Harmony in Chinese Thought

A Philosophical Introduction

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Chapter Three

Active Harmony, Passive Harmony, Freedom, and Domination

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This chapter investigates two varieties of harmony in relation to freedom and domination in the context of ancient Chinese philosophy. It differentiates active harmony from passive harmony. In active harmony, involved parties engage one another in constructive ways while striving for a sort of equity between them. In contrast, passive harmony is characterized by peaceful coexistence without mutual engagement. Each form of harmony creates room for freedom with different emphases. Both are opposed to domination, which often disguises itself as harmony.

TWO FORMS OF HARMONY

Harmony can be characterized either as a relationship or a state of affairs. When we describe various parties as standing in harmony, we can say that they have formed a harmonious relationship or that they have reached a state of harmony. In harmony, different parties come together to form a collective in order to promote the well-being of each and all. Harmony should also be seen as a process. Obviously, a relationship needs to be maintained; a state of affairs needs to be sustained. Thus a state of harmony is an ongoing process.

Much of pre-Qin Chinese philosophy can be understood as a response and solution to the problem of disharmony during that period. While what Laozi and his followers prescribed falls mostly along the line of passive harmony, mainly in the form of *laissez-faire* disengagement, Confucian thinkers by and large opted for active harmony, in the form of constructive engagement. Both attempted to avoid not only disharmony but also domination. Confucius himself was deeply troubled by the lack of harmony in his time. He famously remarked:

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What I have heard is that the head of a state or a noble family worries not about underpopulation but about uneven distribution, not about poverty but about instability. For where is even distribution there is no such thing as poverty, where there is harmony there is no such thing as underpopulation and where there is stability there is no such thing as overturning. (*Analects* 16.1; Lau 1979, 138–39)1

Underpopulation, poverty, and social instability were the three major problems faced by each state during the Spring-Autumn and Warring States period. A shrinking population or stagnant population makes a state weak and vulnerable. Poverty results in misery and leads to social unrest. Instability not only directly threatens the ruling house but also jeopardizes people's daily life. Among the solutions Confucius advocated is harmony. "Instability" is a translation of *bu an* (不安). *The Book of Zhou* states that *an* means "being fond of harmony and not contentious."2

Reading along this line, *bu-an* (not-*an*) is disharmony. We should not interpret Confucius as saying that poverty is not a problem or that it does not matter that the population is small or in decline. His point is that a more even distribution of resources and a harmonious environment are more important and that they can relieve people from poverty and increase the population. What is relevant directly to our discussion here is his emphasis on the grave danger posed by disharmony and the pressing need for harmony.

Disharmony is characterized by disorder and conflict. In a state of disharmony, two or more parties confront one another in an antagonistic way. Disharmony comes in degrees. Severe disharmony, which is characterized by extensive disorder, is not only opposed to harmony but also in direct contrast with the rigid order found in domination. Extensive disorder has grave consequences. Without order, life becomes volatile. Disharmony, however, can serve as a transition between domination and harmony, or between an old decaying state of harmony to a new state. A revolution is disharmony. A revolution for the sake of revolution is pure disharmony. A revolution for the purpose of establishing a new harmony in place of a decayed one is progress.

In name, disharmony without order allows freedom—in the crude sense of being able to do what one wishes—to everyone equally because no boundaries are in place. In actuality, no one is truly free. Freedom in disharmony

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1. 不患寡而患不均, 不患貧而患不安. 蓋均無貧, 和無寡, 安無傾. D. C. Lau makes the follow¬ing remarks in a footnote to this quoted passage: "The text is corrupt here. In the light of what follows, this passage should, probably, read: '. . . worries not about poverty but about uneven distribution, not about underpopulation but about disharmony, not about overturning but about instability'" (Lau 1979, 138n1). According to Edward Slingerland, the transposed first two statements, that is, "worries not about poverty but about uneven distribution, not about underpopulation but about instability," can be confirmed by the quotation in the Luxuriant Dew and the History of the Wei (Slingerland 2003, 192n1).
2. 好和不爭曰安.《周書·謚法》

is unchartered. Uncharted freedom leads inevitably to conflict. In such circumstances, freedom can be exercised only by force or trickery. In the end, disharmony allows freedom for some at the expense of others. It also disables various kinds of freedom as there is little or no collaboration between parties to make space for freedom. The lack of order and stability makes any existing freedom fragile and short lived. In this sense, disharmony per se is the arch-enemy of freedom. In the Spring-Autumn and Warring States period, ordinary people struggled just to survive. They were oppressed by heavy taxation of despot rulers and brutalized by frequent wars between states competing for territories and resources. The space of their freedom was pressed to the minimum. The rulers were not enjoying much freedom either. While some lived in luxury by the social standards of that time and abused their people, many of them lived in constant fear of usurpation by family members and ministers, rebellion by the common people, and invasion by other states. Overall, freedom is in short supply for everyone in a state of disharmony. Freedom is a casualty of disharmony.

The opposite of disharmony is harmony. "Harmony" is a vague word. Some people exalt and promote harmony, whereas others downplay or ignore it. Evidently, people have different conceptions in mind when they display these various attitudes toward harmony rather than holding different attitudes towards the same idea. In the contemporary West, harmony is often understood as accord and agreement, with an emphasis on consistence and uniformity. Following Martha Nussbaum, we may call harmony in this sense "consistent harmony" (Nussbaum 1990, 89). From a Chinese perspective, here I address harmony with an emphasis on difference. I examine the idea of harmony in two forms, active and passive harmony. Both ideas are associated with the Chinese character *he* 和. Active harmony is characterized by positive and constructive engagement by involved parties and by equity between them. By equity I mean an outcome achieved by giving balanced consideration to each involved party after taking relevant factors into account. Confucius and Mencius both discussed and advocated harmony, but neither offered extensive elaboration. Confucius famously claimed that the *junzi* (cultivated persons) seek harmony without going along with the flow unprincipledly (*he er bu liu* 和而不流 *Zhongyong*, Chapter 10) and that the *junzi* harmonize without being the same with others (*he er bu tong* 和而不同, *Analects* 13:23). These thinkers identified the first and foremost important characteristics of harmony. Synthesizing ideas from other classics associated with the Confucian tradition, such as the *Yijing* (*Book of Change*), the *Zhongyong*, and the *Xunzi*, I have identified the following characteristics of active harmony from a Confucian perspective:

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1. Heterogeneity. Harmony presupposes two or more coexisting parties. These parties are not uniform and they possess varied dispositions.
2. Tension. Various parties interact with one another. Tension of various levels arises naturally from difference.
3. Coordination and Cooperation. While tension may result in conflict, it also places constraints on parties in interaction and generates energy to advance coordination. In coordination, involved parties make allowances for one another and preserve their soundness.
4. Transformation and Growth. Through coordination, tension is transformed and conflict is reconciled into a favorable environment for each party to flourish. In this process, involved parties undergo mutual transformation and form harmonious relationships.
5. Renewal. Harmony is achieved not as a final state, but as stages in an ongoing process. This admits of degrees. A harmonious relationship is maintained through continuous renewal. (Li 2014b, 9)

On this conception, Confucian active harmony is a multilateral harmony. Harmony is always a relational and composite affair. It is dynamic. Harmony is interactive and processive in nature. It is neither pure accord, nor mere agreement, nor passive conformity. Finally, it is deep harmony in that it does not presuppose a "first mover" that has preestablished an ultimate order that determines harmony once and for all. An existing order for a particular stage of harmony is the outcome of previous harmonization. When a married couple is in active harmony, for example, they form a functional whole by positively engaging each other in their endeavors, each claiming a fair share of burden and benefit, reciprocally adjusting through creative tension, and complementing each other, and mutually enhancing in well-being and growth. In Confucian terms, such a relationship is characterized as "*xiang cheng*" and "*xiang ji*" (相成，相濟 [*TTC* 1985, 2094]), meaning mutually completing and reciprocally compensating one another. Mencius advocated a social system of such active engagement. He proposed a well-field system (*jingtianzhi* 井田制)3 in which people work together in a public land in the center that is surrendered by pieces of land assigned to families. Such an arrangement encourages people to be friendly to each other, to watch out for one another, to assist one another in illness and hardship, and to harmonize in the community (*Mencius* 3A4). For Xunzi, harmony between humanity and nature does not only entail refraining from using resources in nature but also developing natural resources and cultivating human needs so that the two

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3. The well-field system was a land distribution method in ancient China. Its name comes from Chinese character 井 (*jing*), which means "well." In this system a square area of land was divided into nine identically sized sections; the eight outer sections were privately cultivated by individual households and the center section was communally cultivated for the state.

sides are well balanced in growth (*Xunzi* 19.1). Another important feature of active harmony as understood by the Confucians is called "*ge de qi suo*" (各得其所), meaning each gets its due. This is the idea of equity in achieving harmony. According to this Confucian idea of equity, if various components in the world are to contribute to harmony, each should get its due in accordance with its own "nature." Equity in this sense does not mean absolute equality. It does not mean, for example, that between a couple everything is to be divided in exact halves. It does mean, nevertheless, that each party gets its due in the long run. How to determine what each party is due is one of the greatest challenges for social harmony, as it is also one of the greatest challenges to systems of other social and political philosophy including those prioritizing justice and liberty. In the Confucian view expounded here, what is due to each party is context dependent. In ancient times, for a person to have had decent clothes, nutritious food, adequate rest, and appropriate recognition was the proper due. For people of the twenty-first century, the list would include vacation and travel. This ideal is not only a matter of fair distribution of resources but, more importantly, a matter of justice on the deepest level. The *Yijing* advocates the ideal that "everything gets vindicated on its own path of life and all contribute to the great harmony" (*ge zheng xingming, baohe taihe*各正性命, 保合太和 [TTC 1985, 14]), indicating that things in the world are entitled to validation in their own right. This principle first of all applies to human society. The principle of equity draws an important line between active harmony and domination, which will be discussed later.

An alternative form of harmony is passive harmony. It is characterized by peaceful coexistence, without active engagement. When people or parties are in passive harmony, there is no hostility toward each other; they do not interfere with each other. But there is no friendly attraction or interaction between them either. When two countries are in a state of passive harmony, it is like the ideal state prescribed by the Daoist philosopher Laozi, that people in each country can hear the noise of each other's roosters and dogs, but they never interact with each other (*Daodejing*, ch. 80). Laozi did not say that people within the same state should also avoid interaction, even though perhaps such interaction should still be kept at a minimum as active interaction is likely to generate tension and even conflict. Laozi prescribed such a state as desirable in contrast to one of constant war against one another, which was rampant during his time. In his view, when people in neighboring states refrain from interacting with each other and each minds their own business, they can avoid conflict and war, which was definitely a preferable alternative to the chaotic state during Laozi's time. We can also imagine a married couple with fading mutual interest and attraction continuing their dull lives together. They are not hostile toward each other, they do not fight, and they maintain a peaceful

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environment at home, yet there is not much of anything else either. As long as they still live under the same roof, they must interact and probably have some kind of active engagement. But they would keep such engagement to a minimum. Hence the relationship between them is described more appropriately as largely passive harmony rather than active harmony. Such a marriage is not as bad as one of hostility, constant fighting, or violence, but it is far from the ideal of a harmonious family. In the workplace, if two coworkers have difficulty working jointly as an effective team, they should at least maintain passive harmony between them so that there is peace. While such a situation is not optimal, it is not disruptive either. Passive harmony is a minimum form of harmony.

Passive harmony is not a bad thing. In passive harmony, there is tolerance and a certain form of mutual acknowledgment. In order to overcome a war or other forms of violent conflict, passive harmony is often the first step to achieve. Both active harmony and passive harmony demonstrate some kind of order. Like active harmony, passive harmony is also opposed to domination and to disharmony, but in a different way. In passive harmony, peace is retained. So it is nevertheless better than disharmony. Passive harmony is also free from domination. Even though domination may also coexist with peace (as will be discussed later), in passive harmony, no party is subjugated by another. Passive harmony can be seen as harmony in a marginal sense. This kind of harmony as described and prescribed by Laozi, though there is not much going on, is preferable to open confrontation and conflict, which Laozi loathed. We can also contrast the kind of passive harmony between Laozi's two countries with active harmony, in which both sides engage in active trading and other kinds of exchange with each other to their mutual benefit, with frequent visits between the two sides, and each side learning from and enriching the other. Proponents of passive harmony, like Laozi, may worry that active engagement may lead to disagreement, alienation, and conflict. They prefer disengagement rather than risking conflict in seeking mutual benefit through active engagement as required by active harmony.

In contemporary Western literature, active harmony and passive harmony find a partial parallel in the peace theory. Johan Galtung has defined two kinds of peace. Negative peace "is the absence of violence, absence of war," whereas positive peace "is the integration of human society" (Galtung 1964, 2). Positive peace concerns human integration and covers a broad range,

> from efforts to change the "minds of men," change their ideas about other groups, improved contact through exchange, improved understanding through studies, peace research itself, semantic analyses, improved communication—especially news communication—changes in the economic order of society, and so on to functional cooperation between groups or nations through technical and

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cultural cooperation or trade policies, to institutional fusion with superordinate bureaucracies, police forces, courts and governments till the world state is reached. (Galtung 1964, 3)

Galtung's goal toward peace is shared largely by the philosophy of harmony, even though his goal is specifically the creation of peace. His two forms of peace overlap but do not quite coincide with the two versions of harmony I have articulated above. Galtung's negative peace is absence of violence and war, but not necessarily absence of hostility, whereas passive harmony excludes such negative energy as hostility. Galtung imagines that negative peace can be achieved through coercion. Negative peace can be reached in "a world state dominated by one nation, or a United Nations, equipped with coercive power and readiness to use it" (Galtung 1964, 3). Such a state is described as domination rather than passive harmony in my articulation. In comparison, Galtung's negative peace can be achieved through a top-down approach, whereas passive harmony is achieved by a bottom-up approach. Passive harmony cannot be imposed by external force without the willingness of the participants. In active harmony, mutual compensation and mutual completion are important, which appears to be missing in Galtung's positive peace. Furthermore, Galtung's concepts are mainly those found in the field of international relations whereas the two conceptions of harmony in Chinese thought are philosophical in nature. Nevertheless, the two pairs of concepts can lend support to each other in pursuing their goals.

HARMONY AND FREEDOM

In Plato's ideal state, harmony as justice does not leave much room for freedom. Discourse on harmony, sporadic as it has been, also addressed few, if any, issues surrounding freedom in harmony. Here I want to make the case that freedom is important to both active and passive harmony. So far I have used "freedom" in the crude sense of being able to do what one wishes. To further our discussion of freedom, it is helpful to make reference to Isaiah Berlin's two concepts of liberty. Berlin himself has used "liberty" and "freedom" interchangeably.4 What he says about liberty is largely applicable to

4. Berlin (2002, 1969). I follow Berlin scholar Ian Carter here by not making a distinction between liberty and freedom. Referring to the connection of Berlin's liberty to freedom, Ian Carter writes, "Many authors prefer to talk of positive and negative freedom. This is only a difference of style, and the terms 'liberty' and 'freedom' are normally used interchangeably by political and social philosophers. Although some attempts have been made to distinguish between liberty and freedom" (Pitkin 1988; Williams 2001; Dworkin 2011), generally speaking these have not caught on. Neither can they be translated into other European languages, which contain only the one term, of either Latin or Germanic origin (e.g. liberté, Freiheit), where English contains both" (Carter 2018).

what I discuss in terms of freedom in this chapter. On Berlin's account, the concept of negative freedom addresses the question, "What is the area within which the subject—a person or group of persons—is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?" (Berlin 2002, 169). He said, "by being free in this sense I mean not being interfered with by others. The wider the area of non-interference the wider my freedom" (170). Accordingly, negative freedom is about the absence of constraints that would prevent one from acting as one wishes. Using Berlin's definition in assessing the connections between harmony and freedom, it would be appropriate to say that passive harmony is characterized primarily by negative freedom. In passive harmony, one is free from interference and domination. In the harmonious states prescribed by Laozi, for example, people mind their own business, without any or with little interaction with one other. It does not take much to achieve and maintain such harmony if everybody is left alone as negative freedom requires. This kind of freedom aligns well with the goal of Laozi in his advocacy of passive harmony. For Laozi, everything has its own roots and should return to its own roots in quietude (*Daodejing*, Chapter 16). He held that the highest form of virtue is manifest in water. Water does not pick a fight against anyone or anything. It just goes in its own way regardless of what others think (*Daodejing*, Chapter 8). These imageries suggest a preference for noninterference, for being left alone, which is the essence of negative freedom.

Berlin's concept of positive freedom is more complicated. His positive freedom is about "what, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?" (Berlin 2002, 169); it answers such questions with "being one's own master" (178). Unlike negative freedom, positive freedom is the presence of something internal to the person that directs the person's own actions. For Berlin, positive freedom consists in self-rule and self-mastery. People sometimes take self-mastery as self-realization. When Berlin discusses the ideal of self-realization, he gives it a rationalistic interpretation and takes such an idea as to "enable individuals to recognize their own part in the working of a rational world" (188–89). Through this connection, Berlin sees a danger in positive freedom as it may be used to justify authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. We should understand Berlin's worry about positive freedom within the context of his time. He explored freedom during the Cold War, under direct threat from communist regimes and with fresh memories of Nazism in World War II. Naturally, Berlin was wary of any political philosophy what may be construed as totalitarianism.

From the perspective of the Confucian philosophy of active harmony, people need not only negative freedom but also positive freedom. Freedom in

the positive sense also includes having the ability to achieve one's goal. Such an ability is not only about having self-determination but also includes being equipped with skills and tools in successfully pursuing one's goals. Confucian active harmony in society aims to produce persons with moral virtues as they pursue the good life. Such persons are capable of self-determination in developing themselves and improving society. By promoting active harmony, Confucians aim to create a suitable environment that is conducive to personal growth, enables people to pursue the good life, and facilitates their success. The practice of active harmony does not have to be heavy-handed. It can leave adequate space for involved parties to exercise negative freedom. Take for example Confucius's teaching of "education regardless of classes" (*you jiao wu lei*有教無類, *Analects* 15.39). On the one hand, his teaching implies noninterference: society should not prevent people, regardless of their social classes, from pursuing education. This concerns negative freedom. On the other hand, it implies that society should create a good environment that enables people to set their own goals and to become educated in preparation for the good life. This concerns positive freedom. Confucius is believed to have set a good example for possessing a self-determination for pursuing education when he was fifteen years old (*Analects* 2.4). There are also abundant passages in the *Analects* where Confucius encourages people to translate such a self-determination into the habit of pursuing education (1.14, 5.15, 5.28, 6.3, 8.13, 11.7, 17.8, 19.5). Self-determination, perseverance, and a favorable social environment contribute to people's positive freedom. In a learning community that exemplifies active harmony, there is room for each to have adequate personal space so that each can explore his or her own possibilities. However, negative freedom alone is far from adequate. A philosophy of active harmony can make room for positive freedom beyond Berlin's conception. Confucius famously said, "To strive towards being more fully human is on oneself, does it depend on others?" (*Analects* 12.1). The Confucian idea of becoming fully human implies the capacity for freedom. The self is the master of such a process of one's cultivation of virtue. In active harmony, each party contributes to the growth and benefit of others and, in the meantime, also benefits from the process. Confucianism understands freedom as being realized in "choosing the good" (*ze shan* 擇善).5 Choosing the good requires a person to broaden his or her knowledge base, to know what the good is, and to become equipped with the tools in pursuing it. From the Confucian perspective, choosing the good is liberating and fulfilling. It enables and empowers the individual who so chooses. Therefore positive freedom is as important as negative freedom when constructing a meaningful life.

5. See Li (2014a).

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For proponents of active harmony, passive harmony is a low form of harmony in part because it represses positive freedom. In passive harmony, each party is left alone to do its own things. It leaves plenty of room for parties to exercise negative freedoms in their private space. They do not interfere with one another's freedom, yet there is no active engagement between parties and no positive freedom is exercised by any party through pursuing one another for interaction and for collaboration. There is no active enabling energy in this kind of freedom and no synergy for collective endeavors. While this kind of freedom may give each adequate breathing room, it is mostly the freedom to be left alone. Such freedom can serve to protect otherwise vulnerable parties from aggression, which may lead to domination. It also can serve as a license to refuse collaboration and external assistance. If we indulge ourselves in this kind of negative freedom alone, resources are wasted and opportunities are lost. In the Confucian view, if freedom is merely about not being interfered with by others, then an amateur and an experienced mountain climber would be equally free when they are both left in uncharted mountainous wilderness. In fact, however, it is the experienced mountain climber equipped with knowledge and skills who is more likely to make it out alive in exercising his or her freedom, not the amateur, who does not have the know-how and necessary training to find his way out. Confucians advocate the active construction of human society. In the grand scheme of things, they believe that humanity should join forces with Heaven (*tian* 天) and Earth (*di* 地) in creating a meaningful world. On a personal level, they believe people achieve humanity through social engagement in building human relationships. Only through active harmony is such an ideal possible.

Freedom is essential to active harmony as it injects energy into it; without such energy, active mutual engagement is impossible. In the meantime, active harmony enables a kind of freedom that is not available in passive harmony. Constructive engagement opens new space in life and extends freedom. Proponents of passive harmony may see danger in active harmony, similar to Berlin's distrust of positive freedom. In active harmony, freedom by various parties tends to give rise to tension, sometimes even conflict. How such tension is handled determines the integrity of active harmony. In active harmony, no party is an island. The exercise of freedom by one party often affects the space of freedom of other parties, which in turn has consequences for the original party him- or herself. Therefore the integrity and continuation of active harmony requires each party to exercise freedom within a reasonable limit, without jeopardizing the freedom of others. Active harmony also restricts certain kinds of freedom, as unrestricted freedom on one party undermines the freedom of another party. The ideal form of active harmony is one in which freedom for each is enhanced yet the synergy of all parties is

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maximized and their healthy collective state is preserved and continued for renewal. Freedom is the air for synergy in active harmony; active harmony cannot exist without it. And precisely because of that, active harmony augments freedom, especially positive freedom.

HARMONY AND DOMINATION

Domination exists when one party (or more than one) controls the other (or others) by direct force or by threat of undesirable consequences, either explicitly or implicitly. The essence of domination is power. Domination may coexist with peace and may thus present the appearance of harmony, but such peaceful states are not in fact harmonious. Domination can be an engaging activity; the dominating party can actively enforce dominance. But it is a one-way affair. It is to be distinguished from active harmony as there is no reciprocated engagement that is constructive to all parties, nor is there equity because of its one-sided power structure. Equity is an important differentiating mark between active harmony and domination. Domination is not passive harmony either because passive harmony is characterized by disinterest in mutual engagement and by self-contentment in coexistence rather than the power of one over another. In its ideal form, passive harmony is a result of self-determination. Furthermore, although domination usually comes with order, it is a forced order, a kind of order with a high human cost, as domination obstructs both social equality and human freedom.

It is noteworthy that the Confucian idea of active harmony was initially developed as an alternative to domination that was disguised as harmony. In the classic text of *Zuo Commentary*, Chapter Zhaogong Year 20, the philosopher Yanzi distinguishes harmony from mere sameness (*tong* 同). In his conversation with the duke of Qi, the duke bragged about his relationship with his minister Ju, who was always in agreement with the duke. Yanzi pointed out that the kind of relationship between the duke and his minister Ju is mere "sameness" rather than harmony. "Sameness" suggests not only uniformity but also conformity. Yanzi used the examples of making a good soup by mixing various ingredients and making good music by orchestrating various instruments as examples for harmony, in contrast with the duke's case. Yanzi said,

> When the duke says "yes," Ju also says "yes"; when the duke says "no," Ju also says "no." This is like mixing water with water. Who can eat such a soup? This is like using the same kind of instruments to produce music. Who can enjoy such music? This is why it is not all right to be merely same. (TTC 1985, 2093)

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For Yanzi, the relationship between the duke and the minister should be a harmonious one, not a relationship of sameness. A harmonious relationship presupposes that they engage each other with different perspectives and different views on various issues. This is evidently not the case with the duke and his minister. The minister was without his own independent voice and was merely in conformity with the duke. In light of our discussion of domination, we can say that it is no coincidence that the minister always held the same opinion as the duke. The duke had power over the minister. Out of fear, the minister always had to agree with the duke, creating the appearance of the two always seeing eye to eye on everything. This is a classic example of domination.

Domination comes in roughly two forms: the hard and the soft. Hard domination is overt, as in the case of a military invasion of one country by another, institutionalized slavery, or racial apartheid. Soft domination is more subtle. It does not involve the use of overt force. It is nevertheless a form of domination because it involves a use of power to gain and maintain advantage. The duke and his minister represent one case in point. The duke does not openly force the minister to do things, nor explicitly threaten the minister with bad consequences. But they both understand the power structure at work in their situation and act accordingly. It is a kind of soft domination. In comparison with its hard sibling, soft domination is more easily disguised as harmony (as we can see in the case of the duke and his minister).

Yanzi's contrast of "sameness" with harmony shows that active harmony requires the freedom of all involved parties. Domination gives freedom disproportionally to the dominator(s), while it severely restricts the freedom of the dominated. The duke could express whatever he believed, but not the minister. The duke's freedom in acting on his wishes was not balanced by honest input from the minister, who was under the domination of the duke and acted only in conformity with the latter. We can imagine that the duke may allow the minister a certain kind and a certain degree of freedom in doing other things, but not in matters important to governance. In a way, the minister was even less free than a commoner. The Chinese proverb "mountains are high and the emperor far away" (*shan gao huangdi yuan* 山高皇帝遠) expresses the idea that when you are far away from authorities, they cannot interfere with what you do, implying that you are free to do what you wish. The minister, however, did not have such a "luxury." He lived right by the duke and everything he did could have repercussions. Under this kind of domination, the minister's freedom was severely limited. In an important sense even the duke did not have optimal freedom. He may have ample negative freedom, as no one could interfere with him in his kingdom, but he did not have positive freedom in the sense of being enabled to choose appropri-

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-ate goals and being equipped with tools to achieve them. Without honest and innovative assistance from ministers and other people, the duke would be trapped in his own biases. He could only exercise his freedom in a limited and distorted way.

The confusion of domination with harmony has been the greatest challenge to the ideal of harmony today, as it was over two thousand years ago. In the name of social harmony, oppressive governments force people into submission so those with power can maintain tight control. Hegemon individuals take advantage of others in unfair relationships (as in the case of the duke and his minister). For such reasons, harmony has been given a bad name and has been seen as merely a façade for brutal domination. So much so that today in China "having been harmonized" (*bei hexie le* 被和諧了) means having become a victim of interference by the government's extensive and oppressive machinery of domination.

It is worth mentioning that the fate of the concept of harmony in the West has similarly suffered, largely due to the way in which harmony has been construed. In his influential *Open Society and Its Enemies*, Karl Popper made Plato's ideal of justice as harmony the main target of criticism. For Popper, Plato's idea of conflict-free harmony *necessarily* leads to totalitarianism and it is contrary to freedom (Popper 1945). Plato's idea of harmony between the three parts of the soul and between the three classes of people in society can be interpreted as one element dominating others. Understood this way, it is a model for domination rather than harmony as Confucians understand it.

In his republican philosophy of freedom, Philip Pettit proposes a conception of freedom as nondomination. For Pettit, domination exists when someone holds power to interfere with the lives of others arbitrarily. An act is arbitrary "if it is subject just to the *arbitrium*, the decision or judgment, of the agent; the agent [is] in a position to choose it or not choose it, at their pleasure" (Pettit 1997, 55). Pettit argues that in this sense one cannot not truly be free as long as interference is a real possibility, regardless of whether interference actually takes place. Pettit's republicanism differs from Isaiah Berlin's liberalism in that republicanism embraces a form of positive freedom, even though it does so with caution. Pettit's republicanism rejects arbitrary interference but not interference altogether. It recognizes the need for positive social construction to enable and enhance freedom. Laws are needed, for example, as long as they are made democratically and appropriately. Furthermore, Pettit emphasizes the need for "civilizing the Republic" and insists on the need to have good social "norms" in order for society to function appropriately. For Pettit, the existence of a "norm" must satisfy three conditions. First, relevant parties generally display the pattern of behavior in question; second, they generally approve of someone's doing so and/or

disapprove of someone's not doing so; and third, this habit of approval makes the behavior more likely or secure than it would otherwise be (Pettit 1997, 244). Understood this way, freedom is freedom from domination, but it coexists with regulative social norms.

Two things can be said in comparison of Pettit's republicanism with Confucian active harmony. First, in Confucianism there is also the idea of freedom from domination. The *Tangong B* Chapter of the *Book of Rites* records a story of Confucius conversing with a woman, who lived at the foot of Mount Tai where mountain tigers had killed her father-in-law, her husband, and her son. When Confucius asked why she did not move back to the city, she responded that at the foot of Mount Tai there was no brutal government. Confucius commented, a bad government is more brutal than man-killing tigers. The story suggests that freedom from domination is a worthy value. This was the main reason that, in ancient China, some people preferred to live in deep mountains far from civilization so they were out of the government's control. Although both Confucius and Pettit are opposed to domination from bad government, Pettit's concept of nondomination goes further. For Pettit, domination does not merely mean that the powerful use their power arbitrarily but also the very existence of such power. In other words, if the government or someone has the power to exercise it arbitrarily, even if they refrain from using it, it still counts as domination (Pettit 1997, 64). Confucius lived in a predemocratic era. For him, the best possible scenario was having a benevolent king who would not exercise arbitrary power over his people by his own choice. In a democratic era, Confucians need to seek democratic means to secure nondomination rather than place the hope on benevolent rulers. Second, Confucian ritual propriety (*li* 禮) falls under Pettit's definition of "norm." Confucians emphasize the need for ritual propriety in order to achieve social harmony. In this way, Pettit's view is consistent with Confucians in that they both see the need to "civilize" society by utilizing "norms" in socialization and in so doing they both attempt to integrate freedom with active engagement in social construction.

Social hierarchy is associated with social norms. People often associate domination with hierarchy. However, hierarchy is not necessarily connected to domination. Whereas domination requires hierarchy, hierarchy does not necessitate domination. While domination can establish and reinforce hierarchy, hierarchy can also accommodate harmony. In the earlier case of the duke and his minister Ju, their relationship is a hierarchical one, the duke being above the minister; it is also one of domination, as the story reveals. In contrast, we can imagine the duke and the minister in a relationship of harmony as the philosopher Yanzi advocates. The Confucian ideal of the ruler-minister relationship is that while the minister should work for the ruler with loyalty,

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the ruler should treat the minister with the norms of ritual propriety (*Analects* 3:19). Loyalty to the ruler means always keeping in mind the best interest of the ruler as ruler. When the ruler deviates from his rulership due to personal shortsightedness or selfishness, the minister must remonstrate with the ruler. The ruler, on the other hand, must treat the minister with respect and let his minister perform his proper role for the state. Thus if the ruler and the minister can each express their own opinion on issues, and if, better yet, certain decisions on affairs of the state are left for the minister to make on the basis of his professional judgment without arbitrary interference from the ruler, harmony is achievable even within hierarchy.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that in real life, active harmony, passive harmony, disharmony, and domination each may not be pure; they may coexist in the same relationship or alternate over time. We can imagine that in a general state of disharmony there can be pockets of harmonies, a relationship that is primarily one of domination may allow room for harmony, and active harmony and passive harmony may exist in the same place. Sometimes in order to achieve and maintain active harmony, we need to preserve some kind of passive harmony, either as a transition or as a time-out to reflect on the situation. The ultimate goal, however, should be to generate and to achieve active harmony and the kind of freedom that comes with it. When circumstances make active harmony unreachable in the near run, we should strive to maintain at least a condition of passive harmony, avoiding conflict and leaving room for freedom in separate domains. We must not confuse domination with harmony and must rise up against domination when it undermines harmony. Fighting domination may result in disharmony, at least in the short run. Our ultimate goal should not be disharmony or domination, but active harmony. In achieving it, we should see disharmony as a transitioning stage from domination to harmony. I hope this analysis and discussion has shown that, from a Confucian perspective, not only can active harmony take place without domination, but the absence of domination is a precondition for active harmony, and furthermore, only active harmony can maximize the kind of freedom that is most conducive to human flourishing.

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