

UNIT 1 TOPIC 1 THE CHINESE FAMILY

Pre-knowledge

Before class, students should read Unit 1 Topic 1 and watch some videos or read up some information on the Chinese family to find out, to what extent, his own family is different from a Chinese family and ponder why such differences exist.

Aim and Objectives

Topic 1 aims to provide students with some knowledge of the origin and concept of the Chinese family and the significance of 家 to a Chinese. It will also equip them with the knowledge of the traditions of a Chinese family and the influences of these traditions on the family and each individual. Students will also learn about the evolution of the Chinese family in terms of its structure, concept and functions.

Teaching and Learning Activities

Activity 1

To every Chinese, 家 is the utmost important thing in his life. Everything one does is not for himself but for his family. Wherever one goes, 家 is always the place he yearns to return to. Since the character 家 is pictographic, show your class the classic character of 家 and ask them what they see from it. Then explain the creation of this character.

Activity 2

Watch the video clip *Features of traditional Chinese family* on YouTube. Have a class discussion on the features of a traditional Chinese family.

Activity 3

Photocopy the article *Chinese Family Values in Australia* written by Anita S Mak and Helen Chan (from the Australian Institute of Family Studies) for your class. Get them into groups of three or four for a group discussion on what traditional family values are and how these values changed among overseas Chinese and along with social developments in China. Have the groups present their points.

Activity 4

Have your students search on the Internet to find out the origins of the family in the West and list the different features of the Chinese and Western concepts of family.

Activity 5

Use a wall map and the DVD *Families of China* produced by Master Communications to introduce your students to a people and culture that is different from their own. Have them take down notes for a class discussion.

Activity 6

Have your students analyse the video *Families of China* after watching it. They have to identify the similarities and differences between the two cultures. If this video is unavailable, you may use others listed in the Resources/Materials section.

Activity 7

Read the Introduction and Chapters 14, 19 22, 23, 28, 34 & 38 from *International Handbook of Chinese Families* written by Chan Kwok-Bun (2012). Ask your students to take down notes for a PowerPoint presentation lasting 2-3 minutes each on the traditional Chinese family.

Activity 8

Have your students do Exercise 1 of the Workbook according to your teaching needs and progress.

Resources/Materials

Apart from those listed in the activities, you may also consult these resources/materials:

1. 家 (*Family*) (1957). Directed by Chen Xihe. Shanghai Film Studios.
(Note: the film is in Mandarin.)
2. 家 (*The Family*) (2015). Directed by Liu Shumin. Australia: Secular Films.
(Note: the film is in Mandarin.)
3. Upton-Mclaughlin, S. (2013), "The Significance of Family in China". *The China Culture Corner* [Online]. 21 June, 2013.
Available at: <https://chinaculturecorner.com/2013/06/21/the-chinese-family/>
4. HappyExPat (2012). "Understanding the Concept of 'Family' in China". *eChinacities.com* [Online]. 8 April, 2012. Available at: <http://answers.echinacities.com/forum/topic/understanding-concept-family-china>
5. Huang, P.C. (2011), "The Modern Chinese Family". *SAGE Journals*. 37(5) September. pp. 459-497.

Assessment

1. Collect the notes taken by your students during all group and class discussions.
2. Prepare one or two quizzes.
3. Each student is required to write a 300-word personal account of his reflections on the concept of family.

Workbook Answer Key

1. What is your impression of the original character of 家?

Students should consider these points:

- The composition of the character and its meanings
- The glyph shape presentation of Chinese characters
- The original concept of 家 in the Chinese society
- The evolution of the character 家
- The importance of 家 to the Chinese

2. Why was a pig included in the original character of 家?

Students should consider these points:

- The kind of society China was during ancient times
- The early living conditions of the Chinese
- The Chinese concept of poultry

3. Group Discussion

In a group of three or four, discuss the concept of the character 家. Write down some of its meanings and symbolism.

Students should consider all the points listed in Questions 1 and 2.

4. Pair Work

Watch the video clip *Features of traditional Chinese family* on YouTube. With a partner, summarise your understanding of a traditional Chinese family.

Students should consider these points:

- The structure and functions of a traditional Chinese family
- The role of each member of the family
- How a traditional Chinese family works
- The importance of kinships
- The traditional Chinese concept of family

5. Class Discussion

As a class, discuss the differences between the Chinese concept of the family and that from Western countries. Write down some of the key differences.

Students should consider these points:

- The structure and functions of a family
- The role that each member plays in a family
- The role of parents and/or grandparents
- The relationship between family members
- The importance of the family to each member of the family
- Men and women in the family
- Love and marriage

6. How many Chinese words with the character 家 in each of them do you know? Translate each word into English and write down its meaning or cultural importance.

Chinese: 家翁 English: one's father or father-in-law

Meaning(s) or cultural importance:

The construct of fatherhood in Chinese societies has a complex history. Traditionally, fathers of a pre-modern agrarian China embodied personal virtues and family ethics defined by Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. The father was the one who worked to feed the family while the mother stayed at home to care for the children. The way fathers defined their roles as a member of society, as a man and as a parent changed through different historic periods. In particular, the numerous social movements of the decades leading to the formation of modern China had enormous impact. Land reforms from 1948 to 1951 and industrialisation during early Socialist campaigns shattered the economic foundation of the patriarchal kinship system. Parental roles as breadwinners, educators and family authority became unnecessary. Public responsibilities of fathers then became incompatible and were removed from family life.

Chinese: 家教 English: family education or private tutor

Meaning(s) or cultural importance:

Family education refers to education parents give their children after they were born. In China, parents are seen as the first educators of their children. Family education is thus the most basic and important education model of the society. Given the importance of family education, parents put in much effort in educating their children and helping them grow as a person.

Chinese: 家乡 English: hometown

Meaning(s) or cultural importance:

In Chinese culture, a hometown or ancestral home (籍贯, 祖籍 or 老家) is the place of origin of one's extended family. It may or may not be the place where one was born. The Chinese emphasis on a person's ancestral home is a legacy of China's history as an agrarian society, where a family would often be tied to its land for generations. In Chinese culture, a person's ancestral home or birthplace plays an important social role in his personal identity. For instance, at a university, students who hail from the same region will often become members of the regional or hometown society or club for people with the same background. Discussion of ancestral origins is typical when two people meet for the first time. In recent years, the "root-seeking" movement has led to greater interest in ancestral hometowns, especially among overseas Chinese.

Chinese: 东家 English: landlord

Meaning(s) or cultural importance:

东家 means the man in authority, such as the head of a household, the employer of servants and the owner of slaves or animals. In ancient China, the East was considered the most important direction (partly because of the fact that it is from where the sun rises) while the West was a subordinate direction. The Imperial Temple, dedicated to ancestral tablets, was built on the grounds on the eastern side of the Imperial Palace. The palace of the empress, the East Palace, was also the largest. This word in modern Chinese came from this concept of the East being a symbolism of authority and supremacy.

Chinese: 汉学家 English: sinologist

Meaning(s) or cultural importance:

The terms "sinologist" and "sinology" were coined around 1838. Their prefix "sino" was derived from the Greek word *sinæ*. It may be traced back to the Arabic word *Sin*, which was, in turn, likely to have derived from *Qin*, as in Qin Dynasty, China's first singular dynasty. A sinologist is an academic in the study of China, focusing on its language, literature, culture and history. Until the 20th century, sinology was seen as the study of Chinese philology (language and literature) but has, in modern times, been broadened to include Chinese history and epigraphy. In Europe, sinology is usually known as Chinese Studies.

7. What is your concept of family? What does 家 mean to you?

Students should consider these points:

- The role and function of the family
- The impact of the family on each member including oneself
- The relationship between family and society

Note: All URLs listed herein were ascertained to be accessible on 8 September, 2020.