CONFUCIAN VALUES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

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australiaCONFUCIAN VALUES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

ABSTRACT

The significance of understanding different cultures is well evidenced by a series of recent reports and as Australia situates itself more authentically in the Asian Pacific region of the world, and educational, business and political ties are strengthened with Asia, it is imperative that the aspiring business person and in particular, tourism professionals broaden their understanding of Asian cultures.

This paper recognises Confucianism as a key philosophical underpinning to many Asian societies. Bearing in mind that approximately one quarter of the world's population has a Confucian heritage, that the Chinese diaspora around the world is notable, that a variety of scholars have predicted a revival in Confucian thought and that there are significant numbers of Confucian travellers, the clear conclusion that one is drawn to is that it may be useful, if not indeed necessary, to recognise the key elements of the Confucian value system when developing, marketing and managing tourism experiences.

This paper outlines the key tenets of Confucianism that underpin human relations and interactions. It then discusses the implications of Confucian values to tourism management and marketing in three specific areas: individualism, protocol, and business and social ethics.

INTRODUCTION

The significance of understanding different cultures is well evidenced by a series of recent Australian reports. Reports such as *Managing Cultural Diversity* (1996), *Cultural Understandings as the Eighth Key Competency* (1994) and *Enterprising Nation: Renewing Australia's Managers to Meet the Challenges of the Asia-Pacific Century* (1995), served to highlight the importance and significance of cultural understanding to Australian industry in general. In 1995, a report by the Office of Multicultural Affairs, *Productive Diversity in the Tourism Industry*, highlighted some of the issues specially relevant to the Australian Tourism industry.

The documents mentioned above demonstrate the significance of cultural understanding for the Australian workforce which is responding to the challenges of the global society. The cultures of Asia however, are particularly significant for Australian tourism because of the constant flow of tourists from Asian countries. Australia's determination to become a significant participant in the Asia Pacific region can be traced back to the end of the Second World War, but it is in recent years that various Australian governments have given Australian-Asian relationships such pre-

eminence. The Asian Pacific region has for some time been seen as the focus of Australia's economic and social future (Fitzgerald, 1994). While there have been extraordinary advances in information technology, international communication and the transportation of goods, Australia is becoming culturally more distant from Britain and Europe. As Print (1998:10) observes, "traditional loyalties and values that have forged the development of our country over the last century are increasingly being challenged, forcing Australians to rethink what it means to be Australian".

Fitzgerald (1994) suggests however, that while there are trade statistics that point to Australia's increasing involvement with Asia, geographical proximity alone in this age of efficient communications, is a weak argument for Australia's continued interest in Asian cultures. He rightly points out that the transformation of Asia must be understood as a global phenomenon rather than a mere regional one. Australia must respond creatively to Asia not only because of geographical proximity but because the world is changing. It is important to move beyond the stereotypical views Westerners still hold of Asian cultures and develop a deeper appreciation of the cultural diversity of the region.

Fitzgerald (1994, p.15) advances his argument in this way: "... it is becoming increasingly difficult to participate in public life anywhere in the world, let alone to assert the values appropriate to contemporary Australia, without knowing about what is happening among the states of Asia and why it matters in the broadest sense". The economic transformations in Asia cannot surely be intelligently grasped as merely regional events. As Fitzgerald (1994, p.14) explains, "Asia's role in this global village is expanding at a rate to match its demographic, economic, geographical and historical potential." The Asian nations are experiencing significant transformations and Australia cannot ignore them, not only because Australia is geographically close to Asia, but because these are transformations which are significant to the global environment. If one were to study Asian cultures only because of the possible economic benefits, then the education system would surely be devalued as a simple servant of mercantile interests. Quite apart from these mercantile interests, tourism in the Asian pacific region can play a role in developing economic and social opportunities that can alleviate poverty.

As Australia situates itself more authentically in the Asian Pacific region of the world and educational, business and political ties are strengthened with Asia, it is imperative that aspiring business people and in particular, tourism professionals, broaden their understanding of Asian cultures. As pointed out in *Productive Diversity in the Tourism Industry* (1995, p.13):

Cultural awareness is vital in all tourism industry sectors and at all levels. This is not only to meet market needs but because of the multicultural nature of the workforce. Industry sector bodies should promote the importance of cultural awareness and cross-cultural skills training to their members.

THE CONFUCIAN TRADITION

Confucian philosophy and the tradition that developed from it have had an enormous influence on Chinese culture and the cultures of various other Asian states (Fitzgerald, 1964; Wan, 1980; Grasso, Corrin, & Kort, 1997). As the twentieth-first century begins, Confucianism is being reinterpreted by East Asian states in search of distinctive values that counter the influence of the more unfavourable aspects of contemporary Western culture (Tan, 1989; Tu, 1995). The contemporary interest in Confucianism however, is not only taking place in East Asia, but also in the West, where scholars are re-evaluating the contributions that Confucianism can make to a variety of debates, particularly in global social and cultural transformations (Little & Reed, 1989; Leung, 1992; Dallmayr, 1993).

The potential of ancient philosophies to contribute to current intellectual debates has often been questioned, especially by those who hold the view that the solutions to contemporary problems can be found entirely within the realm of contemporary experience. But as Little and Reed (1989, p.xv) suggest in the introduction to their study on the "Confucian Renaissance":

In an age when modern communications enable instantaneous exchange of information and ever more rapid change of physical location, and talk of a "global village" is seductively plausible, it is easy to ignore the continuing importance of the myths and sages which inspired and provided the coherence for the major traditions of civilisation.

Confucius (551-479 BC) is one such sage whose inspiration of centuries ago continues to be debated as the East and the West face the social, economic and political challenges of the third millennium. He was a philosopher, scholar and itinerant teacher who gathered a group of acolytes who continued to teach his wisdom after his death. He was primarily interested in the development of the mind and moral character, with social harmony through self-cultivation as the ultimate goal. As Confucianism developed into one of the dominant philosophies of East Asia, Confucius was exalted to the status of a sage, even though he would have described himself in a more humble way as merely a teacher of moral principles (Wan, 1980).

Confucius proposed that the political and social disorder of the times was due to the decline of the feudal period which had offered stability and order for so long. He also contended that the dearth of intellectual activity had undermined society and led to moral degradation (Hu, 1996). Confucius sought to resolve these problems by embarking on a campaign that emphasised the responsibilities of the individual within society. Leaders, in particular, had the responsibility to show exemplary behaviour before the community could be expected to show similar attributes.

As Confucian philosophy developed, it did not become a lofty ideal but maintained a relatively practical role in the life of the Chinese people. The teachings of Confucius were mainly concerned with the practical expression of moral conduct, proper social relationships and the principles of good governance. Confucius showed sustained interest in personal and organisational ethics, the development of virtue, the importance of education, and the learning and practice of proper behaviour that would lead to social harmony.

Confucian Schools of Thought

Confucianism developed from the teachings of Confucius and his followers, but the tradition that emerged departed to some extent from the original thought of its founder. There was a difference between the teachings of Confucius, the teacher-philosopher, and the teachings attributed to him by the tradition which, with the accretion of many centuries acquired a host of miscellaneous ideas which were not originally Confucian (Wan, 1980). As with most other philosophical or religious traditions, scholars took from the Confucian literature that which would support their particular point of view and used the authority of Confucius to bolster the credibility of their argument (Wan, 1980).

There are differing accounts explaining why Confucianism developed into China's cultural and educational backbone, but much of the responsibility for the rise of Confucianism must be attributed to a number of educators, politicians and other intellectuals who were supportive of the teachings of Confucius and who individually or collectively engendered the spread of Confucian thinking through their hermeneutic interpretations (Burk, 1980; Dawson, 1981). They interpreted, elaborated upon and re-assessed the Confucian texts highlighting different aspects of the rich philosophy. Confucianism received imperial patronage at various times throughout China's history by rulers who shared the Confucian vision. Some rulers, however, were less interested in the Confucian vision but wanted to use the Confucian texts to establish and maintain political control (Ryckmans (1995).

It is reasonable to suggest that some of the past and contemporary criticism of Confucianism focuses on issues that were peripheral in the original texts or not supported at all. For example, a popular perception is to associate Confucius with a form of feudal tyranny and the doctrines of Confucianism with oppression of individuality. But these views are more the consequence of the different teachings that came to be associated with Confucius rather than beliefs that could be substantiated by the original sources of Confucian philosophy (Wan, 1980). As Lu (1983) explains, however, Confucianism cannot be identified only with the philosophy of Confucius because this "misconception hampers a deeper understanding of the richness and complexity within Confucianism." Nevertheless, these different schools must be recognised as contributors to the Confucian tradition.

Contemporary Confucianism

The Confucian tradition has permeated Chinese culture for twenty-five centuries and there is little disagreement that the impact of Confucian teachings was profound within China and other countries in the East Asian region (Milner & Quilty, 1996). It is an interesting point that while other philosophies and educational positions were adopted, and in some cases eventually rejected in China, Confucianism seems to have worked itself into the very fabric of Chinese culture. It is reasonable to suggest that the influence of Confucianism has been so profound that it has characterised Chinese culture (Clark, 1987).

Confucianism spread very early to a number of other East Asian countries, but primarily those which had literary and cultural links with China, i.e. Korea, Japan, Vietnam and in other political units which developed later, such as Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong (Little & Reed, 1989). All of these countries adopted Confucian morés to underpin their social institutions to a greater or lesser degree and while Confucian influence has varied according to the ideological stance of different governments, it has nonetheless been a constant factor in East Asian cultures. Confucianism has long been honoured for its blend of secular rationalism and ethical mindfulness and in recent years has been more favourably assessed as Asian states search for an identity and a set of values which is uniquely theirs, insulates them from unsavoury aspects of Western culture, but which still allows them to dialogue and learn from

the philosophical, economic and political achievements of the West (Tan, 1985; Tu, 1995, 1996; Dirlik, 1995). Confucianism represents a core value for approximately a quarter of the world's population and the renewed interest in Confucianism has been so profound that many scholars have identified the phenomenon as a Confucian renaissance (Hall & Ames, 1987; Little & Reed, 1989; Tu, 1996).

KEY TENETS OF CONFUCIANISM

The basis for determining the key Confucian concepts has been gleaned from the primary sources themselves, in light of the scholarship of a number of writers in the field (eg. Legge, 1960, 1970; Lau, 1979; Wan, 1980; Clark, 1987; Chen, 1993; Shaughnessy, 1997). Confucianism advocated a number of important values that underpinned human relations and interactions, but its substance was centred on four unique but inter-related concepts. The first was the central value of goodwill (ren), which identified the capacity of the human person to extend generosity and compassion to all of humanity. It promoted reflection on one's allegiances and maintained that the ultimate allegiance was not to one's state, but to the human community through goodwill. A fundamental aspect of ren was the notion of reciprocity which was an important principle that underpinned the Confucian understanding of goodwill. The second was protocol (*li*), the rules of proper conduct. These were the unwritten laws and regulations that governed thought and action in society and regulated human behaviour and desire. Goodwill was to be expressed by observing this universal principle of conduct from which all social and individual rules of behaviour were derived. The third was filial piety (hsiao) which taught to love one's family first and then to extend this love and respect to the rest of society. The state was conceptualised as the larger family so the same obligations of duty applied to the state as they did to the family. Filial piety was the way in which goodwill was rooted in practical expression. It cultivated and gave a foundation to the development of goodwill because the doctrine taught to love one's family first, and then to extend this love and respect to the rest of society. The harmonious family was seen as the foundation of the harmonious state. The fourth was the doctrine of the mean (zhong yong) that taught an appreciation of central virtues that achieved balance between extremes. If people adhered to the doctrine of the Mean they would achieve the desired and harmonious balance which was essential for an harmonious society.

Confucianism maintains that adherence to the above tenets would lead to the ideal state of *Great Harmony* which would produce balance in thought and daily living, so that extremes such as discipline and freedom, and community and individualism, were emphasised in such a way that they avoided contradiction and led to a harmonious social order.



Figure 1 Key tenets of Confucianism

IMPLICATIONS FOR TOURISM MANAGEMENT

While Confucianism has been of some interest to Western philosophers, Confucian thought has not been part of mainstream Western philosophical debates. A further difficulty identified in a review of the literature is that Confucianism generally has been portrayed in both the East and the West as a conservative philosophy that promotes order and stability at the expense of creativity, individuality, equality and social mobility. An exploration of Confucian values contributes to a wider understanding of East Asian cultures which has intrinsic human value. Its appositeness however, within the context of tourism management is clearly evident in at least the following three distinct areas.

Individualism

One of the strong notions that has emerged out of Western intellectual paradigms, and continues to emerge in the Australian context, relies heavily on the concept of individualism. Confucian philosophy questions the individualised autonomous self as the basis of society in favour of a concept of the collective and relational person. This notion has been challenged by classical philosophers (e.g. Plato and Aristotle), and in contemporary times by such writers as Bellah (1995), Niebuhr (1960, 1963) and Riesenberg (1992), to name a few. But as Tu (1995) points out, while individualism is clearly less persuasive than it used to be, it is still prevalent, and in many ways still symbolises the ethos of the value system in the West. While the tension between individualism and collectivism has been well recognised within intellectual debates, the Confucian focus on collectivism, social capital, the common good and the liability of selfinterest provides it with a clear distinctiveness. In Hofstede's (1980, 1991) well known study on the value orientations of cultures, he identified dominant values in a variety of different cultures. One of the dimensions of cultural values he researched was the "individualism and collectivism" index. Hofstede's research shows that in the main, Western countries are more individualistic in their approach in comparison to Asian countries, and in particular societies influenced by Confucianism. As Tu (1995, p.85) explains:

Industrial East Asia, under the influence of Confucian culture, has already developed a less adversarial, less individualistic, and less self-interested modern civilisation.

The tensions between individualism and collectivism provide a variety of challenges for tourism management and marketing, particularly in terms of how the tourism product or service is consumed, and ways in which it may be experienced. For example, experiences which are group oriented and do not single out the individual may be more comfortable to the traveller who has a Confucian mindset. Furthermore, the development of tourism products and services within Confucian cultures, or for Confucian outbound travellers, may have better chances of commercial success if the negotiating process reflects the collective orientation of Confucian tourism consumers. Importantly however, Confucian notions of individualism and collectivism can challenge some of the current paradigms which underpin tourism development strategies; in particular they can challenge the nexus between individualism, self-interest and notions of the common good which are often key motivators for government support of the tourism industry.

Protocol

One of the most debated aspects of Confucianism is the tension between order and disorder. Confucius proposed that in the ideal organisation, everything needed to be ordered for the good of the whole. The task at hand was to foster the natural order because when the natural order was reflected in systems and processes, harmony and wholeness would be achieved.

The Confucian concept of *li*, described contemporarily as "protocol", had a ritualistic and aesthetic quality, but its most important function was to regulate human behaviour and desire:

Look not at what is contrary to *li*; listen not to what is contrary to *li*; speak not what is contrary to *li*; make no movement which is contrary to *li* (*The Analects*, 12, 1, Lau (trans.), 1979).

Li made distinctions between people, but it enabled them to live and work in harmony for the common good. Harmony was achievable because everyone was expected to carry out their duties according to the appropriate rules of conduct for that group. If everyone accepted their place in society, if well trained and properly selected officials led them, and they abided by acceptable codes of behaviour, harmony was attainable:

If for a single day a man could return to the observance of the rites through overcoming himself, then the whole empire would consider benevolence to be his (*The Analects*, 12,1, Lau (trans.), 1979).

The most significant point about this is the acceptance of the notion that people are not born equal in intellectual nor physical abilities, so they should serve in different capacities which are all necessary for society. If everybody acts honestly according to one's capacity, then there should be little tension between the essential relationships in society. There is evidence in the sources that Confucius saw adherence to protocol as essential to social harmony (e.g. *The Analects*, Lau (trans.), 1979, 12,1; 15,33) but he proposed that the rules were there to serve humanity and not the reverse. A contemporary interpretation of the sources supports Tu's (1988) argument that Confucian principles are not conservative ideas intended to sustain existing relationships, but rather as Swindler (1992) also suggests, produce a fundamentally liberal and egalitarian situation.

These relationships were well structured and sustained because it was a prominent Confucian belief that mutual understanding between people could occur only when there was agreement to respect and tolerate individual differences and responsibilities. Confucian philosophy and the tradition of Confucianism supported a hierarchy that is still evident in social and workplace relationships that have been influenced by Confucian values. Hu (1996, p.4) explains:

One of the most important functions of *li* is to arrange the social life of humans on a rational basis, that is to say, to put people in their due position according to their different characters.

It is clearly important to recognise and understand the Confucian concept of protocol and its requirements for hierarchical respect in contemporary tourism management and marketing situations that attract Confucian influenced business people. It is particularly useful when negotiating macro and micro international ventures with tourism professionals who may live in any of the Confucian heritage countries such as China, Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam, Japan; but also for understanding some of the motivations behind political decisions which may impact favourably or unfavourably on the global environment, and at times internal national environments (Dirlik, 1995). Finally, understanding Confucian social and business ethics makes more comprehensible the reemergence of strong Confucian values in some contemporary and influential Asian states such as Singapore (Emmerson, 1995). Practical examples of responding to Confucian protocol requirements would manifest themselves in the way Confucian visitors are greeted and welcomed; decisions about seating arrangements at meetings; appropriate gift giving practices and negotiation etiquette (Irwin, 1996).

Business and Social Ethics

As Riesenberg (1992, p.xxi) argues, the industrial nation-state has championed the "organisation man or woman" and that it is difficult to engage in moral growth in the activities prescribed within contemporary workplace frameworks. Supporting this position, MacIntyre (1981, quoted in Burchell, p.1) also argues for a restoration of cohesion and coherence to the 'moral vacuity of modern culture" as a:

Response to a contemporary ethical landscape which 'exalts' the morally neutral exercise of bureaucratic expertise and which partitions each human life into a variety of segments, each with its own norms of behaviour.

Confucianism can contribute a clear re-emphasis on the links between rights and responsibilities. Rather than focus on a legal framework within which one must live and work, Confucianism focuses on a social framework of consensual and reciprocal obligations that in theory do not need the support of externally imposed laws. A defining feature of ethical citizenship is the recognition of reciprocal rights and responsibilities (Heater, 1990).

One of the characteristic features of Confucian thought is its emphasis on the power of example rather than coercion (Ryerson, 1992). There are a number in Confucian texts (e.g. *The Analects*) that testify to the potency of moral example:

If a man is correct in his own person, then there will be obedience without orders being given; but if he is not correct in his own person, there will not be obedience even though orders are given (*The Analects*, 13,6, Lau (trans.), 1979).

Confucius conceived knowledge of what is right, and action towards achieving it, as one undertaking; consequently he emphasised ethical practice rather than ethical theory as is shown in many passages in *The Analects*. He explained that the person who wants to learn:

Is quick in action but cautious in speech (The Analects, 2,13, Lau (trans.),1979).

The gentleman (whole person) wishes to be slow in speech but quick in action (*The Analects*, 4,24, Lau (trans.),1979).

He puts his words into action before allowing his words to follow his action (*The Analects*, 2,13, Lau (trans.),1979).

The gentleman (whole person) is ashamed of his word outstripping his deed (*The Analects*, 14,27, Lau (trans.),1979).

Confucian values set a standard of relational behaviour that can assist in achieving purposeful and ethical interactions. They offer a challenge to tourism management and marketing in that they encourage business dealings within an ethical framework. The new wave of Confucianism that has been heralded by Hall & Ames (1987), Little & Reed (1989), and Tu (1995) suggests that it would be fruitful to dialogue with Confucian resources so that contemporary approaches to tourism management can gain from the wisdom of both the East and the West. The Confucian emphasis on balancing rights and responsibilities, and achieving harmony in society, can serve as a useful underpinning for current debates on sustainable tourism development. Other practical examples of responding to Confucian business and social ethics could include the way in which business relationships are nurtured; a focus on workplace rights and responsibilities in hotels that employ Confucian heritage workers and methods by which tourism is used in poverty alleviation strategies.

Australian tourism has long recognised and benefited from, the lucrative Asian markets and continues to strive to meet the needs of the Asian tourist. Yet Asia is currently undergoing significant social and economic change and these changes have affected the way many Asians live and work, and consequentially their needs and expectations when travelling overseas are also changing. Nevertheless, Confucian values form a constant reference point and underpin the social and economic interactions of many East Asian countries. To remain competitive with other popular global destinations, the Australian tourism industry needs to recognise Confucian values and respond to them with interest and understanding.

CONCLUSION

Since the early 1980s, Confucianism has reappeared as a significant philosophical interest in both the East and West and there has been widespread recognition of the importance of Confucian philosophy which scholars have identified as a form of renaissance (Hall & Ames, 1987; Little & Reed, 1989; Tu, 1996). Confucianism has had a profound influence on many parts of Asia and

continues to be an influential force in Asian education, politics and business (Dirlik, 1995). New interpretations are necessary so that the richness of the Confucian tradition can be explored within the context of significant industries such as tourism.

This paper has offered an examination of some of the key concepts of Confucianism that underpin Confucian human relations and interactions. Confucius developed the notion of goodwill (*ren*) to become a central concern of Chinese philosophy. It was a unifying concept that recognised the innate goodness of a person and laid the foundation for the principle of reciprocity in all relationships. He gave a new interpretation and relevance to the ancient notion of protocol (*li*) that was the practical expression of goodwill (*ren*). *Li* tempered human behaviour, ensued that everyone understood their role in society and gave government a standard for ethical conduct. It was an essential aspect to achieving social harmony and one that invited mutuality and balance in daily life. Confucianism emphasises the importance of the relational through emphasis on filial piety (*hsiao*) and advocates for the achievement of balance through teaching the doctrine of the Mean (*zhong yong*). The paper then suggests three preliminary, but distinctive implications for tourism management and marketing in the areas of individualism, protocol, and business and social ethics.

Little and Reed (1989, p.xvi) forecast that the, "ancient myths and sages from Asia are likely to be more central to the future of our global village than today's dominant Western culture." Whether they become central or not is yet uncertain; what is certain, is that the concepts that emerge from an interpretation of Confucianism within the context of the tourism industry can make a real contribution to the current scholarly debates. Confucianism is a rich resource for the development of alternative views to tourism management and marketing. Particularly useful further research should include studies into Confucian social connections, ethical tourism behaviour and the role of Confucianism in debates on global tourism management.

Bearing in mind that approximately one quarter of the world's population has a Confucian heritage, that the Chinese diaspora around the world is notable, that a variety of scholars have predicted a revival in Confucian thought and that there are significant numbers of Confucian travellers, the clear conclusion that one is drawn to is that it may be useful, if not indeed necessary, to recognise the key elements of the Confucian value system when developing, marketing and managing tourism experiences.

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