

# The Concept of Harmony in Contemporary P. R. China and in Taiwanese Modern Confucianism

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## Abstract

The present article deals with the idea of the “harmonious society,” which is at the core of contemporary social ideologies in the P. R. China. This concept is examined from three perspectives: the official state interpretations of the concept of harmony (*he* 和 or *hexie* 和諧), and the classical and Modern Confucian elucidations. The author concludes that official political interpretations from the P.R. China mainly follow Xunzi’s classical elaboration of this concept, which is in the legalist tradition and implies autocratic elements, whereas the philosophic interpretations written by the Taiwanese Modern Confucians generally elaborate the Mencian, i.e. the more egalitarian and democratic stream of classical Confucian thought.

**Keywords:** harmony, Confucianism, ideology, harmonious society

## Izveček

Predmet pričujočega članka je raziskava ideje »harmonične družbe«, ki je v središču aktualnih družbenih ideologij L. R. Kitajske. Avtorica raziše kitajski koncept harmonije (*he* ali *hexie*) z vidika treh različnih perspektiv: uradne interpretacije sodobnih ideologov, klasičnih pomenov in moderno konfucianskih nadgradenj. Pokaže se, da uradne interpretacije v glavnem sledijo Xunzijevega razumevanju tega koncepta, ki vsebuje vrsto avtokratskih elementov, medtem ko Moderni konfucianci večinoma izhajajo iz Mencijeve, t.j. bolj egalitarne in demokratične struje klasičnega konfucianizma.

**Ključne besede:** harmonija, konfucianizem, ideologija, harmonična družba

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## 1. Harmony and Confucianism in the P. R. China

The main purpose (and the expected significance) of the present study is to illuminate the relation between modern ideologies and traditional concepts. It aims to show that Confucianism is by no means a monolithic or static scope of traditional thought, but rather implies different currents that can be used quite arbitrary and selectively by modern ideologies. It furthermore aims to show a specific kind of conceptualizing biased historiographies, marked by their function of legitimizing the state power. These research questions are significant as they allow us to examine the influence of modern Chinese theories, especially those deriving from the state-forming Confucianism, which, in its modernized form, presently still functions as one of the central ideologies of the entire present-day Eastern Asia, and has a profound influence on political, economic and cultural relations between Europe and China. In this context, we need to consider the extent of the philosophical “traditions” based on historic assumptions, and the extent of the mere product of the (ideological and political) demands of the present.

One of the main reasons for the loss of the normative authority (which the Communist Party of China enjoyed unconditionally until the 1990s) can be found in the fact that the values it asserts within its central ideologies are no longer in contact with social reality; none of the leading ideologists can establish ways in which the values of “collectivism” or “serving the people” (both of which hold an important place in the so-called socialist morals), may be combined with the term market economy and the harsh competition that defines it. This is even truer when dealing with the concepts of protecting worker’s rights and the social state, which are one of the dominant socialist values, but cannot be found in the priorities of the Communist Party of China (CPC). These discrepancies lead to the vacuum of values that is not reflected merely in blind consumerism and the lack of critical reflection in the political measures and social mechanisms, but also in the loss of traditional identities. Jürgen Habermas called such states “crisis of rationality” (1986, 87), for these states appear in every society that finds itself at a crossroad between actual practices and the ideological assumptions suited for the previous practices.

The idea of “harmonious society” represents one of the core elements of the social ideology in contemporary China. Although the concept of harmony which underpins this idea has often been explicitly denoted as originating in Confucian thought, Confucian discourses did not form any part of the public intellectual

debate in the P. R. China before the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to that time, the historical figure of Confucius, and the entire Confucian tradition, were the targets of severe criticism by official governmental ideologists. Confucian teachings were seen as a reactionary “feudalistic” ideology which had mainly served the interests of the exploitative ruling classes of the previous social orders, while Confucius himself was seen—in the light of the tradition of the May 4<sup>th</sup> cultural renewal movement<sup>1</sup> and Marxist modernization theories—as a symbol of the ultra-conservative tradition that had blocked Chinese modernization and as thus “responsible” for the country’s backwardness. Helena Motoh (2009, 91) argues that such criticism reached its peak in the campaign “Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius” (*Pi Lin pi Kong*)<sup>2</sup> after Lin Biao’s death in an airplane accident in 1971. In this campaign, Confucius and his thought were seen as a prototype of reactionary ideology and traditionalism, although it was mainly directed against Lin Biao and the moderate politician, Zhou Enlai.

Less than two decades later, however, and to the complete surprise of many experts in Chinese studies, such criticism was completely reversed. As Helena Motoh (2009, 91) points out, one of the first indications of this turnabout was Gu Mu’s official address on the occasion of the 2540<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Confucius’ birth. In his speech, Gu Mu, who was one of the chief ideologues of Chinese modernization, indicated the importance of a “correct” (or rectified) relation to traditional national culture and urged a revival of the positive elements of Confucian thought within the framework of a synthesis with Western ideas. At the same time, he stressed that in this synthesis the Chinese tradition should predominate over the Western one.

This “official” turning towards Confucianism manifested itself in the official Party language, the founding of numerous departments and chairs of “national studies”<sup>3</sup> and the establishment of a network of “Confucian institutes” throughout the world (Motoh 2009, 91). However, Confucianism was also re-discovered by many intellectuals who hoped to find in it a useful tool for re-evaluating

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<sup>1</sup> In his article, “How to understand the slogan ‘Let’s close the Confucian store’”, Zhang Yixing wrote: “This slogan of the May 4<sup>th</sup> cultural revolution gives the impression that the representatives of the May 4<sup>th</sup> movement were totally opposed to Confucian thought and traditional culture.” (Zhang 2004, 1) (“五四”新文化运动中“打倒孔家店”这一著名口号给人的印象，似乎是“五四”那批代表人物都是全盘否定儒家思想和传统文化的).

<sup>2</sup> 批林批孔

<sup>3</sup> *Guo xue* 國學. In contemporary China, we can also cite the so-called “National studies fever” (*Guo xue re* 國學熱).

(traditional) social practices, thereby contributing to the solution of the many socio-political problems facing contemporary China.

In recent years, Confucian teachings have been valued primarily in terms of their possible contribution to the idea of a “harmonious society.” According to Zheng Yongnian and Tok Sow Keat (2007, 2), China now needs to adjust its attitude: a more proactive role is now necessary if the country is to shape its own destiny, both internally and externally. “Scientific development” (*kexue fazhanguan*)<sup>4</sup> and “harmonious society” serve to provide Hu’s domestic audience with new developmental objectives; “harmonious world” sends the signal that China is now moving into a new stage of development. This new mentality and approach—China finally “going out”—is applicable to both China’s domestic and foreign policies, three decades into its “open door” policy.

## 2. Harmony and Legislation

Although in the reports of the 17<sup>th</sup> Communist Party Congress, the concept of the harmonious society would be overshadowed somewhat by the slogan of “scientific development,” the “construction of a harmonious society” (*hexie shehui jianshe*)<sup>5</sup> still represents one of the main principles of the continental government, and was even applied in the new reform of Chinese legislation. This link between harmony and law was often the focus of Chinese academic articles dealing with the legal implications of the (planned) harmonious society:

In establishing its legal and judicial system, the ancient Chinese society in which Confucian culture predominated laid stress upon the concepts of “applying rituality, respect for harmony and consideration of the methods of ancient rulers.” In its method of following “the middle way,” Confucianism strove for the consolidation for these concepts. The “respect for harmony” represents the core of ancient Chinese culture and, at the same time, the basic value tendency on which rests the classical Chinese idea of a legal system. Nowadays, we have re-established this idea of “constructing harmonious society” and emphasized the content of the notion “harmony” [...]. Thus, the foundation of modern societies is law, which is based upon regulations, the wisdom of the people, equality and justice. A harmonious society lays stress upon peace and order, sincerity, friendship, love and also upon a coherent development. It strives for the unification of man and nature and for a healthy

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<sup>4</sup> 科學發展觀

<sup>5</sup> 和諧社會建設

sustainable development. Thus, if we want to establish a harmonious society, we must first establish the rule of law<sup>6</sup> (Zhou 2010, 285).

As Leila Choukrone and Antoine Garapon point out, the concept of harmony in this context is seen primarily as an instrument of social discipline, a view which comes to the forefront in discussions on the linkage between harmony and law:

This theoretical framework turns law into a disciplinary principle dedicated to society's moral construction. If law is seen as an instrument for legitimizing power, it remains implicitly but primarily subordinate to the regime's durability [...]. Thus, at the current juncture, "harmony" is also essential for a Party concerned over retaining its grip on the country. (Choukrone and Garapon 2007, 3)

This position was already made explicit in an article by Xiao Zhuoji, a professor of the School of Economics of Peking University and Vice-chairman of the Social and Legal Affairs Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, whose comments on the new political direction appeared in the English edition of the official *China Daily* soon after Hu Jintao's announcement of the new "harmonious path": "In addition, we will crack down on various social ills, which are poisonous tumours in a harmonious society and must be eliminated" (Xiao 2010, 2).

Similar passages can also be found in various academic articles which, within the context of the harmonious society, stress the importance of discipline, self-restraint and a "correct" attitude towards superiors and the community (see Li 2010, 9). If, as Choukrone and Garapon argue (2007, 3), the idea of harmony serves as an ideological support for a legal model which is used as a disciplinary and moral tool for preserving the present regime, then harmony (as an ostensibly essential aspect of Confucian teachings) also serves as a symbol for Confucius, seen as a thinker who propounded a "proper" morality that manifests itself in the subordination of individuals to "higher" social goals and in the unconditional obedience to superiors.

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<sup>6</sup>以儒家文化为主导的中国古代社会，在建立法律制度和司法体系时，凸显儒家中庸之道所追求的“礼之用、和为贵、先王之道斯为美”的思想理念。“和为贵”既是古代中华文化的核心，也是中国古代法制观的终极价值取向。当代，我们重新提出了“创建和谐社会”的构想，并赋予了“和谐”二字新的内涵... 然而，现代和谐社会的基础是法治，其内涵包括法律、民智、公平、正义。和谐社会所倡导的是人类生活的安定有序、诚信友爱、协调发展，所追求的是人与自然互相融合，健康持续发展。因此，一个和谐的现代社会必定首先是一个法治社会。

### 3. The Concept of Harmony in Original Confucianism, Later Developments by Mengzi and Xunzi

Although official publications dedicated to promote the idea of a harmonious society often indicate Confucius and/or Confucianism as the source of this concept, at first glance the connotations indicated above do not seem to derive from the original Confucian canon, but from the discourses of the post-Confucian Legalist school of thought. However, we should recall that for Dong Zhongshu, the Han scholar and reformer who elaborated the later traditional Confucian state doctrine, the normative function of “propriety” (*zheng* 正), which manifests itself through the implementation of “rituals” (*li* 禮), provided a basic means (together with the hierarchical social structure) for integrating legalist elements into the ideal framework of original Confucianism. In order to understand the implications of this position, let us briefly examine the semantic connotations of the concept of harmony (or harmonization) in the context of the most relevant classical texts<sup>7</sup>.

In the *Analects* (*Lun yu* 論語), Confucius makes a radical distinction between sameness (in the sense of “uniformity,” *tong* 同), and harmony or “harmonization” (*he* 和), and criticizes the former in the following terms: “The nobleman creates harmony, not sameness. Ordinary men, on the contrary, are all the same and cannot create harmony<sup>8</sup>.” (Kong 2012a, Zi lu 23)

The idea that diversity is a condition of harmony (Motoh 2009, 99) can also be found in the Confucian classics *The Annales of Spring and Autumn* (*Chun qiu lu* 春秋錄):

If the ruler approves something, everyone approves it. And if he is against something, everyone is against it. This is like adding water to water. Who would like to eat (such a watery soup)? This is like all instruments (in an

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<sup>7</sup> Li Chenyang (2002, 583) points out that the character *he* 和 has been applied mostly in the verbal form (“to harmonize”) or as an expression that denotes the process of harmonization (often in the sense of tuning). However, this kind of mixed usage is true for the majority of classical Chinese notions (especially when abstract), which can assume different grammatical functions depending on the context. In addition, there are many passages in ancient Chinese texts, in which the notion *he* can be best translated by the noun “harmony” (e.g. Kong 2012a: Xue er 12, 2. Sentence; Li ji 2012: Tan gong I, 59, or Zhuangzi 2012: Shan xing 1 etc). Even the modern term “harmony” (*hexie* 和諧) can appear in both the verbal and nominal form.

<sup>8</sup>君子和而不同，小人同而不和。

orchestra) playing the same musical tune. Who would like to listen to such music?<sup>9</sup> (Kong 2012b, Shao gong ershi nian 1)

Underlying this view is the assumption that social harmony is merely a projection or metaphor for the mutual coherence of tones that forms the basis of any good music. Rituals, of which it is part, also have a regulatory function. Thus, any kind of harmony that was not in accordance with rituals was deemed inappropriate by the Confucians and could not represent a positive value: “To know the harmonious coherence and still create harmony without regulating it by the rules of propriety, this likewise should not be done.<sup>10</sup>” (Kong 2012a, Xue er 12)

Here, we find the regulatory or normative function of the central Confucian concept *li*. Although music is an important part of Confucian ritual, not every kind of music is appropriate for cultivated people. The function of the ritual fusion of nature and culture, men and nature, individuals and society can only be fulfilled by “proper,” or “sublime” music (*ya yue*<sup>11</sup>). Given the similarity with the Confucian understanding of harmony<sup>12</sup>, it cannot be claimed that the disciplinary function of harmony—in a broader sense—derives exclusively from legalist discourses.

As is well known, the interpretations of the original teachings of Confucius by his most important followers, Mengzi and Xunzi, differed in their specific approach towards innate human qualities. This naturally influenced their divergent views on the relation between individuals and society, as well as their interpretation of social harmony. We should bear in mind that Xunzi also provided the interpretative foundation of Dong Zhongshu’s reformist thought, which implied various legalistic elements. On the other hand, neo-Confucian philosophy mainly followed the Mencian interpretations of the original Confucian teachings, and provided a basis for the later Modern Confucian theorists. In the framework of the present study, it is worth noting that while the concept of harmony often appears in the works of the “legalist” Xunzi, it is scarcely mentioned by the “humanistic”<sup>13</sup> Mengzi, who always understood the concept *he* in the sense of mutual human harmony and coherence:

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<sup>9</sup>君所謂可，據亦曰可，君所謂否，據亦曰否，若以水濟水，誰能食之，若琴瑟之專壹，誰能聽之。

<sup>10</sup>知和而和，不以禮節之，亦不可行也。

<sup>11</sup>雅樂

<sup>12</sup> As one can easily imagine, the harmonious coherence between unmarried lovers does not find an unconditional approval in Confucian ideology.

<sup>13</sup> In *Mengzi*, it is mentioned only three times, while in *Xunzi* not less than seventy-six times.

Opportunities of time provided by Heaven are not equal to vantages of situation provided by the Earth, and vantages of situation arising from the Earth are not equal to the union arising from the harmony between people<sup>14</sup>. (Mengzi 2012, Gongsun Chou III/10).

Mengzi explains this view with the following example, in which he analyses the reasons for a city's decline:

The city walls were distinguished for their height, and its moats were deep enough. Its arms were distinguished for their strength and sharpness, and the stores of rice and grain were large enough. Yet it was given up and abandoned. This is because vantages of situation provided by the Earth are not equal to the union arising from the harmony between people<sup>15</sup>. (Mengzi 2012, Gongsun Chou III/10)

Such a harmonious coherence is conditioned by adaptation, for he also applied the term *he* with this connotation: “Hui of Liu Xia could apt harmoniously to the sages<sup>16</sup>.” (Mengzi 2012, Wang zhang II/10).

In his understanding of the concept *he*, Xunzi adhered to its original meaning, which is linked to musical harmony: “Rituality is grounded in the respect of culture, and music in harmony<sup>17</sup>.” (Xunzi 2011, Quan xue 12)

Further, he often explicitly connects the harmonious compliance among people with the concept of regularity (*jie*)<sup>18</sup>:

If we want our government to function well, our efforts will and thoughts have to follow rituality. If not, then chaos will prevail and people will suffer. Our food, clothes, homes and actions must all follow rituality, because only in this way can harmony be achieved. Otherwise, we will experience unhappiness and illness<sup>19</sup>. (Xunzi 2011, Xiu shen 2)

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<sup>14</sup>天時不如地利，地利不如人和。

<sup>15</sup>城非不高也，池非不深也，兵革非不堅利也，米粟非不多也；委而去之，是地利不如人和也。

<sup>16</sup>柳下惠，聖之和者也。

<sup>17</sup>禮之敬文也，樂之中和也。

<sup>18</sup>The contemporary meaning of the term *jie* 節 refers to festivals or celebrations. Originally, it meant “respect for proper social rituals.” Even the modern compound that denotes a feast, implies the word for “ritual” (*lijie* 禮節). The regulative function of the word *jie* is also evident in its classical connotation of “saving.”

<sup>19</sup>凡用血氣、志意、知慮，由禮則治通，不由禮則勃亂提侵；食飲，衣服、居處、動靜，由禮則和節，不由禮則觸陷生疾。



According to Xunzi, this regularity which was meant to order human relations in a harmonious society was based upon the regular order of Nature. In fact, it manifested itself in the orderly sequence of the four seasons:

To act in accordance with Heaven/Nature means that there is no drought on the heights and no floods in the lowlands. Winter and summer follow each other with an orderly, harmonious constancy and the crops mature in their proper time<sup>20</sup>. (Xunzi 2011, Xiu shen 3)

This orderly harmony must be strengthened by culture (Xunzi 2011, Ru xiao 1)<sup>21</sup>. Xunzi thus distinguishes between “good” and “bad” harmony:

When harmony among people is established by the means of goodness, everything will flow smoothly. If somebody wants to establish harmony by means of evil, he is nothing but an opportunist<sup>22</sup>. (Xunzi 2011, Rongru 11)

Hence, “good” harmony is based on a regulative order of nature, which also manifests itself in a proper hierarchic structure of society. Such connotations, which are already rather legalistic, are expressed explicitly in the following passage, in which this Confucian philosopher links an orderly social hierarchy to the concept of unification. This concept is, of course, fundamental to the functioning of a centralistic state, while also clearly contradicting Confucius who, as we noted above, advocated diversity:

It is therefore reasonable to create harmony by the means of divisions. (Such) harmony allows unification and unification allows superiority. In this way, the farthest borders (of the state) can be reached and our enemies can be defeated<sup>23</sup>. (Xunzi 2011, Wang zhi 19)

But Xunzi goes even further, and links the creation of harmony to the idea of punishment: “With the establishment of forms of punishment, the governing [of society] will become balanced and people will live in harmony<sup>24</sup>.” (Xunzi 2011, Wang zhi 26)

The disciplinary connotation that prevailed in the understanding and propagation of a “harmonious society” in China under Hu Jintao, thus derives directly from Xunzi’s interpretation of this notion. They can thus be regarded as

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<sup>20</sup>高者不旱，下者不水，寒暑和節，而五穀以時熟，是天之事也。

<sup>21</sup>因天下之和，遂文武之業。

<sup>22</sup>以善和人者謂之順...以不善和人者謂之諛。

<sup>23</sup>故義以分則和，和則一，一則多力，多力則彊，彊則勝物。

<sup>24</sup>刑政平，百姓和。

Confucian, but in terms of their fundamental aims they derive from elaborations of the original Confucian teachings which were functional to the integration of despotic elements into the new state doctrine formulated in the Han period.

#### **4. Modern Confucian Interpretations**

In the context of the present study, it is of particular interest to determine whether (and to what degree) the modern concept of a “harmonious society,” which represents an important element of current ideologies and is often denoted as a Confucian heritage, may also be linked to the theoretical conclusions of Modern Confucianism.

As noted, Modern Confucians have generally followed a neo-Confucian philosophy based upon Mengzi’s, rather than Xunzi’s development of the original teachings. Xunzi was thus often viewed as something of a heretic who did not profess or elaborate a “proper” Confucianism in his own discourses. Xiong Shili, who taught many of the representatives of the second generation of Modern Confucianism, identifies what he considers the fundamental failing in Xunzi:

Confucianism upholds original human goodness, that is, the shining aspect of human nature. Orthodox Confucianism, from Mencius to Wang Yangming, insists that there is original benevolence in human nature (with the exception of Xunzi). Xiong concludes that Xunzi fails to reach the essence of Confucianism (Yu 2002, 131).

In order to better understand this basic division, we will briefly examine the meaning and interpretations of the concept of harmony in the context of the second generation of Modern Confucianism. The main representatives of this generation are Mou Zongsan, Xu Fuguan, Tang Junyi and Fang Dongmei. Although the present study is devoted to the specific theoretical concepts relating to modernization (and it is in this context that these philosophers will be discussed below), given their relevance to our chosen topic, we will provide a brief survey of their views on the legitimization of Confucianism and harmony.

One of Xiong Shili’s most gifted students was Mou Zongsan, who is generally regarded, especially in philosophical terms, as the leading representative of the second generation of Modern Confucians. With respect to the legitimacy of Confucian teachings and the definition of a “proper” Confucianism, Mou agrees

with his teacher Xiong Shili in terms of the criteria of autonomous ethics and the unity of reason and emotions. Consequently, only Confucius, Mengzi and the authors or commentators of the classical works, *The Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhong yong*<sup>25</sup>) and *The Book of Changes* (*Yi jing*<sup>26</sup>) can be considered as “legitimate” heirs to pre-Qin Confucianism. Xunzi instead belongs to a lateral (i.e. not completely legitimate) current, due to his advocacy of the so-called “ethics of heteronomy” (Lee 2001, 73).

While Mou does not give much attention to the question of harmony, at least explicitly, some clues to harmonious living in society can be found in his work, *On Summum Bonum* (*Yuan shan lun*), in which he attempts to explain the method of the harmonization (or unification) of happiness and goodness. In this study, he also briefly considers the interpretation of the original Confucian phrase “the harmony of balance” (*Zhong he*); a phrase which, however, has nothing to do with the social connotations of harmony that are at the heart of presentday continental ideologies. On the contrary, this phrase refers to the ideal foundations of harmony, which are grounded in the completeness of the individual (and integral) moral Self.

The existence of my individual life is a completed fact, but it still implies possibilities of improvement. Therefore, it is not a kind of fixed or determined existence. This existence is, according to the Buddhists, a non-defined existence of everything that exists. Everything that exists is in this completed fact of existence, but, at the same time, this existence is un-defined (i.e. it is not of a fixed, determined nature). All existence is permeated by reason and grows out from it. The *Doctrine of the Mean*<sup>27</sup> refers to this, for it says:

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<sup>25</sup> 中庸

<sup>26</sup> 易經

<sup>27</sup> The Confucian classic, the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhong Yong*) is a text rich with symbolic meanings that provide implicit guidelines for the improvement and cultivation of human personality. Ezra Pound defined it as an “unswerving” or “unwobbling pivot,” in the sense that the mean (*zhong*) is a balance, without oscillations or inclinations to either side. The second part of this compound (*yong*) generally refers to something common, familiar or domestic. It is changeless, but not static; rather, it can be regarded as continual. I have decided to translate it with the term “own way.” One of the first translators of this text, James Legge, understood the purpose or goal of this mean as the preservation of a harmonious balance that keeps the mind in a state of continuous concentration. Someone who follows these principles can never stray or deviate from their “own way,” meaning that they can always act in accordance with their unique or individual position within the natural and social world. These principles apply to everyone, and help each person to live in accordance with the natural order (see Li ji 2012, *Zhong yong* 33).

“When the harmony of balance is achieved, Heaven and Earth are in their proper places and everything that exists develops<sup>28</sup>. (Mou 1985, 306)

In his discussion of the *Doctrine of the Mean (Zhong yong)*, Xu Fuguan likewise deals with this concept (i.e. the “harmony of balance,” *zhong he*), which he views as a notion that:

refers to the “nature” that unifies the internal and the beyond and to the harmonizing function of the nature that consummates both the self and the things around (it). The internal aspect is what consummates the self, and the beyond is what consummates the things around. (Ni 2002, 287)

Xu explains this notion as follows:

Here, the notion “balance” (*zhong*)<sup>29</sup> does not only refer to a foundation of some external balance, but rather to a common basis for both “balance” (*zhong*) and “one’s own way”. In the third commentary of Guang Ya we can read: “One’s own way is harmony.” This means that harmony can be equated to one’s own way. The expression “harmony” which forms a part of the compound “harmony of balance” (*zhong he*), is not only an effect of the “own way,” but a joint effect of balance and the own way. The balance that appears in the expression “harmony of balance,” acts outwards as the way of the mean (or the middle way), but on a higher level it connects the innate qualities of each individual with their life. Therefore, it can be denoted as the “great foundation.” The notion “harmony,” which appears in the phrase “harmony of balance,” is an effect of the middle way (or the own way of balance). The middle way (or the own way of balance) therefore implies the actual effect (or substantial impact) of “harmony” and thus is capable of reaching everything under heaven [...]. Hence, we can say, that the concept of harmony refers to something which describes “the effect of that which is called dao.” At the same time, this concept expresses the very entity which makes the inherent connection with the middle way (or the own way of balance) possible<sup>30</sup> (Xu 2005, 127)

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<sup>28</sup>我之個體生命之存在是既成的，雖是既成的，但可改善。因此，茲並無定性的存在，此如佛家說無定性眾生，推之，凡天地萬物都是既成的存在，但亦都非定性的存在。一切存在都可涵泳在理性底潤澤中。此既中庸所謂...致中和，天地位焉，萬物育焉。

<sup>29</sup> *Zhong* = “the mean, the middle.” Due to its very specific and concrete use in the text, we have translated it with the more appropriate term “balance.”

<sup>30</sup> 中和之“中”，不僅是外在的中的根據，而是“中”

“庸”的共同根據。廣雅釋詁三：“庸，和也”。可見和亦即是庸。但此處中和之“和”，不僅是“庸”的效果，而是中與庸的共同效果。中和之中，外發而為中庸，上則通與性與命，所以謂之“大本”。中和之“和”，乃中庸之實效。中庸有“和”的實效，故可謂天下之達道... 中和的觀念，可以說是“率性之謂道”的闡述，亦即是“中庸”向內通。

The harmony of balance is thus the most basic foundation of each individual, which enables them to achieve/maintain a harmonious co-existence with other individuals and society as a whole. As we shall see, in Modern Confucian philosophy the moral Self represents both the foundation of each individual and the core of the universal reason. This is naturally preconditioned by the complementarity of the relation between the individual and their natural/social environment. This means that social harmony is necessarily linked to the harmonious inwardness of the individual.

Given that, in the Modern Confucian view, the universe (or all that exists) is permeated aiming the virtue of goodness, both the phenomenal forms of reality as well as its substantial nucleus that manifests itself in the idea of the “things as such” (noumenon) are axiological notions. The harmony of human existence is thus strictly bound with moral premises. For Xu Fuguan, these values are closely linked to the aesthetics of perceiving beauty, which is one of the fundamental functions or effects of harmony. Xu argues that this is why music was considered of paramount importance in the ideal framework of original Confucianism. A profound musical sensation enables us to simultaneously project its harmony into the sphere of social reality:

In Confucianism, balance (*zhong*) and harmony were the central aesthetic criteria of music. Behind balance and harmony there is the meaning of goodness; thus, they can move human hearts and awaken goodness in them.<sup>31</sup>  
(Xu 2001, 14).

In the field of concrete social politics, Xu Fuguan envisioned a system that would enable society to achieve “rational harmony” on the basis of a reasonable competition. A co-existence that was not merely a question of the individual should be premised on the independence of each individual, with the collective rights of the community grounded in individual rights (Ni 2002, 296–97).

However, when the maturity of the people and the other conditions are sufficiently present so that people who enjoy political rights can live together harmoniously, the system of rights may become less important or even unnecessary. As Chenyang Li suggests, between well-related family members, “it is meaningless or even destructive to talk about their rights against one another” (Li 2010). Yet between the stage that relies on sage rulers and the stage at which

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<sup>31</sup>中與和是孔門對樂所要求的美的標準。在中與和後面，便有善的意味，便足以感動人之善心。

harmony prevails, Confucianism must provide room for something less ideal. As Shu-hsien Liu says, in the current historical situation “we have to negate the tradition in order to reconfirm the ideal of the tradition” (Ni 2002, 298).

Xu Fuguan was thus advocating a harmony of human communities based upon the uniqueness and irreproducibility of each individual.

In the chapter “Twenty years of Duke Zhao,” in *Zuo’s Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals*, Yanzi says: “Harmony is like a stew.” A stew contains various kinds of tastes that blend together into a delicious unity. Therefore, “harmony” is composed of many different combinations of particular qualities. In harmony, none of these particular qualities will lose its uniqueness: instead, they blend harmoniously with one another.<sup>32</sup> (Xu 2005, 127)

The morality offered to the individual by Tang Junyi is not based on either the uniqueness of their individual existence (as in Xu Fuguan’s political philosophy), nor on the autonomous freedom of the moral Self and its infinite mind (as in Mou Zongsan). Tang’s idea of morality is much more directly rooted in the individual sense of the innate responsibility which—similarly to the neo-Confucian concept of “innate knowledge” /*liang zhi*/—can guide human beings through the opaque thickets of all the ethical dilemmas and doubts they encounter during their actual lives. But the individual can contribute to the higher goal of social harmony only if they obey this inner gnome of responsibility:

You need not ask what you should do, because you alone know what is to be done. However, sometimes you might sense the possibility of acting in more than one way. You might even feel that these different possibilities are in contradiction with one another. You might not know immediately which one to choose, or how to unify them in order to achieve a higher level of harmony [...]. And yet all these questions must be resolved exclusively by you, for you alone can recognize the reason for acting in one specific way<sup>33</sup>. (Tang 1985, 53–54)

However, this form of responsibility does not condition individual interests based on those of society (or groups). A morally conscious person will always act in

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<sup>32</sup>左轉昭公二十年晏子謂“和如羹焉”，羹是由各種不同的味，調和在一起，而得到統一之味的。所一“和”是各種有個性的東西，各不失其個性，卻能彼此得到諧和統一之義。

<sup>33</sup>你不必問什麼是該作的，因為你自己知道你自己所該作。但是你自己可以同時感到幾種該作，你感到他們間的矛盾，你一時會不知道如何選擇其一，或統一之於一種更高的和諧... 這些仍只有你自己去解決，因為只有你自己，才真知道你該作時所據以為該作之理由。

accordance with their responsibility, regardless of their own interests, or the interests of the broader social community.

A human being is not a thing; a human being is a goal in and of itself. This means that individuals are not tools of society, nor tools of the state. And the people of today are not tools for the people of tomorrow [...]. But if we say that people are not tools of society, this does not mean that we are outside of it, and individuals should not look upon society and the state as the means for achieving their own interests [...]. I believe that the conflict between individuals and society can only be solved by educating people to develop to the utmost their innate moral nature<sup>34</sup>. (Tang 2000, 61–62)

This is clearly not about obedience to external authorities. As his choice of language indicates, Tang remains loyal to the fundamental principles of Chinese ethics, which consciously strives to transcend the boundaries between the Self and Others through harmonious action in the sphere of interpersonal relations. (Sin 2002, 320)

However, since the ethical Self or the morally conscious mind of an individual also strongly influences the specific features of the culture in which they were born and live, Tang believes that the prevailing orientation in a given culture is rooted in the attitudes that predominate in the minds of the persons within that culture. Hence, one of the main differences between Chinese and Western culture is to be found in the Chinese focus on ethics and art, while the West was instead founded on religion and science. A difference which, Tang adds, derives from the Chinese stress upon harmony, as opposed to the Western emphasis on distinctions.

A similar (albeit more biased) view on “cultural<sup>35</sup>” difference can also be found in the works of Fang Dongmei (Thomé Fang), whose thought is essentially based upon the “typically Chinese” concept of “creative harmony.” He considers Western philosophy to be trapped in a mesh of continuous contradictions, from which it seeks to escape through nihilism (Li 2002, 265). If the Chinese tradition is far more sophisticated, then this is due precisely to its concept of harmony and harmonization:

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<sup>34</sup>人不是物，人本身為一目的。人本身為一目的涵義，亦包括個人不是社會之一工具，國家之一工具，此時代之人不是下不是下一時代人之工具... 我們說每一人不是社會之一工具，不是說每一人可以自外與社會，個人亦不須視社會國家為達其個人目的之工具... 我們人為只有以教化充兩發展人之此種道德的天性，可以協調所為個人與社會的衝突。

<sup>35</sup>Gross generalizations applied to different cultures (and without entering into the definition of this complex and semantically vague notion) is a characteristic of the Modern Confucians and, to a certain extent, of modern Chinese theoreticians in general.

In contrast, Chinese philosophy maintains a balance between qing and li<sup>36</sup>. Through cultivation, Chinese philosophy aims at a grand harmony in life; it is like a symphony, with all notes contributing to its harmonious unity (Fang 1980, 93).

This “harmonious unity” is rooted in Fang’s core concept of “comprehensive harmony,” which is grounded in turn in a view of the universe as a balanced and harmonious system. And because he considers this paradigm as the very bedrock of Chinese philosophy, the Chinese ideal of life must be harmonious as well. In this ideal, there is no room for either conflicts or selfishness. This kind of harmony is not limited to the universe, but also represents a criterion for the formation of behavioural patterns and political ideals (Fang 1980, 93).

But given the idealistic nature of his philosophy, Fang did not devote much attention to questions regarding the social reality. Harmony, which is at the centre of his idealistic theory, is mostly confined to the harmony of the unification of men and nature, in contrast with other representatives of the second generation of Modern Confucians who, as we have seen, addressed questions of social harmony in a more comprehensive and detailed way.

## 5. Conclusion

Even though the modern ideologies in the P. R. China that proclaim the ideal of a harmonious society, and the treatises on harmony by theorists from Taiwan and Hong Kong both refer to Confucianism as their main template for achieving such social coherence, it is manifestly evident that certain fundamental distinctions divide these two discourses. The most obvious difference is to be found in an ideal of harmony which, for the continental theorists, is rooted in the tradition of the legalistically oriented Xunzi, while Modern Confucianism instead tends to follow the more humanistic line of Mencian discourses. The ideology of this emergent, neo-liberal superpower is thus grounded on an authoritarian discourse which has the obedience of its citizens as its prime concern, whereas for Modern Confucians influenced by Mengzi’s philosophy, the autonomy of the individual is at the forefront of their theorisation. The Mencian approach certainly offers a much

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<sup>36</sup>Emotion and reason



better basis for the development of a “democratic<sup>37</sup>” society composed of free individuals. But given that the Modern Confucian concept of a harmonious society is still unachieved and remains mostly at the theoretical level, while the more disciplinary discourse is supported by a well-equipped, highly efficient and at times very aggressive propaganda apparatus, this latter may very well prevail. Ultimately, the question of what kind of “harmony” awaits the Chinese people in the near future remains an open one.

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<sup>37</sup> Here, the notion of “democracy” is not understood in its prevailing sense of a multiparty system with diverse forms of parliamentary and political decision-making, but in much broader terms. In keeping with its original denotation, democracy is seen as a social system founded upon a complementary and equal relation between society and free individuals.

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