria and Analytical Procedure

Passages entered the working corpus only where they bore directly on shang tong: defining its meaning or operation, describing the relations among levels of authority through which normative judgment travels,

supplying its legitimating ground in tian zhi, jian ai, shang xian, ming gui, or san biao, or evidencing how such judgment is enforced through reward, punishment, praise, and censure. The dialectical, military, and technical chapters were excluded unless a direct bearing emerged.

The Mozi was read in full and qualifying passages located in the standard collation, so that each interpretive claim remains traceable. Passages were then grouped by evidential function, compared across the shang/zhong/xia sets and the doctrinal clusters to separate stable doctrine from context-bound formulation, and interpreted through the five dimensions of the framework. Finally, the reconstructed conception was set against the Confucian alternative and against the authoritarian reading, and its implications assessed.

Interpretive Caution, Trustworthiness, and Limitations

Anachronism. The central interpretive risk in this study is anachronism: the attribution to a pre-Qin text of concepts belonging to modern communication and social theory. Terms such as “resonance”, “psychological discipline”, “communicative order”, and “behavioral regulation” are therefore used throughout as analytical interpretations developed in the present study, not as concepts Mozi formulated. Each such construct is introduced at the point of use together with its textual anchor—identifiable evidence concerning normative transmission, social feedback, praise and punishment, or the adjustment of conduct — so that a reader may contest the construct while still assessing the evidence. No interpretive construct is advanced where such an anchor is absent.

Trustworthiness. Credibility was pursued through four practices: (a) textual anchoring, whereby every interpretive claim is traceable to a located passage; (b) attention to disconfirming evidence, whereby passages that resist the order-orientation reading—notably the upward-reporting channels within the vertical chain and the universalist, egalitarian strain in Universal Love — are reported and discussed rather than suppressed; (c) consilience with existing scholarship, whereby readings are checked against the secondary literature and departures are argued rather than assumed; and (d) transparency of the category matrix, which is stated in full above so that the analysis can be replicated or challenged on explicit grounds. Dependability is supported by the sequential procedure set out in Section 4. Transferability is limited, since the analysis is bounded by a single textual tradition (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Limitations. Four limitations should be stated. First, the study is interpretive and non-quantitative; it makes no claim to statistical representativeness, and the weighting of evidence rests on textual centrality rather than frequency. Second, the Mozi is a composite, multi-layered text; references to “Mozi” in this paper denote the Mohist textual tradition rather than a single historical author, and doctrinal attribution in the strict sense is not attempted. Third, the reconstructive move — reading classical material through communication-studies categories — is inherently theory-laden: the framework illuminates order, authority, and standardization at the cost of features it does not thematize, such as the ritual-performative and aesthetic dimensions of speech. Fourth, the treatment of Confucianism in the comparative section is deliberately schematic and serves clarification of the Mohist position; it is not offered as a full account of Confucian communication thought.

Translation and Terminological Conventions

Classical Chinese quotations are rendered into English in the main text, with the source cited immediately after the quotation. The Chinese original is given at the first occurrence of each key term and in a footnote wherever the argument turns on a specific character, phrase, or textual variant.

Ian Johnston's *The Mozi: A Complete Translation* (2010) serves as the principal English reference, chosen because it renders the complete text in a consistent terminology; James Legge's translations are used for the Confucian corpus (*The Chinese Classics*; *Sacred Books of the East*). No single translation is treated as definitive.

Translations follow a three-tier attribution rule:

1. Where a published translation corresponds closely to the Chinese passage cited, the established translation is followed and cited to the translator and page.

2. Where minor adjustment is required by differences in textual edition, terminology, or analytical context, the rendering is marked "adapted from" the relevant published translation.
3. Where no sufficiently corresponding published translation exists, the author provides a translation and marks it explicitly as such.

Translations prioritize semantic fidelity to the classical Chinese over stylistic equivalence. Where a conceptual meaning cannot be conveyed adequately by direct rendering, an interpretive gloss is supplied and clearly distinguished from the literal translation.

Ontological Dimension: Vertical Communication Chain and the Establishment of Legitimacy

The establishment of any communication order first and foremost requires addressing the origin and structure of communicative power. Within Mozi's intellectual system, the Way serves not only as the foundation of values, but also as the supreme source of legitimacy for all communicative practices.

Heaven's Will: The Ultimate Source of Communicative Authority

Amid the thorough collapse of state governance, legal norms, and social order during the Warring States period, secular political authority could no longer uphold the credibility of public communication. In response, Mozi turned his attention to the transcendent concept of Heaven. He argued that to rebuild order, it was imperative to establish a unified top-down value system.

Mozi constructed a rigorous hierarchical communication structure: Son of Heaven – Three Dukes – feudal lords–district elders–village heads–common people. Running through this structure is a clear vertical communication chain: Heaven's Will at the top functions as the supreme mandate, transmitted down through the Son of Heaven as the core intermediary to governors at all levels, and then passed down level by level to the general populace. In this way, all standards of righteousness under heaven converge in the Son of Heaven. As Mozi states, "What the superior takes to be right, all must take to be right. What the superior takes to be wrong, all must take to be wrong" (Johnston, 2010, p. 93).

Furthermore, Mozi positioned Heaven as the overseer above the Son of Heaven, arguing that failure to exalt unity with Heaven would leave heavenly calamities unceasing. For this reason, solemn and reverent rituals must be performed to seek blessings from Heaven (Huang, 2005).

Notably, this communication chain possesses a dual nature. On the one hand, top-down communication represents the flow of legitimacy and the establishment of order. Its function can be understood primarily as transmitting information within the established normative framework rather than providing an institutional channel for dissent. On the other hand, the seemingly existent bottom-up feedback mechanism remains embedded within the normative framework of Exalting Unity. Rather than functioning as a modern institutional channel for autonomous public-opinion supervision, it can be understood as a means of transmitting information upward while maintaining the broader normative order. Scholarly studies have noted that this bottom-up information flow is institutionally designed more like a dotted line serving integration and surveillance, with the ultimate goal of reconverging fragmented social opinions into a unified value judgment (Tong, 2011).

Within this logic, the standards of righteousness for all under heaven are progressively gathered upward and ultimately consolidated in Heaven, while the authority to interpret Heaven's Will is concentrated in the hands of the Son of Heaven, thereby structurally achieving a high degree of centralization of thought and discourse. The hierarchical administrative network composed of the Son of Heaven, the Three Dukes, feudal lords, and grassroots local chiefs is thus not only a system of political governance, but also an institutional vehicle that undertakes communicative functions. This bureaucratic communication structure operates like the warp threads of silk and the headrope of a net, shaping social cognition and behavior as a whole through continuous information transmission and standardized edification. Furthermore, Mozi established Heaven's Will as the ultimate yardstick for evaluating all speech under heaven, providing an unquestionable standard of legitimacy for communicative practices. This reflects the distinct order-oriented orientation of his communication thought:

to construct a stable communicative order by narrowing the range of competing normative judgments and aligning public discourse with shared standards. (Hu, B.J., 2022).

“Virtue” : The Public-Oriented Turn of Communication Ethics

With Heaven’s Will established as the supreme source of communicative authority, the Mohist school further defined clear ethical norms for communicative practices at the practical level of human conduct, the core of which is Universal Love.

Universal Love — captured in the core precept “If people love one another universally and benefit one another mutually, order will prevail in the world.”(Johnston, 2010, p. 139) — is not mere moral exhortation, but a highly normative ethical requirement for communication. All communicative practices must transcend the limits of kinship, social status, and private interest, and be fundamentally oriented toward benefiting all under heaven. From the perspective of communication studies, this means that public discourse and information circulation should not serve factional bias or emotional mobilization, but instead act as a vehicle for advancing public welfare and social integration.

For this reason, Universal Love is not confined to the level of value declaration, but directly bears on the qualification of communicative actors. Mozi’s doctrine of Exalting Worthiness essentially establishes an ethical threshold for communicative power: not everyone is fit to occupy the high position of authoritative public instruction. Only those whose conduct truly conforms to the principle of Universal Love possess communicative legitimacy. This arrangement objectively gives rise to a hierarchical allocation of communicative authority, whereby the legitimacy of communication stems not from hereditary status or coercive power, but from whether the communicator upholds the ethical standard of Universal Love.

Nevertheless, this ethical framework, derived logically from Heaven’s Will, also lends the Mohist notion of Universal Love a distinctly abstract quality. Scholars have observed that Mohist love does not grow out of concrete interpersonal relationships, but is inferred from transcendent normative principles. It therefore aligns more closely with a formal moral universalism, whose operational logic differs markedly from Confucian affective ethics — the principle that “he is affectionate to his parents, and lovingly disposed to people generally” (Legge, 1970, p. 476) , which unfolds along a gradient of relational closeness (Wei, 2003). In this sense, Universal Love is not an empirical practice of sentiment, but an institutionalized ethical norm that can be promoted and verified.

This is particularly visible in Mozi’s argumentative strategy for Universal Love. Time and again, Mozi builds his case on utilitarian outcomes, arguing that Universal Love benefits both the self and others, and highlighting its ability to mitigate social conflict and foster mutual gain. As Feng (2011) observes, Mozi’s conception of Universal Love is not grounded in emotional identification, but represents a social utility-driven moral system of reciprocity, at its core a rational ethics of exchange. Within this framework, love ceases to be a spontaneous outpouring of inner feeling and becomes a social principle that can be mandated, standardized, and implemented.

From a comparative perspective, this undifferentiated universalist ethics also constitutes a defining feature of Mohist thought. Comparative studies have shown that, unlike the Confucian differentiated love rooted in the structure of benevolence and ritual propriety, Mohist ethics places greater emphasis on decontextualized universal reciprocity, and its underlying logic exhibits a high degree of comparability even in cross-cultural contexts (Shao & Yao, 2013). This universalist orientation enables Universal Love to provide a seemingly moderate humanistic foundation for Exalting Unity, while at the same time reinforcing its operability as a principle of communicative discipline.

Accordingly, Universal Love and Exalting Worthiness are not a negation of Exalting Unity in Mohist communication thought, but rather an ethical counterbalance and complement. To a certain extent, they mitigate the coercive undertones embodied in Exalting Unity, so that order construction does not rely solely on violence and obedience, but is built upon the moral commitment of equality and mutual benefit. Yet it is precisely in this process that Universal Love is subsumed into the institutional logic of Exalting Unity, transformed into an ethical



instrument supporting the coordination of values and the regulation of conduct. Its inherent tension thus comes to the fore.

Mechanism Dimension: Discursive Standards and Psychological Discipline

Having completed the ontological construction of communication grounded in Heaven's Will and Virtue, Mozi's intellectual logic proceeds to the operationalization of communicative power. At this level, the core task is to establish standards for evaluating discourse and to develop mechanisms of reward, praise, punishment, and censure that reinforce conformity with the established normative order. This task is fulfilled precisely through the discursive norms of Speech and the disciplinary mechanism of Resonance.

Speech: The Criterion for Discursive Truth

Faced with the predicament of fragmented discourse and the absence of shared standards during the Warring States period, Mozi did not sink into the quagmire of relativism. Instead, he innovatively proposed the Three Criteria as an objective criterion for distinguishing the truth and value of statements.

The Three Criteria (sanbiao三表) consist of three interlocking dimensions. As Mozi formulates this criterion, a valid doctrine must be rooted in established historical experience: "The foundation is in the actions of the ancient sage kings above" (Johnston, 2010, p. 321). It emphasizes historical experience as a key basis for evaluating statements. By appealing to the Way of the sage-kings, Mozi introduces a temporal authority into communicative content, requiring that all discourse be embedded in established historical order rather than fabricated out of thin air. At the communicative level, this standard means that valid speech must connect with existing orthodox narratives to acquire historical legitimacy.

The second is the empirical dimension. The second gauge grounds doctrinal judgment in lived sensory experience, taking people's perception as the critical frame of reference, as articulated in the text: "The source is in the truth of the evidence of the eyes and ears of the common people below" (Johnston, 2010, p. 321). This dimension highlights the distinct empiricist orientation of Mozi's thought, in contrast to contemporary intellectual paths that centered on inner cultivation, intuitive insight, or metaphysical speculation. Communicative content divorced from the actual lived experience of the common people would be dismissed as empty and baseless discourse, unable to gain broad acceptance.

The third is the consequential dimension. The final gauge establishes practical outcome as the ultimate adjudicative standard, formulated explicitly in the text: "It emanates from government policy and is seen in the benefit to the ordinary people of the state" (Johnston, 2010, p. 321). The validity of a statement does not hinge on its rhetorical refinement, but on whether it truly benefits all under heaven when applied in governance. This standard directly links communication to social governance, framing communication not as a value-neutral exchange of information, but as a public act subject to scrutiny of its social consequences.

Taken as a whole, the Three Criteria embody the highly self-conscious empiricist and utilitarian orientation of Mohist thought. Through cross-verification across the three dimensions of history, experience, and effect, it seeks to establish an operable mechanism for truth screening within the chaotic public sphere of discourse. As Hu Shi summarizes, this method requires that thought be consistent with established best traditions, stand up to empirical factual verification, and yield positive outcomes in practice (Hu, S., 1998). Methodologically, further scholarship points out that the Three Criteria are not a single instrument of judgment. Instead, they integrate multiple modes of thinking including observation, comparison, analogy, and induction, reflecting Mozi's highly conscious pursuit of the authenticity and effectiveness of communicative content (Xu, 1999). From the perspective of indigenous communication theory, this system of judgment, which emphasizes the correspondence between name and reality and the consistency between speech and effect, is also regarded as a unique response to the question of truth made by traditional Chinese communication thought at the practical level (Shao & Yao, 2016).

Resonance: From Emotional Connection to Institutionalized Discipline

Communication is not only concerned with the construction of institutions and language, but also intervenes more profoundly in the shaping of psychological structures and social order. In this study, “resonance” is used as an analytical term to describe how normative judgments are transmitted, received, and reinforced within the communicative structure of Exalting Unity.

The ancient saying—“when acted on, it penetrates forthwith to all phenomena and events under the sky” (Legge, 1882, p. 374) —originally described mutual affective resonance and the interconnection of minds, emphasizing a spontaneous flow and echo of emotion. Within the Mohist system of Exalting Unity, however, this resonance is reconfigured into an ordered mechanism of psychological orientation. Communication no longer relies solely on emotional suasion, but shifts toward persuading through reason and governing through institutional norms.

Mozi advocated a hierarchical system of vertical conformity oriented upward toward Heaven and downward toward earthly order, and reinforced this uniform orientation through a dual mechanism of rewards and praise on the one hand, and punishments and censure on the other. At the level of communication mechanisms, this can be analytically understood as a feedback-based process: rewards and praise reinforce conduct that conforms to the established order, while punishments and censure respond to conduct that deviates from it. Huang (2005) characterizes this mode of governance as a process of pervasive ideological shaping, whereby rulers use government decrees and doctrinal teachings as instruments of edification to permeate the entire populace and rapidly bring about ideological uniformity.

On the legitimation, transmission, and social impact of communication, Hu (2022) observes that pre-Qin thinkers’ discussions of speech, instruction, and edict in fact touched upon the core questions of communication: how information is legitimated, how it is disseminated, and how it shapes social order. From a communication-theoretical perspective, this mechanism may be interpreted as shaping recipients’ orientations toward authoritative norms and encouraging the internalization of socially prescribed judgments. This process demonstrates the pivotal role of the reception phase of communication in the construction of order, and also reflects the deep molding effect of institutional design on communication psychology (Yao & Shao, 2018).

Teleological Dimension: Constructed Exalting Unity and Generated Harmony

The Ultimate Vision of Exalting Unity

Mozi maintains that the core meaning of Exalting Unity is to fully unify the standards for judging right and wrong among all people under heaven, so as to establish a shared standard for judging right and wrong and to align individual conduct with that standard. The ideal well-ordered age comes into being only when individual wills are perfectly aligned with public order and the scope of legitimate disagreement is narrowed by the establishment of shared normative standards.

This form of harmony can therefore be understood as an order-oriented form of coordination realized through institutional design and communicative regulation. It is therefore more explicitly dependent on institutional coordination and normative guidance than on spontaneous accommodation among different viewpoints.

Comparison and Dialogue with the Confucian “Harmony without Uniformity”

To clarify the epistemological character of Mohist Exalting Unity thought, it is necessary to examine it within the comparative framework of the Confucian principle of “harmony without uniformity”. The Confucian principle of “harmony without uniformity” is essentially an organic view of order rooted in the coexistence of differences. It acknowledges the heterogeneity of social composition and advocates seeking dynamic equilibrium among multiple actors through the gentle permeation of ritual and musical cultivation and the exemplary effect of the gentleman’s virtue (Huang, 2000). By contrast, the Mohist school holds that differences in ideas are often the root of social disorder, and therefore advocates dissolving individual heterogeneity in pursuit of a homogeneous social consensus. This extreme pursuit of uniformity stands in sharp contrast to the Confucian-dominated view of order centered on “harmony without uniformity”. The Confucian school likewise pursues

order, but its path lies in cultivation through ritual and music. Through a silent, imperceptible process of internalization and self-cultivation, it achieves an organic harmony that accommodates differences (Shao & Yao, 2014).

Confucius states that “the superior man is affable, but not adulatory; the mean man is adulatory, but not affable” (Legge, 1893, p. 206). In this formulation, the quality of he (harmony) embodied by the superior man denotes dynamic equilibrium grounded in diversity, whereas Mozi’s notion of tong (uniformity) is closer to an undifferentiated, absolute sameness. Hu (2022) summarizes the ideal of order in Chinese communication thought as “harmony and integration generating creativity”, emphasizing that it “accommodates multiplicity while maintaining mutual harmony”. In its pursuit of integration and order, Mohist Exalting Unity evidently sacrifices the diversity embraced by the notion of “harmony”. This is not a simple judgment of superiority or inferiority, but rather reflects the Mohist school’s urgent quest for an efficient and forceful mode of social integration amid the collapse of ritual order and incessant warfare of the Warring States period, and bears witness to the profound utilitarian undercurrent of its thought (Guan, 2004).

Although “harmony without uniformity” and “Exalting Unity” differ in their core premises, the two are not diametrically opposed. Within the Chinese tradition of communication thought, Exalting Unity establishes the baseline of social order and upholds the fundamental identity and stability of the community, while “harmony without uniformity” safeguards the plurality and freedom of thought and stimulates rationality and innovation. Though they follow different paths, both ultimately point toward the shared goal of social harmony and stable order.

DISCUSSION

Returning to the present day and re-examining the communication thought of the various pre-Qin intellectual schools, we find that at their core they all address a proposition that transcends time and space: how to negotiate the informational relationships between individuals, between individuals and power, and between individuals and society.

Ancient discourse centered on themes of obedience to edicts and moral cultivation, and of ritual, music and government decrees, while contemporary discourse frames the same concerns as information dissemination, public opinion mechanisms and public communication. Although the terminology and institutional contexts differ substantially, these discussions can be compared at the level of their shared concern with the relationship between communication, authority, and social order. Mozi’s theory of Exalting Unity responds not merely to the practical predicaments of the chaotic Warring States era, but to a broader communication problem that remains analytically relevant beyond its historical context: in contexts of pluralistic discourse and fragmented values, how can society maintain basic order and the possibility of cooperation through communication mechanisms. Mozi regarded divergent doctrines as a major root of social disorder, and sought to reconstruct the cognitive order of the public sphere by establishing authoritative sources of information, unifying standards of judgment, and institutionalizing channels of communication. Though rooted in the pre-Qin intellectual era, this line of thinking still carries important theoretical implications for today’s communication environment, characterized by hyper-mobile information and steadily eroding consensus (Xie, 2017).

From the perspective of communication theory, Mohist thought is not a collection of fragmented political propositions, but an internally coherent project of communicative order. Centered on Exalting Unity, Mozi systematically addressed key issues such as the legitimacy of information sources, communication ethics, the verification of discursive truth, and the regulation of communication effects, forming a model of communication mechanisms aimed at social integration. This perspective may offer useful intellectual resources for the development of indigenous communication theory in China and invites further reflection on the relationship between communication and social order. Mozi’s thought of Exalting Unity offers a solid foundation for building a communication theory with indigenous characteristics that can engage in dialogue with Western scholarship (Shao & Yao, 2013), and represents an important pathway for advancing the indigenization of communication studies and constructing a discourse system of communication studies with Chinese characteristics (Xie, 2017).

Overall, Mozi's thought of Exalting Unity is not a simple matter of ideological unification or suppression of speech, but a mode of social governance that seeks to overcome chaos and achieve cooperation through communication mechanisms. The profound tension it reveals between discipline and freedom, and between order and vitality, remains a productive question for communication research. As an analytical reconstruction, this study therefore highlights how Mozi linked communicative authority, normative judgment, institutional transmission, and the regulation of conduct in the pursuit of social order.

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