



The Philosophy of Harmony in Classical Confucianism

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Abstract

This essay introduces the philosophy of harmony in Classical Confucianism. In the first part of the essay the author summarizes the concept of harmony as it was developed in various Confucian classics. In the second part, the author offers an account of the Confucian program of harmony, ranging from internal harmony in the person, to harmony in the family, the state, the international world, and finally to harmony in the entire universe.

This essay discusses the philosophy of harmony (*he*) in Classical Confucianism during the Pre-Qin and Han period (up to 220 AD). The Confucian tradition has been shaped with many sources, including social ideals, values, and practices that predate Confucius (551–479 BCE). The corpus of the Confucian Classics consists of 13 ancient texts, including the *Yi Jing* (*Book of Change*), *Li Ji* (*Book of Rites*), the *Shang Shu* (*Book of History*), the *Shi Jing* (*Book of Odes*), the *Zuo Zhuan* (*Zuo's Annals*), and others, in addition to Confucius's *Analects* and the book of *Mencius*. None of these works was actually written by Confucius himself. Confucian philosophers subsequently reshaped the tradition by modifying and developing early Confucian thought. When we examine the Confucian philosophy of harmony, we examine it in the tradition rather than in one or two philosophers.

Although harmony has been a prominent theme in Confucianism, and the Chinese government has recently made social harmony a key mark of its political platform, serious study of this concept has been sporadic, particularly in the English-speaking circle. Given the world situation we are facing today, it is high time for us to carefully study this Confucian ideal and explore its implications for our age.

I

The concept of harmony was formed in China before Confucius came to stage in history. One of the earliest formulations of harmony can be traced

to Shi Bo, a scholar-minister who lived toward the end of the Western Zhou (1046–771 BCE) period. Shi Bo praised early sage-kings that they harmonized (*he*) five flavors to befit the taste and the six measures of sound to adjust the hearing, and that they achieved the highest level of harmony in society (Chapter *Zhengyu* of the *Guo Yi*). According to the Confucian classic *Zuo Zhuan* (Chapter *Shaogong 20*), the ancient scholar-minister Yan Zi (?–500 BCE) formulated the notion of harmony on the model of making soup and producing music. He said,

Harmony (*he*) is like making soup. One needs water, fire, vinegar, sauce, salt, and plum to cook fish and meat. One needs to cook them with firewood, mingle (*he*) them together in order to balance the taste. One needs to compensate for deficiencies and reduce excessiveness. The good person (*jun zi*) eats [such balanced food] in order to purify his heart/mind (*xin*).¹

And,

Sounds are like flavors. Different elements complete one another: one breath, two styles, three types, four instruments, five sounds, six measures, seven notes, eight winds, and nine songs. Different sounds complement one another: the pure and the impure, the big and the small, the short and the long, the rapid and the measured, the sorrowful and the joyful, the strong and the tender, the slow and the fast, the high and the low, the in and the out, and the inclusive and the non-inclusive. Listening to this kind of music, the heart/mind of the good person (*jun zi*) is purified.²

For Yan Zi, both in making soup and making music, we need to mix different ingredients or notes to produce a harmonious whole.

In the Confucian classic *Shi Jing*, harmony is a prominent subject. There we find passages as follows:

The deer sound pleasantly as they graze in the field.
I entertain honorable guests with the music of drums and strings.
With such beautiful music there are profoundly harmony and joy.
With elegant wines, I entertain the heart of the honorable guests.

and,

Enjoying fine dishes and wines with all your brothers,
There are harmony and joy like playful children.
Enjoying the union with wife and children,
It is like the mingling of drums and strings.
With brothers in concord there are profound harmony and joy.
Then you can leave your family in good order and make wife and children happy.
Think hard about it,
Is it indeed truly so? (Section of *Xiao Ya: Chang Di*)

In the *Shi Jing*, harmony is highly valued and cherished as an important human ideal. It is in close connection with human happiness. The happy life is one in harmony with other people and with nature.

In the Confucian view, music more than anything else captures the essence of harmony. Music is the process of bringing a plurality of sounds into concord. The Confucian notion of harmony is modeled after music. The *Yue Ji* Chapter of the *Li Ji* sets its theme by stating that ‘Music is the harmony of the Heaven and Earth’. Music does not only symbolize harmony, but also positively promotes harmony. The *Yue Ji* Chapter maintains that good music can move people’s heart deeply and improve people’s morals. Harmonious sound makes people gentle and kind. The *Yue Ji* Chapter states,

When the ruler and ministers listen to music together at the ancestral temple, they cannot but respect each other in harmony. When the old and the young listen to music together in the neighborhood, they cannot but interact gently and smoothly. When father, sons, and brothers listen to music together at home, they cannot but love one another in harmony.

In the Confucian view, music has this powerful positive effect on people because it is intrinsically harmonizing. Music is like the flower of a plant. Blooming flowers indicate a strong and healthy plant. For the author(s) of the *Yue Ji*, flourishing music indicates the overall health and virtuousness of society.

The *Yi Jing* develops the notion of ‘grand harmony’ (*tai he*). It is the concept that the entire universe constitutes a great harmony. ‘How great is the *Qian* (Heaven)! From it the myriad things originate under Heaven . . . With the changes of the *Qian* way, the myriad things all keep on their own path of life. Thus they preserve the grand harmony’ (*Yi Jing*: *Tuan*). Accordingly, ‘grand harmony’ is the most important ideal in the *Yi Jing*. The world is full of different things, yet all these things harmonize as they go through incessant changes. The ‘*Yi Jing*’ is considered the primary text among all Confucian texts. The notion of ‘grand harmony’ sets the stage for all other Confucian ideals, social as well as individual.

The Confucian classic *Zhong Yong*, originally a chapter of the *Li Ji*, treats harmony as a central concept. The *Zhong Yong* states at the outset, ‘Equilibrium is the great foundation under Heaven, and harmony is the great way under Heaven. In achieving equilibrium and harmony, Heaven and Earth maintain their appropriate positions and the myriad things flourish’. Harmony and equilibrium are closely connected in that harmony is achieved through a process of equilibrium. ‘Equilibrium’, or ‘*zhong*’, also implies being balanced and upright. In the Confucian view, harmony is by no means merely following the flow. Harmony is anchored in uprightness and is achieved through equilibrium. Human beings are not only to promote harmony within humanity but also throughout the entire universe. Section 22 of the *Zhong Yong* states that when humans realize their own nature (*xing*) and the natures of other things, ‘they can assist in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth’ and ‘they

can form a triad with Heaven and Earth'. It means that when Heaven and Earth transform and nourish everything, and when humans form a triad with Heaven and Earth, which presupposes the appropriate places of both, the world is a great harmony.

In the *Analects* and the *Mencius* harmony serves an important role in promoting the goals of Confucian social and political philosophy, even though neither work is elaborate on the concept. In the *Analects* Confucius adopts the ideal of harmony, making it a criterion for the morally refined person (*jun zi*). He says that 'The *jun zi* harmonizes but does not seek sameness, whereas the petty person seeks sameness but does not harmonize' (*Analects* 13.23). For Confucius, a sensible person should be able to respect different opinions and be able to work with different people in a harmonious way. A major function of *li* (rites, rituals of propriety) is precisely to harmonize people of various kinds. Confucian disciple You Ruo is recorded in the *Analects* as saying that 'of the functions of *li* harmonization is the [most] precious' (*Analects* 1.12). There is little need to emphasize how Confucians value *li*. They see a direct connection between *li* and harmony. Mencius (372–289 BCE) also highly values harmony. He comments that among the three important things in human affairs, the harmony of people is the most important: 'good timing is not as good as being advantageously situated, and being advantageously situated is not as good as having harmonious people' (*Mencius* 3B.1). In order to achieve a major goal in social affairs, one would need all three: good timing (*tian shi*), being advantageously situated (*di li*), and having harmonious people (*ren he*). The most precious thing, however, is to have people who harmoniously work with one another.

In comparison, harmony appears to be a more prominent concept in the *Xunzi*. Xunzi (310–238 BCE) concurs with Confucius on the importance of *li* to harmony. Xunzi says that '[only] when following *li* is one harmonized and regulated' (*Xunzi: Xiushen*). He also echoes Confucius in saying that 'To harmonize with others by goodness is being reasonably accommodating' and 'to harmonize with others by wickedness is fawning' (*Xunzi: Xiushen*). Xunzi elaborates on the idea in more detail: 'with the great transformation of the *yin* and the *yang*, the generous supply of wind and rain, the myriad things each get harmonized so they can live, and get their nurture so they grow' (*Xunzi: Tianlun*).

The Han Confucian Dong Zhongshu (179–104 BCE) takes harmony to be the ultimate principle of the world. Dong incorporates the *yin-yang* philosophy into Confucianism and sees the operation of the interactive forces of the *yin-yang* as a process of harmonization. His major work of the *Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chiqiu Fanlu*), in particular the Chapter of 'Following the Heavenly Dao' (*Xuntian Zhidao*), is based on the principle of harmony. Dong says, 'the entire Dao between Heaven and Earth culminates in the beauty of harmony'. Harmony is the right path of Heaven and the balance between the *yin* and the *yang*. When

the *yin* and the *yang* are balanced, the energy (*qi*) flows well and things get generated. Dong writes,

The Heavenly *qi* is active constantly without stagnation. Therefore the person following the Dao does not keep one's *qi* stagnant either. When the *qi* is not channeled well, it fills up the area leaving no free space. Therefore the morally refined person nurtures it and harmonizes it. He regulates it with standards; he rids of the isolated and accepts that which harmonizes with others. That which stands at a high terrace is too much toward the *yang* whereas that which stays in a large room is too much toward the *yin*; both are distant from the harmony of Heaven and Earth. Therefore the sage does neither. He is only in equilibrium.

For Dong, harmony is that on which Heaven and Earth generate the myriad things. Those who sincerely pursue harmony really understand the Dao. Dong recognizes that there are disharmonies in the world. The mix or alternating of harmonies and disharmonies is the way in which Heaven and Earth operate. But ultimately, disharmonies are transformed into harmonies.

We may summarize this Classical Confucian concept of harmony as follows. First, harmony is a metaphysical as well as a moral concept; it both describes how the world operates and prescribes as to how human beings ought to act. Second, Confucian harmony is not 'perfect agreement'. Co-existing parties in harmony are different from one another. While harmony does not preclude sameness altogether, sameness itself is not harmony. Harmony is sustained by energy generated through the interaction of different elements in creative tension. In this sense, Confucian harmony is not 'immediate harmony' in the Hegelian sense; it is not the kind of harmony in which Adam and Eve find themselves in the natural state. Confucian harmony is reflective and mediated, in the sense that it is generated through conscious and persistent efforts of humanity. Third, harmony is by its very nature relational. It is through mutual support and mutual dependence that things flourish. This notion of the world is non-foundational. The Confucian universe is not built on an absolutely fixed foundation. It is built on an interactive network of mutually dependent components. A mentality of harmony is a contextual mentality. The requirement of harmony places a constraint on each party in interaction, and, in the meantime, provides a context for each party to have optimal space to flourish. In the Confucian view, the world is not there just for one item or one kind of thing. It is for the 'myriad things'. Monopoly and hegemony are contrary to the spirit of harmony. Fourth, harmony, as understood in Confucianism, can take place at various levels. It can take place within the individual. A person can harmonize various parts of his or her body, the mind-heart, and various pursuits in life into a well-functioning, organic whole. Harmony can take place between individuals at the level of the family, the community, the nation, and the world. This may include harmony between societies, harmony within a society with

different ethnic groups (or political parties), harmony within the same ethnic group with different kinships, and harmony within the same kinship. Harmony also can take place between human beings and the natural universe. While the Confucian concept of harmony is comprehensive, it places tremendous weight on interpersonal harmony, such as harmony between ruler and ministers, parent and children, husband and wife, between siblings, and between friends. It also places immense weight on the harmony between human society and the natural world. Its ultimate goal is to achieve the grand harmony throughout the cosmos as laid out in the *Yi Jing*.

II

Now let us take a look at Confucian harmony as to be realized at multiple levels of the world. Confucian philosophy of harmony is to be implemented through a program of moral cultivation. Such a program, first explicitly developed in the Confucian classic of the *Great Learning*, unfolds from cultivating the person, managing the family, placing the state in order, to bringing peace to the world. All these are to take place against the background of grand harmony in the universe as presented in such texts as the *Yi Jing* and the *Zhong Yong*.

Confucian philosophy is known as a ‘person-making (*zuo ren*)’ philosophy. The Confucians view personal cultivation to be the foundation of the good society. A meaningful life, with all its accomplishments, begins with the making of the good person. Understanding the importance of cultivating the self is called ‘knowing the fundamental’ (*zhi ben*); it is regarded as the highest form of knowledge. Therefore, in Confucianism, self-cultivation is not merely a personal matter. It is from the very beginning a matter of large significance for the good world. Ultimately, each person has an obligation to cultivate one’s self. The cultivation of the person integrates the physical, mental, as well as moral dimensions; it implies a movement toward the internal harmonization of the person. The Confucian notion of comprehensive harmony in a person captures one’s multi-dimensional existence.

In the *Analects*, Confucius indicates that a moral person is able to adjust and balance the magnitude to his or her *qi*, avoiding going to extremes (16.7). Being able to harmonize one’s internal *qi* is a necessary component of moral cultivation. Confucius made a connection between a person’s moral achievement and one’s peace of mind. When describing a person of *ren*, Confucius said that ‘the person of *ren* is not in anxiety’ (9.30). It would be an over-interpretation if we take this to mean that a person of *ren* never becomes concerned about things. A person of *ren* has a strong sense of morality and, of course, is concerned about things, such as the moral state of society as Confucius was evidently concerned about. However, such a person is not in anxiety because he or she has nothing

to hide and feels comfortable with himself or herself. Confucius said that 'the morally refined person is open and at ease, whereas the petty person is constantly apprehensive' (7.37). A moral person is not concerned about one's own personal gains, and is not worried about how others would think of him or her as long as he follows the moral path. When asked if a person of *ren* would complain, Confucius said, 'if one seeks *ren* and acquires it, why should one complain?' (7.14). A person of *ren* retains a good state of mind because he or she enjoys a healthy internal harmony. Such harmony is not merely mental, which is implied by being free from anxiety; it is also physical, because in Confucian thought, the mental and the physical are both constituted by *qi* and are inseparable. According to Gongsun Nizi, the presumed author of *Yue Ji* Chapter of the *Li Ji* (the chapter that puts harmony at the center of Confucian philosophy) and a student of one of Confucius's disciples, when one is in anxiety one's *qi* becomes wild (qtd. in the *Chunqiu Fanlu* ch. 77). When one's internal *qi* is disturbed and becomes wild, its regular flow is being obstructed and internal harmony is being upset. Therefore, 'yu' or anxiety is contrary to the principle of equilibrium and harmony. Gongsun Nizi's philosophy of 'nurturing the *qi*' is anchored in the concept of equilibrium and harmony. On this reading, 'yu' or anxiety is a sign of disharmony in a person. A person in harmony with oneself is free from anxiety. It goes without saying that, when one is constantly anxious and without internal harmony, one's mental and physical health will be jeopardized. Thus, maintaining internal harmony is an integral component of self-cultivation in Confucianism.

In *Xunzi*, human beings have a natural tendency toward self-interest. If they follow this tendency, they will seek self-interest and, then, they will compete with one another, which would result in social disorder. In order to prevent such a deplorable prospect, leaders in society established *li*. The purpose of *li*, therefore, is to avoid disorder in society (ch. 23). Without disorder, a society well-regulated by *li* is a harmonious one. In the same vein, when a person follows *li* in his or her life, he or she not only harmonizes with others, but also harmonizes within oneself. If one harmonizes with others, he or she is in good relationships with other members of society; if one harmonizes within oneself, one is in good physical and mental states and does not degenerate into sickness or wickedness (ch. 2).

In the Confucian view, the individual self is not to be cultivated in isolation. The individual person exists in a nexus of human relationships. The primary human relationship, in this view, is that of the family. The family is the cornerstone of the Confucian good society. A Chinese popular proverb reflects this view well, that 'when the family is harmonized, everything thrives' (*Jia he wan shi xin*). In Confucian ethics, the cultivation of self necessarily translates into fostering a good family and maintaining harmony in the family. The family consists in persons in relationships. The *Zhong Yong* identifies five major human relationships, namely relationships

between ruler and ministers, between father and son, between husband and wife, between older and younger brothers, and between friends. It is notable that, of these five important relationships, three are within the family. Confucians regard the primary relationships within the family to be those between parents and children, between spouses, and between siblings. These relationships have been put in that order of importance. Good family relationships require family members to exercise good coordination with others. In order for the family to be harmonious, family members need to maintain an active give-and-take relationship. The father is to be caring, the son filial, the husband appropriate, the wife deferential, the elder brother gentle, and the younger brother respectful (*Li Ji*, *Li Yun* chapter). Unfortunately, developed in a patriarchal society, from early on Confucianism inherited biased views against women. Its philosophy of the family is largely men-centered. This is reflected in its deliberation of the relationships within the family. Today, the relationship between husband and wife in harmony needs to be reconfigured into equal partnership. Yan Zhi Tui (531–590?), a scholar-official of the North Qi period wrote the *Yan's Family Teachings*, a classic work expounding Confucian teachings of the family. In Chapter 3 of this influential work, Yan wrote that

When there are people, there are husbands and wives; when there are husbands and wives, there are fathers and sons; when there are fathers and sons, there are brothers. The family tie is just these three relationships. From this point to history and to the nine kinships all are based on these three relationships.

The harmony and prosperity of the family rely on these three relationships. The *Li Yun* chapter of the *Li Ji* states that 'the family thrives when the father and son are dedicated in their (affectionate) relationship, brothers accord in feeling and action, and husband and wife are in harmony'. When these family relationships are harmonized, it does not only foster people's internal harmony of their selves, but also extends to the harmony in society.

The next level in the Confucian program is harmony in the state. In Chinese, 'politics' is called '*zheng*'. Confucius defined 'politics' in terms of another word '*zheng*', namely 'setting things right'. The *Ai Gong Wen* chapter of the *Li Ji* records a conversation between Confucius and the king Ai Gong of the state of Lu. During the conversation, Ai Gong asked Confucius, what is the most important human affair? Confucius replied, the most important human affair is governance ('*zheng*'). Ai Gong asked further, what is governance about? Confucius said, 'governance is about setting things right' (*zheng zhe, zheng ye*). Here the second '*zheng*' means 'correct' and 'upright'. Confucius promoted the notion of 'governing the state with *li*' (*Analec*s 11.25) and 'governance with virtue' (2.1). 'Governing the state with *li*', or 'governing the state with *li* and deference' (4.13), means governing the state with civility. Because a major function of *li* is harmonization (1.12), governing with *li* means using *li* in order to

harmonize society. 'Governance with virtue' implies the goal toward building a society of virtue. When people are virtuous they are civil; when they are civil they are in harmony. Confucius said,

If you lead people with decrees and govern them with penal law, people stay away from punishment but without shame. If you lead people with virtue and govern them with *li*, people will take the right path with a sense of shame. (2.3)

'Sense of shame' guards a person from doing wrong things. If a person has a sense of shame, he or she will not do bad things because he or she will feel ashamed. This is called 'behaving oneself with a sense of shame' (13.20). The idea is to develop a person's internal strength to resist temptations of moral wrong-doings. On the other hand, if a person does not have a sense of shame, he or she will only behave in order to avoid punishment. Confucius held that the function of governance is not only to prevent people from doing bad things by threatening them with penal laws, but more importantly to help people develop a moral sense and become moral people. Confucians did not hold that there is no need for penal laws. They were, however, opposed to the Legalists who advocated the reliance on the use of harsh penal laws in maintaining order in society. The Confucian goal of governance is to bring about a harmonious society, in which people care about one another and are cared for by each other. In such caring society sufferings are minimized and people are harmonized. According to the *Commentary of the Zhou Li (Zhou Li Zhushu)*, the word for state officials 'zai', as in 'da zai' (prime minister), means 'to harmonize'. It implies that government officials are to bring society to harmony. That is precisely the goal of Confucian government.

At the next level of Confucian harmony is to realize peace in the human world ('*ping tian xia*'). '*Tian xia*' is the shorthand for the expression '*pu tian zhi xia*', or 'all under Heaven', meaning all peoples (and everything) on earth. We may translate it as 'the (human) world'. In Confucius's and Mencius's times, however, this expression was used to refer largely to the territory of China itself, which was divided into small states following the disintegration of the Zhou dynasty. A goal shared by many states was to unify the land into one large peaceful nation, which was called '*ping tian xia*'. Mencius was one of the ancient philosophers who paid much attention to achieving peace in the world. Indeed, he had peace in the world as the highest goal of his political philosophy. He said, 'if the world is to become peaceful at this time, who else but me should take the responsibility?' (*Mencius* 3B.13) This, however, is not to suggest that everyone should become a ruler. It suggests that a person should not escape responsibility toward world peace and harmony. Mencius said,

The ancients followed this philosophy: when one is successful in life one bestows benefit to the people; when one is not successful, one is still a cultivated person in the world. If one is poor one should take care of one's own cultivation; when one is prosperous, one bring goodness to the world. (7A.9)

For those capable, they should set the goal to bring peace to the world. The word for peace, 'ping', does not only mean that there is no war between people, but also suggests harmony. For example, the *Xiang Gong 29* chapter of the Confucian classic *Zuo Zhuan* states that 'the five sounds are harmonized and the eight streams of air are ping'ed' (*wu sheng he, ba feng ping*). Here 'ping' is used with a meaning in parallel with 'he', i.e., harmony. Therefore, when Confucians advocate the 'ping' of the world, they mean bringing peace and harmony to the world. In promoting harmony, there is a constant danger of repressing differences in order to reach agreement. Confucian philosophy guards against this danger. In the *Analects*, Confucius famously advocates 'harmony with distinctiveness' (*he er bu tong*) (13.23). In today's world, this approach to harmony is particularly meaningful. One of the greatest challenges in the world today is for different peoples and different cultures to co-exist in peace. In the Confucian view, harmony does not require the world to eliminate or even reduce differences. To the contrary, harmony is achieved through differences. The philosophy of 'harmony with distinctiveness' provides us with a key toward world peace and prosperity.

Finally, at the most fundamental level lies the Confucian ideal of harmony in the entire universe. Confucians prescribe to a triadic interactive model of the cosmos between Humanity, Heaven, and Earth, as evidenced in such works as the *Yi Jing*, the *Shang Shu*, and the *Zhong Yong*. On this model, the three components of the universe work together to generate and maintain harmony in the world. Humanity does not only make history; it also shapes the universe. This understanding of the world is emphatically non-foundational; it does not place any components solely on the basis of any other among these three. Because of this non-foundational approach, there is no pre-established order in the universe to start with. The world process is the interactive process of all these three components. Order in the world is a result of their interaction. On this understanding, it is the interactive, balancing, and rebalancing process of the three components that generate harmony in the world, and, for the world, there is no higher principle than harmony. Following this model, humanity is to coexist and to coordinate with nature, with Heaven above and Earth below. The purpose of humanity is to participate with Heaven and Earth in promoting and maintaining harmony in the universe.

III

In the above sections we have introduced the philosophy of harmony in Classical Confucianism. Like any philosophy, the Confucian notion of harmony is subject to criticisms from various perspectives. Daoists argue that Confucians are too proactive in promoting harmony in the world. Instead of following the philosophy of 'wu-wei' (no-contention, effortless

action) and taking the natural way of just letting things be, Confucians actively engage themselves in generating harmony in the world. In the Daoist view, this kind of effort is not only artificial but also in vain. From the Legalist perspective, the Confucian notion of harmony as the goal of human society is too idealistic. The only effective approach to an orderly society is to use rewards and punishments. In contemporary times, some people may object to the Confucian concept of harmony because of its holistic value orientation. Confucian philosophy of harmony takes the collective good as its goal. In such philosophy, individuals' good has to be realized in the process of achieving holistic goods in the family, the society, and the world. This approach requires a balance between individuals' good and the good of the large society. From a liberal point of view, Confucian philosophy of harmony does not give adequate protection to individuals. Its requirement of balance between the individual and society ultimately sacrifices the interest of the individual. Criticisms of these kinds reflect philosophies that are different from Confucianism at the fundamental level. Adjudication between these philosophies is beyond the scope of this essay. But we must point out one important thing. Regardless of Confucians' emphasis on the need for giving individuals adequate consideration, from Confucius's statement about persons in superior positions must follow the rules of *li* in dealing with persons in inferior positions to Mencius's strong advocacy of human dignity, in practice Chinese rulers and those with power from ancient to contemporary have often demonstrated an undisputable tendency in suppressing individuals for the sake of the state or society, and they have done this in the name of social harmony. Perhaps the time has finally come that Confucian harmony can be pursued in the way its classical proponents have envisioned, namely to harmonize for the good of the society and the entire world, rather than for its rulers or the ruling class. Indeed, contemporary Confucians have been emphatically promoting harmony with such orientation.

Understood this way, the Confucian philosophy of harmony has great significance to the world today. At the individual level, everyone needs to coordinate his or her life and to harmonize his or her self. We have entered a fast-paced era in human history. Life has become more complicated than ever. Health problems, both physical and psychological, intertwined with moral issues, have become major challenges to all people. Maintaining a balanced life style has become an increasingly difficult task for everyone. In order to lead a fulfilled life a person must be able to harmonize various aspects of life toward a life of wholeness. At the collective level, society has become the most dynamic in history; interpersonal relationships have become more intricate than ever before. Maintaining a harmonious relationship with other people is a necessary component of a good life in our time. Everyone needs to learn how to live with others in harmony. In the meantime, our world has now become a global village. People of different races, cultures, and religions come to

live together. Harmony between cultures, societies, and civilizations is one of the most challenging issues in front of all of us. It will determine the future of human civilization. Finally, environmental challenges have become increasingly acute and unavoidable. The Confucian harmony approach provides a viable alternative to the conquest model that is prevalent in dealing with nature in our time. Harmony with nature is undoubtedly the only way for humanity to survive. In this regard, Confucianism has much to offer us. In the Confucian view, all pressing issues, from those at the micro- to the macro-level in our time, come to this: harmony or disharmony, that is the question! And there is no escape from that.

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Short Biography

Dr Chenyang Li is professor and chair of the Department of Philosophy at Central Washington University. He grew up in China during the Cultural Revolution and was among the first class of college students after that era. His research interests include Chinese philosophy, value theory, and comparative philosophy. His publications in English include: *The Tao Encounters the West: Explorations in Comparative Philosophy* (1999), and *The Sage and the Second Sex: Confucianism, Ethics, and Gender* (ed. 2000), and numerous articles in journals like *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*, *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, *International Philosophical Quarterly*, *Philosophia*, *Philosophy East & West*, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, *Journal of Value Inquiry*, *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, and the *Review of Metaphysics*. Currently he is writing a book on the Confucian ideal of harmony.

Notes

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¹ Translations from Chinese into English throughout this essay are my own, unless indicated otherwise.

² <<http://www.sinica.edu.tw/fms-bin/fmsw3?ukey=-1544126449&path=/2.7.11.40.5.211p>>.

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