

6 The Making of a Harmonious Utopia

In early 2011, journalists and China commentators were reeling from whiplash as Chinese authorities seemed to be sending mixed signals about the party's assessment of pre-modern culture. Early in the year, Beijing's National Museum of China had erected an almost 10-metre-tall statue of the sage Confucius at its northern gate. Considering how concepts and ideas associated with Confucianism had been gaining popularity throughout the 1990s and 2000s, and considering how the Hu-Wen administration had been evoking this particular heritage of Chinese philosophy over the preceding years (Chan 2009), many were speculating about the symbolic relevance of this statue (e.g. Coonan 2011). Situated on Chang'an Avenue, just half a kilometre from the Gate of Heavenly Peace, the statue left some with the impression that the CCP had 'resurrected Confucius and practically put Mao and Confucius side by side', as Pei Minxin put it; considering Mao's distaste for the sage and his philosophy, Pei concluded that 'Mao must be turning in his grave' (cited in Chen 2011).

Not even four months later, the monumental statue disappeared overnight. Assertions by officials that it had merely been moved, and that this had been planned all along, left many Chinese citizens and foreign observers unconvinced (see China Digital Times 2011), especially since the statue had been removed in such a clandestine way. Speculation abounded, with some wondering whether leftist cadres had successfully agitated against this symbol of an ideology they had long perceived as feudalistic and backward (see Jacobs 2011). Others wondered whether the party had been swayed by disgruntled descendants of Confucius, who had viewed this official endorsement of the sage as disingenuous and disrespectful, especially since the CCP had never formally apologised for the persecution of all things related to Confucius during the Cultural Revolution (see Reuters 2011). Whatever the reasons, the statue had become a political issue, closely tied to controversies over the direction

that national culture in general and the CCP's political orientation more specifically should take. As Dirlik (2011b: 2) put it at the time, Confucius powerfully served as 'a symbol of national cultural identity' that was the object of 'both cultural political manipulation and popular desire'.

The curious incident of the Confucius statue came in the wake of the networked spectacles that this book analyses, and of the many attempts to recalibrate official discourses by drawing from the rich traditions of Chinese history (see also China Story 2012). In this chapter, I turn to these activities and I explore how various actors referred to classic Chinese concepts and statements to fill the core official concepts of the Hu-Wen era with meaning: the ideas of a 'harmonious society' (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会) and of 'scientific development' (*keji fazhan* 科技发展). I start with a brief discussion of China's so-called 'Confucian Revival' at the start of the 21st century, and of the political discourses that accompanied this renewed interest in pre-modern philosophy as part of a wider push to invigorate 'national studies', or *guoxue* (国学), and anchor modernity in Chinese tradition. I then explore how China's networked spectacles evoked the idea of 'harmony' in both domestic and foreign affairs contexts, and how various actors used resources from the past to make sense of the concept. This will also include a discussion of official attempts to frame the PRC's foreign policy in terms of harmony and peace. Next, I discuss the way in which the CCP uses the concept of harmony to legitimate its modernist developmental politics, and I conclude by examining the kind of neoliberal hypermodernity that these conceptual activities have frequently come to justify.

6.1 Modernity and the 'Confucian revival'

In contemporary China, the interest in pre-modern Chinese culture and philosophy is intimately linked to the modernity projects of various elites. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, constructing the modern imagined community of the nation requires a sense of national tradition. This is very much in evidence in China, where consecutive generations of Chinese modernists have tried to understand the complex and fragmented dynastic and pre-imperial past from the perspective of the relatively recent invention of China as a modern nation-state.

Arif Dirlik (2011c) has shown how these endeavours roughly fall into one of two schools of thought. The first is a culturally conservative

programme aimed at creating Chinese national identity through activities that could also be called acts of ‘collective remembering’, that is knowledge-making practices that treat the past as a unified narrative in the service of a group and that do not lightly suffer ambiguities about the past (see Wertsch 2002 for a discussion). Such modern practices of collective remembering tend to follow nativist trajectories that seek to reify history as national history, and in China this has included attempts to elevate certain elements of the past to the status of national essence (*guocui* 国粹) or national soul (*guohun* 国魂), two terms that date back to early modernists at the close of the Qing Dynasty (Dirlik 2011c: 7). At the time, the contemporaries borrowed this terminology from neighbouring Japan, a nation-state they perceived as a template for how to become a modern power without abandoning traditions. In contrast to this, liberal cosmopolitan modernists tried to critically interrogate China’s past, questioning the value of traditions, and drawing from foreign scholarly traditions to do so (ibid.: 6). This paradigm famously informed the May Fourth’s New Culture Movement (see Mitter 2004), but it has remained an important fixture in scholarly and popular understandings of China’s past to this day.

The continuous interplay between these two paradigms in China highlights some of the contradictions involved in becoming modern, and they speak to the complex question of how to situate ‘local’ forms of knowledge within the now near-global knowledge practices of modernity (see also Gluck 2011). In Dirlik’s view (2011c: 4), they illustrate a general modern quest for ‘ethno-epistemologies’ that actors invoke ‘to establish claims to alternative modernities (but only rarely to alternatives to modernity).’ He goes on to argue that such attempts to define knowledge and identity through national traditions ‘point not to the past but, taking a detour through the past, to an alternative future’; this, as will become clear below, is very much the case for how the Hu-Wen administration and various other actors in China leveraged traditions in the service of their own ethno-epistemologies.

The debates that Dirlik outlines informed a renewed interest in China’s past in the wake of the Cultural Revolution, and it is before this backdrop that the PRC experienced a surge in ‘national studies’ (*guoxue* 国学) that has lasted to this day, and that still produces both powerful nativist and cosmopolitan iterations (for discussions see Chen 2011, Gan 2009, Liu 2011, Tong 2011, and Xie 2011). This interest, while not originally state-induced, became a convenient foundation for the authorities’ own

attempts to place their state-led nationalism on a broad, popular footing (see also Zhao 2004). Indeed, one of the reasons it was viable for the CCP to launch its patriotic education campaigns in the 1980s and 1990s was that traditional culture was again in vogue in China, especially among cultural conservatives (Makeham 2011).

The 'national studies craze' (see Chen 2011, Xie 2011) has led to a barrage of self-help books and popular cultural products in China, including TV programmes like CCTV's *Lecture Room* (*Baijia jiangtan* 百家讲坛), which has provided pop celebrities like Yu Dan (于丹) with a platform for their feel-good messages (see Makeham 2011: 14). These cultural products are part of a profitable industry, but they also serve actors as vehicles for their political discourses. Yu Dan, for instance, spells out the lessons of her engagement with the Confucian classics in an interview with Osnos (2014):

We must rely on a strict system to resolve problems. As citizens, our duty is not necessarily to be perfect moral persons. Our duty is to be law-abiding citizens.

Yu Dan's arguments illustrate how the renewed interest in pre-modern philosophy, particularly in its nativist instantiations, is frequently fuelled by the wish to 'civilise' Chinese subjects, reinvent them as 'citizens', and encourage the kind of self-discipline that advocates perceive as crucial for creating stable social relations across the nation. These discourses are then frequently culturally conservative and politically neo-authoritarian (see Sauntman 1992, Van Dongen 2009, and Minzer 2018 on Chinese neo-authoritarianism more generally). A prominent example of this is Zhao Tingyang's (2005, 2006) work, which mines pre-dynastic history for insights into the perceived golden age of the Western Zhou Kingdom (ca. 1040 to 771 BC). The Zhou kings had often served the philosophers of China's axial age (ca. 722 to 221 BC) as a source of anecdotes, reflections, and lessons on how to rule, and Zhao Tingyang mobilises this tradition to outline how these rulers venerated 'all under heaven' (*tianxia* 天下), and how their 'heavenly mandate' (*tianming* 天命) rested on an ideology that connected the cosmos, the world, the rulers, and their subjects through relations of respect and duty. For Zhao, it is a moral imperative to learn from this precedent and transitively apply its rationale (or, rather, Zhao's interpretation of that rationale) to the flawed social relations of our contemporary 'bad world' (see Zhao 2009), so as to govern society

through an emphasis on order (for critiques see Barabantseva 2012 and Callahan 2008).

Such arguments about governance and self-governance, grounded in pre-modern thought, became particularly popular during the Hu-Wen administration. It is hard to say in which direction the causalities ran, but the official endorsement of ‘harmony’ (he 和) arguably signalled that ideological engagement with traditional philosophical concepts was acceptable to the authorities. Political scientists ranging from liberal constructivists (e.g. Qin 2009) to hardened realists (e.g. Yan & Xu 2009) consequently took up the challenge of trying to explain the PRC’s role in world politics in terms of pre-modern thought, often constructing their own versions of established political theories like constructivism or neo-realism, but now with Chinese characteristics (for discussions see Hui 2012 and my own work in Schneider 2014a). While these practices have run the gamut of traditional Chinese philosophies, from Daoism through Legalism to Moism, the most commonly evoked sources are arguably the Confucian classics, at least in nativist versions of ‘national studies’ that celebrate a ‘Confucian revival’ (*ruxue fuxing* 儒家复兴). As Dirlik writes (2011b: 2):

At its narrowest, contemporary scholars of *guoxue* (and their popular constituencies) identify it with *ruxue*, or what is usually described somewhat misleadingly as ‘Confucianism,’ and Confucius with the spirit of the nation.

‘Confucianism’ (*ruxue* 儒学) indeed encompasses a whole array of ideas and practices, some philosophical, others religious, which are all tied in complicated ways to pre-modern antecedents and their modern reinterpretations (see Billioud & Thoraval 2014). It is then best not to understand Confucianism as a unified, coherent set of principles, even if it is frequently portrayed as such by advocates, but rather as a discursive field, a network in which diverse actors create emergent and often idiosyncratic meanings in the service of their respective political projects, using Confucian concepts as their building-blocks.

This has arguably been true throughout history: the writings that are today considered Confucian classics were written and rewritten after the period in which Confucius himself lived (the Spring-and-Autumn period, *chunqiu* 春秋, ca. 722–481 BC), and connections between the actual man’s thoughts and later interpretations of the classic works that

became attributed to him are frequently tenuous. Like so many classic texts in Chinese philosophy, the famous Confucian texts were compiled after the sage's death by his disciples, and these texts were then rewritten (and sometimes outright forged) during subsequent periods, for instance during the Han Dynasty (206 BC to 220 AD). Later 'Neo-Confucian' scholars, most notably of the Song Dynasty period (960 to 1279 BC), significantly expanded the Confucian framework, and the early 20th century saw yet another round of reassessments that would become part of 'Modern Neo-Confucianism' (*xiandai xin ruxue* 现代新儒学).

More recent interpretations have selectively drawn elements from these precursors to make sense of life and sociality in a rapidly changing China, often augmenting or contrasting their efforts with European, Korean, and Japanese philosophical currents, or with the works of Chinese philosophers outside the mainland (see Berthrong 1998/2018 and Rošker 2016). The result has been a rich collection of discourses under the overarching banner of 'Contemporary Neo-Confucianism' (*dangdai xin ruxue* 当代新儒学), which fits only awkwardly into essentialist understandings of the sage and his legacy (for helpful discussions see the contributions in Hammond & Richey 2015 and Hon & Stapleton 2017, as well as Osno's insightful 2014 journalistic account).

The conceptual frameworks of Confucian thought provide contemporaries with resources for their own political agendas. This has included criticising the institutions of global modernity, especially those that rely on egalitarian mass participation, and instead promoting governance by experts who are awarded their position based on meritocratic selection mechanisms, and whose mandate is to create stability and welfare for all. An example of such 'political Confucianism' is the work of Jiang Qing (2005), but arguably also of Daniel A. Bell (2007, 2008), whose assessment of contemporary Chinese meritocracy (Bell 2015) has been the subject of heated debate (see Bell et al. 2015 for an extended discussion, Nathan 2015 for a critique, and Bell 2015b for the response).

The PRC's authorities have been largely opportunistic in their embrace of 'Confucian' initiatives. The state has for instance opted to name a major part of its public diplomacy efforts after the sage: the Confucius Institutes (*Kongzi xueyuan* 孔子学院, see D'Hooghe 2015: ch.4). The authorities also seem to have initially supported a private initiative to establish a 'Confucius Peace Prize' in 2010 as an alternative to the Nobel Peace Prize, which had been awarded to dissident Liu Xiaobo that year.

The PRC's Ministry of Culture later withdrew its support, prompting the organisers to move their activities to Hong Kong (BBC 2011). From there, they have since awarded the prize to controversial figures such as Vladimir Putin, Fidel Castro, Robert Mugabe, and Hun Sen, and these activities have arguably created no small amount of embarrassment for the PRC's central authorities and their attempts to present China as a responsible stakeholder in international society.

Political initiatives related to Confucius show how complicated the networked processes are through which actors try to generate meanings around China's philosophical traditions. Such initiatives also demonstrate how discourses about Confucian tradition do not necessarily align with the CCP's attempts to appropriate pre-modern Chinese concepts (see Dotson 2011). This is visible in the way that official actors interpreted the Hu-Wen administration's emphasis on the nominally Confucian concept of 'harmony'.

6.2 Harmonising all under heaven

During the Hu-Wen administration, and especially after 2004, official ideology revolved strongly around the idea of a harmonious society (see Chan 2009, China Story 2012, Trevaskes 2012), and actors confronted with the challenge of positioning their activities within official discourse frequently returned to this concept to legitimate themselves and their actions, whether to secure funding, promote certain policies, or intervene in public discourse. This meant that a multitude of actors engaged in meaning-making processes that involved the concept of harmony (Zheng & Tok 2007), and many official actors ultimately planned policy initiatives based on their understanding of this idea (for an overview and assessment see the contributions in Zhao & Lim 2009). This frequently entailed turning to pre-modern sources for inspiration on how to understand what a contemporary Chinese 'harmonious society' might stand for.

As I have discussed earlier, these understandings were frequently based on highly idiosyncratic interpretations of China's past, especially its Confucian heritage, but be that as it may, the networked spectacles of the Hu-Wen period clearly anchored their use of the term harmony in pre-modern classics, using in particular quotations from the famous Confucian *Analects* (论语). For instance, the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony relied on quotations from this work in the segment that

showcased Chinese typesetting, and that was built around a movable typeset that produced the various iterations of the character for harmony I discussed in chapter 4. In order to ensure that the Chinese character *he* (和) was indeed associated with Confucian interpretations, the demonstration was accompanied by a recital of two central quotations from the *Analects*.

Is it not a pleasure to have friends come from afar?
 有朋自远方来，不亦乐乎 (Analects 1.1)
 Within the four seas, all are his [the sage's] brothers.
 四海之内，皆兄弟也 (Analects 12.5)

It is worth noting that, in the original, the first quotation is part of a statement on sagely learning, and the second quotation is part of a discussion about propriety. Here, these text passages are decontextualised to become part of a contemporary, cosmopolitan narrative anchored in pre-modern times. The programme for the opening ceremony makes this clear (BOCOG 2008b: 'Written Character'):

With the passing of seasons and years, the Chinese people have gone in pursuit of the eternal Harmony [sic].

As I have discussed in the previous chapter, 'harmony' became part of the linear trajectory of history that organisers of China's networked spectacles constructed for these occasions. It became a transitive concept that applied across time, even as it took different forms along the way. In addition, however, the concept was also used transitively to cover numerous social domains and different kinds of relations, following the rationale associated with the idea of 'all under heaven' that I discussed earlier.

During the Beijing Olympics, the opening ceremony organisers applied the concept to a range of spheres which were stacked from large (the world) to small (the individual). This included the natural environment, which was cast into eco-friendly terms for instance by projecting images of forests and waterfalls, as well as by prominently using the colour green in the 'Nature' segment. The relationship between humans and nature was then implied to be 'harmonious', which was symbolically captured in the same segment by young children colouring in a landscape painting of nature while learning about environmentalism in a mock classroom. The

visitor's guide made this connection explicit (BOCOG 2008b: 'Nature', translation in the original):

We live with the Heaven and the Earth; nature and mankind [sic] are in harmony.

天地与我并生，万物与我为一。

The original Chinese passage is a quotation from the Daoist classic *Zhuangzi* (2.9), and the translators have taken some liberties with the original, for instance by including the word 'harmony', which is not in the original. Another translation might read: heaven, earth, and I came into being together; all things and I are one. However, the guide's translation choice emphasises the eco-friendly message that the organisers have programmed into this segment: that humanity and nature should exist in harmony.

During the opening ceremony, the concept further came to have a societal dimension. On the one hand, this included discursive statements about how humanity should strive for world peace, an issue I return to below to show how the harmonious society discourse connected with official attempts to cast Chinese foreign policy as inherently peaceful. On the other hand, the idea of harmony came to imply unity, and especially national or ethnic unity within China. This message was communicated through staged performances such as the children in ethnic attire carrying the national flag, or minorities that 'dance joyously to greet all athletes' (BOCOG 2008a: 45). More subtly, the opening ceremony suggested that harmony might mean social harmony, or even social stability, and this was implied by the large numbers of actors moving in perfect unison for example during the Fou drum performance and the Confucian recital, or as part of the movable typeset that was ingeniously controlled by individual human performers hiding beneath the stage. In one instance, 1,000 performers literally recreated the very fabric of a miniature model of the Olympic stadium with their bodies (Figure 6.1).

While these performances may not have been universally understood as examples of harmony, in some cases even informing anxieties about China (Gries et al. 2010, see also chapter 8), the organisers demonstrably tried to connect the masses of people on stage to harmony discourses. The CCTV commentary, for instance, clarified for domestic audiences that the miniature 'Bird's Nest', formed by human bodies, was indeed

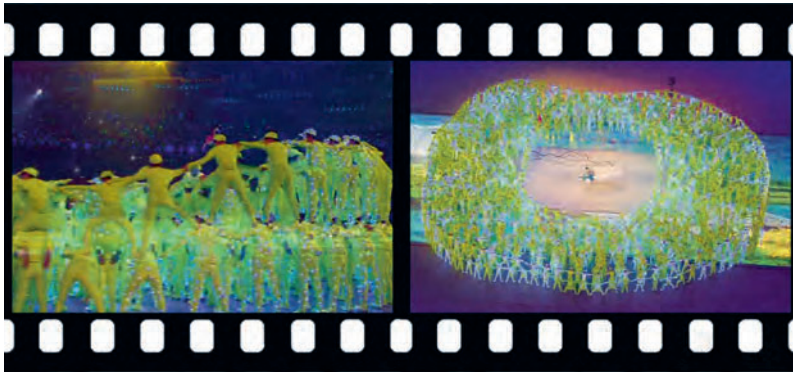


Figure 6.1: Constructing a Stable Stadium and a Stable Society. Images assembled from screenshots of online footage.

a metaphor for constructing a united, national, harmonious society (minute 61):

The people dressed in green have set up a green Bird's Nest for us, bathed in starlight, and in a flash this green Bird's Nest becomes glittering and translucent, and delicately beautiful. On the picture scroll, scenes from all around present-day China unfold before our eyes, transmitting the abundant confidence of contemporary society in setting up a harmonious scene in which the people live and work in peace and contentment.

绿衣使者为我们搭建起绿色的鸟巢星光流转，绿色鸟巢瞬间变得晶莹剔透、精致美丽。画卷之上展现出中国大江南北的时代风貌，传递着丰富的现代社会信心，构建出一幅人民安居乐业的和谐景象。

Finally, harmony extended to self-cultivation practices and individual responsibilities, represented for instance by the Taiji performances and the children studying how to personally protect the environment. While relatively muted during the opening ceremony, the neoliberal implications of this dimension of the discourse would later return more forcefully during other events, especially in the Shanghai Expo's hypermodernist discourses (see below).

Connected through the tropes of Confucian heritage, the organisers of the opening ceremony brought these elements together as a whole that lent itself to creative, ideological work. The Olympic opening ceremony

conceptualised harmony as an ideology that extends from the much evoked 'One World' all the way to the individual.

Interestingly, the performances followed a script that seems to have taken its cues from the arguments of contemporary Chinese philosopher Zhao Tingyang (2005: 89-90 & 107) that I have discussed above: that all realms of social interaction should be viewed as transitively governed by the same conservative principles. It is hard to say whether the ceremony organisers were influenced by Zhao directly, or whether each party arrived independently at similar interpretations, possibly informed by the push that the Hu-Wen administration had been making in this very direction as it rediscovered Confucian tradition for its own governing purposes. The result is nevertheless a comprehensive reimagining of how a perceived Confucian political category like *he* (和) might connect with contemporary governance in the PRC, and how such a term might come to mean harmony at home while at the same time implying a harmonious (read: peaceful) agenda abroad.

6.3 From peaceful rise to peaceful development

Under Hu's leadership, the state had generally been refocusing its foreign policy directives for some time, abandoning an earlier focus on the ill-phrased 'peaceful rise' concept (see Suettinger 2004 and Glaser & Medeiros 2007), which had arguably evoked too many orientalist 'yellow scare' associations of China resembling a waking dragon or rising leviathan. At the time of the administration's three flagship spectacles (Olympics, anniversary, expo), the central authorities had been well on their way towards a more benevolent-sounding discourse of mutual peace and prosperity, and at that point the recognisable tropes on 'peace' and 'harmony' (*he* 和) blended neatly with earlier policy directives such as the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. These five principles date back to 1954 (see Panda 2014 for a discussion), and they encompass the following (Xinhua 2015):

1. mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity,
2. mutual non-aggression,
3. non-interference in each other's internal affairs,
4. equality and mutual benefit, and
5. [somewhat tautologically] peaceful coexistence.

The Olympics opening ceremony of 2008 already suggested that ‘harmony’ should stand for world peace, and that the PRC would generally strive to achieve such peace, due to the presumably innate cultural heritage of Confucianism. The commitment to peace was built into the performances through symbols such as white doves, foreigners performing alongside Chinese actors, images of foreign children, and ultimately the large globe used during the final segment of the ceremony (Figure 6.2).

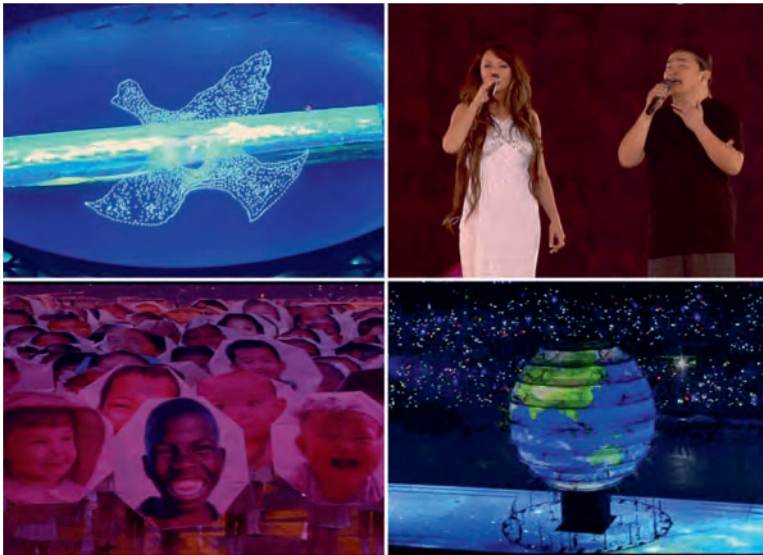


Figure 6.2: Symbols of Global Peace at the Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony. Images assembled from screenshots of online footage.

During that segment, the singers Sarah Brightman and Liu Huan stood atop the globe, holding hands, and singing in Chinese and English:

Come together,
Put your hand in mine.
You and Me,
From one world,
We are family.

来吧！朋友，
伸出你的手，

我和你，
心连心，
永远一家人。

The event connected a cosmopolitan discourse on world unity and peace to the idea of China as an inherently harmonious nation-state, and it did so in no uncertain terms, for both domestic and foreign audiences. Examples of this are the official materials and commentaries that accompanied the event. The English-language media guide for foreign journalists explained the concluding elements of the 'Writing' segment, with its display of peach blossoms, as 'romantic and enjoyable, adequately demonstrating the sweet wish of peace-loving Chinese people' (BOCOG 2008a: 33), and the Chinese-language CCTV commentary at that moment in the proceedings (minute 38) concluded that the multitude of blossoms

...instantly transports people into a spring-flower-filled, harmonious peach blossom garden paradise that expresses the Chinese people's heartfelt, glorious desire for peace.

让人们瞬间置身于满园春色和谐的桃花仙境表达中国人热爱和平的美好心愿。

Such statements about harmony as peace informed China's networked spectacles in general, but arguably the most provocative example of how official actors deployed the concept to creatively shift political discourse was the 60th anniversary military parade. During that event, the military equipment was reframed as part of the contemporary agenda for peaceful development. Hu Jintao set the stage for this understanding with his speech, which mentioned 'harmony' three times and 'peace' eight times. The national broadcaster CCTV then expanded on the theme by framing the military parade for domestic audiences and systematically de-emphasised the potential for violence that the armed forces might represent. Instead, the anchors cast the troops and weaponry as tools for peace. This was no small feat, considering that the state was rolling weapons of mass destruction across Tiananmen Square (Figure 6.3).

To sell the PLA as a force for peace, the announcers deployed an arsenal of flowery phrases and euphemistic metaphors, interlinked with 'watch words' that flagged the PRC's policy stance. Take the example of the People's Armed Police (PAP), a paramilitary security division tasked,



Figure 6.3: A High-Tech Force for Peace and Harmony. Images assembled from screenshots of online footage.

among other things, with quelling any potential domestic unrest by force (see Cheung 1996 for an introduction). CCTV (2009: time stamp 0:58:40) explained that PAP's duties were to 'uphold national security and social stability, and guarantee that the people can live and work in peace and contentment' (维护了国家安全和社会稳定, 保障人民安居乐业). The station's anchor then went on to make the case that:

The officers and men of the armed police use their limitless loyalty and selfless respect for the party and the people to make society harmonious and the people happy by propping up a peaceful sky.

武警官兵用对党, 对人民的无限忠诚和无私奉献, 为社会和谐, 人民幸福撑起一片安宁的天空。

Harmony here becomes coterminous with social stability (*shehui wending* 社会稳定), and it comes to serve as an indirect justification for the frequently harsh law-and-order agenda of the Chinese state (see Trevaskes 2012 for a discussion). During later segments, as the parade moved on to heavier military equipment, the announcers shifted this focus on 'harmony' from a domestic context to the international stage,

for instance commenting on the PLA navy's formations by reminding viewers of the navy's involvement in United Nations peacekeeping missions (CCTV 2009: time stamp 1:14:00):

A formation of navy vessels joined several dozen countries from all five continents to carry out escort missions in Somalian waters in the Gulf of Aden, showing the world a positive image as our country took on the responsibilities of a Great Power, making an important contribution to constructing harmonious seas and safeguarding the world's peaceful development.

海军舰艇编队出访五大洲几十个国家，赴亚丁湾索马里海域执行护航任务，向世界展示了我国负责任大国的良好形象，为建设和谐海洋、维护世界和平发展作出了重要贡献。

This claim to Great Power status was a common feature of the parade's discourse, as was the commitment to a multipolar world order based on national sovereignty. A particularly intriguing statement that drew these elements together accompanied the display of the PLA's nuclear weapons (CCTV 2009, time stamp 1:22:44):

China has always pursued a policy that rejects a first strike with nuclear weapons, insisting on a nuclear self-defence strategy and not entering into a nuclear arms race with any other country. China is a responsible Great Power that will certainly contribute its strength in the service of world peace and development.

中国始终奉行不首先使用核武器的政策，坚持自卫防御的核战略，不与任何国家进行核军备竞赛。中国作为一个负责任的大国，一定能为世界的和平与发展贡献自己的力量。

CCTV thus followed the same arguments as other official media outlets, which framed the event in terms of peaceful development and responsible Great Power behaviour. For English-speaking audiences, outlets like the China Daily (2009) or Xinhua News (2009e) made this case, with Xinhua (2009b) quoting the military parade's director Fang Fenghui to disambiguate the display of weapons in the following way:

Fang said the formation of the phalanxes shows the ongoing transformation of the PLA from a labour-intensive force to a technology-intensive one and its ability to carry out diverse military missions. He said the military parade will 'showcase PLA's firm determination to safeguard national security and interests and maintain world peace.'

Through the official media, state actors thus attempted to calibrate the military discourse in terms of technological advances within the military, treating the display of weapons as a necessary reflection of the changing role the armed forces played in a multipolar world. In this sense, the military parade generated an opportunity for domestic viewers to identify with the imagined community of the nation and feel pride for its achievements while at the same time framing that identification process through the lens of harmony and peace. Somewhat counter-intuitively, the military display was not about military might, despite arguments in the foreign press to the contrary (e.g. Dyer & Anderlini 2009). It was about national unity and a moral imperative to promote peace, designed by the Hu-Wen administration as part of its ideological work to define the meaning of a harmonious society at home and of a harmonious world abroad.

6.4 Reinterpreting the classics

The discussion so far has already illustrated the high degree of creativity required to reprogramme discourses during China's networked spectacles and fit pre-modern concepts like 'harmony' into modernist frameworks for making sense of China. The fact that the PRC's cultural governance approach actively sought to involve diverse actors in these processes (see chapter 3) then also meant that this creative work was open to reinterpretation by actors with often differing agendas and assumptions. Some elements of the discourse neatly slotted into the kinds of 'nativist' ethno-epistemologies discussed above; others created meanings that aligned with cosmopolitan ideas about the Chinese past and present. Take the case of the China Pavilion at the Shanghai Expo, which so powerfully served as an official symbol of national glory, while at the same time providing a site for complex semiotic assemblages.

As discussed in chapter 4, the architectural team contextualised its engineering practices by deploying cultural references, and this included citing (in Chinese) classic sources on matters of harmony. In their architectural guide the design team prominently referred to the Confucian *Analects* that also served the designers of the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony as a resource for their meaning-making activities. In one instance, the architectural guide features a painting of Confucius along with a quotation that contains two foundational phrases of the Confucian intellectual tradition, and that appear frequently within the Hu-Wen administration's harmony discourse: *he wei gui* (和为贵) and *he er bu tong* (和而不同). The original quotation in the guide reads (SCAT 2010: 16):

孔子曰：礼之用，和为贵。君子和而不同，小人同而不和。

I will return to the English meaning in a moment, since translating these phrases is by no means straightforward. Interestingly, the architectural guide itself provides only the Chinese original, spelled out in the traditional rendering from right to left, top to bottom, without punctuation marks, but rendered in the simplified character script introduced on the mainland in the 1950s and 1960s (see Figure 6.4). This is a somewhat idiosyncratic choice that on the one hand signals a commitment to historical authenticity (by reproducing the reading direction of ancient scrolls) while on the other hand making the text legible to Chinese audiences who may not be familiar with the traditional character script of the original. The quotation is presented as part of the picture portraying the sage, printed on what looks like aged paper, again suggesting a sense of historicity and serving the creators of the guide to legitimate their interpretation of Chinese antiquity. This is in and of itself a fascinating choice, seeing that the image of the sage has become an object of contemporary political debates, especially in the wake of official attempts to 'standardise' the portrait of Confucius, which in turn is an interesting twist, considering how much of the Confucian tradition was concerned with 'rectifying' names and concepts (see Steinkraus 1980, Tabor 2014).

What, then, can the use of these classic quotations tell us about meaning-making during the design and construction of the China Pavilion? Deciphering the intended meanings behind such use of classic quotations is made more difficult by the fact that classic Chinese is

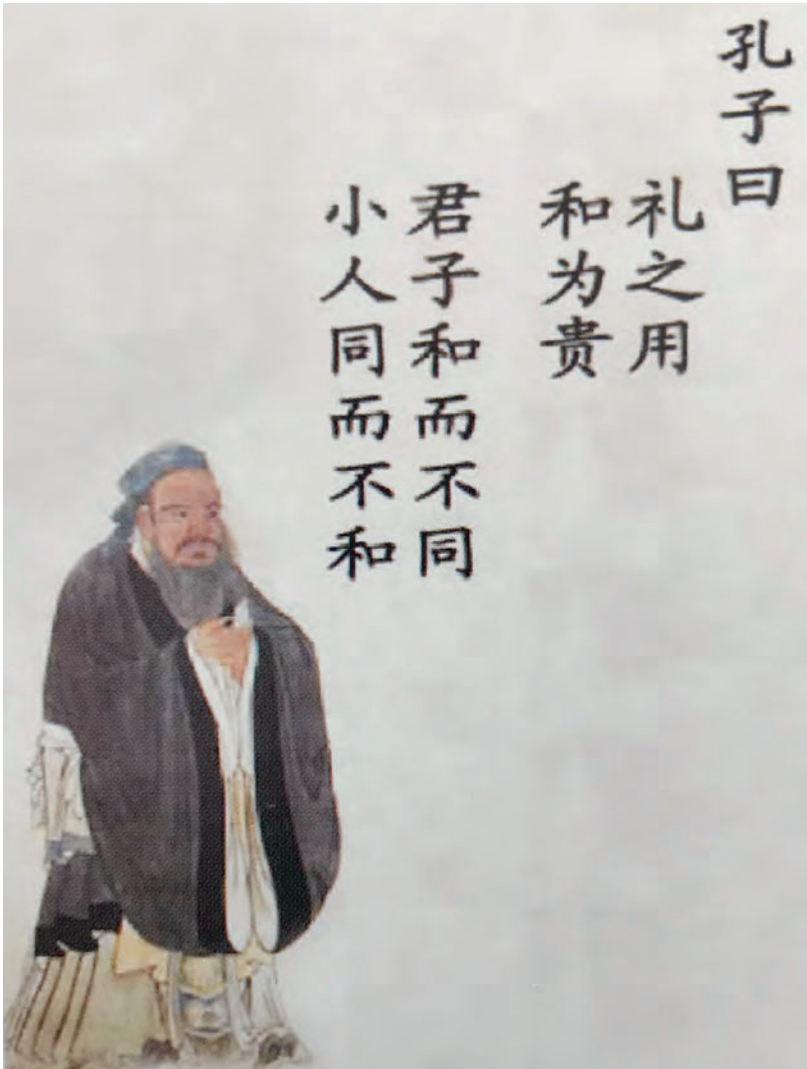


Figure 6.4: Confucian Quotations on Harmony in the Service of Architectural Design (SCAT 2010: 16).

an extremely minimalist and ambiguous language; a fact that to some extent enables precisely the creative translation and blending activities that Chinese actors engage in when they cite classic sources. There are indeed numerous ways to translate quotations from such early materials, whether into contemporary Chinese or foreign languages. A classic translation into English comes from James Legge (1861) and, applied to the text passages that the guidebook contains, the English version would here read:

The Master [Kong] said: In practising the rules of propriety, a natural ease is to be prized. The superior man is affable, but not adulatory; the mean man is adulatory, but not affable.

Legge's somewhat archaic and frequently literal translations are of course also a product of their time: James Legge was a Christian Missionary and Oxford University professor during the Victorian period (see Girardot 2001), and his language choices to some extent reflect this context. Here, Legge's translation draws attention to the fact that the text in the *Analects* was concerned with sagely conduct, and specifically with the question of how to behave in accordance with the principles embodied by pre-modern rituals (li 礼).

It is unlikely that the architectural guide has this reading in mind. The editors have juxtaposed two disparate text fragments from the original source (*Analects* 1:12 & 13:23), implying firstly that these two segments are connected, secondly that both lines were spoken by 'Master Kong', even though the first sentence is actually attributed to a different person, the Confucian disciple Master You (Youzi 有子). This already suggests that the creators of the architectural guide were not concerned with issues of actual historicity or text-immanent coherence, but rather with the core commonality between these text fragments: the character *he* (和). This is also implied by the guide itself, which interprets the China Pavilion as an embodiment of *hexie* (和谐), i.e. 'harmony' (SCAT 2010: 30). It seems plausible that the editors understood the quotation in that context. A more likely translation of the quotation might then be the following, which I have here based on translations that the official broadcaster China Radio International prefers when citing Confucian classics (CRI 2011 & 2014):

Confucius said: In practising the rights, harmony is precious. The superior person aims at harmony but not at uniformity. The mean person aims at uniformity but not at harmony.

Intriguingly, the architectural guide presents these quotations from the *Analects* in juxtaposition with the classic Daoist quotations I mentioned earlier. Again, the authors combine text fragments from two different contexts, in this case quotations from different books, each again dealing with the idea of *he* (和). These sources are the *Dao De Jing* (道德经, section 42.2) and the *Zhuangzi* (outer chapter, 'The Way of Heaven', 13.2). As

was the case with the Confucian quotations, the passages are presented alongside a picture of a sage (presumably Master Lao) on faded paper. The original reads:

老子曰：万物负阴而抱阳，冲气以为和。与人者和者，谓之人乐。与天和者，谓之天乐。

There are again numerous possible translations. For three different authoritative English versions of the first passage see *Dao De Jing* (n/d), and for a translation of the second passage see Legge (1881). I would here suggest the following:

Master Lao said: All things carry the principle Yin and encompass the principle Yang; the principle Qi brings them into harmony. To be in harmony with others is called human happiness; to be in harmony with heaven is called heavenly happiness.

The editors here channel two separate classic sources, by separate philosophers, into a single voice: that of the probably fictitious Daoist sage Laozi, whose role in compiling the famous *Dao De Jing* remained contested throughout history (for discussions see Fairbank & Goldman 2006: 53, Gernet 1972/2002: 93-94, and, in Dutch, Ter Haar 2009: 50). Together with the misattributed Confucius quotations, the architectural guide then produces a rather apocryphal understanding of China's past, but this may be beside the point: the designers and architects here imagine what the building means, using discursive resources that the party and state had highlighted as relevant at the time (see also Penny 2012). While the results may be anachronistic, they allow the actors to frame and legitimate their contemporary strategies of sustainable development, and ultimately to appeal to the state agents who needed to select this project plan and approve its funding. To this end, the design strategy positions the project as a meaningful undertaking by 'flagging' popular pre-modern concepts.

The selective mobilisation of pre-modern statements about 'harmony' also provides the architects with a foundation for then demonstrating their eco-conscious (and technologically-minded) prowess. This includes the use of environmentally-friendly materials and energy-saving techniques like a natural ventilation system, solar panels on the building's roof, a system that harvests rainwater, and an energy management system that

features natural air cooling and energy-efficient plumbing (SCAT 2010: 59), all of which are brought into context with the architectural guide's conception of Confucian and Daoist harmonious living. The producers of this officially approved discourse on the China Pavilion demonstrate how parameters provided by the CCP's leadership, such as the focus on 'harmony', come to be reworked to create contemporary meanings and produce novel discourses, in this case about architecture and engineering.

In the end, these attempts to evoke pre-modern sages has little to do with the classics. Recall the design choice to create a multi-layered colour scheme of red hues that would together form the building's characteristic 'China Red' – a dynamic that the designers' architectural guide explicitly describes as again embodying the famous Confucian phrase *he er bu tong* (和而不同), which the book translates into English as 'harmony in diversity' (SCAT 2010: 45). The government, specifically the municipal Shiboju in Shanghai, has used a similar interpretation in its own official guide to the China Pavilion's exhibits, which clarifies what the propaganda officials at that specific government agency wanted the classic phrase to mean in this context: 'it implies a pluralistic, united, harmonious Chinese civilization' (寓意了多远, 统一, 和谐的中国文化; Shiboju 2010: 127).

The meaning of 'harmony' has here come a long way, from historical arguments that sage-like behaviour might mean that scholars should be agreeable without grovelling, to the contemporary political ideal of China as a society that despite its supposed hierarchical structure encourages diversity and pluralism. Effectively, a set of private and state actors have collaborated to generate political discourse, programming a networked spectacle with their particular cosmopolitan and multicultural interpretation of what 'China' should stand for. Using the China Pavilion as their site of discursive assemblage, and drawing from the approved symbolic resources available at the time, they have blended the input space of pre-modern Confucian meanings with architectural design elements to create an emergent liberal argument about the modern Chinese nation-state as a multicultural society. This illustrates the general degree of conceptual flexibility that characterises political discourses during China's collaboratively produced networked spectacles.

6.5 The logic of urban modernity

The practices I have described so far consisted of attempts to draw from pre-modern Chinese sources to fill the Hu-Wen administration's 'harmonious society' concept with meaning and put it to work in the service of specific modern political projects. It is not my intention to suggest that this strategy only played a role in the context of China's networked spectacles. Osnos (2014), for example, recounts how the Beijing Confucius Temple used CCP slogans to refer to China's pre-modern past and legitimate its own spiritual agenda; he cites the temple's justification for a staged performance that was meant to represent the 'harmonious ideology and harmonious society of the ancient people, which will have a positive influence on the construction of modern harmonious society'. Others have applied the concept of harmony to social and economic matters, for instance Bell and Mo (2014), who have proposed a developmental metric that they explicitly conceptualise as an alternative to US-based Freedom House's index of political and civic liberties in different countries. This measure, which the authors argue is a more holistic indicator of societal wellbeing than its American counterpart, carries the name 'Harmony Index'.

Such appropriation of the CCP's watch words, and in this case of the party's nominally Confucian lingo of harmony, is a frequent feature of Chinese political communication, and I provide additional examples of the ideological drift that this practice encourages in chapter 7. Here, it is worth stressing how the harmony framework connected with modern concerns about economic and social development, captured by the other crucial slogan of the Hu-Wen era: 'scientific development' (*keji fazhan* 科学发展). The PRC's 60th anniversary parade illustrates how official actors juxtaposed their scientific development agenda with the harmonious society idea.

The parade itself was in many ways a stereotypical representation of modern development, anchored firmly in the modern concept of national sovereignty and replete with the recognisable symbols of modernity, such as planes, high-speed trains, cars, and any other human-made artefact with streamlined design that promises to propel its occupants forward (see Figure 6.6). Several floats were explicitly dedicated to such metaphors of progress, for instance the floats on industry and transport. Throughout the pageant, state-led industrial development functioned as an important anchor-point for this iconography.

Particularly blatant cases were the floats that depicted progress in China's various provinces and municipalities, with Beijing, Jilin, Fujian, Sichuan, and Shaanxi each featuring aeroplanes or aerospace technology as part of their presentation, and prominently displaying high-speed trains. It is indeed hard to imagine a more perfect fusion of modernist and traditional concepts than the PRC's bullet trains of 'mark Harmony' (*hexie hao* 和谐号). A particularly interesting example that brought economic development in line with the harmonious society agenda was the Tibet float, which showcased infrastructure projects like highway and tunnel constructions on a large screen, under the title 'Harmonious Tibet'. On CCTV, the commentators clarified for domestic audiences that the float exemplified the 'magical nature and developmental progress of a harmonious Tibet' (神奇自然, 发展进步的和谐西藏).

In a similar way, CCTV clarified for viewers that urban development was a crucial part of the harmonious society agenda. One float, designated 'harmonious homeland' (*hexie jiayuan* 和谐家园), showcased a model 'harmonious community' (*hexie shequ* 和谐社区): an urban skyline under a rainbow with a prominently placed 'service centre' to attend to citizens' administrative needs, a 'district council' for citizen participation, and featuring a phalanx of people in wheelchairs to symbolise the state's care for the elderly and infirm. CCTV's commentary stressed that the authorities had been tirelessly labouring to develop these harmonious communities, which constitute 'the glorious homeland and safe harbour of the masses' (人民群众的美好家园和稳性港湾).

This fusion of urban modernity with Confucian harmony continued a year later, at the Shanghai Expo, but now with more explicit references to pre-modern precedents as actors set out to programme the event's discourses about economic sustainability and modern living. The feature films were an example of this, particularly the Confucian-themed film *Harmonious China*, which presented scenes of predominantly urban living under the banner of its three Confucius quotations, including the popular phrase *he er bu tong* (和而不同). Another example was the pavilion's display of ancient artefacts. The guidebook to the China Pavilion's core exhibition makes it clear that a set of these items were meant to illustrate the 'urban economy and citizen's life' (城市经济与市民生活; Shiboju 2010: 80). Describing urban development during the Song Dynasty, the guidebook concludes (*ibid.*):

From ancient times to the present, the appearance of the city has undergone huge changes, but throughout the Chinese people's wish for a harmonious life has not changed.

从古到今的城市面貌发生了巨大的变化，但中国人对和谐生活的诉求始终没有改变。

In the pavilion, this connection between ancient wisdom and contemporary urbanisation was most powerfully presented in the form of the ingeniously animated Qingming Scroll. This 120-metre-wide installation reproduced the urban landscape of the original scroll, but embedded with looped narrative arcs for the multitude of activities that the original depicted. Animated citizens buy wine, ride carts, chase pigs, and pilot boats along the river, and these dynamics loop endlessly through a day-night cycle. As Chow (2012) points out, the design choice itself reflects a commitment to the kind of holistic perspective associated with Daoist thought. His description of the artwork (*ibid.*: 184) echoes the arguments about ritualistic entrainment, embodied participation, and emergent meanings I discussed earlier:

...for spectators, these dynamics are so intricate that the interaction between various impulses can only be perceived collectively. The final image projected to spectators is still full of energy, but it is definitely not the result of a single dominant impulse. The phenomenon again is comparable to the emergent motion of a flock of birds or a school of fish, in which each animate entity is simultaneously steering toward local members of the flock and away from overcrowding.

The exhibit designers made an intriguing choice to illustrate the expo's theme 'better city, better life' by using such a high-tech version of a pre-modern artwork. Indeed, much of the artwork's content is used to extrapolate a continuous tradition of harmonious urbanism that extends to the present. The deputy director of the Shanghai Expo, Zhou Hanmin, made this case in a speech that contextualised this exhibit (Zhou 2012):

What visitors appreciate in the animation painting is that so many people could get along with each other so harmoniously. The

harmony and peace depicted by the painting is the epitome of the 5,500-year long Chinese civilisation.

Aside from suggesting that contemporary Chinese urbanism is a direct extension of ancient Chinese practices, and that it is consequently fuelled by a desire for harmony, the organisers also used the Song Dynasty, and specifically the famous Qingming Scroll, as a resource to make discursive statements about what they felt the nature of modern Chinese urbanism should be. It was in this context that the organisers redeploy the symbolic resources of antiquity to generate novel discourses that envisaged urban life as a function of the market economy.

The guidebook to the exhibit, for instance, covers the original painting in four double-page spreads (Shiboju 2010: 48-55), in each case reproducing a section of the scroll and flanking it with annotations that explain various activities related to three topical areas: the city (*cheng* 城), the market (*shi* 市), and the suburb (*jiao* 郊). In the 'city' section, the guidebook points out examples of money exchange and of early advertising, followed by two double-pages dedicated to 'the market', which highlight examples of commerce and trade, for example store signs and shipping activities. One explanation reads (*ibid.*: 50):

The Song era's handicraft industry was already highly developed. Many workshops and manufactures appeared, along with an abundance of categories. [The industry's] division of labour was deep and the scope was large. At the time, the 20,000 or more merchants of Bianjing [today's city of Kaifeng] were classified into 160 professions.

宋时的手工业已很发达，出现了手工业作坊和工场，且门类多，分工细、规模大。当时汴京的两万多商户，分数一百六十行。

The use of phrases like 'division of labour', along with the repeated emphasis on commerce and trade, push a discourse of market-economic activity onto these representations. Before this backdrop, it is intriguing that the guidebook would choose a quotation from the notoriously obscure classic *The Book of Changes* (*Yi Jing* 易经, sections Qian 1.1 and Kun 2.1) to usher in its discussion of the animated scroll (Shiboju 2010: 44); in this context, that quotation might be interpreted loosely as follows:

Heaven is in constant motion. The superior person applies themselves ceaselessly;
 The earth is strong. The superior person takes charge of all things through great virtue.
 天行健，君子以自强不息；
 地势坤，君子以厚德载物。

What emerges from these exhibits and explanations is a capitalist discourse that associated virtuous behaviour with industrious, urban activity, and that justifies this understanding in pre-modern readings of philosophy and art, idiosyncratic as those readings may be.

6.6 Sustaining the future of modernity

The revival of pre-modern concepts is then indeed not necessarily about the past, but rather about how to design the future, as Dirlik (2011c: 4) has also pointed out. Networked spectacles serve as exceptional spaces that allow various actors to play with ethno-epistemologies to extrapolate utopian visions of the future (see Jameson 2007), and in the case of the Shanghai expo this included official attempts to envisage a hypermodern techno-utopia. To paraphrase Dirlik, this was no alternative to modernity, but it was an alternative modernity. Hubbert (2017: 51) rightly points this out when she writes that the official Chinese expo narratives did not locate ‘tradition as antithetical to modernity’ but ‘instead wed cultural history and heritage to economic growth and technological advancement to offer tradition as a prescription for addressing modernity’s putative hazards’.

For instance, many of the installations on the China Pavilion’s third exhibition floor, which promoted sustainable development, were steeped in optimism that scientific progress would solve the woes of the planet. These problems were presented as urgent, but ultimately as manageable through technology. This was a scientific, solutionist approach to politics, one that was interested in fighting the symptoms of modernity but not their causes.

In that vein, the exhibits relied heavily on flowcharts and other visual representations that implied that society might be a machine that had to be fine-tuned for efficiency. Visitors could ‘calibrate’ some of these processes themselves, ‘by touching digital display screens’ and manipulating

‘parameters such as commuting distance and mode of commute to obtain a calculation of their daily carbon footprint’ (Wallis & Balsamo 2016: 43). An extreme example of the mechanistic understanding that the exhibits communicated is the process charts with which the guidebook explains the idea of a ‘smart energy network’, which in Chinese is called a ‘general capacity network’ (*fan neng wang* 泛能网). The flow chart (Shiboju 2010: 104) has at its centre the ‘Energy Efficiency Controller’, which connects various energy production and storage processes through computer relays to three specific domains: housing, transport, and industry. The graphic lists the ‘biogas, wind, solar, nuclear, and clean coal’ energy sources, and it espouses a ‘synergistic optimization across supply and demand sides of various energy forms’. This is the Chinese-language explanation that accompanies the image:

The general capacity network is based on the technology of energy-efficient systems; it applies capacity and information coupling in the four sectors of energy production, storage, usage, and recycling, and it forms real-time synergies between energy inputs and outputs that cut across time and space; in this manner, it realises optimisation and capacity efficiency throughout the full life cycle of the system; its energy-efficient operating system balances all changes in the flow of energy supply and demand, exploits each step, and optimises time and space, and in this way maximises systematic energy efficiency; ultimately, its output is a kind of self-organising, high-level, systematic smart energy source that is highly efficient.

泛能网基于系统能效技术，通过能源生产、储运、应用于回收四环节中能量和消息的耦合，形成能量输入和输出跨时域的实时协同，从而实现系统全生命周期的最优化和能量的增效，能效控制系统则对各能量流进行供需转换匹配，梯级利用，时空优化，以达到系统能效的最大化，最终输出一种自组织的高度有序的高效智能能源。

It is telling how strongly this short text relies on words like ‘optimise’ and ‘efficient’; this is a view of systems that is borne out of mechanistic, industrial-age understandings of complexity. It extends Taylorist and Fordist visions of efficient control to the 21st century (see Smith 2016: 207 and Vidal 2016), selling these ideas to the audiences as solutions rather

than problematising them as factors that potentially contributed to the issues these systems are now meant to solve. Note, for instance, how consumerism and industrial production are simply taken for granted as economic realities rather than being an object of critical discussion. The question is not how to rethink the nature of human energy consumption, but how to maintain past patterns of energy consumption under new conditions, so as to ensure economic growth through continuous consumption.

Indeed, the pavilion and its exhibits presented a largely unquestioned, rationalist, and frequently neoliberal narrative of urbanised, industrialised modernity that fits neatly into the tradition of mass events like world expositions, with their modernist discourses, and it is telling that the official Shanghai Expo theme also reflected this focus, at least in the Chinese original. Whereas the organisers translated the event's slogan into English as 'better city, better life', a more accurate translation of the Chinese slogan would be 'cities: making life even better' (城市, 让生活更美好). The logic encapsulated in the phrase was that, if only modern urbanisation continued, prosperity would follow naturally.

This modernist discourse was further married to the strong sense that when it came to leading a 'low carbon' life and achieving 'measured consumption', responsibility lay squarely with individual citizens. As the guidebook explains (Shiboku 2010: 109):

Let every single citizen take action. To start with ourselves, to start with the little things, start now, and to start with what is next to us, is to positively participate in energy conservation and the reduction of carbon emissions, and to make our own contribution to the country's energy conservation and carbon emission targets. [Let us] together create a thriftier, cleaner, and more civilised sustainable glorious life.

让我们每一个公民行动起来，从我做起、从点滴着手、从现在做起、从身边做起，积极参与节能减排，为实现国家的节能减排目标作出自己的贡献。共同创造更加节约、更加洁净、更加文明的可持续的美好生活。

In the guidebook, this explanation accompanies an illustration of the ideal low-carbon day (ibid.: 108), which provides readers with everyday solutions to environmental problems: taking showers instead of baths,

switching from cars to bicycles, taking the stairs rather than the lift, going to bed earlier to save electricity, etc. In the pavilion itself, this focus on individual action reappeared in calls to recycle waste and avoid harmful consumer products like plastic bags.

My point here is not that these understandings of society and economics are fallacious, though it is worth pointing out that they have been criticised severely for only redressing and restating the foundational problems of modernity in modernist terms, rather than providing serious alternatives to modern modes of living, producing, consuming, and organising (see, for instance, Graeber 2011). My point is that the overarching discourse of harmony provided organisers at the Shanghai Expo with a framework for imagining Chinese modernity, and that among official actors in Shanghai this entailed tying narratives of industrial progress to a neoliberal discourse that placed individual responsibility at the core of sustainable development visions.

6.7 Conclusion

Throughout China's networked spectacles, pre-modern Chinese philosophy has served official actors as an important input space for making sense of modern society, politics, and economics. Extending the longstanding practices of reinterpreting ancient classics, the cadres, media workers, architects, designers, advertisers, and other actors involved in staging these large-scale spectacles filled the official slogans of the Hu-Wen era with meaning and deployed them as part of their own projects. What emerged from such activities was often a conservative, nativist discourse about the supposed timelessness of authoritarian, elitist governance practices in China, but it also included liberal, cosmopolitan statements about the value of pluralism, coated in the veneer of tradition to legitimate progressive arguments. In this, the discursive activities at China's networked spectacles were not much different from the practices that have long driven the quests for meaning in Chinese 'national studies'.

Such creative reinterpretations of antiquity in the service of modern political projects arguably played fast and loose with the source materials, which were hardly concerned with issues like multiculturalism, environmental protection, nuclear deterrence, neoliberal efficiency, or other similarly anachronistic topics. In that sense, these interpretations of Chinese antiquity departed noticeably from their historical templates.

At the same time, they also departed from the contemporary official discourses that the authorities were developing. Even among official actors, the 'harmonious society' and 'scientific development' slogans offered conceptual building blocks to promote diverging agendas.

The men and women who were designing Hu Jintao's harmony discourse seem to have been favouring interpretations that emphasised order and hierarchy (see also Penny 2012), and this stream of ideological work integrated Confucian quotations into a neo-authoritarian vision of contemporary China. Other actors, for instance the designers and architects of the China Pavilion, skilfully referred to this network of meanings but did not simply echo the same interpretations. Through the language of official discourse, these actors assembled specific statements about the sort of 'harmony' that they thought the China Pavilion should stand for, in this case reframing potentially hierarchical understandings of harmony through the use of liberal ideas about diversity and sustainable development.

The Shanghai authorities in charge of the expo and the China Pavilion's exhibitions adopted a similar discourse to that of the pavilion designers in their public-relations materials, explaining China's Confucian heritage to domestic audiences in terms such as unity and plurality, but also extending it to legitimate a neoliberal developmental agenda that sat uneasily next to the more egalitarian propaganda work of the central authorities. In this way, designers and local administrators participated in the contemporary reimagining of China, contributing to the ongoing discourse of what Chinese society might stand for in the 21st century. As the next chapter will show, the horizon of meanings became wider yet as the PRC's cultural governance switched non-official actors into the social interactions that defined its networked spectacles.