

UNIT 4 TOPIC 5 THE INFLUENCE OF WESTERN CULTURES AND THE YOUTHS OF CHINA

Pre-knowledge

Before class, students should read Unit 4 Topic 5 and watch some videos on the challenges young people in China face and the attitudes the Chinese have towards Western culture in China to gain some basic understanding of these topics.

Aim and Objectives

The current generation of youths (those born after 1980) has been said to be the luckiest in the history of China. They have benefitted from rapid economic growth since the Opening Up in 1979. As an only child in their respective family, most of them have enjoyed a higher quality of life and better education. Yet they are also said to be the unluckiest, having to face unprecedented challenges in gender imbalance and soaring property prices, as well as loneliness resulting from being an only child.

Topic 5 aims to provide students with some knowledge of the predicament of the youths in China. They will also compare the pressures and challenges these youths in China face with those they face and reflect upon this issue with a deeper understanding.

Teaching and Learning Activities

Activity 1

Have your students discuss how foreign cultures have influenced popular culture in China.

You may ask these questions:

- A. Why are fast food and Starbucks popular in China?
- B. Why are Hollywood movies popular in China?
- C. Why is Western culture welcomed in China?
- D. Do you think westernisation in China is beneficial to her youths? Support your argument with examples or evidence.
- E. Do you think the values from Western cultures may be in conflict with traditional Chinese values? Support your argument with examples or evidence.

Activity 2

Choose and play some of the most popular Chinese pop songs of today to your class. Then ask them to judge whether these songs have been influenced by popular music from the West and discuss the reasons for their stand.

Activity 3

Watch an episode of the television programme *The Voice of China* produced by Zhejiang Television.

Have your students discuss these questions:

- A. How is *The Voice of China* different from *The Voice* in Australia?
- B. Do you think the songs in *The Voice of China* sound like traditional Chinese music? Why?
- C. Do you think how people act in *The Voice of China* coincides with traditional Chinese culture? Support your opinion with examples or evidence.
- D. Do you like *The Voice of China*? Why?

Activity 4

Watch an episode of the television programme *If You Are The One*. Then have your students read the article *If You Are the One's Meng Fei: 'Looking for beauty is universal for men'*, written by Monica Tan (available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2016/feb/11/if-you-are-the-ones-meng-fei-looking-for-beauty-is-universal-for-men>).

Have your students discuss these questions:

- A. Why is *If You Are the One* the most popular Chinese television programme in Australia? Support your opinion with examples or evidence.
- B. Do you think how people act in *If You Are the One* coincides with traditional Chinese culture? Support your opinion with examples or evidence.
- C. What social values does *If You Are the One* reflect?

Activity 5

Have your students visit taobao.com and browse the goods on the website. Then have them compare it with online shops from Australia.

Activity 6

Divide your students into three groups and have each group research online one of the three major challenges for the youths in China (Textbook pages 233-235). Then have them compare these challenges with those the youths in Australia face.

Activity 7

Ask your students to 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. Dewar, S. (1989), "Are the Youth of China Coming to the Party". *China Review*. November: 28–29.
2. Hay, J. (2008), "Chinese Youth: Teenagers and Young Adults in China". *Facts and Details* [Online]. Available at: <http://factsanddetails.com/china/cat4/sub21/item1878.html>
3. LaFarha (2015), "The westernization Of China". *China Daily* [Online]. 26 June, 2015. Available at: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2015-06/26/content_21114127.htm
4. Loubere, N. (2010), "Is China Conforming to a Westernized Global Culture? An Assimilation Theory Analysis of Chinese-Western Cultural Relations". *Graduate Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies*. 7:1 (2010). pp 70-83.

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 on the westernisation of China that he has read.

4. Students are required to prepare a PowerPoint presentation to show their understanding of the challenges faced by the youths of China.
5. Students are required to compare the different pressures faced by the youths of China and those in Australia or their country of origin.

Workbook Answer Key

1. How have Western cultures influenced China?

Students should consider these points:

- Through cultural exchanges
- Import of Western goods into China
- Foreign investment in China
- Tourism
- Overseas students, both Chinese studying overseas and foreigners studying in China

2. Group/Class Discussion

How do we keep a balance between adapting to other cultures while maintaining one's own cultural traditions?

Students should consider these points:

- Maintaining your own culture when moving to another country can be difficult, especially if you are trying to also assimilate into the new culture. Striking a balance between the new culture and your own culture helps you maintain your identity.
- Keeping up communications with people from back home
- Joining local clubs and associations with ties to your own culture
- Sharing about your own culture with new friends and colleagues
- Observing your own cultural traditions wherever possible

3. Have you watched any episode of the dating show *If You Are the One*? Why is it so popular in China? Why do Australians and people in the West also like to watch this show?

Students should consider these points:

- The theme and format of the show
- Out of curiosity and the intention to learn more about the real social culture of the Chinese
- Both men and women want to know each other in dating or romance
- No other TV programmes like this one

4. Internet Search + Pair Work

We have learnt about the types of social media that are popular in China. With a partner, choose and find more about two of them. Compare them with Australian/Western equivalent. How they are similar or different?

Students should consider these points:

Type of social media	China: WeChat	Australia/West: SMS
Similarities	Users of either medium can communicate with messages, graphics and photographs.	
Differences	WeChat has an audio function which allows users to leave vocal messages or talk to each other via a phone call.	

Type of social media	China: Taobao	Australia/West: Amazon
Similarities	Each of them is a large online shopping website.	
Differences	Taobao offers a much bigger variety of commodities including electronics, furniture, clothes, books, toys and groceries. Amazon offers a relatively limited variety of commodities such as books and clothes.	

5. Internet Search

Why is online shopping so popular in China? Have you heard of China's 光棍节 (Guāng Gùn Jié, Single's Day)? How is it related to the popularity of online shopping in China?

Students should consider these points:

- Convenience and accessibility
- Attraction of "Best Buys"
- Confidentiality
- 光棍节 (Singles' Day) is hugely popular among the young in China, who use this "festival" to celebrate being single. The date it falls on, the 11th of November, was chosen because the digit "1" represents someone who is alone. It has become a popular "festival" because many singles are said to want to give themselves a good treat by shopping on this day.

6. We have learnt about the key challenges facing the youths in China. Do youths in Australia or the West face the same challenges? Explain briefly how these challenges affect the youths in Australia or the West.

Students should consider these points:

- Some are similar but some are different
- Pressure from studies or work
- Mental health
- Suicide prevention
- Teen pregnancy
- Binge drinking
- Bullying

7. Internet Search

What is the current situation of the employment market in China? Find out if there is underemployment among young adults there. Provide some statistics to illustrate how serious the problem might be. You may also compare these figures with those in Australia or a country in the West.

Students should consider these points:

- China's labour force was one of the most important factors contributing to the unparalleled economic development over the past four decades. She initially benefitted from an ample supply of cheap labour, but with a slowdown in economic growth, she is facing changing demography and labour dynamics. Unemployment rate was 4.1 percent in 2016.
- Youth underemployment is rising in China. It rose from 9.3 percent in 2010 to 10.6 percent in 2014, and reached 10.8 percent in 2016.
- In Australia, the trend participation rate for 15-24 year olds remained unchanged at 66.5 per cent in 2017. The youth unemployment rate remained unchanged at 13.0 per cent.

8. Internet Search + Pair Work

What is the Ant Tribe? How did this phenomenon come about? With a partner, find out if there is evidence that this phenomenon may happen in Australia or a country in the West, and the preventive measures that the government may take.

Students should consider these points:

- “Ant Tribe” is a term used to describe a group of university graduates (typically born during and after the 1980s) who have to settle for low-paying jobs in big cities in China, while harbouring hopes they will someday land a good job in the field they have been trained for in university.
- The term was coined by Lian Si (廉思), then a postdoctoral researcher at Beijing University, to draw a comparison between the lives of these university graduates and ants – they share many similarities with ants, living in colonies in cramped areas, and are hardworking and intelligent yet underpaid.
- The Ant Tribe is considered to be among the disadvantaged social classes together with peasants, migrant workers and those former employees of government-owned corporations who were left unemployed the economic reforms in China.
- In the 2010 Annual Report on the Development of Chinese Talent, it was estimated that there were one million people who fit the definition of the Ant Tribe living in slum-like conditions. These university graduates with degrees in economics, engineering, management and medicine earned an average of US\$286 a month.
- A key characteristic of the Ant Tribe is their optimism. These young people often stay in urban areas to maximise their career prospects after graduation, and accept starting-level positions for which they are over-qualified. They believe that they will rise to their desired job level in no time. Graduates from the best universities generally flock to the big cities, while students who have completed only vocational training are more likely to vie for positions in smaller cities.
- To control costs, Ant Tribe members are likely to rent small rooms or share a crowded small apartment in the city slums. Accommodation is often spartan with few pieces of furniture. Some dwellings have no windows and many share a bathroom. Many also have no access to hot water or heating and air conditioning. These apartments have been noted to resemble slums in third world countries.
- Some factors that are pushing the Chinese government to try and solve this social problem are economic and market forces, education reform and wage reform.
- The Ant Tribe phenomenon may happen to the Aboriginals or island people in Australia.

9. Who are the leftover men and leftover women in China? How did this phenomenon come about?

Students should consider these points:

- Leftover men and leftover women are translations of the terms 剩男 and 剩女 respectively.
- They are derogatory terms made popular by the All-China Women’s Federation that classify men and women who remain unmarried in their late 20s and beyond.
- The phenomenon derives from the One-Child Policy, a belief in Mammon, materialism, Western influence and social-economic conditions.

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