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Ancient Chinese Scholars' Interpretation of the Saying "君子和而不同" from *the Analects of Confucius* in the Context of the History of Classical Scholarship

Abstract

In *the Analects*, Confucius says: The superior man is affable, but not adulatory; the mean man is adulatory, but not affable. 君子和而不同，小人同而不和。¹ How should we understand this statement? From the perspective of the history of scripture, through the interpretations of Chinese scholars, I find that Yan Ying 晏嬰 speaks of "harmony as cooking", while He Yan 何晏 and Huang Kan 皇侃 emphasise the moral opposition between the gentleman and the villain. They believe that a gentleman's mind is peaceful and harmonious. The villains, on the other hand, go about doing similarly bad things because they share the same preferences. Zhu Xi 朱熹 interprets the phrase in a spiritual sense. He believes that He 和 means that a person is not impatient or angry. He believes that Tong 同 means favouritism and collusion. A number of scholars have since drawn from this phrase in the *Analects of Confucius* the difference between the gentleman and the villain in what they do. In the history of classical scholarship, these interpretations deserve our attention.

Interpretations from the pre-Qin period

The difference between He 和 and Tong 同 is recorded in *Guo Yu* "Zheng Yu" 國語·鄭語. Shi Bo 史伯 of the Western Zhou says,

¹ Trans. by James Legge,
<https://ctext.org/analects?searchu=%E5%90%9B%E5%AD%A0%E5%92%8C%E8%80%8C%E4%B8%8D%E5%90%8C>

He 和 actually multiplies all things, but Tong 同 does not. The use of one thing to stabilize another is called He. Hence, He is able to make life abundant and long-lasting, and all things come to it. If Tong is used to supplement Tong, all life leaves. So the ancient kings mixed earth with gold, wood, water and fire, and all things came into being.

夫和實生物，同則不繼。以他平他謂之和，故能豐長而物歸之；若以同裨同，盡乃棄矣。故先王以土與金木水火雜，以成百物。²

Here Shi Bo distinguishes He from Tong, arguing that life should be multiple and harmonious rather than all the same, and *Yanzichunqiu* 晏子春秋 records that at the end of the Spring and Autumn period, Yan Ying 晏嬰 of Qi said that,

He was like making a meat soup, cooking fish and meat with water, fire, vinegar, sauce, salt and plum, and cooking them over a wood fire. The cook mixes the flavours so that the various tastes are just right. If there is not enough flavour, add more seasoning. If the taste is too strong, the spices are reduced.

和如羹焉，水火醯醢鹽梅，以烹魚肉，燂之以薪，宰夫和之，齊之以味，濟其不及；以洩其過，君子食之，以平其心。³

There are many similarities between this harmony that Yan Ying and Shi Bo speak of.

Interpretations from the Han and Tang dynasties

In *Lunyujijie* 論語集解, He Yan 何晏 of the Three Kingdoms period comments,

Gentlemen are peaceful in mind, yet they have different opinions, which is called Butong 不同, and the villain likes the same things, yet they each fight for their own interests, which is Buhe 不和.

君子心和，然其所見各異，故曰不同，小人所嗜好者同，然各爭利，故曰不和也。

Huang Kan 皇侃 of the South-North dynasty says in his *Lunyuyishu* 論語義疏 that,

² Xu Yuangao 徐元誥, *Guoyu Jijie* 國語集解 (Beijing: China Bookstore, 2002), p. 470-471. Trans. by myself.

³ Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan Zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Beijing: China Bookstore, 1983, p. 1419. Trans. by myself.

He means not to fight with each other. Butong means that people have different aspirations. All gentlemen have the same peace of mind, but their aspirations and ideals in life are different.

和，謂心不爭也。不同，謂立志各異也。君子之人千萬，千萬其心和如一，而所習立之志業不同也。……小人為惡如一，故云同也。好鬥爭，故云不和也。⁴

He Yan and Huang Kan interpret the term Butong in terms of the moral dichotomy between the gentleman and the villain. But they do not interpret it in the conceptual sense of He and Tong.

Interpretations from the Song Dynasty

Zhu Xi 朱熹 notes in *Lunyujizhu* 論語集註 that,

He means one who is neither impatient nor angry, while Tong means to be partial, to collude. Yinshi 尹氏 says, "A gentleman reveres morality but does not follow it blindly. How can there be harmony when the villain reveres profit?" Zhu Xi believes that a gentleman does not have an impatient, irritable mind, and so would not mean favouritism. The villain colludes and takes sides with each other, so there is no harmony. 和者，無乖戾之心。同者，有阿比之意。尹氏曰：「君子尚義，故有不同。小人尚利，安得而和？」⁵

Clearly, this interpretation, like that of He Yan and Huang Kan earlier, emphasises the opposition between the gentleman and the villain on a moral level. More importantly, Zhu Xi also associates the original classic sentence with morality and interest. He argues that the difference between the gentleman and the villain is that they are one type of person who acts for the common good and one type of person who acts for personal gain. The gentleman thinks for the collective, so they are often in a state of

⁴ Huang Kan 皇侃, *Lunyu Yishu* 論語義疏 (Beijing: China Bookstore, 2013), p. 344. Trans. by myself.

⁵ Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 (Beijing: China Bookstore, 2012), p. 148. Trans. by myself.

harmony but do not blindly cater to others. The villain is all about himself at heart. So although they are in collusion with each other, they always come together to fight over their mutual interests to the point where harmony is impossible. In other words, on a moral level, the gentleman and the villain are at odds with each other because of the conflict between public and personal interests. This is the difference between He and Tong.

Compared to He Yan and Huang Kan's reading, Zhu Xi's reading has two advantages. Firstly, He Yan and Huang Kan do not define the concept of He and Tong, while Zhu Xi does so. Second, Zhu Xi further emphasises that He and Tong are triggered by the dichotomy between public and personal interests. On this basis, the fundamental dichotomy between the gentleman and the villain becomes more prominent. To conclude, Zhu Xi's reading is a further development and refinement of the reading of He Yan and Huang Kan.

Interpretations from the Qing dynasty and beyond

In his book *Lunyuzhengyi* 論語正義, Liu Baonan 劉寶楠 of the Qing dynasty says that,

He is born out of moral righteousness and Tong out of interest, and that Yi 義 means a right and proper reason or action. Yi is not a fixed truth, so it can be different for everyone. Although people are different from each other, they can live together in harmony as long as they do not cling to their own views. Interest is something common to ordinary people. When the people are committed to profit, they have a competitive mindset, so they all have the same goal but cannot be harmonious. This is the difference between a gentleman and a villain.

和因義起，同由利生。義者宜也，各適其宜，未有方體，故不同。然不同因乎義，而非執己之見，無傷於和。利者，人之所同欲也。民務於是，則有爭心，故同而不和。此君子、小人之異也。⁶

Apparently, Liu Baonan uses morality and interest to explain the reason for the opposition between He and Tong, which is in line with Zhu Xi's view.

Qian Mu 錢穆 says in *Lunyuxinjie 論語新解* that,

He is like five spices being put together to cook, and like five tones being matched together to form music. Tong is like using water to enrich water and fire to enlarge fire. They are attracted to the same things and are bound to fight with each other.
和如五味調和成食，五聲調和成樂，聲味不同，而能相調和。同如以水濟水，以火濟火，所嗜好同，則必互爭。⁷

Qian Mu's analogy is similar to Yan Ying's statement mentioned earlier. He draws from the opposition between the gentleman and the villain on the level of moral qualities to the differences between the two in what they do.

Conclusion

The idea that a gentleman can live in harmony without blindly catering to others can lead people to respect differences and build harmonious interpersonal relationships. Of all the harmonies in human society, interpersonal harmony is the most important. We all live in a social environment and have to get along with others in our daily lives and work. Although there are differences in the personalities of different individuals, everyone can build harmonious interpersonal relationships by communicating with others on the basis of an awareness of and respect for such differences. We can adapt ourselves to the situation and approach work and life in an appropriate way.

⁶ Liu Baonan 劉寶楠, *Lunyu Zhengyi 論語正義* (Beijing: China Bookstore, 1990), p. 545. Trans. by myself.

⁷ Qian Mu 錢穆, *Lunyu Xinjie 論語新解* (Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore, 2002), p. 346. Trans. by myself.

The concept that a gentleman can live in peace and harmony without blindly conforming to others can be a better way of dealing with the relationship between individual views and the collective will. Many people think that the interests of the collective and the individual are in conflict with each other, but in fact this is not the case. The fact that people have a desire to cooperate shows that individual views and collective will can be dealt with properly. We can draw inspiration from the thought of Confucius that He exists with the intention of finding a point of maximum benefit on both sides. When the individual viewpoint conflicts with the collective will, we can look for a principle of justice to reconcile it.

Finally, the idea that gentlemen can live together in harmony without mindlessly pandering to others can lead to respect for civilisational differences between countries and promote international harmony. Today's world is a pluralistic one, where different cultures mingle and collide, and the process of globalisation is shortening the distance between people. Under such circumstances, the ultimate question of how different civilisations can co-exist and develop, and how countries of different civilisations can live together in peace, rests with He 和.