

CURRICULUM MATERIALS REVIEW

RELIGIONS AND PHILOSOPHIES IN CHINA

Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism

Developed by Waka Takahashi Brown

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By Patrick Grant

It is surely a daunting task for anyone to provide a good summary about topics as rich and complex as Chinese religion and philosophy. China's size and diversity make this a formidable endeavor, yet Waka Takahashi Brown with the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education has provided teachers with a useful guide to give students a basic introduction to religion and philosophy in China.

The guide is organized into five chapters described as "lessons," with the first an introduction to religion, philosophy, and China, the middle three about the principal traditions of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, and a final lesson that brings these three traditions together. These five chapters entitled "lessons" should be considered "curriculum units" since there is enough material in each to last many class sessions. The introduction provides important points about teaching religion, and there are several helpful appendices, including a succinct pronunciation guide and a timeline.

The first chapter has two separate parts: one to distinguish religion from philosophy and another to introduce China. This chapter, as with the other four, gives teachers the option to teach all of it over several days or use the material selectively within a larger curriculum.

The second chapter examines Confucianism. Several handouts give concise summaries of Confucian history and ask students by group to analyze them for class presentation. These brief summaries will cause many students to ask further questions, such as: who was the Duke of Zhou that Confucius so greatly admired? There are just a few excerpts from the *Analects* in this chapter, but among the stronger segments are the six skit activities focusing on the writings of Mencius, one of Confucius's important followers. Also, there is an activity, particularly useful with older students, that poses four hypothetical situations and asks "What would Confucius Do?" There is however, only a brief mention of Xunzi, another important early Confucian, in this chapter. Older students enjoy discussing the question "Is man naturally good?" by contrasting the writings of Mencius with those of Xunzi.

The third chapter, Daoism, includes a wider range of activities. Among them are uncomplicated but successful lessons asking students to design a Chinese scroll painting and Ying Yang collages. At first glance such lessons may be strictly for the elementary or maybe the junior high student, but even older students enjoy these endeavors as a variation from a usual class routine. The extensive section using learning stations can be easily adapted by a teacher to create handouts to plan discussions.

The fourth chapter, which examines Buddhism, includes several *Jataka* tales that reveal important tenets of Buddhism. One significant feature of this chapter is the attention to Tibetan Buddhism with

a teacher information card to plan a discussion about the relationship between Tibet and the People's Republic of China.

The fifth chapter, which brings the three traditions together, is the briefest. This is unfortunate because students should learn about how Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism are compatible while understanding their differences. The Venn diagram activity helps a little with this, and there is a very good "compare and contrast chart" that can help a teacher organize a lecture.

The many historical summaries are concise and accessible to the beginning student of Chinese religion. More advanced students will want to look beyond this curriculum guide for further readings. For example, the spread of Buddhism to China is given an accurate but cursory treatment as the work of merchants, traders, and pilgrims. Some teachers may want to add information about how the Silk Road assisted the spread of Buddhism. The Cave of the Thousand Buddhas at Dunhuang along the Silk Road is fascinating. Also, the travels of two Chinese pilgrims, Faxian and Xuanzang, are interesting as well.

The slides accompanying three of the chapters are useful. About ten slides look at three middle/high schools in China. The author wisely encourages teachers to caution students against making general assumptions based on three schools. The slides are accompanied by intriguing questions asking students to draw comparisons with their own schools. The slides will surprise some students since they show many similarities to schools in the United States.

This book includes a wide range of information helpful for a teacher, but there are a few significant missing components. A teacher will want to consult a good historical atlas since there are no historical maps with this curriculum. Yet the contemporary maps in the first chapter show essential information clearly. Slides are sufficient to inform without visually overwhelming the student, although there are no slides (and only one image) about Confucianism. More background information accompanying art slides would help the teacher further. For example, one slide of a beautiful mountain scene includes a brief text about mountains being sacred. A class learning about Chinese religion would find information about China's many sacred mountains interesting.

Yet this curriculum guide is well-organized with much to help both beginning and veteran teachers. A teacher with little time in a course may find the range of possibilities initially overwhelming, but just a little patience goes a long way toward finding the valuable treasures within each chapter.

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