

China: A Comparative Study of the Ancient Civilization and Modern Nation

Through Multimedia (Grade 6 – 12)

Xinjie Ding

Introduction

For the past few years, there have been many discussions about China through multimedia comparisons and contrasts. A comparative study of China provides perspectives and depths that most studies that focus on one culture, one system, and ultimately one nation lack. A comparative study of China might not have been valid or informative years ago when China was still morphing with no settled issues or on the same footing on which a comparison with another modern nation could be based. For example, years ago a comparative study of modern India and China was not as appropriate as it is today because the differences between the two nations were too obvious in such areas as economic growth and social problems. Today, because the two nations are on a similar trajectory and have accumulated similar problems, a comparative study of the issues facing the two nations is more revealing than ever. As the two countries compete on the global stage for economic and geopolitical prowess and ultimately for future international influence on the world, comparisons based on current status and potential development could be inspirational. Through an in-depth analysis and close comparison of the two countries, students will be afforded an opportunity to contemplate not only local issues but also solutions that transcend the geopolitical confines and the restraints of a specific culture and history.

This multimedia-based unit, with three initial lessons, will focus on comparing and contrasting China and another country at a similar level of development. A focus is also on comparing and contrasting a Chinese phenomenon and a Western phenomenon such as the concept and practice of medicine or a Chinese belief system and its Western counterpart. More lessons will be added to the unit in the future as more topics are researched, explored, and developed.

The purpose of the unit is to provide students with a collection of multimedia resources so that students from grades 6 to 12 can build their understanding of China on their understanding and knowledge of other countries and their own. Through comparing and contrasting, students will be able to put China into a unique perspective that no other studies provide.

AASL (American Association of School Librarians) Standards for the 21st-Century Learner

(AASL Standards are closely associated with Common Core Standards for Literacy in History, Science, Social Studies and Technical Subjects.)

1.1.7 Make sense of information gathered from diverse sources by identifying misconceptions, main and supporting ideas, conflicting information, and point of view or bias.

2.1.1 Continue an inquiry-based research process by applying critical thinking skills (analysis, synthesis, evaluation, organization) to information and knowledge in order to construct new understandings, draw conclusions, and create new knowledge.

2.1.3 Use strategies to draw conclusions from information and apply knowledge to curricular areas, real world situations, and further investigations.

2.2.2 Use both divergent and convergent thinking to formulate alternative conclusions and test them against the evidence.

2.1.6 Use the writing process, media and visual literacy, and technology skills to create products that express new understandings.

2.2.3 Employ a critical stance in drawing conclusions by demonstrating that the pattern of evidence leads to a decision or conclusion.

2.4.1 Determine how to act on information (accept, reject, modify).

3.1.4 Use technology and other information tools to organize and display knowledge and understanding in ways that others can view, use, and assess.

4.1.3 Respond to literature and creative expressions of ideas in various formats and genres.

4.4.4 Interpret new information based on cultural and social context.

Suggested Instructional Strategies for this Comparative Unit

- Investigate/inquire/observe from a variety of angles
- Link new information and/or skills to prior knowledge to build background
- Initiate discussions for deeper understanding
- Create opportunities for students to explore students generated topics
- Encourage critical and creative thinking
- Use questioning strategies that require learners to go deeper
- Implement graphic organizers for analysis and synthesis of concepts and idea
- Provide apps and mobile devices to accommodate 21st-century learners and diverse learners

Suggested Categories of Apps for the Unit to Process Information at Various Levels

IPAD APPS TO SUPPORT BLOOM'S REVISED TAXONOMY
ASSEMBLED BY KATHY SCHROCK

C	CREATING	 Storytelling	 Video Editing	 Videocasting	 Mixing	 Animating	 Podcasting
E	EVALUATING	 Moderating	 Conferencing	 Networking	 Posting	 Collaborating	 Critiquing
An	ANALYZING	 Outlining	 Structuring	 Organizing	 Surveying	 Deconstructing	 Mashing
Ap	APPLYING	 Interviewing	 Simulating	 Demonstrating	 Presenting	 Editing	 Illustrating
U	UNDERSTANDING	 Categorizing	 Annotating	 Tweeting	 Blogging	 Subscribing	 Explaining
R	REMEMBERING	 Recalling	 Listing	 Bookmarking	 Searching	 Mindmapping	 Word Processing

Lesson 1

Government: Democracy vs. Meritocracy (90 minutes)

It's a standard assumption in the West: As a society progresses, it eventually becomes a capitalist, multi-party democracy. Eric X. Li, a Chinese investor and political scientist, begs to differ. In this provocative, boundary-pushing talk, he asks his audience to consider that there's more than one way to run a successful modern nation. (TED Talks)

Objectives:

Students will learn the differences between the Chinese meritocracy and the Western democracy and why the Chinese government believes that the Chinese system of governance is superior.

AASL Standards:

2.1.1 Continue an inquiry-based research process by applying critical thinking skills (analysis, synthesis, evaluation, organization) to information and knowledge in order to construct new understandings, draw conclusions, and create new knowledge.

2.4.1 Determine how to act on information (accept, reject, modify).

4.4.4 Interpret new information based on cultural and social context.

Materials:

[Eric X. Li: A tale of two political systems](#) (TED Talks), and if time allows, watch the second video: [China's Political System and its Evolution](#) (The International Institute for Strategic Studies)

Procedure:

1. Brainstorm: political systems in the world.
2. Discuss or refer to dictionaries to form definitions of meritocracy.
3. Form debate teams to support one system or the other.
4. Watch [Eric X. Li: A tale of two political systems](#) and take notes using the graphic organizer.
5. Start initial debates citing arguments from the video(s). (More debates might be necessary later after students conduct their own research.)

Questions for Discussion:

1. What are the major characteristics of democracy in the United States? List five characteristics.
2. What are the major characteristics of meritocracy in China, as described? List five characteristics.
3. Why does the speaker believe that Chinese meritocracy is superior to democracy?

Assessment:

Students will write an argumentative essay to support one system or the other citing print and digital sources.

Supplemental Materials for Further Research:

Video: [China and Democracy](#) (The Aspen Institute)

A session from the 2012 Aspen Ideas festival. In much of the world, China is admired—or feared—as the rising new model of economic achievement under ruthlessly effective government direction. In the eyes of many others, the Chinese model is increasingly showing its contradictions and limits: economic, environmental, social, and political. Two of the world's leading exponents of these respective views discuss where they disagree, and why—and what the next stage is most likely to hold for the world's most populous and fastest-growing nation.

Lesson 2

Winner in 15 Years: China vs. India (90 minutes)

Tiger vs dragon: China opened its economy to the world in the late 1970s. India didn't follow suit until the 1990s. Despite China's 30-year head start, India's economy is quickly gaining ground, and some economists predict that India is ready to overtake the Chinese economy. Which will win?

India has seen impressive economic growth over the past decade and this seems set to continue. With each country having a population of over one billion, many believe their true economic potential remain untapped. However, while China's economic growth has outpaced India's, many have expressed concern about China's aging population, as well as its continued internal stability.

For India, its poor economic governance has been blamed for stifling growth, while the continued India-Pakistan rivalry raises concerns about long-term stability in South Asia. Nonetheless, with many expecting China and India to be the next global superpowers, it is timely to ask who will be ahead in 2030.

Objectives:

Students will learn to use evidence in the primary and secondary sources provided through multimedia to evaluate various arguments and formulate their own.

AASL Standards:

1.1.7 Make sense of information gathered from diverse sources by identifying misconceptions, main and supporting ideas, conflicting information, and point of view or bias.

2.2.2 Use both divergent and convergent thinking to formulate alternative conclusions and test them against the evidence.

Materials:

BBC News: [India vs. China in 60 seconds](#)

Channel NewsAsia Debate: [Bridging Asia: China or India - Who will be ahead in 2030](#)

Procedure:

1. Ask students questions to gauge what they already know about India in relation to China.
2. Watch the BBC News first and then the Channel NewsAsia debate.

Questions for Discussion:

Based on what you already know about India and China before watching the debate, which country do you think will be ahead in economic terms in 2030?

After watching the debate, have you changed your mind about who will be ahead in 2030? Why or why not?

Assessment:

Students will write an essay using primary and secondary sources (data, arguments) to evaluate the debate and choose their own side.

Supplemental Materials for Further Research:

1. [Old Geographies, New Orders -- China, India and the Future of Asia](#) (TEDxFulbright)
2. [Indian Democracy, Chinese Autocracy](#) (The Agenda with Steve Paikin)
3. [India vs China 2015: Partners or Rivals?](#) (CNN Full Interview)
4. [China vs India - Race to the Top of the World](#) (Documentary by BBC)
5. [Does Democracy Stifle Economic Growth?](#) (TED Talks)
6. [Nobel Prize Winner Angus Deaton on the Chinese and Indian Miracles](#) (The Wall Street Journal)

Lesson 3

Traditional Chinese Medicine vs. Western Biomedicine (90 minutes)

Read this [excellent explanation](#) of how the two systems view the body differently without one system being “right” and the other system being “wrong.” Consider the following analogies from the quotes:

“Both Western and Chinese medicine provide a ‘map’ for understanding the human body in health and disease. Western medicine is like the road map. Depending on the size and scale of the map, a road map can offer very detailed representation of countries, states, counties, cities, neighborhoods, and even individual buildings. This is similar to the way that Western medicine views the body—as a collection of distinct parts (organs, tissues, cells) that can be taken apart and considered in isolation.”

“In contrast, Chinese medicine is like a topographical map. On this type of map, mountains, valleys, hills, and plains are defined only in relationship to one another. It is impossible to separate the various pieces of the landscape and still maintain a meaningful representation of the whole. From the viewpoint of Chinese medicine, no single sign, symptom, or body part can be understood except within the context of the whole patient.”

Objectives:

Students will learn the different concepts behind traditional Chinese medicine and modern Western medicine by examining evidence shown the multimedia. Students will also learn to use evidence to avoid biases.

AASL Standards:

1.1.7 Make sense of information gathered from diverse sources by identifying misconceptions, main and supporting ideas, conflicting information, and point of view or bias.

2.2.3 Employ a critical stance in drawing conclusions by demonstrating that the pattern of evidence leads to a decision or conclusion.

Materials:

[The Science of Acupuncture: Traditional Chinese Medicine](#) (BBC Documentary 2015)

Procedure:

1. Discuss what students know about Chinese medicine, where and how they learned about Chinese medicine. Would they choose Chinese medicine, if available? Why or why not?
2. Watch the documentary and take notes of perceived merits AND deficiencies of Chinese medicine.
3. Organize their notes to formulate an argument for or against Chinese medicine, citing evidence.
4. Form two or more teams to present each side of the argument.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Why do you think Chinese medicine is not widely accepted/practiced in the U.S. and other Western countries?
2. What needs to be done in the U.S. before traditional Chinese medicine will be more accepted?

Assessment:

Students will write an essay for or against Chinese medicine citing primary and secondary sources.

Supplemental Materials for Further Research:

1. Reading and Podcast: [Traditional vs. Western Medicine: Which One Is Easier for Chinese Consumers to Swallow?](#)
2. [What Is Chinese Medicine and How Is It Different From Western Medicine?](#) (American College of Tradition Chinese Medicine)
3. [Nobel Renews Debate on Chinese Medicine](#) (New York Times)