



The Confucian Value of Harmony and its Influence on Chinese Social Interaction

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Abstract

As the cardinal cultural value in Chinese society, the Confucian harmony presupposes the coexistence of different things and implies a certain favorable relationship among them. In social interaction, Confucianism puts weight on “harmony but not sameness”, “harmony without mindlessly following others” and “harmonization of various kinds of people by observing rituals of propriety”, under the influence of which Chinese interpersonal relationships are characterized by emphasis on group orientation, the Doctrine of the Mean, giving or making face for others, guanxi (social connections), and reciprocity.

Key words: Confucianism; Harmony; Influence; Social Interaction

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INTRODUCTION

With the acceleration of globalization and the depth of China's reform and opening up to the world, more and more westerners may find that they are establishing

professional or personal relationships with citizens of the People's Republic of China. Diplomats, “foreign experts”, business people, consultants, researchers, teachers, students and even community leaders who live and work in China or come into sustained contact with the Chinese in other nations have encountered a variety of interpersonal difficulties. Thus, how to interact with the Chinese smoothly and successfully has become a heated subject in intercultural communication.

1. STUDIES ON ENCOUNTERING THE CHINESE

Many researchers and scholars with abundant experience in dealing with interaction with Chinese people have written articles and books to provide guidance for encountering the Chinese. Scott Seligman (1989) who was experienced in dealing with US-China business affairs first gathers in a single book all the key points and insights necessary to begin successful communication with the oldest and perhaps most sophisticated living culture in the world. Fred Schneider (1994), with an unflinching sense of humor, writes an entertaining and highly informative guide to China, explaining how to work and play with the Chinese and offering insights for Sinophiles, Sinophobes, and everyone in between. Some other researchers and scholars focus on academic areas, providing guide for teachers, students and researchers who plan to live, work and study in China by supplying a tapestry of answers to the real questions of daily life in China (Thurston, 1994; Thompson, 1998). Some Chinese scholars cooperate with American scholars to portray and interpret some of the distinctive communication practices in Chinese culture by utilizing the ‘self-OTHER’ perspective as a conceptual foundation, then to offer a realistic and clear illustration of the specific characteristics and functions of Chinese communication, as well as problematic areas of Chinese-North American encounters, or to provide profound interpretation of the critical incidents

occurring between the Chinese and westerners (GAO & Stella, 1998; WANG, Brislin & Chao, 2000; HU, Grove & ZHUNG, 2010). Some Chinese scholars focus on spreading Chinese spirit, such as righteousness, which can help promote the world harmony (LEI, 2011).

Undoubtedly, all these works are beneficial to interpersonal communication with the Chinese, whose society is a relational and collective one and requires every interaction participant to behave properly according to certain rites, which makes interaction itself more complex and complicated than that of Westerners. As to why Chinese social interaction is so complicated, these works all provide a bird view, but do not probe into the deep-level cultural reason in detail. Specifically speaking, the complexity of Chinese social interaction derives from its cardinal value—harmony. In this article, the authors will focus on the core spirit of the Confucian harmony and its profound influence on Chinese social interaction, which can help foreigners to understand the essence of Chinese social relationships and try to establish and maintain cooperative, respectful, trusting and functional ties with the Chinese in the practical sense.

2. THE FUNDAMENTAL CONNOTATION OF HARMONY IN CHINESE CULTURE

Harmony is of paramount importance in Chinese culture to such a degree that it is viewed as the cardinal cultural value in Chinese society (CHEN and Starosta, 1997). According to Chen (2001, 2002), harmony is the essence of Confucian theories of social interaction. In 2004, the PRC government launched a movement of Harmonious Society Construction, which promotes social harmony as the dominant socio-economic vision of China. The core of the movement is to reduce social conflicts and to build balance across social classes. As Oort (1960) notes, governmental policy can have a tremendous influence on people's attitudes. Given this consideration, the value of harmony will continue to receive increase attention in almost every aspect of Chinese social life. Under such circumstances, it is necessary for a person who wants to interact with the Chinese to acquire the essence of harmony.

2.1 The Core Spirit of Harmony in Confucianism

Philosophically, harmony which is called *he* in Confucianism presupposes the existence of different things and implies a certain favorable relationship among them. As the representatives of Confucianism in Ancient China, Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi etc. all make an incisive statement of the essence of *he* (harmony) in human relations, in which *ren* is regarded as a faculty possessed by human beings that refers to showing love and affection to one's counterparts in social interaction, and *li*, as the fundamental regulatory etiquette, which refers to propriety and respect for social norms, is considered the best way to realize *he*.

In the *Analects*, Confucius adopts the ideal of harmony, making *he* a criterion for *junzi*—a good person with moral will of *ren*. He says that “The *junzi* harmonizes but does not seek sameness, whereas the petty person seeks sameness but does not harmonize” (*Analects* 13.23). He emphasizes the independence of individual personality and advocates the coexistence of different individuals. For Confucius, a sensible person should be able to respect different opinions and work with different people in a harmonious way. A major function of *li* (rites, rituals of propriety) is precisely to harmonize people of various kinds. The Confucian disciple You zi says, “Achieving *he* (harmony) is the most valuable function of observing *li* (ritual propriety)” (*Analects* 1.12). Confucius and his disciples see a direct connection between *li* and *he*. They take *li* to be a central aspect of government and believe that through the good use of *li*, good government can create a harmonious society. According to the *Zhouli* “*Tianguan*”, another Confucian classic, one of the six primary functions of the Greater Minister is “[to minister] state rituals (*li*), in order to harmonize the nation” (LI, 2006).

Mencius comments that among the three important things in human affairs, harmony among people is of the greatest significance: “good timing is not as good as being advantageously situated, and being advantageously situated is not as good as having harmonious people” (Mencius 3B.1). In order to achieve a major goal in social affairs, one would need all three: good timing, being advantageously situated, and having harmonious people. The most precious thing, however, is to have people who work in harmony with one another. Mencius praises Liu Xiahui as “the sage who is able to harmonize” (Mencius 5B.1). Liu is well known for his familiarity with *li* and for his firm belief in harmonious coexistence.

Xunzi concurs with Confucius on the importance of *li* to harmony. Xunzi says that “[only] when following *li* is one harmonious and regulated” (Xunzi “*Xiushen*”). He also agrees with Confucius in saying that “To harmonize with others by goodness is being reasonably accommodating” and “to harmonize with others by wickedness is fawning” (ibid.). For Xunzi, harmony is not without principle, and not exclusive of differences and conflicts. This strikes a similar note with Confucius, whose ideal of harmony is “harmony without mindlessly following others” (Zhongyong 10).

Besides, *Yijing*, another classic text of Confucianism puts emphasis on “Grand Harmony”, which indicates that the world is full of different things, yet all these things harmonize even as they constantly change. The influential Han Confucian Dong Zhongshu holds that the ability to harmonize in the world is indeed the most precious ability.

From what has been stated above, we can see the Confucian ideal of “harmony” is different from “sameness” which can not tolerate difference. “Harmony”, however, not only contains “difference”, but also encourages the coexistence of “difference”. Thus, the

Confucian view of “harmony” attaches great importance to openness, equality and reason.

2.2 The Interactional Features of Harmony in Confucianism

Based on the study of the core spirit of harmony in Confucianism as well as the achievements of some scholars’ researches (LI, 2006), four conspicuous interactional features of the Confucian harmony can be found.

First, harmony is an ethical notion; which describes how human beings ought to act. For Confucius, human beings should act upon such principles as “do not look at anything unless it is in accordance with li; do not listen to anything unless it is in accordance with li; do not speak about anything unless it is in accordance with li; do not do anything unless it is in accordance with li.” (Analects, 12.1) Harmony is the Way, the Confucian way.

Second, harmony is by its very nature relational. It presupposes the coexistence of multiple parties; “a single item does not harmonize.” As far as harmony is concerned, all the parties involved possess more or less equal importance. The harmony is achieved by coordinating these parties in a properly cooperative way, with ren (benevolence, authoritative conduct), yi (righteousness, morality) and li (ritual propriety) as criterions.

Third, Confucian harmony is not mere agreement without difference. In a harmonious circumstance, coexisting parties must be in some way different from one another; while harmony does not preclude sameness, sameness itself is not harmony. Furthermore, harmony is different from stagnant concordance in that harmony is sustained by energy generated through the interaction of different elements in creative tension. For Confucians, strife between the two individuals or parties serves as an instrumental step toward harmony in the long run and, on a large scale, for the world. Since harmony is not only a state but, more importantly, a process, disharmony is necessarily present during the process of harmonization.

And last, the requirement of harmony places a constraint on each party in interaction, and, in the meantime, provides a context for each party to have optimal space to flourish. In the Confucian view, parties in a harmonious relationship are both the condition for and the constraint against one another’s growth. A harmonious relationship implies mutual complement and mutual support between the parties (CHENG, 1991).

3. THE INFLUENCE OF CONFUCIAN HARMONY ON CHINESE SOCIAL INTERACTION

Through the analysis of the core spirit of the Confucian harmony, it is evident that interpersonal harmony has been of prominent importance in the traditional Chinese cultural values and the maintenance of good human relationships.

3.1 Categories of Harmony in Chinese Social Interaction

Harmony is highly valued by the Chinese in their interpersonal relationships. The value of harmony guides people’s interaction manners and norms in every aspect of Chinese social interaction—in family, between friends, at school, in business and among strangers. The ability to achieve interpersonal harmony is the crucial criterion of one’s competence in Chinese social interaction (CHEN, 2002).

According to HUANG (1999, cited in Leung 2002), that there are two major types of harmony in Chinese social interaction: “genuine” and “surface.” The former refers to holistic and sincere harmonious relationships while the latter refers to harmonious relationships that appear on the surface level, although conflicts remain underneath the surface. In the latter case, harmony is a communicative norm or strategy that covers, or in some cases supports, hidden conflicts. Strategic tolerance allows better opportunity in the future. Huang further argues that genuine harmony is difficult to establish and, therefore, people generally settle for surface harmony. As CHANG (2001) points out, Chinese interpersonal harmony is a “social performance,” often conducted at the surface level. The preference to surface harmony over direct confrontation in Chinese social interaction often makes foreigners confused, and the idea of harmonious performance might even pose a serious challenge to their sense of integrity, thus resulting in their reluctance and poor performance in interacting with the Chinese.

3.2 The Characteristics of Chinese Social Interaction under the Influence of the Confucian Harmony

As for interpersonal harmony management in Chinese social interaction, most studies have defined it as conflict control (CHEN, 2002; Huang, 2006), which intends to reduce the degree of conflicts and to avoid confrontations in communicating harmony-threatening messages, such as disagreement, competition, and frustration. However, some other studies (ZHU, 2008) may also involve actively creating an interpersonal relationship with a compatible and friendly ambiance before any sign of conflict emerges. This kind of harmonious ambiance potentially facilitates mutual understanding and mutual tolerance, and encourages peaceful interaction and collaboration. Whether this relationship arrives at “surface harmony” or “genuine harmony,” breaking a harmonious relationship is considered a move of high risk. Based on the core spirit of Confucian harmony and these studies, it is held that two aspects should be taken into consideration in the discussion of harmony management: (1) establishing or enhancing interpersonal harmony; (2) preventing conflicts or reducing harmony-threatening activities. Thus, five characteristics of harmony management can be summarized from Chinese social interaction with respect

to these two aspects: group centeredness, the Doctrine of the Mean, saving or making face for others, reciprocity, and emphasis on Guanxi (social connection).

3.2.1 Group Centeredness

Chinese people make clear distinctions between insiders and outsiders, which affects every aspect in social interaction. As Scollon and Scollon note on Chinese social interactions, “discriminating a boundary is not only a logical or a descriptive activity, but it is a regulative and moral activity [in Chinese culture]. What is outside a boundary is not relevant in any way to what is inside” (1994, p. 471). Though mutual exclusion may happen between sub-culture groups, strong cohesion exists within the same group. Inside a group, mutual compromise is the key to maintaining harmonious relationships. A fit example is about group decision which is often achieved by compromise and satisfies every member or at least most of the group members. Thus it is no wonder when an individual gives a speech on behalf of the group, he or she often starts by saying “In our opinion...” or “We think...” instead of “In my opinion...” or “I think...” While dealing with conflicts within a group, insiders also take the harmonious strategies, which can be exemplified by such famous Chinese sayings as “a good discussion” or “you take a step, I take a step, don’t hurt.” Thus, harmony-threatening activities are much more likely to occur with outsiders than with insiders.

Based on Confucianism, the self is relational in Chinese culture. “The self is defined by the surrounding relations” (GAO, & Ting-toomy, 1998, p. 9). Collectivism in Chinese social interaction requires an individual to maintain group harmony by being attentive to the norms of their group, such as one’s nuclear family, one’s class at school, one’s military unit, fellow members of a delegation, or one’s work unit. Group harmony entails emphasizing group achievement and others’ contribution to the group, acting in accordance with others, and de-emphasizing one’s own needs and thought. Interdependent self-image is prevailing in Chinese social interaction which views individual participation in groups as the basic unit of their self-image. Many Chinese proverbs can demonstrate such idea vividly, “One tree does not make a forest”, “A single flower does not make a spring, a riot of colour is the spring”, “A man difficult to pick a heavy responsibility, they can shift million mountain” and so on.

While growing up in China, one tends to be sensitive to his or her position in the group, as above, below or equal to others. Individuals’ roles and expectations of individuals in a group correspond with one’s hierarchical position in the group. For example, when making a decision, those who sit lower on the hierarchy scale are normally expected not to play the decisive role, therefore they commonly deemphasize their ideas or stand their ground less firmly. Their opinions should be conveyed in a more humble manner than those who stand higher in the hierarchy scale. And once a decision has been made, individual group members are expected to embrace it and

act on it. That’s one reason why outsiders seldom hear a Chinese make an irreverent comment, or openly express a view at odds with that of his or her inside group. Toeing the mark is important, and it is enforced.

3.2.2 The Doctrine of the Mean

The Doctrine of the Mean is one of the major theories in Confucianism. The famous Confucian saying--“do not do to others what you would not like to be done to you”—just manifests this theory which requires people to obey the Doctrine of the Mean while they are dealing with interpersonal relationships. CHAN (1963) renders “Mean” as an “equilibrium,” which is identified as the substance of harmony. With respect to social interaction, the Doctrine of the Mean is manifested by two communicative strategies.

First, the Confucian equilibrium advocates self-restraint and indirect expression of disapproval. According to Confucianism, in order to promote harmony, cultivated people must subdue their emotions in public as a symbolic expression of promoting welfare and neglecting the personal desires, because showing raw emotions immediately threatens the principle of li. Such kind of view is somewhat extreme. Withholding all kinds of strong feelings is not applicable to the present situations of China. The Chinese modern view of harmony holds that people should express those strong feelings in a moderate manner. This moderate manner may be best described by the Chinese word hanxu, which refers to a communicative mode that is contained, reserved, implicit and indirect. Therefore, the Chinese tend to express negative feelings or contrary opinions in an indirect manner. In the network of human relationships, open, aggressive arguments and behaviours are seldom allowed in public or in a conflict situation because they are regarded as an insult to the collective.

For example, in a danwei (work unit), not all the clerks agree with the leaders’ decision to give bonus to the employees according to the rank of their scores in performance. Those who disagree with the rule may not express their strong dissatisfaction or argue with their leaders or colleagues at the meeting. Instead, they may write a letter with joint signature to the leaders and state why they are opposed to the new rule. In this way, they will not threaten the authority of the leaders and also maintain the harmonious relationships among the collective. Likewise, in Chinese schools and universities, students seldom question their teachers directly. Sometimes, even they disagree with what the teacher says in class, they may not argue or express their opposition. Instead, they may state their opinions to the teacher after the class is over.

Another implementation of the Doctrine of the Mean is to establish a balanced relationship between various parties that are interacting with each other. When two parties are in conflict or hold different positions on one issue, the Chinese tend not to completely deny or accept one side. Instead, they frequently settle for the neutral viewpoint or solutions in pursuit of the group balance. In

the business negotiation of price, Chinese business people seldom take aggressive measures to press for their supreme profit, instead, they are likely to take win-win strategies so as to maintain the continuance of a business relationship.

3.2.3 Saving or Making Face for Others

According to American sociologist Erving Goffman (1955), "[Face is] the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes." Scholars who have examined the face concept have pronounced it a universal concern of human beings. The only difference in Chinese and Western concepts of face is that face simply has greater social significance for the Chinese, who are conscious of face in social interaction all the time. An oft repeated Chinese proverb puts it thus: "A person needs face as a tree needs bark."

Why concern for face should have such high importance for the Chinese mainly lies in two principal factors. For one thing, over the centuries, agriculture has been an important part in Chinese economy, which makes Chinese society one of very restricted geographical mobility. Most people are attached for life to a place or a given community. Under such circumstances, maintaining harmonious relationships among all its members becomes of extreme importance. Consequently, in people's social interaction, face-saving behaviors are emphasized. Every one exerts their efforts to maintain harmony, avoid conflicts, and protect the integrity of the group. For another, Confucianism emphasizes that humans exist in interactive relationships with others and that most human relationships are characteristic of hierarchical nature, as is put, "seniors and juniors have their ranking". Chinese people are good at identifying with their own relative positions in hierarchies and behaving properly according to the scale where they stay. Social harmony is often preserved when all parties in a social situation behave in a proper way. One important way to maintain harmonious relationship is to accept and respect each person's need to maintain his or her face.

In Chinese society, since face is related to a person's dignity and prestige, saving or making face for others is showing your respect to them, which can boost their self-esteem. Failing to treat someone with proper respect is a real sin with the Chinese. For if you make someone lose face, you will not only lose the respect of the person you have wronged, but also lose that of others who are aware of your transgression. JIA(1997) also argues that face work is a typical conflict-preventive mechanism and a cultural force in typical Chinese communities. In social interaction, Chinese people are always trying every means possible to give face to others by complimenting someone unknown to the public on his or her diligence, or someone for his or her rank, beauty, wisdom or even elegance, and to save face for others by avoiding direct criticism of others, or using tactful or ambiguous words in case of criticizing someone's performance; showing

respect to someone's suggestion even if they do not agree with him and so on. Under the influence of hierarchical relationships, the Chinese are always modest about themselves, but show great generosity to others, especially to their superiors. Making face for the superiors or high-ranking people is regarded as necessary and very polite in social interaction. That's why many Chinese people may think highly of their superiors' talents, leadership and achievements in public, which seems absurd to the westerners. In one word, saving face for others can prevent conflicts, while giving or making face for others can enhance interpersonal relationship.

Besides, saving or giving face for others can be used as a strategic skill to manage business negotiation or resolve conflicts in different contexts. For example, in order to maintain a long-time harmonious relationship and reach a mutually satisfactory outcome, the negotiators of the two Chinese companies are likely to save each other's face by making concessions at the end of a negotiation. Another example is about "giving face" in conflict resolution. When conflict occurs between two clerks in a work unit, the respectable superior may intervene and say to both sides, "please give me a face and settle your problem without hurt." At this time, both sides usually make a compromise and keep their surface harmonious relationship. Thus, making a concession in negotiating or conflict-solving process is a common way Chinese do a favor to enhance mutual or others' face.

3.2.4 Emphasis on Guanxi (Social Connections)

In Chinese social interaction, another important strategy to promote interpersonal harmony is to establish guanxi (connections). And in Chinese society, all success depends as much on having a well-connected family and having attended school with the right people as it does on hard work and initiative. That means guanxi relationships have played a vital role in Chinese people's social life. Then what is guanxi? According to the study of Barlow and Lowe (1982, p. 104), "The term guanxi describes social connections based on concrete, reciprocal exchange of favors and goods among family members and others. In a sense, guanxi is the way people organize relationships outside the jia (family), transforming strangers into kin by extending them favors and incurring obligation. All Pseudo-family ties are cemented by this process. And ideally all relations between people should have a familist[ic] overtone."

According to Chinese psychologist HWANG Kwang-kuo (1986), relationships in Chinese society tend to fall into three categories. (1) Affective ties bind family members and close friends together and are the most important human ties among the Chinese. These deep and intimate relationships are formed early in life and last a life time. (2) Instrumental ties are usually temporary and often anonymous and enable the parties to attain practical ends. The "equity rule" characterizes instrumental ties: each party attempts to maintain a constant ratio between what he or she puts into and gets out of the relationship,

such as the tie between the taxi driver and the passengers, or the waitress and the customer. (3) Mixed ties combine aspects of the previous two and link people who know each other reasonably well, sometimes over many years. There is a warm, emotional component to a mixed tie. People engaged in this type of relationship are said to have *guanxi*. Chinese people attach great importance to *guanxi* relationships due to their affective component, their durability, and their functional value. The importance of *guanxi* network in Chinese people's life can be exemplified by two household sayings, that is "the fence made by pile, people made by dependence on others" and "When a man attains Tao, even his pets ascend to heaven".

Usually there are two ways of acquiring *guanxi* in Chinese social interaction (WANG et al, 2000, p. 32). One is passive, at least initially. As is discussed, Chinese people are group-centered and make a clear distinction between insiders and outsiders. One is born into certain *guanxi* networks: the extended family, parents' work unit, citizens of a small town etc.. one joins other groups and adds them to one's network as one grows. The other way is to do favor for people. A person might want to establish *guanxi* with someone outside his or her existing collectives. It is this method of establishing *guanxi* that frequently gets westerners into trouble. Accepting favors, especially large and important favors, often puts one in "guanxi debt" to the person who grants the favors. It can be difficult to tell, initially at least, whether someone is acting out of kindness or if that person has an agenda. Under such circumstance, it is advisable to return favors, in kind, as quickly as possible, to avoid building up *guanxi* debt that may be called in at a very inconvenient time. In this way, one can also keep the harmonious relationship with people. This is just so-called "tit-for-tat" or "you-scratch-my-back-I'll-scratch-yours" kind of arrangement.

Besides, the Chinese may start establishing a connection with a stranger by seeking information of their township. If they find out that the other person is from the same hometown or home province, the connection of fellows will be established and emphasized. As a result, a sense of group is formed which promotes interpersonal harmony. According to Leung (1988), the Chinese are more likely to avoid conflicts with people who share a particular network. In social interaction, the Chinese are cautious to any hierarchical distance existing in the group and show their proper respect to people who are higher on the hierarchy scale. In order to develop and maintain a long-term relationship, the Chinese need to keep in touch, exchange respect, and build mutual trust.

3.2.5 Reciprocity

From the perspective of social psychology, reciprocity refers to responding to a positive action with another positive action or rewarding kind actions. As a social construct, reciprocity means that in response to friendly actions, people are frequently much nicer and much more cooperative than predicted by the self-interest

model; conversely, in response to hostile actions they are frequently much more nasty and even brutal (Fehr & Gächter, 2000). In terms of interpersonal harmony, reciprocity indicates mutual dependency and responsibility in fulfilling each party's needs in a social interaction. In other words, whether interpersonal *guanxi* can be successfully established depends to a large extent on whether the two parties can act upon the etiquette of returning favor for a favor. In Chinese social interaction, if one takes favor without returning, or just respond in an indifferent way or lack goodwill, he or she may not only be considered to be impolite, but also run the risk of counterparts' noncooperation.

The reciprocal communicative principle is called *renqing* in Chinese, which has twofold meanings: a resource that can be used to repay others and a social norm which teaches people how to get along with others. Under such principle, people in a *guanxi* network should maintain their harmonious relationships by mutual gift giving, greeting and visiting at normal times and by doing a favor willingly in emergency or returning a favor consciously afterwards. In other words, it is natural for the Chinese to do a favor for somebody in trouble and repay someone that has provided help or done a favor. When one gets a favor from others, he or she is in "debt" to the person. *Renqing* debt requires debtors to pay back by doing the creditors a favor with affection. It also explains why the Chinese prefer to perform the reciprocating act and balancing responsibility in interaction. Harmony is built on interdependency and mutual trust, which both parties in a relationship need to value and manifest by maintaining a balance between receiving and giving. The Chinese regard taking without returning as "indebt", and inappropriate management of "debt" is considered irresponsible and disrespectful.

Sometimes, someone seeking a favor will approach even a relative stranger with a gift or giving. Though it is seldom expressed overtly, the obvious implication is that accepting the gift means an obligation to perform the favor. If you do not wish to be beholden to such a supplicant, you should decline the present or giving. However, for some westerners, it is hard to recognize the hidden responsibility when they are presented with a gift or giving. For example, a Chinese visiting scholar wanted to establish intimate relationship with an American teacher so as to ask her for some help in the future. She treated the American teacher a big dinner at her apartment. The latter was pleased to accept invitation and enjoyed the dinner very much. Some days later, the Chinese scholar asked the American teacher to give her a ride to the supermarket, but the latter refused because she had something else to do. The Chinese scholar was very disappointed and thought the American teacher was too indifferent. In Chinese contexts, even if you cannot return favor at a very inconvenient time, you can apologize and promise to do it someday in the future, which can help to maintain the harmonious

interpersonal relationship. After all, not all the cultures depend on reciprocity to develop social relationships. You have to do in Rome as the Romans do in a different culture.

CONCLUSION

With China's fast economic growth and expanding collaboration with the rest of the world, tens of millions of people will pour into China. No matter what their specific purposes may be, they all wish to have a better understanding of and communication with the Chinese people. The key to their success in establishing good relationships with Chinese people is to understand the core spirit of Confucian harmony and its influence on Chinese social interaction.

Through the analysis of the core spirit of the Confucian harmony, we can conclude that in social interaction, it puts tremendous weight on "harmony but not sameness", "harmony without mindlessly following others" and "to harmonize people of various kinds by observing rituals of propriety". Such philosophical value provides Chinese people with a fundamental attitude toward the world problems facing them, an attitude of determination that they must resolve conflicts by harmonization. Under its influence, Chinese people are more willing to engage in negotiation, more willing to compromise, and less willing to resort to confrontation and conquest in the face of socially interactional conflicts. It also enables them to take into consideration the whole picture when considering an issue and to give each party its due. Specifically speaking, the Chinese social interaction is characteristic of emphasis on group orientation, hanxu (being reserved) and balance, face work, guanxi (social connections) and reciprocity.

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