

UNIT 3 TOPIC 5 CHINESE CONCEPT OF LIFE

Pre-knowledge

Before class, students should read Unit 4 Topic 5 and watch some videos on Confucianism, Daoism and Chan Buddhism. They should have a basic understanding of Confucianism and Daoism from previous topics.

Aim and Objectives

Topic 5 aims to provide students with some knowledge of the three main Chinese philosophies and the way they affect the behaviour and value systems of the Chinese. Emphasis should be put on the similarities and connections amongst these philosophies. After studying the essential ideas, students will understand Chinese culture, customs and social issues better.

Teaching and Learning Activities

Activity 1

Before introducing the historical background of the three main Chinese philosophies, you should help your students focus on the key points.

You may ask discuss these questions through Kahoot, Quizlet or a class discussion:

- A. What are the main concepts of Confucianism?
- B. How does Confucianism affect the daily lives of the Chinese?
- C. What are the main concepts of Daoism?
- D. What aspects does Daoism influence the most in China?
- E. When did Chan Buddhism arrive in China? Who were its predecessors?
- F. What are the differences between Chan and Zen?

Activity 2

Ask your students to create a chart to summarise the basic information of the three philosophies. They may include the time of its origin, its founders and main concepts, and the areas it influenced.

Activity 3

Let your students divide themselves into three groups. Have each group pick one of the three philosophies, Confucianism, Daoism and Chan Buddhism. They then have to prepare a PowerPoint presentation or role play to introduce the chosen philosophy. Each group also needs to create a Kahoot quiz related to their presentation for their classmates to take.

Activity 4

Have a class discussion on the reasons why these Chinese philosophies are not popular in Western countries. Talk about how different beliefs can shape the way people live.

Activity 5

Watch the video clip *The Stories of Chuang Tzu – EP 1: The Flight from The Shadow* published by Cullen Vance (available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GUXxtAZXdaM>).

Discuss these questions:

- A. Who is Chuang Tzu (Zhuang Zi)?
- B. What have you learnt from this story?
- C. What is the relationship between Zhuang Zi and Lao Zi?

- D. How does this story relate to Daoism?
- E. Do you like this story? Why?

Activity 6

Print out and give your students some extracts from an English version of the *Analects*. Divide them into groups of four or five. Have each group role-play on some conversations from the extracts.

Activity 7

Divide your students into groups of three or four. Have each group conduct an online research on stories related to Chan Buddhism. They then have to pick one story and prepare a role play based on it to introduce its key ideas to the class.

Activity 8

Have your students do Exercise 5 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. “The Stories of Chuang Tzu – EP 1: The Flight from The Shadow” (2015). *Cullen Vance* [YouTube video]. 16 June, 2015.
Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GUXxtAZXdaM>
2. BBC Radio 4 (2014), “Zen”. *In Our Time*. 4 December, 2014.
Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04sxxv29>
3. China Network Television (2011), “Gardens and Confucianism, Taoism and Chan Buddhism”. CCTV.com [Online]. 6 September, 2011.
4. Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica (year unknown), “Muqi Fachang – Chinese Painter”. Encyclopædia Britannica [Online].
Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Muqi-Fachang#ref270507>
5. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2007), “Daoism”. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy [Online]. 19 February, 2003.
Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/daoism/>
6. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2015), “Chan Buddhism”. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy [Online]. 1 April, 2015.
Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/buddhism-chan/>
7. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2008), “Chinese Ethics”. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy [Online]. 13 March, 2013.
Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-chinese/>

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 prepare a speech of 1-2 minutes introducing one of the three philosophies.
4. Each student is required to write a 500-word personal account of his reflections on the differences between Confucianism, Daoism and Chan Buddhism.

Workbook Answer Key

1. Internet Search

Read up on the concepts of life of the Chinese and Westerners. What are some of the key similarities and differences? Write them down in the table below.

Similarities	Differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Both the Chinese and Westerners believe in leaders having to inspire the people they govern.• Both the Chinese and Westerners believe in food being the source of illnesses and thus advocate healthy eating.• The Chinese believe that everyone has his place in society (although this meant adhering strictly to social hierarchy). Similarly, Westerners value each individual and his contributions to society.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Chinese value social hierarchy and differences in status a lot while Westerners place emphasis on valuing others and treating everyone with equal respect.• The Chinese see education as equipping the young with as much knowledge as possible while Westerners want to help each individual realise his potential.

2. On which areas of society did Confucianism have an impact? In which aspects of Chinese society today is the influence of Confucianism still evident?

Refer to the suggested answers for Questions 9 and 10 in Topic 1.

3. Internet Search

Read up on the Imperial Examinations of ancient China. Write down the purpose(s) it served and how it was conducted.

Used to recruit state officials, the Chinese examination system was fiercely competitive, requiring those who sat for the Imperial Examination to memorise long Confucian texts and the work of Confucius's disciples. The system had an important impact on society, spreading Confucianism far and wide for a long time.

The system:

- dates back to the Sui dynasty. It was back then that it became not only the predominant education system but also the standard of selection for talents across the country.
- disseminated the Confucian worldview throughout China. This was because the examination was squarely based upon the Confucian classics and the recognised commentaries of those classics.
- focused on conformity. The Imperial Examination mainly tested a candidate's ability to remember and present "standard" answers, rather than his analytical skill or creativity.
- allowed only men to sit for the examination.

The Imperial Examination system officially came to an end in 1904, in the final years of the Qing Dynasty.

4. Internet Search + Group Discussion

How were women in the feudal society of ancient China viewed and treated? In a group of three or four, find out five rules that bound women, the reasons for those rules and for how long they had existed. Write them down in the table below:

Rule	Reason(s)	Duration of existence
Arranged marriage	Three Obedience and Four Virtues	Before 1949
No education	As above	Before 1911
Binding of her feet	As above	From Song Dynasty to 1912
Not to be remarried when her husband died	As above	Before 1911

The Three Obedience and Four Virtues were a set of moral principles in Confucianism drawn up specifically for women. A woman had to obey her father as a daughter (未嫁从父), her husband as a wife (既嫁从夫) and her sons in widowhood (夫死从子). She also had to observe the Four Virtues of morality (妇德), proper speech (妇言), modest manner/appearance (妇容) and diligent work (妇功).

5. As a philosophy, what is the Daoist view of life? What kind of lifestyle and mindset does Daoism promote?

Refer to the suggested answers for Questions 2, 3 and 6 in Topic 2.

Suggested video: *Taoism and the River of Life with Taoist Monk Yunrou*

Published by Taoist Monk Yunrou on 29 July, 2011

Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ervJyYW4LA8>

Students may consider these points:

- Touch the earth with our bare feet to reset our energy fields.
- Learn to control time. Time is relative and our perception of time can be manipulated. By controlling our breath, we can calm our mind and slow the flow of time.
- Stay moving all day. Our minds will get dull if we stay inert for too long. We should take a physical break every 25 minutes.
- Make our bedroom a sacred sanctuary for sleep.
- Give thanks with every bite, so we remain anchored to what is important in life.
- Connect with like-minded people. Do not let others distract and pull us into mindless consumption and conflict.
- Do not take the society too seriously. The modern world is grappling with too much stress. The wise soul understands the insanity of it all and stays committed to only the people who matter in his life.
- Control the dream. Create the world we want to live in with our own actions.

6. What are some of the key differences between traditional Chinese medicine and Western medicine? Write them down in the table below.

Traditional Chinese Medicine	Western Medicine
Uses an inductive and synthetic approach.	Uses a reductive and analytical approach.
Is experience-based.	Is standardised and evidence-based.
Is more of a healing art.	Is a pure science.

Lacks proper diagnostic tools.	Has a powerful diagnostic ability as its strength.
Uses the theory of <i>Yin</i> and <i>Yang</i> and the Five elements to examine the human body. When the entire system is in balance, optimal health occurs.	Uses knowledge in modern microbiology, pathology, pharmacology and physiology to study human diseases.
Analyses the patient's tongue, pulse and whole-body situation (reaction, hair, posture, etc.) to reach a conclusion in diagnosis. It is based on symptoms related to the imbalance of <i>Yin</i> and <i>Yang</i> rather than the disease itself.	Uses modern scientific instruments and physical examination to examine the human body and also refers to the patient's medical history. A diagnosis is reached only when all evidence has been collected and studied.
Is a holistic therapy. Patients with the same disease may have different <i>Yin</i> and <i>Yang</i> imbalance and hence they may receive different types of treatments. Likewise, patients with different diseases may receive the same type of treatment if they have similar <i>Yin</i> and <i>Yang</i> imbalance.	Directs treatment on the pathogen. For example, antibiotics are used for killing bacteria, chemotherapy are used for killing cancer, immunosuppressants are used for control autoimmune diseases and surgeries are used for removing lesion tissues.
Uses only herbs for treatments.	Uses chemical compounds to formulate medications.

7. Internet Search

What kind of lifestyle does Chan Buddhism advocate? Write down a few examples of how it is practised in the daily life of a believer.

Suggested video: Main Ideas of Chan Buddhism

Published by Religions and Society in China

Available at: <https://www.coursera.org/learn/religions-society-china/lecture/lwNgL/main-ideas-of-chan-buddhism>

Chan Buddhism advocates living simply, where we rid our lives of most unnecessary and non-essential things. We should focus only on the essentials.

Believers try to achieve these:

- Do one thing at a time, putting their mind completely to each task.
- Do it slowly and deliberately.
- Do less. A monk does not lead a lazy life: he wakes up early and has a day filled with work. However, he does not have an unending task list either. He will complete certain tasks each day and no more.
- Give space between tasks so they can manage their schedule and have time to complete each task.
- Develop rituals. Monks have rituals for many things they do, from eating to meditation. Rituals give something a sense of importance.
- Designate time for certain things. For example, a monk will always have fixed times for meditation.
- Smile and serve others. Monks spend part of their day serving others.

8. What is the tea culture of the Chinese like? What concept of living does it reflect?

The *Tea Classic* (茶经) written by Lu Yu (陆羽) was the earliest treatise on tea in the world. For Lu Yu, tea symbolised the harmony and mysterious unity of the Universe.

The tea culture of the Chinese reflects the traditional oriental culture, combining tea with *Dao*, another integral part of the Chinese culture.

The *Dao* of tea stresses the state of harmony, quietness, optimism and authenticity. Having peace of mind is the first step to achieving tranquility and harmony. It is believed that if a person keeps a quiet heart, he can enjoy conversation, laughter and everything that brings joy.

Lu Yu exhorted the ten virtues of drinking tea: chasing away depression, dissolving lethargy, encouraging liveliness, breaking up illnesses, bringing virtue and courtesy, expressing respect, making a distinction between different tastes, nurturing the body, practising *Dao* and improving one's aspirations.

Note: All URLs listed herein were ascertained to be accessible on 10 September, 2020.