A Study Of Mo Tzu's Ten Doctrines

The "period of Spring and Autumn" (春秋时代 722 - 481 BC) and the "period of the Warring States" (战国时代 511 - 233 BC) in Chinese history were characterized by active social movements. The stage of slavery was over and the feudal system was beginning to take form. During the turning point between these two social systems, the old idea had been destroyed, but the new one was not yet established. This situation was reflected in the literature of the period of the "Hundred Philosophers" (百家争鸣). The philosophers had different opinions and work from different motives. They wrote many books to express their thoughts. Mo Tzu (墨子) lived at this period. He felt that he could not discuss the existing problems in an ivory tower. He was convinced that he must teach a practical doctrine to all people, especially to the rulers, in order to save the world in times of great crisis.

Although Mo Tzu lived in a warring period, he was a practical man both in his doctrines and his actual achievements. He had the basic problems of his times in mind when he suggested the ten doctrines as a solution. He said, "Upon entering a country one should locate the need and work on that. If the country is upset in confusion, teach them the doctrines of Honoring the Worthy (尚贤), and Identification with the Superior (尚同). If the country is in poverty, teach them Moderation in Expenditures (节用), and Simplicity in Funeral (节葬). If the country is indulging in music and wine, teach them Condemnation of Music (非乐), and Anti-Fatalism (非命). If the country is insolent and without propriety, teach them to revere Heaven (尊天), and Worship the Spirits (敬鬼). If the country is engaged in conquest and oppression, teach them Universal Love (兼爱), and Condemnation of Offensive war (非攻). Hence we say, one should locate the need and work on that."

Of the ten doctrines, Mo Tzu was most anxious to spread his doctrine of Universal Love and to persuade the rulers of his day to cease their incessant attacks upon one another. Furthermore, Mo Tzu condemned the music, elaborated funerals and luxurious living of the aristocracy, because such pastimes taxed the wealth and energy of the common people and added nothing to the material welfare of the nation. He attacked fatalistic thinking because he wanted men to believe that wealth and good fortune came only in response to virtuous deeds. Moreover, Mo Tzu talked about "honoring the worthy" and "identifying with one's superior". He gave an idea of hierarchical social order in his political system. The system, was constructed in the form of a pyramid at the top of which was the Son of Heaven (\/ 天子 ), and at the bottom the classes and functionaries. Finally, he asserted that God or Heaven (\天 ) and the Spirit of the dead ( \鬼 ) exist, that they conizance of all human activities and that they have the power to reward or punish any individual for his deeds. Regarded superficially, these ten doctrines seem unrelated to one another. However they have a common aim which was "to procure benefits of the world and to destroy its calamities," as Mo Tzu said. This aim was based on 'Yi' ( \义 ) or 'Righteousness', the central idea of the ten doctrines. 'Yi' was highly appreciated by Mo Tzu.

Since the Chou and Chih Dynasties, different scholars have had different opinions about the basic idea of the ten doctrines. My purpose in this exercise is to examine the logical thinking of Mo Tzu's ten doctrines in order to have deeper understanding of the basic idea of these ten doctrines and greater knowledge about the nature of Mo Tzu's thinking.

This study consists of seven chapters. The first chapter gives some important biographical details of Mo Tzu's life and discusses the authenticity of his works. This is followed by chapter two which explains the meaning of 'Yi' as the basic idea of Mo Tzu's ten doctrines. From chapter three to chapter six, I discuss what is the nature of the ten doctrines, their practical
values as well as their merits and defects. The last chapter concludes with the idea of Mo Tzu's that the ten doctrines were too idealistic and too difficult to be followed. Thus Chuang Tzu (荘子) commented that the philosophy of Mo Tzu "allows no singing in life, no mourning in death .... It causes the people to be anxious, to be sorrowful and its ways are hard to follow."

Finally, I wish to thank Mr. Keong Tow Yung for his guidance during the course of my work on this study. Mr. Keong's kind supervision and encouragement proves to be both very stimulating and helpful.