Chapter 6

Chinese Cultural Treasures as Contributions to a Mindset of Interconnectedness for Global Transformations

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Abstract This chapter elaborates how the cultural perspective of Chinese philosophy supports an interconnected worldview. The author elaborates how three fundamental Chinese traditional beliefs not only manifest in social life in China, but could make a decisive contribution to the emerging narratives around regenerative civilization. In Chinese harmonic philosophy, the assumption is that in their core all people are good and kind and that part of the social obligation is to grow by taking care and trusting each other, while protecting the essential human virtues in a harmonic atmosphere. In this philosophical tradition, personal development is not isolated from others, and it begins in the self and emerges gradually into the family-oriented self, then into the extended family-oriented self, and finally into taking responsibility for one's organization, the community, and even the state, respectively, the globality of all people. All these layers are inseparably linked. The author suggests that China's contribution to mastering the global challenges in the Anthropocene goes far beyond technological and political capacities to meet ecological, social, and ecological targets. The treasures of Chinese philosophy offer opportunities to reframe our views of reality in a way that may be much more in service of well-being on a healthy planet.

Keywords Interconnectedness · Global transformations · Chinese culture · Harmony-belief · Complexity · Ambiguity · Resilience · Sustainability

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6.1 Opening Reflections

This essay is meant to provide an insight into the iceberg of Chinese society and culture by introducing the traditional Chinese aspects of harmony-belief, relationships, and emotions. These aspects are mutually entangled in ways that represent the typical complex and ambiguous nature of Chinese culture. So, in a way, this essay addresses the impossible challenge to express a complex and ambiguous reality in the linear logic of an essay. This paradox is even enhanced by trying to write this essay in English which as a language is based on very different principles than the Chinese mindset that I will try to describe and that is usually expressed in the associative, figurative quality of Chinese language. Therefore, please free your imaginations when you are reading. And please excuse me, if the content does not seem clear and reasonable enough. It is not a humanistic experience that to put the real natural being into the frame for understandings. For me as an author, the real understandings only appear while we devote ourselves into the nature, so to say the real life, which means the mess and clarity always come at the same time.

Another challenge is that I will try to highlight a few principles of Chinese mentality and differences between 'Chinese' and 'Western' perspectives. Both terms are in many ways problematic simplifications as both China and the Western world contain a huge diversity and variations of the aspects I want to describe here. At the same time, some aspects can be taken as representative of dominant developments of both social spheres, such as for instance the historic emphasis of the freedom of the individual in the 'West' compared to the emphasis of the well-being of the collective (Tian Xia) in China. Also, of course, several of the characteristics are not exclusive to Chinese culture but can also be found similarly in other Asian cultures. My experience is that sometimes these kinds of reflections are taken as stereotypical generalization. I will try to summarize these general tendencies as nuanced as possible, while of course I will not be able to address the full spectrum and diversity that could be differentiated here. I invite the reader to take my reflections as guidance into general tendencies without misinterpreting these as all-encompassing judgements.

6.2 Introduction

In short what I want to call the attention of the people of Europe and America to, just at this moment when civilization seems to be threatened with bankruptcy, is that there is an invaluable and hitherto unsuspected asset of civilization here in China. The asset of civilization is not the trade, the railway, the mineral wealth, gold, silver, iron or coal in this country. The asset of civilization of the world today, I want to say here, is the Chinaman, - the unspoilt real Chinaman with his Religion of Good Citizenship. The real Chinaman with his Religion of Good Citizenship. The real Chinaman, I say, is an invaluable asset of civilization, because he is a person who costs the world little or nothing to keep him in order. Indeed, I would like here to warn the people of Europe and America not to destroy this invaluable

asset of civilization, not to change and spoil the real Chinaman as they are now trying to do with their New Learning. (Ku, 1914, p. 8)

This excerpt stems from a public speech delivered by the Chinese scholar Dr. Ku in 1914. He was born in Qing dynasty, and even now, more than a century later, his words seem up to date. Today, I read his words with deep sadness witnessing that his warning has become reality: In the face of global warming, social disintegration, and the breeching of several planetary boundaries, the global civilization is currently facing existential challenges. For the last few decades, China has been on an incredibly speedy track of moving toward industrialization, adopting the development logic and underlying values that were initiated by the “Western” world. As a consequence, due to its large population, China is taken seriously and treated as an international market with valuable economic potentials for Western market players. At the same time, mainstream Western media perceive China’s economic rise and increasing influence as a threat to the West. From the perspective of a psychotherapist, such perspective expresses the projection of a competitive intention with anxiety and fear, whereas from the perspective as a Chinese citizen living in Germany, I feel hurt and confused. What makes me sad is the one-sidedness how influential voices perceive and portray China. The UN SDGs are emphasizing global cooperation (SDG #17 “partnership for the goals”) as a necessity to shape global change in a sustainable way. Still, it seems that China and its development are considered with a rather critical perspective emphasizing flaws over contributions. For example, China’s economic growth has allowed many millions of people to be released from poverty, which is also a great contribution to the well-being of people within the frame of SDGs. In terms of sustainability, another phenomenon I could feel in the international conferences is that there is a shared climate to criticize China as a whole which has the rapidly increasing carbondioxide emission, regardless how much is it per person. An impression I get repeatedly is that Western media and even scholars report about selective aspects of China and Chinese actions from the angle as it would appear from a Western mindset. Often it is overlooked that the same facts could be interpreted very differently if perceived through a Chinese lens and mindset. Such one-sided interpretations often contribute to an atmosphere of mutual hurt, misunderstanding, and distrust.

Therefore, the intention of this article is to highlight a few key features of the traditional Chinese mindset both as a resource for Westerners to interpret Chinese phenomena in a more nuanced way and also as a cultural resource for the emerging global civilization. In the global crossroad of the era of the Anthropocene, it is not helpful to focus only on the scientific or political debate that is based on critique and hence emphasizes differences over commonalities. Rather the current global challenges urge us to move toward a culture and spirit of mutual understanding and collaboration for a shared sense of meaning. It is time to build bridges that allow us to get to know each other deeper and find a common space from which to take action toward sustainability. In this article, three aspects shall be introduced that shape Chinese mindsets and are embodied throughout Chinese society and action through their deep roots in Chinese philosophy:

- (1) Harmony-belief
- (2) Relationships and nature-connectedness
- (3) The relevance of emotions.

They will be introduced in a both linear and spiral way, both separated and integrated. Since the three aspects are related to each other, the illustration would be more like presenting an existing being from three dimensions, rather than talk about three different isolated objectives.

6.3 The Three Different Chinese Contributions to a Global Culture

6.3.1 *Harmony-Belief: The Culture Grounded upon the Goodness of Human Nature*

One of the first learnings for Chinese is the saying “Man on earth, Good at birth. The same nature. Varies on nurture.” (人之初, 性本善, 性相近, 习相远) (Wang, 2011). Even if it might make no sense for a kid who just starts to learn how to speak, it would be the first poem in their whole life and will be with them for the rest of their life. In Chinese harmonic philosophy, the assumption is that in their core all people are good and kind. Therefore, people are growing by caring and trusting each other, protecting those virtues in harmonic atmosphere.

Manifestations of Harmony-belief: From Religions to Daily life

The ultimate manifestation of the *harmony-belief* can be seen in the Chinese religion systems, in which the three dominant religion systems—Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism—have been coexisting for thousands of years. Moreover, religious persecution has been very rare in Chinese history. From religion and philosophy to ethics to aesthetics, *harmony-belief* has a systemic ritual that goes through the daily life of every Chinese, integrating with various channels, including education, social life, intimate relationships, and family traditions. The hope for a harmonic atmosphere is driving people to reach consensus and allow the common good to flourish. It is the atmosphere in which people feel belonging and safe. It is more of a merging force to integrate the diversity, with some gravity that attracts people into a common space.

In the long run, *harmony-belief* has shaped relationships in the Chinese society and also painted colors on how Chinese are keeping contact and interact with each other, which is emotional and sensitive in a latent way. In turn, the mode of unspoken communications reshapes the community and person as a collective being in the community, which makes the happenings among Chinese more volatile, complicated, and ambiguous.

A society without boundary: Integration and entanglement

Chinese society avoids clear boundaries, because the boundary creates the dynamic for separation and splitting. For example, there is no registration system in Chinese traditional religions, and people are ambiguous with their traditional beliefs like Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. No matter how conscious or unconscious they are, Chinese are flexible and adaptive to structures, for religion just as for political or social structures. Even many scholars have discussed for hundreds of years that the concept of religion is a Western-centric definition that does not fit the Chinese belief system (Ku, 1915, p. 16). However, religion can serve as an example, how flexible and adaptive Chinese are coping with beliefs, manifesting an attitude of ambiguity. The ambiguity in terms of religion could be understood as the tendency to make peace (harmonize) among different belief systems. This tendency could be observed in various aspects of people's daily life: Integration with others in a group or community; searching for the middle way or common sense in decision-making process; making peace instead of launching conflicts, etc. Chinese are living in a certain chaos reality, which reinforces their lifestyle of being ambiguous. They believe that nothing could be really clarified. As described in the famous I Ching (Yi Jing易经), the only thing that does not change is change itself, which is another version of ambiguity. A famous official scholar Zheng Banqiao (1751) said: NanDeHuTu (难得糊涂), which means "Ignorance is bliss" or "Be a wise fool," which had been taken as motto by many scholars or governors until modern China. It implies the deep value of Chinese society.

The tendency of integration has a strong impact on dissolving boundaries. There are lots of manifestations in this ambiguity.

Origin of the ambiguity between private and public life: Confucius Doctrine

According to Confucius' doctrine, public life is the extension of private life. Confucius' The Great Learning starts with:

Men in old times when they wanted to further the cause of enlightenment and civilization in the world began first by securing good government in their country. When they wanted to secure good government in their house in order, they began first by ordering their conversation aright. When they wanted to put their conversation aright, they began first by putting their minds in a proper and well-ordered condition. When they wanted to put their minds in a proper and well-ordered condition, they began first by acquiring knowledge and understanding. The acquirement of knowledge and understandings comes from a systematic study of things. (Ku, 1915)

In short, the phrase could be understood as "improve upon the humanity and morality of yourself first, then manage your family, then govern your state; that is the only way to bring justice and virtue to the world" (修身, 齐家, 治国, 平天下) (Ku, 1915), as shown in Fig. 6.1.

Life patterns in reality: Practice in Ambiguity

In Chinese daily life, there are three main manifestations of this ambiguity: First, there is no awareness of the boundary of private and public life; second, there is no

Fig. 6.1 Confucian ethics from “The Great Learning” (adapted by author from Confucius, ca. 400–479 B.C./1898)

distinction between professional and casual time/space; third, there is no distinction of relationships among relatives, friends, colleagues, acquaintance, or strangers.

For example, it has influenced Chinese society significantly that according to Confucius the purpose of education was to take official responsibility in the social system (government, administration, etc.) described as “A student who has exceptional abilities, more than sufficient to carry on his studies, should enter the public service” (学而优则仕《论语·子张》) (Confucius 400–479 B.C./1898). This seems quite distinct from the Western path where “power” in the social system was achieved through superior competitiveness. Whether Marxism, liberal individualism, utilitarianism, democracy, or other Western doctrines or solutions, they cannot work in modern China without being integrated and reconciled with deep cultural and often unconscious channels of social meaning and practice (Yang, 2013). With the anthropological lens, the blurring of private and public life, professional and casual time/space, including the according relationships among these spaces and timelines, is deeply grounded upon Chinese history of a farming country with self-centered and family-oriented ethical ripple.

There are plenty of routines in Chinese daily life to be shown as the arguments. Known to all, people are giving their private contact, always including the private phone number to the one that meet in official occasions. In a company or an organization, the staff are contacting the boss whenever it is needed. Meanwhile, many employees would build and maintain some private relationships, while they are making business or cooperating projects in business occasions. In a way, all business in China is for building networks (making friends). In these circumstances, Chinese transfer all official relationships into private. Traditionally, they do not really trust contracts, but they trust in the person they know. For the same reason, people get used

to sleeping in the middle of a working day or even in ongoing conferences. It is hard for a Westerner to imagine that how acceptable and flexible it is that people could sleep whenever or wherever they feel they need. What stunned Westerners is that Chinese could sleep in offices (chairs, desks) or the passages of the bus or train, or some public places like lobby in a hotel or a bank. All above daily life routines could be applied to no matter elite, high-educated, and wealthy group or lay, poor, and less-educated group. It seems that most conventional Chinese daily life is following their ancestors thousands of years ago, while in the farming fields, where people were working, was the place they were having fun and relaxed. All the surrounding people were extended family members and coworkers in the fields as well. From a Western perspective that emphasizes the “functional” aspects of relationships, this kind of blurring is often interpreted as nepotism. For Chinese, on the other hand, it seems totally counterintuitive why people could trust a “piece of paper” (contract) more than a person they know personally and with whom they have cultivated a harmonious relationship.

Shadow under the Harmony-belief

Of course, the Chinese harmony-belief does not automatically promise harmony. It requires people to take responsibility for creating and protecting this harmony. When harmony is absent, the harmony chaser might be inclined to avoid conflict or controversial opinions to enjoy the temporary peace and escape from the crisis and problems that need to be resolved. On the crossroad of facing to the problems and transiting the crisis into opportunities, people might give up the chance to defend themselves from attacks, to participate in constructive debate, or to complain for their own rights.

In Chinese society, this is manifested in all kinds of typical behaviors:

- Not daring to say “No” and refuse people;
- Saying “Yes” but postponing the execution of promises;
- Not raising criticism but giving positive/encouraging/appreciating words;
- Sudden negative emotional explosions after long-term tolerances;
- Behavior oriented toward satisfying social/collective/others’ expectations.

Harmony is a pleasant atmosphere when it is based on people’s common will. When harmony-belief becomes a social pressure, it turns out to be another form of constrain or oppression, which also brings harm and pain. Obviously, many people benefit from the societal harmony-belief in China; however, others are suffering from the integrative culture that is not encouraging the uniqueness and creativity of the individual.

Fig. 6.2 The Chinese family tree (2015)

6.3.2 Relationships from a Perspective of Complexity and Ambiguity

Chinese society is embodying the principles of what has been coined a “VUCA” world.¹ For Chinese, this is not new, they are born into it and grow up with it. By dancing with the dynamic social connections and sensing the collective needs, Chinese are facing to the chaos and opportunities in an incredible condensed space and time period, since they were swallowed by the unavoidable modernization and globalization in 1980s. Currently, Western scholars are increasingly reflecting about the challenges that it implies for leaders to be confronted with a VUCA reality because the typical Western mentality has rather been trained to cope with complicated (and not: “complex”) phenomena, which are assumed to be controllable. Complex phenomena require a different approach. In this context, Chinese cultural memory may have precious resources to offer because it has embodied complexity for a long time (Puett & Gross-Loh, 2016).

Self-centered network: the family-orientated ethical system

The family tree (Fig. 6.2) illustrates the core relationships in a family-based community in China, which every Chinese are more or less born with. Almost all specific titles of relatives would be kept in mind, because the identification of people’s position and order is of great importance when people interact with each other. Within their family, Chinese people rarely call people by their names but rather by their ‘title’ that stands for the relationship with oneself, including relatives, friends, and acquaintances. For example, Yima (姨妈) is the title for the big sister of the mother.

¹ The term “VUCA” was first introduced around the 1987 in the USA as a term used to describe new demands on the management of corporations in an increasingly complex world. The acronym stands for ‘volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity’.

By acknowledging the relationship, everyone is very clear with the position and the according morality and social rules. That is the foundation for the Chinese *GuanXi* (relationship) in daily life. Based on his or her original family, throughout their lives, Chinese are weaving their own relationship field as a way to cultivate harmony. This practice of cultivating harmony—not only internally but in all parts of their life—is called *TaiJi*, and the relationship field is called *GuanXi*.

Chinese learn *Taiji* for its philosophy on transformation, with all possibilities that making peace by integrating the binary splitting. As shown in a *Taiji* image, the black in white and the white in the black are the main driving forces for integration and merging, in another saying, the harmony is embedded in the controversial existence. That is the reason why Chinese also call the harmonizer in complicated relationships the “*Taiji* player.”

It is due to this practice of cultivating a harmony-oriented field of *GuanXi* that Chinese value making friends before making a deal. Foremost, their relationships—and that of course includes “professional” or “official” relationships—serve the purpose of extending their harmony through their field of *GuanXi*. Mayfair Yang (2007) has drawn similar conclusions on rural economic development based on her study in Wenzhou, the city on the southeastern coast of China:

Given China's long history of commercialization, capitalism is not entirely new. As China today joins the world of global capitalism, some of its rural coastal regional cultures, such as rural Wenzhou, have drawn upon imperial China's petty entrepreneurial and commercial cultural legacy, where the market economy was embedded in and also checked by cultural institutions such as the family, lineage organizations, temple associations, Daoist and Buddhist institutions, and community ethics.... In the indigenous capitalism that we find in places like Wenzhou, the capitalist drive for accumulation of wealth is tempered by the religious and kinship ethics of generosity and social rivalries of giving away wealth. (Yang, 2007, p. 233)

“We” instead of “I”: Relational Identity

Human life finds its meaningfulness in relationships. It is the main theme of the book “I and Thou” from Martin Buber (1923/2017). It has received broad resonance among people in China. However, there is some distinction in the format of the *Eternal Thou*. From Buber's perspective, all of our relationships bring us ultimately into the relationship with God, while for Chinese, it is the family-oriented relationship that brings us into the *Eternal Thou*. As mentioned above, traditional Chinese personal development begins in the self and emerges gradually into family-oriented self, then into the extended family-oriented self. The self can be ethically, intellectually, and psychologically developing into a state that is capable of taking responsibility for one's organization, community, and even the state, until the ultimate position “All Under the Sky” (Tianxia 天下). This self-centered development process (see Fig. 6.1), like ripples in water, shows a traditional Chinese collective identity, in which the development of personal identity is oriented toward fulfilling the collective expectations and well-being. The concept of *Chaxugeju* (差序格局) raised by Fei (1948/1984) described the elastic quality of the “self” that Chinese are rooted in (see also Robel, 1997). As mentioned before, Chinese have no clear boundary between private and

public at all. *Jia* (家 Family) could be extended infinitely as long as the virtue and merits could afford. Small *Jia* could be extended to the community, tribe, state, or the whole world (*Tianxia* 天下 All Under the sky), which is the so-called big *Jia*. As a result, Chinese attitudes like belonging or trust toward the extended family are the extended love grounded upon the core family. So to say, if there is an explicit most popular religion in China, this religion would be “family.” “Confucius wrote, *the person who exercises government by means of his virtue is like the North Star, which makes all the other stars surround it.* (为政以德, 譬如北辰, 居其所, 而众星拱之《论语·为政》) *This is, in fact, a very apt metaphor for describing the Chinese system of organization, that of a pattern of discrete circles, the differential mode of association*” (*Chaxugeju*) (Fei, 1948/1984, p. 46).

The self is always at the center; so, like the motionless North Star, the self is always surrounded by others who come under the influence of the center. And at the same time, a “self” is never a separated individual or “I,” rather the self is defined through the relational field in which it emerges and exists, so it is a “relational self” or “nested I.” No self exists without its surrounding relational field. In Chinese language, there is no distinction of subjective and objective, so “I” and “me” are the same character *Wo* (我). Within the frame of a relational identity, how could individuals fulfill their own needs or expectations? By answering the question, it is necessary to change the needs model from Maslow’s linear Hierarchy model (Maslow, 1954/2007) to the new needs model as shown in Fig. 6.3. In Chinese relational identity mode, Chinese are fulfilling all their needs through their roles and collective identities but never separated from their surrounding field. Or in other words: For a Chinese, meeting his or her own needs is always coupled to balancing this with meeting the needs of the related family, tribe, community, and state. The harmony of all these is the constituting factor for the development of the self. It is not a surprise to have received all kinds of supports or help from others, because generally speaking, everyone is observing and sensing who might need help in the surroundings, which is the virtue that a collective society is encouraging and expecting. In such a culture, it is hard to say whether this comes from personal virtue or from social pressure because everyone is practicing both consciously and unconsciously. Anyway, through the culture of collective mutual support, people who are living in the circle are fulfilled with all the necessity for their physiological, mental, and spiritual life.

Relationship based Culture: GuanXi

It has long been recognized that one of the most significant features of Chinese culture is its emphasis on a harmonious society and the appropriate arrangement of interpersonal relationships (Abbott, 1970). *GuanXi* (Relationship) is the key for Chinese society, which is working based on interpersonal trust. With globalization and industrialization, there are several forces leading to change, but also some sources of continuity, which maintain these patterns regardless of political and economic context (Hwang, 1987, 1997). The community based on *GuanXi* creates an atmosphere that everyone is connecting to everyone. So, in a way, also all information is connected to everyone in the circle. This is contrary to the popular perception in the West that takes the “official” voice as representative for the country and its people.

Fig. 6.3 The Chinese fulfillment of needs model
(copyright by the author)

Actually, nothing can really be hidden in the wild connected human networks in China. According to the Chinese harmony-belief and the family-styled governance, criticism should be kept inside a family. We can criticize harshly inside the family, but whenever we are mentioning or representing “China” (as our extended family) to an outsider, it should be positive. As one consequence, the collective silence of Chinese or the emphasis of positive words is often misinterpreted by Westerners as indications that there is only one mainstream voice from China and that lots of other voices are being oppressed which is taken as a reason to criticize China. From the standpoint of a typical Chinese, such criticism from a non-Chinese is perceived as the first negative signal of a not trustworthy relationship which equals to hurting Chinese emotions and hence launching a conflict actively. Thus, many Chinese take Westerners as “outsiders” even before a relationship could be built, such that possibilities for further communication are being lost. It seems like a “negative circle” to me in which cultural misunderstandings and misinterpretations drive mutual alienation and avoid the building of a trustful relationship.

Nature-relatedness: Nature is the “Self as It Is”

A special aspect of relationship is the Chinese understanding of nature and hence the relationship between human and non-human life. The term “Nature” in Chinese is Zi Ran (自然), which is described in the Dao De Jing (Lao Tsu, 571–471 B.C.): “*Man takes his law from the Earth; the Earth takes its law from Heaven; Heaven takes its law from the Tao. The law of the Tao is its being what it is.*” 人法地, 地法天, 天法道, 道法自然.

“Being what it is” is *Zi Ran*. As *Zi* (自) in Chinese is also the self, so it could also be interpreted as “the self as it is.” The core content of the notion of *Zi Ran* is the inherent and autonomous course of the universe. An important implication of this understanding of nature is that Chinese usually do not understand humans as distinct from nature. While mainstream Western philosophy has emphasized the distinctness of nature and culture, Chinese culture has traditionally not known this distinction. In a way, the sphere of “global nature” to Chinese is only the further expansion of their nature sense of relationship spheres. Regarding the current changes in global ecosystems, these understanding pose particular challenges to Chinese. One aspect of this is that for Chinese there is no stability at all. Only the present moment is eternal. That might be a reason, why many Chinese feel it is not a big deal that global ecosystems are collapsing. I fully understand that to a certain degree, this perspective could be considered somewhat ignorant. However, from another point of view, this manifests the essential quality of the principle that as humans we are part of nature. There is no boundary between clarity and mess, and our planet is always full of mess, e.g., our industrialized modern lifestyle. Just taking all the rubbish away from the place where we can see it, does not mean that it does not exist. The world, since many years ago, is both messy and beautifully. The key point for both is that how we step into the discomfort zone a little bit more, to face to the reality. For Chinese, transformation means to step outside the comfort zone of our familiar ties and relationships, and to care for the world in an extended scale. As Chinese, we were growing up in a farming country, but it is a fact that we are also moving into the industry circle. Hence, it will be a great challenge for China to solve the problems in such a condensed timeline that both taking care of people to develop their life quality and protecting the environment at the same time will be possible.

6.3.3 *The role of emotions: Volatility cultivates resilience*

The mind–heart system of emotional Chinese

Psychology is translated into Chinese as *Xin Li* (心理) study, in which *Xin* is the heart and *Li* is the rationality or mind. From the traditional understandings of ancient Chinese, perception or reasoning is the function of the heart rather than the brain. It is not a coincidence that the American Chinese historian Sun concluded in his book “The deep structure of Chinese culture” that China has a cultural context in which “people have stronger heart than brain. For a Chinese, the mind is from heart, whereas the mind is covered by emotional heart.” (Sun, 2015). Emotions make things complicated, as the life is. Sensitive to the emotion is an effective way to sense the whole field or the climate in space, which is the basic learning for every Chinese since childhood. In other words, it is also the survival coping stances that make Chinese feel belonging and love in the community. In terms of emotions, they are changing in every moment but nothing could be more genuine than our own feelings; they are too diverse and subtle to become tangible and understandable; they can be felt but are also untouchable; they could be expressed in thousands of ways, but

only if people feel them, they could be understood what they exactly mean. As a result, they are always with some quality of mystery to the rational mind. Similarly, this description matches China as a country or culture. People miss the essence of China when they focus on studying official reports or cold databases. Rather, it is necessary to contact people and immerse into the real life. The official appearance is just a cover for Chinese real life, which is a common sense for all Chinese. The real life is with much more *aliveness* with the ambiguous space in between. It is almost a paradox to address that Chinese society is built on an emotional network, while Chinese are among those who are with least facial expressions. However, the Chinese way of being emotionally sensitive is introvert and invisible, which might not be shown explicitly.

Latent communication with emotions sensitivities in social life

While it seems that in the West emotions are primarily processed in “private” or personal spaces, the presence of emotions plays a crucial role in Chinese relationships. For this interaction, emotions or compassion is not necessarily based on these emotions being expressed, no matter verbal or non-verbal. Living in a complex society like China, it is the emotional sensitivities that help people to connect and cooperate with each other. The emotional connections with the harmony-belief help people to achieve the consensus in a latent but efficient way. Normally, people are not expressing themselves actively in public, but it does not mean that the individual’s expectations have been ignored. The active relationships would help to spread individual’s expectations. In terms of the meetings or conferences, it is the time for making decisions and preparation for taking actions, and most of the communications are happening in the circles and communities. If individuals’ expectations have been ignored, the leader who is in charge would feel sooner or later the obstacle of the systemic pressure from the community and circle even if the respective individual does not raise this explicitly.

Implications for the mutual understandings

The above phenomenon is quite related to the following conditions: relationships and harmonic belief determine to which circumstances that Chinese would switch themselves into a relatively more relaxed, free, and extrovert mode. While in a collective community, ‘being a person’ is an art to keep balance of caring myself, others, and the field (common good). A silent or calm appearance is the container for all the emotional and cognitive decision-making processes. Hearing from others and speaking less would always be a good strategy to avoid conflicts and keep harmony as a whole. Emotional contact without words, or so to say “silent communication,” is a crucial element for people to dive into China and understand the mechanism behind the appearance. From my experiences, most Westerner I met who went to China and experienced warm and genuine Chinese, immediately fall in love with the atmosphere there. Therefore, I am translating the Chinese culture as an emotional space. Therefore, China is a concept that cannot be explained but needs to be *experienced*, to be tasted and to be discovered with curiosity and openness of the heart.

6.4 Outlook: Implications for Sustainability and Global Civilization

These reflections are meant to stimulate a discussion about how China might contribute to mastering the global challenges in the Anthropocene. Usually, conversations about sustainability emphasize technological and political capacities to meet ecological, social, and ecological targets. I am convinced that with this focus important treasures of Chinese culture are overlooked. As humans are gaining insights into the complex nature of the how human actions are interwoven with the Earth system, existing mental paradigms are being challenged. Human systems need to cope with the so-called VUCA reality, and sustainability-related scholars and philosophers are increasingly emphasizing the importance of re-interpreting the human–nature relationship and fostering relational paradigms and mental models for sustainability (Walsh, 2021; West, 2020). The three aspects presented in this essay (harmony-belief, relationality, and role of emotions) are meant to illustrate how the Chinese culture could contribute as resources to a transformation of mindsets that are equipped to meet the challenges of the Anthropocene. They might also help to allow for alternative interpretations of Chinese actions and hence avoid misunderstandings and foster constructive dynamics of global cooperation. On the other hand, they might foster the understanding and respect for the diversity of transformation processes in different cultural contexts.

These considerations may lie outside the comfort zone of many mainstream understandings. They may appear to be far from what can be understood according to the knowledge and logic or philosophy that we have been learning, not only cognitively but maybe more importantly with respect to our subconscious conditioning. All the more I would like to see these reflections as an invitation to rethink our assessments and judgements that might be influenced by more anxiety of what we do not understand than we know. The ongoing global transformation invites us to cultivate great awareness for the collective wisdom of all cultures in deep curiosity and appreciation for their diversity and context-specific validity.

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