

# *How to Teach through Poetry: Content and Paths for the Modern Inheritance of Chinese Poetry Education*

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**Abstract:** Poetry expresses aspirations, and songs chant sentiments. As a part of China's excellent traditional culture, classic ancient poetry embodies the profound and extensive history, as well as the profound and extensive knowledge of Chinese culture. Reading and studying Chinese poetry can enhance one's understanding and appreciation of Chinese cultural ideas, traditional virtues, and humanistic spirit, thereby fostering a sense of identity and pride in China's excellent traditional culture, strengthening cultural confidence, and better inheriting and promoting it. However, under the philosophy of the new curriculum standards, ancient poetry classroom teaching cannot fully enhance students' core competencies. Therefore, the necessity to explore the content and pathways for the inheritance of Chinese poetry education is highly evident.

"Using poetry as a means of education" is an educational approach with distinct national characteristics, embodying cultural confidence, language proficiency, thinking skills, and aesthetic creativity. Through the study and application of ancient poetry, students can gradually form correct values, essential character traits, and key abilities, reflecting the value of educating people. As Zhan Furui once said, "Poetry education has two meanings: one is the education through poetry, and the other is the transmission and teaching of poetry." Therefore, how can we ensure that students fully absorb the nourishment of knowledge from the rich and nutritious Chinese poetry? How can we enable students to pass on the nourishment of Chinese poetry and subtly influence their ways of thinking and behaving? Firstly, it requires teachers to have the consciousness to pass on this civilization and serve as a close bridge between Chinese poetry and students. Only in this way can we lay a distinct Chinese foundation for the beautiful lives of young people, provide strong support for upholding the backbone of national culture, and enhance cultural confidence.

## **1. Recitation, creating a learning atmosphere of Chinese poetry**

As the saying goes, "An article is not tiresome even after reading it a hundred times; through repeated reading and deep contemplation, one will understand it naturally." It is evident that recitation is one of the effective ways to improve the teaching of Chinese poetry, and it also helps stimulate students' interest in learning ancient poetry. By consciously cultivating students' language sense through recitation, we can enhance their appreciation level and aesthetic taste, and strengthen their consciousness in inheriting Chinese traditional culture.<sup>[1]</sup>

Firstly, it is essential to correct pronunciation and listen to the reading, ensuring that the text is read smoothly and coherently. Teachers can provide a model reading or play audio and video recordings of renowned readers for students to listen carefully, follow along quietly, and then imitate the reading to master the correct pronunciation and intonation methods.

Secondly, it is crucial to grasp the rhythm of Chinese poetry, understand the emotional tone of the work, pay attention to the stylistic characteristics, and master the emphasis and intonation. Reading the poetry fluently at the linguistic level can help students quickly enter the role of appreciating Chinese poetry and facilitate their understanding of its meaning.

## 2. Savoring, nourishing the blossoming imagery of Chinese poetry

Chinese poetry embodies the complex emotions of ancient people, such as joy, sorrow, pain, struggle, hope, ideal pursuits, patriotic thoughts, and more. These emotions permeate the soul of our nation, seemingly allowing us to touch the vibrant lifeblood of a people, passed down through generations. This is the profound essence of Chinese language and culture. By employing various levels and forms of savoring, such as individual reading, group reading, and rotating reading, students will inevitably be deeply infected by the rhythmic beauty and rhythmic charm of Chinese poetry, unconsciously deepening their perception of it. The high degree of unity between "teaching" and "learning" ensures that teachers teach effectively and students learn efficiently. The goal of "teaching" is for the purpose of achieving a state where 'teaching' is no longer necessary"<sup>[2]</sup> is being realized.

In savoring Chinese poetry, students continuously appreciate the exquisite choice of words and the authors' intention of expressing emotions through scenery. <sup>[3]</sup>This not only stimulates students' interest in learning Chinese poetry but also lays a solid foundation for them to understand and appreciate the artistic conception of poetry. Taking Liu Yong's "Bells Ringing in the Rain" as an example, the poem says:

*Cicadas chill  
Drearly shrill.  
We stand face to face in an evening hour  
Before the pavilion, after a sudden shower.  
Can we care for drinking before we part?  
At the city gate,  
We are lingering late,  
But the boat is waiting for me to depart,  
Hand in hand we gaze at each other's tearful eyes  
And burst into sobs with words congealed on our lips.  
I'll go my way,  
Far, far away.  
On miles and miles of misty waves where sail ships,  
And evening clouds hang low in boundless Southern skies.  
Lovers would grieve at parting as of old.  
How could I stand this clear autumn day so cold!  
Where shall I be found at daybreak  
From wine awake?  
Moored by a riverbank planted with willow trees  
Beneath the waning moon and in the morning breeze.  
I'll be gone for a year.  
In vain would good times and fine scenes appear.*

*However gallant I am on my part,  
To whom can I lay bare my heart? (Xu Yuanchong's translation)*

In poetry, the expression of personal emotions often resonates deeply with readers across generations, evoking tears and emotional responses. The poet employs specific imagery to create an atmosphere of desolation, capturing both the immediate sorrow of separation and the future melancholy. Through the seamless integration of feelings and scenery, a poignant and lingering song of farewell is performed. Only by carefully reading and appreciating the poem can one grasp the profound meanings within the words and phrases, and truly understand the helplessness conveyed in the poet's line, "However gallant I am on my part, to whom can I lay bare my heart?"

### 3. Migrate, thereby expanding the temporal coordinates of Chinese poetry

Chinese poetry has always been a beautiful and profound part of traditional Chinese culture, and it should also be the essence of traditional culture that must be passed down. So, how can we enable students to absorb the nutrients of knowledge from the rich Chinese poetry? How can we allow students to fully roam and explore in the ocean of knowledge? The answer lies in the transfer reading of Chinese poetry.

#### 3.1 The same author, different poems

Taking Du Fu's "Gazing at Mount Tai", "Spring View", and "Ascending the Heights" as examples, all of which are works expressing emotions through distant gazing, why do some convey a sense of grandeur and high aspirations, while others express sorrow and melancholy?

From the perspective of creation time, "Gazing at Mount Tai" is the opening work in Du Fu's poetry collection, written when he was twenty-five years old. The entire poem, through the depiction of the magnificent scenery of Mount Tai, expresses his aspirations and is filled with optimism. The poem is characterized by its majestic spirit, heroic sentiment, passionate emotions, and bright style, reflecting the artistic features of the poet's early works, which are distinctly different from the melancholic and restrained style of his later works. The lines "I will ascend the mountain's crest; It dwarfs all peaks under my feet." These two lines of poetry not only depict the grandeur of Mount Tai but also reflect Du Fu's ambition and perseverance. They can broaden readers' horizons and minds, inspiring people to strive upwards.

"Spring View" presents a different realm altogether. This poem was created during the An-Shi Rebellion, when the Tang Dynasty's capital Chang'an fell into chaos, and the country was in turmoil with people displaced and living in hardship. The war had disrupted social order, and people were yearning for peace and stability. What should have been a scene of vitality and hope in spring was instead filled with profound sorrow. The lines "I cannot bear to scratch my grizzled hair; It grows too thin to hold a light hairpin." This line of poetry vividly portrays the poet's aged appearance and the rapidity of his aging, profoundly expressing his feelings of worrying about the country, grieving over the times, missing his home, and lamenting his own fate.

"Ascending the Heights" was written ten years after "Spring View," after the An-Shi Rebellion had been quenched, but the heyday of the Tang Dynasty was already a distant memory. At that time, the poet was afflicted with various illnesses and lived in poverty. The decline of the country and personal misfortunes had caused great trauma to his spirit. The poem gives us a sense of not sorrow but heroic sadness; not depression but agitation; not narrow-mindedness but magnanimity. The quoted lines, "A thousand miles from home, I'm grieved at autumn's plight; Ill now and then for years, alone I'm on this height," express the poet's deep sorrow and melancholy. Being far away from home and facing the desolation of autumn, the poet feels isolated and alone on this distant height, which amplifies his sense of sadness and hardship. The imagery of distance, autumn, and

solitude creates a poignant atmosphere that conveys the poet's emotional turmoil and bitter feelings. Seeing leaves falling to their roots while he himself is thousands of miles away from home; suffering from illnesses with no loved ones by his side. In the final couplet, the poet writes about his premature graying hair due to hardships and his inability to drown his sorrows in alcohol because of his illnesses. The loneliness is unbearable, the sadness unshakable, and the misery overwhelming! <sup>[4]</sup>The poet, in different periods, endowed his works with rich humanistic spirit and cultural connotations, which have expanded students' spiritual realms, nourished their inner worlds, and elevated their life perspectives.

### 3.2 The same theme, different works

The historical backgrounds of Chinese poetry are often distant from us, but many of the poems share commonalities in the understanding and usage of certain words and phrases. When teaching "On Hearing That Wang Changling Has Been Exiled to Longbiao, I Send This Poem from Afar," we can guide students to expand their reading of Chinese poems about farewells to friends, thus promoting the accumulation of Chinese poetry. For example, in "Farewell to Meng Haoran at Yellow Crane Tower as He Sets Off for Guangling," the line "An old friend leaves the Yellow Crane Tower" refers to the old friend Meng Haoran. Similarly, in "You Go Westward, and I Have No Old Friends at the Yang Pass" (From "Sending Yuan the Second on a Mission to the West") and "An old friend prepares chicken and millet" (From "Visiting an Old Friend's Village"), the term "old friend" in both instances means an old acquaintance. By understanding this, it becomes easier to grasp the emotions and thoughts contained in these works, despite their different times, locations, and authors.

## 4. Background, Unfolding the cultural charm of Chinese poetry

In our teaching, by connecting with the creative backgrounds of Chinese poetry, we can open a window to the era and unlock the door to students' wisdom. This allows students to understand the poets, comprehend the meanings of the poems, and perceive the emotions conveyed. They can truly feel the spirituality of the words, comprehend the poets' lives, gain insights into the society of that time, and accurately understand the humanistic qualities and aesthetic tastes emitted from the poems.

When teaching Cao Cao's "Viewing the Sea," we can try to first let students understand Cao Cao's political ideals and aspirations. This not only familiarizes students with the poet and the writing background but also directly guides them to have a general understanding of the poem. Different times and authors yield vastly different styles. We should let students immerse themselves in the frustrated patriotism of Lu You, who had no way to serve his country; feel the ambition and aspiration of Li Bai, who was full of hope and eager to achieve great things; listen to the lingering love and the sorrow of separation that put love above all else in Li Qingzhao's poetry... If we do not start from the background of Chinese poetry, it would not be so easy to understand these works.

## 5. Key words: Unfolding the magnificent scroll of Chinese poetry

The key words in Chinese poetry are sometimes also referred to as the "eye of the text" or the "theme sentence," which are lines that fully express the author's thoughts, emotions, and writing purposes. They sometimes appear in the middle of the poem, but more often at the end, directly or indirectly stating the theme. By grasping these key words, one can often grasp the main idea of the entire poem.

"The green should be lush, the red sparse" is the thematic line of Li Qingzhao's poem "Ru Meng

Ling". These ordinary words carry a deeper sentiment in describing the crabapple tree after the wind and rain, and the poet's emotion of cherishing spring and pitying the flowers reaches its climax. In this lingering and farewell to spring, it subtly conveys the poet's vexation and distress over the passing of her youth. It can be seen that this is a colorful brushstroke that blends emotion with scenery, the finishing touch of this poem, and thus has become a well-known line passed down through generations.

## 6. Imagination and association, supplementing the artistic imagery of Chinese poetry

The language of Chinese poetry is implicit and concise, and factors such as the multiple interpretations of imagery and the leaps in thought affect the appreciation of poetry. Therefore, to enter the realm of appreciation, one must rely on imagination and association, so that the images in Chinese poetry can vividly and comprehensively emerge in the mind of the appreciator, and only then can one perceive and understand the artistic imagery.

Li Bai's "Viewing the Ancient Ruins in Yuezhong" begins with three lines that vividly portray the bustling prosperity of the past, while the fourth line starkly contrasts this by depicting the present-day desolation and loneliness of the place. The three words "partridges fly" are laden with boundless regret and emotion, creating a sharp juxtaposition with the preceding lines. At first glance, the poem appears to express lamentation over the impermanence of prosperity and decline. However, it also contains the author's sarcasm towards Gou Jian, who forgot his past humiliation and suffering, indulging instead in momentary victory and glory, only to see his triumph turn to nothingness. This triggers readers' thoughts and leaves ample room for imagination and association.<sup>[5]</sup> Works such as Xin Qiji's "Recalling the Past at Beigu Pavilion in Jingkou", Liu Yuxi's "The Stone City", and "The Black-Robed Lane" all require students to engage in association, imagination, inquiry, contemplation, and understanding, gradually deepening their comprehension and revealing the poetic meaning. Of course, the cultivation of imagination and association abilities ultimately cannot be separated from the experiences and insights gained from life and reading.

Chinese poetry is the vibrant and fragrant flower in literary works, nourished by the passionate outpouring of the ancients. Those well-known lines and famous pieces, with their profound artistic conception, all embody the deep emotions of the ancient people. They express individual souls in the most free form and represent the richest human inner world with the most concise and condensed language. Exploring and interpreting the connotations and practical significance of Chinese classic poetry can guide young people to better familiarize themselves with poems and songs, get closer to Chinese classics, and more extensively and deeply "understand Chinese ideological concepts, inherit Chinese traditional virtues, and promote Chinese humanistic spirit," thereby painting a distinct Chinese backdrop for a beautiful life.

## 7. Conclusion

In this era that values speed, Chinese poetry is truly a nutritious feast that allows people to stop and savor. It is not only a treasure of the traditional culture of our country, but also the essence of it. All frontline educators should work together, pooling their strength to pass on the torch of classical poetry, and jointly explore the path for the creative transformation and innovative development of Chinese poetry education in the current era. By guiding students to recite and appreciate classical poetry daily, we can develop their thinking skills, enhance their thinking quality, cultivate healthy aesthetic tastes, accumulate a rich cultural foundation, foster and practice socialist core values, strengthen cultural confidence, and make positive contributions to the realization of the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation.

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