

## UNIT 1 TOPIC 4 FILIAL PIETY

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### Pre-knowledge

Before class, students should already understand the structure of the Chinese family and how the Chinese view their personal identity from previous topics. Students should also read Unit 1 Topic 4 and watch some videos on filial piety to have a basic understanding of the role of filial piety in the Chinese society.

### Aim and Objectives

Topic 4 aims to provide students with some knowledge of the meaning of the Chinese word 孝 (filial piety) and the significance of filial piety to the Chinese society and Chinese culture. It will also equip them with some knowledge of the influences of filial piety on Chinese families and each family member in different time periods.

### Teaching and Learning Activities

#### Activity 1

In Chinese, filial piety is expressed by the character 孝. You may use this character to explain the concept of filial piety. Show your students the etymology of 孝, especially the character in the Seal and Bronze Scripts. Ask them to interpret the meanings. You may then teach them the words 孝顺, 孝道, 孝心 and 孝子 to expand their vocabulary.



Bronze Character



Seal Character

#### Activity 2

Read some excerpts from *Xiao Jing – The Classic of Xiao (with English Translation)* written by Feng Xinming (available at: [http://www.tsoidug.org/Papers/Xiao\\_Jing\\_Transltn.pdf](http://www.tsoidug.org/Papers/Xiao_Jing_Transltn.pdf)). Share some of the most significant quotes from it with your students. Have a class discussion on the traditional values of filial piety based on these quotes.

#### Activity 3

Divide your students into groups of three or four and have each group conduct an interview with several overseas Chinese students on how they practise filial piety in China. Each group will then present its findings to the class.

#### Activity 4

Read the article *Filial Piety: From Strangling Tigers to Taming the Internet* (available at: <https://newgenerationseminar.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/filial-piety-updates.pdf>). Discuss with your students the guidelines for encouraging young people to be good to their parents.

You may ask these questions:

- A. Why did the Chinese government release these guidelines?
- B. Do you think these guidelines can work?
- C. Will you do the same to your parents?

D. What do you think of the parables from six centuries ago?

#### Activity 5

Have your students complete Question 8 of the Workbook before doing this activity. Divide them into groups of three or four and have each group prepare two scenarios on the changes in practising filial piety from ancient China to modern-era China. They then have to role-play and act out the scenarios.

#### Activity 6

Have your students prepare a PowerPoint presentation on comparing the similarities and differences in their attitude towards filial piety between the Chinese and Westerners.

#### Activity 7

Have your students do Exercise 4 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. Lunn, S. (2011), *Mandatory filial piety, the Chinese Way*. *The Australian* [Online]. 8 February, 2011. Available at: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/opinion/mandatory-filial-piety-the-chinese-way/news-story/cae78c18358b9853268f774ba45df81a>
2. Mak, A.S. & Chan, H. (1995), "Chinese Family Values in Australia". *Families and cultural diversity in Australia*. Australian Government, Australian Institute of Family Studies [Online]. Available at: <https://aifs.gov.au/publications/families-and-cultural-diversity-australia/4-chinese-family-values-australia>
3. Reese, R. J. (2003), *Filial Piety in Chinese Religion*. Available at: <https://robertjamesreese.com/essays/filial-piety-in-chinese-religion>
4. Lau, A. (2015), *I am not supposed to be here*. Tedx Talks [Online]. 9 July, 2015. Available at: <https://youtu.be/ID69n6Ur2P8>
5. Tai, Jin (2011), *Filial piety moves the heaven*. 10 September, 2011. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjKb64vJYBY&feature=youtu.be&list=PLpWmbSgMX\\_H0kNGa8W8\\_iaeFvlcesF4Pj](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjKb64vJYBY&feature=youtu.be&list=PLpWmbSgMX_H0kNGa8W8_iaeFvlcesF4Pj)

### **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 review on a book on filial piety that he has read.
4. Each student is required to write a 400-word personal account of his reflections on the concept of filial piety.

## Workbook Answer Key

1. Write down your impression of these two Chinese characters:

Students should consider these points:

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

2. Group discussion

In a group of three or four, share your interpretations of the concept of the two characters in Question 1. Write down all your interpretations.

Students should refer to the points listed in Question 1.

3. Internet Search

Find three Chinese words with the character 孝 in them. Translate them into English.

- Chinese: 孝敬 / English: show filial obedience to; give a present to
- Chinese: 孝子 / English: filial son, dutiful son
- Chinese: 二十四孝 / English: 24 stories of filial piety

4. How are filial piety and ancestor worship in China interconnected and practised? What are your thoughts on these practices?

Students should consider these points:

- Confucian Teaching: Filial piety and ancestor worship are interconnected as part of a single concept. The child who acts with piety towards his parents is equated with the child who mourns his parents through the proper rituals.
- A key manifestation of filial piety was ancestor worship. Ancestor worship in China is related to the basic Confucian idea that children are obligated to respect their parents in life and to remember them after they have died.
- One key locus of ancestor worship for most people was in one's home. People worship their ancestors through ancestral tablets kept at home.
- More information can be found in the article/video clip *Confucian Teaching: Filial Piety and Ancestor Worship* on Columbia University's online resource for Asian history and culture (available at: [http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/at/conf\\_teaching/ct03.html](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/at/conf_teaching/ct03.html)).

5. Introduce one classic book about filial piety. Write down one quote from that book and explain its meaning.

Students should consider these two examples:

1. The *Classic of Filial Piety* (孝经)

- This is a Confucian treatise giving advice on filial piety, i.e. how to behave towards one's senior, such as his father, elder brother or the country's ruler.

- Quote:  
Our body, skin, and hair are all received from our parents, we dare not injure them. This is the first priority in filial duty. To establish oneself in the world and practise the Way; to uphold one's good name for posterity and give glory to one's father and mother – this is the completion of filial duty. Thus filial piety begins with service to one's parents, continues in service to the ruler, and ends with establishing oneself in the world (and becoming an exemplary person).

2. The *Analects*, or the *Analects of Confucius* (论语)

- A collection of sayings and ideas attributed to Confucius and his contemporaries, it is traditionally believed to have been compiled and written by his followers during the Warring States Period. It reached its final form during the middle part of the Han Dynasty and became one of the key texts of Confucianism by the end of this dynasty.
- Quote:  
Master You (有若) said, "Among those who are filial toward their parents and fraternal toward their brothers, those who are inclined to offend against their superiors are few indeed. Among those who are disinclined to offend against their superiors, there have never been any who are yet inclined to create disorder. The noble person concerns himself with the root; when the root is established, the Way is born. Being filial and fraternal – is this not the root of humaneness?"

6. Interview an overseas Chinese student to find out how he/she practises filial piety in everyday life.

Students should consider these points:

- Basic information about his/her family
- His/her knowledge of traditional values
- His/her relations with his/her parents and siblings (if any)
- What he/she does in terms of filial piety to his/her parents and siblings (if any)
- His/her own reflection on his/her filial piety

7. Pair Work

With a partner, compare the Chinese concept of 孝 with the Western concept of filial piety.

Students should consider these points:

- The essence of Chinese filial piety
- Chinese filial piety is not confined to the family, but is also an important social norm in maintaining political order.
- The nature of Western filial piety
- Western filial piety derives from three sources of Western culture:
  - ancient Greek civilisation represented by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle
  - ancient Hebrew Judaism civilisation
  - ancient Roman civilisation
- In the West, there is no concept of filial piety corresponding to that of ancient China. However, it would be wrong to say that there is no concept of filial piety in the West – the early Greeks and Romans were very particular about respecting and supporting one's parents.
- The three sources then blended and came to constitute the Western cultural system in the form of Christianity. It was through Christianity that Western filial piety had then been exercised. Christianity advocates the equal love and respect between parents and children.
- Filial piety in China and in the West have similarities because humanity is not geographically isolated.

- General differences: Chinese filial piety is voluntary, people-centric and extends to other categories; Western filial piety is right-oriented, God-centric and does not go beyond the scope of parent-child ethics.

8. How has the practice of 孝 changed from ancient times to the modern era in China?

Students should consider these points:

- The change in the concept of filial piety
- Virtues and customs were traditionally very strong and highly regarded. Very few people strayed from the cultural norms. Filial piety was the most valued virtue. Schooling children were taught filial piety and grew up having a great sense of respect and obedience, therefore understanding the importance of family hierarchy.
- The modernisation of a nation includes the development of its culture and values. Evolution of traditions is inevitable.
- The change in the practice of filial piety
- In the past: practices of filial piety as depicted in the tales of *The Twenty-Four Paragons of Filial Piety* (二十四孝)
- The One-Child Policy created many “little emperors”, only children have been spoilt by their parents and grandparents.

9. Internet Search

Find out the impact the One-Child Policy has had on the practice of filial piety in China.

Students should consider these points:

- Many a child has been spoiled.
- Parents’ expectations of the child have changed.
- Social and economic pressures on the child are ever increasing.
- When the child moves to the city to work, his parents are left behind at home to care for themselves.
- More and more elderly parents are being sent to nursing homes.

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