

Historical lecture for the story *Xiaoxiao* by Shen Congwen

Topics to be addressed:

- Role of geography in shaping Chinese life: Rural villages and tradition
- Confucius and how his ideas helped shape Chinese life
- Buddha and the Bodhisattvas

Geography and Brief Description of Village Life: (Followed by Map Exercise)

Text used: *East Asia: A New History* by Rhoads Murphey

East Asia, beginning with China, is set off from the rest of the world by the Himalaya Mountains on the west and northwest and by the steppe-desert of Mongolia on the north.

Chinese civilization consists of three great river valleys with their plains and deltas: Huang, Yangzi, and Xi Rivers. Chinese climate is largely determined by the monsoon system which produces spring-summer rains on which agriculture depends. This total area as a whole, contains the largest area of high-productivity agricultural land in the world. Agriculture was the source of wealth which fueled Chinese civilization. As agricultural techniques spread from China to the rest of East Asia that Chinese-style culture developed there, together with originally Chinese attitudes about the land and human relationships to it. In this view, nature had been generous, or as the Chinese said, benevolent, in providing the potential for productive agriculture. Nature was not seen as an enemy rather something to be cherished. It was necessary for people for people to adjust to nature rather than to try to fight against it and to embellish it. Chinese painting and poetry are famous for their loving portrayal of nature.

The primacy of the group and the virtues of collective effort were probably related to the basic place of agriculture in the East Asian system and the need for joint efforts and cooperation.

People lived very close together, gathered in villages rather than in separate farms. Most people lived and died in that village and never traveled a few miles from it. It was also in this village that families sought marriage partners for their sons and daughters. Most land was owned by peasant farmers. The gentry wore long scholarly robes and let their fingernails grow long to signal that they did not do manual labor. People tended to value the past and reaffirmed its values rather than looking towards the future. Agricultural success depended on the close attention to nature. Villages prospered by working within the system rather than attempting to challenge or alter it.

Personal morality rather than law was the foundation of society. Officials had a fatherly relationship to those beneath them and virtuous behavior was defined by Confucius. Girls became members of their husbands' families at marriage, had no property or inheritance rights, and no status in their new families until they produced a son. Wives and widows were expected to be chaste and not to remarry on their husbands' deaths, but husbands could take secondary wives and concubines into the household. This inequality is derived from the basic patriarchal nature of the society whereby family name, and its traditions and continuity descended through the male line. Women were important as breeders of sons, and were often rejected as wives when they did not produce a male heir. Family considerations dominated because the family represented security. It was essential to produce sons, who could support their parents in old age something the state had no provisions for nor never attempted to address.

Confucius:

Texts used: *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook*. Edited by Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *East Asian: A New History* and *World Religions: A Voyage of Discovery* by Jeffrey Brodd.

Confucius (traditional dates 551-479 B.C.E.) was a man of no particular distinction in this own day, who exerted a profound influence on the development of Chinese culture through his teachings. In the sixth century B.C.E., China was an ancient civilization with a glorious past but things had begun to decline rapidly. War raged throughout the land which disrupted the political, social, and economic fabric of the country. Confucius was deeply dedicated to restoring society. He embraced a vision of humanity that centered on human relationships. Confucius derived his examples from the past, from rulers and sages of ancient times. He was more concerned with transmitting traditional ways than with inventing new theories. His ideas are known to us primarily through the sayings recorded by his disciples in the Analects. This short text became a sacred book known to all educated people throughout China. Many of its passages became proverbial sayings which unknowingly at times would be cited by peasants as well. "I transmit but do not innovate; I am truthful in what I say and devoted to antiquity." (Analects 7.1).

The basic message of all his teachings is that people can be molded and elevated by education and by the example of others. Confucius believed the self, the family, and the nation were all related and the health of each depends on the others. The role of relationships in the vision of Confucius advocated several virtues: wisdom, courage, trustworthiness, reverence, and uprightness. The supreme virtue is *Jen* often translated as goodness, love, or benevolence. His emphasis on human relationships was coupled with a deep concern for proper behavior. This is *Li* – it is two definitions rite or sacred ritual. Confucius looked to China's past in determining the rules of behavior that constitute *Li*. He believed good government comes about through the cultivation of *Te* meaning virtue or more specifically virtue through the power of example. Confucius also spoke of the role of relationships in society. For example: father to son, older

brother to younger brother, husband to wife, and ruler to subject. Knowing your role would ensure proper behavior in the society and ensure harmony. Each person would know and would do what was expected of them at all times.

The significance of family in Chinese culture cannot be overemphasized. Confucianism emerged at a time when the family was already the center of Chinese society, and Confucianism fortified this significance. One's relationship with family members provided a clear sense of place and of purpose. The "complaisant" wife, obligated to consent to her husband's wishes, could fall victim to a domineering husband if he abandoned his duty to be "upright."

The success of Confucian ideas owes much to his followers in the two centuries following his death, one of the most important being Mencius (370 – 300 B.C.E.) Mencius, like Confucius traveled around offering advice. The mother of Mencius knew the right influences for her son who later became a Confucian scholar. (Handout on Mencius' mother)

Buddhism:

In the story Xiooxiao a Bodhisattva is referred to so background is provided below.

Buddhism began in ancient India but came into China in the first and second centuries spread by traders. Bodhisattvas are those who are dedicated to attaining enlightenment. They are considered "Buddhas in the making." The term is used to describe persons who are capable of entering into nirvana (eternal peace) but motivated by compassion, stop short of this goal so as to help others achieve it. The Bodhisattvas embodies compassion because they vow to wait to enter nirvana so that they may assist others even until "the last blade of grass" becomes enlightened.

Activities:

1. Map exercise: Have students fill in the 7 continents and ocean and then specific geographic locations in East Asia and more specifically China.
2. Best-Loved Folktales: Have students read *The Magic Brocade* and comment on specific aspects of village life and Confucian values seen in this story.
3. Women's Virtues and Vices: Have students read this chapter and comment on specific Confucian values witnessed in this story.
4. Using the artwork on Chinese mountains: Views and Verse and the Universe and the poems, "The Cold Mountain Poems of Han-shan" and "Chinese Celebrations of the Common Man, have the students read the selections and answer the questions.
5. Selected Sayings: Have the students read the sayings of Confucius and ask them to describe the meanings and relevance in their own words.

The Wounded by Lu Xinhua

Historical Background:

Text used: *East Asia: A New History* and *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook*

- Mao's rise to power: Communist Party – Little Red Book
- Cultural Revolution – Red Guards
- Gang of Four

The Communist Party was organized in China in 1921 and its membership grew. The attraction of communism was the promise to break up the estates of the rich landlords. In 1934-35 Communist forces in China were taken over by Mao Tse-Tung. The Communist revolution in China was in large part a peasant-based movement against the vested powers in the city. In 1939 Mao said, "Since China's key cities have long been occupied by the powerful imperialists and their reactionary Chinese allies, it is imperative for the revolutionary ranks to turn the backward villages into advanced consolidated base areas, ... bastions of the revolution from which to fight their vicious enemies."

By the end of 1949 communist armies drove the Nationalists, led by Chiang Kai-shek, out of mainland China and to Taiwan and the Communists have been in power ever since. At Peking (Beijing) the Communists proclaimed The People's Republic of China under the leadership of party head Mao Tse-Tung. The government drove out western influence, closed foreign schools and undertook a mass "re-education" of the people promoting Communist ideology based on Chinese interpretation of the Marx & Lenin doctrines. Teachings of Mao were meant to wean people away from Confucianism. Communists stressed loyalty of the individual to the state replacing Confucian philosophy of loyalty to the family but both share the

concept of the group over the individual. Under China's new constitution, women won equality under the law. They were expected to work alongside men in the field and factory but continued to struggle for equal pay and job promotion.

Cultural Revolution: 1966 – until Mao's death in 1976.

Aged and ill Mao wanted to assure that after his death China would continue his policies. His move was to crush opponents by mobilizing millions of youth into Red Guard groups that terrorized the opposition – the elite. The students targeted teachers, writers, scholars, and artists who they came to believe, through Mao's teachings, were tainted by western influences. Hundreds of millions of people were persecuted, killed and suffered during this time. The message of this time was the old one of "serve the people," with its clear echoes of Confucian responsibility, but the methods employed by the Cultural Revolution had devastating results. Colleges and universities were closed for a number of years. High school graduates in the decade after 1966 were assigned to productive labor in the countryside. The Red Guards abandoned their families, jobs, and studies to roam around the countryside ferreting out "rightists." Red Guards invaded the homes of all suspected of not being part of the state and destroyed books and artwork. Copies of Mao's "Little Red Book" were everywhere and considered the sacred text for these guards. No one at any level felt safe from the wrath of the Red Guards armed with Mao's destructive policies and ideologies.

As Mao lay dying in 1976, a radical faction led by Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, tried to continue his extreme policies. But the country was sick of radical politics. In 1978 a new, more moderate leadership under Hua Guofeng emerged. Jiang Quig and three of her associates, known as the **Gang of Four**, were tried and convicted of "crimes against the people" and

sentenced to jail. China began to emerge from its nightmare and slowly things started to get back to normal. The universities and their curricula were slowly restored and most of Mao's policies were progressively dismantled. These years were not all chaos - national pride, mass production, central direction, and organized group effort saw many successes in China most notably delivering basic health care to most of its people. The greatly reduced death rate coupled with soaring birth rates the population in China doubled from 1948 until 1982. In 1983 families were seriously discouraged from having large families and China implemented their "one child policy." Families would be taxed if they had more than one child and those with one child would be rewarded. In a society that values a son and where Confucian values remain strong, this policy needed to be implemented with an enormous amount of re-education to the rural peoples, which has not always been done.

Activities:

1. Put students into groups and give each group a long piece of red material. Ask the students to use the material/scarf to illustrate a woman's role in Chinese society. The teacher should hand out cards with various roles written out. For example:
 - A. Upper class woman
 - B. Red Guard
 - C. Student
 - D. Old peasant woman
 - E. Mother
 - F. Artist – Dancer

Then the students should come up with dialogue for that particular role.

- A. They can take the fabric and wrap it around the feet of one the students to illustrate the practice of foot binding among the elite.
 - B. They can take the fabric and make a Red Guard's arm band.
 - C. They can take the fabric and make a backpack
 - D. They can use the material to make a shawl or head covering
 - E. They can use the material to make a sling for the baby
 - F. The can use the material to illustrate the ancient art of ribbon twirling
 - G. See what they come up with
2. Hand out the four pictures and ask the students to look closely and comment on what they see.
Ask them why Confucius would be criticized in the pictures.
3. Hand out the quotations from Mao Tse-Tung on Discipline and ask the students to comment on his words and see if they find any connections to the Confucian quotations.