

UNIT 1 TOPIC 2 STRUCTURE OF THE CHINESE FAMILY

Pre-knowledge

Before class, students should watch two or three video clips about traditional Chinese families on YouTube or any other video websites and read Unit 1 Topic 2 to understand the structure of the traditional Chinese family as well as the historical background and impact of the One-Child Policy.

Aim and Objectives

Topic 2 aims to help students understand the intricate familial system of the Chinese and how it has evolved through the ages. They will also learn about why the One-Child Policy was necessary and how it has affected the Chinese society, as well as the increasing prevalence of the DINK family.

Teaching and Learning Activities

The structure of Chinese families has changed from time to time along with social changes in China. In this section, students will learn about the features of a traditional Chinese family and why the Chinese would prefer the size of a family to be as large as possible. What functions did these traditional Chinese families have and what role did each of the family members play? What impact did these large-sized traditional Chinese families have on the Chinese society then? When and why did these large-sized traditional Chinese families break up?

Activity 1

Show your class a photograph of a traditional Chinese family of four generations living under one roof. Explain who they were and how the family functioned.

You may ask these questions:

- A. How is this traditional Chinese family structured?
- B. Who are the family members? Who is the householder? Why is he or she the householder?
- C. Who do you think is the head of finances in the family?
- D. What are the differences between men and women in the family?
- E. How does the traditional family function?
- F. What are the similarities and differences between a traditional Chinese family and a Western family?

Activity 2

Watch a few episodes of the television series *The Yellow Storm* (四世同堂) directed by Lin Ruwei (林汝为) in 1985 and then have a class discussion.

You may ask these questions:

- A. What is the main plot?
- B. Who are the main characters?
- C. Can you tell which parts from the episodes you have watched show the features of a traditional Chinese family?
- D. What are the relationships between family members in a traditional family?
- E. Which character in the television series is your favourite? Why is it your favourite?
- F. Which traditions are still maintained in a Chinese family now?
- G. Do you like the family traditions of the Chinese? Why?

Activity 3

Ask your students to draw a chart to show the complexity of a traditional Chinese extended family and explain their relationships.

Activity 4

Read some excerpts from the novel 家 (*Family*) written by Ba Jin (巴金) and watch the movie of 家 (*Family*) directed by Chen Xihe (陈西禾) in 1957.

You may ask these questions:

- A. What is the main plot?
- B. Who are the main characters?
- C. What are the different characteristics of the three brothers?
- D. Can you tell what traditions have been maintained in this family?
- E. Why did the two younger brothers try to break the long-standing family traditions?
- F. What was the impact of social changes on the traditional Chinese families?
- G. Can you tell, to what extent, the traditional Chinese family started to change in China then?

Activity 5

Watch some excerpts from the television series *Those Fussy One Child Generation* directed by Ding Mo in 2013, *One Child* produced by the BBC in 2014 and *The Story of the One Child* directed by Guo Lin in 1995. Have some group or class discussions on these television series.

Activity 6

Through the group or class discussions on these television series and films, your students should understand what the One-Child Policy is all about and the kind of life an only child leads. Analyse the reasons for China implementing this policy and its impact on the Chinese family and society as a whole.

Activity 7

Ask your students to interview a Chinese classmate or schoolmate who is an only child.

They may ask these questions:

- A. What role do you play in your family?
- B. What is your daily routine like?
- C. How do your parents show care and concern for you?
- D. Do you like your life as a single child?
- E. What do you think of the One-Child Policy?
- F. Do you hope to have a sibling? Why?
- G. What kind of family life would you like to have, if not the current one?

Activity 8

Each student is required to prepare a PowerPoint presentation on his reflections on the One-Child Policy and its implementation in China.

Activity 9

Have your students read the following articles to understand and analyse the changing family structures in China due to the emergence of DINK families:

- Xinhua News Agency (2015), "China Focus: DINKs in Aging China". *Xinhuanet* [Online]. 28 July, 2015.
Available at: https://archive.shine.cn/article/article_xinhua.aspx?id=294602
- Swanson, A. (2015), "Why many families in China won't want more than one kid even if they can have them". *The Washington Post* [Online]. 30 October, 2015. Available at:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/10/30/why-many-families-in-china-wont-want-more-than-one-kid-even-if-they-can-have-them/?utm_term=.42d85854bb64

- Shanghai Star (2002), "Childless Couples". China Internet Information Center [Online]. 27 March, 2002. Available at: <http://www.china.org.cn/english/NM-e/60094.htm>

Activity 10

Divide your students into groups of three or four and have a group discussion on the impact of DINK families on our family traditions and the society as a whole. Have them share their points in a follow-up class discussion.

Activity 11

Have your students gather as much information as they can in order to write a 600-word report in English comparing the evolution of family structures in China and the West.

Activity 12

Have your students do Exercise 2 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. Liu, Zhihua (2013), "Chinese family structure and values hard to shake". *People's Daily Online* [Online]. 29 January 2013.
Available at: <http://en.people.cn/90782/8112762.html>
2. Hays, J. (2008), "Families in China: Lineages, Married Life, Extended Families and Gender Roles". *Facts and Details* [Online].
Available at: <http://factsanddetails.com/china/cat4/sub21/item107.html>
3. Shao, Q. (1989), "A study of the history of the Chinese family structures". *Chinese Journal of Population Science*. 1(2). pp. 113-24.
4. Yu, X. (2013), "Gender and Family in Contemporary China". *Population Studies Centre Research Report 13-808*. Institute of Social Research, University of Michigan.
Available at: <https://www.psc.isr.umich.edu/pubs/abs/8507>
5. Harrell, S. (year unknown). "Patriline, Patriarchy, Patrimony: Surface Features and Deep Structures in the Chinese Family System (for Hill Gates, ed., a volume on where China goes in the construction of materialist theory)".
Available at: <http://faculty.washington.edu/stevehar/PPP.html>
6. Zeng, Y. (1992), "Changes in Family Structure in China". In Poston Jr., Dudley, L. & Yaukey, D. (eds.) (1992), *The Population of Modern China*. Springer International Publishing.
7. Lam, K. (2016), "Women, Gender and Family in Chinese History". *Religion and Philosophy in the Ancient World*. Illinois: Illinois Math and Science Academy [Online]. Available at: http://digitalcommons.imsa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=ancient_world
8. Davis, D. & Harrell, S. (eds.) (1993), *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era*. California: University of California Press.

Assessment

1. Collect the notes taken by your students during all group and class discussions.
2. Prepare some questions and assess your students when they answer them verbally.
3. Each student is required to write a review on a book on the structure of Chinese families that he has read.
4. Students are required to prepare a PowerPoint presentation to show their understanding of the Chinese family structure and its evolution along with social changes.
5. Compare the differences between the structure of a Chinese family and that of a Western family.

Workbook Answer Key

1. Look at the picture below. How many generations are there in this family? Putting this in the Chinese social context of the past, what role would each of them play in the traditional family?

Students should consider these points:

- Three generations
- Traditional Chinese concept of family (the more people in the family, the more prosperous it is)
- Grandparents or parents had the prime authority
- The relationship between senior and junior members of the family
- Hierarchy and filial piety in the family

2. Why did Chinese in the past prefer a large-sized family?

Students should consider these points:

- The nature of Chinese society in the past
- The importance of manpower to the family
- Family affection and mutual assistance among family members

3. How was the role of a man different from that of a woman in a traditional Chinese family? What are some of the reasons for the difference?

Students should consider these points:

- The man as head of the house
- The man was the only financial resource for the family
- The man controlled the woman
- The role of a woman as a servant to her husband and to produce sons
- Confucius's beliefs

4. Internet Search

Find out the impact of the traditional large-sized family on the Chinese and the Chinese society. Find a Chinese song or poem about family and present it to the class.

Students should consider these points:

- On the relationship among family members
- On the family's social connections
- On the family's well-being
- On Chinese ideology
- On the stabilisation and protection of the family
- Excessive reliance on other family members
- Obstruction of children's creativity
- Examples of Chinese songs: 我想有个家 (*I Want a Family*), 家 (*Family*), 父亲 (*Father*), 母亲 (*Mother*), 家的味道 (*The Taste from Home*)
- Examples of Chinese poems: 贺知章《回乡偶书》(He Zhizhang, *A Note on Homecoming*), 孟郊《游子吟》(Meng Jiao, *Hymn of the Traveller*), 白居易《邯郸冬至夜思家》(Bai Juyi, *Thinking of Home on Winter Solstice Night at Handan*), 薛道衡《人日思归》(Xue Daoheng, *Homesickness on Human's Day*)

5. How do relationship titles in the Chinese family differ from those in a Western family? Why do you think the Chinese titles are more nuanced?

Students should consider these points:

- A Chinese family: use of titles only; A Western family: use of names preferred
- Confucius's concepts; Socrates's concepts
- Traditional Chinese way of living
- More intimate relations among Chinese family members
- Clearer roles and responsibilities of each member of a Chinese family

6. Pair Work

With a partner, conduct a survey of five to 10 students of both Chinese and Western backgrounds. Find out their views on the family.

Students should consider these points:

- Comparison of different concepts of family
- Comparison of different attitudes towards studying
- Comparison of different ways of life
- Comparison of different personalities
- Comparison of different perspectives on careers

7. Prepare a PowerPoint presentation of your understanding of the roles and functions of a traditional Chinese family. Your presentation should last 4-5 minutes.

Students should consider these points:

- The structure of a traditional Chinese family
- Patrilineal and patriarchal
- Men and women in the family
- Duties of children in the family
- The importance of kinships

8. Class Discussion

As a class, debate the pros and cons of a married couple having children and not having children. Write down the key points.

Students should consider these points:

- The pros of having children include: having heirs for the family, fulfilling social responsibility, enjoying family life, having someone to look after them in old age, carrying on of family traditions
- The cons of having children include: creating burdens on family finances, increasing pressure on parenting, affecting a couple's way of life and even their careers
- The pros of not having children include: enjoying life as a couple, enjoying more financial freedom, having more time for studying, work or leisure, having no burden in raising children
- The cons of not having children include: being unable to enjoy family life, discontinuing the family line, having no one to look after them in old age

9. Group Discussion

We have learnt that more and more Chinese couples choose not to have children. How do you think the government can encourage them to have children?

Students should consider these points:

- Promotion of the importance of having children for both the family and the country
- Providing incentives for parenting
- Improving the conditions and quality of kindergartens
- Promotion of traditional Chinese culture

10. Presentation

Bring a family photo(s) and present it/them to the class. Talk about the differences between your family and a typical Chinese family. Your presentation should last 4-5 minutes.

Students should consider these points:

- Different family structures
- Different ways of managing the family
- Different relationships among family members
- Different concepts of raising children
- Different methods of family education
- Different ways of celebrating festivals

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