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# ЛИНГВОМЕТОДИКА

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## VALUES AND STRATEGIES OF LITERARY AESTHETIC APPRECIATION IN COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING IN CHINESE CAMPUSES\*

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Literary aesthetic appreciation is an indispensable part of college English teaching. As an important content of aesthetic education as well as one of the basic qualities of the compound-type foreign language learners, literary aesthetic appreciation is also an essential part of the college teaching innovation, curriculum construction and training objectives. In the course of students' acquiring aesthetic knowledge, college English teachers need to combine moral education and highlight the value of aesthetic education, combine intellectual education and penetrate aesthetic education and combine "interest" stimulus and protrude the art function of literary aesthetic appreciation.

**Key words:** literary aesthetic appreciation; college English teaching; values; strategies

### I. Introduction

Literary aesthetic appreciation is an indispensable part of college English teaching and it is based upon the literary texts or the literature-related texts and draws support from the literary theories and approaches to analyze the literary compositions such as style, features, connotation, denotation, etc., thus acquiring "the particular aesthetic feelings or experiences" [14; 8]. Essentially, literary aesthetic appreciation is a vital part of aesthetic art, originating from the "simple and natural" art like the architectures, paintings or statues to reflect man's spiritual world by employing the "stern", "ideal" and "joyful" styles and forms, which will accordingly bring forth the "happy" and "holy" sensations [6. P. 3—12]. In China, conventional literary aesthetic appreciation is always resulted from or related to the "interpretation" and "speculation" of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism or the classic works about these philosophies [7]. Abroad, literary aesthetic appreciation is frequently fulfilled through "aesthetic education rather than religion", which will adopt the "affective education" to cultivate man's temperament and finally reach a reasonable "thing-in-itself world" [13 P. 113]. It cannot be denied that

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literary aesthetic appreciation is both objective and distinctive and the properties mean that the process needs the participation and support of the literary language. *Ci Hai* [4. P. 1225, P. 1863] has a more accurate explanation. “The literary language owns the features of visualization, affectivity and ambiguity, hence abundant in metaphor, implication and symbolism”. It is “rooted in a sort of cultural tradition”, has sophisticated implications and will be certainly adequate to enlighten and educate “those who can enjoy and create beauties”. In brief, a literary language helps to bring about literary aesthetic appreciation and reach the goal of shaping man’s “inner beauty”. Wang Guowei [10. P. 30—31] ever commented that the “inner beauty” is one representation of a man’s “truthful” “individuality”, characterized with transcendentalism yet promising unconscious affections upon a man’s “postnatal culture”. Since literary aesthetic appreciation is closely concerned with literary language, is it also concerned with college English teaching which employs literary language as a vehicle? The answer is certain. *The National Curriculum Instructions of College English* (trial) points out that college English teaching is an indispensable part of the national higher education, which takes English language learning, strategy acquisition and cross-cultural communication as its major contents, holds the English teaching theories as its guidelines and embodies various teaching modes and teaching methods as a system (1). Therefore, as a required core curriculum for all college students in our nation, college English must be a comprehensive, artistic and aesthetic language course, in which literary aesthetic appreciation is a reflection and practice of its theories and artistry. However, for quite some time, college English teaching put language learning in the dominant place and stressed too much the role of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar, ignored or took no account of the value of cultivating students’ literary cultures and capabilities, making students’ activeness and initiative greatly restrained. In addition, the scientificity, systematicness and distinctiveness of the curriculum were not fully demonstrated, which eventually could not meet the demands of the dimensional, net-working and characteristic English teaching and study. Among other things, English boom, bilingual teaching, credit system innovation and increased university enrollment brought too heavy burdens to college English teaching [2. P. 228—230] and also caused unprecedented challenges to the severe teaching situation. At present, the striking problems in college English teaching include the relatively dropped teaching ideas, the disunity of college, high school and primary school teaching styles, the backwardness of the teaching methods and the shortage of the qualified teachers, etc. [3. P. 12—17; 12. 11. P. 8—9] which, on the other hand, made Chinese researchers mostly focus on the study of English words, grammar or discourse analysis, rather than the exploration of the value and significance of literary aesthetic appreciation. Nevertheless, we should realize that literary aesthetic appreciation cannot be ignored in college English teaching because it plays a very important role in enhancing students’ interests and developing their comprehensive literacy, especially their humanistic literacy.

## II. The Values of Literary Aesthetic Appreciation

Beyond all doubt, literary aesthetic appreciation owns great values and significance in college English teaching. It is not only an important content of aesthetic education

and a basic quality of a qualified college student, but also an essential part of the college teaching innovation, curriculum construction and training objectives, which can be illustrated as follows.

**1. Literary aesthetic appreciation is an important content of aesthetic education.** Zong Baihua [15. P. 14—22], a Chinese aesthetics pioneer, believed that literary aesthetic appreciation has the art function of enlightening man's mind and purifying man's soul. Many great thinkers and scientists love literature and art thus they have higher aesthetic cultures. In their mind, beauty is "the objective reality that cannot be changed at will", "it affects us, educates us and at the same polishes our tastes and mind". Zhu Guangqian [14. P. 9—12, 14] held the similar view, considering that beauty is "practical, scientific and aesthetic", either to "contribute to one's peace of mind or inner tranquility" or help to "beautify one's life" so as to foster his or her "grand visions and cheerful mind" in a "no act for" world and develop a taste of the "delight of avoiding customs". It is thus clear that literary aesthetic appreciation has close relationship with aesthetic education and will maintain a positive effect upon the improvement of one's lifestyle or one's ideological level. In college education, literary aesthetic appreciation is an indispensable part of aesthetic education program as well as a necessary channel to make aesthetic education bring out practical values. If college English teaching is lack of literary aesthetic appreciation and leaves students no abilities of enjoying, judging and creating beauty, it will surely be an imperfection of our national education because "aesthetic education always goes together with intellectual education" [by Cai Yuanpei]. One of the ultimate aims of aesthetic education is to cultivate students' aesthetic judgment and aesthetic perception, which will concern "one's abilities of recognizing and evaluating beauty, including his or her aesthetic understanding, judgment, imagination and creativity, etc." [4. P. 1225—1226] and at the same time bring a better facilitation and form a "subliming" spirit. In a perspective of molding one's soul and improving one's culture, literary aesthetic appreciation will "keep pace with the times" and produce various impacts upon college English teaching, mainly implying that 1) it is rewarding to change the conventional educational and teaching styles, help students out of the traps of only caring about listening, speaking, reading, writing or translating and make them understand and accept English language from "perception" to "reason" and from "reason" to "pure nature"; 2) It is rewarding to give students a comprehensive aesthetic nurturing and education, help them master the basic knowledge about beauty, get them to know "what kind of experience is aesthetic" so as to guide them to discover, taste and create beauty, or "expand to other fields with an aesthetic attitude" [14. P. 11], and thus take conscientious actions voluntarily; And 3) it is rewarding to employ literary aesthetic appreciation to carry out and facilitate quality-oriented education and aesthetic education. In the course of its development, literary aesthetic appreciation can actively encourage students to establish lofty aesthetic ideals, form healthy aesthetic interests, cultivate great aesthetic speculations and hence perfect their characters through all kinds of aesthetic activities.

**2. Literary aesthetic appreciation is one of the basic qualities of the compound-type foreign language learners.** Literary aesthetic appreciation is a potential ability of the refined scholars in ancient China. Even those forerunners who valued "barbarian

skills” and “stones from other hills” like Hu Shi, Wu Mi, Chen Yinque, etc., they all consciously combined the fine literary and cultural spirits at home and abroad in the course of enriching their knowledge and improving their capability. They advocated in public “a thorough knowledge of both the west and traditional China” and highlighted “thriving traditional Chinese culture while digesting the new western culture”. They were unique “double-faced personage” who managed to make literary aesthetic appreciation their “self-conscious” and “self-reflective” behavioral patterns. Li Zehou [2001], after probing into thousands of years of Chinese history and culture, concluded that Chinese nation could not develop well without literary aesthetic appreciation and aesthetic education because the two “elements” “exist simultaneously”, served as the roots of the social and historical development and acted as the dynamic forces to popularize Chinese traditional aesthetics. As foreign language learners who undertake the responsibility of spreading traditional Chinese culture and absorbing new western culture, literary aesthetic appreciation and aesthetic education are of great significance both for students themselves and for our nation. The proposal of the concept of the compound-type foreign language learning on the one hand makes us reconsider the realistic values of literary aesthetic appreciation and on the other hand intends to show that we need to “shoot the arrow at the target” by taking today’s education and teaching into account. Pan Zhangxian [9. P. 35—41] thus claimed that we’d better establish a mechanism for Chinese compound-type foreign language learners, which requires “a combination of language teaching and literature teaching” and “a bridge” to help students “cross” cultures. However, the sticky problem is “How on earth do literature and linguistics get along with each other?” Some Chinese scholars expressed their academic ideas. Zhang Zhongzai [2003] pointed out that “Literature can cultivate students’ talents and do good to their characters”, so “Foreign language discipline needs literature and linguistics to walk at the same time, otherwise foreign language study will be incomplete”. Liu Yiqing [2003] commented that the grammar and language skills training could not be considered as the whole of students’ knowledge which should integrate with literature, culture and philosophy. “Besides language appreciation, there is also analysis and thinking training. This teaching style is indeed to train talents and to make full foundation for them.” College students out of this training atmosphere are really capable, “have not only the linguistic competences but also the cultural abilities and will become the real personage instead of the tools after finishing school.” Lu Wei [2003] explored college students’ literary aesthetic appreciation through observing their translating abilities. She believed that literary aesthetic appreciation is also important to translation because “We badly need such talents that can spread Chinese culture outside and those that can introduce western culture inside” [5. P. 145—150]. Yang Zijian [12. P. 14—16] wrote a paper titled “A Few Questions about Foreign Language Education” to specify the ideas above. He said that “Foreign language teaching is not a tool training, but a sort of education aiming at students’ basic qualities”, so the cultivation of the compound-type foreign language learners will be very significant for the development of China in the new century. Yet what qualities should new-century students have? “1) They should be well-trained in listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating, and they have excellent oral expression and writing abilities; 2) They should have a solid Chinese foundation, either in

speaking or in writing; 3) They should have rich and systematic language and cultural knowledge as well as comprehensive qualities; 4) They should have a better theoretical attainment in philosophy, logic, ethics, psychology, aesthetics, linguistics and literature; 5) They should have creative abilities.” And the five rules are designed for “all English learners, without the difference of English majors or non-English majors”. So owning a better theoretical attainment is one of the objectives of our national college education and talent cultivation, the reason lies in the fact that “the compound-type learners are the outcome of the adequate styles”. Briefly, advocating literary aesthetic appreciation in college English teaching will enhance college students’ comprehensive qualities and abilities, which has no counterpart in other disciplines.

**3. Literary aesthetic appreciation is also an essential part of the college teaching innovation, curriculum construction and training objectives.** Li Shucheng, et al., [1999] claimed that beauty is a perceptual demonstration of one’s nature, which is not only a social phenomenon but also a social practice. Meanwhile, beauty has the features of figurativeness, infectivity, sociality and novelty, etc., making literary aesthetic appreciation inevitable in our social life. The inevitableness, reflected on the layers of education and teaching, will certainly “demand” the corresponding “actions” and “acts” in college teaching innovation, curriculum construction and training objectives. Zhang Weiyou [2003] considered that literary aesthetic education is a grand responsibility not only for all students to accomplish but also for all teachers to undertake. “Though it is important for teachers to master the basic teaching abilities of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating, they should be above all the well-cultured models. Only through achieving this goal can they educate qualified students.” Fundamentally, literary aesthetic appreciation is a combination of aesthetic theory and teaching practice, which is both an aesthetic activity and an educational activity and will reach the educational aims of cultivating the compound-type learners based on the aesthetic theories and the educational theories or by referring to the aesthetic objects (i.e., “college English texts”) and the aesthetic activities to stimulate and strengthen students’ affective experiences. However, it is embarrassing that Chinese colleges and universities gradually think little of literature and literature teaching, but instead pay more attention to linguistic teaching, which has actually influenced our academic studies today. Yao Xiaoping [2003] confessed that our academic studies are in a dilemma of “attending to one thing and losing another” due to the differences of linguistics and literature. “It does not need any statistics; the educational circles have already noticed.” For this reason, some scholars like Liao Zhengfu [2003] expressed their anxieties. And the anxieties are not groundless and private. It is a fact that literary studies (including the study of literary aesthetic appreciation) are on their verges of “marginalization”. Sheng Ning [2003] concluded that the aesthetic and academic problems are not isolated and the “discipline construction” and “curriculum offering” should be responsible for the disadvantaged situation. Because “in the construction of foreign language disciplines”, the officials in charge “harbored some reservations about the corresponding concepts” and caused the unfavorable “case”, i.e., “In the aspect of curriculum offering, a few unscientific factors are involved and have effects, which do harm to the cultivation of students’ qualities” [5. P. 145—150]. Therefore, we cannot only “look at” now, but instead we should keep a watchful eye

on the future of our national education and teaching, making “literature and linguistics supplement each other”. Through reconsidering the value of literature in classes and academic studies can we achieve something in curriculum construction, which will help students acquire their abilities of discovering, feeling and judging truth, goodness and beauty of the world. And through trying the aesthetic activities can students correct their behaviors and eventually establish their lofty aesthetic standards. Literary aesthetic appreciation is a comprehensive ability and requires that our education departments in charge should pay more attention to the value and function of literature courses. Only by cultivating students’ fine qualities of cute intuition, rich imagination, profound understanding, creative thinking and aspiring affections can they meet the demands of the fierce competitions in new centuries and the earnest requirement of the world knowledge economics.

### III. The strategies in literary aesthetic appreciation

E. Sapir, a noted American linguist, had a penetrating view of the close relationship between language and culture. He said that “There exists something behind language; language cannot exist without culture” [1. P. 146]. As a matter of fact, language and literature share a harmonious relationship because literature is a part of culture. If institutions and college teachers want to cultivate students’ abilities of enjoying beauty, appreciating beauty and creating beauty with the help of literary aesthetic appreciation, they need the specific teaching strategies and the “college English texts” (i.e., poems, essays, prose, fictions, etc.) to develop their healthy aesthetic abilities and cultivate their moral qualities. These strategies are as follows.

#### 1. Combine moral education and highlight the value of aesthetic education.

In *New Horizon College English Books* (2), there contain a number of classic texts relating to “truth”, “goodness” and “beauty”, which are indeed the excellent materials to conduct aesthetic education. For example, “A Good Heart to Lean on” is a text in Unit 3 of Book I, telling students how to adopt the moral standards to purify souls to maintain a harmonious relationship between father and son. In this article, “I” felt uneasy with father because he “looked crippled and short”, but father’s determination, optimism, confidence and humor enlightened “me” and helped “me” realize that “it is father who helps me keep a balance” both mentally and physically, and “teaches me” how to be a man and how to get along well with others. “A Test of True Love” is a text in Unit 3 of Book II, telling students what is true love and how to love. The article narrated a young official named John Branford who “frequently wrote to an unknown woman because she gave him constant strength” in the last 13 months. John finally fell in love with the woman “he never encountered”. The story implied that true love does not rely on the beauty of one’s appearance but on the very “inner” beauty like honesty, persistence and “goodness and wisdom”. “Roommate Conflicts” appears in Unit 5 of Book IV, telling students how to set up a good relationship with roommates and how important it is to maintain the good relationship. The article deals firstly with the conflicts of the twin sisters (Katie and Sarah) in their respective dormitories, indicating that conflicts exist widely among young people. If the conflicts cannot be managed well, there would lead to “serious violence”, but frankly, “most roommate conflicts spring from such small,

irritating differences rather than from grand disputes over abstract philosophical principles.” So roommates should learn how to tolerate and forgive each other and acquire the “art of flexibility and compromise”.

**2. Combine intellectual education and penetrate aesthetic education.** College English concerns various types of writing which relate to the aesthetic concepts about beauty, ugliness, nobleness, loftiness, humor, absurdness, tragedy, comedy, etc. and also associate with the aesthetic values and qualities too so college English teachers should act as “guides” or “directors” in language teaching and help students find and use the aesthetic “elements”. For example, “How to Make a Good Impression” is an expository text in Unit 4 of Book I, telling readers how to impress others with gentle, noble and fine qualities. The article has introduced four different ways. 1) “You are the message”; 2) “Be yourself”; 3) “Use your eyes”; and 4) “Lighten up” and be humorous. Our teachers may encourage students to bring their imagination and association into play, discuss about their possible good ways of impressing others. “The Challenging Friend I Didn’t Know” is a text in Unit 10 of Book III, employing the first person to describe the unusual friendship between “I” and John Bullyer who was actually a “friend I didn’t know”. They challenged each other for years in secret because they both wanted to shape their future life better. They tried hard and finally became distinguished in their fields and achieved their academic dreams individually. When they met each other, they realized that it was the “challenging friendship” that helped them gain what they desired. So based on “friendship”, our teachers may ask students to write short essays about “what is real friendship?”; Based on “challenges”, our teachers may ask students to have discussions like “Does English study need challenging spirits?” “Challenges are good or bad for your English study?”, etc.

**3. Combine “interest” stimulus and protrude the art function of literary aesthetic appreciation.** The “texts” required in the teaching program contain aesthetic elements everywhere either in intensive reading materials or extensive reading materials so our college English teachers can discover many aesthetic models if we are careful enough, which will be good for students’ aesthetic education. “Choose to be Alone on Purpose” is a text in Unit 5 of Book IV, employing the examples of Henry David Thoreau, William Wordsworth and John Milton to illustrate “How graceful, how benign, is solitude”. According to the writer, inspiration in solitude is “a major commodity for these poets and philosophers” because they could feel different when being solitary. Our college English teachers, besides telling students the literary knowledge or stories about the literary giants, may also suggest them seeking for a proper place of their own “To be solitary, see what will happen in your mind?” or “After being solitary, see whether you can feel/develop some difference from the nature, people or objects around you?” “Geniuses and Better Parenting” is another text in Unit 7 of Book IV, which focuses on the relationship between the giants like Einstein, Pablo Picasso, Mozart, Karl Friedrich Gauss, etc and their families. Between the lines, the writer emphasizes the importance of parental education and fine family atmosphere for these geniuses. Besides language teaching, we can create some warming “atmospheres”, i.e., we may design two totally different “families” for students to perform on the platform — one is a lovely and reason-

able family while the other is a violent and abusive family, “If you were Einstein in the first family, would you possibly become great? And why?” “What if Einstein was in the second family? Would he be happy and successful? And why?” These activities will be interesting “literary texts” to enjoy and to lead students to realize the value of literary aesthetic appreciation. Aesthetic education has unique significance in subliming one’s spirit, which will do good to our national education. On the one hand, it can make our educational objects (students) develop in an all-around way and acquire their final goal of “gaining truth through beauty” and “harvesting goodness through beauty”, and on the other hand, it also can make our students grow up healthily, both mentally and physically, and finally become the talented and “literature-tasted” persons to serve our society.

#### IV. Conclusion

To sum up, literary aesthetic appreciation is an effective way of reading and study, which can help students experience various forms of pleasures in their personal life. Meanwhile, literary aesthetic appreciation is also an effective teaching approach. Like other styles of aesthetic education, literary aesthetic appreciation is an indispensable part of college English teaching. Therefore, we need to highlight the values of it. While teaching, we should pay attention to students’ aesthetic consciousness and capabilities and improve their literary and aesthetic tastes. Especially in modern time, the cultures collide and the competitions become more and more severe, it will be essential to teach our students the corresponding aesthetic approaches and make them realize the significance of acquiring literary aesthetic appreciation. In that case, they will feel beauty, love beauty, cherish beauty and form the voluntary aesthetic behaviors and can truly accomplish the quality education advocated in China.

#### NOTES

- (1) See The National Curriculum Instructions of College English (trial). Ministry of Education. <http://www.edu.cn>. 2004-01-20 14:20:45.
- (2) See *Zheng Shutang*. New Horizon College English Books (I—IV). Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2008.

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## **ЦЕННОСТИ И СТРАТЕГИИ ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННО-ЭСТЕТИЧЕСКОГО ПОДХОДА В ПРОЦЕССЕ ОБУЧЕНИЯ АНГЛИЙСКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ КИТАЙСКИХ УЧАЩИХСЯ КОЛЛЕДЖА**

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Художественно-эстетический подход — это неотъемлемая часть обучения английскому языку в колледже. Как важный компонент эстетического воспитания, так же как и выработка основных навыков владения иностранным языком, данный подход представляет собой инновационный метод в процессе обучения при составлении учебных программ и пособий. Студенты приобретают эстетические знания, а преподаватели английского языка обязаны сочетать моральные ценности и высвечивать их в процессе обучения, объединять знания и ценности со стимулами «интереса» и выделять эстетическую функцию в рамках художественно-эстетического подхода.

**Ключевые слова:** художественно-эстетический подход, обучение английскому языку в колледже, ценности, стратегии.