

# On the Realities, Value and Strategies of Implementing Literary Appreciation into Chinese Rural Senior High Schools

——Take the Rural Senior High Schools of Shaanxi Province as an Example

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**Abstract**—To argue that literary appreciation is a fairly significant issue to be carried out in Chinese rural Senior High Schools, this paper refers to the realities of Chinese rural Senior High School teaching environment through observing the designed questionnaire and Chinese Journal Net, which reveals that literary appreciation in Chinese rural Senior High Schools seems unsatisfactory. Considering the value of implementing literary appreciation into Chinese rural Senior High Schools, the paper indicates that literary appreciation may bring more colorful experiences to the teachers and students there, may help them develop more harmonious relationship in class and may inspire them to harvest more senses of happiness and satisfaction. In terms of the strategies of implementing literary appreciation into Chinese rural Senior High Schools, the paper suggests adopting the art of reading to help students find aesthetic feelings, the art of speaking to induce students to reveal their aesthetic thoughts, the art of exploring to display students' potential aesthetic attitudes and the art of writing to enhance both teachers' and students' aesthetic achievement. However, it should be emphasized that literary appreciation in Chinese rural Senior High Schools is a systematic project, which demands scholars' targeting researches as well as policy makers' sensible fulfillment.

**Keywords**—*rural Chinese Senior High School; literary appreciation; realities; value; strategies*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Literary appreciation is a fundamental quality in our career, which may profoundly influence our world outlook and personal attitudes towards life. According to Zhu Guangqian (1897-1986), literary appreciation originates from the pure and down-to-earth experience of appreciating beauty in literary texts when we probe into the potential literary world and absorb the nourishment of the literary writings[1]. As for G. Hegel (1770-1831), literary appreciation is a unique school of art that considers much of the existence of beauty and the value of beauty in real life, which concerns the literary insights about the material world and spiritual entertainment[2]. In China, literary appreciation is a recognized tradition that integrates the thoughts of Confucianism, Taoism or Buddhism together and demonstrates a particular style or a striking character[3]. Meanwhile, in foreign countries, literary appreciation comes

out as a channel to get access to the “natural world” through perceiving the stern, exaggerating and alienated beings of the flexible art that relates to architecture, painting, sculpture, etc. [4] In the recognition of the importance of literary appreciation, scholars have agreed to establish certain programs to improve students' literary capabilities in school. Nevertheless, it is a fact that the programs are primarily for college or university students while the Junior or Senior High School students are neglected. According to a recent research, an embarrassing situation is that “college students have realized the significance of the literary aesthetic appreciation in their study but their present level of maintenance is still inferior to their expectations.”[5] The unpleasant reality, referring to the students' viewpoints, should blame two sides—On the one hand, the students themselves are responsible for their awkward situation of lacking literary appreciation; On the other hand, the teachers and schools have not provided flexible atmospheres for those who are interested in literary appreciation. Therefore, the Senior High Schools unexpectedly become the hotbeds of merely emphasizing students' enrollments to universities while paying little or no attention to their inner literary beings. All Chinese Senior High Schools may have the disturbing situations. Yet here, we quote Chinese rural Senior High Schools as particular cases, lying in the fact that China is typically an agricultural country characterized with agricultural culture in which a large number of students are still studying in rural areas or they have to stay in the rural Senior High Schools. In this case, new problems come out. What about the realities of rural Senior High School teaching environment? Is there any value to implement literary appreciation in rural Senior High Schools? And if possible and necessary, what effective strategies are required to implement literary appreciation?

## II. REALITIES OF CHINESE RURAL SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL TEACHING ENVIRONMENT FOR LITERARY APPRECIATION

### A. A Questionnaire Research Based on the True Experiences of the Rural Senior High School Teachers

In order to obtain the first-hand materials to access the realities of Chinese rural Senior High School teaching

environment, we designed a questionnaire to acquire the true experiences of Chinese rural Senior High School teachers as well as students, which contains two parts. The first part has ten questions for teachers, including “(1) Are you satisfied with your literary appreciation in English class? (2) Do you believe that literary appreciation is a necessary part of the education in Chinese rural Senior High School? (3) Is English teaching intimately related to literary appreciation? (4) Can literary appreciation help you teach effectively in English class? (5) Does it seem easy to you to fulfill literary appreciation in English class? (6) Do you believe that it is the teachers who have the responsibility to practice literary appreciation in class? (7) Is it possible that literary appreciation can enhance students’ interest in English class? (8) Do you think that literary appreciation in English class needs the participation of the school leaders? (9) Do you consider that literary appreciation in English class can change students’ attitude in English learning? (10) Do you believe that developing students’ abilities of literary appreciation in Senior High Schools can do good to them in the future?” while the second part has another ten questions for students, including “(1) Is it important for you to acquire the ability of literary appreciation in English class? (2) Are you satisfied with your literary appreciation in English class? (3) Do you think literary appreciation in English class can make you different? (4) Have you ever tried by yourself to practice literary appreciation in English class? (5) Is any advantage you may take if you have literary appreciation in English class? (6) Does it seem easy to you to practice literary appreciation in English class? (7) Do you think that literary appreciation is a conscious act for Senior High School students? (8) Does effective literary appreciation need the involvement of the English teachers and the school leaders? (9) Do you believe that literary appreciation can help you cultivate your potential talent in English learning? (10) Have you realized that literary appreciation in Senior High School will be crucial for your future study in university?” Although several questions for teachers and students are overlapping, they may reflect their different thinking perspectives in literary appreciation. Making use of the opportunities of the students who accept teaching training practice in Junior or Senior Middle Schools of various places in Shaanxi Province, we ask them to help us make the investigation in some rural Senior High Schools which include Yehu Senior High School in Lantian County, The First Senior High School in Zhouzhi County, The Third Senior High School in Huxian County, The First Middle School in Gaolin County, Yanchuan Middle School in Yanchuan County, etc. The statistic results of the questionnaire are astonishing and we conclude four major aspects that are worth noticing: (1) Both teachers and students have realized the necessity and importance of literary appreciation in Chinese rural Senior High Schools yet they don’t know how to do; (2) The specific values of fulfilling literary appreciation in Chinese rural Senior High Schools are under consideration; (3) The accomplishment of literary appreciation in Chinese rural Senior High Schools needs the participation of not only the teachers and students but also the school leaders and the educational governors; (4) The effective strategies admit of no delay to implement into Chinese rural Senior High Schools. Perhaps the unpleasant situation in the rural Senior High Schools of Shaanxi Province can be typical, yet the database research will look universal.

## B. *The Database Research Based on the Contents of the Articles about the Senior High School Teachers*

We have to confess that Chinese Senior High School teachers do not simply devote themselves to English teaching, instead, they also employ their spare time to write about teaching, which provides us precious references to examine what they mainly focus on in teaching activities. Based on Chinese Journal Net (Up to 5:00 pm on September 20, 2013), we can review that there are 1,689 academic articles about Senior High School English teaching between 1981 and 2013 if we make “Senior High School English teaching” as a key word. Of course we also can find the traces of the university scholars who make studies in Senior High School English teaching. Whatever, among these articles, there are 11 accomplished between 1981 and 1989, and 69 accomplished between 1990 and 1999 while the number increases rapidly to 1,609 between 2000 and 2013. Considering these amazing achievements, we also find that Senior High School English teachers may have different teaching concerns. For instance, between 1981 and 1989, English teachers primarily show interest in the ways of teaching grammar, vocabulary, reading, etc; Between 1990 and 1999, English teachers would like to study the effectiveness of slide-projector-assisted English teaching, communicative English teaching, culture-contextual English teaching, etc; whereas between 2000 and 2013 (Up to 5:00 pm on September 20, 2013), Senior High School English teachers have more diversified insights into the themes of quality-based English teaching, multimedia-assisted English teaching, affection-participated English teaching, autonomous English teaching, etc. These articles, on the one hand, reflect the dramatic changes of Chinese Senior High School English teachers’ teaching philosophy and characteristics, but on the other hand, they also expose certain pitiful aspects that need our attention, one of which is that among these 1,689 articles, we rarely run into the qualified paper about carrying out literary appreciation into Chinese rural Senior High Schools. Referring to the particular database research, we may conclude that re-evaluating the significance of literary appreciation then implementing literary appreciation into Chinese rural Senior High Schools will be very urgent and conducting the particular research is definitely valuable and far-reaching in influence.

## III. VALUE OF IMPLEMENTING LITERARY APPRECIATION INTO CHINESE RURAL SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

### A. *Literary Appreciation May Bring More Colorful Experiences to Chinese Rural Senior High School Teachers and Students*

Honestly, due to the unique development of Chinese history and culture, people’s overall living environments are obviously distinctive in urban areas and rural areas. The unbalanced economic situations also result in the unbalanced distributions of the material and human resources, which makes Chinese rural education a little awkward. We have to be frank that the life of the rural Senior High School seems a bit simple, natural and tedious. To some extent, the comparatively small world confines the horizons and experiences of both teachers and students and lets them hardly enjoy more colorful life that the advanced urban areas may provide. Though their English

classes can be interesting, the lack of well-equipped machines and teaching devices may dim the contents of their pleasures. However, some spiritual flavor may bring unusual happiness to them, i.e., the literary appreciation in English class may offer them unexpected enjoyment. Auguste Rodin(1840-1917) once said, “life is not lack of beauty, but a lack of eyes to find beauty.”[6] His teaching is undoubtedly true. In the various contents of the English texts, we may easily find the writings about love, friendship, nature, art, poetry, travelogue, fairy tales, etc. Maybe we can employ them to please us with the help of our own “eyes”. Zong Baihua(1897-1986) ever claimed that “beauty is an objective existence that cannot be transferred along with our wills,” “it affects us, educates us and improves the state of our life and interest.” Zong’s implication is that we have to use our head to find the things that can enlighten our spirits and purify our souls[7]. Coincidentally, Zhu Guangqian stressed that beauty is something “practical, scientific and aesthetic”, thus a number of great philosophers, scientists and men of letters would like to access beauty and take literary appreciation as a basic channel to harvest “peace of mind and inner tranquility”[1]. We will not have to be great personae to experience literary appreciation, especially for those who are in Chinese rural Senior High Schools, yet we can adopt the ways that students love to make the teaching procedure full of tastes and “imbued with colorful thoughts”[1,7].

#### B. *Literary Appreciation May Help Chinese Rural Senior High School Teachers and Students Develop More Harmonious Relationship in Class*

Although Chinese rural Senior High School students have simple life, they have their unique ways of thinking towards English. Yet some attitudes are the origins that they dislike learning English or have prejudice about learning English, which results in a tense or unharmonious relationship between them and their teachers. Particularly in the past, among the rural Senior High School students of Shaanxi Province, a number of students harbored reservation about learning English at school and they even developed an opinion- “Learning mathematics, chemistry and physics well while ignoring English can still help them find a way out in society.” This thought frustrated the enthusiasm of the teachers who had great hopes for them and also brought bad influence upon those followers. Even if the embarrassing situation has changed a lot nowadays because of the global village that highlights the importance of English, the negative effects still potentially exist. Asking the reasons why the Senior High School students feel uncomfortable about English, we are shocked to figure out that (1)they can hardly obtain the pleasure of learning English in class, (2) they take English learning for granted even before accessing English, and (3) they have no tendency to establish good relationship with their English teachers. As for this case, students have their problems, yet what about the teachers? We assume that the rural Senior High School English teachers had better find ways to correct the poor attitudes of students rather than let them be. Practicing literary appreciation will be a good channel. Maybe the teachers think literary appreciation is impossible in class, but we hold that literary appreciation can be both hard and easy: It is “hard” because we do not suit the remedy to the case whereas it is “easy” because once we try to carry it out and combine the arts of intellectual education and

aesthetic education, we may harvest unexpected surprises. Just as Cai Yuanpei(1868-1940) viewed, teachers should know that “aesthetic education can go along with intellectual education.” [8] Until all efforts are made, literary appreciation will help Chinese rural Senior High School teachers and students develop better and more harmonious relationship in class.

#### C. *Literary Appreciation May Inspire Chinese Rural Senior High School Teachers and Students to Harvest More Senses of Happiness and Satisfaction*

Li Shucheng believes that literary appreciation implies “a potential force that can inspire people’s sense of happiness and satisfaction”[9]. On the one hand, literary appreciation may provide an easy platform for both Chinese rural Senior High School teachers and students to demonstrate their potential speculations; on the other hand, literary appreciation may create a relaxing atmosphere in which both Chinese rural Senior High School teachers and students can experience the desirable happiness and satisfaction. In order to achieve this purpose, Pan Zhangxian claims that literary appreciation demands the participation of two sides-“the teachers should not only possess the basic teaching skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing, but behave as thoughtful men with attainment” to set models for students[10]. Meanwhile, students also should develop positive attitudes towards literary appreciation as well as bring their talent into play and fulfill their ambitions, which may serve as the unique ways of rewarding their teachers. Hence, when the teachers focus on the topic about friendship, we may associate friendship with the proverbs like “A friend in need is a friend indeed” or “A friend is easier lost than found”, then fly our imagination to share our personal understandings or stories between each other; Or when the teachers refer to the theme of love, we may associate love with the popular sayings like “Love at first sight”, “Love is blind”, or “Love me, love my dog”, and open a unique world of ours to display our humble perspectives of the family love, social love or personal love, and even the love between humans and animals...No matter what particular way of learning it should be, to harvest more senses of happiness and satisfaction is one fundamental destination that Chinese rural Senior High School teachers and students both require and try to fulfill.

### IV. STRATEGIES OF IMPLEMENTING LITERARY APPRECIATION INTO CHINESE RURAL SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

#### A. *An Art of Reading: Finding Aesthetic Feelings*

Reading is an essential skill for all rural Senior High School students because they love reading very much. It seems wise to guide them to read and integrate their literary appreciation into the reading materials. Of course, teachers will play important roles in the practice. Han Yu(768-824) told us that “A teacher is the person who teaches students knowledge, tell them the way to live and answer their questions.”(*Something about Teachers*) Rural Senior High School teachers have the holy responsibilities too. Besides, teachers had better recommend some good literary pamphlets or easy books to ask students to read in class or after class, which can help them find their aesthetic feelings. Yet the reading time must be limited or students may feel bored. The initial procedure perhaps seems

frustrating while with more interesting materials available to them, students can gradually develop a willingness to get access to literary appreciation and conduct it as a natural habit or sensible action. The strategy is an art for rural Senior High School teachers to guide as well as an art for students to follow.

#### B. *An Art of Speaking: Revealing Aesthetic Thoughts*

Speaking is another basic skill to practice. However, speaking here does not mean talking nonsense. Instead, speaking in literary appreciation implies that both teachers and students have valuable literary topics to debate, negotiate or even argue. It is a demanding task to seize upon a pretext and give vent to students' feelings. Confucius (551BC-479BC) taught us that "Those who know it is not as good as those who like it while those who like it is not as good as those who enjoy it."(*The Analects of Confucius*) The interesting topics like dreams, festivals, food, etc may inspire students to open their mouths and demonstrate their talent. In this way, speaking will be an art to reveal students' aesthetic thoughts buried deeply in their mind. Frankly, speaking practice needs the effort of two sides: Teachers should design reasonable and appropriate topics to attract the attention of the students while students should have their daring spirits to pour out their inner heart.

#### C. *An Art of Exploring: Displaying Aesthetic Charms*

Exploring the secrets of literary appreciation in teachers' teaching and students' studying turns out to be a unique skill to fulfill in rural Senior High Schools. Л.Б.ВАНКОВ (1901-1977), a Russian Educationist and Psychologist, ever remarked that "All men have a potential desire of appreciating and creating beauty. Yet it does not mean that our aesthetic senses will spring out spontaneously. Virtually, the senses require our explorations." [4] On the one hand, rural Senior High School teachers need to optimize the teaching contents to highlight literary appreciation through choosing those typical texts that focus on the beauty of mental realm, moral characters, pure personalities, etc and on the other hand, students need make full use of their capabilities to dig into the profound connotations of the selected texts demanded by their teachers or directly by themselves. The art of exploring may help both teachers and students display the aesthetic charms of literary appreciation.

#### D. *An Art of Writing: Enhancing Aesthetic Achievement*

Writing will be a perfect yet embarrassing strategy to practice literary appreciation in class. According to Noam Chomsky(1928- ), man's recognition is a sophisticated mechanism and man's language acquisition is not simply a mode of imitating and memorizing, instead, it is a complete system influenced by invisible rules and has a tendency to be transformed or generated[11]. Obviously, absorbing the nutrition of reading, speaking and exploring seems significant while combing these arts into writing will be more meaningful and practical. So to speak, finding beauty is important but recording beauty and making beauty eternal will be the channel to obtain the essences of literary appreciation. Thus writing can be an art to enhance the achievement of both rural Senior High

School teachers and students. Desiring extremity is beautiful but writing it properly will make writing itself more appealing.

### V. CONCLUSION

To sum up, literary appreciation is a fairly significant issue to be carried out in Chinese rural Senior High Schools. Although the questionnaire and Chinese Journal Net reveal that literary appreciation in Chinese rural Senior High Schools seem unsatisfactory, we may realize that literary appreciation may bring more colorful experiences to Chinese rural Senior High School teachers and students, may help them develop more harmonious relationship in class and may inspire them to harvest more senses of happiness and satisfaction. In terms of the strategies of implementing literary appreciation into Chinese rural Senior High Schools, we may adopt the art of reading to help students find aesthetic feelings, the art of speaking to induce students to reveal their aesthetic thoughts, the art of exploring to display the potential aesthetic charms and the art of writing to enhance both teachers' and students' aesthetic achievement. However, we may also have to know that literary appreciation in Chinese rural Senior High Schools is a systematic project, we cannot spoil things by excessive enthusiasm; and at the same time, we cannot seek temporary relief regardless of the consequences. The sensible way is that we'd better make targeting researches while flexibly putting the research achievement into realities.

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