HKU03x Humanity and Nature in Chinese Thought

Week 3: Mozi and Logic
Section 1: Challenge to Confucian Conventionalism vs. Objective Standards A. Space-Time Limits of Convention vs. Nature

- Mozi asks: what is the correct discourse 道 *dao*[path] ?
- Mozi argues that conventions can be wrong or immoral
- Mozi puts forward an example - the people of Kai Shu
    - Following their sages, conventional wisdom and elders: when your first son is born, you cook and eat him
    - This makes the second son and the family stronger
    - Using settled judgment or intuition to analyze the situation, is this Kai Shu tradition right? Confucian settled judgment or intuition would say, “Of course not!”
    - Mozi: if it is wrong, then it must be possible for conventions to be wrong
- Mozi argues that you *cannot* use your conventional wisdom or intuitions to decide if cultural practices are correct because these have been shaped by your culture’s social practices
- You need a measure or standard of judging practices that is neutral between all culture
- If you don’t like the conventions of one society, you can go live in a different society with different conventions (Warring States period)
- 天下 *tiān xià* - everything under the world
- But wherever you choose to live, you’ll still be under the 道 *dao*[path] of 天 *tian*[nature:sky]
- 天 *tian*[nature:sky] offers a neutral source of authority about which social convention is right and wrong

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- Unlike a ruler who covers one particular area, 天 *tiān*[nature:sky] guides all living things
- Mozi says that 天 *tiān*[nature:sky's] favors or prefers the *benefit of all under heaven*
- 天 *tian*[nature:sky] favors human utility, human well-being particularly.
- 利 *li*[benefit]
- Mozi focuses more on 天 *tiān*[nature:sky] than did Confucius
- Mozi personifies 天 *tiān*[nature:sky]; it has a 志 *zhi*[will] and has likes and dislikes—all mechanically tide to the 利害 *lì-hài*[benefit- harm] 辯 *biàn*[distinction] making the preference for 利 *li*[benefit] natural
- Mozi is explaining 天 *tian*[nature:sky] by attributing the familiar mechanism of human psychological process leading to beneficial outcomes for humans (*personifying*) but not otherwise treating it as anthromorphic—in particular, not as a loving father or a sovereign—who guide us by commands or normatively valid laws which are backed by punishment.
- Mozi says 天 *tian*[nature:sky] has biases toward human benefit in the way modern physicists might say "nature abhors a vacuum" (hature abhors things that harm humans)
- Mozi maintains the other core elements of the metaphor - 天 *tian*[nature:sky] is up there above us, is the home of reliable and constant *dào*s of its constituents, the sun, moon, stars and the other contents of the sky
- 天 *tian*[nature:sky]'s 道 *dào*[guide] is a reliable, measurement-like standard of moral behavior—that behavior that brings benefit and avoids harm to humans
- Talk of tiān's favoring human well-being sounds familiar, like the Western argument from design for the existence of God'

- Mozi's argument, however, does not conclude with the existence of 天 *tian*[nature:sky], but with its likes and dislikes--nature is structured to favor human well-being

This is more like the modern Gaia Hypothesis: theories about how nature's processes must be such that they result in the evolution of human life and reach a natural, self-regulating balance in ways that favor our continued existence