

A Study on Zhu Ziqing's Prose Creation under His Chinese Language Education Thought and Its Implications for Modern Chinese Teaching

Renjie Wu

*Guangling College of Yangzhou University, Yangzhou, China
653093953@qq.com*

Abstract. After graduation from university, Zhu Ziqing worked as a middle school teacher in the Jiangsu-Zhejiang region for five years, a phase that forged a profound interconnection between his literary creation and educational practice. His dual identity as a modern prose writer and a middle school Chinese language teacher is worthy of in-depth study. By adopting the literature review method and case study approach, this research takes several of his representative prose works (e.g., *Moonlight over the Lotus Pond*) as core research objects to investigate the intrinsic link between his Chinese language education thought and prose creation. Through the analysis of Zhu Ziqing's related works, this study facilitates a more nuanced and multi-dimensional comprehension of Zhu Ziqing's creative logic and educational philosophy. At the same time, his Chinese language education thought embodied in his creation and teaching practice also has certain enlightenment and reference value for contemporary Chinese language education in China.

Keywords: Zhu Ziqing, *Moonlight over the Lotus Pond*, Prose Creation, Modern Chinese Teaching

1. Introduction

As a member of the new generation of intellectuals who grew up during the May Fourth Movement, Zhu Ziqing possessed both Chinese and Western cultural perspectives and stood as an important representative in the history of modern Chinese literature. Initially, Zhu Ziqing engaged in the creation of new poetry, later, he established his important position in the history of modern Chinese literature through typical prose works such as *Moonlight over the Lotus Pond* and *The Back View* [1]. Moreover, he was not only an outstanding modern prose writer but also a middle school Chinese language teacher with a dual professional identity. His five-year teaching experience in middle schools in the Jiangsu-Zhejiang region interacted with his profound literary background, which further prompted him to integrate his creative practice into the classroom and form a unique teaching style.

Existing studies mostly focus on the linguistic style of his work or the single analysis of images in works such as the imagery aesthetics of *Moonlight over the Lotus Pond*, while rarely involving the interrelationship between Zhu Ziqing's Chinese language education thought and his prose [2,3].

Although some scholars have interpreted Zhu Ziqing from multiple perspectives, such as his life experience and literary concepts, few have discussed his views on teacher-student relationships.

By using the literature analysis method, this paper aims to analyze Zhu Ziqing's Chinese language education thought and its underlying profound implications, so as to provide specific theoretical and practical references for future research related to Zhu Ziqing and exploration in the field of literary education.

2. Zhu Ziqing's Chinese language education thought

2.1. Teaching experience

Zhu Ziqing once stated, "I am a Chinese language teacher, and the beginning of my career as a Chinese language teacher can be said to be the beginning of my writing career. This has determined my style" [2].

After 1921, Zhu Ziqing returned to Yangzhou due to family reasons and served as a Chinese language teacher at Jiangsu Provincial No. 8 Middle School. However, he resigned the following year due to disagreements with the school's management philosophy. Later, he taught in various schools in Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces for many years. This teaching experience in the Jiangsu-Zhejiang region directly influenced his prose style. The Back View was created during this period, and its emotional narrative was also affected by this experience.

In the 1930s, Zhu Ziqing offered the course "Study of New Poetry" at Southwest Associated University. This course systematically explored poetry teaching and text interpretation methods, promoting the clearer establishment of his classroom style. His different teaching experiences from middle schools in Jiangsu-Zhejiang to Southwest Associated University, as well as his teaching practice at different stages, mutually nourished his literary accumulation. Furthermore, his profound literary and philosophical foundation in his early years laid the groundwork for his educational thought, while his long-term frontline teaching experience continuously polished his educational cognition, eventually constructing a Chinese language education thought system that combines practicality and theory.

2.2. Core characteristics of Zhu Ziqing's Chinese language teaching

2.2.1. Focus on authenticity and practical revision

As Zhu Ziqing stated, the characteristic of his writing teaching is to reflect "training for being a person". He believed writing teaching should prioritize application: "It should focus on practical writing in a broad sense, because composition classes are mainly about skill training, and art should take a secondary position". He emphasized that only through multi-angle training can students learn to use language as a tool to meet various needs in life and society [2]. This concept was transformed into specific practical methods in teaching.

He once asked students to write a fragment about "wrestling in PE class" and promoted a three-round revision model: self-revision, mutual revision and teacher revision. Self-revision focused on basic expression, with a clear checklist: first, check whether the sentences are smooth? (e.g., revise "I fell down and it hurt a lot" to "My knee hit the track, as if scalded by fire"). Second, verify whether the details are authentic (e.g., "When my classmate helped me up, the smell of camphor balls on his school uniform filled my nose").

For mutual revision stage, he designed an evaluation form with criteria. Is the "sense of authenticity" of this article strong? Which detail makes you feel "real"? If you were the writer, which paragraph would you add details to? (e.g., suggesting adding "the mist on his glasses" to the part where "the teacher checked the wound"). In teacher revision, he emphasized integrating emotion and details. For example, revise "I cried, and the teacher comforted me" to "Tears dropped on the track; the teacher squatted down, and the thread on the second button of his Zhongshan suit swayed, as if saying 'Don't be afraid'".

To deepen the training effect and extend practice, Zhu also founded the class magazine Baima Lake Student Writings. He clearly required that the articles selected for publication must go through three rounds of revision and be accompanied by revision explanations (e.g., "I deleted 'it hurt very much' and replaced it with 'my knee felt burning'"). Through practice, he strengthened the writing concepts of "authentic expression" and "accurate application".

2.2.2. Based on close reading and multi-dimensional guidance

The characteristic of Zhu Ziqing's poetry teaching is based on detailed and rigorous close reading of texts. After reading *The Foundations of Aesthetics* by I.A. Richards and C.K. Ogden, Zhu Ziqing's poetic sensitivity and perception ability were further awakened, and he formed an interpretation method that combines academic depth and teaching value. For example, in the course "Study of New Poetry" offered at Southwest Associated University, he guided students to interpret poetry from multiple angles based on William Empson's theory of "Seven Types of Ambiguity" [3].

In close reading demonstrations, he used Bian Zhilin's Fragment, analyzing the ambiguity of the line "You stand on the bridge to watch the scenery; the one watching the scenery watches you from the tower"—it is not only a spatial cycle but also a metaphor for life, and further implies the modern anxiety of "being peeped at", guiding students to grasp the rich connotations of the poem. At the same time, he opposed over-interpretation, emphasizing that "poetry interpretation must conform to the original work" and criticizing far-fetched interpretations that are divorced from the text.

For independent exploration, he provided different translations (e.g., English and French) of Dai Wangshu's Rain Lane for cross-cultural image analysis of the image of "the girl like a lilac flower". He organized "poetry debates" with the topic "Does poetry need a clear theme?" and required both sides to cite specific poems (such as Ai Qing's Dayan River – My Nanny and Mu Dan's Spring) to support their views [3].

At Southwest Associated University, he explained Farewell to Cambridge through an audio-visual integration method in combination with the characteristics of new poetry. He focused on rhythm analysis and the reconstruction of image scenes: by displaying photos of Cambridge, he asked students to describe scenes using the images in the poem (such as "golden willows", "green duckweed", and "starlight"). For example, transforming "In the gentle waves of the Cam, I would be a water plant" into a visual imagination: water plants sway with the waves, interweaving with the reflection of the setting sun.

At the same time, he also focused on exploring the emotional layers: by comparing "I'd load my boat with starlight and sing aloud in the splendor of starlight" and "But I cannot sing aloud; quietness is my farewell music", he analyzed the poet's emotional transition from enthusiasm to silence, as well as the complex attachment carried by "the silent Cambridge".

3. Zhu Ziqing's concept of "modern education" in Chinese language teaching

3.1. Zhu Ziqing's language view and practical contributions

Zhu Ziqing advocated vernacular Chinese, opposed classical Chinese, and advocated "consistency between spoken and written language", which was one of the important contents of the May 4th Cultural Revolution [4]. His modern educational concept laid a certain practical foundation for modern Chinese language education [5]. He emphasized that emotions divorced from actual content tend to become "clichés", while "conveying meaning" integrated with emotions guides the development of new literature [6]. For Zhu, classical Chinese in his literary view was no longer the obscure ancient Chinese that Hu Shi wanted to abolish, but he-called "practical classical Chinese". As he noted: "Since the rise of vernacular Chinese, the influence of ancient Chinese has become increasingly declining, and it can be said that it is on the verge of extinction. Practical classical Chinese can survive temporarily, but it all focuses on clearly conveying meaning" [6].

He compiled books like *An Introduction to Classical Texts and Chinese Language Teaching*, and co-authored reading materials (e.g., *Examples of Intensive Reading Guidance*, *Examples of Extensive Reading Guidance*), offering concrete, practical guidance for the reading and writing of young students at that time [7].

In August 1931, Zhu went to Europe for academic studies on leave. He wrote a series of travel notes, serialized in the magazine *Middle School Students* and later compiled into *Travel Notes from Europe* and *Travel Notes from London*. He polished his writing for vividness, fluency, and naturalness, and those works became model for middle school students' compositions [7].

3.2. Zhu Ziqing's teaching practice

Over his 28-year teaching career, Zhu Ziqing centered on Chinese language education and enhancing students' Chinese literacy. His serious, responsible, and patient attitude greatly stimulated students' interest in writing. Moreover, he put the modern education concepts through "self-governance and self-cultivation".

For example, during a 1924 student discipline incident at Chunhui Middle School, Zhu Ziqing firmly opposed the school's direct punishment. Instead, he proposed letting the student-founded "Co-governance Association" handle the matter. Zhu Ziqing argued that the purpose of education is to awaken self-awareness, not to suppress obedience. He focused on value guidance: through self-governance practice, students' sense of responsibility and judgment were cultivated. Chunhui's student self-governance model became an educational benchmark at the time [8].

At Ningbo No. 4 Middle School, he co-founded the school magazine *Fortnightly of No. 4 Middle School* with Xia Mianzun and supported the student literary society "Snowflake Society". He required that the editing and reviewing of the school magazine be fully responsible by students, and he only served as an advisor [9]. For example, Wang Fumao's *The Ridiculous Mr. Zhu* was initially rejected by the review team, but Zhu Ziqing suggested: "It might as well be published for readers to judge." Zhu Ziqing also encouraged them to "break the rigid style of eight-legged essays and write in their own words".

4. Analysis of Zhu Ziqing's educational thought and typical works

4.1. Correlation between creative background and teaching experience

Zhu Ziqing's literary creation and his teaching experience are profoundly connected. Observations and reflections from his teaching practice provided materials and perspectives for his creation, while the exploration in his creation in turn nourished the improvement of his teaching concepts [4].

His 1925 work *The Sight of Father's Back* embodies both his deep affection for his father and his teaching focus on "expressing true emotions". His classroom requirement that students write about their real experiences prompted him to focus on the trivial details of "father buying oranges", convey profound family affection through simple words. This narrative method of "revealing the whole through the part" is highly consistent with his teaching proposition that "writing should be close to life". During the same period, as an educator, his care for the daily lives of colleagues such as Wen Yiduo and Wang Li, and his gentle demeanor towards student Yu Guanying, as well as the elegant style he upheld, also subtly influenced the emotional tone in his creations.

Created in 1927, *Moonlight over the Lotus Pond* emerged from intertwined real-life background and personal situation. This "anxiety from reality" prompted him to step out on a summer night, seeking a "peaceful world" by the lotus pond of Tsinghua University. The moonlight over the lotus pond was not only a physical "refuge" but also a spiritual "breakthrough". Its image construction and emotional expression became a vivid case for explaining "artistic conception creation" in teaching.

At the same time, Zhu Ziqing went beyond collecting, organizing, and using poetry history materials to persist in creating classical poetry. He humbly studied under the famous poetry master Huang Huiwen and consulted his close friend Yu Pingbo [10]. These teacher-friend discussions shaped his basic concepts and requirements for poetry recitation. He argued that different poetic forms (Vernacular poems, classical poems, ci, and qu need to be chanted or recited with a cadence, and ballads need to be spoken or sung with a tune). Corresponding recitation methods must be adopted for different poetry works and their structures [10]. This experience was also integrated into his prose works.

4.2. Analysis of main creative techniques in Zhu Ziqing's prose

4.2.1. Rhetoric, imagery, and artistic conception

As a typical representative of Zhu Ziqing's prose, *Moonlight over the Lotus Pond* employs a series of rhetorical devices including metaphors and personifications. The first is synaesthesia, which refers to the simultaneous appearance of two or more senses in a single sentence. In the original text, a line reads: "A light breeze stirs, sending over faint scents, like the distant, indistinct sound of singing from a tall building" [1]. Here, the sense of smell (faint scents) is connected with the sense of hearing (singing). The faint scent is originally an odor that can be smelled, but the author uses "the distant, indistinct sound of singing from a tall building" as a metaphor, combining the "indistinctness" of the singing with the "faintness" of the scent, endowing the intangible fragrance with the rhythm and ethereality of hearing, making the artistic conception more distant and profound.

Another example is "The moonlight on the pond is not uniform; yet the light and shadow form a harmonious melody, like a famous tune played on a violin". Here, sight (for light and shadow) connects with hearing (for melody and tune) [1]. The author endows light and shadow with interwaving

with a "harmonious melody" and compared to it to "a violin (fanyaling) tune", giving static light and shadow hearing's rhythm and beauty, and adding poetry to the moonlight lotus pond.

Beyond synesthesia, the use of metaphor and personification in Moonlit Lotus Pond is equally precise and unique. The metaphors are in harmony with the artistic conception, combining both form and spirit. For instance, describing lotus leaves as "like the skirts of graceful dancers", this metaphor not only depicts the leaves' tall, and layered appearance out of the water but also implies the poetic charm of the lotus pond through the elegance of the "dancers". When describing lotus flowers as "like grains of bright pearls, like stars in the blue sky, like beauties just out of the bath", the three metaphors build upon each other: "pearls" describe the luster, "stars" the sparse distribution, and "beauties just out of the bath" the purity, gradually outlining the charm of the lotus flowers [1]. Personification endows the scenery with "human feelings", drawing the readers closer. For example, "some are blooming gracefully, some are shyly in bud" - "gracefully" and "shyly" personify the lotus flowers as bashful girls, echoing the author's gentle mood while enjoying the beautiful scene.

4.2.2. The interlaced use of reduplication and parallel sentences

The interlaced use of reduplication and parallel sentences is another typical style of Zhu Ziqing's prose texts. There is a series of reduplicated words in Moonlit Lotus Pond, and the sentence structure often presents a parallel symmetry. For example: "On the ripples of the lotus pond, what meets the eye is a vast expanse of lotus leaves, the leaves rise high above the water, like the skirts of graceful dancers." The three reduplicated words correspond respectively to the three images of "lotus pond, lotus, leaves and skirts", and each short sentence has approximately the same number of syllables, forming a sentence structure with progressive imagery and symmetrical structure [1]. This symmetry endows the text with a sense of balance and repetition, conveying a stable and orderly rhythm (supplement predicate to complete the sentence).

The reduplication in Moonlit Lotus Pond is expressed through three techniques: phonetic repetition (musical beauty), image intensification (painting beauty) and structural regularity (architectural beauty), forming a full-circle effect in terms of auditory, visual and structural aspects.

5. The influence mechanism of teaching practice on prose texts

Zhu Ziqing divided the teaching objectives of middle school Chinese into practical and non-practical ones. In his middle school Chinese teaching, Zhu Ziqing attached importance to both the practical value of prose (such as language expression patterns and logical structure) and the non-practical value (such as aesthetic experience). This dual objective led him to prioritize prose texts that combine linguistic exemplarity and aesthetic extensibility. Moonlit Lotus Pond has become a classic teaching text precisely because it meets the teaching requirements: the rhetorical devices of repeated words and metaphors in the text can serve as concrete examples for Chinese rhetoric teaching. The emotional thread of seeking tranquility, appreciating the scenery and savoring the emotions in its teaching can carry the teaching goals of aesthetic education and mood interpretation. The teaching objectives are precisely aligned with the value presentation of the text.

Long-term teaching practice of prose has refined Zhu Ziqing's unique teaching philosophy, which in turn has become an important criterion for evaluating prose texts. The integration of form and spirit requirement proposed by Zhu Ziqing based on teaching practice has gradually become the core for evaluating the aesthetic value of prose. For instance, Moonlit Lotus Pond has surpassed many contemporary landscape prose works to become a classic precisely because it aligns with this teaching philosophy: metaphors like "the skirt of a dancing girl" not only meet the practical need of

rhetorical exemplarity in teaching but also conform to the non-practical goal of aesthetic education.. The development of text evaluation standards based on teaching philosophy creates a positive cycle between the classic status and teaching value of prose texts, further consolidating their dual value in literature and education.

6. Conclusion

This study systematically reviews Zhu Ziqing's middle school teaching experience and the characteristics of his literary creation. His educational viewpoint that students are the main body and his writing philosophy centered on application as the primary goal have had a profound impact on Chinese modern education. The research has found that in his works such as *Moonlight over the Lotus Pond* and *The Sight of Father's Back*, he often uses metaphors, poignant emotional expressions, and repetition techniques. The research further pointed out the close relationship between Zhu Ziqing's language education ideology and his prose creation.

At the same time, due to the limited selection of textual materials, the researchers of this article have mainly analyzed prose and have not conducted a comparative analysis across multiple themes. Future research can compare Zhu Ziqing's and Ye Shengtao's language education thoughts, then analyze the development status of Chinese middle school language education in the first half of the 20th century, and extract the contents that have reference value for contemporary language education from their thoughts.

References

- [1] Zhu, Z. Q. (1996). *The complete works of Zhu Ziqing* (Vol. 2). Jiangsu Education Publishing House.
- [2] Liu, Y. (2021). Writing teaching under Zhu Ziqing's Chinese language education thought. *Chinese Language Teaching and Research*, (20), 148–149.
- [3] He, J. (2009). *Literary interpretation and teaching analysis of Moonlight over the Lotus Pond*. Sichuan Normal University.
- [4] Jiang, J. (1989). A review of Zhu Ziqing studies since the founding of the People's Republic of China. *Literary Review*, (2), 89–96.
- [5] Wang, X. D. (2009). *A study on Zhu Ziqing's academic thoughts*. Jinan University.
- [6] Wang, X. D. (2013). From "literature in the national language" to "national language for literature". School of Chinese Language and Literature, Southwest University.
- [7] Chen, Y. X. (2022). *A study on Zhu Ziqing's moral education thoughts* [Master's thesis]. Zhejiang University.
- [8] Yan, Q. (2023). Zhu Ziqing: From a Chinese language teacher to a famous prose writer. *Composition Writing*, (Z2), 98–101.
- [9] Zhang, Y. J. (2019). *A study on Zhu Ziqing's university literature education* [Doctoral dissertation]. Fudan University.
- [10] Chen, X. Z. (2012). Zhu Ziqing's poetry teaching activities and their influences. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, (6), 55–61.