

GROWING MINDS, GROWING BUSINESS

How can better awareness of Chinese language and culture help me do business with Chinese counterparts?

The U.S. and China have what is arguably the most important bilateral relationship in the world at this time. By engaging in mutually beneficial economic activity, the business communities in both countries support the robust resilience of that relationship. American professionals can prepare for productive interactions with Chinese counterparts by gaining an awareness of Chinese culture. While the nuts and bolts of Chinese business etiquette are helpful, what business people need most is an understanding of how their Chinese counterparts think. How do both traditional and modern value systems drive decision making? To paraphrase a popular Chinese joke lamenting the pressures of life in a competitive market economy, "I am a Confucianist in the morning, a Daoist at noon, and a Buddhist at night."



How do generations in a society with "future-shock" speed of change reconcile seemingly conflicting value systems? In our Confucius Institute classes at the University of Kansas, we discuss the dominant values and social dynamics for each generation. For example, fifty-somethings such as myself remember a China of the early 1980s when "modernize" was the buzzword. For thirty-somethings the buzzword has been "competitiveness." And for the youngest generation, "individuality" and "personal style" now have traction. The professional who understands the recent dramatic changes in China and can detect linguistic and cultural indicators of values will be better able to understand Chinese counterparts and form successful business partnerships. Classes at the Confucius Institute are open to the public and can help provide that understanding. Visit www.confucius.ku.edu for more information.