

Analysis of "Harmony" and "Unity" Concepts in Indonesian and Chinese Culture

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ABSTRACT

"Harmony" and "Unity" are important concepts in ancient Chinese philosophy and the basic spirits of traditional Chinese culture, which advocate seeking a harmonious coexistence based on differences. The ideas of harmony and seeking common ground while preserving differences can also be found in Indonesia's traditional culture and its modern concept of building a state, which is naturally similar to the Chinese concepts of "Harmony" and "Unity". In the context of contemporary social development, which is increasingly globalized, diversified, and complicated, the communication and understanding of the common ideology of the two countries is conducive to the mutual absorption and integration of different cultures, and also to the construction of a community with a shared future based on mutual tolerance, interdependence and joint development.

KEYWORDS

Harmony Unity; Harmony; Indonesia; Traditional Culture.

INTRODUCTION

In traditional Chinese thought, the concepts of harmony and unity have a profound influence. In the *Golden Mean* of the Confucian school, there are verses that explain these concepts, "If people's joy, anger, and sorrow are not shown before others, this can be called "Neutrality"; if people's joy, anger, and sorrow are shown before others, but they behave in a calm and controlled way, this can be called "Harmony"." Neutrality is the most fundamental in the world while harmony is a common law that the world follows. When neutralization is achieved, all elements in the universe will be in their places, and all things will grow and prosper. From the "harmony in people" to the "harmony in the universe", this transformation places everything in the world under the concept of "Harmony". When all things in the universe reach the highest level of harmony, it is called the "unity", which is from the concept of "Unity of Man and Nature". In the *Golden Mean*, when neutralization is achieved, all elements in the universe will be in their places, and all things will grow and prosper. "All things under heaven can develop together without harming each other, and various codes of conduct can be carried out simultaneously without contradicting each other. Mightiness is built this way." This kind of "harmony" refers to that not only in the human society, emphasizing the harmonious development of heaven, earth, and man, but also in the entire universe, which can be called "Ultimate Harmony". Zhang Zai, a philosopher in the Song Dynasty, used four Chinese characters of "天人合一 (Unity of Man and Nature)" and put forward the proposition of "All people are my compatriots, and all things in the world

are endowed by the universe.", emphasizing that all things in heaven and earth originally belong to a harmonious cosmic family, man and man are brothers, man and creatures are friends. They should be close to each other and co-exist and prosper together (*Xi Ming*).

The inherent values of the Chinese nation are "Harmony" and "Unity", which are the core values of traditional Chinese culture and the important national spirits of the Chinese nation. The ideas of "Harmony in Diversity" and "Seeking Common Ground while Reserving Differences" embody materialistic dialectics and historical materialism, which are also the goals of the "harmonious society" to be built in China in the shaping of modern Chinese civilization. The concepts of "Harmony" and "Unity" are equally suitable for all human beings and societies. In terms of the understanding of "peace" and "world", there is a high degree of consistency between Indonesian thought and the Chinese understanding of "Harmony" and "Unity".

EMBODIMENT OF "HARMONY" AND "UNITY" IN INDONESIAN CULTURE AND HISTORY

1. *Harmony" and "Unity" in Indonesia's Five Foundational Principles*

In 1945, when the Republic of Indonesia became independent, the foundational philosophical theory of the Republic of Indonesia, known as the "Five Foundational Principles", or "Pancasila", was engraved in their national emblem. One of them is called "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika", which means "treading different paths that lead to the same destination" or "seeking common ground while keeping differences", and requires that unity and harmony must be maintained in all parts of Indonesia and among all nationalities. This reflects the compatibility of Javanese culture.

Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world and the government recognizes only one nationality, the Indonesian nationality, while all others are called tribes. According to Statistics Indonesia in 2010, there are more than 300 tribes in Indonesia. Indonesia is known as the "Land of Ten Thousand Islands" because of its vast area and countless number of islands. Different tribes are separated by the sea. Historically, Indonesian tribes, cultures, languages, and religious beliefs have differed greatly, and this, combined with the impact of colonial rule in modern times, has resulted in a fragmented Indonesian society with structural conflicts between islands and tribes, the main island of Java and the outer islands, multiple religions, indigenous people and immigrants. In order to shape Indonesia into a modern unified nation, early Indonesian nationalists recognized that the fragmented tribal status quo was the greatest obstacle to unity. At the conceptual level, in 1928, the world-famed Sumpah Pemuda (Youth Pledge) was issued at Kongres Pemuda Kedua (the Second Indonesian National Youth Congress), which stated that "we, the sons and daughters of Indonesia, recognize only one nationality. We, the sons and daughters of Indonesia, recognize only one nationality - the Indonesian nationality; we, the sons and daughters of Indonesia, recognize only one homeland - the Indonesian homeland; we, the sons and daughters of Indonesia, recognize only one language - the Indonesian language". This pledge formed the ideological basis of Indonesia's resistance to colonial rule and struggle for national independence during the wave of nationalism, and for the first time, people in the vast Dutch colony were brought together on a unified ideological

basis to build a new unified identity.¹ It is evident that "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika", as the founding principle of Indonesia, is not only a fruit of Javanese culture, but also a typical example of the all-embracing civilization.

2. "Harmony" and "Unity" in Traditional Indonesian Values

Harmony has a great weight in the traditional moral values of Indonesians, and its values are reflected in inter-religious harmony, harmonious relationships between people, as well as harmonious co-existence between people and nature, etc. Javanese philosophy emphasizes the unity of heaven and man and the harmony between man and nature. The most traditional Javanese idea is the unity of the individual and God (pamore kawula Gusti), which embodies the motto of Javanese philosophy, comparing all things in nature with human behavior. This graphically and vividly expresses the harmony between man and nature. For example, some Javanese aphorisms are called *Cultivation* and describe the close interaction between human beings and the natural comprising the sun, moon, stars, sky, wind, ocean, fire, and earth.² The original Javanese religion valued the harmony between society and the supernatural world, and believed in the existence of soul, which is called *kejawen*. Its main content is to ask Javanese people to live in harmony with their surroundings and to reach inner balance. People who have studied *kejawen* in depth are called practitioners. They will go on a fast or live in seclusion for a period of time in order to practice and find ways to live in harmony with nature. The Javanese who is practicing has to reach inner harmony, on which the attitude of standing aloof from worldly success is based. For ordinary people, they are asked to be happy in their daily lives when they are in harmony with society and the world, without conflict. The Javanese have a very famous motto, "Sepi Ing Pamrih Rame Ing Gawe (hold a low profile and think more about others, instead of yourself). Pamrih means to do things selfishly, thinking only of one's own good; this behavior is recognized as appropriate by Javanese people. Sepi Ing Pamrih means not to be selfish, to think more about others and less about oneself when doing things; one can even sacrifice his or her own interests for the good of all when needed.

3. "Harmony" and "Unity" in Traditional Indonesian Stories and Art

The traditional idea of unity and harmony is also reflected in some myths and legends in Indonesia. For example, there is a myth that in ancient times, there was a King Purusha in Indonesia who had a strange fetish of eating human flesh every day to survive, which made the civilians afraid. At that time, there appeared a warrior named Sutasoma, who was very sympathetic to these civilians. He personally advised the King that he was willing to sacrifice himself in place of the civilian. Upon hearing this, the King became furious and blamed the warrior for interfering with his hobby, and made several unsuccessful attempts to kill Sutasoma. Then, the King and the warrior fought several times. This was a hard slog for them. During the battle, Shiva entered the King's body while Vedas entered the warrior's body. Each side showed its power, and the battle was never-ending. Finally, Brahmā intervened and reminded the two sides with the motto of "treading different paths that lead to the same destination", emphasizing that although they were different in appearance, they

¹ Sun Yunxiao Nationality and Tribe: Dual-track Identification of Indonesia, Beijing Cultural Review, March 2019.

² Xu Liping, Research on Indonesia's Nationality in the Context of the Belt and Road Initiative, Social Sciences in Yunnan, May 2018.

were one. Brahmā asked them to stop fighting. This popular mythology embodies the values of "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" and "treading different paths that lead to the same destination", the spirit of inclusiveness.

The Indonesian concept of harmony and unity is also expressed in traditional art. One of Indonesia's long-established arts, shadow puppetry, is taken as an example. As a typical form of Javanese culture, Indonesian shadow puppetry has a history of more than 3000 years and is related to the religious beliefs and customs of Javanese people. It is also an expression of classical Javanese literature. It is an art form that combines fine art, religion, music, singing, movement, and performance. The concepts of "harmony" and "unity" are vividly expressed in the story and performance of shadow puppetry play. On the one hand, the stories in shadow puppetry play are eclectic, with stories from a variety of cultures, including Indian, Islamic, and Chinese cultures. These stories are mostly taken from *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, which were already popular in Java in the 8th century AD. However, after the Islamic culture penetrated into Java, the stories of the shadow puppetry play changed and many Islamic propaganda stories were added through the vigorous promotion of Islam. This reflects the harmony of various cultures in the Javanese culture in Indonesia. On the other hand, the artists who perform shadow puppet play need to "move their hands, mouths, ears, and eyes together". They not only manipulate the movements of the characters in the plays, but also imitate various characters' languages and voices, reflecting a harmonious and consistent artistic state.³

4. Expression of "Harmony" and "unity" in the Indonesian Language

Javanese is the traditional language of Indonesia. In addition to the official language of Indonesia, Javanese is the language used in everyday life. In the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D., Indian culture was introduced to Indonesia, and Indonesian culture was deeply influenced by the ancient Indian culture, and the strongest dynasty in history, the Majapahit, was a product influenced by Indian culture. The Javanese language has absorbed many elements of Indian culture, such as Indian Sanskrit words and even the Pali writing style (aksaraPalawa). In the 13th century A.D., Islam was introduced to Indonesia, which had a great influence on Javanese culture. Meanwhile, the Javanese language also borrowed a lot of Arabic words. Later, European languages were also introduced to Javanese with the invasion of the Portuguese, Dutch and British.

In the traditional Javanese language of Indonesia, Sanskrit is still preferred by the Indonesians for expressing some forbidden or indecent words. Many Indonesian litterateurs and journalists are exploring and using Sanskrit words, and after various media promotion, there are already a number of terms in heavy use in society. For example, tunanetra (without eyes, referring to the blind), tunasusial (losing morals, referring to prostitutes), and tunakarya (without a job, referring to the unemployed) are all euphemisms borrowed from Sanskrit. "The more euphemistic it is, the higher its value; the more direct it is, the lower its value."

Indonesians, represented by Javanese, rarely express their opinions openly and directly, especially when encountering different opinions or people they do not like. The Indonesian

³ Xu Liping, Research on Indonesia's Nationality in the Context of the Belt and Road Initiative, Social Sciences in Yunnan, May 2018.

word "keberatan" originally means "a little heavy", but later it was derived to express "an awkward matter", which refers to having reservations about a different opinion or viewpoint, but not publicly expressing opposition to it. Never making others feel awkward is also beneficial to living in harmony. This behavioral characteristic indicates that Indonesians care more about showing respect to others and want to get along with others in a friendly way.⁴

5. *Indonesia's Religions and "Harmony" and "Unity" embodied in Long-term Coexistence and Integration*

In terms of the religious beliefs of the Indonesian people, Islam accounts for about 90% of the population. However, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Chinese religion are all part of the free faith of the Indonesian people. Historically, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions have been integrated after their introduction to Java. For example, Hinduism and Buddhism, although both religions come from India. However, in the Indian state itself, these two religions are antagonistic and fundamentally irreconcilable. However, in Java, the two religions are organically combined under the religious concept of Syiwa-Buddhism, which is also a manifestation of Javanese cultural compatibility. Later, Islam was introduced to Java, and Islam became dominant in political and social life, but the original Javanese culture was never abandoned and wiped out. For example, animism, which was originally contrary to Islamic doctrines, was able to be organically combined in Java and developed into the distinctive Javanese Islam. Among the Javanese Islamists, there is a different sect called Kejawen or Abangan, of which most believers are farmers living in rural areas. They do not strictly follow the Islamic rule of praying five times a day. They do not pray at all. They do not go to Mecca for Hajj. They even have no desire to do Hajj and do not practice fasting. However, they do acknowledge the Islamic aphorisms that (1) there is no God but Allah and (2) Nabi Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. This means that they join Islam, but they remain significantly different from the traditional Santri sect.⁵ The integration of various religious ideas with indigenous civilizations that has occurred throughout Indonesian history is a concrete manifestation of the inclusive "Harmony" and "Unity" concepts.

6. *Harmony" and "Unity" in the Daily Lives of Indonesian People*

According to Clifford Geertz and FanzMagnis-Suseno, the traditional Javanese culture in Indonesia has the concept of ru/cun (harmony), which means that everyone should try to avoid conflict in all situations; there is also format (respect), which means that is when engaging in social communication, Javanese people must show appropriate respect to each other according to their status. The main purpose of these concepts is to make people get along well and build a harmonious social relationship. These two concepts have a great influence on the Javanese mindset and way of life. Javanese have two customs related to the concept of rukun (harmony), which are gotongroyong (helping each other) and Muyawarah (discussing with each other). Gotongroyong means doing things together and helping each other, such as building bridges, building roads, helping with neighbors' weddings, etc. in rural areas. Musyawarah (discussion) is the traditional Javanese way of making decisions.

⁴ Xu Liping, Research on Indonesia's Nationality in the Context of the Belt and Road Initiative, Social Sciences in Yunnan, May 2018.

⁵ Cai Jincheng On Compatibility of Javanese Culture, Southeast Asian Studies, March 1997.

In the process of musyawarah, all people are allowed to give their opinions and all opinions are welcomed. They will try to find out the best strategy to solve the problem from everyone's opinion, and it is hoped that through Musyawarah everyone will feel satisfied with the decision made so that social harmony can be maintained. These concepts are very similar to the Chinese ideas of "Harmony Are Prized", "Heaven matters less, earth imports more, people count most", and "living in the world with a peaceful mindset". This is similar to the concept of creating a social environment where all people live in harmony.

Indonesian society is more traditional and Indonesians place great importance on family. For example, Eid al-Fitr is the most important holiday in the Islamic calendar, and on the eve of Eid al-Fitr, Indonesians travel across the county or even the whole country to return home. When they return to their hometowns on Eid al-Fitr, family members express their feelings for each other in words, gratitude for the care and attention they have received throughout the year, and even repent for previous misunderstandings, etc. Indonesians also attach great importance to the relationship with family members. Parents emphasize their children's growth and are happy to attend their children's graduation ceremonies; if their family members are moving, they like to hold welcome and farewell ceremonies to express their cares. Indonesians also attach great importance to the harmonious relationship between relatives and friends. The most important religious ceremony for Javanese is slametan. During the Slametan, they will invite neighbors, relatives, and friends to celebrate happy occasions. Friends and relatives will gather to celebrate together, and after praying, they begin to eat together and take the food home with them after the meal. Slametan is a way for Javanese to express their gratitude for happy occasions, such as birthdays, marriages, pregnancies, etc. It is also a good opportunity to get closer to the people around them, and it is good for social harmony. The concept of "The more sons, the more blessings" is highly valued by Indonesians, who believe that having a large number of offspring is an important symbol of family happiness and prosperity. Families with a large number of children and grandchildren generally have a higher social status and are recognized by the public.

Indonesia is a country with the milk of human kindness. In daily life, people like to communicate, share, and value emotional communication with each other. People in Indonesia like to talk and are willing to initiate conversations with even strangers. Talking warmly with Indonesian friends gives them a feeling of being respected. With the development of the modern internet, more and more young Indonesians in modern society are using social media. The number of Indonesian internet users using various social media is also very high.

Because of the multi-ethnic composition of the Indonesian nation and its suffering from colonial rule in modern history, this country encounters similar issues in securing the unity and integrity of the sovereign political state as the Chinese nation. The ideas of "Harmony" and "Unity" put forward by ancient Chinese philosophers more than 2,000 years ago are naturally similar to the concept of harmony in traditional Indonesian thought. Former Premier Wen Jiabao emphasized that "harmony" is the essence of Chinese culture and a noble value practiced by the Chinese people. It has played a positive role in promoting national unity, strengthening national cohesion and achieving neighborliness throughout Chinese history. Nowadays, it can become a shared value of the world. As for state-to-state relations and national relations in the modern world, all of us advocate harmonious coexistence among countries, nations, and people; different civilizations can co-exist

harmoniously; human beings and nature can co-exist harmoniously; this is a modern interpretation of the historical and traditional thought of both China and Indonesia, and the ideological basis for building a community with a shared future for mankind.

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