

TWO CONCEPTIONS OF HARMONY IN ANCIENT WESTERN AND EASTERN AESTHETICS: “DIALECTIC HARMONY” AND “AMBIGUOUS HARMONY”

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Abstract: In this paper, I argue that the different understandings of “harmony”, which are rooted in ancient Greek and Chinese thought, can be recapitulated in the name of “dialectic harmony” and “ambiguous harmony” regarding the representation of the beautiful. The different understandings of the concept of harmony lead to at least two kinds of aesthetic value as well as ideality – harmony in conciliation and harmony in diversity. Through an explication of the original meaning and relation between the concept of harmony and beauty, we can learn more about the cosmo-metaphysical origins in Western and Eastern aesthetics, with which we may gain insights for future aesthetics discourse.

Introduction

It is generally accepted that modern philosophy can trace itself back to two major origin points, ancient Greece in the West and China in the East. To understand the primary presuppositions of Western and Eastern philosophical aesthetics, we must go back to these origins and examine the core concepts which have had a great influence on later aesthetic representation. Inspecting the conception of “harmony”, a central concept of philosophical aesthetic thought for both the ancient Greek and Chinese world, may bring us valuable insight in aesthetic differences which persist today.

In the following, I argue that the different understandings of “harmony”, which are rooted in ancient Greek and Chinese thought, can be recapitulated in the name of “dialectic harmony” and “ambiguous harmony” regarding the representation of the beautiful.¹ The different understandings of the concept of harmony lead to, at least, two kinds of aesthetic value as well as ideality – harmony in conciliation and harmony in diversity. Through an explication of the original meaning and relation between the concept of harmony and beauty, we can learn more about the cosmo-metaphysical origins in Western and Eastern aesthetics, with which we may gain insights for future aesthetics discourse.

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¹ Notably that the East-West dichotomy is just a ready-at-hand concept helping us to capture the conspicuous differences between two independently developed cultural groups, it should not be taken as the essential and unchangeable properties attached to specific entities.

I. The Pre-Established Relation between Harmony and Beauty in the Ancient World

“Harmony” and “beauty” are inseparable in most of the discussion of ancient aesthetic thought. They are often respectively used to explain the meaning or even the “essence” for each other. Sometimes, they are combined into a composite expression as “beautiful harmony”² or “harmonious-beauty” in order to single out the nature of the aesthetic judgment – aesthetic judgment is originally a judgment of the beautiful representing a kind of harmony. For example, ἁρμονία (*harmonia*), subsequently developed into the concept of harmony, originally meant a joint between the planks of a ship, denoting a “fine”, “fitting” relation of a combination of parts or related things to form a consistent whole. Also, in Greek mythology, Ἄρμονία (Harmonia) is the goddess of harmony and concord, who is the daughter of Aphrodite, the goddess associated with love, beauty, procreation, etc. Thus, the denotation of *harmonia* already suggests the primeval relation between harmony and beauty in the Greek mind. On the other hand, the concept of καλός (*kalos*), meaning beautiful and also encompassing the virtuous, noble and handsome, refers to the beautiful, whether inside or out. Through Aristotle’s thematic discussion, it developed into the concept καλὸς κάγαθός (*kalos kagathos* meaning a beautiful and good gentleman) representing an ideal of personal conduct as well as palpable beauty regarding a healthy body and soul.³ By the etymological and mythological understanding of harmony and beauty in the West, we see that the concept of harmony indicates a specific kind of relation among things through which the functionalistic and purposive beautiful can be manifested and found.

In the following discussion, we consider “*he*” (和) as the corresponding concept in the East, while putting aside some of its differences of “harmony” in the Indo-European languages, we consider *he* as the representative concept not only because of the influence of ancient Chinese culture but also its significance in the modern East Asian context in general. As Li Chenyang states:

A key concept and central value of Confucianism is 和 [...]. It is the name that Japanese people call their nation; the Korean national flag displays the ideal of he between the yin and yang. *He* is usually translated into English as “harmony,” although it may be more appropriately rendered as “harmonization” in certain contexts, making it a process rather than an inert state of affairs.⁴

² As an example, the new *Gengō* (元号) of Japan, Reiwa (令和), is officially translated in English as “beautiful harmony” in order to dissociate Reiwa from the negative connotations of “command” or “order” in relation to the *Kanji* (漢字).

³ C.f. Aristotle (1991), *Eudemian Ethics*. In J. Barnes (Ed.) & J. Solomon (Trans.). The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation, vol. 2. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Book VIII, 1248b8-1249a16.

⁴ Li, C. (2019), Bring Back Harmony in Philosophical Discourse: a Confucian Perspective, *Journal of Dharma Studies*, Springer International Publishing, p. 7. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42240-019-00047-w>

In the context of ancient as well as modern East Asia, which is strongly influenced by Confucian culture, the concept of harmony, *he*, also represents a beautiful relation that gives the world a neat and methodical order. The meaning of this “order” can indeed be understood by comparing the concept of *he* and *tong* 同 (agreement or sameness). David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames explain:

The difference between *ho* 和, translated here as “harmony,” and *t'ung* 同, “agreement,” is the difference between “attuning” and “tuning.” Attuning is the combining and blending of two or more ingredients in a harmonious whole with benefit and enhancement that maximizes the possibilities of all without sacrificing their separate and particular identities. “Tuning” is finding agreement by bringing one ingredient into conformity and concurrence with an existing standard such that one ingredient is enhanced possibly at the expense of others.⁵

Here, we can at least see a basic difference between the concept of *harmonia* and *he*. The former originally meant the joint between different pieces in forming a coherent whole, which is closer to the meaning of tuning. The latter, on the other hand, denotes a mutually beneficial relationship among things, which is made possible by the attunement of the pre-established order, mostly the social-political one. More importantly, taking Confucianism as an example, this kind of harmonious order is intrinsically related to aesthetic thought. In the Confucian mind, acting in accordance with *li* (禮), the pre-established rites or propriety, is already a kind of embodiment of the beautiful. For example, in the *Analects*, Youzi said:

In practicing the rules of propriety (禮), a natural ease (和) is to be prized. In the ways prescribed by the ancient kings (先王), this is the excellent quality (*mei* 美), and in things small and great we follow them. Yet it is not to be observed in all cases. If one, knowing how such ease should be prized, manifests it, without regulating it by the rules of propriety, this likewise is not to be done.⁶

The usage and purpose of propriety lie in bringing about a kind of harmony (“natural ease”). Harmony as the value and ideality of such practice has been coded in advance in the cultural norms and practices (“rules of propriety”), which is agreed as the *mei* 美, beauty (“excellent quality”) by the holy figures (“the ancient kings”). In Youzi’s eye, such beauty can be manifested only through the regulation of the pre-established rites, instead of through knowing how such harmony ought to be prized, which means

⁵ Hall, D. L & Ames, R. T. (1987). *Thinking through Confucius*. Albany: State University of New York Press, p. 166.

⁶ 《論語·學而·12》：「有子曰：『禮之用，和為貴。先王之道斯為美，小大由之有所不行，知和而和，不以禮節之，亦不可行也。』」 Translated by Legge, J. (1861). *The Chinese Classics, Volume I*. Xue Er: 12. From: <https://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=gb&id=1113>.

that the relation between the beautiful and the harmonious must be built under the pre-established order of the society. Hall and Ames also point out:

The realization of interpersonal and social harmony is the effect of yielding to appropriate models of aesthetic orderedness as constituted by rituals, language, and music. These communicative media provide the primary tools of the sage in his role as master of communication. The functions of rituals, language, and music are all of a kind. Each serves to promote aesthetic order.⁷

A Confucian pursues an aesthetic order which is embodied in the social and political reality. This kind of aesthetic Confucian order is understood to be both intrinsically moral and profoundly harmonious. Thus, Hall and Ames even directly translate *he* 和 as “aesthetic harmony”.⁸

The above examples preliminarily show that there is an equally pre-established relation between the concept of harmony and beauty in the transcultural context. My next questions: how do the different understandings of the concept of harmony and beauty create dissimilar aesthetic thoughts and representations in Western and Eastern cultures? Can the roots of these representations be traced back into the cosmometaphysical assumptions of the ancient philosophical conceptions in the course of the conceptual development in different cultural entities?

II. Harmony and Beauty in Ancient Greece: Harmony in Conciliation

The Beginning of Loci Platonici: Pythagoras and Heraclitus as Two Pillars of Plato's Metaphysical Aesthetics.

The conceptual root of the concept of beauty in the West, according to François Jullien, can be traced back to Plato, followed by Plotinus, Ficini and so on, further developed by Kant, the Romantic writers and German Idealists like Schiller and Hegel. He names it as *loci platonici*, referring to the authority of Plato's ideas along with the history of Western philosophy.⁹ Jullien's observation is parallel with, on the one hand, Heidegger's idea of the history of Being which views the Western history of metaphysics as a continuum and, on the other hand, with the critique of logocentrism which refers to the beginning of the history of logos that is rooted in the Platonic theory of ideas. If we accept Jullien's observation and take it as the starting point of our analysis, we may further ask: What is the feature of the Platonic conception of beauty? What constitutes Plato's concept of beauty? And what is relevant to the concept of harmony?

⁷ Hall, D. L & Ames, R. T. (1987). *Thinking through Confucius*, p.284.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.269.

⁹ Cf. Jullien, F. (2016). *The Strange Idea of the Beautiful*. Translated by Richardson, M. and Fijalkowski, K.. London: Seagull Books, p.45.

If we take a little step back and take a look at the wider picture, we can see two of the most important sources of the Platonic dialectic of harmony in relation to the concept of beauty. I emphasize that they are two of the most important sources because, in ancient Greece, the concept of harmony was still undergoing a period of exploration. Li Chenyang correctly points out that the ancient Greek philosophers did not come out with a united understanding of the concept of harmony in the pre-Socratic period:

Greek philosophers Heraclitus, Pythagoras, and Plato presented competing conceptions of harmony; whereas Heraclitian processive harmony presupposes opposites, tension and conflict, Pythagorean harmony and Platonic harmony are founded on a pre-determined order.¹⁰

I would like to add an additional remark on Li's observation: Pythagoras', Heraclitus' and Plato's conceptions of harmony were not simply competing against each other, they were also evolving and developing in the course of classical Greek time. Eventually, the basic understanding of harmony in the Western tradition became relatively stable after Plato's synthesis, which in its nature tends to be close to the Pythagorean mathematical harmony emphasizing the perfect ratio and the hidden unchanging principle. Moreover, besides the concept of harmony, the Pythagorean understanding of the inner relation of harmony and beauty is also imprinted on the inheritors. For example, Pythagoras believes that the harmonious can be founded and represented in the mathematical relation and that, more importantly, means a kind of beauty. Umberto Eco comments:

Pythagoras marks the birth of an aesthetic-mathematical view of the universe: all things exist because they are ordered and they are ordered because they are the realization of mathematical laws, which are at once a condition of existence and of Beauty.¹¹

Pythagoras' aesthetic-mathematical view of the Universe can be evidenced through the Pythagoreans' study of the relation of the musical proportion and the beautiful. According to the medieval Neoplatonist Boethius' observation, Pythagoreans knew that the underlying mathematical ratios in the harmonious scales in music bring different psychological impacts on individuals which can be suitable for educational purposes for the youth.¹² This concept of harmonious ratio can also be applied to issue of health. The Pythagoreans consider the soul to be in harmonious ratio to the body. Such harmony in the human body is like attunement in a lyre. In Plato's *Phaedo*, this

¹⁰ Li, C. (2019), Bring Back Harmony in Philosophical Discourse: a Confucian Perspective, *Journal of Dharma Studies*, Springer International Publishing, p. 1. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42240-019-00047-w>.

¹¹ Eco, U. (2004). *History of Beauty*. Translated by McEwen, A.. New York: Rizzoli, p. 61.

¹² Cf. *ibid.*, p. 63.

idea is presented by Simmias, who was an associate of Philolaus, the leading Pythagorean from Thebes:

If then the soul is a kind of harmony or attunement, clearly, when our body is relaxed or stretched without due measure by diseases and other evils, the soul must immediately be destroyed, even if it be most divine, as are the other harmonies found in music and all the works of artists, and the remains of each body last for a long time until they rot or are burned.¹³

Although Socrates did not fully adopt the Pythagorean idea about soul and immortality in the story, we still can see the trail of the Pythagorean influence in Plato's theory of ideas in the coming paragraphs. Here, we want to highlight that the most significant Pythagorean influence in Western culture is the idea of mathematical perfection and the conception of proportional beauty. F. M. Cornford confirms:

The analogy with concords points clearly to the original source of the theory, Pythagoras' discovery that the concordant intervals of the musical scale or *harmony* could be expressed exactly in the terms of the 'simple' ratios, 1:2 (octave), 3:2 (fifth), and 4:3 (fourth), and that, if the smallest whole numbers having these ratios to one another (viz. 6:8:9:12) are taken, the internal terms are the means (arithmetic and harmonic) between the extremes. Thus was the principle of *harmony* revealed as an unseen and unheard principle of order and concord, identical with a system of number bound together by interlocking ratios."¹⁴

The Pythagoreans took the musical discovery as a justification of their belief in the mathematical nature of reality and argued that certain musical intervals are pleasing to the ear because of their underlying structure. These beliefs strongly affected Plato's doctrine and it is revealed most clearly in the *Timaeus*. In the text, Timaeus describes the origin and nature of the physical world that was made by Demiurge, who proceeds by using a fixed set of numbers to make the soul of the world as a mixture of metaphysically opposite elements (including the indivisible and divisible *Being*, the indivisible and divisible *Same* and *Different*). Those set of numbers are exactly the same as the Pythagorean harmonic ratios (2:1, 3:2, 4:3 and 9:8).¹⁵ It clearly shows that Pythagorean mathematical harmony deeply affected the Platonic cosmos-metaphysics which embedded the ideas of a harmony of opposites and ratio.

The hunt for the perfect proportions of things leads to the task of "discovering" the *section aurea* (the "golden ratio") in beautiful objects. By the influence of Pythagorean and Platonian ideas of proportional beauty, the renaissance artists

¹³ Plato (1997). *Phaedo*. In *Plato Complete Works*, John M. Cooper (Ed.). A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff (Trans). Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 86c.

¹⁴ Cornford, F. M. (1922). *Mysticism and Science in the Pythagorean Tradition*. In the *Classical Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 3/4, p. 144-145.

¹⁵ Plato (1997). *Timaeus*. In *Plato Complete Works*, 35a-36d.

including Piero della Francesca, Luca Pacioli, Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Dürer diligently studied the concept of divine proportion and applied it into their works of art.¹⁶ All these cases show that the aesthetic-mathematical view of the Universe can be seen as one of the pillars of the Western aesthetic concept. The proportional beauty represents the harmonious ratio embodied in everything in the Universe, and vice versa. On the other hand, Heraclitus, regarded as the other conceptual source of Plato's dialectic harmony, declares: "That which in opposition is in concert, and from things that differ comes the most beautiful harmony."¹⁷ Although it may not be possible to establish a substantial "Heraclitean aesthetics" by his few remaining fragments, the aesthetic implication can still be extracted from his main ideas. The pre-Socratic Ionian Greek philosopher is best known for his ideas of the "universal flux", "unity/identity of opposites", "all things are one", etc. These ideas establish a holistic metaphysical worldview that appreciates the hidden harmony behind the superficial contradiction of the visible/sensible world: "The hidden harmony is stronger (or, 'better') than the visible."¹⁸ Here we can see a higher evaluation of harmony which is conceived as the invisible "latent structure".¹⁹ Heraclitus takes this higher principle as the eternal changing substance representing the "reasonableness" and "proper proportion", namely *logos*.²⁰ The difference between Heraclitus' and Plato's understanding of the highest principle lies in the fact that Plato treats the higher valued entity, namely εἶδος (*eidos*, "idea"), as the nonspatial, a temporal, identical and changeless entity in contrast to the Heraclitean idea of "universal flux".

Hussey appropriately identifies three theses within Heraclitus' idea of the unity-in-opposites regarding *harmonia*: 1.) The unity is more fundamental than the opposites; 2.) The opposites are essential features of the unity; 3.) The manifestation of the opposites involves a process, in which the unity performs its essential function.²¹ These observations bring us to the conclusion that Heraclitus takes harmony in accordance with *logos* as the latent structure of the visible providing the interconnectedness of the contrary states of all visible things. Conversely, we could say: the invisible harmony can only be "manifested" and be "seen" by the visible confliction, thus Heraclitus says: "They do not understand how that which differs

¹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 66

¹⁷ Freeman, K. (1983). *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers: A Complete Translation of the Fragments in Diels, Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Fragment 8, p. 25.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁹ It is worthy of notice that Hussey translated *harmonie* as "latent structure" in der Fragment 54. As by his reading, harmony, according to *logos*, is exactly the latent structure of all visible/sensible things that makes the "unity-in-opposites" possible. C.f. Hussey, E. (1999). Heraclitus. In A. Long (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge Companions to Philosophy, pp. 88-112). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 91-91. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521441226.005>

²⁰ Cf. Hussey, E (1999). *Heraclitus*, *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*, p. 91-93.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.96.

with itself is in agreement: harmony consists of opposing tension, like that of the bow and the lyre.”²² Through the right proportion of things, we can not only see the tension *in* the thing but also the harmony *within* the tension. Heraclitus gives us an obscure but profound depiction of the concept of dialectic harmony.

Loci Platonici and the Dialectic Harmony in the Discourse of the Beautiful.

Plato was deeply influenced by the above thinkers and developed his comprehensive understanding of the concept of beauty and harmony, which determined the later development of Western metaphysics and aesthetics. One of the main points of the Platonic thought is that the beautiful is conceived under a dualistic separation between the visible world and the intelligible world. By the famous “analogy of the divided line” in the *Republic* (509-511e), Plato, following the Parmenides’ idea of the way of ἀλήθεια (*aletheia*, “truth”) and the way of δόξα (*doxa*, “opinion”), divides different kinds of knowledge that belong to two worlds regarding the truth and the illusive. In another work, the *Symposium*, he gave, through Diotima’s ladder of love,²³ a clearer account for the relation between ἔρος (*eros*, meaning “love” and “desire”) and the beautiful, which also presupposed a dualistic world view: the world of appearances and of ideas. The Love, as the desire of the beautiful things, becomes the motivating force and eventually leads to the “knowledge of beauty”, namely the (Idea of) Beauty:

This is what it is to go aright, or be led by another, into the mystery of Love: one goes always upwards for the sake of this Beauty, starting out from beautiful things and using them like rising stairs: from one body to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, then from beautiful bodies to beautiful customs, and from customs to learning beautiful things, and from these lessons he arrives in the end at this lesson, which is learning of this very Beauty, so that in the end he comes to know just what it is to be beautiful.²⁴

Such a process of elevation involved the elements of the classic antagonism between (formed) body and (formless) soul, mortal and immortal, sensible particulars and intelligible universals, etc. The underlying idea of all these elements is the dualistic world view, namely the dualism between the sensible and supersensible world or, in Plato’s terms, the world of the Ideas representing the genuine and essential realities. The pursuit of essences is also directed by this underlying idea, with which we have to “think” the relation of conformity between the (external) object and the (internal) idea of beauty in our mind.²⁵ The beautiful becomes the “mediator” between the

²² Freeman, K. (1983). Fragment 51, p.28.

²³ Cf. Plato (1997). *Symposium*, 210 a-e. In *Plato Complete Works*, edited by Cooper, J. M. Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett, p. 492-493.

²⁴ Ibid., 211 c-d. In *Plato Complete Works*, p. 493.

²⁵ Jullien particularly questioned the necessity of “thinking” the beautiful. See: Jullien, F. *The Strange Idea of the Beautiful*, p.18.

object and the idea. This relation can be called beautiful when it conforms to a harmonious state between the object and idea, or the cognitive object and cognitive subject forms a harmonious relation. Jullien summarized accordingly:

The structure in which the beautiful holds us is that which goes from the conformity of the sensible to the interior conformity which is appropriate to the 'idea'; and Plato, in leading us from the particular of beautiful things to the universality of the beautiful, and then starting to define the beautiful by its appropriateness, effectively opened the path. A furrow was marked out (was it a vein?) which has since then only been extended.²⁶

According to Jullien's reading, the Western aesthetic conception is profoundly confined by the line of thought that true harmony can only be found in the unity of the dualistic elements. The Platonic dualistic thinking and the Greek conception of harmony delimited the scope of application in the sense of "uniting or conciliating the differences". Such a conception presupposes the dialectic process of striving between heterogeneous elements and the process of striving implies an original division of things. The later development of Western aesthetics continues to show the imprint of this thought. Jullien observed: "Even in the critique introduced by Kant in respect of metaphysics, this mediating function of the beautiful re-emerges just vigorously and necessarily: Kant also really and logically, needed *to retrace this route through it*, from the moment that he maintains the condition of a dualism."²⁷

In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant undertook the critique of the power of judgment, starting with the analytic of beautiful, in which he positioned the reflective judgment as the "third" to bring the reconciliation of the theoretical and the practical philosophy regarding the two forms of determinant judgment. Such reconciliation, according to Kant, can be observed in the aesthetic pleasure in the beautiful in the "free play" or free harmony" of the faculties of imagination and understanding. The beautiful once again played the key role of bringing harmony between the faculties of the human mind and more importantly, through Kant, the story of a reconciliation of dualism transformed into the original separation of subjectivity and the subjectively constructed object (*Gegen-stand*, means object and also "the thing stands against the subject") in the history of Western philosophy. Ontologically and normatively speaking, this original division of things, in the German idealists' further interpretation of Kantian aesthetics, is rooted in the subjective power of judgment (*Ur-teilen*, means to judge as well as "original-splitting" in German). Consequently, the search for the way to bring back the original unity from the original split became the common target of many German idealists and romanticists. To put it briefly, there is sufficient evidence to determine that Plato's metaphysics does establish the basic form and direction of the discourse in Western aesthetics regarding the beautiful and

²⁶ Jullien, F. *The Strange Idea of the Beautiful*, p.19-20.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.48.

the harmonious. The concept of harmony can be conceived as a kind of “dialectic harmony” concerning the unity of the bipolar world or of the heterogeneous elements.

III. Aesthetic Harmony in Ancient China: Harmony in Diversity

Doing Art for Life: Confucian Orderly Harmony and Beauty

In contrast, the conception of harmony in the East is represented in a quite different way. As an alternative, the Eastern conception of harmony does not underline the dualistic and dialectic elements in constructing a harmonious beauty or beautiful harmony in things. Instead, it often refers to the tranquil and amiable personality, with which the aesthetic subject could bring himself or herself to the spiritual emancipation and the harmonious state of mind. The educational effect (*Bildungseffekt*) in and through aesthetic activities has always been appreciated in the circle of ancient Chinese literati. In *the Spirit of Art in China* 《中國藝術精神》, Xu Fuguan (徐復觀) asserted that both Confucianism and Daoism accentuate aesthetic education for the sake of consummation of one’s life. Although they have fundamental differences in their aesthetic thoughts and ideal personhoods, they both hold the position of “doing art for life” (「為人生而藝術」).²⁸ Therefore, if we want to comprehend the concept of harmony in ancient Chinese aesthetic thought, we cannot overlook the effect of aesthetic education within Chinese ideal personhood.

It is undeniable that Confucianism stands as the key cultural influence in East Asia and it largely shaped the understanding of the relation between the harmonious and the beautiful in the associated cultural groups in ancient China. Therefore, it is reasonable to take the ancient Confucian conception of harmony as a prototype of Eastern harmonious beauty. The first noteworthy point is the relation between harmony and music. Xu points out that Confucius might be the first and the most conspicuous and greatest discoverer of the spirit of art in the Chinese history.²⁹ He argues, through the examples in the *Analects* and *Li Ki: Yue Ji* 《禮記·樂記》, that Confucius and his pupils also placed music education at a very important position in the self-education process.³⁰ Hall and Ames also notice that “[m]usic for Confucius is an expressive medium for the kind of aesthetic order that can be achieved by a person in his community, a harmony consequent on a lifetime of cultivation”.³¹

To understand why Confucius emphasized the significance of music, we have to explore how Confucianism understands the relation among the artistic activities, the aesthetic values and ideal personhood. For Confucianism, on the one

²⁸ Cf. 徐復觀 (2001) 。《中國藝術精神》。上海：華東大學出版社，頁81-82。

²⁹ Cf. 徐復觀 (2001) 。《中國藝術精神》。上海：華東大學出版社，頁3。

³⁰ Cf. 徐復觀 (2001) 。《中國藝術精神》。上海：華東大學出版社，頁5-8。

³¹ Hall, D. L & Ames, R. T. (1987). *Thinking through Confucius*, p.280.

hand, *ren* 仁 is, in general, the highest moral value as well as the representation of ideal personhood; on the other hand, *yue* (the character 樂 denoting “music” and also “happiness”, *le*) is an artistic representation and also expression of emotion (through art). “*Ren* is morality, *yue* is art.”³² According to Xu’s observation, in the Confucian tradition, *ren* and *yue* can be unified because they are originally communicable in its essence. At the deepest level as well as the highest state, art and morality are communicable and will naturally gain a harmonious unification because morality fills up the content of art and art fosters and stabilizes the power of morality.³³

By enumeration of the classical texts, Xu further asserts that the essence of *yue* can be concluded by the word *he* (harmony) in the ancient Chinese. Negatively speaking, *he* only means the dissolution of the contradictory elements; positively speaking, *he* means the harmony in diversity, or the harmony without uniformity. As Li describes, “[c]onfucianism famously advocates seeking harmony rather than uniformity (*he er bu tong* 和而不同) (Analects 13.23)”.³⁴ Such harmony seeks no reconciliation between dialectic elements, instead, it strives for a kind of optimizing of difference. Such optimization is a process. Therefore, *he* can also be translated as “harmonization” in different contexts.³⁵ From the Confucian point of view, through music, *ren* can be manifested in a natural and harmonious way. *Li Ki: Ru Xing* says, “singing and music are the harmony of it [*ren*, humanity]”.³⁶ Such harmony is not embodied in the dialectic harmony containing the contradictory elements *on the surface* and the structural unity *at the background*. In a sense, dialectic harmony praises the conflict and tension, since harmony as deep structure and higher truth can be recognized and experienced through opposite appearances (e.g. Heraclitus’s bow and lyre and Pythagoras’ study of music harmony). Instead, the Confucian believes, harmony exists in a mutually beneficial relationship among different elements, especially among people and those of various opinions. In short, it is a kind of harmony in diversity, not a kind of harmony in conciliation of opposite elements.

The second noteworthy point within the Confucian conception of harmony lies in the relation between music and ceremonies (*li* 禮). We can first look at the following representative passage in *Li Ki: Yue Ji*:

Music is (an echo of) the harmony between heaven and earth; ceremonies reflect the orderly distinctions (in the operations of) heaven and earth. From that harmony all things receive their being; to those orderly distinctions they owe the differences

³² Cf. 徐復觀 (2001)。《中國藝術精神》。上海：華東大學出版社，頁8。

³³ Cf. 徐復觀 (2001)。《中國藝術精神》。上海：華東大學出版社，頁9-11。

³⁴ C.f. Li, C. (2008). *The Ideal of Harmony in Ancient Chinese and Greek Philosophy*. Dao 7,, p. 86.

³⁵ C.f. Li, C. (2008). *The Ideal of Harmony in Ancient Chinese and Greek Philosophy*; p. 85.

³⁶ 《禮記·儒行·18》：「[...] 歌樂者 仁之和也；[...]」 Translated by Legge, J. (1885). *Sacred Books of the East, volume 28, part 4: The Li Ki. Ru Xing* (The conduct of the scholar):18. From: <https://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=gb&id=71384>

between them. Music has its origin from heaven; ceremonies take their form from the appearances of earth. If the imitation of those appearances were carried to excess, confusion (of ceremonies) would appear; if the framing of music were carried to excess, it would be too vehement. Let there be an intelligent understanding of the nature and interaction of (heaven and earth), and there will be the ability to practise well both ceremonies and music.³⁷

Yue Ji presupposes that the origin of music is the human heart-mind (*xin* 心) and ceremonies spring from the external norms. Music is the manifestation of the human emotion originating from the natural “movements” of the human heart-mind which is affected by external factors such as atmosphere and cultural fashion. Therefore, such movements must be regulated by the norm in order to return to the proper way of expression. Here, ceremonies play the role of regulating human behaviors and serve as the standard of being “proper”. Through the interaction between music and ceremonies, the human heart-mind can eventually restore its pureness and return to the original stillness in accordance with the elegancies of manner.³⁸ Hall and Ames point out:

In the classical Chinese tradition, ritual action derives from the attempt to imitate the regularity and order of nature. We have stressed that this imitation does not entail obedience to any presumably universal norm or law. In fact, the early Chinese tradition simply acknowledged a spontaneous harmony in nature with which human beings, through concerted effort, can effect integration, thereby enriching both their natural environment and themselves. The harmony which exists in nature, far from being predetermined by some abstract natural law, is a negotiated and open-ended achievement of those intrinsically related elements that constitute the process of existence.³⁹

By the interaction of music and ceremonies (ritual action), the gentleman (*junzi* 君子) can achieve harmony and resonance with heaven and earth. All beings, including the visible and the invisible, according to the proper regulation by music and ceremonies, can live in the status of “mutual respect and love”.⁴⁰

³⁷ 《禮記·樂記·14》：「樂者，天地之和也；禮者，天地之序也。和故百物皆化；序故群物皆別。樂由天作，禮以地制。過制則亂，過作則暴。明於天地，然後能興禮樂也。」

Translated by Legge, J. (1885). *Sacred Books of the East, volume 28, part 4: The Li Ki*. Yue Ji (Record of music):14. From: <https://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=gb&id=10124#s10031950>

³⁸ 《禮記·樂記·11》：「樂由中出，禮自外作。樂由中出故靜，禮自外作故文。大樂必易，大禮必簡。樂至則無怨，禮至則不爭。」 Translated by Legge, J. (1885). *Sacred Books of the East, volume 28, part 4: The Li Ki*. Yue Ji (Record of music):11. From:

<https://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=gb&id=60510>

³⁹ Hall, D. L & Ames, R. T. (1987). *Thinking through Confucius*, p. 171-172.

⁴⁰ 《禮記·樂記·12》：「大樂與天地同和，大禮與天地同節。和故百物不失，節故祀天祭地，明則有禮樂，幽則有鬼神。如此，則四海之內，合敬同愛矣。」 Translated by Legge, J. (1885). *Sacred Books of the East, volume 28, part 4: The Li Ki*. Yue Ji (Record of music):12. From: <https://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=gb&id=10122#s10031927>

Concisely, Confucians believe that, through aesthetic activities (e.g. music), one can refine one's personhood and virtue, and live out a kind of beautiful harmony or harmonious beauty in accordance with pre-established social norms and ceremonies. Such orderly manners, existing within oneself and also amongst one another, embody the meaning of Confucian harmony and orderly beauty.

Life is Art: Daoist Indifferent Harmony in Relation to Life, Freedom and Forgetfulness

Daoism, as the other major school which together constitutes the basic aesthetic understanding of the ancient Chinese, suggests a different perspective of harmony in accordance with their unique conception of the life of aesthetics. Taking Xu's viewpoint, Daoism, like Confucianism, is also concerned with the educational effect of aesthetic experience in cultivating one's life. However, Daoism maintains a very distinct understanding of aesthetic life. Rather than concern themselves with the reconciliation of dialectic opposition, or the unity of the differences, Daoism focuses on the unawareness of the differences among beings. It is better to remain in the state where the "relationship" and the "reference" between things is opaque, invisible, silent and forgetful, instead of being in the visible state where every part within the whole has to be interdependent on each other. Thus, Zhuangzi said:

When the springs are dried up, the fishes collect together on the land. Than that they should moisten one another there by the damp about them, and keep one another wet by their slime, it would be better for them to forget one another in the rivers and lakes.⁴¹

The whole nurtures the unattachment of the parts; this is the true state of harmony for Daoism. Genuine freedom lives in a state of harmony that refrains from the attachment of relationships and ceremonies. Harmony is not the unity of things, instead, it is the indifference of things. Xu pointed out that, from the perspective of constructing a cosmological view towards life, the spirit of Daoism, especially in the case of Laozi, is theoretical and metaphysical. However, from the perspective of the affirmation of the aesthetic value of life, what the Daoist pursues is, in fact, the highest spirit of art, which became visible with Zhuangzi.⁴² Xu asserted, Zhuangzi, unlike the founder of the modern Western aesthetics (Xu may refer to Kant), did not at first take the beauty or art as the object-to-be-analyzed or experienced; and also, unlike the Confucians, did not embrace a specific art object as the object that could lead us to meet a certain purpose.⁴³ Art objects or artistic activities are not instruments

⁴¹ 《莊子·大宗師·2》：「泉涸，魚相與處於陸，相呴以溼，相濡以沫，不如相忘於江湖」 Translated by Legge, J. (1891). *The Writings of Chuang Tzu*. The Great and Most Honoured Master: 2. From: <https://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=gb&id=41979#s10025686>

⁴² Cf. 徐復觀 (2001)。《中國藝術精神》。上海：華東大學出版社，頁 29。

⁴³ Cf. *ibid.*, p.30.

serving a certain purpose. Instead, Zhuangzi takes art and the aesthetic life as an end of itself. Although the universal purpose of Daoism is to live a free life, Zhuangzi does not consider art as an instrument to freedom. In his work, he presented a picture for us wherein a free life is an aesthetic life, and the aesthetic life retains a kind of beauty. In short: We do not live an aesthetic life *for* freedom, instead, aesthetic life *is* freedom.

About Zhuangzi's aesthetic life, Xu argues that the concept of harmony, *he*, and wandering, *you* (游), represent the implicit agreement (*minghe* 冥合) between the subject and the object, through which humanity could integrate with the environment and the world and gain the universal dissolution of the self and the genuine freedom.⁴⁴ Xu also used Zhuangzi's butterfly and happy fish stories to illustrate his point that the dissolution of the connection between the theoretical and the practical happens in the state of forgetfulness.⁴⁵ This state of mind can be represented by the illustration of the concept of the "forgetfulness of the self" (*wangwo* 忘我), the "lose oneself" (*sangwo* 喪我) or the "transformation of things" (*wuhua* 物化). These cognitive activities, including dreaming, which dissolves the referential relation between the subjective and the objective, are for Xu a process of aestheticization of one's whole life. Nevertheless, I think, the dissolution of the detachment of the self and the not-self would be a better depiction of Zhuangzi's idea, because Zhuangzi never holds an anthropocentric position in the discussion of "losing oneself". The self can be a human or any other living being. In Zhuangzi's work, we cannot find the theme of the dualistic conflict between human beings and other beings. Instead, we can see the theme of how the socially interwoven self finds the way back to plural beings in nature. To live a life with peace and harmony in an indifferent way is not only the purpose of a Daoist life but also the starting point of Daoist thought: "Heaven, Earth, and I were produced together, and all things and I are one".⁴⁶ Indeed, the oneness of the "ten thousand beings" (*wanwu* 萬物, not "creatures", "universe" or "heaven and earth") is formed in plurality and diversity of the "ceaseless procreation". The cosmometaphysical conception of the wholeness of things as the process (not an entity) of the ceaseless procreation, which originates from the *Book of Changes* or *Yijing* 《易經》, is a common belief of Confucianism and Daoism.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p.58.

⁴⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, p.57-60.

⁴⁶ 《莊子·齊物論·9》：「天地與我並生，而萬物與我為一」 Translated by Legge, J. (1891). *The Writings of Chuang Tzu. The Adjustment of Controversies: 9*. From: <https://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=gb&id=41941>

⁴⁷ The term "ceaseless procreation" is an interpretative translation of the concept of *Shengsheng* 生生 by Roger Ames in connection with Tang Junyi's "notion of ceaseless procreation (生生不已觀)". C.f. Ames, R. T. (2010), *What is Confucianism?*. In *Confucian in Context: Classic Philosophy and Contemporary Issues, East Asia and Beyond*. Chang, W. and Kalmanson, L (Ed.). Albany: Suny Press, p.72. Accordingly, Haiming Wen explains: "*Shengsheng* 生生 is an expression that represents felt-creativity in the Confucian tradition, in

In conclusion, Confucianism and Daoism provide two kinds of understanding of harmony regarding the ideal and aesthetic life. Confucianism admits the positive effect of art *for* the completion of life; Daoism, instead, aims at an artistic life or an aesthetics *of* life. Confucianism treats music education as an element of the completion of personality. However, music, as a kind of artistic activity, is not the end in itself. Through art, we can express and balance our emotions in order to train up ourselves in line with the proper ritual rites. The final purpose of doing art or realizing an aesthetic life is to foster the virtues of life. Confucian gentleman should consciously pursue art for the sake of living out a harmonious beauty or beautiful harmony. On the other side, the Daoist does not consciously pursue art itself or artwork as aesthetics object. Artwork as aesthetics object is the result of artificial (*wei* 偽 or *zaozuo* 造作), which is unnatural and superfluous. Living a life like an artwork should be a process of minimization of the artificial things surrounding us. Life is the only artwork that man should pursue. The meaning of the artistic activities lies not in production or an establishment of the work of art yet in the practice and revelation of the art of living in accordance with Daoism's concept of harmony – an invisible, pale, indifferent harmony in praise of the ambiguity and diversity of life forms.

It seems that Confucianism and Daoism are in many ways different and incompatible, how then can they have joined together and co-formulated the aesthetic view of ancient Chinese? Actually, like Li Zehou said:

On the surface, Confucianism and Daoism seem to be diametrically opposed. One embraces the world, the other forsakes it; one is optimistic and progressive, the other negative and retiring. But in reality, the two form a mutually complementary and harmonious whole.⁴⁸

Although the two schools maintain many differences about the ideality of art and life, both of them are concerned with the educational effect of aesthetics in life and similarly, both of them aim at a harmony that appreciates the tranquil and peaceful state of mind. Harmony is nothing about tension and conflict; instead, it is about the harmonious relation concerning the internal states of an aesthetic subject or the relationship among beings, regardless of whether we look at Confucian orderly harmony or Daoist indifferent harmony. These eventually co-constitute a unique aesthetic worldview in the Eastern world, which is based on a similar belief of the harmony in diversity regarding the common cosmo-metaphysical view of the ceaseless procreation.

the sense of ceaseless procreation. *Shengsheng* does not only mean ceaseless felt-creation, but also can be understood as patterns of flourishing events.” See: Wen, Haiming (2009). *Confucian Pragmatism as the Art of Contextualizing Personal Experience and World*. Lanham et al.: Lexington Books, p. 126, note 21.

⁴⁸ Li, Z. (2010). *The Chinese Aesthetic Tradition*. Samei, M. B. (trans.). Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, p. 77.

IV. Dialectic Harmony and Ambiguous Harmony

By the above recapitulation of the ancient Greek and ancient Chinese thoughts on harmony in relation to the aesthetic viewpoint, we can generally categorize them into two kinds of harmony – “dialectic harmony” and “ambiguous harmony” – indicating the difference between the Western and the Eastern aesthetic harmony.

The understanding of harmony from the West can be conceived as a kind of “dialectic harmony” which emphasizes the unity that is formed by the bipolar and dualistic elements. As we have shown, such conception of harmony is rooted in Platonic metaphysics and has been developed along with the history of Western philosophical thoughts called *loci platonici* by Jullien. By the etymology, as circumstantial evidence, we can prove that the above judgment is reasonable because the term harmony is derived from the Greek *ἀρμονία* which originally means “joint agreement, concord”. With further analysis, we can see two conceptual pillars of Platonic harmony which is rooted in Pythagorean and Heraclitan concept of harmony and dialectic. The aesthetic-mathematic cosmology combining the dialectic understanding between tension and harmony constitutes a specific aesthetic concept of harmonious beauty or beautiful harmony in the West embodying reconciliation between conflicts and contradictory elements. Such harmony does not avert conflicts and contradictions, instead, it takes those factors as the essential elements of sustaining a harmony, with which a kind of beautiful emerges. Such harmonious beauty or beautiful harmony is fundamentally cosmological and invisible, but human beings can discover it in the physical world through the eye of the mind, namely *logos* regarding language and reason.

In contrast, the conception of harmony from the East concerns the tranquil and peaceful elements instead of underlining the dialectic unity of differences concerning the reconciliation of contradictory elements. As an old idiom said, “indifferent to fame and profit enlightens the true will; tranquility yields the far-reaching” (*danbo mingzhi, ningjing zhiyuan* 淡泊明志，寧靜致遠),⁴⁹ indifference and tranquility represent not only positive qualities *in* life but also the aesthetic standard *for* life. Chinese intelligentsia, who are in general strongly influenced by the tradition of Confucianism and Daoism, maintain that those qualities are the most essential virtues for cultivating one’s moral character and aesthetic taste. As a result, traditional Chinese aesthetics honor, in general, the flavorless rather than the flavorful, the silent rather than the loud (“The great harmonic – sound at its most subtle” *da yin xi sheng*

⁴⁹ Translated by me. Cf.

《淮南子·主術訓》：「是故非澹薄無以明德，非寧靜無以致遠，非寬大無以兼覆，非慈厚無以懷眾，非平正無以制斷。」 From: <https://ctext.org/huainanzi/zhu-shu-xun/zh?en=on>

大音希聲),⁵⁰ the bland (*dan* 淡) rather than the colorful (*se* 色). As the positive value for both Confucianism and Daoism, both tranquility and indifference imply a subtle richness that is embedded in everyday life in Chinese culture. On the whole, Chinese gentlemen praise the comity and passivity, tend to free themselves from striving (*buzheng* 不爭) and condemn the polarization, aggressiveness or excitement that may destroy the “ambiguous harmony” – a kind of harmony that concerns the felicitous expression in combination with different elements. The true harmony is unconsciously lived in a situation retaining diversity in peace. Thus, I name this kind of “ambiguous harmony” as harmony in diversity.

By unfolding these two kinds of harmony, the harmony in conciliation and harmony in diversity, we can see the cosmo-metaphysical conceptional origin of harmony in Western and Eastern aesthetics. This may bring to the forefront new questions regarding the basic differences and development of Western and Eastern aesthetics. Like Heidegger’s concern of the history of Being (*Seinsgeschichte*), we can re-inspect and further consider the fate of Western and Eastern aesthetics. Such discourse, I hope, will become prevalent in the short future.

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⁵⁰ Cf. Jullien, F. (2004). *In Praise of Blandness: Proceeding from Chinese Thought and Aesthetics*. Translated by Varsano, P. M. New York: Zone Book, p.71. Cf. 《道德經》：「故建言有之：明道若昧；進道若退；夷道若類；上德若谷；太白若辱；廣德若不足；建德若偷；質真若渝；大方無隅；大器晚成；大音希聲；大象無形；道隱無名。夫唯道，善貸且成。」

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