

UNIT 2 TOPIC 4 INTRODUCTION TO CHINESE LITERATURE

Pre-knowledge

Before class, students should read Unit 2 Topic 4 and watch some videos on Chinese literature such as Tang Dynasty poems or famous writers in modern China to gain some basic understanding.

Aim and Objectives

Topic 4 aims to provide students with some knowledge of Chinese literature, including different forms of literary works and some famous writers throughout Chinese history. It will also equip them with the basic ability to appreciate Chinese literature

Teaching and Learning Activities

Activity 1

Have your students read a poem by Li Bai (both the original in Chinese and its translation in English). Then have them discuss how to appreciate Tang poems.

You may share this poem and the image below with them:

静夜思

床前明月光，
疑是地上霜。
举头望明月，
低头思故乡。

In the Quiet of the Night

Moonlight reflects off the front of my bed.
Could it be frost on the ground instead?
I look up to view the bright moon ahead.
Thoughts of hometown bring down my head.



Activity 2

Ask your students to find another Tang poem and translate it into English. Then have them write their interpretation of the poem in a short article.

You may share this poem and the image below with them:

春晓

春眠不觉晓，
处处闻啼鸟。
夜来风雨声，
花落知多少。

Spring Dawn

In Spring one sleeps, unaware of dawn,
Everywhere one hears crowing birds.
In the night came the sound of wind and rain,
Who knows how many flowers fell?



Activity 3

Ask your students to research online information on Li Bai and Meng Haoran.

They may use these questions as a guide:

1. When were they born and when did they die?
2. What did they do for a living? How did they start writing poems?
3. How many poems did they write in their lifetime? Which of those poems were they most famous for?
4. What are their poems mostly about?

Activity 4

Have students surf the internet to find one or two poems from the Song Dynasty and then compare them with the Tang poems for any differences.

Activity 5

Ask your students to research online Mo Yan and his works. Then have them discuss why he was awarded the Noble Prize in Literature.

Activity 6

Let your students watch two cartoon movies about Mulan, one produced in China and the other in the United States. Then have them discuss the similarities and differences.

Activity 7

Have your students research Pearl Buck and her life, as well as her contributions to the world in terms of promoting Chinese history and culture. Then have them discuss how important she was in this aspect.

You may share with your students the image of Pearl Buck below.



Arnold Genthe, commons.wikimedia.org

You may use this as reference:

- Pearl Buck (1892-1973) was born in Hillsboro, West Virginia, as Pearl Comfort Sydenstricker. Her parents, Caroline and Absalom Sydenstricker, brought her to live in Zhejiang Province in 1895. She was brought up there and first learnt the Chinese language and customs from a Mr Kong. Then she was taught English by her mother and her teacher. She was encouraged to write at an early age.
- She returned to the United States in 1910 and studied at Randolph-Macon Women's College, where she earned her degree in 1914. She then returned to China and married agricultural economist John Lossing Buck and gave birth to daughter Carol.
- The small family then moved to Nanjing, where Pearl Buck taught English literature at the University of Nanking. In 1925, the Bucks adopted Janice (whose surname was later changed to Walsh) and subsequently eight other children.
- Pearl Buck left China in 1926 to study at the Cornell University for her Master of Arts.

- Pearl Buck began her writing career in 1930 with her first publication *East Wind: West Wind*. In 1931 she wrote *The Good Earth*, her most well-known work, which is also widely recognised as her best. It won her Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1932. Her career continued to flourish and she won the William Dean Howells Medal in 1935.
- Pearl Buck was forced to flee China in 1934 due to political tensions. She returned to the United States and divorced her husband. She then married Richard J. Walsh, president of the John Day Publishing Company in 1935 and went on to adopt six other children. In 1938 she won the Nobel Prize for Literature after writing *The Fighting Angel*, a biography of her parents.
- In her lifetime, Pearl Buck wrote over 100 works of literature. Many of her books relate to her life experiences. She dealt with many topics including women, Asians, immigration, adoption, emotions and conflicts that many people go through in life. In 1949, she established Welcome House Inc., the first adoption agency dedicated to the placement of bi-racial children, particularly American Asians.

Activity 7

Have your students research online Lin Yutang and his works on Chinese history and culture, as well as the daily lives of people. Then have them discuss his contributions to Chinese literature.

You may use this as reference:

- Lin Yutang (1895-1976) was born in Fujian Province.

- Lin Yutang obtained his bachelor's degree from the St. John's University in Shanghai, a master's degree in comparative literature from the Harvard University, and a doctorate in linguistics from the Leipzig University in Germany.
- Celebrated as a Chinese author of books in English, Lin Yutang is known for his work as a linguist, philosopher, writer, traveler and inventor. He is best known for his translation of "Humor," as well as *The Analects of Confucius*, *World of Mankind* and *Cosmic Wind*. He advocated humorous literature and earned himself the title of Master of Humor.
- Lin Yutang also contributed a number of notable collections including *My Country and My People*, *The Importance of Living*, *Moment in Peking*, *Leaf in the Storm*, *The Vermilion Gate*, *The Wisdom of Laotse* and *The Gay Genius: The Life and Times of Su Tungpo*.
- In 1966, homesickness forced Lin Yutang to leave the United States and return to Taiwan. The house he lived in Taiwan was a gift from the government and which he designed himself. The villa with white walls and a roof in indigo tiles represents the 四合院 architectural style, which has a quadrangle courtyard surrounded by four houses. The most gratifying aspect of returning to Taiwan was the fact that he could hear and speak the local dialect of Fujian once again.
- Lin Yutang once described the dwelling as "in the dwelling there is a garden, in the garden there is a house, in the house there is a courtyard, in the courtyard there is a tree, on the tree there is the sky, in the sky there is the moon, what a fortunate life!" The balcony was a place he often went before his death. He liked sitting near the table on the rattan chair after dinner, with a smoking pipe in his mouth, appreciating the evening glow from the sun setting behind Guanyin Mountain.

Activity 8

Ask your students to 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. Harris, P. (2009), *Three Hundred Tang Poems*. Everyman's Library.
2. Mair, V. (2001), *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*. Columbia University Press.

Assessment

1. Collect the notes taken by your students during all group and class discussions.
2. Students are required to choose a Tang poem and translate and analyse it.
3. Each student is required to write a book review on the play 家, written by 巴金, or a critique on a film adaptation of the play.
4. Students are required to learn to write a Chinese poem to express their feelings and emotions.

Workbook Answer Key

1. Pair Work

With a partner, list the key stages of Chinese literature and the famous works from each stage in the table below. Which of these stages are you interested in learning more about? Why?

Stages	Famous Works
Eastern Zhou to Warring States Period (770-22 BC)	诗经
Han Dynasty (206BC-220AD)	古诗十九首
Six Dynasties and the Sui Dynasty (220-618)	文心雕龙
Tang Dynasty (618-907)	李白《将进酒》
Song Dynasty (960-1279)	苏轼《念奴娇·赤壁怀古》
Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368)	王实甫《西厢记》
Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)	罗贯中《三国演义》
Qing Dynasty (1644-1911)	曹雪芹《红楼梦》
Republic of China (1912-1949)	鲁迅《孔乙己》
People's Republic of China (1949-present)	陈忠实《白鹿原》

2. Internet Search + Pair Work

With a partner, find out and write down some of the key historical events that were written into the *Records of the Grand Historian*.

Students may include these events:

- 陈胜吴广起义
- 项羽本纪·鸿门宴
- 廉颇蔺相如传

3. Internet Search

Why was the Tang Dynasty famous for its poems? Write down the names of two famous poets and the titles of three of their most famous works.

Students may consider these two poets and their poems:

1. 李白

- 《望庐山瀑布》
日照香炉生紫烟，遥看瀑布挂前川。
飞流直下三千尺，疑是银河落九天。
- 《静夜思》
床前明月光，疑是地上霜。
举头望明月，低头思故乡。
- 《送孟浩然之广陵》
故人西辞黄鹤楼，烟花三月下扬州。
孤帆远影碧空尽，惟见长江天际流。

2. 杜甫

- 《春夜喜雨》
好雨知时节，当春乃发生。
随风潜入夜，润物细无声。
野径云俱黑，江船火独明。
晓看红湿处，花重锦官城。
- 《春望》

国破山河在，城春草木深。
感时花溅泪，恨别鸟惊心。
烽火连三月，家书抵万金。
白头搔更短，浑欲不胜簪。

• 《登高》

风急天高猿啸哀，渚清沙白鸟飞回。
无边落木萧萧下，不尽长江滚滚来。
万里悲秋常作客，百年多病独登台。
艰难苦恨繁霜鬓，潦倒新停浊酒杯。

3. Internet Search

Find two famous Tang poems, one regulated and one truncated, and write them down. Share with your classmates the poems in Chinese and English and tell your understanding of these two poems.

Students may consider these two poems:

1. Regulated verse: 王维《山居秋暝》(Mountain Life on an Autumn Evening)

空山新雨后，	After fresh rain in the empty mountains
天气晚来秋。	The evening weather heralds Autumn's arrival
明月松间照，	The bright moon shines between the pines
清泉石上流。	The clear spring water flows over the stones
竹喧归浣女，	The clamour of washerwomen returning through bamboo groves
莲动下渔舟。	Fishing boats are lowered down by the lotus flowers
随意春芳歇，	The fragrance of Spring remains of its own accord
王孙自可留。	Nobles passing through may stay.

2. Truncated verse: 王之涣《登鹳雀楼》(Climbing White Stork Tower)

白日依山尽，	The white sun sets behind the mountains,
黄河入海流。	and the Yellow River flows into the sea.
欲穷千里目，	To see a thousand mile view,
更上一层楼。	go up another floor.

Assess points as presented by your students.

4. Internet Search

Identify one famous *ci* of Su Shi's and one famous *ci* of Li Qingzhao's. Explain briefly the theme of each piece.

Students may consider these two *ci*:

1. Su Shi: 《念奴娇赤壁怀古》(The Red Cliff)

大江东去，	The great river eastwards flows,
浪淘尽，	With its waves are gone all those
千古风流人物。	Gallant heroes of bygone years.
故垒西边，	West of the ancient fortress appears
人道是，三国周郎赤壁。	Red Cliff where General Zhou won his early fame
乱石崩云，	When the Three Kingdoms were in flame.
惊涛裂岸，	Rocks tower in the air and waves beat on the shore.
卷起千堆雪。	Rolling up a thousand heaps of snow.

江山如画，
一时多少豪杰。

遥想公瑾当年，
小乔初嫁了，
雄姿英发。
羽扇纶巾，
谈笑间、檣櫓灰飞烟灭。
故国神游，
多情应笑我，
早生华发。
人间如梦，
一尊还酹江月。

To match the land so fair, how many heroes of yore
Had made great show!

I fancy General Zhou at the height
Of his success, with a plume fan in hand,
In a silk hood, so brave and bright,
Laughing and jesting with his bride so fair,
While enemy ships were destroyed as planned
Like castles in the air.
Should their souls revisit this land,
Sentimental, his bride would laugh to say:
Younger than they, I have my hair turned grey.
Life is but like a dream.
O Moon, I drink to you who have seen them on the stream.

In this *ci*, Su Shi remembers the heroes of bygone eras, expressing his utmost respect for them. Through this yearning, he laments on his own life which is full of tribulations.

2. Li Qingzhao: 《声声慢》(Forlorn)

寻寻觅觅，冷冷清清，
凄凄惨惨戚戚。
乍暖还寒时候，
最难将息。
三杯两盏淡酒，
怎敌他晚来风急？
雁过也，正伤心，
却是旧时相识！

满地黄花堆积。
憔悴损，如今有谁堪摘。
守着窗儿，
独自怎生得黑？
梧桐更兼细雨，
到黄昏点点滴滴。
这次第，
怎一个愁字了得？

So dim, so dark,
So dense, so dull,
So damp, so dank,
So dead!
The weather, now warm, now cold,
Makes it harder
Than ever to forget!
How can a few cups of thin wine
Bring warmth against
The chilly winds of sunset?
I recognize the geese flying overhead:
My old friends,
Bring not the old memories back!

Let fallen flowers lie where they fall.
To what purpose
And for whom should I decorate?
By the window shut,
Guarding it alone,
To see the sky has turned so black!
And the drizzle on the kolanut
Keeps on droning:
Pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat!
Is this the kind of mood and moment
To be expressed
By one word "sad"?

Translated by Lin Yutang

In this *ci*, Li Qingzhao paints a vivid picture of autumn scenes. But the real meaning behind these scenes is her exasperation at the chaos her country is sunken into and at the loss of her husband and family.

5. Watch a video clip *Journey to the West* on YouTube or any other video sharing website. Write down your impression of the Monkey King.

Suggested video: *How the Monkey King came to be – Journey to the West*
Published by Off the Great Wall on 20 August, 2015
Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yN3_6efimoQ

Assess points as presented by your students.

6. Internet Search + Pair Work

With a partner, do an online research on the Four Great Classical Novels. Each of you will write a brief introduction to two of the novels. Each introduction should be around 200 words.

Suggested video: *China's 4 Classic Novels Explained*
Published by Learn Chinese Now on 18 July, 2016
Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MGe0wtjgk0>

Assess points as presented by your students.

7. Internet Search

Do an online research on Lin Yutang and Pearl S. Buck and their books on China. Choose one book from each author and write a synopsis for it. Share the synopses with your classmates.

Students may consider these two books:

1. *My Country and My People* by Lin Yutang

Written in 1935, this book was the first major work by a Chinese to introduce China and her culture to the West in an understandable way. It covers subjects as diverse as the role of women, the Chinese mind and the importance of calligraphy as a way to understand Chinese culture. In it, Lin Yutang also gives lessons on Chinese literature and painting, and talks about the patterns of circularity and repetition throughout the dynasties.

Downloadable at: <https://archive.org/details/MyCountryAndMyPeople1936>

2. *The Good Earth* by Pearl Buck

This book tells the poignant tale of a Chinese farmer and his family in old agrarian China. The humble Wang Lung takes pride in working the soil, nurturing the land as it nurtures him and his family. Nearby, the nobles of the House of Hwang consider themselves above the land and their workers but they soon meet their own downfall.

8. Watch the movie *The Good Earth* (adapted from the book with the same title written by Pearl S. Buck) on YouTube or any other video sharing website. Write a short review on it.

Assess points as presented by your students.

9. When was stage play introduced in China? Who was the playwright and what was the title of the stage play that he wrote? What was its theme?

Students may consider these points:

- Modern Chinese Drama, or *Huaju* (话剧, literally talking play), started to develop in the early part of the 20th century in Shanghai. Different from traditional Chinese opera, it soon won fans for its realistic portrayals of the lives of common folks and for its wide range of works by such Western playwrights as Shakespeare, Moliere and Chekhov.

- Since then, Chinese playwrights such as Cao Yu, Hong Shen, Lao She, Tian Han and Guo Moruo had created works that realistically reflected the changes in the lives of the Chinese before and after the founding of New China. The most memorable included *Teahouse*, *The Peking Man*, *The Thunderstorm*, *The Family*, *The Prairie* and *The Death of a Famous Opera Performer*. Younger playwrights tried to develop a more modern style, exploring the inner psyche of personalities with more modernist works and incorporating more modern theatrical techniques.
- The most famous and influential playwright was Cao Yu and some of his works include:
 - *Family* (家, 1942): This four-act play was adapted from Ba Jin's novel of the same title. It focuses on the marriage, hard work and eventual death of Ruijue, wife of the eldest son in a big feudal family, to expose the corruption of big feudal families in old China and the cruelty of the old marriage system.
 - *Sunrise* (日出, 1935): This full-length modern drama tells of the corruption and luxuries-filled lives of the rich and of the suffering of the poor in old China. The plot revolves around Chen Balu, a high-class courtesan in the 1930s. She enjoys a pleasure-seeking life in the city but eventually commits suicide in the face of her benefactor's bankruptcy, the death of a teenage girl she has tried to save from forced prostitution, and the departure of her childhood boyfriend.
 - *Thunderstorm* (雷雨, 1934): This full-length modern drama features the complicated relationships among the members and servants of a large well-off family and its disintegration as a result of the morbidity and corruption prevalent in old China. Zhou Puyuan, the son of a wealthy businessman, has an affair with Shiping, who bears two sons with him. After he marries a wealthy woman he keeps the elder son and drives Shiping away with the younger one. Shiping marries Lu Gui, a butler, and gives birth to daughter Sifeng. An entangled family history is played out in what turns out to be a tragic ending.

10. Internet Search + Pair Work

With a partner, choose one of the modern-era writers of China that you have learnt about. Find out how he/she achieved critical acclaim with his/her works. You may include interesting facts about him/her.

Students may consider these two writers:

1. 严歌苓 (Yan Geling, 1958-)

- Yan Geling is one of the most acclaimed contemporary novelists and screenwriters writing in the Chinese language today and a well-established writer in English.
- She was born in Shanghai and served in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) during the Cultural Revolution for over a decade. During this period, she was also a war correspondent covering the Sino-Vietnam border conflict. She was later discharged with a rank equivalent to Lieutenant Colonel.
- Yan Geling published her first novel in 1985 and has since produced a steady stream of novels, short stories, novellas, essays and scripts. Her most well-known novels in English are *Little Aunt Crane*, *The Flowers of War*, *The Banquet Bug* (*The Uninvited* in its British edition) and *The Lost Daughter of Happiness*.

2. 韩寒 (Han Han, 1982-)

- Han Han is a professional rally driver, best-selling author, singer, the creator of *Party, One*, (an app magazine), and China's most popular blogger. He has published five novels to date and is represented by the Hong Kong-based Peony Literary Agency. He is also involved in music production.
- In May 2010, Han Han was named one of the most influential people in the world by *Time Magazine*. In September 2010, British magazine *New Statesman* listed him at 48th place in their "The World's 50 Most Influential Figures 2010" list. In June

2010, Han Han was interviewed by CNN as China's rebel writer who has become the unofficial voice for his generation.

11. What images of China have been conjured up from the books and articles you have read, movies and television programmes you have watched and the music you have listened to that were related to China? Discuss and comment on these images.

Assess points as presented by your students.

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