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The Significance of Chinese Intellectual History for a Better Understanding of Contemporary Chinese Society: The Ideological Construction of “Harmony” and Its Interpretations in Mainland China and Taiwan

Abstract

Through the lens of the contemporary ideologization of the classical philosophic term harmony (*he* 和), the present article deals with the question of the relation between the Chinese tradition on the one side, and contemporary Chinese society on the other. First, it introduces the contemporary interpretation of the notion of harmony and reveals the reasons for its integration into the current revitalization of Confucianism. Through the analysis of classical Confucian texts, it then shows that the current interpretation is not founded upon the proto-democratic elements of original Confucianism, but rather upon the autocratic and state-generating line of Confucianism that was developed by Xunzi,

who represents a bridge between Confucianism and Legalism. Through the analysis and interpretation of the classical notion of harmony it then indicates that the interpretations generated by the crucial representatives of the Taiwanese Modern Confucians are – in contrast to those developed on the mainland – following the much more egalitarian and democratic lines of classical Confucian philosophy that were elaborated by Mencius. In the conclusion, the author reveals the significance of such differentiations in the context of evaluating the political and social systems of contemporary China. This significance is not merely limited to the recognition of autocratic elements within contemporary Chinese ideology, but also manifests itself in new possibilities of revitalization and upgrading of such elements of the Chinese ideational tradition, that can help us to generate a new, specifically Chinese model of democracy.

Keywords: harmony, Confucianism, Confucian state doctrine, Confucian philosophy, intellectual history, ideology

Povzetek - Pomen poznavanja kitajske idejne zgodovine za razumevanje sodobne kitajske družbe: primer idejnega konstrukta »harmonije« in njegove interpretacije na kitajski celini ter na Tajvanu

Članek obravnava vprašanje razmerja med kitajsko tradicijo in sodobno kitajsko družbo na primeru sodobne ideologizacije klasičnega filozofskega termina harmonije (*he* 和). Najprej prikaže sodobno interpretacijo pojma harmonije in izpostavi razloge za njegovo umestitev v sodobno revitalizacijo konfucianizma. Potem skozi analizo klasičnih konfucijanskih besedil prikaže, da gre pri sodobni interpretaciji koncepta harmonije v LR Kitajski za interpretacijo, ki ne sloni na proto-demokratskih elementih izvornega konfucijanstva, temveč sledi avtokratski in državotvorni liniji konfucianizma, ki se je razvila na osnovi idej Xunzija, kateri v resnici predstavlja most med egalitarnostjo izvornega konfucijanstva in despotskimi izhodišči legalizma. S pomočjo analize interpretacij klasičnega pojma harmonije nato prikaže, da sledijo interpretacije tajvanskega modernega konfucijanstva – v nasprotju z izhodišči konfucijanskega prepoveda, kakršen se je razvil na celini – egalitarnejšim in bolj demokratičnim smernicam klasičnega konfucijanstva, ki sledi liniji Mengzijeve filozofije.

V zaključku izpostavi pomen prepoznavanja tovrstnih razlikovanj v kontekstu vrednotenja političnih in družbenih sistemov sodobne Kitajske. Ta se ne kaže zgolj v prepoznavanju avtokratskih elementov znotraj sodobne kitajske ideologije, temveč tudi v tem, da nam nudi tudi možnosti revitalizacije in nadgradnje tistih elementov kitajske tradicije, ki lahko pripomorejo k izdelavi specifično kitajskega modela demokracije.

Ključne besede: harmonija, konfucijanstvo, konfucianizem, idejna zgodovina, ideologija

Introduction

The main purpose of the present article is to shed light on the need to preserve and develop classical studies in the context of contemporary East Asian studies. Even if, in modern, application-oriented programs, detailed historical or even classical philological studies are considered outdated, useless, or even reactionary, in the article I will clearly show that this view is too superficial and one-dimensional. It is precisely these kinds of studies that can offer us a more differentiated and correct insight into contemporary East Asian politics, as they take into account the ideological background that defines this modern politics and its ideological connotations.

In this I will focus on the case of present-day China.¹ In the past twenty years we have been noticing across Europe (and partly also the USA) a tendency towards the elimination of classical sinology from university curriculums. This scientific field, which in addition to the study of contemporary Chinese language and society also includes an examination of the classical Chinese ideational tradition and the study of classical Chinese, is increasingly being replaced by the science of so-called “Chinese studies”, the subject of which is limited to the contemporary Chinese language and the specific features of modern Chinese society and culture.

The present article is built upon the supposition that to acquire an in-depth understanding of the circumstances of the present-day People’s Republic of China, it is absolutely necessarily to have a good grasp of its ideational tradition and history. I will support this supposition with a multi-layered contrast analysis of the classical and contemporary interpretations of the philosophical concept of harmony (*he* 和), which belongs to the central elements of the modern ideology being propagated in the People’s Republic of China (PRC, hereafter) in the context of the revival of Confucianism.

The argumentation that will lead us to the verification of the hypothesis will be established on three different levels:

1. On the level of ideologizing by looking at the concept of harmony in the modern PRC,
2. On the level of interpretations by considering the representatives of Taiwanese Modern Confucianism,
3. On the level of presentation by exploring classical interpretations of the concept of harmony.

1 Similar research could also be carried out in Japan, Korea and any other area of classical Sinitic culture, where Confucian ideational heritage is dominant. However, since I myself am a sinologist, and also due to the space limitations of this journal, I will focus exclusively on the already mentioned two areas of this cultural sphere, i.e. Taiwan and mainland China.

Through this kind of three-part analysis I will demonstrate that there is an essential difference between the Taiwanese and mainland interpretations of the concept of harmony and that the consequences of this difference can be observed in the different conceptualizations of Chinese modernization and the Chinese socio-political system. Based on the results of this analysis it will become clear that knowledge of the Chinese ideational tradition is a necessary prerequisite for a comprehensive understanding of the complex social reality of modern China.

1 Harmony as an ideological construct of the Chinese government

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The idea of a “harmonious society” represents one of the central elements of the P.R. China’s current ideology. Although the concept of harmony, which serves as the basis of this idea, is often explicitly characterized as derived from Confucian thought, discourses of Modern Confucianism in the PRC only came to the fore again in the last two decades of the last century. Before that, both the character of Confucius and the Confucian tradition as a whole were the subject of numerous government criticisms. Confucius and his teaching were seen as a reactionary and “feudal” ideology, which only protected the interests of the ruling, exploitative classes in China’s history. Moreover, Confucius was also (in the unbroken tradition of the May Fourth cultural upheavals and in light of the Marxist theories of modernization) seen as a symbol of that conservative tradition that held back China’s modernization and is therefore “to blame” for the country’s backwardness.

However, just under two decades later, this criticism turned – for many experts completely unexpectedly – into its opposite. As Helena Motoh points out, one of the first signs of this change appeared in the speech made in 1989 by Gu Mu, one of Chinese modernization’s intellectual fathers, at the celebration of the 2,540th anniversary of Confucius’ birth (Motoh 2009, 91). In it, he emphasized the importance of a “correct” (or rather, *corrected*) attitude towards traditional national culture and promoted the revival of the positive elements of Confucian thought within the framework of their synthetization with Western ideas. He also argued that the Chinese tradition should within this synthesis be given precedence over the Western one (*ibid.*).

This is, of course, no accident, as the concept of a “harmonious society”, whose ideational core was supposedly already present in the original Confucian thought, is among the central elements of the PRC’s contemporary ideo-

logical apparatus. In 2005, President Hu Jintao publicly announced the introduction of the “harmonious society” policy, which was to symbolically mark modern China’s new developmental guidelines. The tendency to harmonize society was at least in part the result of the first negative consequences of the rapid economic liberalization introduced in the 1980s by Deng Xiaoping. Hu inherited from his predecessors an increasingly stratified society. The crisis of the neoliberal measures could mainly be seen in the growing regional differences, fragile and unreliable system of the country’s social services, mass unemployment and structural poverty, and in the growing ecological problems facing the nation.

Even today, the concept of a harmonious society represents one of the more important principles of the Chinese government, and is often highlighted in the keynote speeches made by President Xi Jinping (see Xiang Bo 2018). It was even used in the new Chinese legal reform, and the connection between harmony and law is also often pointed out in Chinese academic articles that deal with the implications of a planned harmonious society:

The foundation of a modern harmonious society is the rule of law, which contains laws, common sense, fairness and justice. What a harmonious society advocates is stability and peace, integrity, friendship and love, and coordinated development. What it pursues is the integration of humanity and nature, as well as healthy and sustainable development. Therefore, a harmonious modern society must first be a society ruled by law. (Zhou 2010, 285)²

As pointed out by Leila Choukrone and Antoine Garapon, it is precisely in the debates taking place around the issue of this connection that it becomes most obvious that in this context the concept of harmony serves primarily as an instrument for the disciplining of citizens (Choukrone & Garapon 2007, 36). In his comments on these new political guidelines, published in the English edition of the official *People’s Daily* newspaper on September 29, 2007, shortly after President Hu’s announcement of his pursuit of a harmonious society, Xiao Zhuoji, a professor at the Peking University and a member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, wrote, among other things: “In addition, we will eliminate the various social ills that represent the poisonous tumor of a harmonious society, and which therefore need to be removed” (Xiao 2007, 4).

2 现代和谐社会的基础是法治，其内涵包括法律、民智、公平、正义。和谐社会所倡导的是人类生活的安定有序、诚信友爱、协调发展，所追求的是人与自然互相融合，健康持续的发展。因此，一个和谐的现代社会必定首先是一个法治社会。

Even in academic articles, we often come across paragraphs that, in the context of a harmonious society, emphasize the importance of discipline and self-restraint and the “correct” attitude towards superiors and the community. As Li Ning points out, such elements can only be achieved on the basis of a “harmonious state of mind”:

The so-called harmonious state of mind means that social members can correctly face social reality, can treat themselves, their fellow human beings and society in the correct way. The state of mind that such people possess is optimistic, active and self-initiative and peaceful. (Li 2010, 9)³

Leila Choukrone and Antoine Garapon (2007, 36) pointed out that the idea of harmony serves as ideological support for the sort of model of legislation that is used as a tool of disciplining and moralizing with the goal of maintaining the ruling regime. That is why harmony (as a supposedly essential part of the Confucian teaching) also serves as a symbol of the sort of Confucius who represented and spread “correct” morality, which is supposed to be manifested in the subordination of the individual to “higher” social goals and in unconditional obedience to superiors.

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2 Taiwanese theorists and the concept of harmonious alignment

The concept of harmony is not only important in mainland China, but also in Taiwan and other regions of East Asia, which have a common, originally Sinitic tradition of philosophical and institutionalized Confucianism. It is also particularly important in the context of the so-called Modern Confucianism, which represents (as we will see in the next chapter) the third reform of Confucian doctrine and is based on the teachings of the Neo-Confucian philosophy of the Song dynasty.

Let us briefly look at the meaning and interpretation of the concept of harmony in the context of the second generation of Modern Confucianism, whose main representatives are Mou Zongsan, Xu Fuguan, Tang Junyi and Fang Dongmei. Among them all but Tang Junyi, who spent most of his life in Hong Kong, emigrated from mainland China to Taiwan after 1949.

In a theoretical sense, Mou Zongsan is considered the most important representative of this generation. At least on an explicit level, Mou does not deal

3 所谓和谐心态,就是指社会成员能够正确面对社会现实,能够正确对待自己、他人和社会,具有乐观向上、积极进取、豁达平和的心理状态。

much with the question of harmony. Some allusions to harmonious life in society can be found in his work *On Summum Bonum* (*Yuan shan lun* 圓善論), in which he tries to explain the method of harmonizing (or aligning) happiness and goodness. In this work, he briefly addresses the question of the interpretation of the original Confucian term “harmony of balance” (*zhong he* 中和). This, first and foremost, it is not just a matter of the social connotation of harmony, as the new ideologues of the PRC have in mind, but rather of their ideological foundations, which are based on the perfection of the individual (and at the same time absolutely integral) moral self.

Mou himself, as well as most other Modern Confucians in Taiwan, was interested in harmony mainly in the sense of balance or equilibrium, which can refer both to the individual self as well as to the structure of society. Such a concept of harmony, harmoniousness, or harmonization comes from one of the oldest Confucian classics, namely *The Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhong yong* 中庸), which is a text rich in symbolic meaning and contains numerous instructions for improving and nurturing one’s personality. It is also often described as an “immovable axis” (Pound 1969, 21).⁴ In his philosophy, Mou started from this kind of concept of harmonious balance, which is dynamic and based on constant balancing between different elements of the whole. This harmony can never be achieved in a way that lasts forever, but instead changes in accordance with the changes in the universe (as well as society and the individual) (Mou 1985, 306).

The balance that appears in the term harmony of balance outwardly acts as the path of the mean, while on a higher level it connects people’s innate qualities with their life. (Xu Fuguan 2005, 127)⁵

The harmony of balance is therefore the intimate basis of the individual, which enables them to live harmoniously with their fellow human beings. In the context of the Modern Confucian view of the world and man, it is precisely the moral self that represents the basis of every individual and at

4 The mean (*zhong*) here mainly means balance without leaning to any one side. The second part of this compound (*yong*) means the common, something that is well-known and familiar and does not change, which does not mean that it is static, but that it is continuous. I myself have decided to translate it in the sense of “a thing’s own path”. According to one of the first translators of this text into English, James Legge, the purpose or goal of this mean is to maintain a harmonious balance that keeps the mind in a state of constant focus. A person who acts according to these principles should never stray from their path, which means that they would always know how to act in accordance with their individual position within the natural and social world. These principles should apply to every individual and teach them to live in accordance with the natural order (cf.: *Li ji* 2012, *Zhong yong* 2012).

5 中和之中, 外發而為中庸, 上則通與性與命。

the same time the core of social and even cosmic rationality. This, of course, presupposes the complementarity of the relationship between the individual and their (natural and social) environment. In other words: this means that social harmony is necessarily connected with the individual's harmonious inner world.

Because in the Modern-Confucian worldview the Cosmos, or everything that exists, is imbued with the value of good, which means that both the apparent forms of reality, as well as its substantial core, reflected in the idea of "things in themselves" or *noumenon*, are axiological concepts, the harmony of human existence is most closely related to moral assumptions. For Xu Fuguan, these values of the good are closely related to the aesthetics of feeling beauty, which is one of the fundamental functions or effects of harmony. This is precisely why, according to Xu, music was so important within the original Confucianism. A deep experience of musical harmony is at the same time the possibility of projecting this harmony into the realm of social reality:

Balance (*zhong*) and harmony were the central aesthetic criteria of music in Confucianism. Behind balance and harmony is hidden the meaning of good, and this is what can move the human heart and arouse goodness in it. (Xu 2001, 14)⁶

In the field of concrete social policy, Xu Fuguan advocates one that would enable the fulfilment of "rational harmony" on the basis of reasonable competition. Coexistence, which is not only a matter for the individual, should be conditioned by the independence of every one of them, and the collective rights of the community should be based on individual rights (Ni 2002, 296-297). But Xu believes that when the people reach a certain level of maturity, and when all the material conditions for this are met, the system of rights will become less important or even unnecessary. For him, this is a similar situation to the one found within families: even if in their relationships members of the same family all claim their individual rights, this is quite unnecessary or even pointless. And yet, in a period when this level of maturity has not yet been reached, new Confucianism must provide society with enough space for a less ideal arrangement. That is why the well-known modern Taiwanese philosopher Liu Shu-hsien taught that at any given moment we must negate tradition precisely in order to be able to re-establish its deepest ideals (*ibid.*, 298).

In any case, and like most other Taiwanese Modern Confucians, Xu Fuguan openly advocates for the kind of harmony of human communities, which is

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

based on the uniqueness and inimitability of each individual. He often justifies this with quotes from Confucius:

In the chapter Twenty Years of Duke Zhao of Zuo's Commentaries to the Spring-Autumn Annals, Yanzi says, "Harmony is like a brodet." Brodet contains a wide variety of flavors that combine into a delicious whole. Therefore, the meaning of "harmony" lies in the fact that it consists of the most diverse combinations of individual peculiarities. None of these individual peculiarities in it lose their uniqueness, but can be harmoniously combined with each other. (Xu 2005, 127)⁷

According to Xu, in this respect, the Chinese tradition is much more advanced than the "Western" one, as it provides people with ethics, aesthetics and axiology that is not limited to rational constructs (*ibid.*, 130).

We find a similar (but even more biased) position regarding the differences between the two "cultures" in the works of Fang Dongmei, whose philosophy is in its very essence focused on the examination of the "typically Chinese" concept of "creative harmony". While he sees Western philosophy as caught in a web of constant contradictions, from which it tries to escape again and again through nihilism (Li 2002, 265), his own tradition of ideas is for him incomparably more sophisticated. The reason for this superiority supposedly lies precisely in its consideration of harmony and harmoniousness:

In contrast, Chinese philosophy maintains a balance between *qing* and *li*⁸. Through cultivation, Chinese philosophy aims at a grand harmony in life; it is like a symphony, with all notes contributing to its harmonious unity (Fang 1980, 93).

This "harmonious whole" derives from his central concept of "comprehensive harmony" based on the notion of the universe as a balanced and harmonious system. Since he sees this type of paradigm as the basis of Chinese philosophy, for Fang the Chinese ideal of life is necessarily harmonious, and in this there is no room for conflict, nor for selfishness. However, this harmony is not limited to the universe, but also represents a criterion for the formation of behavioural patterns and political ideals (Fang 1980b, 93).

In general, in his idealism, Fang Dongmei did not engage too often with issues of concrete social reality. The concept of harmony at the forefront of his idealistic theory is mainly limited to the harmony of the unity of humanity

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

8 Emotion and reason.

and nature. As we saw earlier, however, the other representatives of the second generation of Modern Confucianism treated the issue of social harmony somewhat more concretely and in more detail.

The philosopher Tang Junyi never lived in Taiwan for a long period of time, but migrated to Hong Kong after the founding of the PRC. Nevertheless, he was an active member of the Modern Confucian intellectual movement and wrote his theories in close collaboration with his Taiwanese colleagues. As such, we will also briefly present his vision of harmony and harmoniousness here.

The sort of morality that Tang recommends to the individual to ensure social harmony does not depend so much on the uniqueness of their individual existence, as advocated by Xu Fuguan, nor on the autonomous freedom of the moral self and its infinite mind, which is the focus of Mou Zongsan's attention. Tang's idea of morality is much more directly based on the individual's sense of innate responsibility, which, similar to the Neo-Confucian concept of "innate knowledge" (*liang zhi* 良知), ought to serve as a signpost that helps guide the individual through the impenetrable jungle of the ethical dilemmas and doubts facing them in their concrete life. As the following quote shows, the individual will be able to contribute to the higher goal of social harmony only on the basis of obeying this inner signpost of responsibility:

You don't have to ask what you should do, because you yourself know best what needs to be done. Sometimes, however, it can happen that you feel several possibilities for what you should do, and perhaps you feel that there is a contradiction between them. You may not immediately know which of them to choose, or how to combine them all to reach a higher level of harmony... However, you still have to solve all this for yourself, because only you can really know what you should do and why you should do it. (Tang Junyi 1985, 53–54)⁹

This responsibility does not actually mean that the interests of society should come before the interests of the individual. A morally aware individual will in any case make decisions based on their responsibility, regardless of whether it is in their own interests or those of the wider social community.

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

A person is not a thing; a person is a purpose in themselves. This means that the individual is not a tool of society, nor a tool of the state. And the people of this age are also not tools of the people of a future age... But if we say that a person is not a tool of society, it does not mean that we are outside of society, and individuals also do not need to regard society and the state as tools to achieve their own goals... But the human mind and what is inherent in it is reciprocity and love. If a person strives to actually and fully experience their innate mind, they will never be able to feel separated from society... I believe that only through educating people to fully develop this innate moral nature will we be able to reconcile the conflict between the individual and society. Only in this way will we be able to transcend the binary category of individual and community and reach a place where the existence of society will be to the benefit of the individual and vice versa. (Tang Junyi 2000, 61-62)¹⁰

This does not mean obedience to an external authority. According to his own words, in this regard Tang remains faithful to the fundamental principles of Chinese ethics, an important characteristic of which lies in the conscious effort to overcome the divide between the self and others, precisely on the basis of the harmonious functioning of interpersonal relationships (Sin 2002, 320).

However, since the ethical self, or the morally aware mind of the individual, also has a significant influence on the concrete features of the culture in which they were born and in which they live, according to Tang we can from this kind of dominant attitude of the individual's mind also draw conclusions about the orientation of their culture. For him, one of the central differences between Chinese and Western culture is that the former emphasizes ethics and art, while the latter emphasizes religion and science. According to Tang Junyi, this difference is conditioned by the fact that the spirit of harmony prevails in Chinese culture, while the spirit of distinction prevails in Western culture (*ibid.*).

10 人不是物, 人本身為一目的。人本身為一目的涵義, 亦包括個人不是社會之一工具, 國家之一工具, 此時代之人不是下不是下一時代之工具... 我們說每一人不是社會之一工具, 不是說每一人可以自外與社會, 個人亦不須視社會國家為達其個人目的之工具... 而人的心性即是仁, 既是愛。人真求自盡其性的心, 絕不會自外於社會... 我們人為只有以教化充兩發展人之此種道德的天性, 可以協調所為個人與社會的衝突, 超出個人與社會之對立的範疇, 使社會的存在支持個人之存在, 個人的精神也支持社會之存在。

3 The basis for understanding the traditional concept of harmony (he 和): the three reforms and the distinction between philosophical and institutionalized Confucianism

In both types of modern interpretations of the classical Chinese concept of harmony, i.e. those that have emerged in recent decades in Taiwan, as well as those that dominate in the PRC, it is often emphasized that harmony is a traditional Confucian concept. In this way, the ideology of harmony is placed within the framework of the ideologies of the so-called Confucian revival. However, we could already see from the example of these interpretations that the idea of Confucian revival is quite different on one side of the Taiwan Strait and the other.

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This difference is not only manifested in the fact that the Confucian revival in Taiwan developed continuously since the formation of the current of Modern Confucianism, which, as we will see below, was established around the start of the 20th century. As is generally known, this continuity was on the mainland interrupted for a good three decades (from the 1950s until the mid-1980s), during which time philosophers on the mainland could only deal with politically “relevant” topics, such as the Sinicization of Marxist and Leninist theories. However, as we could see in the previous two chapters, the difference between the two discourses goes much further or deeper, i.e. to the very core of substantive evaluations and interpretations of the concept of harmony, in which both see one of the central features of the Chinese mentality.

Unlike Taiwan’s modern Confucianism, the Confucianism within the revival, as it developed on the mainland, and which we will define more precisely below, is presented as a one-dimensional, monolithic discourse without substantive and ideological distinctions, which are necessary for its correct – that is, more comprehensive and coherent – understanding.

Discourses originating from the oldest, i.e. original Confucianism, in their further development actually split into several currents, which are not only different, but partially even diametrically opposed to one another. These currents are believed to have formed in the history of Chinese thought within the framework of developments whose guidelines were defined by the three reforms of the original Confucianism.

The latter was a school of ideas that was extremely advanced for the time in which it was created (i.e. 6th century BCE), as it contained many proto-dem-

ocratic, egalitarian and humanist elements.¹¹ The founder of the school was Confucius (551–479 BCE), and his two most famous successors were Mencius (372–289) and Xunzi (310–235). While the former further developed the humanistic, ethical and egalitarian elements of Confucianism, the latter built on the hierarchical and rational elements of the same doctrine. The central difference between the two was in their conception of human nature: while Mencius began with the assumption of its goodness and of the innate humanity of every human being, Xunzi believed that people are by nature evil and egoistic, and therefore need to be controlled by strict laws and penalties.

The blossoming of original Confucianism can be traced all the way back to the end of the Zhou dynasty and the beginning of the first united, all-Chinese empire under the auspices of the Qin dynasty (221–207 BC). During this period, Confucianism (as well as all other philosophical schools of the ancient period) was banned. Only after the fall of the Qin and the beginning of the Han dynasty (202 BC–220 BC) was this school of philosophy rehabilitated. This happened in the framework of the so-called first reform of this doctrine, in which Confucianism as state doctrine emerged from Confucianism as school of thought.¹²

This new Confucianism was essentially a synthesis of Confucianism and Legalism.¹³ The Han dynasty continued to unite most of the Chinese territory under its rule, and thus needed a centralist government and “strong-arm” ideologies to control such a large empire. For this purpose, it would have been most appropriate if it had simply adopted the despotic philosophy of

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- 11 Here I am not using the concept of democracy in the prevailing sense, which is mainly understood as the liberal multi-party system of various forms of parliamentary political decision-making, and which is based on individual rights and normative laws, but rather in a much broader sense. Starting from the original meaning of the word, democracy is here meant as a social system based on a complementary and equal relationship between society and the autonomous individual. For a more detailed description of proto-democratic elements within Confucianism, see Sigurdsson (2015, 13–21, 50–60), Lee (2010, 45–62), Makeham (2015, 13–26), and Rošker (2015, 63–65). The theoretical basis of such seeds of democracy mainly concerns concepts such as “*Min ben* 民本 (People as the Basis)”, “*Tianming* 天命 (Mandate of Heaven)” and “*Neisheng waiwang* 內聖外王 (Inner Sage and Outer Ruler)”.
 - 12 Chinese distinguishes between the terms *Rujia* 儒家 and *Rujiao* 儒教. The first refers to the school of Confucian thought, ethics and philosophy, while the second refers to the Confucian state doctrine or the normative ethical system that prevailed in China from the Han dynasty until the end of the Qing dynasty. In English one and the same term – Confucianism – is used for both Chinese terms, but we can try to at least descriptively preserve the differentiation.
 - 13 Legalism (*Fa jia* 法家) was a Machiavellian and autocratic discourse based on preserving and protecting the interests of an absolute ruler. As the central (and only allowed) ideology, it dominated the sixteen years of the despotic Qin dynasty.

Legalism, but this was not possible, since adopting the state doctrine of the losing dynasty was not appropriate within the framework of the ancient Chinese worldview. That is why the court ideologist of the Han dynasty, Dong Zhongshu, chose Confucianism as the new state doctrine, which he interpreted through the lens of the teachings of Confucius' successor, Xunzi. The latter developed a theory that was already very close to Legalism, so it is not surprising that he was also the teacher of some of the most prominent Legalist personalities, namely Han Feizi and Li Si,¹⁴ and even in China he is usually perceived as the bridge between Confucianism and Legalism (see Li Zehou 1980, 81).

72 Within the framework of this first reform, in which the Confucian state doctrine was created, a system of official examinations was also introduced, in which in order to obtain an official position (and thus political power) it was necessary to pass an exam testing one's knowledge of the Confucian classics. In this way, Confucianism gained an institutional basis. Due to the strictly formal nature of these exams, which was associated with an uncritical approach to the material and rote learning, over the centuries intellectuals became more and more alienated from it, as it did not offer them any intellectual inspiration or motivation. To obtain the latter, they increasingly turned to Daoist and Buddhist philosophies. Since this threatened Confucianism as a state doctrine, a third reform took place under the so-called Neo-Confucianism of the Song dynasty. Within its framework many Daoist and Buddhist elements were incorporated into Confucian philosophy. Of key importance here is also the fact that the philosophers in this reform interpreted the original Confucianism through Mencius, i.e. the successor of Confucius who developed and upgraded the humanistic, proto-democratic and proto-republican elements of Confucian doctrine.

The third reform of Confucianism occurred at the turn of the 20th century, when Chinese intellectuals began to confront Western thought. At that time the stream of Modern Confucianism arose, which strove to find a synthesis of Chinese tradition with Western ideas that could form the basis for a specific Chinese modernization. This current – in terms of the interpretation of the Chinese tradition – represented the successor to the Neo-Confucianism of the Song dynasty, which means that it took its starting positions from Mencius' philosophy, and not from Xunzi's.

14 Han Feizi was one of the central theorists of Legalist doctrine, and Li Si was the prime minister of the legalistic state of Qin.

In the second half of the 20th century, when the Chinese ideational tradition was out of favour in the PRC and its philosophers could at most deal with the Sinicization of Marxism and Leninism, the starting positions of this trend were developed further mainly by Taiwanese (and partly also Hong Kong) philosophers, who were the representatives of the aforementioned second generation of Modern Confucianism.

4 The roots of the modern concept of harmony: Confucianism as school of thought or Confucianism as state doctrine?

As noted above, contemporary Chinese ideologues (and politicians) emphasize the close connection between Confucius and the concept of harmony. It is often noted that harmony is one of the fundamental concepts of Confucian philosophy (cf. e.g. Xiang 2008, 3; Bai 2011, 50). However, research into the works attributed to Confucius¹⁵ showed that the concept of harmony (*he* 和) appears in them only five times (see Confucius s. d.: Xue er 12; Shu er: 32; Zi Lu: 23, Ji shi: 1; Zi Zhang: 25). Since harmony is said to be a Confucian concept, we also took a closer look at the works of his two most influential successors and found that the concept of harmony appears only twice in the work of Mencius (see Mengzi ed.: Gongsun Chou II: 10; Wan Zhang II : 10), while Xunzi mentions and explains it very often in his eponymous work, namely 76 times (see Xunzi s. d.). All of the above points to the fact that the concept of harmony within the original Confucianism is more a Legalist than Confucian concept. Even if Confucius and Mencius also use it a few times, their interpretation of it differs significantly from that of Xunzi, who, as pointed out above, was a supporter of “strong-arm” ideas. Let us take a look at some typical quotes in which these three ancient philosophers mention harmony.

In his *Analects* (*Lunyu*), Confucius explicitly emphasized the difference between sameness (and thus uniformity (*tong* 同)) on the one hand, and harmony or harmonization (*he* 和) on the other, opposing the first concept and defending the second: “The noble person seeks harmony not sameness; the petty person seeks sameness not harmony.” (Confucius s.d., Zi lu, 23).¹⁶

15 These are *The Analects* (*Lunyu* 论语) and *Spring-Autumn Annals* (*Chun qiu lu* 春秋錄). Only the first work deals with the subject of Confucius’ philosophy, while the second work deals with historical reports on the economy of the State of Lu.

16 君子和而不同，小人同而不和。

The idea that diversity is a prerequisite for harmony (Motoh 2009, 99) is also found in Confucius' classic *Spring-Autumn Annals* (*Chun qiu lu* 春秋露). In this context, Confucius explicitly advocates an understanding of harmony that is based on the autonomy and critical spirit of the individual:

If the ruler says he supports something, everyone will likewise support it; and if the ruler says he is against something, everyone will likewise be against it. It is like pouring water into water. Who would care for it? It is like playing all the music with just one instrument. Who could listen to it? (Confucius s.d., Shao gong ershi nian, 1)¹⁷

Mencius also has a similar opinion of harmony. He sees it as one of the fundamental values of humanity and humanism:

The opportunities offered us by Heaven are not of equal importance to the advantages offered us by Earth. And these are again of less importance than interpersonal harmonies. (Mengzi s.d., Gongsun Chou III, 10)¹⁸

This point of view is illustrated in a concrete way by Mencius in the following example, in which he analyses the reasons for the collapse of a city:

Its walls were not too low, and the defensive moat around it was not too shallow. Its army was not too weak and there was no shortage of food supplies. From this we can see that harmony between people is of much greater importance than the physical conditions (lit.: the advantages offered us by Earth. (Mengzi s.d., Gongsun Chou III, 10)¹⁹

Unlike the two philosophers above, the proto-legalist Xunzi perceived harmony primarily as unity, serving the powerful state with an invincible army. Such a concept is, of course, based on the functioning of a centralized state and is also in clear contrast to Confucius' aforementioned advocacy of diversity. Xunzi writes:

It is appropriate, then, that we create harmony through division. [Such] harmony makes unity possible, and unity makes superiority possible. With superiority, we can reach the extreme borders [of countries] and defeat our opponents. (Xunzi s.d., Wang zhi, 19)²⁰

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

18 天時不如地利，地利不如人和。

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

20 故義以分則和，和則一，一則多力，多力則彊，彊則勝物。

In addition, Xunzi already explicitly connects the creation of harmony with the concept of punishment, the importance of which he often emphasizes in his works: “By introducing punishment, the government will be balanced and the people will live in harmony” (Xunzi s.d., Wang zhi, 26).

Connotations of discipline, such as we witness in the perception and spread of a “harmonious society” in the modern PRC, are therefore quite directly related to Xunzi’s interpretations of the concept. In this sense, they are indeed Confucian, but in their basic orientation they are based on the development of the original Confucian teaching that served as the basis for the integration of despotic elements into the new state doctrine formed during the Han dynasty.

So have the “softer” connotations of harmony, as expressed in the works of Confucius and Mencius, completely sunk into oblivion? In the context of the present article, it is certainly interesting to see whether (and to what extent) the modern concept of a “harmonious society”, which represents an important element of current ideology and is often characterized as a legacy of the Confucian tradition, connects with the views of Modern Confucianism, which represents the central current of modern Taiwanese theories.

Taiwanese and Hong Kong Modern Confucians mainly derived their ideas from Neo-Confucian philosophy, the basis of which was not Xunzi’s but Mencius’ interpretation of the original teaching. Therefore, Xunzi was often seen as a heretic and was not considered among the philosophers of “true” Confucianism.

5 Epilogue

If we try to draw a parallel between the modern ideology of the PRC on the one hand, which praises the ideal of a harmonious society, and the discussions about harmony that arose from under the pens of Taiwanese (and partly Hong Kong) philosophers on the other, we cannot ignore some essential distinctions that largely demarcate both discourses, even if they both refer to Confucianism as the central source of the kind of social harmony under discussion.

Surely the biggest difference between them is that the former advocate the ideal of harmony based on the tradition of the legalistically oriented Xunzi. The ideology of the new neoliberal-national superpower is therefore based on far more authoritarian and citizen-obedience-based assumptions than those that define the philosophical and ideological foundations of Taiwan’s Modern Confucianism. The representatives of the latter mostly follow the softer and more

humanistic line of Confucius and Mencius' discourse, which does not push the individual into the background, but put them in the foreground of their interests.²¹ In other words, we could say that mainland philosophers advocate harmony based on Confucianism as a doctrine, while Taiwanese philosophers are mainly adherents of Confucianism as a school of thought.

Certainly the discourse of Confucius and Mencius provides an incomparably better basis for the development of a "democratic" society of autonomous individuals than Xunzi's strong-arm philosophy. Therefore, it is probably no coincidence that mainland ideologues are more and more directly striving for a modernized (and currently also digitalized) use of those proto-legalistic elements of their own tradition that enable the government elite to have better and more complete control over the society and individuals. On the other hand, contemporary Modern Confucians in Taiwan and Hong Kong also continue and develop the theoretical guidelines of the revival of Confucius' and Mencius' theories. Therefore, within the framework of such discourses, they are researching and updating a range of traditional proto-democratic concepts, which could, in a form adapted to contemporary conditions, provide a good basis for the development of a specifically Chinese type of modernization and democracy.²² This represents an attempt to create and develop a system that is not based on the profit-oriented, liberal model of over-emphasized individualism; rather it is comparable to modern communitarian systems.²³

In my eyes, the ability to make such distinctions is crucial for interpreting modern China and its attitude towards its own tradition, and thus also for reliable predictions of the future development trends of its politics. This ability, however, can only be acquired through insight into the multifaceted develop-

21 As pointed out above, Taiwanese Modern Confucians mainly follow the criteria of autonomous ethics and the unity of reason and emotions; therefore, they consider only Confucius, Mencius and the authors or commentators of the classical works *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhong yong* 中庸) and *Book of Changes* (*Yi jing* 易經) to be part of the "legitimate" line of Confucianism from the Zhou period. In contrast, Xunzi supposedly belongs to a fringe (that is, not entirely "legitimate") line, as he is considered to represent the so-called "ethics of heteronomy" (Lee 2001, 73).

22 As pointed out above, the central proto-democratic concepts of original Confucianism, which most often form the subject of Modern Confucian elaborations, are the concepts of "*min ben* 民本 (People as the Basis)", "*tianming* 天命 (Mandate of Heaven)" and "*neisheng waiwang* 內聖外王 (Inner Sage and Outer Ruler)".

23 But since the concept of a modern Confucian harmonious society is still quite underdeveloped and remains only at the theoretical level, the first, "disciplinary" discourse, behind which stands a well-equipped, partly intimidating and also highly effective propaganda apparatus, may still have better chances of imminent realization. Therefore, the question of what kind of harmony actually awaits the Chinese people in the near future remains, of course, still open.

ments that took shape within the Chinese history of ideas. This is all the more true for cases such as these, among which the modern interpretation of the concept of harmony also belongs, since its creators keep resolutely referring to the traditional roots of this concept. The possibility of understanding such “roots” and gaining insight into the complex ideological developments of the Chinese tradition is again conditioned by the ability to read and understand primary sources written in classical Chinese.

Without such tools, future generations of experts in the field of Chinese studies might still be well-versed in their “profession”, being specialized in Chinese language and culture, but they will only be able to offer society repetitions and translations of dominant ideologies. And I am not sure that I want to become the sort of teacher who only imparts to her students the ability to produce such “expertises”. Therefore, I believe that teaching classical Chinese is an extremely important tool for gaining more adequate knowledge, understanding and interpretation of modern Chinese society.

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