

Draft

Volume 3 Issue 2

Harmony & Discord Side B

- 5 Quah Sy Ren **The Paradox of Harmony**
- 15 Phoon Yuen Ming **The Issue of Displacement
— The Revolution and Lives of the
Malayan Communist Party Exiles
from Singapore**
- 25 Jonathan Sim **Early Chinese Conceptions of
Harmony — Drawing Insights for
Managing Diversity from Cooking
and Music**
- 43 Ngoi Guat Peng **Solidarity and Support: The
Possibilities of Becoming 'Free
Citizens'**
- 53 Tang Wei **Contest For Destruction**
- 55 Hong Guoyao **Dual**

Dear Reader,

3

Last issue, the publication of *Draft* coincided with the Sunflower Movement in Taiwan. This time, in the course of putting together the new issue, series of protests were taking place in Hong Kong. There are perhaps no better footnotes to our theme of 'Harmony/Discord' than these events.

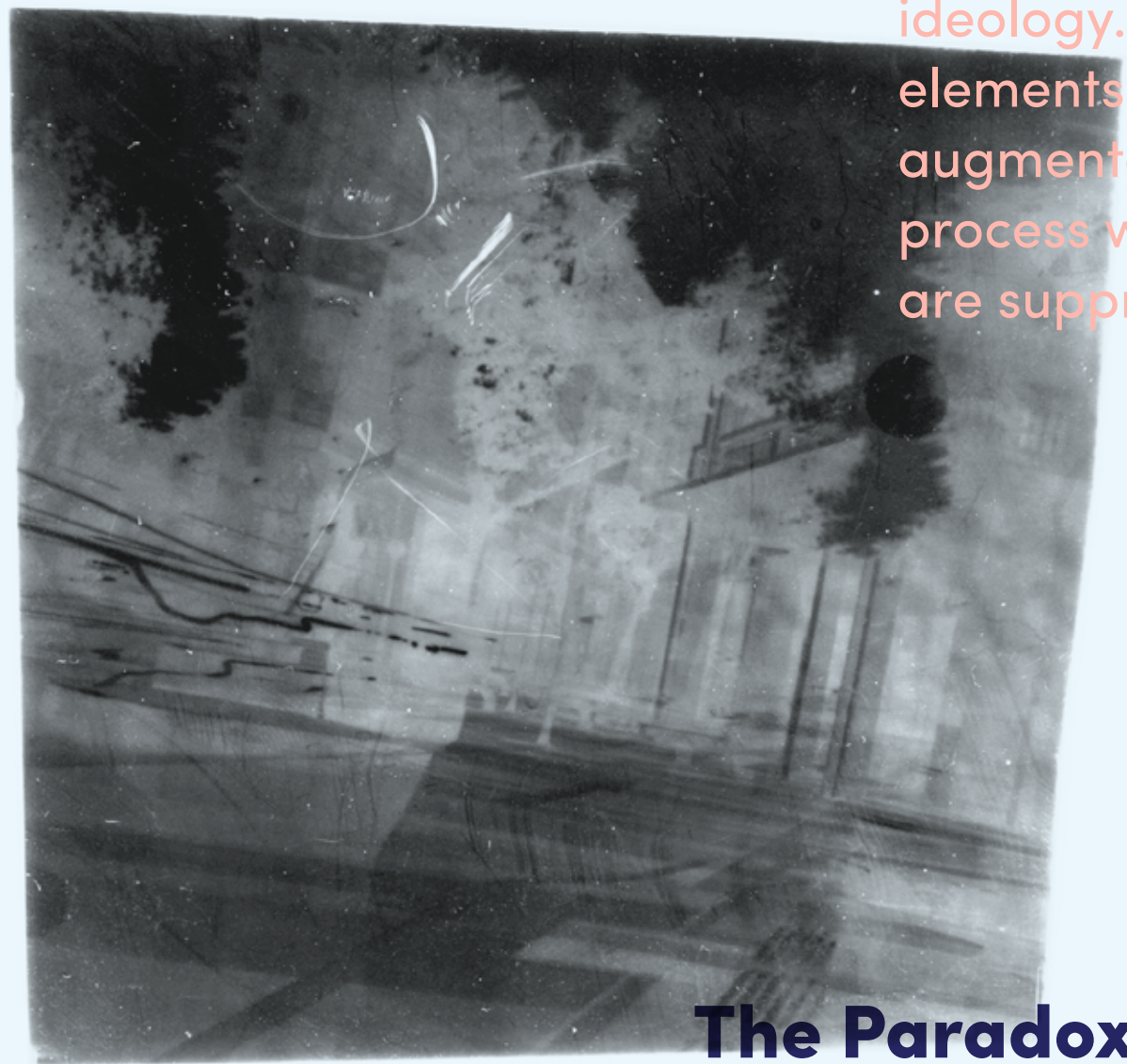
Words expand in their meanings the more we contemplate them. This issue, as we foreground the notion of 'harmony', we realise just how dissonant it can be. Harmony can be construed as illusion, reality, ideal, veneer, and/or irony, and that's exactly what our writers have done. In Feature article, **Quah Sy Ren** discusses the paradox of harmony through Drama Box's recent community engagement 'BOTH SIDES, NOW'. In Columns, **Phoon Yuen Ming** explores the relationship between 'displacement' and 'exile' in the lives of revolutionists, and **Jonathan Sim** explicates the notion of 'harmony' in Chinese philosophical traditions. In Special Feature, we are glad to reprint an article by **Ngoi Guat Peng**, in which she appeals for a civil solidarity that transcends national borders. In Open Call, we have the music of **Tang Wei**, who pieced it together almost seamlessly from distorting recorded sonic samples of ceramic crashing onto a hard surface, and our photographer **Hong Guoyao's** work 'Dual'.

It's hard to make sense of 'harmony' without premising it on 'discord', and vice versa. But come to think of it, isn't everything kind of like that?

This issue also marks the third year of *Draft's* publication. We are immensely grateful to all the writers, translators, artists and designers for making issue after issue with us, and to you, our reader, for reading page after page. Thank you.

Here's to another year.

Wang Fang, Kate
Co-editor



Harmony is a careful and deliberate construct perpetuated by ideology. Some elements are augmented in the process while others are suppressed.

The Paradox of Harmony

by

Quah Sy Ren

translation Lu Caixia



Under a HDB block, people are dressed casually, browsing and shopping in a neighbourhood store overflowing with household goods. Savoury smells emanate from the local food stalls in a crowded kopitiam. The library is a tranquil oasis in comparison, offering those thirsty for knowledge a treasure trove of wisdom in four languages. A stone's throw away, the HDB Hub, a showcase of the average Singaporean's dream home, is closed for the day.

This is the Toa Payoh neighbourhood on a Saturday evening, the emblem of harmony in Singapore, where its denizens live in ease and plenty. It is a peaceful and secure existence, with hopes and dreams for a not-too-distant future. It is a scene of the utopian imagination.

It was in this seemingly idyllic environment that Drama Box executed its most ambitious social project to date—**BOTH SIDES, NOW—Living with Dying**—a series of exhibitions, talks, performances and dialogues that invited people to ponder their own mortality.

Death is not something many people consciously think about in their daily lives, much less something they wish to face and discuss. But no one can escape the inevitability of dying and it is not something that can be wished away by living happy and fulfilling lives.

Although not necessarily discernible, tensions exist between human beings and their environment, in dialogues between people, and between the feelings and hopes of an individual. They support the fragile illusion of harmony but also threaten to destroy that illusion.

There are all kinds of tensions that lurk beneath the veneer of harmony. This is a perfect metaphor for the relationship between life and death. Although not necessarily discernible, tensions exist between human beings and their environment, in dialogues between people, and between the feelings and hopes of an individual. They support the fragile illusion of harmony but also threaten to destroy that illusion.

Among the many exhibitions presented by *BOTH SIDES, NOW-Living with Dying*, there was one titled 'My Message To Death'. Participants were encouraged to pen down thoughts they found difficult to articulate and pictures of what they wrote were then taken and mounted on the exhibition walls.

One photo showed three young women holding a piece of paper with the message: 'Please don't take our friends away.'

Another showed a mother with an infant in her arms. Her message said simply: 'Take me first.'

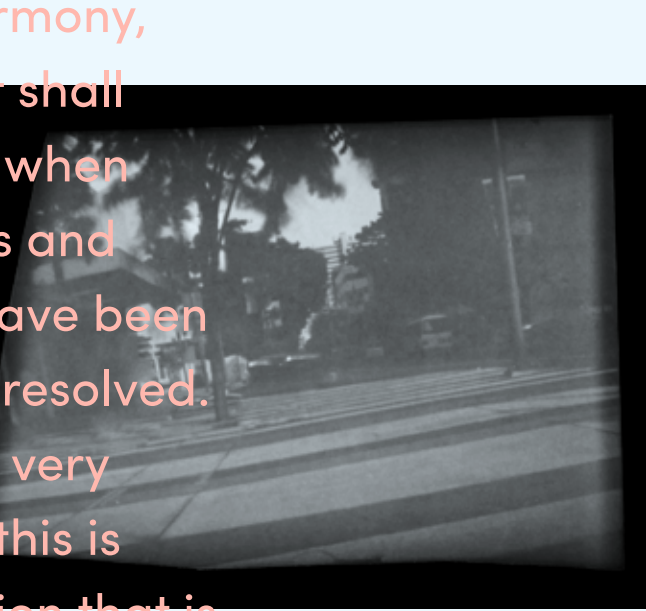
Two young men wrote: 'Hello!' and 'Ah! Come get me!'

An old woman had just one word for her maker: 'Peace.'

These heartfelt words revealed many different feelings about life and death, some persistent, some open-minded, some filled with love, and some at peace. If not for a single direct question posed to these individuals, these thoughts perhaps would never have been encapsulated in words and pictures. After all is said and done, would these people look at the bright spots and dark shadows of life in a new way?

An evening forum theatre titled *Exit* dealt with the issue of families coping with illness and death. In one family, the father is gravely ill and faces the option of prolonging his life with surgery, which will weaken his body further. His wife is insistent that he undergoes the operation, while his son is unwilling to see him suffer more pain. Both mother and son want the best for their dying kin but disagree with each other's choice. Surgery or no surgery? The performance posed this question to the audience and exposed the false pretence of harmony in a brutal and forthright manner. The audience members were made to grapple with the differences tumbling out from underneath the cloak of harmony and put themselves in the shoes of the characters to think about the possible options.

In the spirit of Forum Theatre, the myth of harmony was exposed through dramatic tension, enabling people to face the underlying differences. Only then are we able to awaken the



mony,
shall
when
s and
ave been
resolved.
very
this is
ion that is
o reach or
taphor that
st in reality.

That is the ultimate
vision of harmony,
a stage that shall
be reached when
all problems and
dilemmas have been
adequately resolved.
But it is also very
aware that this is
only an illusion that is
impossible to reach
or simply a metaphor
that does not exist in



In the spirit of Forum Theatre, the myth of harmony was exposed through dramatic tension, enabling people to face the underlying differences.

individual initiative, which may not bring solutions to problems, but will at least allow us to face them squarely.

Drama Box is currently the local theatre group that is most enthusiastic about using this form of theatre. It has a keen and active concern in the Singapore society and works to bring theatre beyond the realms of the middle-class elite. Combined with their passion for social activism, the group aims to be at the heart of the community and touch those in the lower rungs of society. Among the different forms of theatre, Forum Theatre clearly stands out as a more suitable choice than fine theatre in fulfilling this social responsibility.

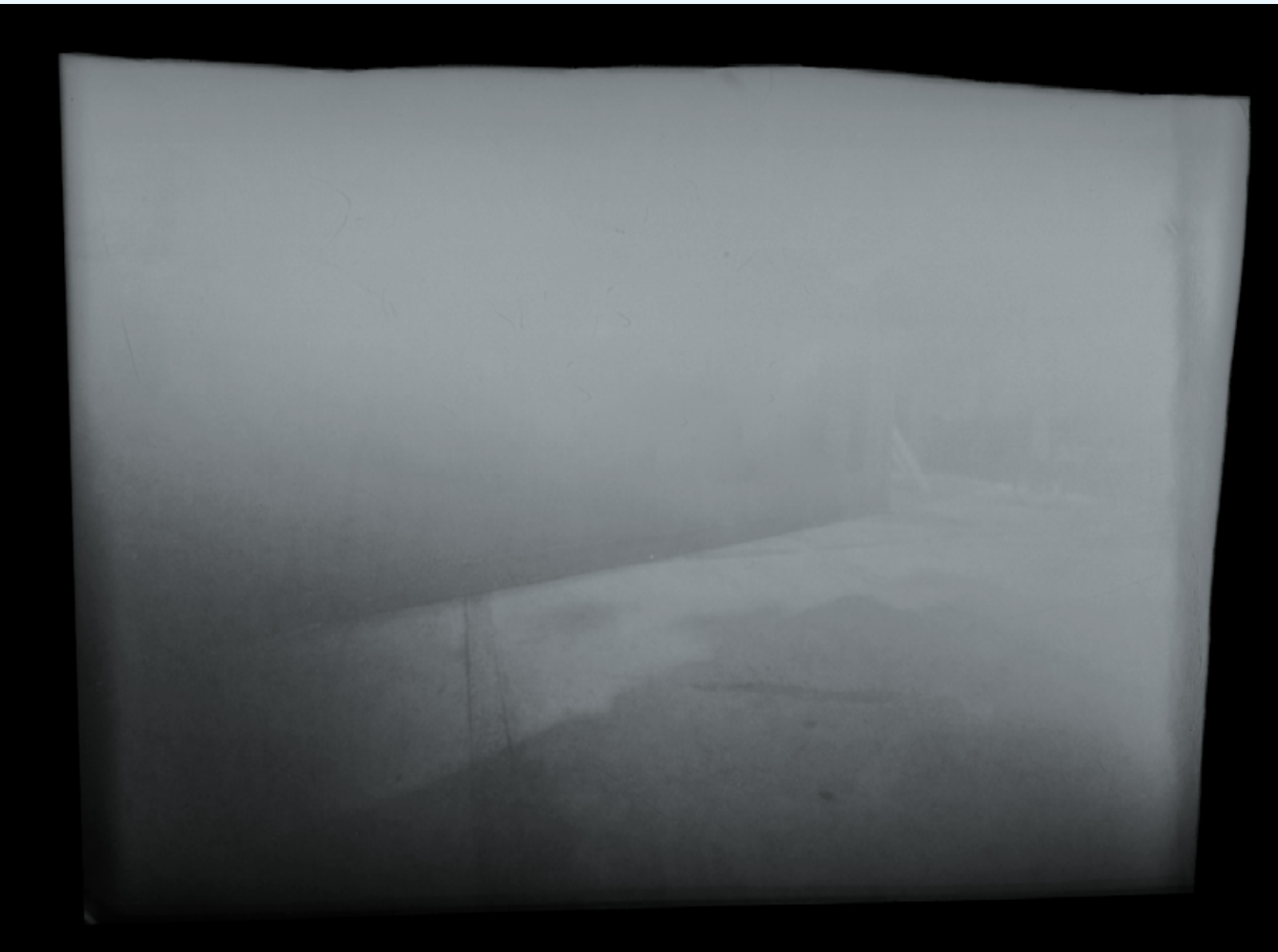
The paradox is that the group itself is embracing the very idea of harmony even as it seeks to expose its superficiality. That is the ultimate vision of harmony, a stage that shall be reached when all problems and dilemmas have been adequately resolved. But it is also very aware that this is only an illusion that is impossible to reach or simply a metaphor that does not exist in reality. The group is also very clear that its social activism would be meaningless if not grounded in the ideal of harmony.

Almost no one left the performance during the one and a half hours. The audience, many from the community, formed a coherent group in the temporary performance space. Under the guidance of the performers, they saw through the veneer

of harmony in the facets of life, prompting them to begin their own dialogues with the bits and pieces in personal memories and experiences that were consciously or subconsciously forgotten. Those too were the facets of their lives, albeit pushed to the dark recesses of the mind by the desire for harmony. In this space, all sorts of views and ideas were given an airing and people suddenly discovered the plurality of their existence that is often ignored.

The appearance of harmony evokes a feeling of warmth and joy and presents a picture of cordiality. This is the feeling that outsiders get when they walk around the Toa Payoh neighbourhood. It appeals to their sense of envy and longing, and draws them to pursue and participate in it. In this case, harmony is no longer an ideal state but an instrument of rule. Harmony is a careful and deliberate construct perpetuated by ideology. Some elements are augmented in the process while others are suppressed. Some things are eliminated or sacrificed in the name of harmony. That is the price we pay for harmony and this is its brutal yet true nature.

In *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral*, Kuo Pao Kun told the story of a 'Country of Every Person'. On one of his famed sea voyages, Zheng He chanced upon a little island known as 'the world's precious gem, created from a teardrop of the Buddha.' On the island, people 'lived in harmony and banded together in joy and



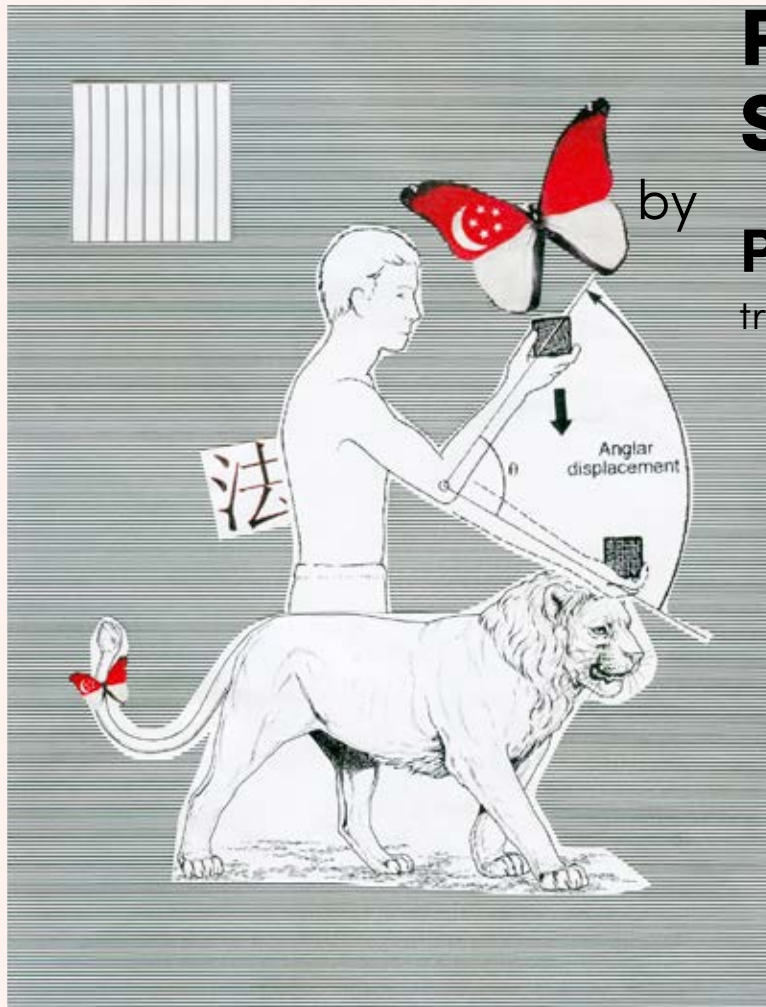
sorrow' and they were 'law-abiding people who treated others with honesty and sincerity'. The 'Country of Every Person' was a veritable utopia and a society in the ultimate state of harmony. However, there was one little 'imperfection' in this otherwise perfect paradise as it 'also had the practice of keeping eunuchs'. When Zheng He knew about this, he lamented: even the happiest of existences requires some to pay the price of castration, no matter that they take care to do it ever so gently and thoughtfully on this little island.

✧ Quah Sy Ren is Associate Professor at the Division of Chinese, Nanyang Technological University.

The Issue of Displacement – The Revolution and Lives of the Malayan Communist Party Exiles from Singapore

by Phoon Yuen Ming

translation Lu Caixia



In early September, a friend shared on Facebook her experience of watching in Kuala Lumpur *To Singapore, with Love*, a film that was banned by the Media Development Authority of Singapore. She mentioned that during a dialogue with the director, a young human rights worker had suggested that the term ‘political exile’ had diverse meanings, while *To Singapore, with Love* had confined itself to singular narratives. He suggested that the director could have looked at the issue of ‘displacement’ from a wider perspective as it took many forms. Those displaced may not have had the opportunity to tell their own stories, he said, and not every instance of displacement had a cross-border dimension. An example of the former could be refugees who were lost at sea, while the indigenous people and those who lived in the New Villages during the Malayan Emergency constituted examples of the latter. These people who were being ‘displaced’ within their own country were not seen as ‘political exiles’.

Living in Singapore, I have yet to have the opportunity to watch the ‘banned film’. But I think that the planning behind each and every documentary piece on human rights is intended to communicate the director’s thoughts and concern about the issue within a given framework and motive. Hence, it is impossible to take all perspectives into account or satisfy the expectations of every viewer. As director Tan Pin Pin put it herself, *To Singapore, with Love* was made to better understand

A closer look at these alternative narratives that aim to poke holes in mainstream accounts reveals that they too have many inconsistencies and conflicting claims.

Singapore and 'how we became who we are by addressing what was banished and unspoken for'. It was precisely due to this intention that the film was banned. Therefore, a discussion about the plurality of 'political exile' and the various forms of 'displacement' was never Tan Pin Pin's objective.

The history of the Malayan Communist struggle in Singapore shares a very interesting relationship with the notions of 'exile' and 'displacement'. Limited by geography, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) was unable to sustain an armed resistance in Singapore like what was being done 'inland'. As official accounts tell us, the pioneering generation of Singaporean leaders ousted the communist elements within their party, emerging from the political storm to build Singapore into an affluent and prosperous nation. What this implies is also that the MCP was in fact on the path of parliamentary politics in Singapore during the 1950s and 1960s, albeit clandestinely.

In recent years, there have been several academic publications on the leftist struggle in Singapore and also many memoirs, oral histories and autobiographical accounts published with the aim of giving their sides of the story. Together, they have helped us piece together an account of Singapore's nation-building years that differs from the official narrative. A closer look at these alternative narratives that aim to poke holes in mainstream accounts reveals that they too have many inconsistencies and

conflicting claims. While leftists decry the use of state violence by arguing that they were 'not Malayan Communists' and that there were no 'Malayan Communists,' the MCP itself was asserting that it too played a role in the nation-building process, in which many had sacrificed their youth, freedom and even their lives, while others were forced into exile.

The MCP had always operated underground in Singapore. In order to protect the cadres and to conserve its strength, the party evacuated those who had blown their covers to Indonesia in the early 1960s. The MCP had a secret water route at the time, and cadres who were escaping to Indonesia were given legal documents issued by the local government. They made their way to Jakarta via the islands between Singapore and Indonesia and were then dispersed inland into the villages and towns in Java and Sumatra. These experiences were brought up in Eu Chooi Yip's oral history account as well as Wong Soon Fong's memoir. A later article by Zhang Taiyong gave more details on this secret route. However, what really offers a real understanding of the travails of this group is the work *Exile* by MCP writer He Jin, an autobiographical novel written in the literary form.

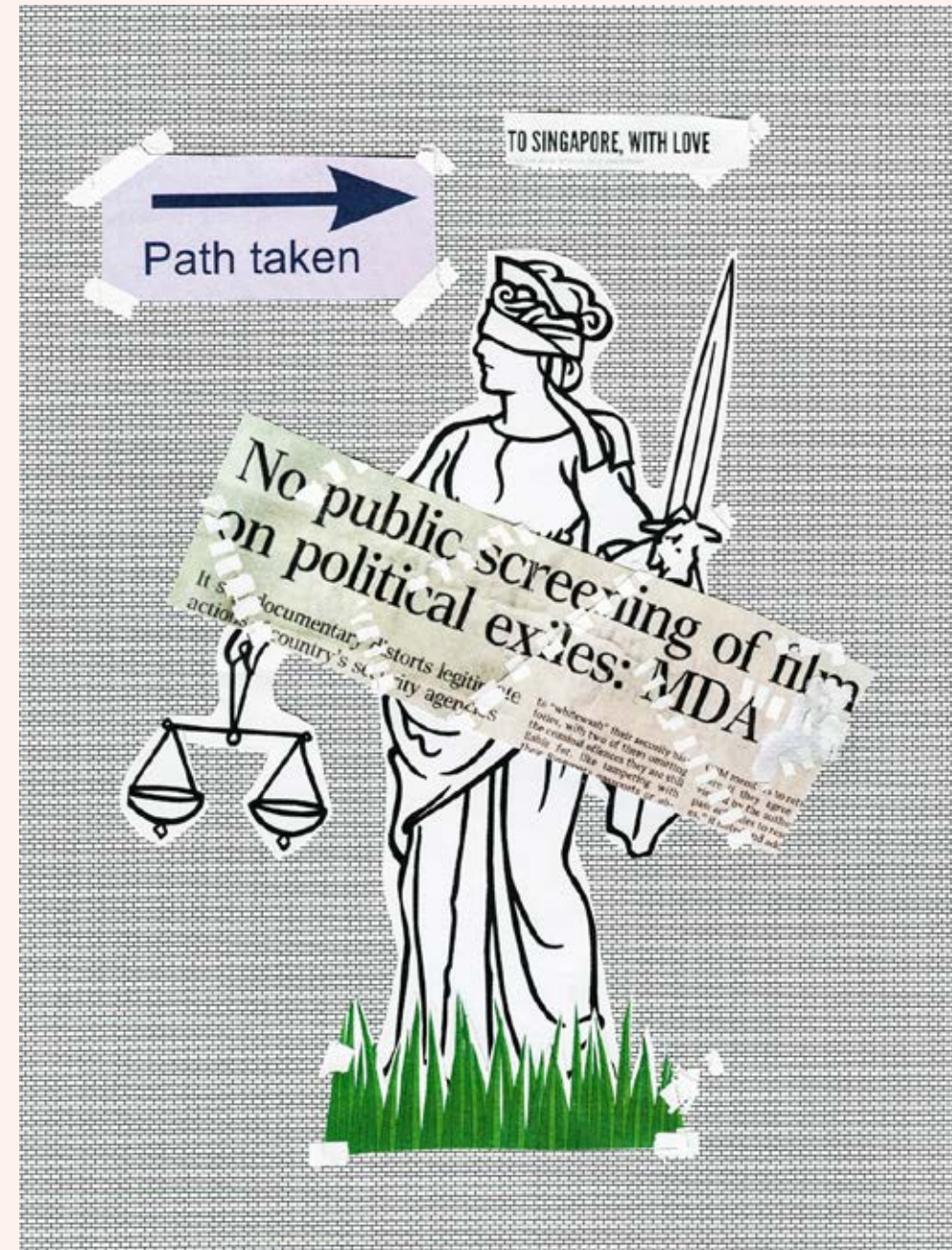
Exile is the sequel to He Jin's novel *The Mighty Wave*, and its subtitle reads: *The Story of the Exile of Young Singaporean Students to Indonesia in the 1960s*. Basing the main characters on himself and his wife, the author tells the story of a young man

The history of the leftist struggle in Singapore, or more accurately, the history of the Malayan Communist struggle in Singapore, is in fact a diasporic history with a focus on exile.

and woman who took part in the student protests of the 1950s and subsequently fell in love and married each other. When the situation for underground operations in Singapore worsened in the 1960s, the duo fled to Indonesia with the help of the party, where they lived in exile for a decade. There, they kept their real identities hidden and became teachers in the coastal towns and islands of Sumatra, constantly keeping an eye out for the opportunity to open a secret waterway to Malaysia.

Exile is a political act in itself, and there is a whiff of romanticism associated with the term. But like 'revolution', there are many practical considerations to be made when exile becomes a reality, following the same logic that a revolution cannot be sustained on empty stomachs. It was in this 'revolutionary' spirit and with the intention to 'bring the fight back home' that this group of exiles from the MCP 'lived in relative normalcy for several years' in Indonesia.

The couple in the story lived peaceful and normal lives as teachers in Indonesia. With the party indicating its approval, they also had three children in their years of exile and lived happily as a family of five. However, they did not forget their party, and like true revolutionaries, waited in vain for party members to contact them. But the party seemed to have forgotten about its exiled members. If not for their persistence, they could have left the



But like 'revolution', there are many practical considerations to be made when exile becomes a reality, following the same logic that a revolution cannot be sustained on empty stomachs.

organisation anytime they wished and led normal lives, but they remained focused on their task of reestablishing contact with their comrades. When they finally rejoined the party, two of their children were sent away to China, where they were to be brought up and educated as the seedlings of revolution. Their mother was worried about them but their father was confident that fellow Communists would take good care of his children. Without their children around, they would avoid censure for being too attached to their families and were able to fully embrace the cause of 'taking the fight back home'.

Families must be broken up before revolution can begin. It was not long before the couple took their youngest daughter with them to Jakarta. There lay the boundary between party and family as well as personal responsibility and responsibility to the party. With their older children also waiting in Jakarta to be sent to China, the family of five found themselves in a situation of reunion and imminent farewell. There they lived under one roof, but the children were now under the care of the party that was responsible for their education, and they had to call their parents 'uncle' and 'aunt'. As for the adults, they had to endure one rectification campaign after another upon their return to the party and the revolution.

Revolution is not a dinner party but there are mouths to be fed. The group in Indonesia duly followed the party principle of 'overcoming mountains and seas' to strengthen their bodies and minds for revolution by undergoing the hardships of living in exile. In this context, to 'overcome mountains and seas' was to be engaged in farming, woodcutting, rearing livestock and fishing. In his novel, He Jin described the work of growing fruits and vegetables as well as rearing poultry in vivid detail. These were insightful accounts based on his actual experience. Wong Soon Fong, in his memoir, also mentioned his involvement in fishing and the fishery trade on a few islands overlooking Malacca, where he also established a communications point for the party. But after more than two years of meticulous planning, it had to be abandoned due to suspected enemy surveillance. The exiles also managed several chicken farms of considerable scale in Bandung and Bogor. Once, an epidemic in the chicken farms threw the group into chaos, and the rectification campaign was hastily concluded while members held an emergency meeting to deal with the crisis.

These examples illustrate that when livelihood contradicts politics, there is no more illusion which is the priority. Similarly, those who were most devout took pains to stay under the radar became forgotten, while those who were exposed and made to escape became the emblem of 'revolution'. What is worth noting here is that when revolutionaries are no longer at the heart of

These examples illustrate that when livelihood contradicts politics, there is no more illusion which is the priority.

the struggle but live in exile, that is itself a form of 'displacement'. When 'livelihood' takes precedence over 'politics' as the daily reality for the exiled and the practice of 'politics' is relegated to a facile rectification campaign, this is undoubtedly another form of situational 'displacement'. Along this line of thought, we can probably make the hypothesis that exile means 'displacement'. If Wong Soon Fong, one of those interviewed in *To Singapore, with Love*, was a member of the MCP exiled to Indonesia, by extension, we can see the hidden link between exile and 'displacement' in this documentary.

The history of the leftist struggle in Singapore, or more accurately, the history of the Malayan Communist struggle in Singapore, is in fact a diasporic history with a focus on exile. Relative to the 'inland' fighters who were using insurgency to uphold the revolution, the isolated underground members in Singapore were forced to go into 'exile' to realise their revolution. But their experiences precisely illustrate that revolution, exile, and living, while having to suffer multiple 'displacements' as a result, may not be a mistake. The reality is that for many of the exiles, to go into hiding is just a way of life and part and parcel of their everyday existence.

✧ Phoon Yuen Ming, Malaysian, freelance columnist. PhD Candidate in Chinese Studies, National University of Singapore. Graduated from Department of History of National Chengchi University and National Chi Nan University. Her research interests include the history of Malayan communists, Chinese New Village, left-wing literature and gender studies.

Early Chinese Conceptions of Harmony – Drawing Insights for Managing Diversity from Cooking and Music

by

Jonathan Sim



People often regard harmony as a central idea in Chinese culture and thought. Yet, if you were to ask people what is Chinese harmony, you often receive an answer similar to this: 'harmony is about the balance of Yin and Yang.'

While there is nothing wrong with this answer, it is not representative of the diverse views of harmony that were conceptualised and taught by philosophers throughout China's very long history.

Since ancient times, specifically, during the Warring States period of the Zhou Dynasty, the early Chinese philosophers were preoccupied with ideas about harmony as they lived in an era of constant war. While they had different ideas of achieving harmony, their diagnosis as to the cause of such war and conflict was the same: while people were indeed fighting because of a scarcity of resources, the root cause of such discord was due to the fact that there were diverse groups of people, each with their own system of values, and ideas of right and wrong. And because people could not agree on a common value system for interaction and for the distribution of (scarce) goods, they perceived each other as enemies competing fiercely for the same thing.

At first glance, it would seem that this problem could be easily solved if everybody were forced to think the same way, or to

Just as how a single note cannot produce music, nor a single ingredient produce a delightful dish, a society where everyone is the same would be a society devoid of creativity and it will ultimately be an unsustainable society.

adopt the same value system. But Confucius was quick to point out that harmony must not be confused with the elimination of diversity by making everything and everyone the same (和而不同 *he er bu tong* - harmonise but not make everything the same). Confucius warns that though such a solution could possibly solve problems of discord, the end result may not be that great either. Just as how a single note cannot produce music, nor a single ingredient produce a delightful dish, a society where everyone is the same would be a society devoid of creativity and it will ultimately be an unsustainable society.

True harmony, therefore, is about diversity. With diversity comes the inevitable conflict due to differences in values and the way people act and respond to things. The aim of harmony is not about eliminating such differences, but to manage diversity in such a way that the interaction between these diverse groups becomes fruitful. It is worth noting that I did not define harmony as the elimination of conflict. That is not the objective of harmony from a Chinese perspective. There are times where conflict can be completely eliminated. But there are times where conflict is a necessary evil, and must be present but managed in a way that will prove useful for developing fruitful interaction between the diverse groups.

The early Chinese thinkers did not get their ideas of harmony from nowhere. They drew inspiration from everyday occurrences

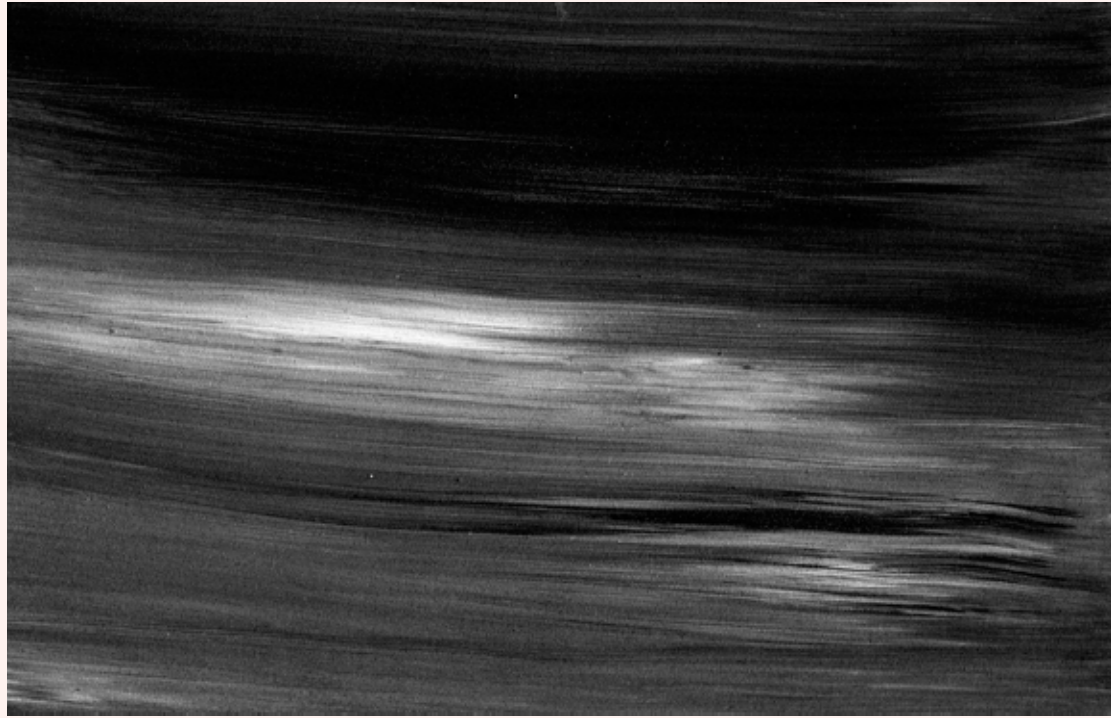
around them, specifically, from cooking and music – two processes that involve managing a diverse range of elements in such a way that the end result is not only harmonious but aesthetically pleasing as well.

Though the early thinkers drew inspiration chiefly from these two sources, I would like to explore three different models of harmony that can be derived from these two models. These three models present us with three different ways of looking at discord, and how harmony is conceived through different methods of diversity management.

1 The Culinary Model of Harmony

The culinary model of harmony conceptualises discord as the presence of diverse elements fighting for attention in the same space and time. To achieve harmony in such a setting requires managing the diverse elements in such a way that all the elements involved can still manifest themselves in the same time and space, but in varying degrees of intensity.

In the context of cooking, every flavour appears to be competing for attention with one another. The job of the chef when cooking, is to ensure that each flavour manifests itself with just the right intensity that it complements the other flavours in the dish. This is done through careful a preparation of the ingredients (cutting



and seasoning), and then adding the right amount of each ingredient at the appropriate time. A good chef is able to bring into harmony even flavours and ingredients which usually seem to be at odds, such as sweet and sour pork/fish/chicken, and even durian ice-cream!

Mencius illustrates the culinary model of harmony perfectly. In *Mencius* 5A3, we are told about Shun, the legendary sage-king who successfully brought into harmony a personal dilemma involving three conflicting values: Shun had appointed his brother, Xiang, as Prince of Youbi (a town).

Here's the dilemma that Shun faced: His brother, Xiang, had tried repeatedly to murder Shun. (1) As king, Shun had to punish Xiang, but Shun could not bear to execute his own brother. (2) Nor did Shun wish to dishonour his brother by reducing him to a commoner. (3) But as king, Shun had to be fair and just. He had to punish his brother for his crimes.

Like a good chef who carries out the necessary preparations and is keenly aware of the right time for certain actions, Shun made some preparations in advance. Early on, Shun had already appointed someone else as administrator of Youbi. That way, when Xiang became Prince, he had no power or control over the town, and could not do any harm or damage to its people.

True harmony,
therefore, is
about diversity.

Once that was done, Shun waited for the right time to appoint Xiang as Prince of Youbi. While this was a promotion, it was clear to Xiang and to many that this was an exile, a punishment for his crimes. Nonetheless, Shun was able to keep his dear brother alive and to uphold the honour of his brother.

Like a chef able to bring three different flavours into harmony, Shun was able to harmonise three seemingly conflicting values into a single coherent action through careful preparation and timing.

In this culinary model of harmony, discord occurs when we perceive a situation to only allow one element to thrive in an environment of diversity. Based on such a perception, we conceptualise every element as if they are in competition for that single spot, thus putting tension between them. The culinary model of harmony requires us to reframe our perception of situations, and to refrain from a binary mode of framing things – either this or that, yes or no. Such a model of harmony challenges us to instead see creatively how every diverse element can be simultaneously manifested like the different ingredients and flavours of a dish.

Such harmony is not that simple to achieve. One must do the necessary planning and preparation, and discern the right timing to execute the various actions. If one were too hasty or too slow, one might ruin the process and fail to achieve harmony.

2 The First Musical Model of Harmony

As for harmony in the context of music, there are two different models that we can study. The first model of musical harmony involves a harmony between the various instruments in a band or an orchestra. This is done by ensuring that musical instruments are correctly tuned to a particular melodic scale, to a particular musical standard. This may seem like a small matter in today's context, but in the ancient Chinese context, this was a big issue because the bronze bells had a limited tonal range as compared to string and wind instruments. Moreover, instruments made from different states were tuned differently. If one were to bring together these instruments in an orchestra, one would only hear dissonant sounds as each instrument would perform based on its own standard, on its own melodic scale. It was thus necessary to adjust the instruments, and tune them accordingly so that they fit the same scale, the same melodic standard.

In this model of harmony, discord is the result of different standards (e.g. standards of what is right and what is wrong) coming into conflict with one another. In a diverse society, where people subscribe to different systems of beliefs and values, it is inevitable that there will be clashes in certain areas. Who is to say that their standard should be the universal standard? To do so would be to privilege one group's system of belief and values over other groups. This would lead to more unhappiness and conflict.

Harmony, on the other hand, requires establishing a common standard by which the different diverse groups can agree on and refer to when there are disagreements. This may, however, require some minor adjustments on the part of each group to fit this external standard, just as how various instruments in an ancient Chinese orchestra had to be adjusted to be in tune with an external melodic standard.

But wait a minute! Doesn't this seem to contradict what Confucius taught - that harmony is not about making everything the same? No, this model does not contradict the words of Confucius. This model of harmony does not completely do away with diversity. Diversity is preserved and even supported! But for this to be achieved, there must be some degree of commonality imposed onto all. This model of harmony calls upon diverse groups to make some minor adjustments so as to fit themselves with a common standard whose sole feature is a common set of rules (or protocols) for handling and preventing conflicts. There is nothing more to this common standard, and so the diverse groups can still retain their respective set of beliefs and values, and of course, their unique character and identity.

Mozi (another early Chinese philosopher), was a strong advocate of such a model of harmony. He recognised that different people had different standards of righteousness, and so it would be difficult to achieve any sort of agreement between different



To achieve harmony in such a setting requires managing the diverse elements in such a way that all the elements involved can still manifest themselves in the same time and space, but in varying degrees of intensity.

groups of people, especially when it came to the issue of distributing scarce resources.

Mozi thus advocated the idea of referring to one's superiors as a way of settling differences of standards. Since we hold different standards of righteousness and cannot agree on a particular issue, let us instead refer to our superior and use his standard. But of course, Mozi knew that even superiors disagreed amongst themselves, so he advocated turning to the highest superior - Heaven.

Heaven held the ultimate standard – the standard of universal concern. Since Heaven treats everyone equally, people should adopt this standard and apply equal concern and treatment to one's self, kin, and to everyone else. People moderate themselves when they begin to consider the needs of those close to them. But such moderation takes place on a rather small scale, and does no good for everyone in society. However, when everyone begins to extend their concern to cover everyone in the world, they will moderate themselves, cease to indulge, and work hard to ensure that everyone has enough for their sustenance, and for the good of their society.

What is interesting is that although the standard of universal concern only requires people to extend their concern and treatment of the self to everyone, it leaves room for each

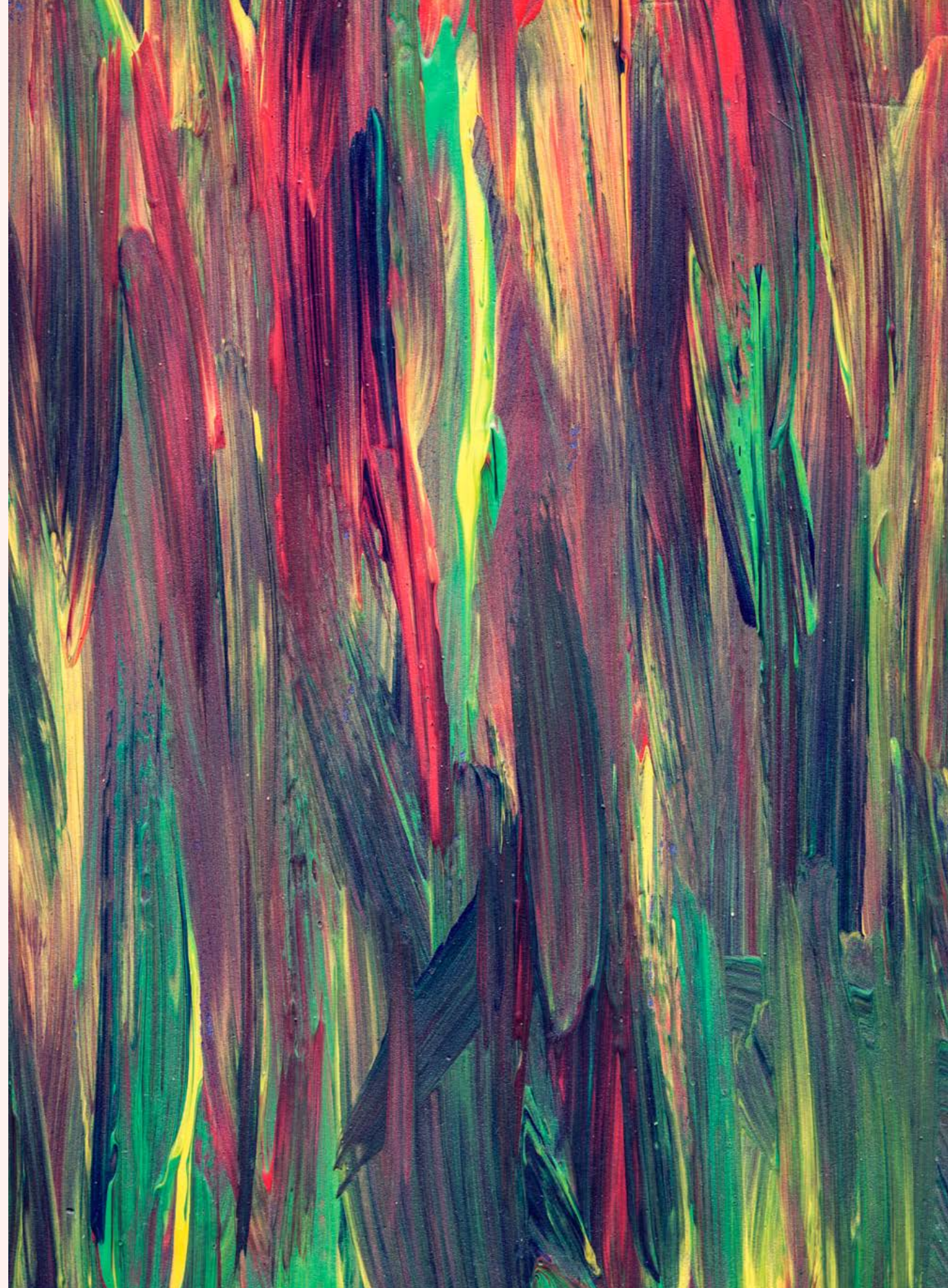
individual to exercise this universal treatment in their own way, according to their own system of beliefs and values.

This added consciousness of the universal impact of one's individual actions is similar to tuning an instrument, as it requires one to make the necessary adjustments, moderations, in order to avoid acting in a way that would produce dissonant actions or conflict. Just as how a tuned instrument is able to avoid producing dissonant sounds, a moderated individual with universal concern avoids acting in a conflicting manner.

Harmony can thus be achieved when a common standard of interaction is established among diverse groups. This common standard requires slight adjustments on the part of all, but it is a necessary adjustment so as to prevent conflicts from happening.

3 The Second Musical Model of Harmony

The second model of musical harmony involves managing diversity in the context of the same space, but not necessarily at the same time. In an orchestral setting (both in ancient China and in a modern context), there will be times when some instruments must 'give way' to other instruments to take the lead. In this model, harmony is about preserving the continuity of the performance through a series of leading and giving way to one another. Disharmony occurs when instruments or musicians



refuse to give way, or when different parties insist on leading at the same time. In which case, the music becomes very jarring, and in some extreme cases, the performance cannot continue as the conflict has escalated to such an extent that the other musicians do not know when or how to come in.

A superficial understanding of this would be to regard harmony as nothing more than obedience to a set of social 'traffic' rules. Rather, this model of harmony treats the diverse groups as belonging to a certain eco-system. Harmony exists when diverse groups act in ways that preserve/perpetuate or improve the eco-system. Each group must know how to perceive and understand cues given by other groups, and be willing to yield and/or sacrifice accordingly so that another group may rise up and lead at the appropriate time – in so far as it keeps the eco-system/cycle in balance.

The quality of yielding and leading is not the key aspect of this model of harmony. It is essential to harmony, but it is significant only because it is the mechanism that allows the musical performance to continue. What is of greatest importance to harmony in this musical model, is that yielding (and responding to the right cues) is the necessary component for sustaining and advancing processes or cycles in system (or if it helps you understand better: in a kind of eco-system).

Harmony, on the other hand, requires establishing a common standard by which the different diverse groups can agree on and refer to when there are disagreements.

In this model, there will inevitably be 'conflict', or necessary evils, that are present in order to preserve a process/system. In the case of an environmental eco-system, it is a necessary evil for the predator to catch and kill its prey - but only in so far as it helps to maintain the balance of the system. Too much or too little of this, and the delicate balance of the system will be destroyed.

In an orchestral setting, some instruments must perform softly or even stop playing, so that the sounds of other instruments may rise up and take the lead. And when some instruments have had their chance to express themselves, they too begin to slowly fade out, thus allowing the other instruments to have their chance. The yielding and leading of the various instruments are done not because we desire equal airtime for each instrument, but because this motion of rising and falling, of yielding and leading, produces a momentum that keeps the melody going.

Discord occurs when groups are not willing to yield/sacrifice, or do not perceive the cues to yield accordingly. In which case, the delicate eco-system is affected, and the cycle disrupted. As in the case of an orchestra, a musician (or a group of musicians) could perform in such a radical excessive manner that it throws the entire orchestra off to the extent that the rest are unable to continue performing.

Confucius is a strong advocate of such a model of harmony. He was of the firm belief that people should study rituals as a way of moral education and self-transformation. Rituals should not be understood merely as a series of religious actions.

Rather, a better way of understanding rituals from a Confucian context, would be to understand it as a kind of practice that exemplifies certain ideals about human relationships. Perhaps in a Western context, it is better known as social etiquette. Nonetheless, Confucius was well aware of the power of such social etiquettes. A hug expresses affection, a salute expresses respect. A pat on the back expresses support. We learn and we practise these ritual actions from our family and friends, in well-defined circumstances.

When people practise these ritual actions, they learn about the meaning that they are supposed to communicate, and understand the visual and bodily cues that accompany it. When they see others acting in this way, they would know how to act accordingly - when to give way, and when to take the lead. More importantly, they are also aware of what is being communicated.

When these ritual actions are repeated and internalised, people begin to intuitively know when to act and how to respond in situations outside of such fixed scenarios. In this way, they would be able to interact with diverse groups of people in ways that

Harmony exists when diverse groups act in ways that preserve/perpetuate or improve the eco-system.

would not only avoid conflicts, but also promote strong and close relationships with one another.

According to Confucius, discord arises because people have forgotten about ritual actions, or they know about it but fail to practise it. Conflicts arise because people are unable to show certain cues or understand the cues of others, and thus are unable to give way or lead in whatever situations they are in. Not only do people not get what they want, there is frustration in their personal interactions with one another as people clash in their desire to lead at the same time. In addition, the greatest failure and factor for even greater disharmony is the fact that human affection is not effectively communicated. Rather than promoting close human ties in one's daily interaction, people end up furthering distrust, frustration, and disappointment.

As I have shown above, the early Chinese thinkers drew their inspiration for ideas of harmony from the day to day activities in their lives – cooking and music. While we may not think much about these activities, these early thinkers have acquired great insights about managing diversity from the way diverse elements were able to harmoniously come together and interact in a fruitful manner.

✧ Jonathan Sim is a Research Officer in Philosophy at Nanyang Technological University. His research interests lie primarily in classical Chinese philosophical, especially in early Chinese concepts of harmony. But he is also very much interested in other areas of philosophy, including ethics, philosophy of science, and philosophy of religion. He is currently involved in the production of a Massively Open Online Course (MOOC) in classical Chinese philosophy, and is collaborating with the NTU Library to produce workshops on critical thinking and analysis. He loves talking about philosophy, and will be more than happy to meet up for a chat over coffee! (jyhsim@ntu.edu.sg)

Solidarity and Support: The Possibilities of Becoming 'Free Citizens'

by

Ngoi Guat Peng

translation Pang Caifeng

This article was originally published in *Promethean Fire Review* (www.pfirereview.com), a Malaysian social commentary site, on 7 October 2014. Special thanks to the author and *Promethean Fire Review* for approving the reprint of this article.



Hong Kong's student movement and Occupy Central have yet to come to an end and Chinese from all over the world have expressed their support. A candlelight vigil to support Hong Kong was even carried out in Singapore, where political bystanders often remain tight-lipped. This, however, comes as no surprise. Recent incidents suggest that members of the Singaporean community have taken to voicing their opinions while organising movements akin to a civil society. One particular example was the National Library Board's (NLB) removal and pulping of the three children's books which were perceived to be spreading the ideology of same-sex and single parent families. The books were deemed to have the potential to destabilise 'conventional family values' in Singapore.

This episode brought about a heated debate on the NLB's actions and was largely met with opposition from members of the literary and arts scene as well as those in the academic profession. More than 100 local and non-local writers, mainly English and Chinese ones, expressed their views and wrote about this saga. Some Singaporean writers even pulled out from NLB-related events to state their stand while a mass reading event was organised at the National Library Building atrium by a group of parents to express their disapproval towards NLB's decision to remove the books.

As a result, opinions are being trapped within nationalistic sentiments, compromising the individual's rights to free will – the right to agree or disagree, as well as the ability to make independent judgments.

In *To Singapore, with Love*, Singaporean documentary maker Tan Pin Pin interviewed individuals who had been leaders of student movements, leftist activists or members of the communist party. The subjects spoke about their life stories as political exiles who left the country in the 1960s. Upon screening by the Media Development Authority of Singapore (MDA), the film was given the classification of 'Not Allowed for All Ratings' due to the consensus reached by the authority that the film both distorts history and undermines national security. This led to an uproar within the filmmaking and artistic circle, who responded by issuing a joint statement expressing their 'deep disappointment'. Members of the public also signed petitions that requested for greater freedom of expression for filmmakers in Singapore.

History Bound by Nationalism

The two incidents mentioned may seem independent of one another but on closer inspection share a common relation. Both the removal of the children's titles and banning of *To Singapore, with Love* are strapped to problems that are identifiable. The former was due to the arguments regarding homosexuals and non-conventional families. It all started with a complaint from an anti-gay rights reader claiming that the titles contained messages that were not 'family-friendly' and may whet the appetite of Pink Dot, a group that champions for homosexual acceptance in Singapore. On a similar note, the Malayan Communist Party

(MCP) members and leftists featured in *To Singapore, with Love* have no place in Singapore's mainstream history. Homosexuals, leftists, communists are the emblem of political incorrectness in Singapore.

In recent years, leftist activists and ex-MCP members have penned down history from their perspectives. Books like these, as well as compilations of oral records from exiled Singaporeans, have been published and made it to book shelves. More recently, a commemoration was held at Hong Lim Park on 2 February 2013 to mark the 50th anniversary of Operation Cold Store, which took place on the same day in 1963. In attendance were the families of political exiles and former political convicts, who were given the chance to express their thoughts as well as their wish for their loved ones to come home. The event took place without any obstructions. Has the demand for democracy by the civil society resulted in the realisation that, in the face of oppositional forces, overly assertive means should not be taken? Or is it because these former student activists and MCP members no longer have the resources and influence, and hence are no longer perceived as a threat?

Regardless, the pursuit of a uniform and 'correct' sense of history and set of values through anti-homosexual and anti-communist behaviours are, in fact, curbing the possibilities of free discussion and thinking. As a result, opinions are being trapped within

nationalistic sentiments, compromising the individual's rights to free will – the right to agree or disagree, as well as the ability to make independent judgments. This line of argument may not be uncommon but considering the poignancy and tension in Singapore, one's rights to speak and be involved is dependent on his or her status.

Restricted Freedom

Past experiences on demonstrations in show of solidarity with Malaysia and Hong Kong included reminders from organisers that only Singapore citizens and permanent residents were allowed to speak or participate while foreigners could only take on the role of 'onlookers'. For example, amidst the crowd which turned up for 'Singapore in Solidarity with Hong Kong' on 1 October 2014, a few Hong Kong students were taken away for questioning under the Public Order Act after the event. The police also took the chance to reiterate that foreigners who are in Singapore to study or work should not break the law. Participants were also reminded of the conditions of the demonstration: no placards, banners or posters bearing ideologies, no chanting of slogans, etc. However, there is no clear definition of an 'onlooker'. Are onlookers allowed to hold candles during the vigil? Are they allowed to sing along? Or are they only allowed to hang around in silence?

Are we able to create the new identity of 'free citizens', build a community that overcomes nationalism, and render support for one another based on our common pursuit of universal values?

Are onlookers allowed to hold candles during the vigil? Are they allowed to sing along? Or are they only allowed to hang around in silence?

I was talking to a Hong Kong student on exchange programme I met at ‘Singapore in Solidarity with Hong Kong’ and asked how he was adapting to Singapore. His reply was ‘everything’s fine except the lack of freedom in speech’. He is studying law at Hong Kong University and has been on exchange in Singapore for a year since August. I also asked if the professors discussed about the student movements and Occupy Central in class. ‘No,’ he said, ‘possibly due to the sensitivity of this issue.’ He went on to say that the greatest difference in the Singapore campus is the atmosphere; posters that bear political agenda can be put up freely on Hong Kong’s campuses and students can express their views on politics.

There was another instance when I asked a professor in Hong Kong if universities interfered with the research carried out by academics and discouraged the use of politics-related or sensitive topics as research areas. His response left a deep impression: the media automatically steps in if a Hong Kong university interferes with a professor’s research or involvement in community. It is no doubt that media plays an important role in keeping the society and balance of power in check, and is the drive for progression in a society. The transparency of the media, as well as media personnels’ grasps on justice and accuracy, has a direct relationship with the freedom of speech in a society. Any imbalance and lapse will cause the community to lose an important support.

A Virtual Public Sphere that Crosses National Boundaries

Support and solidarity are the most basic expressions of unity. Democracy and freedom are not abstract ideologies. They can be a way of life that people do not fear, empowering people with the rights to make independent choices about personal, national, and political identities. The national boundaries of countries have long been overcome by the massive sharing of information, forming of connections and solidarity between people. As such, a public sphere has been created in the virtual world. However, these virtual spaces are not that removed from reality. They provide an efficient platform for sharing experiences drawn from respective countries and for exchanging thoughts and perspectives, while putting to test one’s ability to make rational judgment.

Reminders to not interfere with the internal affairs of other countries in Singapore and the need to maintain the order and safety of the society are constantly repeated. It is not uncommon to see messages on social media platforms that single out non-locals to be mindful of their speeches when conflicts arise. The impression that ‘outsiders’ are ‘intruders’ may possibly morph into social exclusion if it is internalised and becomes a habit, coupled with the lack of desire to understand. Free will can be

The national boundaries of countries have long been overcome by the massive sharing of information, forming of connections and solidarity between people.

said to have been exploited if the value of an individual is not being determined based on self-evaluation or creation, but through the judgment of an external power.

Are we able to create the new identity of 'free citizens', build a community that overcomes nationalism, and render support for one another based on our common pursuit of universal values? At the same time removing the segregation between 'internal' and 'external' to connect through universal qualities like equality, respect and synergy? Being 'free citizens' also poses a reflective question about being 'citizens of a nation'. How do we, from a greater perspective, overcome the issues of nationalities to lend a helping hand to the others out of sheer compassion? How certain are we that there will not be a day when we are the ones in need of help?

While discussing with students from my Chinese Thoughts class about co-humanity being an innate responsibility and a sense of humaneness that radiates from self to others, it was evident that pressure from the surroundings will always be present. Humanity is an intrinsic value that is still relevant in the world today. We should ponder upon our responsibilities in the modern society towards humanity and those around us. It is only through conscious independent thinking and judgment can we find a personal spot for freedom amidst complicated relationships and conflicts. And that is possibly the pathos of a 'free citizen'.

✧ Ngoi Guat Peng is Assistant Professor at Division of Chinese in Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. She is also a researcher at Inter-Asia School's Modern Asia Thought, Singapore and Malaysia Office. Her professional fields of study include the History of Chinese Thoughts, History of Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia, and Literature Knowledge Production, focusing on literary public sphere, public reason, construction of historical justice, etc. She believes that putting knowledge into practice and being critical is the responsibility of an academic.



An entry into 'Creative Destruction', a contest organised by the Peranakan Museum in the latter half of 2013.

by **Contest for Destruction**
Tang Wei

Open Call 1



Each note here comes from a recording of a piece of ceramic crashing onto a hard surface. I extracted a millisecond fragment of the recording and with each trigger of a note, the fragment is played back many times per second and can stretch out for as long as I'd like it to. Even though the same fragment is repeated thousands of times, with some effects applied it sounds almost seamless and even unexpectedly teased out some subtle details from the sound.

What I wanted most of all was to create something that can provide sanctuary amidst the swirls of daily living. And win a MacBook for myself.

✧ Tang Wei likes the experience of sound and music. He also likes likes and likes to like.

Dual

by
Hong Guoyao



Fraught with tension and drama, DUAL is a photographic imagination of a standoff between man and nature – a culmination of centuries of worldly struggle between both entities. While earth appears to be the sacrificial lamb in man's relentless drive towards development, there is no clear sign of who is gaining the upper hand in this uneasy conflict. Most evident, is perhaps man's dual role as an aggravator and savior of our ailing environment. The work also stems from a personal struggle in striking a balance between an urban lifestyle and environmental conservation. Can photography help reconcile this standoff without our planet having to die? What kind of world do we want to live in?

✧ Hong Guoyao (b. 1987) is a multi-disciplinary artist who works across diverse mediums of photography, performance art and video. His artworks are often evocative meditations on the fractious relationship between human nature and nature at large. Inspired by personal experiences and recollections, his practice explores various manifestations of dualisms in life, be it salvation and destruction, permanence and transience or affiliation and dislocation. A graduate of Digital Imaging and Photography at Nanyang Technological University, he has showcased his works on local and international platforms including 2902 Gallery (Singapore), photo festivals at Pingyao and Lishui (China) and the Angel Orensanz Foundation Gallery (USA).



Open Call 2



Producers

Nicole Lim
Amanda Leong

Editorial

Wang Fang, Kate
Amanda Leong
Teo Eng Hao

Art & Photography

Hong Guoyao (www.guo-yao.com)

Design

semistudio.co

Advisors

Kok Heng Leun
Koh Hui Ling



© Drama Box Ltd
Co. Reg. 200517863N
IPC Reg. No. IPC000610



2014 Issue 1

Discord and Harmony Side A

61



2013 Issue 2

Memory x Space



2013 Issue 1

Body x Space

End

Previous Issues