Worksheet One

BACKGROUND - WHAT WAS TRADITIONAL CHINA LIKE?

China experienced thousands of years of stability before it was forced to deal with the West. The people of China followed the customs and traditions of their ancestors. The family was the most important unit in traditional China and one of the strongest features of the traditional Chinese family was the notion of filial piety. Filial piety can be explained as a value system based on accepting the father as a figure of authority in the family. As well, it involved respecting the views of elders. This attitude towards family life helped create a society which accepted authority and resisted change.

Confucianism

Another important feature of traditional Chinese life was Confucianism. This was a belief system based upon the teachings of an important philosopher – Confucius (551 -479 BCE). Confucius drew together many of the features of traditional Chinese beliefs and gave them a particular focus. Confucianism was concerned with how people related to one another in this life...Confucian ideas taught that each person in society had a class to which they belonged and, partly as a result of this, the structure of Chinese society did not change for thousands of years. Although Confucius did not produce any surviving works, his followers collected his sayings into the Confucian Analects. This work has become a classic.

Confucius believed and professed that there were five principal relationships:

Ruler and Subject; Father and Son; Elder Brother and Younger Brother; Husband and Wife; Friend and friend.

This is expressed in the diagram below:


Activity 1 - Confucius

In your envelopes is a list of quotes and headings from Confucius which pertain to the five relationships mentioned above. In pairs, match the quotes under the heading you think best represents it.
RULER AND SUBJECT:

“Let the ruler be a ruler, the subject a subject, the father a father, the son a son. Truly if the ruler be not a ruler, the subject not a subject, the father not a father, the son not a son, then even if there be grain, would I get to eat it?” 12:11

“To govern is to correct. If you set an example by being correct, who would dare to remain incorrect?”

“In serving one’s lord, one should approach one’s duties with reverence (respect) and consider one’s pay as of secondary importance.” 15:38

FATHER AND SON:

“Being good as a son and obedient as a young man is, perhaps, the root of a man’s character.” 1:2

“If, for three years, a man makes no changes to his father’s ways, he can be said to be a good son.” 4:20

“A man should not be ignorant of the age of his father and mother. It is a matter, on the one hand, for rejoicing and, on the other, for anxiety.” 4:21

ELDER BROTHER AND YOUNGER BROTHER:

“Simply by being a good son and friendly to his brothers a man can exert an influence upon government.” 2:21

“As your father and elder brothers are still alive, you are hardly in a position immediately to put into practice what you have heard.” 11:22
HUSBAND AND WIFE:

“In one’s household, it is the women and the small men that are difficult to deal with. If you let them get too close, they become insolent (disrespectful). If you keep them at a distance, they complain.” 17:25

“A happy union with wife and child is like the music of lutes and harps”

FRIEND AND FRIEND:

“Make it your guiding principle to do your best for others and to be trustworthy in what you say. Do not accept as friend anyone who is not as good as you. When you make a mistake do not be afraid of mending your ways.” 9:25

“To be importunate with one’s lord will mean humiliation. To be importunate (demanding) with one’s friends will mean estrangement (distancing).” 4:26

“He stands to benefit who makes friends with three kinds of people. Equally he stands to lose who makes friends with three other kinds of people. To make friends with the straight, the trustworthy in word and the well informed is to benefit. To make friends with the ingratiating (flattering in order to gain favour) in action, the pleasant in appearance and the plausible (possible) in speech is to lose.” 16:4

“A gentleman makes friends through being cultivated, but looks to friends for support in benevolence (goodwill).” 12:24

Activity 2

Interpreting the source

What do you think Confucius is trying to express in each of the quotations below? In your pairs, discuss the questions under each quotation and write your answers in the spaces provided.

“Let the ruler be a ruler, the subject a subject, the father a father, the son a son. Truly if the ruler be not a ruler, the subject not a subject, the father not a father, the son not a son, then even if there be grain, would I get to eat it?” 12:11

1. What is Confucius saying would happen if rulers were not rulers, and subjects not subjects and so on?
   
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

2. What comment is Confucius making here about the concept of hierarchy in Chinese society?
   
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

“A man should not be ignorant of the age of his father and mother. It is a matter, on the one hand, for rejoicing and, on the other, for anxiety.” 4:21

1. In Chinese society, why might one be ‘anxious’ about their parents getting older?
   
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
“He stands to benefit who makes friends with three kinds of people. Equally he stands to lose who makes friends with three other kinds of people. To make friends with the straight, the trustworthy in word and the well informed is to benefit. To make friends with the ingratiating (flattering in order to gain favour) in action, the pleasant in appearance and the plausible (possible) in speech is to lose.” 16:4

1. What are the three kinds of people one can benefit from making friends with?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. Why does one ‘lose’ when they are friends with the ‘other’ kinds of people (ingratiating, pleasant in appearance, plausible in speech [smooth talker])?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

“Make it your guiding principle to do your best for others and to be trustworthy in what you say. Do not accept as friend anyone who is not as good as you. When you make a mistake do not be afraid of mending your ways.” 9:25

1. What do you think Confucius means when he says, “do not accept as friend anyone who is not as good as you”?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. In what ways are these two quotes about friendship still relevant today?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Individual Activity

Imagine it is 500 years in the future and students are studying our society (Australia) in a similar way to what we have been doing today. Under the following headings, create your own “quotations” which express what you hope for people to understand about your life and your relationships in today’s world.

Parent and child

Friend to friend

Girlfriend to Boyfriend/Husband to wife

Write a short summary about what you have discovered in today’s lesson about Chinese traditional thought and belief systems, and relationships in traditional Chinese society.