

# The role of Chinese cultural values in illegal wildlife trade interventions

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A new study by the University of Kent's Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE) suggests that utilizing Confucianist, Daoist, and Buddhist belief messaging in targeted campaigns could

effectively change the behavior of end consumers in the East Asia illegal wildlife trade chain.

Behavioral change intervention is essential for reducing the demand of illegal wildlife products. With so many conservation campaigns typically approached from the perspective of Western culture, the impact could be limited in different cultures. East Asia is a primary market for many illegal wildlife products such as rosewood, ivory, and pangolin scales and so is often targeted with conservation campaigns, but with limited effect.

The research led by Laura Thomas-Walters, a Ph.D. student studying Conservation Biology at DICE, has identified that resonating with Chinese-influenced societies through [cultural values](#) could be most effective for tailoring the [messaging](#) in illegal wildlife trade campaigns in East Asia. While China alone has 56 recognized [ethnic groups](#), Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism have dominated traditional Chinese ideology.

The study highlighted eight cultural concepts to target messaging around; Harmony (the balance of yin and yang), Jian (frugality), Junzi (an exemplary person), Li (ritual propriety), Qi (the material force of the universe), Ren (inner moral force, humaneness), Shu (altruism) and Zhong (conscientiousness).

For example, in regards to the concept of harmony, messaging could be based around unsustainable product use and the imbalance between humans and nature when species such as pangolins disappear from nature. While in regards to Ren, messaging could reinforce the concept of connection and unity with nature by relating the kindness of humanity to include wildlife.

Laura Thomas-Walters said: "Chinese culture has a long history of consumptive wildlife use, and conservationists have struggled to engage

Chinese-influenced societies with illegal [wildlife](#) trade campaigns. This study suggests routes that could be taken to target these societies more specifically. Yet, it's important to consider that when designing an intervention, respect rather than judgment is essential, and the involvement of a local partnership or regional expertise is recommended."

**More information:** Laura Thomas-Walters et al, Targeted values: The relevance of classical Chinese philosophy for illegal wildlife demand reduction campaigns, *People and Nature* (2020). [DOI: 10.1002/pan3.10127](#)

Provided by University of Kent

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