

FOUR FOLK TALES ABOUT *HYO*: THE CONFUCIAN TRADITION OF FILIAL PIETY

GRADES: 9-12

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SUBJECT: World History, Global Studies

TIME REQUIRED: 50 minutes

OBJECTIVES: Teachers might use this lesson to begin study of Korean history and society, to increase their students' awareness of Confucianism or to launch a discussion of comparative values in societies worldwide. All four stories with the Introduction might also be assigned for private homework reading and response, if the teacher decides not to use the cooperative jigsaw activity.

BACKGROUND:

This is a brief cooperative "jigsaw" lesson for World History or Global Studies classes. The class reads a handout about Confucian reverence for parents in Korean culture and customs. Then each member of a four-student group reads and shares a different folk tale. Finally, the group answers composes a re-write of any one story, to take place in the students' own community.

MATERIALS:

- Handout 1: Preface and "The Virtue of *Hyo*" from *Chung Hyo Ye* (attached)
- Handout 2: Four Folk Tales about *Hyo* (attached; one to distribute to each table)
- Butcher paper, marker pens

PROCEDURE:

1. Ask students to think about a recent time that they had an argument with their parents. Read the short Preface material aloud (or project it from your classroom computer), and preview the activity. (5 minutes)
2. Divide the class into groups of four. Distribute the handouts and a piece of butcher paper with markers for every table.
3. Each student reads and highlights the Preface and Introduction and one of the four stories. (10 minutes)
4. Each student summarizes the story s/he read to the jigsaw group of four. (5 minutes)
5. Bring the storytelling to an end. (You might want to use a timed signal and sound, for all of your classroom activities. You can find one at www.timeme.com.)
6. Give the groups the following prompt:
"Re-write any one of the stories but make it about (Your Town) today. Record your story on butcher paper. You may decorate it if you like. Here is a sample story about respect for parents in (Your Town)."
Read the sample story "In the Library" to the class (or project it from your classroom computer), and then give groups 10 minutes to create their own. (Of course you can change the names of schools and places in the sample story.) (15 minutes)

7. Students mount their stories on the wall, and circulate to read their peers' work. (5 minutes).
8. Closure: Review some of the traditional elements of respect for ancestors in Korea (language, bowing, taking care of aging parents, ancestor ceremonies.) Ask students to consider one of the following questions, as a notebook entry or in personal reflection time:
 - How are traditional Korean attitudes toward parents different from American attitudes today?
 - How might *hyo* account for "the Korean Miracle" of national progress?

"In the Library"
A Scottsdale, Arizona Version of "Under the Burning Sun"

Jason, the valedictorian of Desert Mountain High School, was accepted to Harvard with a small financial aid package – just enough to make his \$45,000 a year college career affordable. He flew off happily to Boston, studied hard, made many friends, and dated a new girl every week.

As part of Jason's scholarship contract, he had to hold a job on campus. Every Saturday he would disappear; no one knew where Jason worked, or what he did. He never spoke about it.

One Saturday morning, Jason's friend Sean took a wrong turn in the basement stacks of Widener Library and found Jason – mopping the library floors in a sweaty T-shirt and jeans.

"Hey, dude!" said the startled Sean. "Is this where you work? Bummer. Couldn't you be at the check-out desk or something?"

"Well, they offered me a chance to re-shelve books," replied Jason. "But my dad worked his way through ASU as a janitor, so I asked to do this instead."

HANDOUT 1: PREFACE AND “THE VIRTUE OF *HYO*” FROM *CHUNG HYO YE*

Tales of filial devotion, loyalty, respect and benevolence
from the history and folklore of Korea



Bi Chon Sang (image of a heavenly lady offering to the Buddha)
on the Bell of King Songdok made in 771 AD. (National Treasure No. 29)

PREFACE

Korea is a nation that has always loved peace and has done everything in its power to preserve it. Based on the teachings of *Hongik Ingan* which means one should “live and act for the benefit of all mankind,” reverence for the Heavens and respect for human life is deeply rooted in the spirit of the Korean people.

Traditionally, large family households consisting of more than three generations were very common in Korean society. Within these large families, elder family members looked after younger family members, and children learned to treat their elders with respect. They also learned to put the interests of others first and take care of their younger siblings. Such an upbringing serves as the basis for an attitude that places the good of one’s neighbor and society above one’s own. It also serves as a foundation for the willingness to sacrifice oneself for one’s country.

Today we are reading stories about love and devotion to parents, many of which are taken directly from historical records and classic folktales. They show the spirit that puts “us” before “me.”

THE VIRTUE OF *HYO*

There are numerous kinds of virtuous deeds; the root of all is filial piety.

There are numerous kinds of sinful deeds; the root of all is filial impiety.

- Korean maxim

The virtue of *Hyo*, or filial devotion, has a long history in Korea, and was traditionally considered to be the foremost measure of person’s character and worth. Koreans throughout the ages have believed that since our parents brought us into this world and raised us, being grateful to them and serving them well is the most basic of all human virtues.

Among the East Asian countries that have been influenced by Confucianism, Korea is the country where filial devotion is most deeply rooted and where the tradition remains strongest. Because the root of Japanese culture is in the *Samurai*, loyalty to the king was traditionally given greater emphasis than loyalty to one’s parents. Whereas a Korean woman will never change her last name, which her parents gave to her, in Japan a woman always takes her husband’s last name, as the duty of a wife to her husband is held to be more important than filial duty.

...According to Korean custom, one should be humble before others, and speak and behave in a respectful manner to one’s parents. Koreans use different words according to the level of respect owed to the person addressed. A parent’s birthday, for example, was called *saeng-sin*, an older sibling’s birthday *saeng-il*, and one’s own birthday *dol*. When Koreans refer to themselves in front of their parents, they use the word “jeo” or “je” – the humble word for “I.” When

conversing with parents, they use formal sentences ending in “sub-ni-da.” Among all the peoples in the world, Koreans are the only people who have such strict and detailed honorific expressions.

...As well as speaking respectfully, bowing is an important part of the decorum of filial devotion. Children express their respect for their parents by lowering their head, which is the most important part of the body, to the floor. According to custom, when a devoted son or daughter was traveling to distant place, they would bow in front of their parents before departing for the journey, and again upon their return.

Traditionally in Korea, children did not allow their parents to live by themselves when they became old. Instead, they supported them with good food and clothes until the end of their lives. Until the 1950s, there were many Koreans who performed daily memorial services for their parents for a period of one to three years after they had died. While this tradition is not practiced to the same extent nowadays, many Korean families still perform such memorial services at least three times a year, on New Year's day, the festival of Autumn Moon (August 15th in lunar calendar), and the date on which their parents passed away. On performing the memorial service, respects are paid not only to parents, but also to ancestors, going back three, sometimes as many as five, generations. Without our parents, we could not have existed, nor could our parents have existed without our grandparents, and so on. It is thanks to our ancestors that we are here today.

Hyo is the act of repaying the love and grace of another person. Koreans believed that the love of their parents was as precious as the grace of the Heavens. Thus, they lived their lives by repaying that love with gratitude and devotion to their parents. Filial devotion to parents is learned by children, and handed down by them to their own children.

Gratitude and respect for one's parents is the root of the greater love and understanding that embraces the whole of humanity – since everyone is the parent or child of someone else.

HANDOUT 2: FOUR FOLK TALES ABOUT *HYO*

The Poor Scholar and the Minister's Daughter

In Choson Korea, there was once a government minister who had a beautiful daughter. When she came of age, the minister began to look for an intelligent young man to be her husband. Shortly afterwards, a young scholar came to see the minister to seek his daughter's hand in marriage. The minister, seeing his poor and shabby appearance, refused him immediately.

However, as it was just past midday, he asked the young man to stay for lunch, and had a table prepared for him, laden with sumptuous dishes and expensive wines.

The poor scholar's eyes opened wide at the sight of delicacies, which he had never eaten or even seen before. However, he did not eat, but began to wrap up the food and put it in a bag he was carrying.

Greatly surprised, the minister asked the young scholar why he was storing the food away instead of eating it.

The young man replied, "I have never seen such fine dishes before, and so I am taking them home to give to my mother."

The minister, deeply touched by the man's devotion, instantly changed his mind and gave him permission to marry his daughter.

The young scholar was the famous Yi Wonik (1547~1634)¹, and went on to become a government minister like his father-in-law.

¹ In Korean, a surname normally comes before the given name. Names in this book follow this convention.

Under the Burning Sun

A brush seller once arrived in a village, and went to the village school to sell his wares. When he got there, he found several young children reading books on the veranda of the schoolhouse. Most of the children were in the shade, but one child was sitting reading his book under the burning sun. The man thought this strange, and asked the boy,

“How old are you?”

“I am seven years old,” the boy replied.

“Why are you reading under the sun, while other students are on the cool floor?”

The boy, wiping the sweat from his forehead, answered,

“My family is poor, and my father works as a day laborer² in order to pay my school fees. My books, brushes and papers are all the result of my father’s hard work and sweat. I feel guilty reading on the cool floor while my father is working in a field in the summer heat. That is why I am reading this book under the burning sun.”

Deeply moved, the brush-seller praised the boy for his thoughtfulness towards his father, and gave him his best brushes as a reward.

² Because his father did not own his own land, he worked for other farmers in return for a wage.

A Visit to Seoul

Some hundreds of years ago, a young scholar who lived in a remote village married a woman from Kwachon. After the wedding ceremony, he went to live with the bride's family. His father, worried about his son, said to him, "There is only one hill separating Kwachon and Seoul. When you arrive in Kwachon, you must take care never to visit Seoul."

"Why not, father?" the young scholar asked.

"If you set eyes on a bustling, flourishing capital city, your mind will become unstable and you will be unable to concentrate on your studies. Please promise that you will remember this."

The scholar was a devoted son, and he always did whatever his father asked of him. Therefore, he promised that he would follow his instructions, and left for his wife's house.

After he had been living there for some time, however, it occurred to him that it would be a shame not to go and visit Seoul, since it was so close by. He felt that if he did not go and see Seoul then, he would be unlikely to have the chance to do so in the future. Therefore, in spite of his father's advice, he climbed over the hill and made his way to Seoul.

Once on the other side, however, he felt so uncomfortable going against his father's wishes that he turned back to Kwachon after reaching the South Gate.

When he returned to his wife's house, however, he reasoned with himself that it would be acceptable for him to go Seoul provided that he could keep it a secret from his father. Again, on the next day, he made his way as far as the South Gate. However, he again remembered what his father had said to him, and being unable to pass further, went back to his wife's house.

He repeated this several times, going to the South Gate in the morning and then returning to Kwachon. A soldier on guard at the gate thought the scholar's actions suspicious and reported him to the authorities. He was arrested and interrogated by the head of the police.

"Why do you appear at the South Gate every day? What are you planning to do?"

The timid scholar replied in a faltering voice.

"I recently moved to Kwachon after getting married, and had never been so close to Seoul before. It was my father's words that made me behave in this way."

"Your father's words? Explain what you mean."

The scholar related the whole story, and begged the officer to pardon him.

"Since I could neither break my promise to my father nor abandon my wish to see Seoul, I walked back and forth in front of the South Gate every day."

The officer saw that the scholar was a devoted son, and said, "Unless you yourself had told your father, nobody would have known about your coming to Seoul. But you kept your promise nevertheless, out of devotion to your parents. This is conduct worthy of a true son, and you deserve to be rewarded. Since you are already in Seoul, please take the opportunity to see the city, and then go back to your hometown."

The young scholar was rewarded by the officer and taken on a tour of the city by a military escort, before returning home to his wife. He eventually told his father what had happened, and related all he had seen in detail. Later, he passed the state examination and rose to become prime minister.

My Mother's Troubles

Once, in a village, there lived a lazy delinquent. Having lost his father at a young age, he had been raised by his widowed mother, and had started to go astray early on in life. He never listened to his mother's words, and was always causing mischief and disturbing the lives of the villagers.

His mother was very worried for his future, and called him to her one day, saying,

"I cannot allow you to live like this anymore. Fortunately, I have heard that there is a scholar of some reputation who is now living in the village. You must go and study under him."

The mother took her son to see the scholar. At first, the scholar tried to teach him to study books and the teachings of the sages. However, the boy showed no signs of progress.

One day, the scholar said to him,

"The weather today is very hot. On a day like this, the best thing for us to do is to find a stream where we can bathe our feet. Also, we can eat watermelon and gold melon, having cooled them in the stream. Let us go now."

The excited student rushed to get ready. The teacher told the boy to take the fruit, giving him a large watermelon and ten gold melons to carry. Pleased to be going on a trip, the student held tightly on to them, and hurried on his way.

But before they had walked one *majang* (about 400m), the boy began to sweat in the summer heat. His steps became unsteady, and he was on the verge of falling over. Unable to endure the heat, he said to his teacher, "I cannot go any further. Let us rest here for a while, and then go back home."

Hearing this, the teacher scolded the boy, "You are complaining about walking only this far, carrying a watermelon? Think how your mother carried you for ten months, how she worked all day weaving cloth and tending to the farm with a heavy baby in her womb."

At that moment, the boy felt a sharp pain, as if something was piercing his chest. Still holding the watermelon, he looked up at the sky, and soon tears started to pour from his eyes. He knelt before his teacher and said,

"Teacher, I have been so foolish. I repent from the bottom of my heart."