

On Harmony as Transformation: Paradigms from the *I Ching*

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I. "Harmony" in Greek and "Harmony" in Chinese

"Harmony" has rich intuitive meaning in the common usage. It suggests concord, accord, attunement, agreement, togetherness and peaceful contentedness. Why does the word harmony attain such a rich variety of meanings? Why does this variety of meaning suggest a common core of reference or at least a family resemblance to one another? Etymology of the term "harmony" from the Greek word *harmonia* seems to explain the primal or basic model of its meaning: harmony is the agreement of musical notes which create a perception of internal togetherness and mutual support among the individual notes.¹ But then, how this model of meaning as well as why this model of meaning became extended and applicable to other harmonious experiences or observations still needs close explanation.² In order to answer this question and the questions mentioned earlier, one can focus on several aspects of the basic meaning of musical harmony *via* an analytical reflection: (1) musical harmony is a totality of parts; (2) each part of the totality is related to other parts in the totality; (3) all parts contribute to the formation of the totality in the sense of wholeness. It is to be noted that in aspect (2) the relation of each part to the other parts in musical harmony is one of support and recognition, not one of destroying or overcoming. One can further

¹Even this meaning of musical harmony need not be the oldest one in the Greek etymology of "*harmonia*" as pointed out by G. S. Kirk in his book *Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments* (Cambridge, 1954). However, Heraclitus obviously did use the word in the sense of musical harmony.

²One may point to some rigorously defined concepts of harmony in such phrases as "harmonic mean" in mathematics, "harmonic progression," "harmonic motion" in physics and "harmonic tones" in music composition.

note that the relation of each part and of all parts to the whole are similarly describable as one of support and recognition so that the formation of the whole implies also the explicit realization of an implicit order internally present in the parts.

This analytical reconstruction of musical harmony, however, is not complete without also mentioning that: (4) relating of parts to totality in music is a dynamic process consummated in the movement of time. In mentioning time, one cannot ignore the spatial involvement inherent in a musical harmony either. The reason is that, in producing a piece of music, the locations of the sounds and the relations of locations in space make a difference. Hence one must recognize musical harmony as a four-dimensional totality exhibiting an order of mutual support among its notes and realizing itself (the totality) in an explicit process of time and with implicit reference to space.

Given the above analytical characterization of musical harmony as a basic model of harmony, it is not difficult to see how this model of harmony applies to other human experiences of harmony in mathematics, physics and daily life. The experience of musical harmony awakens our common sense notion of harmony as an agreeable totality of agreeable parts, and we do as a matter of fact experience this sense of harmony in color, numbers, movements, natural objects, man-made things, human behavior, human writing and poetry, human thinking, emotions, design, management, and organization. Harmony, in other words, is both internally and externally real. Our experiences enable us to recognize the four-dimensional structure of harmony: our perceptions enable us to identify the concrete harmony in diverse experiences of concrete things and events; and our thinking mind enables us to create the image/design of harmony in a general sense and even enables us to make an effort to realize it. The real inner and outer world of man contains the world of harmony as real and as ideal as well. All of our experiences of harmony endow the term "harmony" with a variety of family-resembling meanings in our use of the term "harmony." Why this is so is now obvious: all concrete harmonies share the same core of the harmony structure and yet form different harmonies characteristic of each concrete, individual situation. Harmony is deeply rooted in ourselves and in the world. Even Heraclitus has recognized this, when he says: "The hidden harmony is better than the obvious," and "There is a harmony in the bending back, as in the case of the bow and the lyre,"³ despite his other assertions that

³See the fragments of Heraclitus' sayings; fragments 116 and 117 in Philip Wheelwright, *Heraclitus* (New York: Atheneum, 1964), p. 102.

“War is the common condition of things” and “All things come to pass through the compulsion of strife.”⁴ As observed by Wheelwright, there is no need to see a conflict of positions in Heraclitus. For Heraclitus speaks of the strife of things in the world of flux, and yet asserts that beneath this world of strife, there is a harmony hidden from the *obvious*. Furthermore, Heraclitus seems to suggest the importance of the positive role of strife, for it is through strife that things come to pass. He also seems to suggest that from the viewpoint of the *logos* or wisdom, even strife is a form of bringing out or fulfilling the hidden harmony and in this sense strife is only *contrariety* and *relativity* of things in change/transformation: it is a mode of harmony. This notion of strife will be made more explicit later in the notion of strife or conflict in the *I Ching*.

In Chinese, the concept of harmony is conveyed by the term “*ho*” 和, an ideograph indicating the conjoining of grain with the mouth. Etymologically, this seems to suggest the origin of concept of harmony (*ho*) in the gustatory experience of food. Thus, it is natural to see how a pre-Confucian scholar-minister Yen Ying 晏嬰 in the seventh century B.C. described *ho* precisely in terms of well-concocted food.

Harmony is like making soup: [one has to use] water/fire, sauce/vinegar, salt/plum in order to cook the fish and the meat; one has to burn them with firewood. The cook will mix (harmonize, *ho*) them, and reach for a balanced taste. [He does this] by compensating what is deficient and releasing/dispensing what is excessive. When the master eats [food], his heart/mind will be purified.⁵

In fact, this concept of harmony is not simply applied to the taste of food, but also to the hearing of music and pleasant sounds. Thus it is continued by Yen Ying:

Sound is like taste. It is founded on one *ch'i* 氣 (vital force), two styles, three types, four instruments, five sounds, six measures, seven notes, eight winds, nine themes. These things mutually complete one another [to produce music]; [it is also founded upon] purity/impurity; smallness/bigness; shortness/longness; speediness/slowness; sorrow/joy; firmness/softness; lateness/forwardness; highness/lowness; inness/outness; inclusiveness/non-inclusiveness. These matters complement one another [to produce music]; when the superior man hears of this, he will calm his heart/mind. When his heart/mind is calmed, his virtue (*te* 德) will remain harmonious.⁶

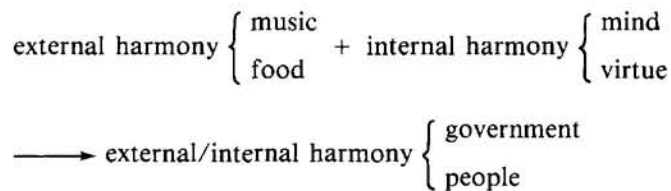
⁴ *Ibid.*, fragment 26.

⁵ *Tso Chuan* 左傳, Duke Chao 昭 20th year.

⁶ *Ibid.*

The important point to observe is that harmony of sound in good music is often made of various elements on different levels or of different kinds, which are nevertheless related to one another in a virtually supportive and mutually strengthening relationship. What is even more significant is that harmony (*ho*) created in sound as well as in taste is intended to bring *peace* and *harmony* to the mind of the superior man so that he will do things harmoniously and thus conduct a fair and harmonious government, which will further lead to the peace of the people. It is apparent from this implicit conception of harmony that harmony is considered both a quality of things and a quality of perception, both a quality of mind and a quality of judgment and conduct. It is further apparent that things, perception, state of mind, judgment and conduct can share the same structure and quality of harmony, and then can be linked together or caused one by the other.⁷ This recognition is indeed important, as we shall see in the philosophy of the *I Ching* and in the Confucian philosophy, for the realization of harmony in the world through the realization of harmony in the person and *vice versa*. This contributes to a deeper understanding of the harmonization process, as we shall explain.

To summarize, the relationship of external and internal harmony can be expressed in the following diagram:



From the above discussions it is clear that both the ancient Greek notion of harmony (*harmonia*) in music, and the ancient Chinese notion of harmony (*ho*) in music and in food, share the same recognition that harmony results from different elements being related in an appropriate way to give rise to a totality of wholeness which leads to the experience of agreement and unity. Even how elements are related to have this result may depend on what the elements and the resulting whole are, certain

⁷There are many qualities that things have and the mind does not have. There are other qualities which the mind has but things lack. Yet it must be recognized that harmony is one of the unique qualities which both things and the mind can share and that there is an intrinsic relationship of interlinking and intercausation between the two.

principles governing the relationship have yet to be explained if it is explainable at all. Besides, one has to account for the existence of strife as the opposite of harmony in the world as well to resolve this opposition, and consequently, to resolve the strife itself if harmony is to reign as the ultimate order of the world.

II. Distinction between Harmony and Identity: Confucian System vs. Mohist View

In his discussion of harmony, Yen Ying made a distinction between harmony and identity (*t'ung* 同): Whereas harmony means inter-departmental complementation for things and inter-subjective supplementation for people, with production and completion of a totality in either case, identity entails no such complementation or supplementation because there is no existence of *different* elements or *different* views or values. In other words, harmony admits disagreement and difference in unity, identity admits no disagreement and no difference at all. Yen Ying's explanation of the difference between identity and harmony in regard to the relation between the ruler and his ministers is highly instructive:

[The principle of harmony in food preparation] also applies to the relation between the Ruler and his Minister. The Ruler sees what is right, yet he may fail to see what is not right; thus the Minister should point out what is not right, so that he may complement/complete what is seen rightly by the Ruler; [on the other hand,] the Ruler sees what is not right, and yet he may fail to see what is right; thus the Minister should point out what is right so that he may complement/complete what is seen to be not right by the ruler. In this way the government is smooth and without mistake and people will have no dispute.

[In regard to Liang-ch'iu Chu 梁丘據 (a Minister of the Ruler of Ch'i 齊 State),] where the Ruler sees what is right, Liang-ch'iu also concurs. Where the ruler sees what is not right, Liang-ch'iu also rejects. This is like [in making food] mixing water with water, but for taste; who would care to eat the food? This is also like playing the same tune on the same harp; who would care to listen to the music? The undesirableness of seeing identity between Ruler and Ministers lies precisely here.⁸

It should be noted that Yen Ying perceives harmony as the completion of a whole by different parts, whether those parts be perceptions or judgments. From this it follows that difference in judgments and perceptions needs not be *dissension* destructive of the totality underlying the

⁸As in n. 5.

dissension, but instead, whatever dissension there is, it should be constructive toward realizing the underlying totality. A distinction therefore between antithetical/antagonistic and non-antithetical/non-antagonistic dissension can be made: the latter leads to a totality in which the disagreeing parties form equal members and coexist to complement each other; the former leads to no such totality or perhaps even leads to the destruction of whatever underlying totality there is, and thus leads to the destruction of one disagreeing party or the other. In this sense the latter defines harmony in a dynamical sense, whereas the former defines the opposite of harmony, strife, in a radical sense. Strife means in this sense irresolvable conflict, the cessation of which is the destruction of the conflicting elements. One must again note that conflict may be resolved into harmony when the conflicting elements *evolve* into different things or different states of their existence through a natural force which integrates or unifies them into a totalistic system. In this case there is still harmony as there is still a *whole* of differences which complete the whole and complement each other. This, as we shall see, remains the basic insight of the philosophy of the *I Ching*.

It can be said that harmony is the absence of strife or conflict, but not the absence of difference; whereas identity is not only the absence of strife and conflict but the absence of difference. One can readily see that there are two kinds of strife: one kind of strife leads to harmony, the other leads to identity; the latter being strife in the radical sense, the former being strife in the relative sense. Consequently, there are two types of ontology and two types of dialectics: for radical-strife-ontology there is only radical strife in the world, and radical strife is the basis and ground for the dialectical changes in the world; hence we will have a dialectics of strife and identity; for the relative-strife-ontology there is only relative strife in the world, and the relative strife is the basis and ground for the dialectical change of the world. It is through transformation of things that strife leads to harmony. Hence, we will have a dialectics of harmonization. We shall see that the philosophy of the *I Ching* illustrates this ontology of harmony and this dialectics of harmonization.

In the philosophy of Confucius in the *Analects*, the doctrine of harmony is strictly subscribed to. Confucius' approach to the chaotic world situation of his time represents an approach of harmony *par excellence*. The world is seen as chaotic because *tao* 道—the supreme and ultimate harmony—does not prevail. But does this mean that *tao* is completely missing from the world? No, one might quickly point out that the reason why Confucius sets out to reform the world is precisely his conviction that there is the *tao*, even if temporarily not prevailing, hidden in the

hearts/minds of rulers and people, which may be “awakened” to its presence, and hence bringing harmony and order to the world. Here I call the *tao* the “supreme harmony” because the Confucian conception of the *tao* is precisely the conception of a total order in which everything and every person under heaven will have its or his proper place in the proper time, and all things and all persons form a relationship of mutual support and complementation so that an organic unity results. One need only point to Confucius’ stress on virtues as the basis of action, and to his formulation of the doctrine of “rectifying names” (*ch’eng-ming* 正名) as the foundation of human relationships and social order. It is his vision that only when things and persons fall into proper places in a whole order and also become related to each other in a supportive manner, that harmony will result. His stress on *jen* (仁) —love based on humanity—is to enable an individual to embrace the whole and the higher (such as the ruler) to relate to the lower (such as the people). His stress on *yi* (義) (righteousness and justice) is no less insightful; it enables each individual to relate to other individuals in concentric systems of relationships without upsetting the balance or the stability of the system. *Yi* is to do justice taking consideration of time/place/relationship/goal/value and the total underlying harmony of the society. Hence *yi* is an individualistic principle based on totalistic consideration.⁹

The Confucian *li* (禮) (propriety and ritual), finally, bespeaks the importance of the smooth maintenance of relationships so that every individual may also learn from each other in order to enrich oneself and perfect oneself. *Li* is a social order derived from a sense of harmony cultivated in an individual and objectified through common consciousness in the social behavior of individuals. Hence *li* is a social harmony which integrates all different persons in the same community, while allowing individual differences. It therefore becomes the form and the discipline which captures the best results of the application of *jen* and *yi* in a society.

Finally, Confucius has shown that he has faith in the perfectibility of man through self-cultivation. This no doubt reflects his conviction and perhaps also his perception that there is a deep and hidden harmony in the virtue of man, and thus in cultivating, awakening and fulfilling this deep harmony in man. Man is able to become an agent of transformation who will transform an external, chaotic world into a harmonious order of *jen*, *yi* and *li*. This perception or conviction is so profound that it may

⁹See my paper, “On *Yi* as a Universal Principle of Specific Application in Confucian Morality,” *Philosophy East and West*, 22:3 (July 1972), pp. 269–280.

be used to define what the genuine Confucian position is. His perception and conviction are equivalent to the cognition of a natural structure of goodness and self-sufficiency founded on harmony, shared by both man and the world. This is the concept of the *tao*. This is also the concept of human nature (*hsing* 性) as made amply clear by the *Doctrine of the Mean* (the *Chung Yung* 中庸) and the philosophy of Mencius.

In light of this Confucian philosophy of man, one can see how Confucius apprehends and advocates harmony as a basic virtue for the superior man (*chün-tzu* 君子). Thus he says: "The superior man lives in harmony (*ho*) with others, but does not cling in identity (*t'ung*) to others; the small man clings in identity (*t'ung*) to others, but does not live in harmony with others."¹⁰

This means that the *chün-tzu* may disagree with others, and yet he would still treat others with respect and as important for the obtaining of the greater good. He may therefore thrive on this disagreement by making it the source of a fruitful and creative relationship. The small man's attitude in clinging to others in identity, on the other hand, is basically sterile and results in selfish partisanship. In this passage it is also clear that *ho* and *t'ung* are two different states of relationship between men. But in order to achieve the state of *harmony* in a human relationship, one has to cultivate a state of harmony in one's mind and a state of harmony in one's behavior. Thus, all the basic Confucian virtues such as *jen*, *yi*, *li*, and *chih* 智 (wisdom) are ideas and norms for developing a harmonious personality for an individual, and when cultivated and realized, become the very ingredients of the harmony of the mind and the harmony of social behavior. They further serve to articulate harmony as a natural and internally integrated state following from the obtaining of these virtues. Thus Confucius says:

The use of the proprieties (*li*) has its precious value in achieving harmony. What is good about the way of previous sage-kings is precisely this: all things small or large, follow this principle. [But one must also note that there is something which cannot be thus done; namely, if one only knows to strive for harmony *for the sake of* harmony *without* the restraint of proprieties, that is where something cannot be done.]¹¹

Why is it not right if one only knows to strive for harmony *for the sake of* harmony *without* the restraint of proprieties? The answer is that harmony must be constituted by the order of proprieties to qualify as gen-

¹⁰See the *Analects*, XIII.23.

¹¹*Ibid.*, I.12; italics mine.

uine harmony; the sense of harmony in a person without the guidance of virtues such as *li* leads only to false harmony, resulting in an unstable and non-enduring relationship or in an unstable and shallow character. This point simply brings us to a heightened understanding of harmony as an ordered state of mind or relationship and thus as necessarily constituted of *li* and other virtues. It is on this basis of understanding that harmony can be realized as a foundation of stability and natural strength: people and society in a state of harmony are inevitably stable and peaceful and could even be productive. There should be no worry about *poverty* or *underpopulation* in the state. Hence, the Confucian statement: "Being equally distributed in wealth, there is no poverty. Being harmonious in relationships, there is no lack of people; being secure and stable, there is no danger of downfall."¹²

Later, Mencius even declares that among the three important things for a state, climate, natural resources and human harmony (*jen-ho* 人和), the climate is not as important as natural resources, and natural resources are not as important as human harmony.¹³

Mencius' notion of harmony is clearly illustrated by his description of Liu Hsia-hui 柳下惠 as the "sage of harmony" in contrast with Po Yi 伯夷 as "the sage of purity" and Yi Yin 伊尹 as the "sage of responsibility." Mencius says:

Liu Hsia-hui was not ashamed of an ill-named ruler, nor did he decline the offer of a small position. When he was appointed, he did not hide his abilities and always behaved according to the way. When he was neglected, he made no complaint. When he encountered hardship and poverty, he did not have self-pity. When he was with his fellow-villagers, he enjoyed himself so much that he did not wish to depart. [He said:] "You are you and I am I; even you undress and make yourself by my side, how could you taint me?" Hence, learning of the way of Liu Hsia-hui, a ruffian will become tolerant and a mean person amiable.¹⁴

Liu Hsia-hui has the virtue of harmony simply because he is able to tolerate differences and even accept bad situations unworthy of his service or company, while at the same time, preserving his own identity and purity. In doing so, he is also capable of transforming the bad into the good, the unworthy into the worthy. It can be easily seen that this concept of harmony is consistent with the concept of harmony developed by Yen Ying and Confucius. It also has all the conceptual elements of the

¹² *Ibid.*, XVI.1.

¹³ See the *Mencius*, 2B.1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5B.1.

harmony which we shall formally develop and illustrate in the philosophy of the *I Ching*.

If the philosophy of Confucius and Mencius can be described as the "philosophy of harmony and harmonization," the philosophy of Mo Ti 墨翟, a late contemporary of Confucius, can be described as the philosophy of identity and identification. We have seen how Confucius makes the distinction between *harmony* and *identity* in the *Analects*. Yet when Mo Ti teaches his doctrine, he specifically singled out the concept of "*t'ung*" as his central teaching: All people should follow heaven and should identify their will with the "will of heaven" (*t'ien-chih* 天志) so that there is no difference in the conception of justice and righteousness (*yi*) and no disagreement and dispute over the words and meaning of the sage. It is clear that Mo Ti wishes to see a society ruled by the central doctrines of one truth in universal love and universal righteousness. He tries to argue for this on the basis of the activities of heaven. In this regard he differs greatly from the Confucianists not only in the contrast between *t'ung* as a principle of elimination of differences and *ho* as a principle of comprehension of differences, but also in the contrast between seeing heaven as a divine source of life and power and seeing heaven as a creative principle of the manifold of things which should coexist in harmony rather than in identity. In the *Li Chi* 禮記 (Record of Rites), the Confucianists did speak of the ideal of "great unity" (*ta-t'ung* 大同) in the well-known chapter on the *Li Yün* 禮運. (Evolution of *Li*). But this ideal of "great unity" implies universal harmony rather than universal identity. Hence the "great unity" is actually a state of great harmony.

It is important to note, however, that in the Neo-Mohist Canons four kinds of identity are distinguished, and the concept of identity (*t'ung*) is thus defined for four different kinds of identity:¹⁵ the identity of one thing referred to by two names; the identity of belonging to the same body; the identity of grouping together in the same space; and the identity of belonging to the same class (*lei* 類). Given these distinctions, it is evident that not all identities are exclusive of differences on whichever level. In fact, identity could become a harmony of differences without negating or eliminating the differences. In particular, the identity of belonging to the same body is quite compatible with the notion of *ho*, and indeed basically exemplifies the same structure of *ho*: integration of differences as parts in a unity of totality.¹⁶

¹⁵ See the Neo-Mohist Canons in Sun Yi-jiang 孫詒讓, *Mo Tzu chien-ku* 墨子閒詁 (Taipei: World Book Co., 1969), 3rd Edition, p. 212.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

One important development of the concept of harmony (*ho*) in classical Confucian philosophy occurs in the writing of the *Chung Yung* (*The Doctrine of the Mean*). In this development, harmony is both a state of mind and a state of things, both an act of doing things by a person and a result of such doing. In particular, *ho* is considered to be rooted in the nature of man (*hsing*), and as the nature of man is derived from the “mandate of heaven” (*t’ien-ming* 天命), thus rooted in the ultimate reality of heaven. The nature of man, as the foundation of the human heart and mind, will articulate itself in the feelings of the heart and judgments of reason in response to things and events of the world in a process of interaction with things in the world. Given this understanding of the nature of man, the question becomes how a man may realize his feelings and reason in a way which preserves the original equilibrium of man’s nature, and at the same time conduces to the growth and fulfillment of man’s nature. In order to do this, man must let out his feelings in proper measure with proper intentionality and proper restraint relative to an event or a situation in the world. If he is able to do this, he is said to achieve *ho*. *Ho* therefore is the state of resonance and consonance between a person and the world in a responsive, interactive relationship. *Ho* permits the difference of feelings and realizes this difference in different contexts. In doing so, the person will not lose sight of the fundamental equilibrium in himself nor create disorder in the world, which would be unlikely if the equilibrium in himself is not lost. On the contrary, *ho* is supposed to bring a state of disorder to order and a state of insufficiency to sufficiency. In this last sense, to achieve *ho* has a metaphysical significance: the act of *ho* as harmonization from man is capable of causing things to fall into order as well as of creating an opportunity for things to grow. In this sense, *ho* is not simply a principle of heart/mind, but a principle of nature (*hsing*). It is the way heaven orders and benefits things.

Thus the *Chung Yung* says:

When the feelings of joy, anger, sorrow and happiness are not elicited, this is the state of equilibrium (centrality, *chung*). When these feelings become elicited, and at the same time follow the proper limitation of nature, this is called *ho*. Equilibrium is the great basis of the world; *ho* is the way whereby an order of all things is attained. If a person succeeds in reaching *chung* and *ho*, then heaven and earth will be well positioned and all ten thousand things will be well nourished.¹⁷

As we shall see, this concept of *ho* is highly recognizable in the Great

¹⁷See the *Chung Yung*, Section 1.

Appendix (*Hsi Tz'u* 繫辭) of the *I Ching*. This suggests that by the time the *Chung Yung* and the *Hsi Tz'u* were written under the influence of the Confucian school, the concept of *ho* had acquired a deepened metaphysical significance: *Ho* is not simply a state of nature, nor simply a state of mind, but a creative process of harmonizing the world by the mind which results in a better state of the world. This is captured in the statements used to describe the profound and sagely wisdom and virtue of Confucius:

He is like heaven and earth under which nothing is not held up and nothing not covered. He is like the alternating movements of the four seasons and like the alternating shining of the sun and the moon. All the ten thousand things are naturally nourished without harming each other. Things go their parallel ways without obstructing one another. The small virtues are like tributary waters, moving without stop. The great virtues are so wide and dense that they allow things to grow and produce without end. This is how heaven and earth are great.¹⁸

This description of the greatness of heaven and earth is a description of harmony in the Confucian perspective with both a human and a metaphysical reference.

III. Resonance among Harmony, Centrality and Unity

In our discussion of *ho* as a state of harmony between the mind and the world, we have referred to the equilibrium of the mind as the requisite foundation for *ho*. This equilibrium or centrality of the mind (*chung*) is important, because it gives a starting point for the realization of *ho*: *chung* is the state of the non-differentiation of human feelings, which under proper conditions will differentiate into different feelings. In this sense, *chung* is not the same thing as identity where no difference is to be allowed, potentially or actually. In fact one might say that *chung* indicates the *proper positioning* of a state of mind for a person in a context of relationships among different things: this state or position will enable the mind or the person to reach out to different things for the purpose of harmony. Hence the concept of *chung* can be spatially or geometrically conceived as well as qualitatively conceived. In the spatial sense, *chung* is the middle position between two positions in a line, neither to the right nor to the left. In the qualitative sense, *chung* is the mean between the excessive and the deficient, and thus neither inclined toward

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Section 30.

excessiveness nor inclined toward insufficiency. The first sense of *chung* is well illustrated in the notion of the central position of lines 2 and 5 in the hexagram of the *I Ching*.¹⁹ The second sense of the *chung* is well illustrated in the *Shang Shu* 尚書 (*The Book of Documents*) many times: “Neither insufficient nor excessive, all must follow the righteousness of the King.”²⁰ This is the *chung* which Confucius in the *Analects* refers to as “neither excessive or insufficient.”²¹ In both these senses it is clear that *chung* is a state not dominated by dogma, and thus not subject to the restriction of a specialized differentiation described as an excess or as an insufficiency. In this sense *chung* is a generalized state of being which is the beginning of all things. But this is only one aspect of the meaning of *chung*. There is a deeper aspect of *chung* to be explained in the following.

As *chung* transcends extremes and differences, it should be able to generate differences and integrate them into a unity. This is first suggested in the statement of Lü Hsing 呂刑: “To govern the people, [the ruler] should not deviate from the middle (*chung*) in listening to the two sides in a litigation, and should not be prejudicedly skewed to either of the two sides in the litigation.”²² The reason why a ruler-judge should not lean toward either side of the litigating parties is that he should make fair and correct judgment acceptable to both parties and to the people at large. He is to maintain a position above the two sides and yet reach out and influence them. In this sense *chung* becomes a way to realize *ho*, by recognizing differences and yet integrating the differences in a unity. It is in this spirit that Confucius speaks of seeking knowledge by “questioning two extremes and exhausting their possibilities.”²³ It can be also said that it is in this sense that Yao 堯 urges Shun 舜 to “hold steadfast to the *chung* [in administering the government]” and Mencius praises T’ang 湯 for the fact that T’ang holds steadfast to the *chung* and seeks to establish what is worthwhile without being bound to any prejudice.²⁴ In this sense *chung* also becomes a supreme virtue and a supreme way for

¹⁹E.g. in the hexagram, *ch’ien* 乾 (progress), the *t’uan* 爻 says: “The position is such that the firm [line] acquires a centrality (*te-chung* 得中).”

²⁰See the *Hung Fan* 洪範 chapter of the *Shang Shu*.

²¹See the *Analects*, XI.16.

²²See the *Shang Shu*, Lü Hsing chapter. King Mu 穆 of Chou 周 also clearly stated in the same document that “One must be in court with pity, and use the codes of criminal law with caution, for the purpose of attaining fairness (*chung*) and rectitude (*cheng*).”

²³See the *Analects*, IX.8.

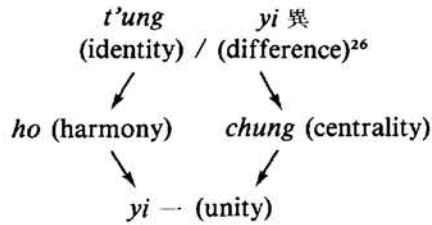
²⁴See the *Mencius*, 4B.20.

realizing harmony and goodness for oneself as well as for others.²⁵ He suggests the middle position between the extreme egoism of Yang Chu 楊朱 and the extreme of altruism of Mo Ti as the really desirable way to relate oneself to the world and mentioned Tzu Mo 子莫 the Confucianist as holding this middle position. But he also comments that, if one holds steadfast to the *chung* without the ability to adapt to individual and changing circumstances, then “to hold steadfast to the *chung*” becomes “to hold steadfast to the oneness.” This means that *chung* is *oneness* (*yi* 一) with adaptability, capable of concretizing a principle and applying itself to different situations, whereas *yi* in this contrast is *chung* in rigidity and thereby violating the very meaning of *chung*. But this also suggests that the *chung*-notion could include the notion of *oneness*, which should mediate between two extreme positions, and produce the most desirable course of action.

This discussion of *chung* should shed light on the relation of *chung* to *ho*. In one sense *chung* is the foundation of *ho*, where differences are not generated; in another sense *chung* is the state of *ho* where differences are organized and integrated, and in this sense *chung* is the way of harmonizing differences and producing a unity necessary for the totalistic integration of differences as parts. This analysis also brings out two senses of unity (*yi*): in one sense, unity is a static state of *oneness* without adaptability, which, while transcending the differences, is incapable of integrating the differences. In this sense unity is similar to identity where no difference is permitted. In another sense of unity, however, as we shall discuss in the philosophy of the *I Ching*, unity is creative and productive of differences as its parts without losing the unifying ground and the unifying principle, and at the same time, maintaining unity among differences even under changing circumstances. This creative unity, in distinction to stationary unity, is the basis for producing and strengthening harmony as a system of integration of differences.

To sum up our discussion of the notions of *ho*, *t'ung*, *chung*, and *yi*, we may indeed articulate their relationships in the following network:

²⁵ It is to be called “*chung-te*” 中德, the virtue of the *chung*, or the “way of the *chung*,” “*chung-tao*” 中道. The term “*chung-te*” was used in the *Shang Shu* proclamation on wine, *Chiu Kao* 酒誥 chapter. In the *Analects* Confucius refers to the *chung-hsing* 中行 (middle course of action), XIII.21. Mencius is the first one to use the term “*chung-tao*” in reference to the vision and philosophy of Confucius, see the *Mencius*, 7B.37, 7A.41. Mencius also discusses the nature of “hold steadfast to the *chung*” by making a distinction between “*chih-chung*” 執中 (“holding steadfast to the *chung*”) and “*chih-yi*” 執一 (“holding steadfast to the oneness”); see the *Mencius*, 7A.21.



“Oneness” (*yi*) is the underlying unity among all parts in a totality, which gives relevance and relationship to the parts in the totality. Of course, there can be many types and even many degrees of unity in a totality: the unity could be a prevailing thread linking all parts; the unity could be an interrelatedness among all parts—a functional interdependence which contributes toward the overall balance, thus stability and strength, of the whole. Furthermore, the unity could be a thoroughly fused and well-formed network of relationships which can be best described as a state of interpenetration among parts and whole, in which the wholeness of the parts and the partiality of the whole are equally present.²⁷ The first type of unity clearly is to be found in any hierarchical structure in nature or in society, in government or in architecture. The second type of unity is to be found in a biological system and is very often referred to as an organic system. The third type of unity is basically conceived in the metaphysics of Hua Yen 華嚴 Buddhism, Chu Hsi 朱熹 and Wang Yang-ming 王陽明 as representing the true nature of reality.²⁸ It is to be strived for by an individual who seeks enlightenment or the understanding of reality. It is apparent that for these systems a world of things is not normally seen to be interpenetrated and therefore a lack of unity in this sense is apparently the case. How to reconcile the true order of unity in reality with the apparent lack of unity in the world is often the fundamental question which many philosophers attempt to settle or for that matter may fail to settle. A deeper and more challenging question

²⁶The Chinese character for “difference” (異) is also pronounced “*yi*,” like the “*yi*” for the character signifying oneness or unity (一).

²⁷Modern-day physics and biology manifest a new trend in interpreting the physical/biological sciences in terms of a philosophy of a higher reality called the *tao* or the “implicate order” which is holographical or hologramlike in nature. Cf. David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1980).

²⁸Even though there are major differences between Hua Yen, Chu Hsi and Wang Yang-ming, the metaphysical principle of “one in all and all in one” is accepted by all three systems beyond reasonable doubt.

is how to reconcile all different types of unitary order as if they are layers or levels of order in a totalistic and unitary system.

Confucius has remarked to his disciple Tseng Shen 曾參: "My way is threaded with unity."²⁹ In making this remark Confucius referred to the corpus of his teaching as having an underlying unity of truth. Tseng Shen has perceived this unity of truth as the way of loyalty (central-mindedness, *chung* 忠) and compassionateness (like-mindedness, *shu* 恕). This is correct but not quite complete. For unity (oneness, *yi*) is oneness—not twoness if the Confucian teaching is threaded with oneness: an ultimate principle must be focused on oneness. There is no other concept better than *jen* (humanity) in the Confucian *Analects* which can qualify for being this principle of unity. In light of this consideration, one may draw the correct conclusion that *chung* and *shu* are two aspects of *jen* and that all other virtues and norms are to be integrated into this system of oneness, one centrality with two manifestations. On the basis of this, one can also show that the Confucian doctrine of *jen* demonstrates a highly integrated structure of interdependence which Confucius has projected to be the *ideal* development and realization of the nature of man, and consequently, can be said to reflect a highly integrated system of human and social reality which would exemplify an ideal state of harmony. How oneness (unity) contributes to harmony seems to be well illustrated by the Confucian perception of this oneness in his teachings and in what these teachings have achieved.

In Mencius, oneness is also counted as an important power to be achieved in order to bring about order and harmony in the world. When King Hsiang 襄 of the State of Liang 梁 raised the question: "How could the world be ordered and stabilized?" Mencius replied: "The world is to be ordered and stabilized on the basis of oneness."³⁰ Mencius did not elaborate on this idea of oneness. But from his philosophy it is clear that this oneness is nothing other than the principle and virtue of *jen*. He has indicated this by replying to the second question of King Hsiang: "Who is capable of unifying the world?" Mencius' reply is this: "Only he who does not indulge himself in killing people can unify (give oneness to) the world."³¹ "Not to indulge in killing people" is a manifestation of *jen*, and there are many things required by *jen* which contribute to the oneness of the world. The so-called oneness of the world is no more than the unity of all people who become related to one another and to

²⁹ See the *Analects*, IV.15.

³⁰ See the *Mencius*, 1A.6.

³¹ *Ibid.*

their ruler in the bond of humanity and love, justice and righteousness, morality and respect, truth and wisdom, all being manifestations of *jen* as well as manifestations of the goodness of the nature of man. Again, it is clear that the unity of the world in Mencius bespeaks a state of harmony which is to be constituted by the realization of the nature of man and the realization of the nature of all things.

In the *Tao Te Ching* 道德經, it is said that the *tao* gives rise to oneness.³² Without going into details of Lao Tzu's 老子 philosophy of *tao* and *te*, it suffices to indicate that the *tao* as primordial unity, in order to give rise to the manifold of things, has to give rise to the unity of things in the beginning. The unity (oneness) of things, as we shall see, coincides to a large extent with the concept of the *t'ai-chi* 太極 in the *I Ching*. It is the source of vitality and life in things as well as the sustaining base for the differentiation of things in a process of change. Indeed, Lao Tzu even points out that it is only when things possess and maintain this oneness that they become the *best* of what they are. Hence, it is said that:

Heaven acquires oneness so that it is pure, Earth acquires oneness so that it is peaceful; the spirit acquires oneness so that it is subtle; the valley acquires oneness so that it is full of life; the myriad of things acquires oneness so that it is flourishing; dukes and kings acquire oneness so that they become leaders of the world. They all become what they are because of the acquisition of oneness.³³

Oneness here is the *tao* in its activity of producing things and the world.

IV. Four Grades of Harmony vs. Four Grades of Strife

With all our discussion on the notion of *ho*, *t'ung*, *chung*, and *yi* in the classical Chinese philosophical works, we are now confronted with the problem: how do we systematically interpret the concept of harmony in light of this discussion? How do we arrive at a theoretical understanding of harmony so that all of the insights from the above discussion can be incorporated and hopefully extended to a comprehensive explanation of reality and experience resulting in significant uses for practical life? To answer this important question, we must first recall that harmony both in the sense of Greek "*harmonia*" and in the sense of Chinese "*ho*"

³²See the *Tao Te Ching*, Section 42.

³³*Ibid.*, Section 39.

always involves different elements, and that these different elements work together and support one another as parts of a whole to make a unity of the whole possible. Harmony is the experience, perception, as well as the reality of this unity of a whole together with the interrelationship of its parts. But it is left undecided as to how these parts are to be related in order to be related in harmony. In other words, the logic of the harmonious relationship is left unspecified or unaccounted for. However, if we examine the possible relationships of two different things or two parts of a whole, we can easily identify the following possibilities of relationships:

A. Two different things or two parts of a whole can be minimally related in terms of logical consistency; i.e. it can be that there exists no incompatibility between two things. Consider a pen and an orange on a table: are they related any more than sharing the table and being placed side by side? Unless other relationships are invested in them, they are not related in logical conjunction and logical consistency. There need not be any support or significant relationship between them, nor, of course, are they dependent on each other for their individual existence. If there is any harmony between them, their harmony is their minimal co-presence without contradiction or contrariety. Perhaps many things exist in this relationship of irrelevance and individual self-sufficiency. This form of harmony, if it is harmony at all, perhaps, can be illustrated by the *Tao Te Ching's* statement: "The people [in the idealized community] do not interact with each other from birth to death."³⁴

B. Mere difference is no obstacle to the growth of the individual. But different things certainly can be more closely related than being related in logical consistency or logical compatibility when they become interactive with each other. In this sense, two different things can have a material relationship other than a logical relationship.³⁵ This material relationship can be simply a physical influence between two different things or a subatomic/molecular/atomic interaction between them.³⁶

³⁴*Ibid.*, Section 81.

³⁵Perhaps all existent things, no matter how they appear to be irrelevant to one another, are materially related in one way or another from considerations of modern physics and modern ecology. In the light of the organismic metaphysics of Whitehead, everything is of course "materially" related to everything else.

³⁶In modern physics various categories of interactions between elementary particles are recognized: strong interactions, electromagnetic interactions, weak interactions and gravitational interactions.

These relationships need not add nor detract *any thing* from any two different things, but they are related with interactions between them, and because of this, form a common field of coexistence. However, they are still far from being actively supportive of each other.

C. The interaction between two different things can be elevated to a mutual support in the increasing of an internal coherence of a relationship between them. This would be a higher degree of harmony between the two things. A mutual support between two things means that each contributes to the other in its growth and fulfillment and thus enables two different things to form a relationship of fruitful interdependence. The relationship of family between husband and wife seems to illustrate this relationship as do any other socially organized group or community relationships which serve the purpose of mutual strengthening and mutual enrichment. The relationship could be described as organic, because it is in an organic body that different organs become interdependent and each can function well in this interdependence.

D. When interdependence becomes interpenetration in the sense that the parts of a whole are more interfused and the whole becomes also actively participatory in the parts as do the parts in the whole, the relation of harmony will become more productive and creative in the sense that a new order of differentiation resulting unity takes place, without, at the same time, losing the ground of the unity governing the parts of the original whole. It is in the sense of creative interpenetration that harmony has reached its ideal state as suggested in the human experience of harmony in music or food. This state of harmony is creative because it is dynamical: it always involves change and transformation in a process of time as illustrated in the production of life.

In light of the above, we can be said to have defined four grades or four modes of harmony, which, in comparison of one with the other, are different in the degrees of coherence of relationship between their parts and wholes. It seems clear that, the more coherently the parts and the whole are related, the more harmony there is. Indeed in the ideal sense of harmony intended by the Greek term "*harmonia*" and the Chinese term "*ho*," no relationship qualifies as harmony other than the closely knit interdependence and perhaps even interpenetration among the parts and the whole. It is also intended by the Chinese Hua Yen Buddhist philosophy of totality and the Neo-Confucian philosophy of *li* 理 (principle) and *ch'i* 氣 (vitality), that reality is harmonious in this ideal sense and all disharmony or strife is mere appearance.

With the above scheme of characterization of harmony, we can also describe the lack of harmony, and consequently, the nature of strife, according to the negation of the four grades of harmony. First, we can recognize that the lack of harmony in a realistic sense must result not from simply negating one grade of harmony to the exclusion of other grades of harmony. On the contrary, strife and the lack of harmony are derived from the negation of all grades of harmony in the above characterization if all of the above grades of harmony are recognized as modes of harmony at all. The reason is simple. The negation of grade-four harmony (interpenetration) still has left the other three grades of harmony *viable*. Only the negation of grade-one harmony (logical consistency) entails the negation of the other higher-grade harmonies and thus becomes equivalent to the negation of all the harmonies. The result of such a negation is logical inconsistency or logical incompatibility of the form: $\neg(A \cdot B) \rightarrow (AV \sim B) \vee (BV \sim A)$.

If we construe strife as the opposite of harmony, then in light of the preceding discussion, strife becomes logical inconsistency or incompatibility between two different things, each of which leads to the negation of the other thing, and therefore "contradicts" the other by not being able to coexist with it. If strife means exclusion and elimination as an end, it is precisely due to this end that the two things at strife war against each other. Again we have to note that, corresponding to the four grades or four modes of harmony, four grades or four modes of strife can be defined. Radical and full strife is of course the case of logical inconsistency or incompatibility, which implies eliminating the existence of one thing at the expense of another. We could define a second grade of strife as one which enjoys logical consistency, but is marked by a resistance to be related in any other way. Thus one could have a strife in the sense of difference in indifference, which one often finds in the classical example of social alienation. A person or a class of persons are alienated from society and *vice versa* if there is no concern nor any significant interaction between the two. In fact, hostility may be said to be potentially present in the relation of alienation when the hostility breaks out in the open: each side has the intention to destroy or diminish the other. Then, we have the third grade/mode of strife. Finally, when the two sides maintain a relation of communication and interaction, but still intend to resist or actually *resist* moving to a higher form of closer interaction, then we may be said to have the fourth grade mode of strife. It is evident that these grades/modes of strife correspond to types of decreasing degrees of support relationship among the last three relationships in harmony.

V. Harmony as Unity of Opposites

Given the above analyses of harmony and strife, it is pertinent to ask how full and ideal harmony can be constructed and how strife can be reconciled with harmony if they are equally real. It is at this point that we can bring in the philosophy of the *I Ching* in order to provide a deeper analysis of the possible relationships among the parts of a whole. For this purpose, we have to look for the condition of, and the basis for, the interpenetrational relationship in the case of ideal and full harmony. It is immediately suggested in the philosophy of the *I Ching* that the very condition of interpenetration of things in a whole is the unity of opposites. This proposition of the unity of opposites is to be understood in a twofold way: it is only between genuine *opposites* that unity is to be found; and it is only in the genuine unity of things that opposites are found. Thus, unity and opposites go hand in hand and each becomes the condition for the existence of the other. It is further noticed that all differences in a unity are opposites, and therefore only when these differences become genuine opposites, would they form a unity and thus form a harmony in a creative sense.

Even Heraclitus recognizes to a certain degree that opposites form a unity. However, he did not explain the principle of such unity itself. His assertion that "Cool things become warm, the warm grow cool"³⁷ is significant. It shows that opposites can mutually transform into one another, and one may therefore suggest that their unity is their mutual transformability. Heraclitus also asserts that "war" is the common condition. "Strife is justice and all things come to pass through the compulsion of strife."³⁸ But then what is called war or strife is simply the incompatibility, and hence the mutual transformability, of the opposites. It is due to the strife of things that Heraclitus conceives change to be possible. He further infers that without change and hence without strife all things would cease to exist.³⁹ The paradoxical conclusion from this is that things exist because of the conflict and strife among them, and hence because of their being opposite to each other. Yet things will perish from conflict and strife. Conflict and strife conduce to both the existence and the perishing of things, and hence the change and transformation of things. But nowhere does Heraclitus explain in which way strife conduces to existence, and in which other way strife conduces to perishing. He fails to

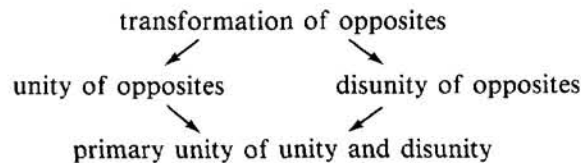
³⁷ *Heraclitus*, fragment 22.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, fragment 26, also see fragment 25.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, fragment 27.

see that it is due to the power of unity that two opposites in a unity give rise to the existence of things, and it is due to the power of the opposition that two opposites in a unity give rise to the perishing of one or the other opposite or the mutual transformation of the two. He fails to focus on, or perhaps even fails to see, the unity side of the two opposites and, for that matter, fails to recognize the genuine nature of genuine opposites. Are warm and cool genuinely opposites? If they are, they must form a unity which leads to the existence of things. When cool becomes warm or warm becomes cool, in some situations, these would mean the production of life and activity such as the recovery from illness and growth in animal life. In other situations, this transformation from one opposite to the other in which the conjunction of opposites is to be formed would mean the cessation of life and thus the perishing of a given thing. But in this sense, the conjunction of opposites should be more appropriately described as a “*disunity*” rather than as a “unity” of opposites.

Heraclitus has focused explicitly on the disunity (strife) and transformation of opposites and has failed to state the “principle of *unity*” as part of the process of change. In fact, one may point out that in the change and transformation of things there is both “*unity and disunity*,” but then the very presence of change and transformation in existing things should presuppose a “unity of unity and disunity,” and thus should underscore the unity of opposites as a productive and creative principle in a metaphysical sense. We may indicate this relationship in the following diagram:



With an analysis and critique of the Heraclitean concept of strife and his implicit thesis of the “disunity” of opposites, we may advance into the philosophy of the *I Ching* as a source for formulating and providing a comprehensive theory of harmony and strife, in which harmony is metaphysically founded and fundamentally illuminated and strife can be given a proper place and clearly explained. The very importance of the *I Ching* philosophy consists in its recognition of change and transforma-

tion (called *pien* 變 and *hua* 化) as constitutive of reality⁴⁰ as well as in its insight that change and transformation primarily take place because of the *unity*, not the disunity of things. Even disunity and strife should contribute to the unity of things on deeper level. This is because again, as in the *I Ching*, all differences of things come from a unity which is interpreted as creative, whereby differences are interrelated and become interrelating, interpenetrating and inseparable. On this basis not only are all differences explained, but the nature of their differences as differences, the possibility of strife and perishing, are also properly recognized and explained. This is again because a well-entrenched concept of creative unity and hence a metaphysical notion of harmony are developed. In this sense of harmony, conditions of consistency, relationship, mutual support, and interpenetration are reaffirmed and a basic model for relating differences in harmony (*via* harmonization) can be constructed. Accordingly, ways can be developed for explaining the significance of strife in harmony as well as for transforming strife into harmony.

⁴⁰ *Pien* (change) is distinguished from *hua* (transformation) in the *Hsi Tz'u* of the *I Ching*. It is said that "To transform and order the transformation is called change"; "To transform and order the transformation consists in change" (*Hsi Tz'u Shang* 繫辭上, 12). *Pien* is the result of mutual interaction between *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽, firm and soft; but the very subtle, gradual and imperceptible minute changes in things are transformational (*hua*). Hence the concept of the "transformation of heaven and earth" (*t'ien-ti-chih-hua* 天地之化) is the nourishing and life-giving process of gradual evolution and development such as in the rotation of seasons, in contrast with sudden conspicuous changes of weather and other conditions to be connoted by the term "changes of heaven and earth" (*t'ien-ti-chih-pien*).