

## **Confucian values in 21<sup>st</sup> Century China**

One of the most well-known figures in Chinese history is undoubtedly 'Confucius' or K'ung Fu-tzu. But the degree to which this famous historical figure actively influences modern-day China is an issue that could be debated for hours.

I recently read an article that discussed Beijing's return to Confucian values in an attempt to quell growing dissent and inspire new loyalty. The authors wrote that China's official buzzword these days is 'harmony'.

While there is no denying the influence of Confucius on the development of Chinese culture, each individual and business you encounter in China will choose to adopt these values to a greater or lesser extent. A basic knowledge of Confucian values will prove invaluable for those wanting to understand the Chinese culture and build effective business relationships.

Confucius lived around 500 BC. He urged people to live according to the virtues of kindness, uprightness, decorum, wisdom and faithfulness. He also encouraged unity, morality, thrift, and respect for authority and reinforced the importance of hierarchical relationships.

The guiding belief is that if everyone follows the same principles, then all will be able to live in harmony – something it seems Beijing's leaders are keen to reinforce again today.

The influence of Confucianism in everyday social and business contact may be subtle in some situations, and very obvious in others. When it comes to business, Confucianism's influence shows up in traits like persistence, perseverance, respect for hierarchal relationships, concern for saving face, and respect for tradition.

A practical example of this is the importance placed on hierarchy and required deference to your superiors which may come into conflict with the more informal style of interaction adopted by other cultures. It is important to ensure that when conducting business, members of your negotiating team command a similar level of respect and rank as the person on the other side of the table.

Confucius extended the biological family to a network of morally binding and mutually dependent relationships. The Confucian state is comprised not of individuals but of their relationships to one another and the resulting interdependencies.

Individual elements are considered inseparable parts of a larger whole. Cooperation is important in order to survive, as is the reciprocity which ensures people will support one another in times of trouble.

With all this emphasis on co-operation, it becomes easier to understand the importance the Chinese culture places on friendships and positive feelings. In business, it means becoming acquainted with the whole individual, not simply the business person.

Developing a sense of trust and harmony are more important in ensuring lasting friendships than pieces of paper. While contracts are vital in today's business world, people still respond to the spirit of the deal.

While many elements of Chinese culture are also an inherent part of Thai culture, the path taken to developing the modern day nation, is uniquely China's own.