

## UNIT 3 TOPIC 1 CONFUCIUS AND CONFUCIANISM

---

### Pre-knowledge

Before class, students would have already learnt about the influences of Confucianism on various aspects of the Chinese society from previous topics, such as literature and the arts, filial piety and family education. Students also need to read Unit 3 Topic 1 to have a basic understanding of Confucius's life and Confucianism.

### Aim and Objectives

Topic 1 aims to provide students with some knowledge of Confucius's life and the core concepts of Confucianism. It will also equip them with some knowledge of the *Analects*, the development of Confucianism and its significance to the Chinese society and Chinese culture.

### Teaching and Learning Activities

#### Activity 1

Show your class a picture of Confucius and ask them about their impression of him. Explain the meaning of 子 (Zǐ) and emphasise its tone, which is used to show respect to the person it refers to. Encourage your students to find out more Chinese saints who are referred to as 子.

#### Activity 2

Watch the movie *Confucius* directed by Hu Mei in 2010 and then have a class discussion.

You may ask these questions:

- A. What is the main plot?
- B. Who are the main characters?
- C. What are the relationships between the characters?
- D. Can you name of Confucius's disciples?
- E. Which character is your favourite? Why is it your favourite?
- F. What are Confucius's aims in traveling around the states?

#### Activity 3

Building on the class discussion in Activity 2, have your students each choose one of Confucius's disciples and gather more information on him. They then have to write a 400-word essay to analyse his character and beliefs, and how he practised Confucianism. Encourage them to include relevant quotes from the *Analects*.

#### Activity 4

Guide your students to study the *Analects* and ask them to choose two sentences from it that they like the most. Have them copy down the two sentences in Chinese and then explain what they understand of them in English.

#### Activity 5

Divide your class into groups of three or four. Have them discuss the relationship between 仁, 礼 and 义 – the core concepts of Confucius's philosophy. Each group will then share their points with the class.

### Activity 6

Building on the discussions in the previous activities, have each of your students prepare a PowerPoint presentation to share his ideas on promoting the values of Confucianism in modern China.

### Activity 7

Have your students gather as much information as they can in order to write a 600-word report in English examining the influences of Confucianism around the world.

### Activity 8

Have your students prepare a brief introduction to Confucianism for their parents. Prepare a feedback form for their parents to fill in, in order to show their understanding of what their child has presented to them.

You may use these questions for the feedback form:

- A. Who is Confucius?
- B. Why is Confucius famous?
- C. What is/are the main concept(s) of Confucianism?
- D. Do you agree with what Confucius advocated?
- E. What is your overall impression of your child's presentation?

### Activity 9

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. *Confucius* (2010). Directed by Hu Mei. Dadi Century (Beijing).  
(Note: the film is in Mandarin.)
- 2. Creel, H. G. (1949), *Confucius and the Chinese way*. Harper Torchbooks (1960).
- 3. Crow, C. (1938). *Master Kung: The Story of Confucius*. Tudor Publishing Company (1937).
- 4. Rule, P. A. (2014), *K'ung-tzu or Confucius? The Jesuit interpretation of Confucianism*. Australian National University.
- 5. Waley, A. (2005), *The Analects of Confucius* (Vol. 28). Psychology Press (2005).
- 6. Hofstede, G. & Bond, M. H. (1988), "The Confucius connection: From cultural roots to economic growth". *Organizational Dynamics*. 16(4) Spring 1988. pp. 5-21.

## **Assessment (all clear)**

- 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 Confucius and Confucianism that he has read.

- Each student is required to write a 600-word personal account of his understanding of and reflections on the influence of Confucianism on the world.

### Workbook Answer Key

- What was Confucius's name in Chinese? Was that his real name? What is his real name if it was not? How many names did he have and why did he have several names?

Confucius's name in Chinese was 孔子 (Kǒng Zǐ, also spelt as Kong Tze). This was not his real name. The character “子” is an honourable title given to ancient great scholars. Confucius's real name was 孔丘 (Kǒng Qiū). He was also called 孔仲尼 (Kǒng Zhòngní), which is like a middle name. He had yet another name, 孔老二 (Kǒng Lǎo'èr), which is like a nickname. People also called him 孔夫子 (Kǒng Fūzǐ), which is a short form of 孔子.

- Internet Search + Pair Work

With a partner, watch the movie *Confucius* on YouTube or any other video sharing website. Share your impression of the movie with each other and write a summary. You may include its synopsis and theme.

Synopsis:

Confucius (Chow Yun Fat) is a Chinese philosopher who is married to Qi Quan (Zhang Kai Li). The couple have two children, daughter Kong Rao (Chen Rui) and son Kong Li (Qiao Zhen Yu). At 53, he is a respected scholar working in the State of Lu with many students. He becomes an advisor to General Ji (Chen Jian Bin), who later betrays him. As a result, Confucius resigns from his post and travels around China to promote his own philosophy.

- Prepare a PowerPoint presentation on the major stages of Confucius's life and your reflections on them.

Students may include these events:

- 551 BC: Confucius is born
- 549 BC: Loses his father
- 533 BC: Gets married
- 525 BC: Starts private teaching
- 517 BC: Flees to the neighbouring State of Qi
- 499 BC: Is appointed the Minister of Justice of the State of Lu
- 495 BC: Leaves his post and the State of Lu
- 483 BC: Returns to the state of Lu
- 479 BC: Confucius passes away

- Class/Group Discussion

What are the core concepts of Confucius's philosophy? In what areas/aspects does Confucius have a profound influence? Take notes from your class/group discussion.

Confucius's philosophical system reveals the influence of Chinese traditions such as ancestor worship, loyalty to the family and respect for elders. It was Confucius who introduced the concepts of benevolence (*Ren*), ritual (*Li*) and propriety (*Yi*). He is also remembered for what is termed the Golden Rule – Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself.

Confucius's philosophy and ideas have had profound influence on the lives of the Chinese, especially in education and interpersonal relationships.

5. Can you think of ways in which one of the core concepts of Confucius's philosophy can be applied to one's life in today's context?

In China today, many ordinary people appear to be returning to Confucian ideas in search of the spiritual nourishment they find lacking. China is having a moral crisis, likely the worst it has ever seen. There are incredibly high levels of corruption, widespread fraud and counterfeiting, and pollution and environmental problems. People look around and say, "OK, we've gotten rich, but look at everything we've lost."

Chinese authorities today try to revive Confucian values that built the "harmonious society" of the past, whereby:

- Sons obeyed their fathers;
- The young demonstrated unquestionable respect for the elderly;
- A code of immutable rituals guided private and public life;
- All subjects of the monarch were content with their station in life.

The premise here is that those in power should be so enlightened that citizens heed their advice. This models after the Confucian thought of emulating one's teachers and becoming useful members of the society, a recipe for perfect moral and political order.

6. Introduce briefly the *Analects*. What is the book about? When was it written? Who was/were the author(s)? Write down a quote from the book, translate it into English and explain briefly what it means.

Believed to have been compiled by his disciples, the *Analects* is a collection of Confucius's teachings and thoughts, and also contains fragments of dialogues between the great Chinese philosopher and his disciples. The name in English is derived from the word "analect", which means a fragment or extract of literature, or a collection of teachings. In Chinese, the book is literally called "discussion on the words (of Confucius)."

Written during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods, the *Analects* is considered to be among the most representative works of Confucian thought and still has great influence on Chinese culture and East Asia.

Quote:

子曰：学而时习之，不亦说乎。有朋自远方来，不亦乐乎。人不知而不愠，不亦君子乎。

Confucius remarked, "It is indeed a pleasure to acquire knowledge and, as you go on acquiring, to put into practice what you have acquired. A greater pleasure still it is when friends of congenial minds come from afar to seek you because of your attainments. But he is truly a wise and good man who feels no discomposure even when he is not noticed of men."

7. What is Confucianism? Name at least two famous Confucianists. Explain briefly their key beliefs.

Confucianism is the teaching of Confucius, who emphasised love for humanity. In Confucianism, high value is attached to learning and devotion to one's family, including one's ancestors. A proponent of peace, it influenced the traditional culture of China for over 2,000 years.

Other Confucianists:

1. Mencius (孟子, 372-289 BC)

Mencius, which is the Latinised form of his given name Meng Zi, was one of the most important philosophers of the Confucian school in the immediate centuries after Confucius's death. He was the main contributor to what is called the "idealised" form of Confucianism. He focused on the inherent goodness of all people, and spoke of the necessity of rulers who acted with virtue and benevolence towards everyone. This idea of seeing the intrinsic goodness in people and the yearning for benevolent rule appeared idealistic and impractical to many people in his time, which saw great social and political turmoil in China.

2. Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130-1200)

Zhu Xi was a Song Dynasty Confucian scholar who became the leading figure of the School of Principle and the most influential rationalist Neo-Confucian in China. He annotated the *Four Books*, the *Analects*, the *Mencius* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*, which collectively became his most significant contribution to Chinese philosophy. He was also known for his emphasis on the investigation of things (格物, gé wù) and the synthesis of all fundamental Confucian concepts.

Zhu Xi put emphasis on logic, consistency and the conscientious observance of classical authority, especially that of Confucius and his follower Mencius. He believed that the cosmos has two aspects, the indeterminate and the determinate. The indeterminate, or *li* (理), is natural law and determines the patterns of all created things. Combined with the vital psychophysical *qi* (气), it produces form. In human beings, *li* manifests as human nature (性) and is essentially perfect. Defects, including vices, are introduced into the body and mind through impurities in *qi*. Human beings may eliminate their mental imperfections through the study of ethics and metaphysics.

8. Is Confucianism a religion? Why?

Confucianism is more of an ethical system or moral ideology than a religion. It has no metaphysical concepts, God or the concept of an afterlife, although it has been integrated with, and influenced, many of these ideas.

Religion has historically met three broad functions:

- Explain the world.
- Promote the social order.
- Provide existential comfort.

Confucianism does not appear to explain the world nor provide existential comfort very much, although Neo-Confucianism did to a limited degree. Confucianism is, however, intimately concerned with how people should lead their lives and treat one another, and how a government should be run.

9. Internet Search + Pair Work

With a partner, find out more about the influence of Confucianism on modern China. Write down some key points and support them with examples.

Confucianism has existed in China for several thousand years. It still has tremendous influence on all aspects of life in China such as its politics and economy.

In China. Confucian thoughts have functioned as the most fundamental mainstream values of people from all ethnicities through the ages. The Chinese are guided in their daily conduct by the basic tenets of Confucian thoughts, namely rites, justice, honesty, sense of

shame, humanity, love, loyalty and filial piety. Confucian teachings shaped the temperament of the Chinese nation – courteous, friendly, gentle, honest, tolerant, earnest and industrious.

10. How has Confucianism impacted the world we live in? Do you think it is still relevant? Support your viewpoint with examples.

Confucius was interested in creating order and harmony in the society. He outlined what constituted good governance – one that valued hierarchy, group orientation, age and tradition – and provided moral guidance towards achieving it. His hierarchical values were deeply entrenched in the family system and society.

Collectivism is an important inherent aspect of a Confucian society. For the Chinese society to have run smoothly for centuries, the individual's wishes were necessarily disregarded in favour of the greater good – the family, community and nation. This is very apparent in the education system. In schools in China, the emphasis was always on providing information for students' memorisation and regurgitation. Analysis and opinion were not encouraged. Chinese examinations continue to reward those with the best memory.

Note: All URLs listed herein were ascertained to be accessible on 9 September, 2020.