

UNIT 4 TOPIC 3 CHINESE SOCIAL VALUES

Pre-knowledge

Before class, students should read Unit 4 Topic 3 to gain some basic understanding of both traditional and modern social values in China. They should also be able to compare the differences between Chinese and Western social values.

Aim and Objectives

Social values in China have changed drastically over the past 30 years. Some scholars cite the Opening Up and the One-Child Policy as the reasons for the change in behaviour and value system of the current younger generation of China.

Topic 3 aims to provide students with some knowledge of the reasons behind the rise of individualism among the young in China and of materialism among the general populace. They will also learn about some of the arguments for and against individualism and materialism, as well as the pros and cons.

Teaching and Learning Activities

Activity 1

Ask your students to research online the definitions of individualism and materialism. Then have them discuss the two concepts.

Activity 2

Individualism is encouraged in Western cultures. However, many Chinese see individualism as a detrimental mindset.

Have your students discuss these questions:

- A. What is individualism? Can you give some examples of individualism from your real-life experience or from what you have heard from the news or seen in a movie?
- B. What will a society become if individualism is totally discouraged? Support your argument with examples or evidence.
- C. What will happen to a society if individualism is overly encouraged? Support your argument with examples or evidence.
- D. What do you think is the extent to which individualism should be encouraged in Australia or your country of origin? Why?
- E. What do you think is the extent to which individualism should be encouraged in China? Why?
- F. What are the factors that may affect a country's level of tolerance towards individualism?

Activity 3

Guide your students to discuss the conflicts between individualism and Confucianism.

Have them discuss these questions:

- A. What do Confucianists believe to be the optimal relationship between a person and the society? Does it coincide with the concept of individualism? Support your argument with examples or evidence.
- B. Since Confucianism and individualism are in conflict at times, what are some familial or social issues that have arisen in China because of this? Support your argument with examples or evidence.

Activity 4

Divide your class into two groups to prepare for a debate on this topic: Individualism should be encouraged in China. Encourage them to look at the arguments both for and against. Each group will then select four members to take part in the debate.

Activity 5

Share with your students the findings of a survey: 71 percent of the Chinese respondents said they gauge their success by the things they own significantly higher than any other nation in the world.

Have them discuss these questions:

- A. Do you believe the result of this survey? Support your argument with examples or evidence.
- B. What do people in Australia or your country of origin measure their success in life with?
- C. Do you like how people in Australia or your country of origin measure their success in life in Australia? Support your argument with examples or evidence.
- D. Do you agree with people measuring their success in life by the things they own? Support your argument with examples or evidence.
- E. What may be the main reasons for people measuring their success in life by the things they own? How can the government or individual change this trend?

Activity 6

Ask your students to research online the reasons for materialism gaining popularity in China. Then have a class discussion on this topic.

Activity 7

Ask your students to talk to their Chinese friends and their families to find out their views on and attitudes towards materialism, as well as how they view its growing trend in China.

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. Sharma, D. (ed.) (2015), *Cultural Perspectives in a Global Marketplace: Proceedings of the 2010 Cultural Perspectives in Marketing Conference*. Springer International Publishing.
2. Jeffrey S. Podoshen, Li, Lu & Zhang Junfeng (2011), "Materialism and conspicuous consumption in China: a cross-cultural examination". *International Journal of Consumer Studies*. 35. pp. 17–25.
3. Watchravesringkan, K. & Dyer, B. (2007), "Materialism among young consumers in China and Thailand: An exploratory study". *Alliance Journal of Business Research*. 3(1). pp.21-35.
4. Song, Sophie (2013), "China Confirmed Most Materialistic Country In The World Even As Luxury Spending Slumps To Lowest Level Since 2000". *International Business Times* [Online]. 17 December, 2013. Available at: <http://www.ibtimes.com/china-confirmed-most-materialistic-country-world-even-luxury-spending-slumps-lowest-1512018>

5. China Change (year unknown), "Materialism in modern China". *China Change* [Online]. Available at: <https://chinachange.org/2011/11/21/materialism-in-modern-china/>

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 or journal on the trends of individualism/materialism in China that he has read.
4. Students are required to prepare a PowerPoint presentation to show their understanding of the manifestations of and attitudes towards individualism and materialism in a few different countries.

Workbook Answer Key

1. What is individualism? Why should it be of concern to any country?

Students should consider these points:

- Individualism: moral stance, political ideology and social outlook that emphasise the moral worth of the individual.
- Individualists promote the exercise of one's goals and desires. They value independence and self-reliance. They advocate that the interests of the individual should take precedence over the state and oppose governmental or institutional interference in one's interests.
- Concerns of individualism to a country include:
 - The State is not an evil.
 - The State is a welfare institution.
 - The State knows better.
 - Law and liberty are not antithetical.
 - An individual and the society are complementary.
 - Individual competition is harmful to the economy in particular.

2. What were some reasons that gave rise to individualism in China?

Students should consider these points:

- The introduction of Western individualism to China
- The impact of Western ideologies on the Chinese and young Chinese in particular
- The improving standards of living in China
- The result of social and economic changes

3. Who are included in the Post-80s Generation? What are their characteristics?

Students should consider these points:

- Those who were born from 1980 to 1990
- Most of them are an only child or "little emperors"
- Characterised by their optimism for the future, excitement for consumerism, entrepreneurship and acceptance of their role in transforming China into an economic superpower

4. What is materialism? Can it be a good thing? Why?

Students should consider these points:

- Materialism: the belief that having money and possessions is the most important thing in life.
- Materialism does motivate us to work harder and better. Materialism is acceptable as long as one does not develop a superior mentality. It can be a driving force.
- One can use materialism to stay rooted in the realities of life, recognising that amassing resources is a form of security, survival and freedom to experience life.
- Good materialism enables us to treasure our possessions.

5. How have consumption practices in China changed after it started opening up to the world in 1979?

Students should consider these points:

- The rapidly increasing economic development of the nation
- The rising standards of living in China
- The rise of upper-middle class
- The emergence of a new generation
- The growing role of e-commerce

6. Internet Search

We have learnt about the Moonlight Generation of China. Find more about them. What do they typically spend on? How much do they spend each month on these purchases? Write down what you have found out and share it with your classmates.

Students should consider these points:

- Moonlight Generation (月光族): used to describe a large group of people, especially young adults, who use up all their salary before they get the next.
- The term is a pun on the characters it is made up of: the two characters 月光, translating directly into moonlight, means “month” and “empty” respectively. 族 means a group of people sharing the same characteristics. It is equivalent to the English saying of living from pay cheque to pay cheque.
- They splurge on luxury goods such as branded and expensive handbags and clothes, as well as on fine dining at restaurants and travelling.
- They typically spend more than what they earn each month.

7. Are traditional Chinese values in conflict with the materialism that is seen in China today? What problems might the clash between these values and the reality cause?

Students should consider these points:

- They do have conflicts because the ideologies and focuses of traditional Chinese values and materialism are different.
- Traditional Chinese values include harmony, benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom, honesty, loyalty and filial piety.
- Traditional Chinese values do not exclude substances. Instead, emphasis is placed on restraining desire with morality, based on Confucian ethics advocating self-transcendence.
- Materialism may result in these issues:
 - Incessant acquisition of material goods (lust, envy, false comfort, idolatry)
 - Indulgence in self-interests (selfishness, lack of compassion, greed)
 - Viewing of accumulation as the equivalent of success (no morals, no sense of right or wrong, preoccupation with money, jealousy, thievery)

8. Watch the video clip *Changing Social Values in China* on YouTube. Write a speech of 400-500 words on your reflections on social values in China.

Students should consider these points:

- The changing attitudes and values of the Chinese, in particular young Chinese, since the economic reforms of the 1980s
- Four main areas of change for the young Chinese of today facing a career choice:
 - They pay more attention to opportunities that can develop their potential and help them realise their true worth. In other words, they want a job that can lead them to greater things in the future.
 - They are becoming more aware of risk as the fallacy of the iron rice bowl starts to become a reality. Job security is no longer viewed as a top priority, like it was in the past.
 - They are less attracted to working in government institutions. With more self-awareness and a free market that works in their favour, they prefer occupations with more autonomy and freedom.
 - With new levels of job mobility, they feel more at ease with changing jobs regularly.
- The value of money: In ancient times, the superior man was concerned with what was right and the mean man with gain. Talking about money was seen as a weakness in character. In modern China, people no longer hold back from talking about money. This is indicative of a changing set of values and attitudes in society.
- Love and Marriage: People have become more practical. Money, cars and houses, among many other material possessions, have become an indication of how successful a person is in life and almost a prerequisite for getting married.
- People are more open, tolerant and rational now.

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