

Too much harmony? Chinese historical terms denoting unity, balance, accord, congruity, proportion, concord, expediency, consonance and correspondence

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0 Introduction

China, in particular pre-modern China is often associated with the notion of “harmony”. The harmonic equilibrium between *yin* and *yang*, the harmonic flow of *qi*, the harmonic balance of forces in *fengshui*, the *dao* as principle of natural harmony, the harmony of body and mind in Chinese medicine and of humans and the cosmos in Chinese philosophy – these are “facts” we all are familiar with from esoteric and wellness discourses.

The three religions of China, Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, are associated with harmony as they all seem to aim at states of balanced equilibria. Their mutual relationship is perceived as syncretistic and harmonious, and the absence of religious wars seem to prove this assumption and lead to further assumptions about the peacefulness and tolerance of Chinese religions in general.¹

Confucianism in particular is perceived as a philosophy of social harmony. Since 2005 even the CCP propagates the ideal of a “harmonious society”, not as the result of a successfully accomplished class struggle but as a particular feature of the Chinese way into a socialist market economy.² China is commonly classified as a “culture of consensus” as opposed to Western “culture of debate”.³ The German Wikipedia-entry to “Chinesische Kultur” defines the following nine essential traits: 1. Groupthink and discrimination between insiders and outsiders (Gruppendenken und Insider-Outsider-Diskriminierung), 2. *Harmony* (*Harmonie*), 3. Face (Gesicht), 4. Being indirect (Indirektheit), 5. Collectivity (Kollektivität), 6. Awareness of hierarchy (Hierarchiebewusstsein), 7. Ritualisation (Ritualisierung), 8. This-worldliness (Diesseitigkeit), 9. Sinocentrism (Sinozentrismus).⁴ This entry is so representative for a wide consensus on Chinese culture that it has not been changed in the otherwise highly

¹ For a critical discussion see Gentz 2011 and 2013.

² For a critical discussion see Roetz 2009.

³ Using Japan as an example, Ruth Benedict in 1946 coined the rather controversial distinction between Asiatic “cultures of shame” in which norms are more determined from the outside and societies therefore strive for harmony with the exterior world, and Western “cultures of blame” in which norms are stronger intrinsically self-determined within the individual. See Benedict 1946.

⁴ These nine points are pretty much congruent with the 12 points discussed in the 12 chapters of Part II: “The Ways of Thinking of the Chinese”, formulated by Nakamura Hajime in his famous and controversial *The Ways of Thinking of Eastern People* which he had drafted already in the mid 1940s. The category “Harmonie”, however is different from Nakamura’s, Nakamura in chapter 12 only uses this term to refer to what we would call religious syncretism (Nakamura 1960, 284-297). See “Chinesische Kultur”, in: Wikipedia, http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinesische_Kultur (13.06.2016).

floating Wikipedia within at least the last 5 years (when I noticed it for the first time). In this Wikipedia entry, harmony in Chinese culture is related to such diverse areas as religion and cosmology, politics, morality, human relations and behaviour.

Looking at this from a historical perspective, it seems that harmony discourses always grow in times of chaos and discord. The early Masters literature disputes manifold ways how to achieve peace and order in a situation of constant warfare and disorder. But the “Disputers of the Tao” were not merely concerned with the right ways of achieving peace, harmony and order. The concrete visions of peace, harmony and order proper also differed greatly among these thinkers, even among thinkers belonging to the same traditions. They differed both in terms of the particular aspects that were emphasised and the ranking of concepts and terms in their respective normative vocabulary.⁵ Reconstructions of “The Confucian concept of harmony”⁶ or “The Confucian philosophy of harmony”⁷ are thus not very convincing.

In the following paper I will argue in a first part that there is no consistent and unified idea of harmony in early Chinese texts. Instead we find discussions about various aspects of harmony that make use of a broad range of terms that each have multiple meanings in different contexts. Talking about harmony in China in most cases follows two fallacious assumptions, first, that identical terms refer to similar concepts and, second, that the Western term “harmony” is a good translation for most of these terms or should consistently be used when translating the character *he* 和. In a second part I will try to show when, how and why the Western term “harmony” came to be used to cover all these aspects.

1 Harmony in early Chinese texts

Historically, some of the terms denoting certain aspects of harmony belong to the earliest layer of Chinese that we are able to reconstruct. *He* 和 does not appear in oracle bone inscriptions. Its earlier forms *he* 龠 and *yue* 龠 do occur but are used as designations for sacrifices, *xie* 𡗗 as well. However, *xie* 協 and *xie* 𡗗 are both used in the meaning of “together”, “common”, or “common efforts”/“combined forces”, and related words such as *he*

⁵ The latter is discussed by Roetz 2015 (2010), 315.

⁶ Yu 2015 (2010).

⁷ Li 2014.

合, *tong* 同, and *hui* 會 (all meaning “together”), and *ning* 寧 and *an* 安 (both meaning “safe/peaceful/quiet”) also appear in the oracle bone inscriptions.⁸

He 和 and its earlier form *he* 龠 appear in bronze inscriptions around the 9th century BCE, mainly on bronze chimes where they designate the harmonising quality of the chimes⁹ and are also used to refer to the harmonisation of the people.¹⁰ *He* 盃 is another character that appears in bronze inscriptions and denotes the mixing of ingredients to make soup.¹¹ Both characters are used interchangeably with each other and with the character *he* 和, they all refer in general to the mingling of things to create a product that is pleasant to the senses when the things are well composed (sounds create music, ingredients create taste).

The earliest sources in which this concept is reflected theoretically are the *Guoyu* (“Zhengyu”, chap. 16)¹² and the *Zuo zhuan* (Zhao 20.8).¹³ In both passages the terms *he* 和 and *tong* 同 are opposed with *he* being the ideal of mingling heterogeneous things to a perfectly fruitful order that has the potential to thrive and *tong* being dull, without musicality and flavour and leading to decline.¹⁴ Both texts connect *he* to the positive effect of balancing (*ping* 平). Both texts connect the balanced mingling of sounds and soup ingredients to balanced politics. The *Zuo zhuan* quotes the “Lie zu” 烈祖 Ode (Mao 320) of the *Shijing* which also praises the right balance of the “harmonious” sacrificial soup.¹⁵ The *Zuo zhuan* further connects the effect of the harmonious products to the balance of the ruler’s mind (*xin* 心) which is thus regarded as belonging to the same category of organs to which ears, mouth and eyes belong, organs that are sensitive to the harmony of the mingled compositions.

⁸ Xu 1988, pp. 199, 284, 504, 573, 577, 802, 848, 1479, 1480.

⁹ Falkenhausen 1993, 124.

¹⁰ Falkenhausen 1993, 1-4 and Li 2014, 24.

¹¹ Yu 2015 (2010), 18, Li 2014, 24-25.

¹² *Guoyu* 1988, 515-516.

¹³ Yang 1990, 1419-1420.

¹⁴ These two famous stories are already quoted in Feng Youlan’s *Zhongguo zhexue shi* 中國哲學史 from 1931 (Bodde 1952, 34-36), and also in Zhang Dainian’s discussion on the concept of *he* 和 in his article on some particularities of Chinese philosophy in 1957 (in another article on some basic philosophical categories in Chinese philosophy from the same year, *he* 和 is not mentioned). They are also quoted in Zhang’s later *Zhongguo gudian zhexue gainian fanchou yaolun* 中國古典哲學概念範疇要論, completed 1987, publ. 1989, as first examples for the key concept “harmony”, chap 37: “*He* 和, *Taihe* 太和” (Harmony, Ultimate Harmony), pp. 127-130, 127-128 (Ryden transl. 2002, pp. 270-276, 270-272). They are also quoted and translated in Roetz 2009, 15-16, Yu 2015 (2010), 16-17, Li 2015, 25-26 etc. The contrast between *he* and *tong* is well known from the famous saying in *Lunyu* 13.23: “The master said: The gentlemen aims at harmony, not at uniformity, the petty man seeks uniformity, not harmony” 子曰：「君子而不同，小人同而不和。」

¹⁵ 亦有和羹、既戒既平。(Shang Sacrificial Odes 商頌).

We find the same line of organs in the *Mengzi* as part of an anthropology of common sensual and moral judgements:

口之於味也，有同耆焉；耳之於聲也，有同聽焉；目之於色也，有同美焉。至於心，獨無所同然乎？心之所同然者何也？調理也，義也。聖人先得我心之所同然耳。故理義之悅我心，猶芻豢之悅我口。

All palates have the same preference in taste; all ears in sound; all eyes in beauty. Should hearts prove to be an exception by possessing nothing in common? What is it, then, that is common to all hearts? Reason and rightness. The sage is simply the man first to discover this common element in my heart. Thus reason and rightness please my heart in the same way as meat pleases my palate.¹⁶

The term *he* 和 does not play any role in the *Mengzi*. It is almost conspicuously absent in most of the text and occurs only three times in the entire *Mengzi* (in only two passages). The above passage is thus not part of a theory of harmony. But it provides a reflection on the anthropological conditions that are necessary for such a theory, namely that there is a common ground of normative judgement that “all humans have” (*ren jie you zhi* 人皆有之).¹⁷ *Xunzi* connects righteousness later to *he* 和 in a theory that takes hierarchical order as the highest form of equability (*ping* 平).¹⁸ Heiner Roetz shows quite convincingly how *Xunzi*’s understanding of “harmony” (by justice *yi* 義) is peculiar to this one thinker and can be adequately explained within his philosophical system of thought only. *Xunzi*’s notion of *he* 和 is thus a unity that is structured hierarchically according to separations (*fen* 分) that are based on justice/righteousness (*yi* 義).¹⁹ The basic structure of the term *he* 和 is still present in this usage, it denotes a composite whole that is perfect and can be appreciated by humans when its constituents are combined according to particular principles of composition. In *Xunzi*’s case the composite whole is human society, the constituents are the members of society with different capabilities, and the principle of composition is the separation according to justice/righteousness.

If we look at the way, the term *he* 和 is used in other texts we find that it describes in most cases this threefold relationship between the composite whole, its constituents and the principles of composition. And yet it often refers to very different aspects of this complex nexus. These are some of the compounds in which we find *he* in early texts in the word classes of verbs, adverbs, adjectives, and nouns:

¹⁶ Lau 1984 (1974), 231.

¹⁷ 3B8, 6A6, 6A10.

¹⁸ Roetz 2015 (2010), 320-321.

¹⁹ Roetz 2015 (2010)

和合, 合和, 調和, 和調, 和平, 平和, 和同, 同和, 和協, 協和, 和通, 和應, 中和, 和順, 和靜, 和輯, 和親, 均和, 滑和, 和洽, 美和, 惠和, 和寧, 固和, 和諧, 雍和

It is most often combined with *tiao* 調, but also associated with *an* 安, *shi* 適 (和出於適), *dang* 當 (和生於當), *shi* 時 etc. No other character from the semantic field of “harmony” is used in so many compounds as the character *he* 和.

Erya 爾雅 and *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 support the impression that a broad repertoire of more or less specific terms belong to the semantic field of “harmony” and that *he* 和 is the most generic of these under which other are subsumed:

Erya: 諧, 輯, 協, 和也, 關關, 嚶嚶, 音聲和也, 龢, 變, 和也。²⁰

In the *Shuowen jiezi*, *he* 和 appears in seven cases as a direct gloss:

誠：和也。
調：和也。
韻：和也。
變：和也。
曆：和也。
怡：和也。
澢：和也。

and in 13 cases as a crucial part of the definition:

諧：樂和諧也。
閭：和說而諍也。
講：和解也。
糲：以米和羹也。
糲：糜和也。
脂：面和也。
駟：馬和也。
垸：以黍和灰而鬚也。
嚶：和田也。
協：同心之和。
騶：同思之和。
協：眾之同和也。
輯：車和輯也。

²⁰ Interestingly, 調 does not appear in the *Erya*.

The relation of *tiao* 調 (which is most often used in compounds with *he*) to *he* is noticeable in the *Shuowen* not only because it is directly glossed with *he* (調：和也), but because it is used in turn to define the two earlier variants of *he*: 龢：調也 and: 盪：調味也.

Tong 同 and *he* 合, both terms related to the semantic field of “harmony”,²¹ are also terms which are used more often than other characters to define words belonging to their semantic fields:

共：同也。
昆：同也。
搃：同也。
劦：同力也。
協：同心之和。
騶：同思之和。
協：眾之同和也。

會：合也。
同：合會也。
恰：合也。
縹：合也。

but they are not used as frequently as *he* 和. *Xie* 諧 is only used twice – in a mutual explanation with *he* 詒:

諧：詒也。
詒：諧也。

Looking at the interchangeability of terms that can denote different (or identical) aspects of harmony in early texts, we might look at an example which allows us to see the terms in a comparative light, namely the ways the perfect relationship between *yin* and *yang* are expressed in the *Zhuangzi*, *Lüshi Chunqiu*, *Huainanzi*, *Chunqiu fanlu*, *Hanshi waizhuan* and *Baihutong*:

Zhuangzi
陰陽調和
陰陽之和
陰陽和靜

²¹ For *tong* see, for example, the following passage from the “Hongfan” chapter of the *Shangshu*: 汝則有大疑，謀及乃心，謀及卿士，謀及庶人，謀及卜筮。汝則從，龜從，筮從，卿士從，庶民從，是之謂大同。身其康彊，子孫其逢，吉。 When you have doubts about any great matter, consult with your own mind; consult with your high ministers and officers; consult with the common people; consult the tortoise-shell and divining stalks. If you, the shell, the stalks, the ministers and officers, and the common people, all agree about a course, this is what is called a great concord, and the result will be the welfare of your person and good fortune to your descendants. Legge 1991 (1865), 337.

陰陽相照、相蓋、相治

陰陽錯行

LSCQ

聲出於和，和出於適

陰陽不適之患

陰陽之和

陰陽之宜

陰陽變化，一上一下，合而成章。渾渾沌沌，離則復合，合則復離，是謂天常。

凡樂，天地之和，陰陽之調也

陰陽失次

陰陽之變

HNZ:

和陰陽

陰陽錯合

陰陽合和

陰陽相錯

陰陽同氣相動

陰陽之和

動靜調於陰陽

陰陽和平

天地之氣莫大於和，和者，陰陽調

陰陽相接，乃能成和

陰陽之始，皆調適相似

天設日月，列星辰，調陰陽，張四時

陰陽所嘔

陰陽和

陰陽化

調陰陽之氣

聖人天覆地載，日月照，陰陽調，四時化，萬物不同，無故無新，無疏無親，故能法天。

陰陽之和

陰陽無為，故能和

和陰陽之氣

陰陽之合

CQFL:

陰陽會

陰陽之所合別

陰陽失平

不與陰陽俱往來

HSWZ:

陰陽和合

調和陰陽

陰陽和調
陰陽不和

BHT

陰陽中和
陽唱陰和
陽倡陰和

If we take the different terms that are used to designate the perfect relationship between *yin* and *yang* we arrive at the following repertoire:

成和, 和, 調, 調和, 和調, 和靜, 相照、相蓋、相治, 調適相似, 適, 宜, 變, 化, 變化, 次, 相錯, 錯行, 錯合, 合和, 和合, 合, 合別, 同氣相動, 和平, 平, 相接, 嘔 無為, 會, 往來, 中和

This repertoire refers to different aspects of *yin yang* which could all be subsumed under the broad term “harmony”. Yet a systematic analysis of different usages of *he* 和 (and comparable terms denoting “harmony”) reveals the broad range of possible meanings behind this/these term/s:

1. The content of the composite whole: a) cosmic, b) social, c) sensual (food, music, beauty), d) bodily health, e) emotions, f) ritual, g) text, h) weather/harvest.
2. The structure and the principles of the order of the composite whole: proper timeliness (sequential order), proper place (spatial order), proper relationship, proper cultivation of each constituent.
3. Individual constituents: a) cosmic (天地, 四時, 陰陽, 五行, 氣), b) divine (神), c) social (上下, 民, 百姓), d) spatial (外內, 遠近), e) political (天下, 國), f) personal (心, 自), g) sensual (五音, 五聲, 五味, 五教).
4. The relation of the constituents within the composite whole: a) each constituent has its right time/place, b) each constituent is separated from the other, c) each constituent has a place according to its capability/talent/social status/social role/office, d) each constituent has its spatial/timely ruling domains/phases (according to *yin yang*, *wuxing* etc. orders), e) there is an equilibrium between all constituents (*ping* 平, *zhong* 中), f) the constituents provide a repertoire from which they are chosen by weighing according to the circumstances.
5. The way the constituents came to be at their time/place: a) following the ritual order of sage kings, b) following the order of the ruler, c) by conviction and agreement, d) by themselves.

6. The way the constituents match: a) corresponding to each other, b) complementing each other, c) supporting/nourishing/benefitting each other, d) in exchange with each other, e) operating separately, f) co-operating with each other, g) agreeing with each other, h) being peaceful, free of conflict, i) united in an effort towards a common goal, j) providing independent equally important options.
7. The way constituents are made to fit the composition: a) tuning the constituents, b) bringing them to an agreement, c) weighing them against circumstances.
8. The effect of the composite whole: a) peace, b) balance of cosmic forces, c) political unity, d) political/military strength, e) wealth/good harvests, f) social order, g) bless/luck/success, h) health/longevity
9. The quality of the composite whole: a) unity, b) balance, c)

All these various aspects can be covered by the term “harmony/harmonic/harmonise” and yet we miss exactly these systematic differences if we cover them by this one term. Both, the translation of the *Huainanzi* by Major, Queen, Meyer and Roth as well as of the *Lüshi Chunqiu* by Knoblock and Riegel consistently translate the character *he* 和 as “harmony/harmonic/harmonise”. The Chinese language does not make things easier because although the contexts often make it very clear, which systematic meaning is intended by using a particular term, the terminology does not consistently follow the systematic differentiations of the thought. It rather often follows literary principles of symmetry, parallelism, opposition and variation. This has an important impact on our keyword issue. Just because order, peace and harmony were central concerns of early Chinese thinkers, there are numerous terms that denote various aspects of these. But because they are not applied consistently they do not gain the status of systematic or ideological keywords. Many of these terms, especially *he* 和, are emphasised as central philosophical terms in later texts and as pivotal concepts that describe the highest achievements and values of particular philosophical discourses. And yet, in meta-reflexive self-reflections up to the 20th century none of these terms ever arrives at the same conceptual level as other terms such as *li*, *qi* or *dao* to define Chinese cultural identity.

2. Chinese harmony in the 20th century

So what are the reasons that this changes in the 20th century and that “harmony” becomes one of the most central concepts in many analyses of Chinese culture, philosophy, religion and society?

2.1 China and Japan

Let us first turn to China and Japan. In China, the concept of “harmony” does not play a strong discursive role during the late 19th and early 20th century when discussions on Chinese culture or the Chinese character were intense. If we look at it from the perspective of the philosophical discourse for example with which I am more familiar than with others we can observe that it does not play a role as an analytical term in the early histories of philosophy by Hu Shi (1919) and Feng Youlan (1931). That it is nowhere discussed in the first Chinese *History of Chinese Philosophy* (*Zhongguo zhexue shi* 中國哲學史) written by Xie Wuliang 謝無量 (1884-1964) in 1916, shows that it did not play any role in the Japanese discourse about Chinese philosophy either as Xie’s *History* is entirely copied from Takase Takejirō’s 高瀬武次郎 (1868 – 1950) *Shina tetsugakushi* 支那哲学史 from 1910²² in which the term is also not discussed. In Uno Tetsuto’s 宇野哲人 (1875 – 1974) even more famous *Shina tetsugakushi kōwa* 支那哲學史講話 from 1914 it also does not play a prominent role. Instead, Xie Wuliang emphasises the importance of the concept of the centre (*zhong* 中) which according to him was discovered during the times of Yao and Shun as a highest ethical norm from which the classifications of the “Hongfan” chapter of the *Shangshu* were then developed.²³ This in turn is again directly taken from Takase’s *History* where he writes that the concept of the centre was invented by the sage kings Yao 堯 and Shun 舜. Takase in turn has taken this over from Zhou Rudeng (1547–1629) who in his *Shengxue zongzhuàn* 聖學宗傳 (1605) claimed that the sage king Yao had discovered (*jie* 揭) the character *zhong* and that with this the true transmission of the Way (*daotong* 道統) had begun.²⁴

In Japan, the term *wa* 和 plays a much more significant role as a cultural key word.²⁵ It has been used as a self-designation for Japan and the Japanese since it replaced the earlier homophonous graphic pejorative transcription *wa* 倭 meaning “dwarf” or “submissive people” and was assigned a special place as the most important of 17 moral guidelines defined in the *Nihon shoki* (*Nihongi*) in 720 CE,²⁶ a guideline that has played a crucial role in Japanese

²² On the history of Chinese histories of philosophy see Gentz 2012.

²³ Xie 1916, p. 15.

²⁴ 蠡測曰：帝堯首揭中字。斯道統之真宗所自啟也。Zhou 1989, p. 49. For more details see Gentz 2012.

²⁵ See Wierzbicka 1997, 248-254.

²⁶ Triplett 2006, 179. The first article says: “I. Harmony is to be valued, and an avoidance of wanton opposition to be honoured. All men are influenced by class-feelings, and there are few who are intelligent. Hence there are some who disobey their lords and fathers, or who maintain feuds with the neighbouring villages. But when those

philosophy, ethics, religion and politics since. It seems therefore unlikely that it was taken over from Japan into early 20th Chinese discourses.

2.2 European “harmony” and the Orient

That harmony is a concept essential to Chinese culture is a view, it seems, which became firmly established only in the 1920s and 30s in Europe and the United States. Neither in the earlier missionary reports on China nor in the detailed and thorough analyses of China by the enlightenment philosophers does the concept of harmony play any significant role. Prior to the 1920s it was used here and there in literature on China, especially in translations of Chinese texts (mostly translating the character *he* 和), sometimes it was mentioned in combination with the term centre (*zhong* 中) reflecting the importance that this term had in the opening passage of the *Zhong Yong*.²⁷ But it was never used in a general or meta-reflexive way as a systematic and analytical term. It never formed part of one of the many essentialist statements about China in the 18th or 19th century. Chinese concepts which nowadays are consistently translated as “harmony/harmonious” were translated in various terms in these early works which described matters in a much more critical and differentiated manner.²⁸ Even Leibniz (1646–1716) used the term “harmony” in his extensive discussions on Chinese culture and philosophy only when he subsumed something Chinese under his own concept of “pre-established harmony” (*prästabilierte Harmonie*). In the works of Herder (1744–1803), Hegel (1770–1831) and Schelling (1775–1854) the notion of “harmony” is absent in their discussions of China. In the missionary literature, in DuBose’s *Dragon, Image, and Demon* (1886),²⁹ in Edkins’ *Religion in China* (1878), Martin’s *The Chinese, their Education, Philosophy, and Letters* (1880), Smith’s famous *Chinese Characteristics* (1890), or Gorst’s

above are harmonious and those below are friendly, and there is concord in the discussion of business, right views of things spontaneously gain acceptance. Then what is there which cannot be accomplished!” See <http://richard-hooker.com/sites/worldcultures/ANCJAPAN/CONST.HTM> (13.06.2016).

²⁷ “喜怒哀樂之未發，謂之中；發而皆中節，謂之和；中也者，天下之大本也；和也者，天下之達道也。致中和，天地位焉，萬物育焉。” The term is therefore also taken up as a part of the compound keyword “*zhonghe*” 中和 in Chen Chun’s 陳淳 (1159-1223) work on philosophical keywords, the *Beixi ziyi* 北溪字義.

²⁸ Terms and expressions such as “concord”, “balance”, “combinations”, “compounds”, “evenly balanced”, “state of equilibrium”, “regularly arranged order”, “united/unitary/unity”, “monism”, “junction”, “inseparableness”, are used by these authors (in German: “Einklang”, “Übereinstimmung”, “Vereinigung”, “Verschmelzen”, “Anpassung”, “Zusammenwirken”, “Willfähigkeit”, “Ganzsicht”, “Angleichung”, “Ausgeglichenheit”, “Verbundenheit/Verbundensein”, “parallel”, “konform”, “Organismus”, “Gleichung”, “Ineinander”, “Einbettung”, “gleicher Pulsschlag”, “Nachahmung”, “Einheit”, “Einheitlichkeit”, “Entsprechung”, and, sometimes, “Harmonie”).

²⁹ He uses twice the term “harmonious” (pp. 62, 91).

China (1899) the term is absent as well.³⁰ In his China friendly *Letters from John Chinaman* (1901) Dickinson does not use it either.³¹ In the early sinological literature the term also plays no role. We neither find it prominently in Brandt's *Die chinesische Philosophie und der Staats-Confucianismus* (1898) where it occurs only in two passages of his Zhong Yong translations,³² nor in Carus' elaborate analyses of Chinese cosmology (1902 [orig. 1896] and 1907),³³ nor in Parker's *China and Religion* (1905),³⁴ nor in Giles' *China and the Chinese* (1902) or his *Civilisation of China* (1911) or in Soothill's *The Three Religions of China* (1913)³⁵. Even De Groot makes almost no use of it in his book on *Universismus* in 1918,³⁶ a book that is full of descriptions of Chinese concepts of concord and the interplay of cosmic forces.

Not the study of Chinese culture, so it seems, but two developments independent from it (and from each other) have lead to the momentous circumstance that the notion of “harmony” came to be associated with China in the 1920s. On the one hand it was the career of this notion in the parlances of European languages where it advanced to become a downright vogue expression in the late 19th and early 20th centuries after a pre-blossom in Hermetic and Mesmeric circles. On the other hand an increasingly broad Western interest in Asian philosophies and religions that awoke in the late 19th century led to this association.

During the 17th century “harmony” was a central official term in confessional politics regulations of theological quarrels relating to orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Because one of the major issues of these quarrels was the repudiation of spiritistic and pietistic movements by academic theologians,³⁷ it is all the more striking that the term “harmony” was prominently used by exactly these “deviant” movements around the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century. Although the term “harmony” neither appears in the Bible (neither in KJV nor in other European translations that I am aware of) nor is used by Jakob Böhme (1575–1624) it

³⁰ John Ross (1852-1915), a missionary from the United Free Church of Scotland, is an exception among these, in his *Original Religion of China* he uses the term “harmony” 17 times on 344 pages (pp. 47, 86, 101, 137, 166, 171, 172, 184, 213, 222, 237, 254, 285, 286, 287, 304, 305), mostly in his translations of Chinese texts, but not once the adjective “harmonious”.

³¹ The term only appears once in the whole book to describe the inability of Westerners to be in harmony with themselves. Dickinson 1920 (orig. 1901), p. 20.

³² Brandt 1898, p. 18, 25-6.

³³ Carus, *Chinese Philosophy* 1902 (orig. 1896), *Chinese Thought* 1907.

³⁴ Pp. 16, 23, 25, 286 and 291.

³⁵ Not a single occurrence.

³⁶ I found only four instances of “harmonisch/e” in his text translations on pp. 34, 131, 314, 375, not a single occurrence of the term “Harmonie”. His student Erich Schmitt uses the term “Harmonie” several times in his 42 pp. PhD on Daoist monasteries (1916), but again without any analytical weight (pp. 9, 25, 27, 32, 33, 34).

³⁷ Taatz-Jacobi 2014, 243-244.

starts to appear a lot in self-designations of radical pietistic movements. We find it in the name of the “Harmonists”, founded by Johann Georg Rapp (1757–1847), who established settlements called “Harmony” and “New Harmony” in Pennsylvania in 1805, or in a community called the “Schwaikheimerian Harmony of the Children of God” (*Schwaikheimer Harmonie der Kinder Gottes*), founded by Georg Friedrich Fuchs in 1812, a community that emigrated to Russia between 1816 and 1819. The term “harmony” is also frequently used by social utopians like Charles Fourier (1772–1837) or Wilhelm Christian Weitling (1808–1871). The notion gained a further important impulse in the late 18th century through the new movement of Mesmerism which after Franz Mesmer’s (1734–1815) foundation of the *Société de l’Harmonie Universelle* in 1784 founded ca 30 further Mesmerian “Harmonious Societies” in and beyond France,³⁸ which all disappeared at one sweep with the French Revolution in 1789.³⁹ At the same time numerous “Harmony Societies” were founded in German cities.⁴⁰ In contrast to the Mesmerist lodges these were exclusive cultural associations of the upper middle class which besides art, entertainment and reading also carried out philanthropic activities, reflecting a global trend.⁴¹

It was probably in the context of Mesmerism that the term “harmony” was for the first time associated with Asia. Joseph Ennemoser (1787–1854) wrote in 1819 that the people in the Orient (*im Morgenlande*) lived in sacred harmony with nature (*in heiliger Harmonie mit der Natur*)⁴². The strong interest in Asia by Mesmerists such as Ennemoser and Windischmann, and later propagators of an “Oriental Renaissance” like Quinet,⁴³ was during the 19th century not yet systematically connected with the term “harmony”.⁴⁴ Mesmerists like most European intellectuals of that time received cultural theories which claimed that climatic influences caused cultural differences. According to these theories, warm climates generated passive, non-martial, acquiescent people and encouraged ecstatic, somnambulist states.⁴⁵ It is in the

³⁸ Among these, the “Harmonious Society” founded by Marquis de Pyséur in Straßburg in 1784, as well as those in Lyon and Ostende were the most important. Further *Sociétés* were founded in Bordeaux, St. Etienne and Santo Domingo, and further lodges were founded in Germany (Karlsruhe, Heilbronn, Bremen, Berlin) and in Switzerland. Peter 2005 (plagiarised in Schmötzer 2015, 151).

³⁹ Ellenberger 1970, 73.

⁴⁰ Leipzig 1776, Magdeburg 1783, Hamburg 1789, Mannheim 1803, Warendorf 1810, Würzburg 1812, Hamm 1816, Bochum 1817, Paderborn 1820, Iserlohn 1858 (founded 1802 “following the example of other cities” [*nach dem Beyspiele anderer Städte*], 1858 renamed).

⁴¹ In Quebec the *Harmonic Society/Société harmonique de Québec* was founded in 1819 as the first of several music societies that all shared the same name and besides the promotion of music and art also carried out philanthropic activities.

⁴² Ennemoser 1819, 185, also quoted in Baier 2009, 210. I am indebted to Maren Sziede for this reference.

⁴³ Quinet 1857 (1842), 51-65, spec. 54-56.

⁴⁴ Baier 2009, 231-243.

⁴⁵ Zotz 2000, 58-59; Baier 2009, 232.

context of these theories, which over the course of the 19th century gained distinctly racist traits, that a first shaping of the idea that Asian religions are peaceable can be traced.

Mesmerism and its concept of harmony was strongly received in occultist, spiritistic and theosophic circles around the end of the 19th century.⁴⁶ Added to that was the revival of Pythagorean concepts of harmony.⁴⁷ Both had a great influence on the intellectual life and art production in Europe. Harmony is an important topic in impressionist paintings of Monet (1899) and Matisse (1908), Cézanne and Gauguin even used the word as a central conceptual term. Harmony was also at the centre of musical developments between 1908 and 1911 when under the influence of occultist and theosophical writings Schönberg started to compose atonal and dissonant music against the traditional harmonic rules.⁴⁸ With Tagore (1861-1941) and Gurdjieff (1866/1877?⁴⁹-1949) and his students the term was also further developed in intellectual circles and increasingly gained momentum. In the 1920s and 30s the term “harmony” appears in all areas of life almost as a vogue expression. Paintings of Kandinsky (1924), Devaux (1925) and Klee (1927, 1936) include “harmony” in their titles, Mondrian develops this term in the 1920s as a central utopian concept in his neoplasticism. The same presence of this term can also be found in titles of the film industry, especially around the mid of the 1910s⁵⁰ and the early 1930s.⁵¹ There is also a reflection in academic research, in 1926 Hans Kayser published his *Morphologische Fragmente einer allgemeinen Harmonik* as the first part of his new foundational research on harmonics. In this context of the 1920s the term “harmony” became a central building block in an increasingly positive discourse on China.

After a century of critical disenchantment,⁵² Asian philosophies and religions gained a new positive meaning during the late 19th century in mesmerist, occultist, theosophical and

⁴⁶ Baier 2009, 277.

⁴⁷ Keil 2012, 133-172.

⁴⁸ Keil 2012, 186-197.

⁴⁹ The exact year of Gurdjieff's birth is not known. Webb 1980, 25-26 gives a number of different years of birth (1872, 1873, 1874, 1877, 1886).

⁵⁰ *Canned Harmony* (1912), *The Great Harmony* (1913), *Harmony and Discord* (1913), *Discord and Harmony* (1914), *Strangled Harmony* (1915), *Harmony in A Flat* (1916), *Life's Harmony* (1916), *Flat Harmony* (1917), *Hustle and Harmony* (1917).

⁵¹ *Red Hot Harmony* (1928), *Harmony Heaven* (1929), *The Harmony Boys* (1929), *Close Harmony* (1929), *Peace and Harmony* (1930), *A Feast of Harmony* (1930), *Harmony at Home* (1930), *Honeymoon Harmony* (1930), *Harmony Row* (1933), *Too Much Harmony* (1933), *Harlem Harmony* (1934), *Harmony Lane* (1935), *Key to Harmony* (1935), *Stolen Harmony* (1935), *Strangled Harmony* (1935), *Two Hearts in Harmony* (1935), *Harmony Parade* (1936), *Scenes in Harmony* (1936), *Hands in Harmony* (1936) etc. An equally striking accumulation occurs only in 2009: *A Perfect Harmony* (2009), *American Harmony* (2009), *Ballad of Broken Angels: Harmony* (2009), *DisHarmonyMatch.com* (2009), *Driving Mad Harmony* (2009), *Harmony and Me* (2009), *Harmony Town* (2009).

⁵² Osterhammel 1998.

philosophical circles and through this reception also gained a wider more positive connotation and broad interest in the West at the beginning of the 20th century. Following the great systematic translation activities of Max Müller, James Legge, Richard Wilhelm and others, a first wave of reception of Chinese philosophy and religion can be detected in small intellectual and “Lebensreform” circles in Europe. Between the two world wars, however, a massive orientation towards Asian religions and philosophies occurred, especially among young middle class intellectuals.⁵³ The cause of this new orientation was an alienation of many Europeans from European culture after the devastating destructions of the First World War (and in Germany the excessive inflation until 1923) all of which cast doubt on the model of western culture as a whole. A cultural pessimism developed as a consequence of this in which European culture was criticised as aggressive and materialistic and as lacking human and spiritual values. Asia in contrast appeared as a peace loving, spiritual culture and provided an important conceptual antipole for cultural critics such as Spengler (1880–1936) or Eucken (1846–1926).⁵⁴

The reception of Daoism tripled in these years, translations of the *Daode jing* alone escalated from 11 in 1918 to 32 in 1927.⁵⁵ Yet, however, Asia has to be regarded as only one facet of a rich spectre of alternative religiosity which blossomed wildly especially in the 1920s.⁵⁶ Like so many other trends that had existed already before the First World War in marginal and eccentric forms, Chinese philosophy and religion now moved into a more central position.⁵⁷

It seems to be a combination of both, the general dissemination of the term “harmony” on the one hand and the widened active interest in Asian philosophies and religions on the other which caused the term “harmony” in the 1920s to quite suddenly play a dominant role in the description and analysis of China.

The term “Harmonie” occurs rather rarely in Richard Wilhelm’s *Yijing* translation from 1924, Krause almost makes no use of the term in his *Ju-Tao-Fo: die religiösen und philosophischen Systeme Ostasiens* 1924 (the terms *zhonghe* or *he* are not listed in his index volume), in

⁵³ “Für eine kurze Zeit nach dem Ende des Ersten Weltkriegs hatten auf Asien zurückgreifende Lehren, die während der wilhelminischen Zeit nur eine beschränkte geistige Oberschicht und einige lebensreformerische Zirkel erreicht hatten, das Ohr der größeren Gruppen der Intelligenz, besonders unter der bürgerlichen Jugend(bewegung). Eine ‚neue Religiosität‘ entstand.” Linse 1991, 335-336, quoted in Grasmück 2004, 26.

⁵⁴ Eucken/Chang 1922; Lee 2003, 554-557.

⁵⁵ Grasmück 2004, 26, 47-50, 59-60, 123.

⁵⁶ See the numerous examples in Linse 1983.

⁵⁷ Makropoulos 1991.

Hackmann's *Chinesische Philosophie*, in Forke's *Gedankenwelt des chinesischen Kulturkreises* as well as in his *Geschichte der chinesischen Philosophie*, all three published in 1927, the term is only used occasionally in a descriptive manner, never as a systematic term.⁵⁸ Interestingly, Hackmann refers to Ernst Cassirer's concept of "mythical thinking"⁵⁹ (Cassirer's second volume of his *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen: Das mythische Denken* had just been published in 1925), and Cassirer had since 1902 been attracted by Leibniz' concept of a "pre-established harmony" (*prästabilierte Harmonie*) to philosophically secure the unity of a universe and a consciousness that Cassirer considered to be split into manifold forms.⁶⁰ Wolfram Eberhard also refers to Cassirer in his 1933 work on the cosmological speculation in China during the Han,⁶¹ he does, however, not use the term "harmony" very often in this work,⁶² the term plays a much more central role in his draft of the astronomical world view in ancient China from 1936.⁶³

The first work in which I found a frequent systematic use of the term "harmony" to describe Chinese philosophy and religion, is Creel's *Sinism* from 1929. The term is equally central in Granet's *La pensée chinoise* from 1934. This establishment of "harmony" as an analytical meta-reflexive term continues: Bodde discusses "harmony" as an own philosophical topic in an essay on "Harmony and Conflict in Chinese Philosophy" from 1953,⁶⁴ Thomas Fang defines Chinese mentality as a "cultivated sense of comprehensive harmony" in his *The Chinese View of Life: The Philosophy of Comprehensive Harmony* in 1957,⁶⁵ Gustav Mensching classifies the special spirit (*Sondergeist*) of Chinese religions in his general classification of religions from 1959 as their orientation towards "cosmic harmony" and Glasenapp (1963), in his discussion of "Chinese Universism", which he regards as one of the five world religions, constantly uses the term "harmony", a term that De Groot who invented the concept of Chinese universism in 1912, did not use at all.

⁵⁸ See Hackmann pp. 26, 34, 61, 106, 204-5 etc.

⁵⁹ Hackmann, p. 35.

⁶⁰ See Cassirer's *Leibniz' System in seinen wissenschaftlichen Grundlagen*, Marburg: N.G. Elwert, 1902, esp. p. 398-9; see also the analysis in Moynahan 2014 (chap. 4, p. 85-120), as well as Kajon 1988, p. 257.

⁶¹ Eberhard 1970, pp. 12-13.

⁶² Eberhard 1970, pp. 13, 14.

⁶³ Eberhard 1970, p. 245.

⁶⁴ In the middle of this essay (on p. 54) he writes: "By now it should be evident that basic among Chinese thought patterns is the desire to merge seemingly conflicting elements into a unified harmony."

⁶⁵ Fang 1957: "Chinese mentality is best characterized by what I call the cultivated sense of comprehensive harmony", p. ii. And: "For several thousands of years, we Chinese have been thinking of these vital problems in terms of comprehensive harmony which permeates anything and everything." p. 18.

3. Conclusion

“Harmony”, one of the central keywords to explain Chinese culture, is a rather recent keyword which is probably not even 100 years old. It plays an important role in a number of early Chinese texts such as the *Shangshu*, the *Zhuangzi*, the *Guanzi*, the *Xunzi*, the *Huainanzi*, or the *Lüshi Chunqiu* (it is almost absent in the *Mengzi*, not very frequent in *Xiaojing*, *Chunqiu fanlu*, *Heguanzi*, *Hanfeizi*, *Liezi*, *Shangjun shu* or military texts, only occurring once in the *Gongyang* and once in the *Gulian zhuan*, absent in the *Gongsunlongzi*). But it never developed into an analytical or ideological key term, probably because too many terms occupied the same semantic field of harmony and where not consistently applied to denote identical meanings in the great variety of aspectual meanings that were discussed in relation to the central issue of harmony in pre-modern China.

The 20th century prominent use of the term “harmony” to describe Chinese culture seems not to be grounded in Chinese texts in the first place and it probably did not find its way from these texts directly into the public discourse on China. Nor did it arrive in China via Japan. It rather grew within an inner-European discourse as a general notion of anything that promised the healing of a destroyed reality. It designated everything that in the light of a “transcendental homelessness” allowed an insight into some new reality beyond the growing (and after WW1 considered as absolute) contingency of cultural and moral values in Europe.⁶⁶ The expanding notion of “harmony” encounters Chinese philosophies and religions in the 1920s, just in the very moment when these are so widely received that they are perceived as a possible new home of a new Europe and can thus be conceived as part of the new visions of harmony.

⁶⁶ Makropoulos 1991.

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