

## UNIT 1 TOPIC 3 CHINESE NAMING AND PERSONAL IDENTITY

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### Pre-knowledge

Before class, students should read Unit 1 Topic 3 to have a basic understanding of Chinese names and zodiac animals.

### Aim and Objectives

Topic 3 aims to provide students with some knowledge of the origin and concept of Chinese naming, the Chinese systems for counting age and other important aspects that shape a person's identity. It will also equip students with the knowledge of the evolution of Chinese names.

### Teaching and Learning Activities

#### Activity 1

Show your students the classic Chinese character of 姓 and ask them to read the text on page 20 of their Textbook. Ask them to explain why this character has a female radical.

#### Activity 2

Have your students conduct a survey on the name, Chinese Zodiac sign and ancestral home of their Chinese classmates or friends. Have them report their findings to the class.

#### Activity 3

Read the article *Chinese personal names* written by Dai Liqun.

You may ask these questions:

- A. Do Chinese names and Western names share the same order? If not, what is the difference?
- B. When was the original *Hundred Family Surnames* composed?
- C. Can you tell me five single-character surnames and three double-character surnames? Do you know the meanings of these surnames?

#### Activity 4

Have your students conduct an online research on Chinese names from different periods. You may divide them into three groups and have each group collect names from the 1950s, 1970s or 2000s. Have each group share their findings with the other two groups.

#### Activity 5

Conduct a role play on Chinese name calling conventions. Divide your students into three groups. Have each group prepare a scenario presenting a joke by using name calling conventions wrongly. For example, the scenario may be of a student addressing her teacher as “老板” instead of “老师”.

#### Activity 6

Have your students conduct some research before this group discussion. The questions for the discussions may include: What is Chinese nominal age? Why do the Chinese use nominal age?



### Activity 7

Watch the video *The Chinese Zodiac, explained* by Hsueh ShaoLan to help your students understand the functions of the Chinese Zodiac.

You may ask these questions:

- A. What are the animals in the Chinese Zodiac? Why did the Chinese choose those animals?
- B. What animals in the Chinese Zodiac are considered as the lucky animals? Are those animals actually luckier than others in modern Chinese society?
- C. How does the Chinese Zodiac affect the world outside China?
- D. How can others tell the behaviour of the Chinese using the Chinese Zodiac?

### Activity 8

Ask your students to do Exercise 3 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. Dai, Liqun (2006), "Chinese personal names". *The Indexer*. 25(2) October. pp. C1–C2. Available at:  
<https://documents.in/reader/full/chinese-personal-names-the-indexer-cited-zi-and-hao-style-names-usually>
2. "Top 10 Chinese Surnames + Origins/Facts" (2013). *Off the Great Wall* [YouTube video]. 1 September, 2013. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXiwczsJSnc>
3. "How to Pronounce Chinese Names" (2015). *OSU flipped ESL* [YouTube video]. 5 January, 2015. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fb73w3eT9tk>
4. Hsueh, ShaoLan (2016), "The Chinese zodiac, explained". *Ted.com* [Online]. Available at: [https://www.ted.com/talks/shaolan\\_the\\_chinese\\_zodiac\\_explained](https://www.ted.com/talks/shaolan_the_chinese_zodiac_explained)

## **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 identity.

## **Workbook Answer Key**

1. What is the meaning behind your name? What is the meaning behind your Chinese name (if you have one)? What differences can you detect between your English name and a Chinese name?

Students should consider these points:

- Use of Christian names in English naming
- Use of words expressing the parents' hopes or wishes or in memory of the time, venue or occasion when the baby was born in Chinese naming



2. Which comes first in a Chinese name, the surname or the given name? What is the reason for this order? How many characters are usually there in a Chinese name and why?

Students should consider these points:

- The surname first and the given name second
- The Chinese emphasise the importance of the family while the Westerners focus on the importance of individuals
- Usually three characters in a Chinese name, but some people prefer two characters and some surnames have two characters
- The reason is closely related to people's choices and the adapting to social changes

3. What is the *Hundred Family Surnames*? Is there something from the Western world that is similar to it? Are there any similarities or differences between the two if they could be compared?

Students should consider these points:

- A classic Chinese text composed of common Chinese surnames, compiled in the early part of the Song Dynasty
- No book from the Western world similar to the *Hundred Family Surnames* but most have a family genealogy

4. Internet Search

Identify a famous Chinese historical figure. Find out how many names he had and write down the reasons behind those names.

Example:

- Sun Zhongshan: other names include 孙文 (Sūn Wén), 孙逸仙 (Sūn Yìxiān, Sun Yat Sen), 载之 (Zài Zhī)

5. Internet Search

Who were 毛泽东 (Máo Zédōng) and 李白 (Lǐ Bái)? How many names did each of them have? List all the names they had and explain the meanings of these names.

Students should consider these points:

- Mao Zedong: other names include 毛润之 (Máo Rùnzhi), 石三伢子 (Shí Sān Yázi)
- Li Bai: other names include 李太白 (Lǐ Tàibái), 青莲居士 (Qīng Lián Jū Shì)

6. Internet Search

What are some Chinese characters that are frequently used in names? Write down up to 10. Which of them do you think are used more often in names for males and females respectively? Which of them do you think are gender-neutral?

Examples include:

- Male names: 伟, 威, 强, 昌, 刚, 豪, 龙, 兴, 忠, 军
- Female names: 花, 玲, 秀, 娟, 菊, 玉, 莲, 琴, 翠, 凤
- Neutral names: 博, 文, 锦, 锐, 睿, 晓, 川, 康, 尚, 清

7. Today, some Chinese parents give their children double-character names by combining the surnames of both parents. What do you think of this practice?

Students should consider these points:

- Social equity



- Individual choices
- Pros and cons

8. How are nicknames in China different from those in Australia or other Western countries?

Students should consider these points:

- The nature of Chinese nicknames:
  - a) conveys a wish to have an easy time raising the child
  - b) shows a more intimate relation to the child
  - c) functions as a temporary name before the child is given a formal name
  - d) following what others do
  - e) giving the child a nickname as his siblings already had theirs
  - f) maintaining the tradition
- Chinese nicknames are usually those formed from the names of animals and those antonyms of goodness and beauty, such as Doggy and Ugly Girl
- The nature of Western nicknames:
  - a) derived from a child's formal name
  - b) abbreviated form of a child's formal name, such as Liz from Elizabeth and Alex from Alexander

9. Internet Search

Who was Bruce Lee? What was his original name? Why did he change his name?

Students should consider these points:

- Bruce Lee was a Hong Kong and American actor, film director, martial artist and instructor. He was also the founder of the martial art Jeet Kune Do.
- He is widely considered to be one of the most influential martial artists of all time and is credited with helping to change the way Asians were presented in American films.
- His original name was 李振藩 (Lǐ Zhènfān). He did not change his name. He was given the name Bruce when he was born in San Francisco.

10. In China, the Chinese address their family members or colleagues strictly according to hierarchy. Is that different from the culture in Australia or in a Western country? What does it reflect?

Students should consider these points:

- Uncommon in Australia
- Reflects the traditional Chinese culture of rituals and belief that juniors must show respect to seniors
- Reflects the traditional Australian culture of equity

11. Why do you think the Chinese like to address others according to their job positions? Write down some examples.

Students should consider these points:

- Show respect to others
- Uphold the traditional Chinese culture of rituals
- Examples: 习主席 (Chairman Xi), 王主任 (Director Wang), 李老师 (Mr Li)

12. What are the differences between one's real age and nominal age? Why are there two age systems in China?

Students should consider these points:

- Real age is based on one's actual birthday in the Western calendar



- Nominal age is based on the Chinese Lunar calendar and the Chinese counting method
- The Chinese would like to keep their traditions while they use the Western calendar

13. How were the 12 animals of the Chinese Zodiac chosen? Why is the cat not one of them?

Students should consider these points:

- The Chinese Zodiac is a cycle of 12 years, where each year is represented by one of 12 animals. A story from Chinese mythology tells of a great race that decided which animals made it into the Zodiac and in what order.
- The rat forgot to wake the cat up for the race for the Chinese Zodiac, and it resulted in the cat not given a year to represent.

14. Why are the Chinese attached to their hometowns? How does this attachment affect their social relationships?

Students should consider these points:

- 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.
- "Ancestral home" is an item to be filled in in many documents used in the People's Republic of China.

15. Do Chinese who live overseas still feel they are Chinese? What do they feel about their personal identities?

Students will have different response. They should consider these points:

- Even though they are away from China, many overseas Chinese continue to feel connected to China as they are Chinese in blood, at heart and in the mind.
- Overseas Chinese vary widely in terms of the extent of their assimilation and interaction with their countries of permanent residence, as well as the depth of their relationship with China.
- Some overseas Chinese living in countries may find that they constantly try to reconcile themselves with the cultural and ethnic definition of being "Chinese".

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