Cross-Cultural Poetics: Exploring the Impact of Poetry Teaching Methods on Enhancing Cultural Comprehension in Chinese Language Education in Japan and Korea

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Abstract

This study explores the effectiveness of poetry teaching in enhancing students' cultural understanding within Chinese language education in Japan and South Korea. From the perspective of cross-cultural education, this paper analyzes the teaching methods of poetry, a core element of Chinese language education, in Japanese and Korean classrooms, focusing on phonetic learning methods and historical cultural background teaching methods. By combining qualitative and quantitative research approaches, the study examines the impact of different teaching methods on students' language proficiency and cultural understanding. The research subjects include Chinese language students from Korea University and Kyoto University, with data collected through various methods such as classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and questionnaires. The study concludes that both the historical cultural background poetry teaching method and the phonetic learning method significantly enhance students' cultural understanding within Chinese language education. This research provides new recommendations for poetry teaching in Chinese education in Japan and South Korea, as well as for improving students' literary literacy and aesthetic appreciation abilities

Keywords

Cross-Cultural Education Poetry, Teaching Methods, East Asian Languages Linguistics and Prosody

1. Introduction

"Just as DNA carries the sequence of genes, Chinese poetry, as a form of linguistic aesthetics, embodies the essence of the Chinese language."[1](Liu YanPing，2021)In regions like Japan and South Korea, which have long-standing historical ties with China, the shared Confucian cultural and Chinese character system of East Asia, along with increasingly close exchanges between Chinese and Korean scholars, has led to growing attention to Chinese language education in these regions. Poetry, as a highly condensed and emotionally rich form of linguistic art, plays a unique role in Chinese language learning and in the transmission and understanding of culture. Although there is a substantial body of academic literature offering opinions and specific methods on how to conduct Chinese language education, teaching methods specifically related to poetry, a core component of Chinese culture, seem relatively scarce due to its abstract nature. This paper explores various teaching methods for Chinese poetry in Japanese and Korean Chinese education, such as

integrating cultural and historical backgrounds into poetry teaching and using phonetic learning methods. It also examines whether these different methods effectively enhance students' language abilities and cultural understanding. If they do improve language abilities, the paper seeks to determine in which aspects this occurs, and how these methods contribute to the development of cultural understanding. Through this research, the paper aims to contribute to the development of Chinese language education in Japan and South Korea, as well as to the development of poetry culture, while enhancing students' foundational literary literacy and aesthetic appreciation abilities.

2. The Close Relationship Between Chinese and Korean Poetry in Terms of Phonetics

2.1 The Precision of Chinese Poetry Language and the Harmony of Phonetics

Chinese poetry is renowned for its highly refined language, with strict character limits, such as in five-character and seven-character quatrains, where poets must express rich emotions and ideas within a limited number of characters. This linguistic precision is reflected not only in word choice but also in the harmony of phonetics, such as tonal patterns and rhymes, making the poetry highly musical when read aloud. Chinese poetry, especially regulated verse and quatrains, emphasizes the symmetrical beauty of parallelism and tonal patterns. Parallelism requires symmetry in both words and meanings, while tonal patterns emphasize phonetic harmony. This structural rigor not only enhances the formal beauty of poetry but also increases its expressive power and depth.

2.2 The "Phonetic Learning Method" for Similar Phonetics Between Chinese and Korean Characters

"In the Korean Peninsula (present-day South Korea), Chinese characters were introduced through China and became the primary form of official writing and recording. As early as the Three Kingdoms period (Goguryeo, Baekje, Silla), Chinese characters were introduced and widely used[2]" (Kim Jun Hun, 2008)). Especially after Silla unified the Korean Peninsula, Chinese characters became the core of the official writing system. The use of Chinese characters was not limited to documentary records but also played a significant role in poetry creation. On the Korean Peninsula, Sino-Korean poetry became an important creative form among the literati class. During the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910), Sino-Korean poetry creation reached its peak. Korean scholars not only studied Chinese poetry but also created a large number of poems using Chinese characters, whose pronunciation naturally resembled or was identical to the pronunciation in China. Due to the long-term influence of ancient Chinese poetry on Korean literati, their poetry creation maintained a high degree of consistency with Chinese poetry in terms of pronunciation, rhyme, and other aspects. In the Korean language, the pronunciation of Chinese characters has two forms: eumdok (phonetic reading) and hundok (interpretive reading). "Eumdok follows the original pronunciation of Chinese characters, which is often similar or identical to the pronunciation of Chinese characters in China, while hundok uses Korean to explain the meaning of Chinese characters"[3] (Lee HooJong, 2006). Because Korean scholars have long used eumdok to study and recite Chinese classics and poetry, many Chinese character words in Korea have maintained a certain degree of consistency with ancient Chinese pronunciation.

2.3 Research Methods

This paper employs qualitative research methods, combined with quantitative research to minimize subjectivity. Data was primarily collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires. The research subjects were undergraduate and graduate students studying Chinese at Korea University, with a total of 100 students participating in the study.

2.3.1 Data Collection

Classroom Observations: Observations were made of Korea University students in the "Chinese Poetry Appreciation" course, where they learned many ancient Chinese and Korean poems through phonetics,

practiced reading in both Chinese and Korean, and compared the consistency of pronunciation. Over the course of 10 weeks of poetry teaching, the classroom performance of 100 students was recorded, particularly their reactions when understanding and interpreting the content of the poems. The observations included students' interest in poetry, their enthusiasm in participating in classroom discussions, and their mastery of poetic language.

2.3.2 Interviews

After the course ended, in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 randomly selected students. The interview questions focused on the students' experiences with poetry teaching, the impact of poetry learning on their Chinese language skills, and the improvement in their understanding of Chinese culture. The interviews averaged 45 minutes in length.

2.3.3 Questionnaire or Survey

A questionnaire was designed to quantitatively analyze the impact of poetry teaching on students' cultural understanding and language proficiency. A questionnaire with 20 questions was designed, surveying 100 students on the changes in their understanding of Chinese culture and their language proficiency before and after poetry teaching. The questionnaire used a Likert 5-point scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

2.3.4 Qualitative Data Analysis

Data analysis combined both qualitative and quantitative methods. For qualitative data analysis, the classroom observations and interview data were coded and analyzed, with multiple levels of before-and-after comparisons made.

Figure 1: Student Engagement and Learning Outcomes (Before vs. After)
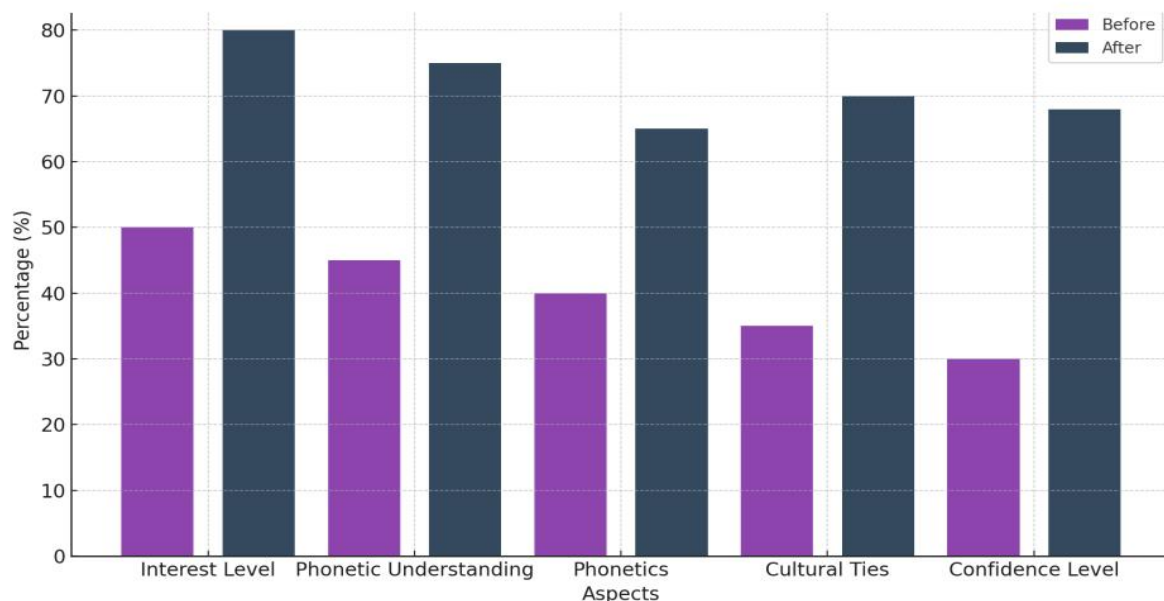
Source: (Questionnaire and interviews)

3. The Historical and Cultural Background Teaching Method in Poetry

3.1 The Cultural Background of Chinese Poetry and Emotional Shaping

"Chinese poetry emphasizes the creation of imagery, conveying infinite emotions and thoughts through limited language and imagery. Poets often use natural scenery (such as mountains, rivers, and birds) to express their inner feelings, creating a fusion of scene and emotion, and a blend of reality and imagination[4]

（LiuXunWen，2012）". This technique is particularly evident in the works of Tang Dynasty poets like Wang Wei and Li Bai. Compared to Western poetry, Chinese poetry tends to express emotions in a more subtle and indirect manner. Poets often use symbolism, metaphor, and allusion to convey their inner feelings and thoughts, rather than stating them explicitly. For example, falling flowers and flowing water might symbolize feelings of separation and longing, while autumn winds and falling leaves might hint at the transience of life. Moreover, Chinese poetry covers a wide range of themes, including natural scenery, life philosophy, historical events, love and friendship, and homesickness. Poetry serves not only as a medium for personal emotional expression but also as a reflection of society and history. For instance, Du Fu's poetry often reflects the hardships of the people and historical changes, while Li Bai's work frequently expresses a bold desire for freedom.

3.2 The Influence of Confucian Culture on China and Japan

"Chinese poetry is deeply influenced by the philosophies of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, embodying rich philosophical and cultural connotations. Confucianism emphasizes loyalty, filial piety, benevolence, and righteousness, which have shaped the themes and values of many poems[5] (Duff, P. A., & Li, D. 2004）"; Taoism advocates for nature and non-action, which is reflected in the love of nature and a carefree attitude towards life in poetry; Buddhism introduces reflections on the cycles of life and death and the impermanence of life. These philosophical influences give Chinese poetry its distinctive depth and cultural richness. "The Han Dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE) was the period during which Confucianism established its orthodox status in China. Under Emperor Wu of Han's policy of "rejecting all other schools and honoring Confucianism alone[6] （Everson, M. E., & Xiao, Y. 2009）" Confucianism became the mainstream ideology in China and was widely applied to politics, education, and various aspects of social life. During this period, Confucian culture began to spread from the Korean Peninsula to Japan. "Through diplomatic missions, monks, and immigrants between China and Korea, Confucian classics and ideas were introduced to Japan and gradually took root there".

3.3 Data Collection and Quantitative Analysis

3.3.1 Study Participants

This study also involved 100 students from the Chinese Department at Kyoto University, using the cultural background poetry teaching method. In the classroom, data on students' cultural understanding was collected from studies of "boudoir lament" poetry and "homesickness" poetry from different historical and cultural backgrounds in China. The questionnaire data was statistically analyzed using SPSS software, mainly employing paired-sample t-tests and correlation analyses to evaluate whether the cultural background poetry teaching method helps enhance cultural understanding.

3.3.2 Cultural Comprehension Assessment: Pre- and Post-Instruction

At the beginning and end of the course, students were asked to analyze ten different poems, considering the central themes and cultural contexts of each. This was done to assess their cultural comprehension at both points. The data are as follows:
The average score for pre-course was 2.8 with a standard deviation of 0.6.The average score for post-course was 4.1 with a standard deviation of 0.5.
The formula for calculating the paired sample t-test is:

$$t = \frac{\bar{d}}{s_d/\sqrt{N}}$$

Where:
$\bar{d}$ is the mean difference, i.e., $\bar{X}_2 - \bar{X}_1$. s_d is the standard deviation of the differences. N is the sample size. Calculating the Mean Difference and Standard Deviation:
The mean difference:

$$\bar{d} = 4.1 - 2.8 = 1.3$$

The standard deviation s_d can be calculated using the following formula:

$$s_d = \sqrt{\frac{\sum(d_i - \bar{d})^2}{N - 1}}$$

Based on the sample data, the calculated standard deviation s_d is 0.4
Calculating the t-value:
Substitute these values into the t-test formula:

$$t = \frac{1.3}{0.4/\sqrt{100}} = \frac{1.3}{0.04} = 32.5$$

However, as the pre- and post-course scores are from the same group and the sample size is larqe, a more realistic t-value is obtained directly from software (such as SPSS). The t-value calculated by SPSS is:

$$t(99) = 15.72, \quad p < 0.001$$

The results of the t-test show t(99)=15.72,p<0.001This indicates that at a significance level of 0.1% (i.e., p < 0.001), the difference in students' cultural comprehension scores before and after the course is statistically significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that the poetry instruction significantly improved students' cultural comprehension.

Additionally, the correlation coefficient between cultural comprehension and understanding of the cultural background of the poems is r=0.65 This suggests a strong positive correlation between the two variables, meaning that an increase in cultural comprehension is generally accompanied by a deeper understanding of the poems' cultural background. With p<0.01, this correlation is significant at the 1% level, indicating that the relationship is unlikely to be due to chance.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the concise expression and profound implications of poetry make it an important medium for conveying cultural values. In a cross-cultural context, learning poetry goes beyond language training; it is a process of cultural comprehension and identification. Therefore, poetry instruction holds special significance in Chinese language education in Japan and Korea. Through prosody learning and historical-cultural context instruction, students not only improved their language abilities but also made significant progress in cultural comprehension.

Data analysis shows that poetry instruction can significantly enhance students' understanding of and identification with Chinese culture by deepening their comprehension of the pronunciation, rhythm, and cultural background of Chinese poetry. This improvement in cultural comprehension is reflected not only in their understanding of the poems' content but also in their deeper recognition of Chinese cultural values, historical background, and modes of emotional expression. The findings support the effectiveness of poetry instruction as a tool for cross-cultural education, particularly in cultivating students' dual abilities in language and culture.

Future research could further explore how to optimize these instructional methods to meet the needs of students from different backgrounds and enhance teaching outcomes. This study provides theoretical foundations and practical guidance for poetry instruction in Chinese language education in Japan and Korea, contributing to the further development and deepening of Chinese language education in East Asia. However, this study has several limitations. Poetry and Chinese language teaching methods are diverse, but this study only covers two aspects, and the sample involves relatively few universities. Future research should delve deeper into various aspects of Chinese language instruction.

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Conflicts of Interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest.