

The Ideal of Harmony in Ancient Chinese and Greek Philosophy

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Abstract This article offers a study of the early formation and development of the ideal of harmony in ancient Chinese philosophy and ancient Greek philosophy. It shows that, unlike the Pythagorean notion of harmony, which is primarily based on a linear progressive model with a pre-set order, the ancient Chinese concept of harmony is best understood as a comprehensive process of harmonization. It encompasses spatial as well as temporal dimensions, metaphysical as well as moral and aesthetical dimensions. It is a fundamentally open notion in the sense that it does not aim to conform to any pre-set order. This broader, richer, and more liberal understanding of harmony has had a profound influence on Chinese culture as whole in its long history.

Keywords Harmony · Order · Pythagorean · Confucianism · Daoism · Moism

The primary Chinese word for harmony 和 (*he*) appears frequently in pre-Qin classics.¹ The fact that it is used in ancient literature to describe a highly desirable state of affairs suggests that it stands for a social ideal of that time. For example, in the *Shi Jing* 詩經 (*Book of Odes*), a collection of the earliest Chinese poems,² allegedly edited later by Confucius himself, there are numerous places where the poets use *he* or “harmony” in describing happy occasions in life. For instance,

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. (*Thirteen Classics with Commentaries* 1985: 406)³

¹Other Chinese words for harmony include “*mu* 睦,” “*xie* 協,” and “*xie* 諧.”

²The dates of these poems range from early Western Zhou to middle Spring and Autumn period (11th-6th Century BCE).

³“呦呦鹿鳴、食野之芩。我有嘉賓、鼓瑟鼓琴。鼓瑟鼓琴、和樂且湛。我有旨酒、以燕樂嘉賓之心。” Translations from Chinese into English throughout this essay are my own, unless indicated otherwise.

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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 family in good order and make wife and children happy.
 Think hard about it,
 Is it indeed truly so? (*Thirteen Classics with Commentaries* 1985: 408–409)⁴

Here the poet(s) depicts two scenes of harmony. The first is an occasion in a beautiful natural setting, with deer whistling and musical instruments being played. People gather to enjoy elegant wines and dear friendship. The second scene depicts a family setting, with caring brothers, loving spouses,⁵ and playful children together enjoying food and wines. Picturing the scenes of deer, pasture, music, food and wines, friends and family, how can one not concur with the poet(s) that these harmonious occasions present indeed the ultimate happiness of life? Here the word for harmony, *he*, captures the spirit of an ideal way of life. It enables us to grasp conceptually a highly desirable state in life. It is evident that by the time the poems were written, the Chinese concept for harmony was already current and fully expressed in word.⁶ In this essay I investigate the etymological development of the word and the formulation of the notion of harmony in early Chinese philosophies, and compare it with ancient Greek notions of harmony, in hope that such a study can shed light on the meanings of the notion and can help us better understand the concept of harmony.

1

A careful study of the evolution of related words of *he* 和 indicates that the philosophical conceptualization of harmony in ancient China is a result of the process of analogy, generalization, and abstraction from concrete states of affairs such as mixing sounds and mingling flavors. The word *he* 和 is closely associated to two other words in ancient time, 穌, and 盃. All three words have the same pronunciation, namely *he*.⁷ Their earliest appearances had various forms. 和 has appeared as 禾, 哂, 想 and 杲.⁸ 穌 has also appeared as 糴. The upper part of 盃, i.e., 禾, has been located to the left of the part of 皿. It may be meaningful to note that all three words have to do with the root word 禾, which is also pronounced as *he*. The earliest

⁴ 賓爾籩豆、飲酒之飮。兄弟既具、和樂且孺。妻子好合、如鼓瑟琴。兄弟既翕、和樂且湛。宜爾室家、樂爾妻孥。是究是圖、宜其然乎。

⁵ The phrase used to describe the husband and wife, *hao he* 好合, literally means “nice union.”

⁶ This is not to say, however, that there was already a shared, specific conception of it. Different philosophers had different conceptions of harmony as we will show later in this essay. The distinction I make between concept and conception here is similar to that of John Rawls (Rawls 1971: 5). In my understanding, people addressing the same concept may have different conceptions of it; people of the same conception may apply it differently in real life. Accordingly, disagreement may occur at both levels. They may disagree on the conception of harmony and they may also disagree on how to apply shared conceptions in reality.

⁷ It is pronounced like “her” in British English.

⁸ Another ancient variation of 和 is 璫, used to denote a special kind of jade. It is not directly relevant to the present study. See *Dictionary of Chinese Character Variants* (Yi Ti Zi Zidian 2004 異體字字典, internet edition, 2004, 5th Edition, <http://140.111.1.40/start.htm>).

appearance of 禾 in the Oracle Bone Scripts (*jia gu wen* 甲骨文) is 𥝌;⁹ it represents a standing grain stock with seeds on its top. The ancient Chinese lexicon *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* 說文解字 explains 禾 as “fine cereal crops (*jia gu ye* 嘉穀也).” Given the importance of cereal crops as a primary source of food to human well-being, association with 禾 gives words prosperous and auspicious connotations. According to the study by the Chinese scholar WANG Guowei 王國維 (1877–1927), 盞 originally stands for the utensil used to mix wine with water in order to adjust the density of the wine (Wang 1959: 152). This is largely consistent with the definition in the *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*, which defines 盞 as a verb: to mix flavors (*tiao wei ye* 調味也), as it is common in ancient Chinese language to turn a noun into a verb indicating the function of the object that the noun denotes. It is also natural to extend its meaning from the process of mixing flavors to the general process of mixing other things as well.

The *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* interprets 和 as “corresponsiveness (of sounds) (*xiang ying ye* 相應也),” and interprets 蘇 as “to mingle (or mix) (*tiao ye* 調也).” The Chinese scholar GUO Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978) rejects this distinction between 和 and 蘇. According to Guo, the word 蘇 has the root of *yue* 龠. *Yue* 龠 stands for a musical instrument made of bamboo pipes. The three 口 in the middle indicate three holes in the instrument. Guo’s study leads him to the conclusion that 蘇 is a variant of 龠 and that its original meaning is 龠, namely a musical instrument (Guo: 93–106). Accordingly, the meaning of 蘇 as mixing of sounds is derivative of the instrument that produces sounds. If we accept Guo’s argument, we can conjecture that 蘇 can be used for not only the mingling of sounds generated by one instrument but the mingling of sounds generated by many instruments; we can infer that the meaning of harmony or harmonization is a further extension of the meaning of mixing sounds, as a favorable result of the mixing of sounds.

Guo’s theory can be supported by the fact that the meaning of 蘇 as mixing and harmonizing of sounds is clearly indicated in the Bronze Scripts (*jinwen* 金文)¹⁰ found in the chime-type metal musical instrument called *zhong* 鐘. For example, the Zi Fan He Zhong 子犯蘇鐘, made by a Zi Fan around 632 BCE and now preserved in the National Museum in Taipei, is so named because its Bronze Scripts contain the expression of *he zhong* 蘇鐘, namely “the *zhong* that mingles sounds.” The Zi Fan He Zhong has a set of eight pieces. When these pieces are struck, various sounds are generated. The mingling of these sounds produces good music. So the function of these pieces is to harmonize various sounds in order to produce music. The Bronze Scripts on the Yun Er Zhong 沅兒鐘, also made during the Spring and Autumn period (770–476BCE), include the expression of “*zi zuo he zhong, he hui bai xing* 自作蘇鐘... 蘇會百姓,” namely, making this chime of harmony for the harmony of the people (ZHANG Yinlin 1999: 23.). Here the meaning of 蘇 as the making of music is now extended to the social dimension, from harmonization of sounds for music to harmonization of the people for a good society. The Yun Er Zhong provides strong evidence of the evolution of 蘇 from a specific meaning of mixing sounds for music to a generalized meaning of harmony.

Among the three characters of 和, 蘇, and 盞, only 蘇 has been identified in the Oracle Bone Scripts.¹¹ All three words, however, appear in the Bronze Scripts. Guo is probably correct as

⁹ See Fang 1993: 519. *Jia gu wen* are inscriptions in bones or tortoise shells during the Shang Dynasty (ca. 1766–1050 BCE), the earliest form of Chinese written words. So far about 154, 000 pieces, with 4,500 words on them, have been discovered. About one third of these words have been decoded.

¹⁰ The Bronze Scripts (*jin wen* 金文), also called *zhong ding wen* 鐘鼎文, are inscriptions carved in bronze utensils during the Shang and Zhou (ca. 1046–256BCE) dynasties. Their contents are mostly about social events and rituals. Cf. Ji.

¹¹ 和 and 盞 are not included in the dictionaries of Oracle Bone characters. See Liu 1993.

he suggests that 和 came from a simplified version of 蘇, through a process of reducing three 口 into just one in the 俞 (Guo 2002: 04–105). We can cite two observations in support of Guo’s theory. First, 俞 appears in the Oracle Bone Scripts as 𠄎 and 𠄏 (see Xu 1989: 199.); this may indicate already a move of reducing the number of 口 from three to two, or at least that variations in the number of 口 in the word had already occurred. Second, in the *Zun De Yi* 尊德義 (The Promotion of Virtue and Rightness) and the *Wu Xing* 五行 (Five Virtues), two early Confucian texts discovered among the Guodian Chu Bamboo Strips, 和 appears as 𠄎 (味) (See Jinzhou City Museum 1998: 31 and 57; Zhang, Shouzhong 2006, 15), which resembles the 蘇 (蘇) in the Bronze Scripts of the Guo Shu Zhong 虢叔鐘 (Palace Museum 1999: 220), with the exception of the simplification of the right side into just one 口. The Guo Shu Zhong 虢叔鐘 was made toward the end of the Western Zhou period (ca. 1046–771 BCE). The *Zun De Yi* and other works of the Guodian Chu Bamboo Strips were written during the middle or later period of the Warring States (475–221 BCE). Therefore the writing in the *Guo Shu Zhong* came a few hundred years before that of the *Zun De Yi*. We can conjecture that the change from 蘇 to 𠄎 is an indication of the simplification process suggested by Guo, even though it is conceivable that during the period both forms of the word were being used.

In the Bronze Scripts, although 蘇 is still the main form of the word (see Zhou 1997: 297), 和, 蘇, and 盃 are used interchangeably. For example, in the Bronze Scripts “*Shi Kong He* 史孔盃,” 𠄎 (和) was used for 盃. In the Bronze Scripts “*Geng Er Ding* 庚兒鼎,” built in the middle to late period of the Spring and Autumn period, there is the expression “*yong he yong yu* 用蘇用鬻,” i.e., making soup by mingling ingredients (See Ma 1990: 381–382). Here 蘇 is no longer merely the mingling of sounds, but also the mingling of food ingredients. It has a meaning similar to 盃.

Based on the evidence presented above, we can summarize our findings as follows. If we accept WANG Guowei and GUO Moruo’s readings, as we have good reasons to, the current word 和, as used to denote harmony, comes from two sources. First, it comes from the musical instrument 蘇, which was later simplified into 和.¹² Second, it comes from the wine utensil 盃, which later was used interchangeably with 和. In other words, from the musical instrument that produces various sounds comes the meaning of mingling various sounds; from the utensil that mixes wine with water comes the meaning of mixing different flavors. The early meaning of 和 as mixing or mingling, comes from words of these instruments.¹³ This is consistent with the conjecture that, in the earliest times in human history, words for concrete objects were formed before words for abstract ideas, at least for pictographic languages like Chinese.

Further developments of early Chinese philosophical thought appear to confirm this theory of the word’s evolution. Ancient scholars explicated the meaning of 和 in both ways, reflecting the two sources of 和 as shown above. One of the earliest such discussions was by SHI Bo 史伯, a scholar–minister who lived toward the end of the Western Zhou period. SHI Bo praised early sage–kings that they harmonized (*he*) five flavors to befit the taste (*he wu wei yi tiao kou* 和五味以調口) and the six measures of sounds to adjust the ear (*he liu li*

¹² In his classic Commentary of the *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* on Xu Shen’s 許慎 mutual interpretation of 調 and 蘇, DUAN Yucui 段玉裁 (1735–1815) writes, “today [we] only use 和, and 蘇 has been eliminated. 今則概用和, 而蘇廢矣” (Annotated *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* 1992: 93).

¹³ However, the interpretation of 和 as “corresponsiveness (of sounds)” in the *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*, is not entirely wrong as it indicates one meaning of the word as corresponsiveness, as in *he shi* 和詩, namely writing a poem in response to another person’s poem. In *Analects* 7.32, we read that “Confucius sang with others. When another person sang well, Confucius always asked him to repeat before responding (*he*) to it (子與人歌而善, 必使反之, 而後和之).” This meaning of *he* as corresponsiveness may well be an extension or specific variation of the original meaning of “mixing (sounds).”

yi cong er 和六律以聽耳), and that they achieved the highest level of harmony in society (*he zhi zhi ye* 和之至也”) (*Zhengyu* 鄭語 Chapter of the *Guo Yu* 國語, in Lai 2000: 746–747).

The *Shaogong* 昭公 Year 20 Chapter of the *Chun Qiu Zuo Zhuan* 春秋左傳¹⁴ contains a record of a detailed and insightful discussion of *he* by a scholar–minister YAN Ying (晏嬰, ?–500 B.C.E.):

He is like making soup. One needs water, fire, vinegar, sauce, salt, and plum in order to cook fish and meat. One needs to cook them with firewood. The cook has to mingle (*he*) the ingredients together in order to balance the taste. He needs to compensate for deficiencies and to reduce excessiveness. The good person (*jun zi*)¹⁵ eats [such balanced food] in order to achieve a balanced mind. (*Thirteen Classics with Commentaries* 1985: 2093)¹⁶

YAN Ying’s understanding of harmony is based on one of the two sources of the meaning of *he*, namely that of mixing things as indicated in the word 盪, but also takes it to a more sophisticated level. The cook needs different things to make a delicious soup. She needs ingredients that taste and smell very different. One important aspect of fine cooking is to be able to balance one excessive flavor with another. The process also requires contrasting elements such as water and fire. Water and fire are usually seen as diametrically opposed to each other, yet neither is dispensable for cooking. Harmony here is a process rather than a state; it is harmonization. For YAN Ying such process is not merely mingling different flavors or tastes. It includes the balancing of opposite elements into an organic whole. It should be noted that the Chinese word for soup here, *geng* 羹, does not mean just any soup. It stands for a kind of rather elegant soup. *Geng* includes meat or fish as a necessary ingredient and it is cooked with vegetables. The final touch of the cooking process is to add well-mixed starch to generate a kind of thickness in the soup. Because it includes meat or fish in it, this kind of soup has strong flavors that need to be balanced out. Because it has starch in it, the soup must be well mixed in order to produce a good feel in the mouth. Thus, YAN Ying’s use of making *geng* as an analogy for harmonization is an excellent choice. YAN Ying believes that enjoying such kind of harmonized food can balance a good person’s heart/mind (*xin*).

YAN Ying then moves on to expound harmony by using the other source of *he* as in making music. He continues:

Sounds are like flavors. Different elements complete each other: one breath, two styles, three types, four instruments, five sounds, six measures, seven notes, eight winds, and nine songs. Different sounds complement each other: the pure and the impure, the big and the small, the short and the long, the fast and the slow, the sorrowful and the joyful, the strong and the tender, the late and the quick, the high and the low, the in and the out, and the inclusive and the non-inclusive. The good person listens to this kind of music in order to balance his mind. (*Thirteen Classics with Commentaries* 1985: 2093–2094)¹⁷

¹⁴ The exact dates and authorships of many early Chinese texts, including those used in this essay, are undetermined. I leave these complicated issues out here.

¹⁵ Here *jun zi* should have a meaning broader than just the morally cultivated person. It may refer to the gentry in ancient society.

¹⁶ “和如羹焉，水火醯醢鹽梅以烹魚肉，燂之以薪，宰夫和之，齊之以味，濟其不及，以洩其過。君子食之，以平其心。”

¹⁷ “聲亦如味，一氣，二體，三類，四物，五聲，六律，七音，八風，九歌，以相成也。清濁大小短長疾徐，哀樂剛柔，遲速高下，出入周疏，以相濟也。君子聽之，以平其心。”

A piece of enjoyable music requires a variety of sounds in various modes. Good musicians are capable of mingling together various sounds, some in sharp contrast, to make a coherent and harmonious piece. For YAN Ying, different sounds can mutually complete and mutually compensate one another (*xiang cheng xiang ji* 相成相濟), and good musicians are able to mix them together in a mutually completing and mutually compensating way.

In making his argument for harmony YAN Ying draws directly on the understanding of *he* in its original meanings as mixing various sounds and as mingling different ingredients, namely the meanings of 蘇 and 盞 respectively. For YAN Ying, however, harmony is not merely a matter of mixing sounds and mingling flavors. Harmony results only when different flavors are being mixed to enrich one another, and when various sounds are mixed to complement one another. This is to say that different elements need to form a relationship in which they mutually complete and mutually compensate one another and in which “one element smoothens another” (*yi ta ping ta* 以他平他).¹⁸ The *Zhou Yu B* chapter of the *Guo Yu* 國語·周語下 explicitly states this point: “when sounds correspond and mutually promote (*bao* 保) one another it is called *he*” (*shen ying xiang bao yue he* 聲應相保曰和) (Lai 2000: 166). Thus, we can say that *he* is not just that sounds mutually respond to one another; it is that various sounds respond to one another in a mutually complementing, mutually reinforcing, and mutually advancing way.

Through this history of the evolution of the idea of *he* in China, it is evident that the concept of *he* as harmony grew out of the early ideas of mixing sounds and mixing flavors. From the idea of *he* as the harmonious interplay of sounds and as the mingling of various ingredients, it is not difficult to see how this meaning can be extended, by analogous thinking, to mean harmony in other things and harmony in general.

2

In this section, I will make a comparison of the ideals of harmony in three pre-Qin philosophical schools, namely Confucianism, Daoism, and Moism. Since their conceptions of harmony share the same ancient source of the concept as explored above, my emphasis in this section will be mainly on their differences.

Much of the above discussion of *he*, though by early scholars before Confucius, has been incorporated in Confucian classics and has become an important component of Confucian philosophy. Confucius famously advocates seeking harmony rather than uniformity (*he er bu tong* 和而不同) (*Analects* 13.23). The *Analects* says that “of the functions of *li*, harmonization is the [most] precious. Harmony is the beautiful way of the sage-kings” (*Analects* 1.12). As stated in the opening section of the *Zhongyong* 中庸, the Confucian goal is to achieve harmony so that Heaven and Earth maintain their appropriate positions and the myriad things flourish (*Thirteen Classics with Commentaries* 1985: 1625). The Confucian text *Wu Xing* 五行 of the Guodian Chu Bamboo Strips makes *he* the virtue of virtues. It states that “when the five virtues are practiced in harmony, it is called Virtue; when the four virtues are practiced in harmony, it is called Goodness. Goodness is the way of humanity. Virtue is the Heavenly way” (LIU Zhao 2003: 69).¹⁹ The “five virtues” are human excellence, rightness, ritualized propriety, wisdom, and sageliness (*ren* 仁, *yi* 義, *li* 禮, *zhi* 智, *sheng* 聖). The “four virtues” refer to the first four of these five. When

¹⁸ This is a characterization of *he* by SHI Bo in *Zhengyu* 鄭語 Chapter of the *Guo Yu* 國語 (in Lai: 746).

¹⁹ “德之行五，和謂之德，四行和謂之善。善，人道也。德，天道也。”

these four virtues are practiced in harmony, one is walking the way of humanity. When all the five virtues, including sageliness, are harmoniously practiced, one becomes one with Heaven. The text further explains that “human excellence and rightness generate ritualized propriety; it is the harmonization of the four virtues” (LIU Zhao 2003: 71).²⁰ It also states that “sageliness generates wisdom, ritualized propriety and *yue* (music); it is the harmonization of the five virtues. Harmony results in happiness; happiness results in Virtue. When Virtue prevails, the nation prospers” (LIU Zhao 2003: 71).²¹ These passages appear to have placed human excellence as a higher virtue than rightness and ritualized propriety and placed sageliness as a higher virtue than wisdom, ritualized propriety, and *yue*. It should be noted that it is not about just practicing these virtues; rather it is the harmony among these virtues that makes the human way and the Heavenly way.²² One should not only practice these virtues, but also practice them in harmony. We can understand this as practicing these virtues in a balanced and appropriate manner. These virtues need to be balanced because any lacking in them is not the highest or perfect virtue. For example, a person who practices human excellence, moral rightness, and wisdom, but does not follow rules of propriety, is not good.²³ It needs to be appropriate also because the practicing of these virtues has to suit specific circumstances in order for a person or an action to be really virtuous. When a person can harmoniously practice the four virtues of human excellence, moral rightness, ritualized propriety, and wisdom, he or she accomplishes human goodness. When a person can harmoniously practice the five virtues of human excellence, rightness, ritualized propriety, wisdom, and sageliness, he or she accomplishes the Heavenly Virtue. It is not just these virtues, but the harmony among them, that leads to happiness, to the ultimate Virtue, and to the prosperity of the world. Thus, harmony is given the utmost importance in Confucian philosophy.²⁴

In the Daoist text *Dao De Jing* 道德經, *he* is also an important concept. There the expression that “various sounds *he* with one another (*yin sheng xiang he* 音聲相和)” is along with several other pairs of attributes in relationship, namely “that being and non-being produce one another, the difficult and the easy complete one another, the long and the short contrast with one another, and the high and the low attract one another” (*Dao De Jing* 2). Between the two attributes of each of these pairs there is not only contrast but also creative tension. The parallel between the mingling of sounds, on the one hand, and other pairs, on the other, suggests that the *he* of the sounds implies a mutually completing and mutually compensating relationship. It is stated that “the myriad things carry *yin* and embrace *yang*, and achieve harmony (*he*) through the dynamic *qi* (“energy”)” (*Dao De Jing* 42). Everything in the world is affected by *yin* and *yang*. The world is harmonized by the dynamism of the *qi*. It praises the natural state of the baby as the ultimate harmony (*he zhi*

²⁰ “仁義，禮所由生也，四行之所和也。” The *Wu Xing* text of the Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts reads “human excellence and rightness generate *li* and *yue* (仁義，禮樂所由生也).”

²¹ “聖，知禮樂之所由生也，五行之和也。和則樂，樂則有德，有德則邦家舉。”

²² In the *Zhuangzi* there is a similar connection between *he* and Virtue. The Section of *Shan Xing* 繕性 states that “*he* is Virtue (夫德，和也。Chen: 402).” The Section of *De Chong Fu* 德充符 states “the achievement of *he* is called Virtue (德者，成和之脩也)” (Chen: 157).

²³ In *Analects* 15.32, Confucius indicates that a person of *ren* may not always follow the rules of *li*: “[If one] is intelligent enough to acquire something, *ren* enough to keep it, and earnest enough in handling it, but does not act by the rules of *li*, that is still not good.” For a discussion of possible tensions and conflicts between various values, see Li 2006.

²⁴ The above discussion of Confucian texts overlaps in content with my article “The Confucian Ideal of Harmony” (Li 2006), where readers can find a fuller discussion of harmony in Confucian philosophy.

zhi ye 和之至也) (*Dao De Jing* 55). The state of the baby is the most natural. For the Daoist, harmony is the most natural way.

In the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, *he* appears a lot more frequently than in the *Dao De Jing*. The *Zhuangzi* likewise uses *he* in describing the operation of the universe. For instance, the Section of *Qi Wu Lun* 齊物論 states that “there is small *he* when there is little wind and there is great *he* when there is strong wind” (Chen 1984: 33). Here *he* describes the natural symphony, namely a harmony of sounds, generated by various objects in the world. Abundantly, *he* in the *Zhuangzi* is used in describing and prescribing the practice of human agency. As such, it is closely connected to the concept of *wu wei* 無為 or effortless action. In the *Zhuangzi*, *wu wei* does not mean doing nothing as sometimes the notion has been interpreted. Rather it means to take a path that harmonizes with the world. In the Section of *Qi Wu Lun*, the author mocks the monkeys obsessed with having four nuts in the morning and three nuts in the afternoon rather than the other way round. Then Zhuangzi says that “the sage harmonizes (*he*) the ‘yes’ and the ‘no’ and stays by the Heavenly pivot. This is called walking on two tracks (Chen 1984: 62).” To walk on two tracks is to exercise flexibility in harmonizing various forces in the world. It is to uphold virtue and promote harmony in order to smooth the world (*hao he er wu jian* 好和而惡姦) (Chen 1984: 630). *Wu wei* and harmonization are also the best way to situate oneself, and hence the best way to preserve oneself. In the Section of *Zai You* 在宥, the Daoist sage Guangchengzi 廣成子 is quoted as advising the first Chinese ruler HUANG Di 黃帝 to “take care of your self cautiously and things will thrive on their own” (Chen 1984, 279). Then Guangchengzi says that “I hold the One to stay in harmony. Therefore, even though I have lived twelve hundreds years, my body is still in good shape” (Chen 1984: 279). “The One” here is a translation of the word *yi* 一. *Yi* in Daoist literature has often been interpreted as “Dao.” Therefore, to say that “I hold the One to stay in harmony” can mean that “I follow the Dao to stay in harmony.” *Yi* may also be interpreted to mean simplicity. Given that “the One” immediately follows the advice to “take care of your self cautiously and things will thrive on their own,” and that this advice has a strong connotation of *wu wei*, it is reasonable to assume that this “One” implies the ideal of *wu wei*. According to this interpretation, the purpose of *wu wei* is to achieve and to maintain harmony in the world.

Furthermore, the *Zhuangzi* promotes harmony as a positive value. In the section of *Xu Wu Gui* 徐無鬼, sage Xu Wu Gui says that “gods love harmony and hate trickery” (Chen 1984: 630).²⁵ The Section of *Tian Dao* 天道 states that “understanding the virtue of the Heaven and Earth is the most fundamental understanding. People with this kind of understanding can harmonize with Heaven. Those who can equalize and reconcile (*jun tiao* 均調) the world can harmonize with people. Harmonizing with people is called human happiness.²⁶ Harmonizing with Heaven is called Heavenly happiness” (Chen 1984: 340). In his classical Commentary of the *Zhuangzi*, GUO Xiang 郭象 (252–312) writes, “[the sage] can follow the path of Heaven and is responsive to people. Therefore he can harmonize with Heaven to the utmost and harmonize with people to the greatest” (*Twenty-two Masters*

²⁵ In his classical Commentary of the *Zhuangzi* the Tang Daoist scholar CHENG Xuanying 成玄英 (ca. 601–690) interprets this sentence as that “the holy people love to harmonize and identify with things and hates to keep to oneself 夫神聖之人，好與物而同而惡姦私者” (*Collected Annotations of the Zhuangzi* 莊子集釋, on the *Xu Wu Gui* Chapter, <http://www.sinica.edu.tw/ftms-bin/ftmsw3>). The authenticity of some of the chapters in the *Zhuangzi* has been disputed. I will not get into the dispute here.

²⁶ GUO Xiang 郭象 in his *Commentary of the Zhuangzi* 莊子注 says that *le* 樂 should be read as *luo*, namely happiness or cheerfulness (*Twenty-two Masters*: 44). The word can also be read as *yue*, or music. In ancient times, *yue* was a combination of music, dance, and poetry. If we read the word this way, it echoes earlier development of the concept of *he* as we discussed earlier in the essay.

1986: 44).²⁷ On the same paragraph, CHENG Xuanying 成玄英, another classical Commentator of the *Zhuangzi*, writes, “*jun* 均 means making even, and *tiao* 調 means making smooth. In addition, [the sage] interacts with the world without a fixed will; he uses his influence in evening out and going along with everything; and he is identified with everything in the world. Therefore, he harmonizes with people.”²⁸ Thus, in the *Zhuangzi* harmony is understood primarily in terms of accord with the world. The Daoist sage is selfless and follows the flow of the world. It is evident that in the *Zhuangzi*, *he* or harmonization is a guiding philosophy for the enlightened.

In comparison, we can find two major differences between the Daoist and the Confucian notions of harmony. First, whereas Daoist harmony, particularly in the *Zhuangzi*, is primarily between humanity and the natural world, the Confucian sage in pursuit of harmony is more active in taking initiatives to generate harmony within society, even though harmonizing the world is also included in the Confucian ideal.²⁹ Second, in promoting harmony Confucians are more proactive than their Daoist counterpart. Whereas in Daoism harmony with the world is more of a matter of accommodating the natural world, which seems to have a tendency to harmonize in itself, Confucians emphasize the need to take action toward harmonization, including transforming society and the world in order to achieve harmony. We may characterize this important difference as that, whereas the thrust of Confucianism is to harmonize the world, the thrust of Daoism is to harmonize *with* the world.

While the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi* emphasize harmony between humanity and nature, *he* in the *Mozi* primarily concerns human relationships. Mozi (ca. 470–390 BCE) makes a direct connection between harmony and love. He writes, “between Heaven and Earth, within the four seas, the feelings of Heaven and Earth and the harmony of *yin* and *yang* is everywhere. Even the sages cannot alter it” (*Mozi* 6; *Twenty-two Masters* 1986: 228). For Mozi, the mutual need between the female and the male is universal, in humans as well as in animals. It is the nature of *yin* and *yang*. Harmony between *yin* and *yang* mandates accommodation of this universal need. The ruler and the sage must take this fact into consideration as they lead the people. Mozi writes, “when [the relationship between] husband and wife is regulated, Heaven and Earth are harmonized” (*Mozi* 6, *Twenty-two Masters* 1986: 228). Being regulated is being made appropriate; being made appropriate is being in harmony. Love is not limited between husband and wife.³⁰ Mozi writes,

When there is love between local lords they do not fight. When there is love between heads of households they do not conspire to usurp one another. When there is love between common people they do not harm one another. When there is love between the king and the minister, the king is kind and the minister loyal. When there is love between the father and the son, the father is caring and the son filial. When there is love between brothers, there is harmony and accord. (*Mozi* 15; *Twenty-two Masters* 1986: 236)

If people do not love one another, there is no harmony; the lack of harmony harms the entire world. Mozi writes, “when the father is not kind and the son is not filial, when

²⁷ “夫順天所以應人也，故天和至而人和盡也。”

²⁸ “均，平也。調，順也。且應感無心，方之影響，均平萬有，大順物情，而混紋同塵，故與人和也。” In *Collected Annotations of the Zhuangzi* 莊子集釋, on the *Tian Dao* Chapter (<http://www.sinica.edu.tw/ftms-bin/ftmsw3>).

²⁹ The Confucian ideal of harmony between humanity and the natural world is expressed in such texts as the *Zhongyong* and the *Yijing*. See Li 2004.

³⁰ For a discussion of the meaning of *ai* 愛, which is rendered here as “love” for the sake of simplicity, see Li 1999: 97–98.

brothers are not harmonious and smooth in relationship, that is great harm in the world” (Mozi 15; *Twenty-two Masters* 1986: 236).

In comparison with the Confucian ideal of harmony, which stresses the dynamic nature of tension and diversity within harmony, Mozi emphasizes the aspect of accord in harmony. He was one of the earliest philosophers to promote the notion of *he he* 和合, namely harmony and unity.³¹ The opposite of *he he* is *li san* 離散, separated and scattered, as indicated in Mozi’s expression of “*li san bu neng xiang he he* 離散不能相和合” (Mozi 11; *Twenty-two Masters* 1986: 232). He maintains that, when people do not love one another, they fall apart. For example, Mozi writes, “when within the family father, son, and brothers resent and hate one another, they all want to move apart and cannot form harmony and unity (*he he*) among themselves” (Mozi 12; *Twenty-two Masters* 1986: 232). Along with the notion of *he he* is that of *shang tong* 尚同, namely promoting uniformity or sameness. Mozi holds that in order to achieve harmony and unity, people must share the same idea. He writes, “what is the reason for the world to have order? It is only because the government promotes the same idea” (Mozi 13; *Twenty-two Masters* 1986: 235). Perhaps it is appropriate to say that the disparity between the Confucian and Mozi’s ideals of harmony on difference and sameness is a matter of degree. Confucians do not oppose sameness per se whereas Mozi does not aim to eliminate difference all together. Nevertheless, when we place these two conceptions of harmony side by side, it is evident that Confucians are more willing to accommodate differences and less eager to embrace sameness, whereas Mozi is wary of differences and more inclined toward sameness. It can be argued that while the Moist emphasis on the sameness or similarity between human beings is conducive to unity in the world, the Confucian notion of harmony is more suitable to our contemporary world where pluralism and diversity are a reality, because the latter leaves more room for differences.

3

There is a remarkable resemblance between the Chinese³² and the Greek on the evolution of the concept of harmony during the “axial” age. The English word “harmony” came from Latin *harmonia* and from Greek *ἁρμονία*, which means “concord of sounds.” The word *ἁρμονία* (*harmonia*) is from *ἁρμός* (*harmos*), which means “joint” or “means of joint,”³³ suggesting that harmony is the coming-together of different things.

Heraclitus and the Pythagoreans are among the earliest Greek philosophers to explore the notion of harmony. Heraclitus (ca. 535–ca. 475 BCE) defines harmony as “the opposites in concert.” He said that “that which is in opposition is in concert, and from things that differ comes the most beautiful harmony” (Fragment 8; Freeman 1983: 25). He criticized those unenlightened on the essence of harmony: “they do not understand how that which differs with itself is in agreement: harmony consists of opposing tension, like that of the bow and the lyre” (Fragment 51; Freeman 1983: 28). Thus, tension and opposition are essential to harmony. For instance, “cold things grow hot, [and] hot things grow cold” (Fragment 126;

³¹ The term *he he* does not appear in any of the Confucian *Thirteen Classics*. It only appears once in the *Lilun* 禮論 (On Ritualized Propriety) Chapter of the *Xunzi*, where it is used to describe a happy gathering rather than as a philosophical concept (“when people are happily together 人之歡欣和合之時”) (see *Twenty-two Masters*: 337). The expression, however, was picked up by later Confucians.

³² In this section, I use “Chinese” as a short-hand expression for Confucian and Daoist as well as “the pre-Confucian and pre-Daoist” as explored in the first section, leaving out the less influential Moist.

³³ It has the Indo-European language root “*ar-*,” which means “to fit together.” See Franklin (2002).

Freeman 1983: 33). Hot and cold form a hot–cold continuum in a single entity. He also stated that day and night are one and are essentially connected and interdependent (Fragment 57; Freeman 1983: 46). Without opposition and tension, there is not real harmony. Moreover, he maintained that out of all things there comes a unity and out of a unity all things (Fragment 10; Freeman 1983: 25). For Heraclitus, unity exists in the variety of things and things with opposing tensions form a unity. He also held that harmony can be hidden and hence escapes people’s attention, perhaps because people usually see opposition and tension as incompatible with harmony and they usually look for harmony in places without opposition and tension. Heraclitus maintained, however, that hidden harmony is better or stronger than harmony on the surface, the visible (Fragment 54; Freeman 1983: 28). Only those with wisdom, presumably like himself, can understand real harmony and see the value of it. Heraclitus’s notion of the *logos* of the world is modeled after fire. Fire is fluid, dynamic, and constantly renewing. To use another metaphor, living in the world is analogous to walking in a river, in which everything changes constantly. It is in this kind of constant change and a universal absence of permanence that harmony or harmonization takes its course.

The scholar of Greek philosophy W. K. C. Guthrie interprets Heraclitus’s doctrine of the “harmony of opposites” in three ways. First, because everything is made of opposites, all things are subject to internal tension, as in his example of bow and lyre. Second, the opposites are in some important sense identical. The identity of opposites implies several relationships, such as reciprocal succession as that of day and night, relativity to the perspectives of the subject as “donkey prefer chaff to gold” (Fragment 9; Freeman 1983: 25), and inclusion in the same object of different aspects as in that “the way up and down is one and the same” (Fragment 60; Freeman 1983: 29). It also includes the fact that, in the sphere of values, opposites can be appreciated only in contrast with their opposites. Third, tension and struggles between opposites are the universal and creative force of harmony (Guthrie 1962: 445–446). Harmony comes from contrary elements and contrary movements that are neutralized by equilibrium in a balance of forces. Without tension and opposites there can be no harmony. This is a point where Heraclitus differs significantly from the Pythagoreans, who emphasized the concordant relation in harmony.

To some extent, Heraclitus’s understanding of harmony resembles his Chinese counterpart in that they both see harmony as an integration of different forces and as an on-going process in a fluid yet dynamic world. This notion of harmony does not presuppose a given, fixed underlying structure in the world; if the world is to have a structure, it is a result of the harmonizing process rather than a precondition for harmony. We may call this radical notion of harmony “deep harmony” as opposed to the kind of harmony seen as conforming to a pre-existing structure in the world. A prominent theme of ancient Chinese cosmogony is that the world began with *hun dun* 混沌 or chaos. Studies indicate that, by the time of the Eastern Zhou period (770–256 BCE), *hun dun* had become a common theme across various schools (Girardot 1984: 54). The *Chu Silk Manuscript A* 楚帛書•甲篇, which some scholars have referred to as the Chinese “Genesis” (*Chuangshu Pian* 創世篇) (Dong 2002), describes the initial state of the universe in terms of “*mengmeng momo, wangzhang bibi* 夢夢墨墨, 亡章弼弼.” *Mengmeng* implies cloudiness (i.e., *mengmeng* 朦朦); *momo* indicates darkness. *Wangzhang* means without patterns. Together the two expressions describe an undifferentiated state of chaos. RAO Zongyi 饒宗頤 interpreted this as saying that, at the beginning stage of the universe things have not taken their forms (Rao and Zeng 1985: 11). The *Dao Yuan* 道原 text of the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* states, “In the very beginning, all things were undifferentiated and unsubstantiated. The undifferentiated and unsubstantiated is the One; The One perseveres 恆先之初, 迴(洞)同大虛, 虛同為一, 恆一而止” (Rao and Zeng 1985: 11). The “One” is the Dao. The text states of the Dao that “its name is One; its home is non-substantiation; its nature is effortless action; and its function is harmony—

者其號也，虛其舍也，無為其素也，和其用也” (Rao and Zeng 1985: 11). On this understanding, the original, primordial *hun dun* is the unmanifested Dao. This Dao generates everything in the world through harmonization. This notion of Dao does not have a pre-given form. It is fluid, generative as well as generated (manifested). The *Jing-Guan* 經·觀 text of the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* quotes supposedly the Yellow Emperor as speaking of the beginning *hun dun* where “there was neither dark nor bright, neither *yin* nor *yang*. With *yin* and *yang* not being set, I have nothing to name for. Then it started to be divided into two, as *yin* or *yang*, and further divided into the four seasons. [When] the firm and soft complement each other, the myriad things are produced. 無晦無明，未有陰陽。陰陽未定，吾未有以名。今始判為兩，分為陰陽，離為四時，剛柔相成，萬物乃生” (see <http://ef.cdpa.nsysu.edu.tw/ccw/01/hunkin.htm>). The Dao gives rise to *yin* and *yang*. Through the forces of *yin* and *yang*, the Dao generates the myriad things. We may say that the Dao evolves as harmony takes shape in the world. Deep harmony in this sense is a self-generating harmony reaching the most fundamental level of the world.³⁴

In contrast, the Pythagorean notion of harmony is more structured and fixed. Although Pythagoras (ca. 582–ca. 507 BCE) came a few decades before Heraclitus and their times may have overlapped,³⁵ the school of philosophy he founded lasted long after Heraclitus, and later Pythagoreans like Philolaus of Tarentum (ca. 480–ca. 405 BCE) contributed greatly to the Pythagorean notion of harmony. In Pythagoras, order and harmony are established in numbers. Aristotle describes Pythagoras and his followers this way,

The Pythagoreans...were the first to take up mathematics, not only advanced this study, but also having been brought up in it they thought its principles were the principles of all things. Since of these principles numbers are by nature the first, and in numbers they seemed to see many resemblances to the things that exist and come into being—more than in fire and earth and water... since, again, they saw that the modifications and the ratios of the musical scales were expressible in numbers; — since, then, all other things seemed in their whole nature to be modeled on numbers, and numbers seemed to be the first things in the whole of nature, they supposed the elements of numbers to be the elements of all things, and the whole heaven to be a musical scale [*harmonia*] and a number. (*Metaphysics*, 985b, 23ff; McKeon 1947: 255)

The earliest use of *harmonia* by the Pythagoreans has to do with the tuning of musical instruments (see Burnet 1968: 35), and it is realized in a musical scale. It has more to do with the relation of proportion between elements than harmony in the sense we use it today. However, they expanded this notion to the entire world and interpreted the world as harmonious. Pythagoras has been credited with being the first to apply the name *kosmos* to the world, in recognition of the rational order embedded in it, as *kosmos* meant order (Guthrie 1962: 208, 110), and the first to come up with the notion of the harmony of the spheres. In this way, *harmonia* becomes harmony in the general sense of the word. For the Pythagoreans, numbers are the ultimate principle of everything; even God is not the first cause in the cosmos; numbers and harmony are first in relation to God (Robin 1928: 69). Numbers are taken to be the “wisest” of things in the world; numbers are a harmonious unification of the opposites because they alternatively change their qualities between even and odd (Robin 1928: 56). Real harmony exists in numerical ratios, which can be found in music.

³⁴ Although the above quoted texts have a close Daoist association, the code of reference of Chinese cosmogony was shared by both Daoism and Confucianism (See Girardot: 39). Both Daoism and Confucianism subscribe to the notions of Original *Qi* 元氣 and of the *yin-yang* principles.

³⁵ W. K. C. Guthrie writes, “the life of Heraclitus also in all likelihood overlapped that of Pythagoras” (Guthrie: 157).

Philolaus wrote the first account of Pythagoreanism and defined the concept of harmony in some way similar to Heraclitus, namely as “a unity of many mixed (*elements*), and an agreement between the disagreeing (*elements*),” or the accordance of the discordant (Fragment 10; Freeman 1983: 75). Like Heraclitus, Philolaus understood harmony as presupposing opposition and tension, similar to the kind of tension existing between the opposite ends of the strings in a lyre. Beautiful sounds of harmony are produced because there is opposing tension. For Philolaus, the existence of unlike and unrelated elements in the world both requires and proves the existence of harmony. He writes, “the things which were like and related needed no harmony; but the things which were unlike and unrelated and unequally arranged are necessarily fastened together by such a harmony, through which they are destined to endure in the universe” (Fragment 6; Freeman 1983: 74). However, Philolaus does not hold this understanding of harmony as the unity of opposites against a fluid, constantly-changing universe as Heraclitus does. Following the Pythagorean tradition of making numbers the foundation of the universe, Philolaus offers a specific account as to how harmony is to be understood in terms of the octave in music:

The content of the Harmony (*Octave*) is the major fourth and the major fifth; the fifth is greater than the fourth by a whole tone; for from the highest string (*lowest note*) to the middle is a fourth, and from the middle to the lowest string (*highest note*) is a fifth. From the lowest to the third string is a fourth, from the third to the highest string is a fifth. Between the middle and third strings is a tone. The major fourth has the ratio 3:4, the fifth 2:3, and the octave 1:2. Thus the Harmony (*Octave*) consists of five whole tones and two semitones, the fifth consists of three tones and a semitone, and the fourth consists of two tones and a semitone (Fragment 6; Freeman 1983: 74).

Here Philolaus is perhaps reiterating a theory first developed by Pythagoras himself, as F. M. Cornford writes that “the original source of the theory [lies in] Pythagoras’s discovery that the concordant intervals of the musical scale or *harmony* could be expressed exactly in terms of the ‘simple’ ratios” (Cornford 1922: 144–145).³⁶ The octave is a fixed system with predetermined intervals. The interval between, say C up to F is a major (or perfect) fourth, and between C up to G is a major (or perfect) fifth. The ration of frequency between C and F is 3:4, between C and G is 2:3, and between any C and the same pitch class an octave higher is 1:2. Harmonics is the fifth subject of study in the Pythagorean program of education, following arithmetic, plane geometry, solid geometry, and astronomy. As in other subjects of science, the principle of harmonics has to be expressed in numerical ratios.³⁷

The Pythagoreans also considered the soul to be a kind of harmony. For them, the soul is a harmonious ratio in the body. On one understanding, this means that such a harmony in the human body is like *harmonia* (an “attunement”) is in the lyre.³⁸ However, this may not mean that the soul is a relation between the physical body parts. In the *Metaphysics*

³⁶ John Burnet also writes, “it may be taken as certain that Pythagoras himself discovered the numerical ratios which determine the concordant intervals of the scale” (Burnet: 45).

³⁷ It may be appropriate to mention at this point that the chimes of the Marquis of Zeng (the fifth century BCE), excavated in Sui County of Hubei Province, China in 1978, show that the word 蘇 *he* had been used to name the fourth interval of the ancient Chinese tone system (Huang 1979: 36). While the significance of this ancient use of 蘇 *he* still needs to be investigated, it is nevertheless clear that the word was not used to denote a relation between tones as in Philolaus. Therefore, this fact does not indicate in a meaningful way a Chinese notion of harmony similar to that of the Pythagoreans.

³⁸ In reference to the Pythagorean theory of the soul, Aristotle writes, “Its supporters say that the soul is a kind of harmony, for harmony is a blend or composition of contraries, and the body is compounded out of contraries” (*De Anima* 407, 32ff; McKeon: 160)

Aristotle says that the soul for the Pythagoreans is a modification of numbers (985b 30; McKeon 1947: 255). Just as musical harmony is the attunement of numerical ratios, the soul as harmony is also the attunement of numerical ratios. Because only numbers are ultimately real; it is only logical for them that the soul as the essential reality has to be a numerical ratio. The Pythagoreans may not have made a strict distinction between the body and the soul as they seemed to hold that numbers have magnitude and spatial extension (Guthrie 1962: 280). After all, everything, including physical bodies, is made of numbers.³⁹ Therefore it is conceivable that the soul can be embedded in the body and can be in some way purified. Indeed, they believed that it is by contemplating the *kosmos* that the soul becomes orderly (*kosmios*) as well (Guthrie 1962: 211).⁴⁰ Cornford writes, “the attainment of that purity [of the soul] which is to release the soul at last from the wheel of incarnation, may now be construed as the reproduction, in the individual, of the cosmic harmony—the divine order of the world. Herein lies the secret of the power of music over the soul” (Cornford 1950: 20).

Like their Chinese counterpart, the Pythagoreans saw music as a prototype of harmony. But unlike the former, they went to the point to equate harmony with numerical ratios and abstract mathematical formulas. As such, their understanding of harmony had a strong quantitative tendency since the very beginning. The Chinese understanding of harmony, on the other hand, starts with a strong qualitative characteristic, namely it focuses on what kind of elements (e.g., different and opposed) situated in what kind of relationship (e.g., balanced and mutual enhancing). If we can say that the Pythagorean notion of harmony had a quantitative and somewhat scientific orientation in it,⁴¹ this orientation was not nearly as predominant in the Chinese notion from the very beginning. While the Chinese also used music as a model in understanding harmony—which incorporated numerical considerations⁴²—their preferred model for harmony is down to earth, like soup, something much more tangible and manifest than numbers. The use of numerical elements in YAN Ying’s statement cited earlier in this essay probably serves more an aesthetic purpose than is literally true. There is another difference between the Pythagoreans and early Chinese on their initial conceptions of harmony in music. The Chinese started with the model of different sounds responding with one another. The Pythagoreans, on the other hand, began with a linear (or sequential) model of sounds. Commenting on the Pythagoreans’ understanding of music, John Burnet writes, “Of course, when the Greeks called certain intervals concordant they were thinking primarily of notes sounded in succession and not simultaneously. In other words, the term refers to melodic progressions and not to what we call harmonious chords” (Burnet 1968: 35). This even applies to their theory of the harmony of the spheres, which for the Pythagoreans means the concordant intervals built in the structures of the heavenly bodies (see Burnet 1968: 44). This one dimension model of harmony has roots in the Pythagorean divinization of number, which is taken to be solely

³⁹ Aristotle holds such a reading of the Pythagoreans and complains that they confused formal and material causes (see Guthrie: 236).

⁴⁰ A similar view can be found in Plato’s *Republic*, 500c. In Plato’s *Pythagoras*, Pythagoras says to Hippocrates, who is desirous of joining his classes, that “you will gain this by coming to my classes, that on the day when you join them you will go home a better man, and on the day after it will be the same; every day you will constantly improve more and more” (318a; Goold 1977: 121).

⁴¹ According to Robin, the Pythagorean philosophy of number was based on the “the experimental observation of the fact that the qualities and relationships of musical concords are constituted by numbers,” and their use of mathematics was of great importance to the progress of science (Robin: 56, 62).

⁴² For discussion of the numerical elements in ancient Chinese music, see Scott Cook 1995, Chapter 1.

responsible for harmony; number is sequential in nature and the perfectly rhythmic alternation of odd and even in number is an unmistakably linear progression. In contrast, the Chinese since the very beginning have thought of harmony as various (more than just opposing) elements simultaneously interacting with one another, and hence have had a much broader conception of harmony. The Chinese notion of harmony is multi-dimensionally dynamic rather than rigidly structured in a linear sequential pattern as in the Pythagorean numeric model; it does not admit a fixed formula and it is open-ended and continuously self-renewing. These differences between the Pythagorean and Chinese conceptions of harmony may have a significant influence on people's attitude toward how harmony is to be realized. If harmony is founded on a linear, logical, inherent structure of the world, we need to discover this reality and conform to it; if harmony is a multi-dimensional, inclusive, and dynamic creative process, we need to participate in a proactive way to generate it through collaboration. Different approaches can result in different patterns of action in practice.

Now it is time to turn to Plato's ideal of harmony. In his *Republic* Plato famously lays out his philosophy of justice in the state and in the individual. For Plato, justice in the state consists in the harmonious existence of the three classes, each being engaged in its own business. Justice in a person lies in the harmony of the three elements of the soul. He writes,

A man is just in the same way that a state is just. And we have surely not forgotten that justice in the state meant that each of the three orders in it was doing its own proper work. So we may henceforth bear in mind that each one of us likewise will be a just person, fulfilling his proper function, only if the several parts of our nature fulfill theirs (*Republic* 441d-e; Cornford 1945: 139–140).

For Plato, the three parts of the soul have to come into harmony in order for the soul to be just. This requires reason and the spirited element of the soul to be brought into accord and the two together are set in command over the appetites. Plato designs an educational program for his ideal city with the purpose “to bring the two elements into tune with one another by adjusting the tension of each other to the right pitch” (Cornford 1945: 102). Harmony between the three elements is a structured harmony, with reason in control, assisted by the spirited element, and appetites in check. Specifically, this means,

The just man [*sic*] does not allow the several elements in his soul to usurp one another's functions; he is indeed one who sets his house in order, by self-mastery and discipline coming to be at peace with himself, and bringing into tune those three parts, like the terms in the proportion of a musical scale, the highest and lowest notes and the mean between them, with all the intermediate intervals. Only when he has linked these parts together in well-tempered harmony and has made himself one man instead of many, will he be ready to go about whatever he may have to do. (Cornford 1945: 142)

The three classes of people in the state and the three elements of the soul represent respectively three cardinal virtues, i.e., wisdom, courage, and temperance. The structured harmony of the three classes and the three elements of the soul represent the cardinal virtue of justice. This emphasis of the harmony among virtues resembles in some way the emphasis of harmony among virtues in classic Confucianism as we discussed in part 2 of this essay. For Confucians, it is not just the practice of the virtues, but the practice of the virtues in harmony, that results in the highest virtue. For example, the virtue of rightness (*yi*) and that of ritualized propriety (*li*) must come into harmony in order for the Confucian to be really virtuous. In Plato, the virtues of wisdom, courage, and temperance need to be in

harmony; such harmony of virtues can be achieved by the right kind of education program “blended in perfect proportion” (Cornford 1945: 102). For both Confucians and Plato, appropriate relationships between the virtues are just as important as the virtues themselves.

There is, however, a fundamental difference between Plato’s harmony and Confucian harmony. Whereas for ancient Confucians as well as ancient Daoists harmony is “deep harmony” without a pre-set order, Plato’s harmony is to conform to a firm, pre-set, rational order imposed onto the world from outside. In *Timaeus*, Plato presents a cosmogony which departs fundamentally from ancient Greek mythology. In Hesiod’s *Theogony*, the world began with the formless, orderless Chaos. Often described as a misty void, vast and dark, Chaos without external forces gave birth to Gaia, Eros, Tartarus, and Erebus. In a sharp contrast, Timaeus (*alias* Plato) in a conspicuous Pythagorean mood tells us a creation story in accounting for the order and beauty in the world. The Demiurge, he tells us, created the world by imposing mathematical order in it, because order is good and disorder is bad. In doing so, God made a soul for the world according to his plan. Though invisible, the world soul partakes of reason and harmony. It is this world soul that each individual’s personal soul must emulate. Timaeus distinguishes the unchanging from the changing. The unchanging can only be apprehended by intelligence and reason. The realm of the unchanging is the realm of Plato’s Forms.⁴³ Plato’s harmony is established on the Forms. The Forms are prior to harmony in the state and the individual. For Plato, the just state is the Good state, which imitates the Form of Good. The soul cannot become harmonized until it recognizes the Forms of the cardinal virtues; the soul’s harmony is nothing but its union with the outward Forms answering thereto (Cornford 1945: 91). In order to achieve this goal, one must contemplate “a world of unchanging and harmonious order.” In doing so, “the philosopher, in constant companionship with the divine order of the world, will reproduce that order in his soul and, so far as man may, become godlike” (Cornford 1945: 209). Plato’s philosopher is able to not only apprehend the unchanging Form of Good but also align himself with such order already embedded in the world.

In this sense, Plato’s harmony resembles Pythagorean harmony in an important way, even though they differ in other aspects. They are both conformist harmony, seeing harmony as complying with a pre-given, perfect order in the world. This is not the case for the Chinese, at least not for the mainstream in Chinese traditions. Daoism places the formless *wu* 無 (Nothingness) before *you* 有 (Being). While Confucianism strongly promotes social order, as far as its metaphysics is concerned, generative creativity (*sheng sheng* 生生) without pre-set order is definitely its central theme, as evidenced in such texts as the *Yi Jing* 易經. The Chinese “deep harmony” is not without order. However its order is of a different kind. It is generated rather than pre-given; it is secondary to the forever changing, elusive, and generating Dao. As the function of the Dao, harmonization generates order; generated order in turn becomes element of continuous harmonization.⁴⁴

In conclusion, the ancient Chinese concept of harmony is best understood as a comprehensive process of harmonization. It encompasses spatial as well as temporal dimensions, metaphysical as well as moral and aesthetical dimensions.⁴⁵ It is a fundamentally open notion in the sense that it does not aim to conform to any pre-set

⁴³ I read the *Timaeus* as largely consistent with the *Republic* in the aspects relevant to our discussion. For the relation of the *Timaeus* to Plato’s other Dialogues, readers can see Owen 1965 and Cherniss 1965.

⁴⁴ Unfortunately, this ancient understanding of harmony is to a large extent lost in the Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, which takes the Heavenly Principle (*tian li* 天理) as the order and foundation of the world. “Principle” (*li* 理) only occupies a subordinate role in classic Confucianism.

⁴⁵ For a rich discussion of Confucius’s and Plato’s notion of harmony in relation to poetry, see Cai 2002: Chapter 5, on “Poetics of Harmony: Plato and Confucius on Poetry.”

order. This broader, richer, and more liberal understanding of harmony has had a profound influence on Chinese culture as whole in its long history.⁴⁶

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