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# Communication Strategies in the Light of Indigenous African and Chinese Values: How to Harmonize

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**Abstract** Many values originating in Africa and in China, and ones that continue to influence much of everyday communication in those societies, are aptly placed under the common heading of “harmony.” After first spelling out what harmony involves in substantially Confucian China, and then in Africa, this article notes respects in which the Confucian and African conceptions of harmony are similar, an awareness of which could facilitate smooth communication. The article then indicates respects in which the Confucian and African conceptions of harmony are different, a lack of awareness of which could undermine smooth communication. The point of the article is to facilitate Sino-African communication by means of an awareness of indigenous moral-philosophical mindsets that continue to be salient in China and Africa, despite the influence of the West.

**Keywords** Africa; China, Conflict, Confucianism, Cross-cultural communication, Harmony; Values

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## 1. Introduction

For all we can tell, the Chinese arrived on African shores at least several decades before Europeans did (Bloom and Poplak 2015, 305, 308–13). The Chinese did not stay in Africa, but in the twenty-first century they have returned, principally with an eye to doing business, but also to undertake studies, tourism, and the like. In addition, a notable number of contemporary Africans have gone out of their way to make contact with China (on which see Bodomo 2012).

Of course the biggest cultural obstacle to mutual understanding between Africans and Chinese is linguistic. It would be tough for a given Chinese person to get a handle on the thousands of indigenous languages to be encountered in sub-Saharan Africa, and, conversely, difficult for a given African person to master the character-based language dominant in China.

However, even if a person from one culture were to master the language of another, or even if, as has most often been done, those from both cultures were to use English as a third medium,<sup>1</sup> there would remain other large cultural obstacles to communication. Many of these concern different value systems. The central aim of this article is to provide some guidance about how Chinese and African people can improve their communication in the light of an awareness of their respective indigenous values.

As has been argued elsewhere (Metz 2015b), many values originating in Africa and China, and ones that continue to influence much of everyday communication in those societies, are aptly placed under the common heading of “harmony.” After first spelling out what harmony involves in substantially Confucian China, and then in Africa, this article notes respects in which the Confucian and African conceptions of harmony are similar, an awareness of which could facilitate smooth communication. The article then indicates respects in which the Confucian and African conceptions of harmony are different, a lack of awareness of which could undermine smooth communication.<sup>2</sup>

The article focuses strictly on barriers to Afro-Sino (sub-Saharan and Chinese) communication that are a function of indigenous values that continue to be associated with harmony in the twenty-first century. Hence, it does not address communicative barriers that do not appear

to be a function of values, such as orality in contrast to literacy. The article also does not address values that are not a function of harmony or that might have been but are now dropping away, such as gendered roles. Furthermore, the conception of harmony from the Chinese tradition this article addresses is solely the Confucian one, where harmony in Daoism is different and has been less influential.<sup>3</sup>

The point of the article is to facilitate Afro-Sino communication by means of an awareness of indigenous moral-philosophical mindsets that continue to be salient in sub-Saharan Africa and China, despite the influence of the West.<sup>4</sup> Those Chinese coming to Africa and those Africans coming to China are probably already familiar with Western values, and are, by contrast, on average not as familiar with each other's values. This article aims to help fill this gap and in ways that promise to foster mutual understanding.

The reader will have noticed talk of "Africans" and "Chinese," and might be put off by the apparent essentialism. However, when this article uses geographical labels, it does so merely to signify what has been *salient* in much of a locale for a long span of time. In the way that baseball is aptly described as "American," even though not all Americans like it and some beyond the US do, so features will be described as "African" or "Chinese" in the same way. That is meant to signify that these features have been prominent in (not necessarily universal among, or exclusive to) those parts of the world in ways they have tended not to be elsewhere (for further analysis of this approach, see Metz 2015d, and for further qualifications regarding stereotypes, racism, and the like, see Chigwendere and Louw 2018, 50).

## 2. Harmony in Chinese Thought

As mentioned in the introduction, this article considers values as they feature in Confucianism, the most influential worldview in China for more than 2,500 years. Confucianism is often thought to be centered on the value described as "harmony," with some contemporary philosophical exponents having argued that most, if not all, of its major prescriptions are a function of this basic good (e.g., Chan 2014; Li 2014). In the face of how long and varied the Confucian tradition has been, and given the aim of facilitating cross-cultural communication in the present age, this

article gains traction by focusing on how Confucian harmony has been understood particularly in the post-Mao era, by not just philosophers, but also laypeople in China.

The notion of harmony salient in at least contemporary Confucianism is “an active process in which heterogeneous elements are brought into a mutually balancing, cooperatively enhancing, and often commonly benefiting relationship” (Li 2014, 1; see also Yao 2000: 170–73; Ihara 2004; Li 2006). Aesthetic analogies are often used to illustrate this value. For example, although an onion and a carrot might taste good on their own, they can taste even better, bringing out the best of each other, when placed together in a soup. For another example, although a violin and an oboe can be pleasant to hear in isolation, they can produce even better music when played together and with still other instruments. What these examples suggest is that harmony is not merely peace and is not at all sameness; instead, it essentially involves *integration* between things that remain *different* in a way that characteristically is good for them all.

The central form of Confucian harmony is interpersonal, roughly a process by which people with distinct attributes are brought into a relationship that typically produces something new and is good for those involved. Although there can be harmony between the mental states of an individual person, and between Heaven and earthly lives (on which see Li 2014), the main form is between two or more human beings. In any event, it is interpersonal harmony that is most important when trying to communicate with Chinese people influenced by Confucianism. Interpersonal harmony requires difference among people that are brought together in a creative and beneficial way.

Probably the most salient form of difference in the Confucian tradition is hierarchical role. The young are to be subservient to the old, and the ruled are to be subservient to the rulers.<sup>5</sup> In general, those with fewer qualifications, particularly when it comes to education and virtue, are meant to comply with those with greater qualifications, who direct their labor albeit in ways that are for both their own and others' good. When those with more qualifications use them to direct and benefit those with less, and when those with less defer to the decision-making of those with more, then there exists the central kind of interpersonal harmony.

However, not all interpersonal harmony is constituted by hierarchical role. Friends, for the clearest example, can harmonize in the way they interact, but that relationship need not involve deference. Similar remarks apply to colleagues and neighbors.

In sum, as the influential scholar Wei-Ming Tu remarks, “If someone is able to uphold the harmony in family relations, neighborly relations and in the relations between the upper and the lower ranks . . . then we can call him a Confucian” (2010, 254). This conception of interpersonal harmony makes good sense of the top three values that were espoused by Chinese people in a major survey of their beliefs (Chinese Cultural Connection 1987). At the top of the list of forty values mentioned is filial piety, the demand that children defer to and support their parents, who have cared for them. Second in line is industriousness, which is the inclination to work hard, not so much for the benefit of oneself, but rather for one’s family and other close connections. The third highest value is tolerance, the idea that others must be allowed to be different from oneself. Note that the fourth highest value mentioned by those surveyed is harmony itself.

Confucian harmony, particularly as it is constituted interpersonally, continues to determine everyday communication in China and societies, such as Korea and Japan, influenced by it. As one scholar of Chinese communication remarks,

(H)armony is the core value of Chinese culture that guides Chinese communication behaviors...(T)he ultimate goal of Chinese communication is to pursue a conflict free interpersonal and social relationship...Thus, the ability to reach a harmonious state of human relationship becomes the main criterion for evaluating whether an individual is competent in the process of Chinese communication. (Chen 2008, 2–3; see also Chen 2009)

Several others who have studied communication among the Chinese say much the same thing (e.g., Holmes 2008; Wei and Li 2013). Precisely how striving for harmony influences communication, and what Africans might learn from this, are discussed below in the fourth section.

### 3. Harmony in African Thought

Many of the values salient in traditional sub-Saharan African cultures and that continue to influence contemporary sub-Saharan Africans are also summed up with talk of “harmony” (or “community”) by African intellectuals. In many indigenous African worldviews, harmony is considered basic and good for its own sake. As one scholar of traditional sub-Saharan values points out,

Harmonious living is clearly a pivotal value. African traditional religion . . . plays a key role in the realisation of this all-important value among every traditional African group . . . (M)orality is yet another relevant avenue through which traditional Africans try to form people and reinforce in them the important idea and value of harmonious community-living. . . . The vast majority of norms, taboos and prohibitions is directed towards protecting the community and promoting peace and harmony. (Ejizu n.d.)

And where harmony is not pursued as an end in itself, it tends to be deemed a central and essential means to something else, such as vital force (Bujo 1997) or the common good (Gyekye 1997).

To get a sense of how the African tradition conceives of harmony, consider these remarks, from a philosopher, jurist, theologian, and psychologist:

Communitarian moral theory . . . advocates a life lived in harmony and cooperation with others, a life of mutual consideration and aid and of interdependence, a life in which one shares in the fate of the other (Gyekye 1997, 72, 76).

(H)armony is achieved through close and sympathetic social relations (Mokgoro 1998, 17).

I participate, I share. . . . Social harmony is for us (Africans—ed.) the greatest good (Tutu 1999, 35).

A sense of community exists if people are mutually responsive to one another’s needs. . . . To be is to belong and to participate (Mkhize 2008, 39, 40).

In these quotations about the nature of harmony (or community), two distinguishable ways of relating are mentioned (for a thorough analysis, see Metz 2013, 2017b). On the one hand, there is sharing the fate of others, being close, participating, and belonging, while, on the other, there is aiding, being sympathetic, sharing, and being responsive to others' needs. These two ways of relating harmoniously may be summed up as sharing a way of life with others and caring for their quality of life.

This specification of what it is to relate harmoniously appears to capture well the moral value of many salient traditional practices south of the Sahara desert, or so it has been argued elsewhere (Metz 2017b). For example, it is well-known that many indigenous African peoples used consensus of some kind to resolve disputes, among either popularly appointed elders or all those affected who talked under the proverbial tree. These peoples are also famous for having mainly sought out reconciliation when a crime was committed, instead of, say, deterrence or retribution. In addition, they routinely employed collective harvesting and other forms of labor; rather than leaving it to an individual or his family to undertake a large job, all able-bodied members of a village would chip in to lend a hand. These and related ways of living appear well understood as grounded on the value of harmony, qua as sharing a way of life and caring for one another's quality of life. They all are plausibly conceived as ways of prizing relationships of cooperative participation and mutual aid.

Traditionally speaking, it was considered particularly important to maintain harmonious relationships with ancestors, wise founders of a clan deemed to have survived the deaths of their bodies, to live with the clan on earth in an imperceptible form, and to guide it with commands and punishments (e.g., Murove 2007; see also Chigwendere and Louw 2018, who emphasize the characteristically African need to communicate with spirits). These days, literal belief in ancestors is on the wane, and it is increasingly common instead to emphasize a need to harmonize with not just persons, but also certain animals and other parts of nature (e.g., Oruka and Juma 1994; LenkaBula 2008; Behrens 2014).

Just as Confucian harmony continues to influence contemporary Chinese behavior despite the Western influences of Christianity and capitalism, so indigenous African conceptions of harmony remain influential despite the same (as well as Islam). Although Euro-American

culture permeates urban areas, and especially business contexts, traditional values still resonate and should be kept in mind when engaging with people there.

#### 4. Communication in the Light of Afro-Sino Value Similarities

This section considers commonalities between Confucian and African conceptions of harmony, and suggests how an awareness of them could improve communication between Chinese and sub-Saharan people. Differences between the two are addressed only in the following section.

For both traditional China and Africa, harmony is the “mother of all values” (in the words of Bell and Mo 2014). Instead of utility or autonomy being considered the basic and comprehensive good, which is common among Western philosophers and their peoples, in these two non-Western traditions it is often harmonious relationship that is deemed to be such. At bottom, one’s duty as a moral agent is to create, sustain, and enrich certain ways of relating, particularly among people.

As one scholar has pointed out of both relational value systems, a “harmony framework has to do with balancing . . . aligning and smoothing” (Anedo 2012, 16). Notice how these concepts are markedly different from characteristically Western ones of optimization, efficiency, cost-benefit analysis, ownership, self-governance, and individual rights. Both Confucian and African conceptions of harmony prescribe ways of relating that involve generosity, compassion, respect, tolerance, and sincerity. Conversely, generally to be avoided are ways of treating others based on stinginess, hard-heartedness, arrogance, intolerance, and dishonesty.

Finally, for both value systems—and not emphasized up to now—harmony is especially to be realized within the family, and familial bonds are given some priority relative to other ties when it comes to the allocation of one’s time, labor, money, and other resources. As noted above, filial piety, a harmonious relationship between parents and children, ranks most highly among the Chinese. “For the Chinese mind . . . (t)here is no need to prove the priority or the primacy of the family. It is accepted as a given fact” (Allinson 1989, 19). Many Chinese also prioritize aid to those who are part of *guanxi*—family-like relationships of reciprocity and a shared sense of self with those in business and civil society (Chang and Holt 1991; Lauzon-Lacroix and Anthony 2015, 268–81). Similar remarks apply to African

peoples, who tend to believe in “family first,” even while believing that everyone has a dignity that merits respect. Although blood and kin have traditionally been prized (Appiah 1998), another way to view the importance of the (extended) family is in terms of the length and strength of the harmonious relationships between its members.

In the light of these similarities when it comes to valuing harmony, here are five ways to facilitate cross-cultural communication between Chinese and sub-Saharan people. One is to use familial labels to forge, sustain, and acknowledge in-group status. It is common in African cultures to call, for example, “father” or “uncle” those who are not blood relations in order to express close ties. Similar things go for many Chinese people, one example of which is that often Chinese politicians who speak about a country in Africa will call it “little brother” (or sometimes “poor brother”). Although Western societies are known for having a lower “power-distance” (Hofstede et al. 2010) than African and Chinese ones in day to day interaction, it is interestingly true that the latter societies are the ones that noticeably tend to use the names of family to mark bonds with friends, colleagues, and others in social circles. Those in Africa and China should become aware of this shared linguistic practice and use it to help develop and recognize ties or, in Chinese terms, *guanxi*, networks on which one can rely to get things done.

A second respect in which Africans and Chinese can communicate in the light of shared values pertaining to harmony concerns conflict resolution. An egoistic approach could prescribe using domination or threats to get one’s way, ignoring what the other has to say. A focus on autonomy could also mean seeking out an arrangement that is good for oneself, but not necessarily good for the other who has agreed to it, given ignorance or an otherwise weak bargaining position. In contrast, a valuation of harmony brings in its wake a tendency to seek “win-win” solutions, where both parties are expected to benefit. Two scholars remark on characteristically Chinese conflict resolution:

Through the analysis of the core spirit of the Confucian harmony, we can conclude that in social interaction, it puts tremendous weight on “harmony but not sameness.” . . . Such philosophical value provides Chinese people with a fundamental attitude . . . of determination that they must resolve conflicts by harmonization.

Under its influence, Chinese people are more willing to engage in negotiation, more willing to compromise, and less willing to resort to confrontation and conquest (Wei and Li 2013, 66; see also Anedo 2012).

Similarly, recall above that in traditional African settings consensus has often been sought to resolve disputes. Here, too, the idea is that there should not be a minority that is left out and whose needs go unmet. In both traditions, then, there are deep values counseling that, instead of viewing others largely as obstacles to getting what one wants, one should talk things out with an aim of finding a way forward that is accepted by and good for all.

Thirdly, and relatedly, when there is conflict between Africans and Chinese people, or even when they just come into contact for the first time, the values of both prescribe consulting with local elders about how the interaction should proceed. If a firm from China were to settle in a sub-Saharan town, both Confucian and African conceptions of harmony would prescribe talking first with leaders from the community, as opposed to, say, making decisions in the light of perceived individual rights of ownership. For the Chinese, it is imperative to obtain input from, if not to defer to, those with superior qualifications. Those with the training, information, and moral insight should be the ones to recommend the way forward, meaning asking for the advice of African chiefs, politicians, and perhaps even healers; that, in fact, would be partially constitutive of Confucian harmony. For African people, consulting with the town's representatives would be a key way to begin to develop a shared way of life with those in it. Meeting face to face would be an important means by which to initiate a sense of togetherness and to coordinate interaction between the firm and the town. In addition, the knowledge of the local elders would be important to draw upon so as to avoid harming the town's residents and instead to do what is likely to help them.

A fourth way that a common appreciation of harmony can foster cross-cultural communication has to do with the mass media in African and Chinese societies. In the West, newspapers, television stations, radio networks, and websites are commonly thought to have two proper aims, namely, making money for shareholders and facilitating democratic self-governance for citizens. However, if the point of the media is to

foster harmony of some kind, then their main proper aims are different. In particular, since both Confucian and African harmony centrally include a relationship of beneficence, it follows for both traditions that the main goal of the mass media should be to facilitate informed reflection about what the likely effects of institutions and practices are going to be on the quality of people's lives and what to do when these effects are insufficiently desirable (borrowing here from Metz 2018). When it comes to government in particular, the media should critically reflect on whether it is doing what it should to enable its people to live well. It might be that those who hold political power are not genuine experts and so merit criticism, or that, even if genuine experts are in charge, they have not made the correct decisions. It does not follow that making a profit is irrelevant for Confucian harmony or that facilitating democracy is irrelevant for African harmony; the point instead is that both forms of harmony prescribe a third major goal for African and Chinese broadcasters.

Fifth, and finally for now, a similar point applies to social media platforms and other forms of communication that, in the West, are used largely for self-expression. Westerners tend to view one major aim of communication, in forums such as Facebook and blogs as well as novels and memoirs, to be the display of one's authentic and potentially idiosyncratic feelings, emotions, judgments, and imaginings. Indigenous African and Chinese cultures are different (e.g., Ingelhart and Welzel 2011), and the difference is traceable, at least in large part, to their prizing of harmonious relationships. For cultures that prize harmony, much of one's focus is expected to be on the well-being and virtue of others, and not so much on oneself, which means that the main point of communicating should be to help other people to improve their lives, not to bring out one's inner life regardless of how others might be affected (see Kim and Markus 2002, 437–40; Wong 2013). It does not necessarily follow that self-expression is categorically out of place, for in many cases it could be done in ways that serve to help others (see Metz 2015c). It is also not obviously the case that censorship is justified as a way to ensure that social media and books focus on the good of others, for it would often be ineffective or heavy-handed. What does follow is that when Chinese and African people communicate using these tools, they can do so in the light of the shared aim of doing what they expect will be good for one another.

## 5. Communication in the Light of Afro-Sino Value Differences

Unlike the previous section, which drew on convergences between Confucian and African harmony to strategize about communication, this one focuses on divergences. How do the different conceptions of harmony in these traditions threaten misunderstandings and conflict?

One area of apparent difference concerns the importance of greetings. For both traditions, there is good reason to greet those who come before you, especially those known to you. However, in the African tradition, greetings have a moral significance, whereas they appear to be more a function of etiquette in the Chinese. Not to greet in a characteristic sub-Saharan context is a moral failing, while not doing so in a Chinese one is more likely to be viewed as merely impolite. It might be that these differences are a function of competing conceptions of harmony. In the African tradition, those with whom to harmonize are normally viewed as having a dignity (for an overview, see Metz 2014). The ultimate reason to harmonize with a person is that it has a superlative noninstrumental worth that demands attention, indeed respect. From this perspective, a failure to greet counts as a degradation. In Confucian thought, the category of dignity appears to be not so essential. Although there is the idea that human beings have a moral status insofar as they are capable of virtue (see Li 2014, 160–61), being owed moral treatment is not the same idea as a person having dignity that would be disrespected upon failure to acknowledge her presence.

A second difference has to do with what degree of sameness is welcome in the two traditions and how that might influence communication. In the Chinese tradition, harmony consists of the unification of differences, not the achievement of uniformity. One of the most influential passages from *The Analects*, alluded to in a quotation above, is: “The gentleman seeks harmony not sameness, the petty person seeks sameness not harmony” (translation from Chan 2014, 91). Reducing difference would reduce harmony, for the Confucian. However, while African harmony does not require sameness, it does not appear to forbid it, either. There is a much greater emphasis in the African tradition on the desirability of having the same goals and more generally living the same way, for instance when it comes to rituals or the distribution of wealth. As an influential moral and political philosopher says of a major strand of

African ethics, it “advocates a life lived in harmony and cooperation with others, a life of mutual consideration and aid and of interdependence, a life in which one shares in the fate of the other” (Gyekye 1997, 75–76). It is this conception of harmony that is plausibly responsible to some degree for the prevalence of song in African cultures. Collective singing is a powerful form of unity; people tend to feel as one upon singing the same song, if not also in the same way.

A third difference between Confucian and African harmony concerns the moral relevance of enjoying a sense of togetherness and its bearing on the point of conversation. One scholar claims, “Confucians see a harmony (not necessarily friendliness) coming out of this continuous interplay of opposing forces” (Li 2006, 594). Whereas indigenous sub-Saharanans would want people to harmonize by (among other things) enjoying a sense of togetherness, including by thinking of themselves as a “we” and taking pride in each other’s accomplishments, this is apparently not essential for Confucian harmony. Although many Chinese are friendly in respect of (if not in fact friends with) members of their *guanxi*, that is, in business and similar kinds of networks in which people come together for mutual benefit over time, there can be harmonious relationships in Confucian terms without friendliness. That could be fostered if two parties with antagonistic attitudes and differential statuses were organized appropriately, namely, so that the tension between them turned out to produce something creative and good for both sides. What this means for conversation is that indigenous Africans will be inclined to talk for the sake of overcoming distance and feeling close (cf. Biko 1971, 45–47; Shutte 2001, 27–28), whereas indigenous Chinese will tend not to and instead will be ensuring that they realize their places in hierarchical roles. For the Chinese, silence is often prescribed on the part of those in lower positions, insofar as talking is “an act that can attenuate hierarchy” (Kim and Markus 2002, 440).

In addition to influencing whether to say something (and for which purpose), differential conceptions of harmony probably affect how to say it, which is a fourth contrast. Chinese culture is famous for prescribing the avoidance of overt criticism and the demand to save one’s own face and that of the other, too (e.g., Matondo 2012, 40, 42, 43). Part of this is likely grounded on the conception of harmony as centrally constituted by hierarchical role; indirect communication is often warranted, “particularly with regard to sensitive topics or expressions of opinion, so that the

speaker can avoid directly causing loss of face or disruption of hierarchy among conversation participants” (Rowland n.d.; see also Chigwendere and Louw 2018, 57). Deference on the part of an inferior towards a superior includes not bringing the other to shame by being openly negative or critical (although it can allow for gentle, private remonstrance, on which see Nosco 2008). Conversely, insofar as the inferior is expected to submit to the superior, the superior need not ask with a “please” and similar “linguistic niceties are not mandatory” (Sartor 2013). Although sub-Saharan societies typically have had royalty, before which similar dynamics have been likely, the logic of African harmony is much more egalitarian. Whereas Confucian harmony prescribes hierarchical role in most major spheres of life, the default African position is evenhanded participation among people, simultaneously allowing for more bluntness, on the one hand, and calling for more politeness, on the other.

For a fifth and last contrast, consider the extent to which, by the African conception of harmony, leaders are expected not merely to consult with subordinates, but also to obtain their authorization to proceed. African political theorists often prescribe this approach to making decisions for government, where unanimous agreement among elected representatives appears feasible in large-scale societies, as well as for other major institutions, including business (e.g., Wiredu 2000; Khoza 2006). African harmony demands substantial dialogue on the part of all those affected by a policy. In contrast, Confucian harmony does not. Although consulting with subordinates can often be expected to produce better decisions on the part of those in charge, there is nothing requiring that in principle, let alone the former’s unanimous assent. It is open to Confucian leaders simply to make requests or even to issue commands, in unidirectional fashion. This is the divergence between the two conceptions of harmony that would probably have the most stark implications for communication between African and Chinese people who are still influenced by traditional values.

## 6. Conclusion

This article has sought to facilitate cross-cultural communication between African and Chinese people by highlighting some of the indigenous

values that continue to influence their lives in a globalized twenty-first century. It has pointed out how many of their long-standing conceptions of the good life are a function of some kind of harmonious relationship, which includes an improved quality of life for those party to it. This common beneficent-relational orientation towards how to live means that, for both cultures, it is important, recalling some examples, to consult with older and presumably wiser people before making major decisions, to resolve disagreements in ways that are acceptable to all those involved, and to converse in order to attend to the needs of others, not so much to express oneself or to get what one wants.

This article has also noted, however, that the African and Chinese traditions have different interpretations of the specific kind of harmony that is to be prized, and that these divergent value systems risk misunderstanding and conflict. In particular, the centrality of a hierarchical role in the influential Confucian conception of harmony differs from the more egalitarian conception of harmony common among sub-Saharan peoples. Also, the article noted respects in which this difference can lead to incompatible expectations when Africans and Chinese communicate with each other. Broadly speaking, those with a Chinese background in a superior position will expect to receive deference on the part of subordinates, whereas African people would be more inclined to voice their complaints openly and to want a say—perhaps even a vote—in how to proceed.

Upon having noted respects in which indigenous African and Chinese values of harmony prescribe different approaches to communication, this article has done little to indicate how to proceed in the light of them. Of course, an awareness of the differences can help to avoid some of the conflict, but another reason this article has not addressed more is that the two traditions of harmony share a striking, common approach to resolving conflict: compromise. As indicated in this article, central to both African and Chinese understandings of harmony is the disposition to strive for “win-win” solutions to problems, ones that are good for both sides. The right way forward, therefore, is for those who encounter intercultural conflict to come up with mutually agreeable and beneficial arrangements as will best suit particular contexts.<sup>6</sup>

## NOTES

1. Although much gets “lost in translation” while using English, doing so has been easiest to begin to communicate, and has facilitated some of the very first cross-cultural philosophical engagements between indigenous China and Africa, on which see Bell and Metz (2011); and Metz (2015a, 2015b). For an overview of this nascent field, and a proposal about how to develop it further, see Dottin (2019).

2. For some comparisons of Confucianism (and sometimes more generally indigenous Chinese) values and indigenous African values that do not bear as directly on communication, see Hofstede et al. (2010); Bell and Metz (2011); Anedo (2012); Ampiah (2014); Metz (2015b, 2017a).

3. For an analysis of some facets of Daoist harmony in relation to some strains of African thought, see Unah (2014).

4. For much more abstract reflection on the proper methodology to use when considering intercultural communication, with focus on China and Africa, see Chigwendere and Louw (2018). These scholars also discuss some communicative features of the two major cultures that do not directly concern conflict reduction but are of academic interest.

5. And, traditionally, women are to be subservient to men.

6. For oral comments on a presentation based on a previous draft of this essay, I am grateful to participants in the Africa-China Colloquium organized by Vusi Gumede and the University of South Africa Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute in 2017. I also thank Daniel A. Bell for having taken the time to read a draft and share some written reactions.

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