

Top Ten Things to explore – 2014 CE Tour

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TR updated the 2013 doc based on the 2014 teachers' Lesson Plan "Themes".

Some ideas for Dana, Jeromie, Monica, and Bridget:

1. For Dana: regional Compare-and-Contrast
 - a. Some ideas that could be used as the "domains of comparison" by regions include the following:
 - i. Geography, natural resources, demographics, language/dialects, economy, manufacturing, agriculture, food, religion(s), foreign investments, drinks...
 - b. I personally think food could be a terrific angle, as that also reflects many other elements.
 - c. Dividing by administrative regions, e.g., provinces and major cities, can be a bit arbitrary. Some such admin regions are much smaller or can be less interesting than the others. One possibility is to divide by the major regions, e.g., the northeast (or Manchuria) which has several provinces and they are quite similar in many ways. Other examples include: Yunnan and Quizhou are often talked to together; Qin Hai and Ningxia are similar (though one could argue one is more like Tibet, while the other is more like XinJiang, population-wise); and there are other groupings that can make sense. Some, though next to each other and with similar-sounding names, are quite different: like Shang-dong (east of mountain) vs. Shang-xi (west of mountain), or He-nan (south of river) vs. He-bei (north of river). A major city can be very different from the province where it sits in, e.g., Beijing in the Hebei province, Chongking in Sichuan, Shanghai in Jiangsu, or Guangzhou in Guangdong. Such cities are very diverse (with lots of people moving in from all provinces) versus the surrounding province which tend to be more homogeneous.
 - d. Taipei is actually quite different from many other parts of Taiwan, for the same reason, but not to the same degree like Shanghai in Jiangsu.
2. For Jeromie: a day in the life of a student
 - a. Students in China and Taiwan do live and study very differently from those in the U.S. in many aspects: transportation to school, uniform, co-ed or single-gender schools, what food to bring to school (and how), daily routines, exercise, homework, length of school year, summer sessions, cram school sessions, extracurricular activities, teacher-student relationship (including Q&A styles), teacher-parent relationship...
 - b. Taiwan is also often very different from China, especially in terms of expressing political thoughts
 - c. In China the "elite" schools are very different from the migrant workers' children's schools...

3. For Monica: balancing Traditional and Modern cultures: Many dimensions could be observed during the trip:
 - a. Living arrangement (how to take care of multiple generations in the traditional way?)
 - b. House decoration styles (modern houses don't have the same main entrances)
 - c. How to worship at home (like burning incense?)
 - d. How to balance the western learning style (asking questions) and the eastern learning styles (taking notes)? How about focusing on differences (challenging the norm) versus fostering consistency (always respecting the order)? How about individualism vs. group-first? How about merit-only vs. considering seniority? All these are constantly debated in Chinese families and schools.
 - e. How to accommodate multiple faiths in one family? (Mainly in Taiwan)
 - f. How to accommodate multiple political beliefs in one family? (this really applies in Taiwan)
 - g. How have females adjusted their roles from the traditional "*helping husbands and educating children*" to joining the workforce and pursuing careers? (happening in big ways in both Taiwan and China)
 - h. How have married couples adjusted the relationship model from "wife is married into husband's household" to a couple taking care of two pairs of parents? This is very pronounced in Mainland China as many families only had one child, so often there would be 4 grandparents, 2 parents, and one child. In China this has led to new living arrangement designs.
 - i. How to adjust to children studying abroad (very common in China's elite families)? This is a sensitive topic though.
 - j. You won't see a migrant worker's home or family (or their housing in the cities) directly in China on this trip. Many migrant workers work in the cities and leave their children behind in the villages to be cared for by the grandparents, and they take a long regular train rides home for the big holidays (Chinese New Year, for example, at that time all family members are supposed to get home). These home trips lead to one of the biggest seasonal population movements in the world, easily 200-300 million or more people will travel home and back during those 2 weeks. It really gets intense for some of the big manufacturing cities like Guangzhou, where 3, 5 million or more migrant workers all want to go home at the same time from that one large train station.
 - i. These migrant families' stories can be very tough to hear, and also hard to learn directly on this trip. This is one of the biggest social stress points in Mainland China today, and teachers will see some parts of this at the Dandelion School in Beijing (school for the migrant workers' children who live in the city with their parents).
4. For Bridget: evolving adoption (or re-adoption) of teaching from Confucianism
 - a. I am not a Confucianism expert, but this is an interesting topic: The Chinese history started with many governing and education philosophies in the Spring-Autumn period (through ~ 200 BC), ideas like Legalism and

Confucianism started then. Legalism proved to be more effective in building up strong states (Qin benefited the most, enabling the First Emperor to defeat all other kingdoms and unify China).

- b. The harshness (real or perceived) of Legalism led to re-thinking after Qin fell. Han dynasty started to adopt Confucianism and its prescribed “order” in the society (Heaven – Earth – Emperor – Parents – Teacher) and a tiered exam system with which learned people can advance their careers regardless of their families’ background.
- c. Over time Confucianism expanded with many more scholars’ influence as well influence from Buddhism and Taoism, as well other ancient teaching. E.g., one of the major contributors to this Neo-Confucianism, Zhu Xi (Song dynasty), is in the highest order in Taoism’s deities (as can be seen at the Longshan Temple in Taipei). Interestingly Confucius himself never became a “god” like some of his followers did, probably because most major cities have Confucius temples anyway, and he transcends all religions.
- d. So Confucianism goes way beyond Confucius the person. Much of the teaching (along with ideas from many other philosophers) became core in the Chinese culture, family structure, every day life, public governance structure, etc., etc
- e. Confucianism was regarded by some intellectuals as a force impeding progress in the early 1900s. They advocated adjustments by incorporating Mr. Sci and Mr. De (Science and Democracy – neither was a focus in the traditional Confucianism). The 1911 revolution introduced Democracy and Dr. Sun Yet-Sen’s philosophy extended the Confucianism thinking by adding Government of the People (Democracy), Rights of the People, and Welfare of the People. This is the core governing principles of the Nationalists which ruled most of China from 1911 to 1949 and retreated to Taiwan in 1949. Confucianism continues to be upheld as the core of the Chinese society in Taiwan, and the many Confucius temples hold annual celebrations for Confucius’ birthday (a holiday called the “Teachers’ Day”, on September 28th).
- f. The Communists very much totally revoked Confucianism, especially during the Cultural Revolution. The family system very much stayed alive though (but it indeed was stressed for a while). As the strict control is gradually lifted and the Commune system was dismantled in China, much of Confucius’ teaching started to come back, and one would often hear Confucius’ teaching being quoted by officials, intellectuals, and business people. The Confucius temples in China re often tourist attractions now.
- g. One interesting thing to see, in both Taiwan and China, is the overlap of the knowledge worker group, the merchant group, and the politician group. This is partly because of the exam system -- many of the top government leaders and business leaders all came out of the top schools, leading to a system almost like meritocracy. This is an interesting variation of the Confucian thinking.

A suggestion on the Top Ten things to explore during 2014 CE tour...

1. Study the Incense Burners and other sculptures – at the temples, palaces, and homes
2. China's food scenes
3. A visit to a local store, or ideally a local “wet market” – part of “a day in the life of...”
4. Look at the “Couplets” hanging (or carved) on the two sides of a door -- how many characters on each side? Why are the couplets there?
5. What old style opera shows are on Chinese TV? Where did the story come from, from which dynasty roughly?
6. What does a typical school look like, and what is the “morning exercise”?
7. How many “English Learning Schools” are there? Who goes there? How different or similar is this to the “cram schools”?
8. At the temple, learn about whom the believers are worshiping (For what? Where did the deities come from, which dynasty?)
9. Confucius Temples and Confucianism
10. The evolution of volunteer and philanthropy programs – the biggest one being Tzu Chi in Taiwan

Some background to provide a context...

While you enjoy the many activities during the 2 weeks, there are things that you might want to explore or be “on the look-out for” to help collect information for the teaching plans. I think these ten things will also get you a deeper look into the Chinese culture, how it has evolved over time, and maybe even projecting which way it will go in the future...

A quick backgrounder first:

On the cultural front, Mainland China (I'd use “China” or “Mainland” for short), Taiwan, and Hong Kong share many similarities but can look very different.

China started opening up in the early 90s and has seen a phenomenal and neck-breaking economic growth. It has erased almost all of the painful “Cultural Revolution” tragedies. The “Cultural Revolution” was really a political “cleaning-house” event disguised as a “cultural” thing – today most Chinese would not want to discuss it. It did a great deal of damage to almost all the old things, fortunately some clear heads did protect some of the most critical buildings and artifacts. With the great economic growth (and wealth), the Chinese society is now very focused on tourism domestically and internationally, and that has led to a renaissance of interest in old things and old sites. Our teachers will see many, many tourists from all over China (rich, middle class, and poor) visiting the various sites. With the hugely uneven wealth distribution, one would see some disparities that may be hard to stomach.

I have found it to be beyond amazing how much China has changed from the mid-90s to today, and I get that feeling every time I go (~30 times). The growth is just unbelievable, and also interesting is that many of the Chinese cultural elements are coming back after having been suppressed in the 50s-80s. Many of the young people today in China would not remember the old dark days before the economic opening, but most of them do learn about Chinese history from family, schools, theaters, books, TV, Web, etc.

Taiwan's economy experienced a similar rapid growth and wealth-building in the 70s through the 90s, and has been able to protect all the cultural elements, especially the way of living (following the old teachings, without the forced “commune” structure), private land ownership, the diverse religions, and protection of old buildings (dated back to 300-500 years ago), etc. So for one to see “Chinese culture”, Taiwan would be a better showcase, although Taiwan does not have the really old things like the Terracotta Soldiers or the historical sites like the Great Wall. Taiwan is much, much smaller and does not have the world-class infrastructure that China has built up over the last 10 years. It is fortunate that many of the truly irreplaceable artifacts from throughout Chinese history were moved from the Mainland to the National Palace Museum in Taipei in 1949 – otherwise much of that would have been lost during the Cultural Revolution. This Museum is the best place in the world to see how the Chinese art has evolved over the ages (and dynasties). You will find that people know the Chinese history through people,

events, and things, but not necessarily by the “dynasty” marking. Some things are indeed always associated with a dynasty when discussed in daily lives (and in schools), for example:

- Tang poems
- Song literature
- Yuan music (one type of rendering)
- Ming Old Palace (the Forbidden City was built in the Ming dynasty)
- Qing dresses (used in many TV shows and movies)
- Three Kingdoms – this term is often used to discuss strategies and conflicts of all things when 3 parties are involved
- Tang 3-color pottery
- Spring-Autumn and Warring States period – this term is often used to describe a highly fragmented environment with no single dominant center
- The opposite to Spring-Autumn would be the “Unified China” by the Qin dynasty. Certainly the Great Wall is always thought of as a Qin thing.
- The moon cake has some connection to the Ming revolution where the moon cakes were used as a communication medium by the Ming revolutionaries to overthrow the Yuan rulers.
- ...

Net Net, many of the things from Chinese history are embedded in the daily lives, but not necessarily tied to a particular dynasty as things have evolved through many dynasties.

Also interesting is that many business people from Taiwan own businesses on the Mainland, and one can say a great deal of China’s economic growth can be attributed to the ideas and operational experience from such businessmen from Taiwan. The largest electronic contract manufacturing company, HonHai (also known as Foxconn), which manufactures most of Apple’s products, is one such company. Headquartered in Taipei, Foxconn has more than one million workers in multiple plants in China. There are thousands if not more of such trans-strait companies operating across the Taiwan Strait. On your flight from Shanghai PVG to Taipei you will see many such businessmen (and women) plus lots of tourists from Mainland China traveling to visit Taiwan.

For the Mainland Chinese tourists there is a special visa to enter Taiwan, and both sides control the issuance of such visas, otherwise Taiwan would be flooded with visitors☺. Our teachers will see (1) many Mainlanders in Taiwan and (2) many people from Taiwan visiting or working in Mainland China. You probably would not be able to tell them apart, but the two groups do dress slightly differently, and they often speak with different accents (due to the different dialects spoken at home) and use different words from time to time. So someone who grew up in the Mainland (like my cousin) can pick me out as someone who grew up in Taiwan pretty easily, based on the words I use. The reverse is also true. An interesting thing is that, when Taiwan was holding a presidential election, some people from China went there to witness it – because there are no such elections in China. The other way is also true – many folks in Taiwan would go visit China to see some of the old sites and “live the Chinese history”.

Today at every level Taiwan is a separate political entity from China, but with very strong shared cultural roots (and family ties in many cases). For people from Taiwan to visit Mainland China, there is also a special permit.

As of May 2014, the exchange rate of Taiwan's currency (NTD) to the USD is about 28 or 30 to 1, while the RMB (in China) is about 6.1 to 1 USD.

Hong Kong is the most westernized city in China today, and like Macau, it has been running as a SAR (Special Administration Region, I think) with a locally elected government reporting to the central government in Beijing. It takes a special permit for a Mainlander to visit Hong Kong, and U.S. citizens can enter Hong Kong without getting a visa beforehand. There is a custom entry point between Hong Kong and China (by rail, car or ferry). Hong Kong is a very densely populated city with super modern shopping, all with a beautiful backdrop of the Victoria Harbor (especially at night – kind of like Vancouver or Victoria with their harbors).

Hong Kong is also interesting in that much of the daily business is conducted in English and Cantonese (one of the many dialects spoken in the Canton or Guangdong province). People can speak Mandarin but often with a pronounced accent. Our teachers will run into many Hong-Kongnese when in China – can you pick them out ☺? A hint: they would speak English with a British accent.

Of the 3 places, Taiwan is probably the best “microcosm” of China, because the 1949 migration involved people from every province in China. Today one can hear hundreds of Chinese dialects in Taiwan (mostly with the older generation) and you can see restaurants from every region there. It is a good place to develop a summary for the trip.

1. The Incense Burners – interesting sculptures

In China you will see many incense burners, very much as a form of sculpture, and they are often decorated with various animals.

The picture below is taken at the LongShan Temple in Taipei. You will see many burners, large and small, in many places like the Forbidden City, Temple of Heaven, museums, etc., etc. Some have elaborate carvings, some are plain.

People burn incense when they pray in the temples (or in front of Buddha statues at home) or paying respect to their ancestors. Many families have a “memorial” of their ancestors in the house or apartment, sometimes right next to a religious symbol (in Taiwan this can be one of the many religions).

It'd be interesting to see if you can find burners that have animals craved into them, and observe how people pray in the temples.

A temple is a place of worship, not a tourist attraction. It may be crowded or even noisy – but to the persons who are praying, it is a serious matter. In some temples the administrators may ask visitors who are dressed too informally to cover themselves with an extra coat or a scarf, just like at the St. Peter's Basilica.

This is also a good example of how the traditional culture blends in with the modern culture. For example, many families would not want to burn incense (or candles) inside an air-conditioned house or apartment. What would they do? People either burn only one incense stick, or after they pay their respect, they take the incense stick outdoors and put into a small holder by the door. Most of the candles in the house have been replaced with lights shaped like a candle flame.



2. Foodies' delight – comparing different regions' food

Food plays a huge part in the Chinese culture and you can find many books about this. I'd just point to some of the interesting things you would see during the trip.

At the most basic level, northern China is more about flour (noodle, dumplings, bread, etc.) and southern China is mainly rice (in many forms: noodle, sticks, cakes, etc.) – but not exclusively so. This also led to white liquor (grain-based, typically higher alcohol content) vs. the yellow liquor (rice-based, closer to a red wine's alcohol content). China does also produce red and white grape wines, a great deal from Shaanxi province area where Xi'an is.

The regionalization of food goes far beyond flour vs. rice. The major categories that people are familiar with include the following:

- Cantonese: generally speaking sweeter than the others – it also has probably the greatest variety, as it has added the western influence through Hong Kong, where western-style pastries have been added to the mix,
- Szechuan: spicy, to help fight off the humid climate there,
- Hunan: also spicy, with interesting use of long chopsticks,
- Beijing: Peking Duck plus many Manchurian-influenced dishes and the “palace cuisines”, the northern-style flour dumplings are very popular everywhere now,
- Shanghai: lots of steamed seafood, and the Yantze River delta area is also known for fermented food of all kinds, fish, beans, tofu, etc., probably started as a way to better preserve food with controlled fermentation (same as in Japan and Korea),
- Taiwan: the local dishes have many unique attributes, one being that many dishes are served in a soup form,
- Shaanxi: you'll see some of this in Xi'an, with a heavy influence from the Muslim culture. There is not as much focus on pork in Xi'an as a result.

There are many others like Shangdong, Anhui, Zhejiang, Quizhou, Yunnan, etc., at the province levels. Many more are at the city level (e.g., Hangzhou or Suzhou cuisines). Each has its signature dishes based on its local supplies and cooking ideas. Mongolian BBQ is well-known in the U.S., but it is really a modified form (the Inner Mongolian area in China is indeed well known for hot pots and grills using lamb and other meat). This hot pot idea has been adopted by many food categories.

Some of the food categories go across the province boundaries, e.g., the Hakka people live in many provinces and there is a Hakka food style.

Where can one see all the food varieties? In Beijing you can see almost all of it if you look hard for them. In Taiwan you can see most of them pretty easily because the 1949 migration brought people from every part of China to Taiwan. Taiwan's food scene has been further enriched by the Japanese influence, like raw seafood (sashimi but served in a Taiwanese style). Pastries have also become very popular in Taiwan.

3. Visit a market, ideally a “wet market”

What is a wet market? This is the traditional market where vendors operate individual stalls, like a farmers’ market in the U.S. The wet market is open every day and many people in China and Taiwan prefer to shop in these markets where they have bought from the same veggie or meat or whatever merchants for years, and they can get (or order) the really fresh stuff. Before supermarkets and refrigerators, this was how everyone shopped for food every day.

The picture below was actually taken in Hong Kong. Same type of markets exist in China, (often outdoors there), Taiwan, and other cities in Asia.

Supermarkets are gaining ground in China fast. WalMart has 300+ stores in China, and France’s Carrefour is bigger than WalMart in China. In Taiwan the Costco stores (6 in total I think in Taiwan) are very popular. But my mother-in-law still prefers to shop in the wet market near her house in Taiwan. Of course the wet markets are getting harder to operate in today’s congested cities and the small vendors can’t compete against WalMart’s efficiency, and food safety is becoming a bigger and bigger concern.



4. Look at the Couplets on the sides of the doors

At entrances or many doors you may see the “couplets” in Chinese characters in two vertical formations, one on each side of the door. This is a unique form of art (calligraphy and poetry). You will definitely see these in the Hu-tongs near your hotel in Beijing. With the modern housing styles (apartments, etc.), where would people hang such things? You’ll see them in people’s houses. The wording people choose for such hangings also give you an idea what’s important to that family. Some would focus on business and fortune, some on career, some on study, etc.

This form of art takes work. In the picture below there are 7 characters on each side, each character aims to match the corresponding one on the other side, and the meaning of the two formations also matches each other and ideally with rhyming sounds. In this picture the literal translation would go like the following:

Right hand side: Mind – thinks – goals – succeeding – hundreds – businesses – growing
Left hand side: Time – comes – fortune – arriving – home – blooming – prosper

This is NOT the best example since the 5th and 6th characters do not match as well as they could be. The writer could have stopped at four characters each, and that’d be very good (and such a 4-character set is indeed used often). The top 4 characters indicate “the five fortunes are at the door”. This shows a smart matching for this particular address of “14”, because $1+4 = 5$. You will see a lot of symbols like these in China everywhere.

The same word matching technique is also used in Chinese poetry, like in Tang poems.



5. What traditional opera shows are on TV? What is the story about?

CCTV has channels that play China Traditional Operas. There are many interesting stories (love stories, battles, shows based on myth like from the Western Journey, etc.) It'd be interesting to catch a short segment, and see the dresses and hear the singing. This is comparable to opera in Italy where the performers spend years to master the music, and the audience often applauds when a good singer/actor finishes one famous segment.

This type of traditional shows and music is often how the folk stories get handed down from generation to generation, and a great deal of the Chinese cultural value is encapsulated in many of these shows. Before TV and radio, these shows would be taken to cities and villages and performed on a temporary stage. There are also permanent stage set-ups like the one in the Forbidden City.

There are many local variants of this type of shows, performed in the local dialects. For example, Taiwan has its own variant, Hong Kong has its own, plus multiple variants near and around Shanghai, etc., etc. The one based in Beijing is considered the “national traditional opera” performed in Mandarin. They all use similar stories handed down over the centuries and dynasties and in the shows they often speak to a specific dynasty, or even specifically to an emperor, similar to how a show in the UK would be tied to a specific King. So while the dynasties are not important in today's daily lives, they are talked about very often in the various shows. Now many such shows have converted to TV programs.

One thing about these operas is that there is a very clear definition of good vs. evil, like a western movie in the U.S. So to a great degree the Chinese value system and social order are encapsulated in these shows. Below is an image of the Monkey King in a Beijing Opera-style show fighting the bad guys. There are lots of acrobatic moves in this type of shows, coupled with energetic music, as the Monkey King is the kung-fu master. Many of China's acrobats now perform with the Cirque du Soleil.



6. Who does a typical school look like? What's the "Morning Exercise?"

I once stayed at a hotel in Beijing overlooking a middle school, and got to see the students gathering for the "morning exercise", just like what I used to do when I was in elementary and middle schools.

Students get (typically walking) to their neighborhood school, put their book bags (and lunch boxes) down, then gather in the school yard to attend the flag raising ceremony, followed by the morning exercise, semi-military like. The teachers would stand in the front facing the students, sometime joining the exercise movements. This routine has not changed much over the years in China and Taiwan. If your hotel is close enough to a school, you'll hear the music over the loudspeaker.



One thing our teachers could consider doing, if the hotel is a high rise building, is to go to a higher floor and find a school yard to see this exercise. Some schools could be in the summer session (but they might not do the full morning routine though).

The picture above is most likely a middle or high school, with the 3-story classroom building in the back, then the older style housing behind that, then high rise apartments further back. If this was taken in Beijing, it'd be probably 10+ years back, as now there are so many more tall buildings in Beijing.

Air pollution is a big challenge in China, including Beijing and Shanghai. It is just so crowded with people and cars, and there is no sea breeze to remove the haze. Beijing after a rain shower would be much nicer.

7. English-learning Schools and Cram Schools

As you go around Beijing, Shanghai, Taipei and other cities in China (same for Taipei), you will see many signs like these:

英语教学 or 英语会话 (Simplified Chinese for “English-Teaching” and “English Conversation) or

英語教學 or 英語會話 (traditional Chinese characters)

Of course some such signs will be in English. It'd be interesting to count how many you see, as many people learn English this way, outside of the regular schools. Some such schools have huge store fronts; and some just have a sign sticking out of a window with a phone number (probably a private teacher who is for hire).

It is a huge market, for \$2B a year in China alone back in 2010.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/jul/13/china-english-schools>

If you stop by at one such school, they will probably think you are applying for a job to teach there....

There is a Chinese old saying from Mr. Sun Tzu (who wrote “The Art of War” which is studied in war colleges all over the world and used in business studies a lot): *“When one knows himself and his competitor, he will win one hundred of one hundred battles.”*

Given the huge market in China (for products and services from the U.S.) and China being the biggest supplier of merchandises to the US (and the biggest holder of U.S. Treasury debt), I think everyone would agree it is a great idea for the students to understand China at multiple levels. Tourism has grown exponentially both ways, and that will only grow bigger. Learning Chinese is a great way to really get to know this “mystery” on the other side of the earth – and it is very interesting as well, as a comparative study between how Europe evolved versus how China has evolved.

A sub-plot you may also pick up is the division of labor between China and Taiwan in the electronics business. This was not jointly planned – it just evolved naturally as China started to apply many the lessons from Taiwan’s economic development, starting in the early 90s with China’s first special economic zone in Shenzhen (right next to Hong Kong). Today Taiwan has some of the best design engineers to do the detailed designs for companies in the U.S. (Dell, HP, etc., or for Taiwan’s own companies like HTC or Acer), while China has the best manufacturing capacity to produce the iPADS/iPhones in huge volume. Many electronics companies today have Research/Branding in the U.S., design engineering in Taiwan, and manufacturing in China. It is a complex partnership set-up.

The English school is just one form of the Cram Schools in Taiwan (and in China).

A lot of parents want their children to learn things after schools, or to help them catch up at school. Such cram school come in many flavors: private tutoring, group tutoring, and some even have regular school hours for students who have finished one school type (say senior high) but want to study for one more year for the college entrance exams. These cram schools typically are staffed with very well known teachers who are good at preparing students for their exams, so you will see many cram schools highlighting their star teachers like movie stars. Often the cram schools will also do campaigns based on their students' exam scores (like the SAT scores in the U.S.).

It may be possible for our teachers to visit one such cram school – but the logistics may or may not work out.

Cram schools are not unique to Taiwan or China. But I'd say the intensity and scale are greater in Taiwan, China, and Hong Kong compared to similar schools in other countries.

8. Who are the Deities that people are worshipping?

When you visit the Long-Shan Temple (in the Taipei suburb where Sandy grew up!), you will see many Deities that people go there to worship, and it is a combination temple of Buddhist and Taoist, plus many folk Deities. I'd suggest you take some time to look at a few halls closely, as this is a great place to learn what Chinese people value and how the rules upon which the Chinese society is organized. This is also a great place to learn more about the early migration of people from Mainland to Taiwan in the 1600s-1700s time period (mostly from Southern China), followed by the second wave of migration around 1949 (with people from every part of China).

People in Taiwan and Hong Kong have total freedom when it comes to religion, and the belief system is very, very diverse. Mainland China is somewhat restricted in this regard.

The main hall has Guan-yin (see below) in the center. This is the major part of the Buddhist part of the temple. You can also see the “couplets” on the two sides of the statue. Guan-yin (also known as “Kuan Shih Yin Pu Sa”) is the goddess who provides comfort, guidance, and protection. The name literally translates to “the one who watches and listens to the world’s sounds”. She is also a key part of the Taoist belief system, as many Deities are worshiped in both formal religions. My Mom was a devoted believer of Guan Yin. The picture below is a very typical rendering of a Buddhist Deity.

Also very interesting to see is the influence from India, where Buddhism was adopted from (remember the Tang Monk with a statue in Xi'an?) Many of the Buddhism symbols, like the “luo-hans” guarding the temple, have facial features resembling people from Central/South Asia.



Long Shan Temple's back hall is anchored by Wen Chang (or Imperial Sovereign Wen Chang, see below left). This is the center of the Taoist part the temple. Wen Chang is the God governing literature, knowledge, and government careers (very much tied to studies in the old days). The word "Wen" literally means "Literature". The Taoist Deities' rendering is typically more real-person-like. Interestingly Wen Chang, in his home province of Sichuan, was compared to Confucius in some ways (as the person responsible for "learning").



Many of the Taoist Deities are real people in Chinese history. One example is Guan Yue (above right), who is the most famous general during the Three Kingdom period and is known and respected for his loyalty to his leader and blood brothers (by oath). Throughout Chinese history Guan Yue has been viewed as the "Saint of War". Interestingly he is also worshiped as the "God of Merchants" because he was good at managing finance as well. He is known to have a red face. In Chinese Beijing opera this red face paint symbolizes loyalty and goodness, while the evil characters often would have all-white face paint.

An interesting goddess is the one who governs child birth, see below. You can guess why many people go pray in front of her 😊



People live, and people die. In the Taoist system the Cheng-Huang Yeh (literally it translates to mean the “Duke of City and Water”, picture below) governs one’s entrance into the afterworld. The people who have done good things when alive, they get treated well. People who have done evil get penalized in the afterlife.



Net net, Long Shan Temple is a good place to learn the belief system in the Chinese culture. Christianity was introduced into China in the 1800s, and now it’s very common that within a family multiple religions are followed by different family members, and people find ways to support and work with the various belief systems.

9. Confucius temple(s)

The home temple for Confucius is in Qufu, the city where he was born. Most large cities in China have its own Confucius temple (typically one per city and supported by the government). There are no monks or priests at the Confucius temples – these are not religious institutions. They are best thought of as memorials for teachers, as teachers play a huge role in the Chinese society, right after the role of parents.

Taipei's Confucius temple (see below) is modeled after the one in Qufu. One would notice right away that this is not set up for religious worship, e.g., no incense burners. And then one would see many plaques signed by the government leaders, including the presidents of the country, to honor Confucius. The often-used words include “The Exemplary Teacher of All Ages”, “Educate without Discrimination”, and several others. This “Honoring Confucius” tradition has been in place for many centuries. In Taiwan each September 28th there is a formal ceremony (with traditional dresses and music) to celebrate Confucius' birthday. You can see the ceremony's videos at this link:

<http://www.ct.taipei.gov.tw/en-us/C/About/CeremonyProcess/1/4/13.htm>

In Mainland China there are no such ceremonies and the Confucius temples there, from what I have seen, are more like museums. The Confucius Temple in Beijing is bigger and could be interesting to see, as it also serves as a museum and sits next to the “Imperial Academy” which played a key role in many dynasties as the highest-level school in the country.

Some Confucius temples have side halls honoring people who have done great deeds in the community, including great teachers and people who have exemplified the key teaching around the four key thoughts: Loyalty (to country), Filial Piety (to parents), Self-discipline (to spouse), and Faithfulness (to friends). These side halls are good examples of what the traditional Chinese culture values most. Of course the modern society has added many new dimensions to these thoughts, so the Confucianism, or Neo-Confucianism, continues to be a constantly evolving thing.



10. The evolution of Volunteerism and Philanthropy Programs

One of the most amazing volunteer programs in Taiwan is the Tzu Chi Foundation, founded by a Buddhist Nun. Tzu Chi literally translates to “Compassionate Relief”.

This is also an interesting study of how a traditional, Buddhist-centric organization has evolved to be a very broadly-based organization contributing to causes in many countries (47 according to its own web site). It serves as a good example of how volunteerism and philanthropy have really grown in Taiwan (and slowly in China as well) as the economy created great wealth. The fund raising capacity of Tzu Chi is phenomenal.

In Taipei, and often in other places in Taiwan (and in some places in China), our teachers could run into teams organized by Tzu Chi or other charities and NGOs to help deal with poverty and natural disasters. Often such teams will wear a vest with their organization’s name and colors (Tzu Chi’s is blue and white). Some such teams also operate in many U.S. cities.

Buddhist and Taoist temples had always served as charity operations in the past, but they tended to be quite passive and localized. Tzu Chi are several others are much larger (almost comparable to the Red Cross in many ways) and much more active.

Tzu Chi is the largest of such organizations in Taiwan, and even has its own TV channel.

I personally believe that this serves as a great example of how the traditional culture has evolved to incorporate modern ideas like fund raising, volunteer programs, international outreach, youth programs in schools, and even how people would treat their bodies after death. Tzu Chi has a program to encourage people state in their wills to donate their bodies for medical studies before final burial, for example, and many believers have done that. This last part is really an astonishing movement in terms of how the traditions are progressing with the modern cultures.

To a great degree, the Chinese culture, once centered around Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism which had supported the emperor’s rules, has been going through another re-definition since the 1911 revolution which removed the “emperor” completely in China’s social order. For some parts of the 20th century, some of China’s leaders either tried to, or was positioned as emperor-like figures (or even god-like figures). That is very much gone at this point. In Taiwan the president is elected by the people every 4 years and gets criticized often about almost everything. In China today the leader is very much like a Chairman of the Board or CEO (with two 5-year terms), even though still above criticism, the current president and chairman (Mr. Xi), and his last two predecessors, are not viewed as “gold-like” figures.

Taiwan and China represent some very interesting and super-fast social changes that are really interesting to experience and see. Hope everyone enjoys this learning experience and finds many gold nuggets to support your Lesson Plans.