



CONSUMING WILDLIFE - MANAGING DEMAND FOR PRODUCTS IN THE WILDLIFE TRADE

Perspective



Targeted values: The relevance of classical Chinese philosophy for illegal wildlife demand reduction campaigns

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Abstract

1. The illegal wildlife trade is a global conservation priority, prompting a rise in interventions aimed at reducing the demand for wildlife products. Research shows that designing campaigns to target the values held by a specific audience is an effective way to alter their behaviour. However, many demand reduction campaigns are grounded in the perspective of Western morality. This is problematic when the recipients of these campaigns frequently reside in East Asia, where they are exposed to the historical and cultural praxis of Confucianism and Daoism.
2. This paper examines some of the central concepts of classical Chinese philosophy to see how they could be used by practitioners to design effective behaviour change campaigns in the future. Acknowledging that the East Asian cultural sphere has a long history of consumptive wildlife use, reflecting an instrumentalist and anthropocentric approach to wildlife, we still find potential for appealing to a relational ethic. There is a fundamental metaphysics that all of nature is unified, interconnected and interpenetrating. *Qi* is the vital force of the universe that links inorganic, organic and human life-forms, creating the basis for a profound reciprocity between humans and the natural world.
3. We also consider some of the key virtues in Chinese philosophy, and how they could be interpreted through the lens of demand reduction for illegal wildlife products. This includes *li*, ritual propriety, and *ren*, the inner moral force which keeps us in balance. Finally, we cover influential scriptures, identifying many historical verses that are relevant to modern conservationists.

KEYWORDS

China, conservation social science, consumer research, demand reduction, illegal wildlife trade, philosophy

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1 | INTRODUCTION

As with most environmental problems, unsustainable trade in wildlife products is a result of human actions (Amel, Manning, Scott, & Koger, 2017; Green, Crawford, Williamson, & DeWan, 2019). This is a global conservation priority and one of the largest and most lucrative international crimes, affecting an estimated 18% of vertebrate species (Rosen & Smith, 2010; Scheffers, Oliveira, Lamb, & Edwards, 2019). To combat the illegal wildlife trade, there is increasing interest in changing the behaviour of end consumers in the trade chain through demand reduction interventions (Verissimo & Wan, 2018). Correspondingly, there is also increasing recognition of the central importance of the social sciences and humanities to conservation, knowledge of which are essential in devising strategies to influence human behaviour (Bennett et al., 2017; Reddy et al., 2017; Teel et al., 2018).

Tailoring messages to a specific audience, rather than using a 'one size fits all' approach, is a key lesson from past research on effective behaviour change strategies (Kotler & Lee, 2011). Current illegal wildlife product demand reduction interventions rarely attempt to segment audiences, but when they do the most common approach is to classify people by demographic variables such as age and gender (Greenfield & Verissimo, 2018). However, populations may also be subdivided according to shared psychographic characteristics, such as their personality, values and motivations, an approach that has been of great use in public health (Boslaugh, Kreuter, Nicholson, & Naleid, 2005; Lin, 2002). Practitioners may not realize that the way in which they have framed their messages will limit the target audience to only those who hold certain values. A study of environmental communications in America found that the moral framing was relatively narrow, focusing mainly on Western liberal values (Feinberg & Willer, 2013). This could reflect the lack of cultural diversity among employees of environmental organizations, and unintentionally alienate non-liberal audiences (Taylor, 2015). Making a conscious effort to reframe moralization in environmental discourse can reduce political polarization in conservation attitudes (Feinberg & Willer, 2013). For example, expanding the type of values that are appealed to in climate change campaigns to include those held by American conservatives can greatly increase their effectiveness (Wolsko, Ariceaga, & Seiden, 2016).

If conservation campaigns are usually approached from the perspective of Western morality, whether consciously or not, this could limit their impact in different cultures. Furthermore, interventions that are culturally insensitive can potentially damage trust and credibility with stakeholders (Margulies, Wong, & Duffy, 2019; Smith, 2018). The East Asian cultural sphere is a primary destination market for many wildlife products such as rosewood, ivory and pangolin scales, and as such has been the target of many demand reduction interventions (UNODC, 2016; Verissimo & Wan, 2018). One recent campaign was carried out by WildAid in China to reduce demand for shark fin, which is consumed as a luxury food item. Structured on moral persuasion, this campaign enlisted celebrities

like Yao Ming (a sports celebrity) to convey WildAid's global message that 'when the buying stops, the killing can too', aiming to influence individual consumer choices. While the campaign was able to inspire the rollout of other shark protection campaigns across the country, its core message did not resonate with most mainland Chinese consumers because it did not fully account for the social dynamics involved with shark fin consumption and the limitation of choices available to individual recipients of hospitality (Jeffreys, 2016).

Considering the clear differences, historic and current, between the West and Chinese-influenced societies, understanding the cultural context in which future demand reduction interventions take place is vital. Despite moves towards a more communitarian ethic, the contemporary West is still steeped in an Enlightenment mentality (Tu, 1998a). Western society has inherited a Greek philosophical emphasis on rationality, the biblical image of man having 'dominion' over the earth and a Protestant work ethic (Callicott, 2015; Tu, 1998a). Although the spiritual landscape of industrial East Asia has certainly been altered by Westernization, particularly positive attitudes towards mercantilism, commercialism and international competitiveness, it is still heavily influenced by the historical and cultural praxis of Confucianism and Daoism (Tu, 1998a).

While Chinese consumers desire Western status goods, their reaction to commercial advertisements is mediated by the degree to which the ads evoke Chinese cultural values (Zhou & Belk, 2004). Appealing to the dominant cultural values is a strategy that has been widely adopted by the marketing industry (Cheong, Kim, & Zheng, 2010; Lin, 2001). Appreciation for this approach extends beyond the commerce sector. Other fields have already been successful in incorporating aspects of traditional Chinese culture into behavioural change interventions, including smoking cessation, blood donation and menstrual hygiene practices (Huang et al., 2014; Su & Lindell, 2016; Yu, Holroyd, Cheng, & Fai Lau, 2013). Indeed, the majority of public service advertisements broadcast on national television are framed by traditional virtues or contemporary socialist core values (Hu, 2019). We are not the first to call for more culturally nuanced approaches to demand reduction in China, and even government leaders have advocated for environmental rhetoric to be framed around traditional Chinese values (Margulies et al., 2019; Miller, 2013). To date, however, there has been little practical guidance on the philosophical concepts and values that may be of use to conservationists.

Chinese culture has a long history of consumptive wildlife use, reflecting an instrumentalist and anthropocentric approach to wildlife (Swan & Conrad, 2014). Its citizens also possess diverse understandings of nature and their relationship to it, sometimes simultaneously (Weller, 2014). This multiplicity of views has in part been influenced by the West, and many are not amenable to a pro-conservation stance. However, by analysing the central concepts of classical Chinese philosophy, we see opportunities for conservation practitioners to design more effective behaviour change campaigns in the future, such as by appealing to a relational ethic. We also consider some of the key virtues in Chinese philosophy, and how they could be interpreted through the lens of demand reduction for illegal wildlife products. These are summarized with

TABLE 1 Summary table of key concepts

Concept	Relevance to demand reduction
<i>Harmony</i> The balance of <i>yinyang</i>	Consider conceptual link between unsustainable use and imbalances. I.E., TCM that threatens rare species and thus harmony between humans and nature may not work
<i>Jian</i> Frugality	Consider promoting the value of frugality, away from purely excessive and self-serving conspicuous consumption. E.g. status-driven purchases such as accessories carved from hornbill casques (Collar, 2015)
<i>Junzi</i> Exemplary person	<i>Junzi</i> could be messengers in campaigns, portrayed by trusted public personas or symbolic role models. Could also relate in the way one is perceived by others in terms of projected image, e.g., reconsidering acts of illegal consumption, or reevaluating perceived pride in feeling beyond the law
<i>Li</i> Ritual propriety	Consider introducing new concepts or evolving the symbolic meanings behind ritual and social acts, customs or habits surrounding wildlife consumption
<i>Qi</i> The material force of the universe	Creates the basis for a profound reciprocity between humans and the natural world. Potential to reinforce the human-nature relationship by highlighting this intimate connection in an artistic sense
<i>Ren</i> Inner moral force, humaneness	Reinforce the concept of connection and unity with nature. Potential to promote benevolence as transcendent beyond humanity, to include wildlife. E.g., incorporating lessons learnt from local stories with spiritual or culturally prominent plant and animal figures
<i>Shu</i> Altruism	Consider campaign concepts or narratives that highlight altruistic behavior across generations or between family members, and reinforce values that look beyond personal gain. E.g. revisiting the wider meaning behind the act of gifting to others
<i>Zhong</i> Conscientiousness	Relates to commitment, whether in fulfilling our duties to others (e.g. by preserving a future with continued sustainable consumption), or to oneself and our own pledges for self-cultivation by following through thoughts of change with visible action or behavior

potential examples in Table 1. Finally, we cover influential scriptures, identifying many historical verses that are relevant to modern conservationists. Although we focus on China, these concepts could be applied to many nearby countries that hold similar beliefs or have a large ethnically Chinese population. By reframing interventions to target local beliefs, we hope to not only increase their effectiveness but also to limit the imposition of ex situ values by foreign conservationists.

2 | RELATIONAL ETHIC

China is one of the largest and most populous nations in the world (United Nations, 2019). Its history reaches back for thousands of years, with varying levels of exposure and influence from different cultures. Care should be taken to avoid overgeneralizations as its population encompasses 56 recognized ethnic groups, and there is a corresponding diversity in beliefs (Ma, 2007; Weller, 2014). However, there are some common elements in the 'three teachings' which have dominated traditional Chinese ideology, Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism (Peng, 2018; Teiser, 1996).

Within these traditions, there is a fundamental metaphysics that all of nature is unified, interconnected and interpenetrating (Grumbine & Xu, 2011; Mei, 1967). This leads to strong potential for a philosophical ecology; a cosmology which recognizes 'a continuity of being' (Tu, 1998b). One mainstream belief among ethnic Chinese is that all life is constituted of *qi* (Traditional Chinese: 氣, Mandarin pinyin: *qi*), the vital force of the universe, linking inorganic, organic and human life-forms (Tu, 1998b). *Qi* is the unifying element of the

cosmos and creates the basis for a profound reciprocity between humans and the natural world (Tucker, 1991). If the natural world is relationally unified rather than just an aggregate of independent entities, a relational ethic emerges (Callicott, 2015). These classical Chinese tenets can be used to promote an anthropocosmic (as opposed to anthropocentric) worldview where by accepting and embracing the inescapable linkages with all things, we may participate fully in the transformative aspects of the universe (Adler, 2014; Tu, 2001). Anthropocosmic resonance means we are in a position of mutual dependence on the broader world (Weller, 2006). *Qi* does not differentiate humanity from the rest of nature, and previous rulers have recognized the need to maintain harmony by appreciating and cultivating our intertwined relationship. Excessive harvesting of rare species is an imbalance that directly affects us.

The urgent need to minimize harmful impacts on wildlife can be seen to derive from the intertwining of nature and human identities (Hassoun & Wong, 2015). Rather than the Judeo-Christian precept of dominion over nature, there is a sense of relational resonance of the human with the cosmos (Li, 2003). Individuals are not autonomous beings, instead our very identities are constituted by our relationship to others, including the natural world (Sun, 1991). This relational conception of the self provides an alternative to the common Western debates in conservation about instrumental and intrinsic values (Adler, 2014; Hourdequin & Wong, 2005). The nonhuman is so implicated in who we are that its having value is a necessary condition of our having value. This provides another rationale that conservationists could appeal to, explaining why Chinese consumers need to respond to imminent extinctions of wildlife species.

3 | KEY CONCEPTS/VIRTUES

Harmony is a central concept within Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism, although interpretations may differ. In Daoism, harmony with the fundamental laws of the universe is the path to returning to the Dao, the Way, the original undifferentiated state (Creel, 1953). Yin and Yang (陰陽, *yīnyáng*) are two forces in constant struggle within everything, but when they reach harmony the energy of life is created (Wang, 2014). When that harmony is disturbed, hardship will fall on humans (Lai, 2001). This could be seen as a philosophical basis to oppose the use of endangered species in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). If powerful *yao* (藥, *yào*; substances to treat diseases) such as tigers or pangolins disappear from nature, then the natural balance of yin and yang in the world is disturbed (Tiquia, 1999). When the world lacks harmony, so does society and the individuals within it. Communicating this concept in a demand reduction campaign could provide a culturally relevant rationale for TCM consumers to practice restraint in their use of endangered species.

An ethos of self-cultivation is present throughout the three teachings, by which virtue can be achieved. Like the dynamism of nature, we must continually strive to cultivate that which is good within us. In this way, we may hope to transcend selfishness, nepotism and even anthropocentrism (Tu, 2001). One of the core values in Chinese culture is *ren* (仁, *rén*; Confucius & Chan, 1963). This is humaneness, the inner moral force keeping each of us in balance (Mei, 1967). It is also often translated as benevolence, or perfect virtue. It is to love universally and accept all as one body (Chan, 1975). Key to *ren* is the development and practice of *zhong* (忠, *zhōng*), conscientiousness, and *shu* (恕, *shù*), altruism (Chan, 1975; Confucius & Chan, 1963). *Zhong* is loyalty, but not just to a particular person (Hsieh, 1967). It is self-devotion, loyalty to doing one's duty the best they can. *Shu* on the other hand is a form of cognitive empathy or sympathetic understanding, a deference to the needs of others. If through *zhong* we seek to develop our own character, by *shu* we may help establish the characters of others (Chan, 1975).

Although not as central to the cultivation of harmony, another relevant virtue is *jian* (儉, *jián*) or frugality. The renunciation of material wealth is an important aspect of Buddhism, and Confucians are supposed to prefer thriftiness over extravagance (Gao, 2018; Kieschnick, 2003). Frugality influences Chinese people's daily consumption behaviours and promotes a more sustainable lifestyle (Roiland, 2016; Yau & Davies, 2015). Indeed, a nationwide public service announcement called 'Mengwa' (梦娃, a personification of Chinese dream) promotes thriftiness as one of seven key virtues in China (Wu & Luo, 2019). Continuing on from this work, conservationists could encourage citizens to reject a culture of Western-influenced conspicuous consumption, and cultivate frugality by refraining from excessive status-driven purchases such as accessories carved from hornbill casques (Collar, 2015).

Finally, we come to *li* (禮, *lǐ*) or ritual propriety. This is both a virtue in itself and a means of achieving virtuosity. It is a form of moral etiquette that governs our behaviour in formal and informal situations. By faithfully following *li*, being good becomes second nature

and we can establish harmony (Confucius & Chan, 1963). However, it is not just the blind perpetuation of old rituals as it is recognized that customs can evolve. Practitioners should consider how to address rituals surrounding wildlife consumption, for example, gifting rhino horn as a sign of respect amongst businessmen (Vu & Nielsen, 2018). *Shu* is relevant again here, as it permits the flexibility to contravene role-specific duties or customs (Confucius & Slingerland, 2001). This approach has been used successfully in a 2009 mass media campaign conducted in China, 'Giving Cigarettes is Giving Harm' (Huang et al., 2014). The campaign challenged the common practice of gifting cigarettes to maintain interpersonal relationships by equating the proffered cigarettes with omens portending future diseases. Concern for the wellbeing of others, stimulated by graphic imagery of diseased organs, prompted viewers to reconsider a socially ingrained and respected practice.

The truly virtuous can be called *junzi* (君子, *jūnzǐ*), a noble or exemplary person that we should aspire to be like (Hourdequin & Wong, 2005; Tucker, 1991). They are a kind of moral paradigm, leading others to act well by example. This concept is often promoted to the business sector in China as a way to achieve a positive corporate image, through displays of good business practice and ethics (Woods & Lamond, 2011). Conservationists could also feature *junzi*, the embodiment of *ren*, in demand reduction campaigns to frame the proposed behaviour change as a positive stride towards an ideal. Appeals from blood banks in China have featured respectable role models such as state leaders for this very purpose (Yu et al., 2013). Imagery of these idols reminds people that voluntary blood donation is a 'great and glorious' behaviour. Citizens are encouraged to follow their example and contribute to public altruism by donating blood.

One very well-designed intervention which demonstrated several of the concepts presented here was the 2014 Chi campaign, conducted by TRAFFIC in Vietnam. Informed by the extensive market research, this campaign aimed to reduce demand for rhino horn among affluent consumers. It used multimedia channels and the support of influential business leaders to motivate sector elites, and reinforce the embodiment of 'Chi' (*Qi*) in corporate best practice (Offord-Wooley, 2017). Key messages emphasized that success, masculinity and good fortune are derived from individual displays of strong character, rather than conspicuous consumption or gifting of rhino horn. In this way, the campaign was able to present positive cultural ideals without directly challenging established gifting practices, or upsetting ritual propriety (*li*). Instead, companies were encouraged to embrace the *junzi* concept through their actions with commitments to corporate social responsibility for environmental protection, and by modelling exemplary behaviour change to existing networks and peers (Offord-Wooley, 2017).

4 | INFLUENTIAL SCRIPTURES

There have been many classical scholars throughout Chinese history whose works are still influential today. Some of these verses are very relevant to modern conservationists, and we consider a selection of

them below. We are not suggesting that they should be explicitly quoted, but their ethos can be used to inform the design of targeted campaigns to reduce consumption of illegal wildlife products. For in the words of Sun Zi (孫子, *Sūn Zǐ*), ancient Chinese strategist, 'if you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles' (Sun, 1910). Demand reduction is not a military campaign between enemies, but it is still vital to understand the communities we hope to change. Conservationists will not be able to develop effective messaging strategies without a clear understanding of their values and motivations.

Scholars frequently emphasized the lack of fundamental distinctions between humans and other beings. For instance, Wang Yangming (王陽明, *Wáng Yángmíng*; 1472–1529) dwelled on this in his *Inquiry on the Great Learning*:

The great man regards Heaven and Earth and the myriad things as one body. He regards the world as one family and the country as one person. As to those who make a cleavage between objects and distinguish between self and others, they are small men. That the great man can regard Heaven, Earth and the myriad things as one body is not because he deliberately wants to do so, but because it is natural to the humane nature of his mind that he do so. (Wang & Chan, 1963)

This sense of humanity that extends beyond the individual becomes the source of great benevolence (*ren*) for all, a necessary part of being a *junzi*. For instance, Zhou Dunyi (周敦頤, *Zhōu Dūnyí*; 1017–1073), a pioneer of Neo-Confucianism, supposedly refused to cut the grass in front of his window as he believed their feelings and lives were one and the same (Hao & Chan, 1963). As Mencius (孟子, *Mèng Zǐ*; 4th century BCE), often referred to as the second sage after Confucius (孔子, *Kǒng Zǐ*), said:

As for the relation of gentlemen to birds and beasts, if they see them living, they cannot bear to see them die. If they hear their cries, they cannot bear to eat their flesh. (Meng & VanNorden, 2001)

A final teaching of relevance is the need for moderation. This is a common theme for Lao Zi (老子, *Lǎo Zǐ*; 6th century BCE), the founder of philosophical Daoism, who wrote 'I have three treasures. Guard and keep them! The first is deep love, the second is frugality, and the third is not to dare be ahead of the world' (Li & Ivanhoe, 2001). Xun Zi (荀況, *Xún Kuàng*; 298–238 BCE), although a strong proponent for the control of nature, feared the limitless greed for material goods that is human nature in its natural state (Hourdequin & Wong, 2005; Puett & Gross-Loh, 2016). He warned:

People who are influenced by teachers and laws, accumulate literature and knowledge, and follow propriety and righteousness are superior men, whereas those

who give rein to their feelings, enjoy indulgence, and violate propriety and righteousness are inferior men. (Tzu & Chan, 1963)

Satisfaction can only be achieved by the limitation of our desires, a lesson that could clearly also be applied to excessive consumption of wildlife products (Hourdequin & Wong, 2005).

5 | LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

It is important that while seeking to understand the influence of classical Chinese values, we also recognize and study the changing nature of contemporary Chinese culture and philosophy. Throughout the turbulent 20th Century and increasing globalization, other ideologies such as Marxism have had a significant impact (Foster, 2015; Peng, 2018). There are significant generational gaps in value orientation, with older generations being more influenced by the traditional ideologies (Sun & Wang, 2010). This may mean that framing demand reduction campaigns in line with traditional values will be more useful for products such as Saiga horn, which have an older consumer base among the Singaporean Chinese (Doughty et al., 2019). A detailed exploration of the way in which Western ego- or ecocentric perspectives are adopted or integrated into existing cultural frameworks by contemporary Chinese generations would provide considerable insight. However, despite the rise of individualistic values, collectivist values do still persist throughout the country (Zeng & Greenfield, 2015), and there is a government-sponsored renaissance of traditional cultures (Billioud, 2016; Kang, 2011). Indeed, the enduring relevance of classical philosophy can be seen in the prevalence of TCM, and there is currently a prominent Confucian revival movement (Billioud, 2016; Liu, Li, Zou, & Li, 2015).

This article does not propose to be a comprehensive review of 3,000 years of Chinese philosophy. All the traditions we have drawn from have broad applications, and their prominence and meanings have changed throughout history. In addition, China is highly diverse. Different ethnic groups may have differing interpretations of the key concepts we have outlined, underlining the need for formative audience research before widespread release of interventions for enhanced relatability. Evolving cultures and changing perceptions of concepts across generations over time, that is, differential views on medical linkages with *Qi* (Yang, 2015), should also be carefully taken into account to maximize campaign acceptance by audiences. As such, pilots and robust impact evaluation will be needed to test the efficacy of framing demand reduction campaigns in light of classical and changing values (Baylis et al., 2016). Due to its sensitive and deep-rooted nature, misinterpretation or clumsy use may result in disconnect and alienation from the target audience. Thus when designing an intervention, respect rather than judgement should be paramount, and involving local partnership or regional expertise is recommended. By necessity, some of what we have covered will involve simplifications and generalizations, but we have probed a huge and colourful culture of thought for ideas which we think will be

beneficial for conservationists to draw on when attempting to reduce demand for illegal or unsustainable wildlife products within the East Asian cultural sphere.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

L.T.-W. conceptualized the idea and led the drafting of the manuscript. All authors contributed to providing critical feedback, writing and editing various parts of the manuscript. All approved the final submission.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section.

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