

# An Analysis of the Important Role of Ancient Poetry in Chinese Language Education

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**Abstract:** Chinese language education refers to Chinese language and culture education conducted mainly for overseas Chinese and overseas Chinese whose mother tongue or first language is not Chinese. By its nature, we can see that language and culture are inseparable, and language is the carrier of culture. This makes it clear that no matter what language teaching method we choose, the teaching of language will involve the teaching of related cultures. At the same time, as the essence of China's traditional culture, ancient poetry contains the rich cultural heritage of Chinese civilization and long-standing historical tradition, which is the crystallization of Chinese traditional culture. With the continuous development of Chinese language education, the teaching of ancient poems has become an important part of Chinese language education and plays a pivotal role in the teaching of Chinese language. Therefore, this paper will focus on the status, current situation and teaching methods of teaching ancient poems to explore how to better apply ancient poems to the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language in the classroom, and how to appropriately integrate some cultural teaching into the language teaching at the same time to help improve students' interest in learning.

**Keywords:** Chinese language education; Ancient poetry; Teaching methods

## 1. Introduction

The benefits of applying ancient poetry teaching to Chinese language education, using ancient poetry as a carrier of culture, spreading Chinese culture and helping Chinese language learning are obvious, but it is still in the exploratory stage in practical application, and there are often cases that students cannot understand it. Then what is the focus of ancient poetry teaching, and how to efficiently apply ancient poetry teaching to Chinese language education will be the focus of this paper.

### 1.1 Analysis of learning situation and teaching materials

#### 1.1.1 Analysis of learning situation

The students in the author's class are Chinese American teenagers who moved to the United States with their parents when they were young, and most of them speak English as their first language. Due to their parents' own cultural identity, they attach great importance to the preservation and transmission of traditional Chinese culture and Chinese language, and in the absence of a Chinese language learning environment, they want their children to master their native language and culture in addition to acquiring English. Therefore, they choose to have three or two Chinese classes a week, with one class lasting 30 or 50 minutes. During the teaching process, we found that some students can recite ancient poems such as "Poem for a Silent Night". They have some initial listening and speaking skills when learning Chinese and have the ability to spell Chinese characters in Pinyin.

#### 1.1.2 Teaching materials

The author works as an online Chinese language teacher for Chinese-American teenagers at World Wonder Education and Smiling Chinese. World Wonder Education uses an in-house edition of the Chinese textbook for primary schools, while Smiling Chinese uses a Chinese textbook published by the Jinan University. Both the Chinese textbook edited by the Ministry of Education and the Chinese textbook published by Jinan University involve the teaching of ancient poems. Under the background of the new curriculum reform, in order to cultivate the students' traditional cultural literacy, the text of ancient poetry is added to the Chinese textbook. According to statistics, there are 124 ancient poems in the Ministry's version of the Language from Book 1 to Book 6, accounting for about 30% of the total number of texts. The total number of ancient poems in the classroom is 70, and there are 54 in the

day-to-day section. The textbook used by Smiling Chinese, an online Chinese language teaching organization, is a revised edition of the Chinese language published by the Jinan University, which teaches Chinese to ethnic Chinese children. By counting the 12 books of the Revised Edition of Chinese (Primary Edition), there are 8 lessons of ancient poems in the textbook, with two poems in each lesson, making a total of 16 poems.

### ***1.2 The relationship between teaching ancient poetry and language teaching***

Language teaching includes three parts: phonology, vocabulary and grammar. Modification, as an important aspect of ancient poetry, is an important concept in linguistics and a characteristic of our literature, so we should strengthen the teaching of this aspect. Therefore, we should pay attention to the following three aspects in teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language and Culture class about language: phonetics, vocabulary and modification.

#### ***1.2.1 The phonetic characteristics of ancient poems***

Compared with other languages, Chinese phonetics has clear syllable boundaries, more musical tones, higher and lower changes in tone and intonation, which makes it musical, and this feature is especially prominent in ancient poetry. Phonetic learning is actually the training of vocal and rhythmic tones<sup>[4]</sup>. First of all, ancient poems are rich in vowel speech materials, and there are several confusing vowels in one ancient poem. Through repeated drills, students can experience the vowel sounds in comparison and deepen their understanding. Secondly, the ancient poems themselves have rhymes, and multiple rhymes appear repeatedly in the same poem, so students can drill the speech flow pronunciation in the overall verse and experience the pronunciation characteristics of various rhymes ancient poems intonation and staccato. Finally, the poems are accompanied by different combinations of syllabic structure, which create rhythmic variations in the short chanting. Students can experience the rich rhythmic and rhyming variations of Chinese tones in the rhythmic recitation, and internalize the musical beauty of ancient poems. Ancient poems are about rhyme and rhythmic variations, and behind such beautiful rhythms are hidden cultural messages. Therefore, we should not only pay attention to the teaching of phonetics, but also guide students to understand the hidden cultural connotation behind the rhyme.

#### ***1.2.2 Features of teaching ancient poetry in terms of vocabulary***

Ancient poems contain many words and phrases with traditional Chinese culture. For example, "Qingming" and "peach charm" are cultural words that we cannot ignore and must be carefully explained. Only when we understand the cultural meaning behind these words can we understand the poems deeply. When teaching these two poems, it is essential to explain the above cultural vocabulary. In the teaching of ancient poetry culture class in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, only when the cultural connotations of these words are clearly explained can they understand the thoughts and feelings of the poems, as well as some of the cultural backgrounds, cultural thinking and the poet's lyricist's human attitude related to the poems.

#### ***1.2.3 The characteristics of rhetoric in teaching ancient poetry***

Since classical Chinese poetry is about implicit meaning and concise language, poets and lyricists often use various rhetorical devices to express their meaning and create a beautiful mood. Thus, when studying ancient poetry, we must study rhetorical devices. For example, the poet Lu You of the Song Dynasty used the rhetorical technique of personification in his poem "The Diviner·Ode to the Plum", in which the poet used the rhetorical technique of anthropomorphism to describe the loneliness and sorrowful situation of the plum blossom and its unique fragrance in the cold, reflecting the poet's lonely, elegant and pure aspirations.

Therefore, rhetoric is an important aspect that should not be neglected in teaching Chinese as a foreign language when teaching language related knowledge in ancient poetry and culture classes.

### ***1.3 Teaching Culture in Teaching Ancient Chinese Poetry to Foreigners***

Teaching culture can help reduce the gap caused by cultural differences. The content of ancient poetry is all-embracing, and as a category of our literature, it can not only show us the current life and customs of thought, it is also the self-writing of ancient literati and scholars. For example, the "Poetic Edda" and "Li Sao" both embody cultural contents such as customs and habits, political thoughts, historical cognition, geographical knowledge and philosophical thoughts of the current world.

Therefore, the ancient poems they composed will certainly contain the fundamental spirit, way of thinking, aesthetic perception and value judgment of the Chinese nation. Through the teaching of ancient poems, learners can feel the interests, habits and manners of Chinese people, which can reduce the gap caused by cultural differences, deepen their understanding of Chinese civilization, enable better communication between people, and make the world know China better.

Culture teaching can also improve the awareness of intercultural communication and the improvement of intercultural communication ability. Intercultural communication refers to the communication activities between people with different cultural backgrounds. Understanding different cultural backgrounds is the foundation of intercultural communication, and teaching Chinese as a foreign language as an important content of intercultural communication, knowledge of different cultural backgrounds is also the key content of our foreign Chinese teaching classroom. Therefore, in the teaching of ancient Chinese poetry and culture class for foreigners we have to grasp the Chinese cultural traits in it for cultural teaching. It records all aspects of our ancient history, culture, and life in its unique form to present to future generations, and has a profound influence on our modern Chinese language.

To sum up, the combination of culture teaching and language teaching can make students master the basic language knowledge and acquire the ability of cross-cultural communication, so that the purpose of teaching Chinese as a foreign language can be realized. No matter which language is spoken, it is the essence of that nation's culture. Only by understanding these essences can we use this language flexibly and develop the ability to communicate in this language, reduce cultural collisions and increase learners' enthusiasm for learning.

## **2. Difficulties in teaching ancient poetry**

### ***2.1 Difficulty in understanding***

What is the most difficult part of ancient poetry? Chinese teachers all mention that the meaning vocabulary of ancient poems is difficult to be understood, that they find it difficult when explaining the meaning of the poems, and that learners know little about the cultural background of the ancient poems.

#### ***2.1.1 Difficulties in Vocabulary Comprehension***

There are deviations between the meanings of ancient Chinese and modern Chinese, we all use modern Chinese now, and ancient poems belong to ancient Chinese, and there is a big difference between the language of poems and the language of communication used in life, and the words and phrases in ancient poems are basically not used in life. Moreover, in the process of learning ancient poems, learners only simply understand the things described in the poems due to their different cultural inculcation, and they usually stay on the literal meaning, such as some physical words, such as mountain, water, cloud, car, flower and so on. It is difficult for them to understand the cultural meaning behind each word. Therefore, it is difficult to explain the process of ancient Chinese vocabulary.

#### ***2.1.2 Difficulty in understanding poetic meaning***

Ancient Chinese poetry developed and matured in the context of Chinese culture, and it was influenced by various aspects of Chinese philosophy, aesthetics and literary development. Under the guidance of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism and the idea of "unity of heaven and man", ancient Chinese literary works have oriental artistic characteristics different from those of the West, which are reflected in the creation of poetry as the poet's description of natural phenomena and social life scenes with his thoughts and feelings, making ancient Chinese poetry have some special features in the mood. This makes ancient Chinese poetry special in terms of its mood, i.e., the so-called "image outside of an image, scene outside of a scene" and the characteristic of "words have endless meaning". Chinese learners have lived overseas for a long time and have been influenced by Chinese culture relatively little, especially Chinese literature, so it is difficult for them to develop Chinese thinking without being influenced by Chinese culture. Therefore, in the absence of Chinese-style thinking, it is difficult for learners to understand the mood created by the poets and the feelings they are trying to express. So learners tend to be intimidated in the process of learning ancient poems. These also become difficult points in explaining the poems.

#### ***2.1.3 Difficulties in understanding the background of ancient poems***

What is important in learning ancient poems is not only itself, but also the author and writing

background of ancient poems, which belongs to historical and cultural knowledge. Gradually grasp cultural knowledge through learning ancient poems, which is also one of the purposes of teaching ancient poems. And the content of many poems is deeply related to the context in which they were written, so it is necessary to understand the context of ancient poems in order to better understand them.

## ***2.2 Limitations of online teaching***

On the one hand, due to the epidemic, most Chinese teaching takes online teaching, and some rich and interesting teaching activities that can mobilize motivation cannot be combined with ancient poetry teaching methods due to space limitations. To a certain extent, this has limited the use of teaching methods and has affected the effectiveness of teaching ancient poetry. On the other hand, the teaching role of teachers has also changed. Chinese teachers have gradually become the main actors in the classroom of online Chinese language teaching from being trainers and coordinators of offline language learners. Due to the lack of physical environment and cultural atmosphere of the classroom, teachers have to add an explanatory part to the teaching of ancient poems to mobilize the online classroom atmosphere, but the disadvantage of this is that learners' concentration and class participation in the online classroom have decreased.

## **3. Teaching methods of ancient poems**

### ***3.1 Chanting***

Chanting is a good and effective method and experience that people have learned from the practice of learning ancient poems for thousands of years. What is "chanting"? In the book "Shuowen Jiezi", it is mentioned that "chanting" is a kind of elongated reading between "reading" and "singing". Between "reading" and "singing" is a kind of elongated voice of reading poetry, there is a certain cadence and melody, but different from singing, there is no fixed music score. The most important feature of "chanting" is the rhythmic reading of intonation and staccato. Mr. Chen Shaosong(2012) believes that there is a difference between "chanting" and "reciting", but they also have something in common. The difference between the two lies in the fact that they both read rhythmically according to a certain cadence, using the tone of intonation and staccato to express the language with a certain melodic beauty<sup>[1]</sup>. The difference between the two lies in the fact that "chanting" places more emphasis on the rhythm of music, with a more distinct melody, a longer voice, and a more complex cadence; "reciting" places more emphasis on the rhythm of language, with a shorter voice and a simpler cadence. At the same time, ancient poetry itself is highly readable, with a distinctive rhythm, and rhythm is the life of a poem<sup>[3]</sup>. Therefore, it is a key for Chinese-speaking students to learn ancient poetry well. The art of chanting breaks through the boundaries of different disciplines and is a marriage of literature and music. It integrates the two disciplines organically, combining poetry and music to deepen students' understanding and memory of ancient poems in the atmosphere of music and reverie, and enriches the teaching tools of language classes. Chanting helps cultivate students' sense of language, gives them adequate language training and skills training, fully perceives the charm of the article, appreciates the artistic realm of the article's interplay of scenes and emotions, and appreciates the meaning of the text beyond words and unexpected feelings. Therefore, chanting is an important way to develop a sense of language. Chanting also helps to improve students' aesthetic sensibility, allowing them to gain more effective perceptual knowledge of beauty, stimulate their aesthetic desire, and make them develop a rational understanding of poetic meaning and thinking.

### ***3.2 Situational Teaching Method***

Situational teaching method refers to the teaching process in which teachers purposely introduce or create vivid and concrete scenes with certain emotional colors, mainly with images, in order to induce certain attitudinal experiences of students, thus helping them to understand the teaching materials and enabling them to develop their mental functions. Liu Jing((2012) reckons that the use of scenario teaching method in teaching ancient poems can make learners better understand the mood of ancient poems and the author's thoughts and feelings. When teaching ancient poetry, teachers can use pictures and videos to attract students' attention and then create scenarios and dialogues based on the content of the poems to establish a connection between students and the poems, allowing them to grasp the important connotations of the poems through emotional intuition. By creating realistic scenarios that

visualize implicit elements with Chinese cultural traits, etc., students deepen their understanding of the content of the ancient poems<sup>[2]</sup>.

#### 4. Conclusion

With the increasing international influence of China, the demand for Chinese language education among overseas Chinese is increasing day by day. As the main target of overseas Chinese language education, overseas Chinese youths are an important group of Chinese culture exported to the outside world, which is of great importance. The new generation of Chinese is the future hope of overseas Chinese. Whether overseas Chinese youths identify with Chinese culture or not determines how far Chinese culture can go locally, and they are an important carrier for the spread and transmission of Chinese culture overseas. In terms of the content of the current textbooks, they mainly focus on learning language skills, and the cultural knowledge covered in the textbooks is single, mainly on teaching ancient poems. However, Chinese teachers tend to ignore the importance of ancient poems in the process of teaching them, and simply let learners read them in class or recite them in class, ignoring the inherent cultural connotation of ancient poems and the thoughts and feelings of the poets. Therefore, by analyzing the key points and difficulties of teaching ancient poems and designing efficient teaching methods, learners can learn about Chinese culture in the process of learning ancient poems. Through the learning of ancient poems, learners can understand the Chinese way of thinking, values and customs and culture, and spread the essence of Chinese culture correctly, so that people all over the world can correctly understand Chinese language, understand China and like China. We believe that with the joint efforts of scholars and teachers of Chinese as a foreign language, the seed of classical poetry teaching will be deeply rooted in the soil of Chinese as a foreign language and bear fruitful results.

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