

# A RESEARCH ON THE TEACHING OF LITERATI'S RECITATIVE OF CHINESE CLASSICAL POETRY

<sup>1</sup>**Liu Xiaofan and Panya Roongruang**

Bangkok Thonburi University, Bangkok, Thailand

Email: <sup>1</sup>lxf18701656682@gmail.com

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## Abstract

This paper first aims to elaborate on the nature and features of recitative culture, then use the composing rules of recitative melody to conduct teaching research. The goal of this research is to enable learners to equip with the ability to compose recitative melodies for Chinese classical poetry and can sing at the same time. The third goal of the research is to find out an efficient way of teaching. The research method is in accordance with the action research model presented by Kurt Lewin. It is the qualitative research method. During the teaching, students can accept and master the knowledge rapidly. They are able to create their original recitative melody and sing it, which also proves the teaching process is beneficial to improving students' learning outcomes.

**Keywords:** recitative, Chinese classical poetry, teaching research, action research

## Introduction

Recitative refers to the way of expressing Chinese classical poetry with cadence and rhythm according to the character's tone and intonation. It can be recognized as a method to sing tunes according to the rhythm, and understood as a way for the literati to appreciate poems. Meanwhile, recitative distinguishes from modern singing or reading because of the huge differences compared to them. Singing is, by no means, another form of traditional recitative way. The traditional way to recite poems combines the features of the Chinese language and characters to form a special tone through creation and evolution.

In ancient China, Shi, Ci, and Wen (three genres of literature) all made intonation curves through pitch sequences and constructed a melody that could

be sung throughout the method of recitative. The essential characteristic lies in the high degree of appropriateness between the recitative performance and the character's tone. As Rousseau stated, "The melody affects our ego as a sound and as one's feelings and emotional symbols (He, 1983)." Music has the power to arouse emotions and produce profound effects on people's spiritual world. While recitative, the listener's emotion that the music has aroused comes from the author's own experience. Integrating with the listener's emotion evolves into a more diversified feeling that becomes the listener's comprehension. Chia-Ying Yeh believed that Chinese classical poetry had been characterized by giving people strength through feeling and creating emotions directly since it was born. To write a poem, one must obey the rule that "the essence of a poem lies in the emotion that it evokes, but the style of a poem is determined by its language." A poet will write poems to express his feelings and emotions when seeing scenes, feeling emotions, and experiencing the external world (Yeh, 2022). The feeling of Xing is the most essential and most mysterious part of the creation of Chinese literature. The feeling of Xing derives from the literati's emotion and is communicated by the poem. Readers' feelings will be uplifted when they appreciate the poem using their heart and soul. Recitative is a musical expression that helps readers show their profound emotions after reading a poem. Therefore, as a medium, language isn't the only means for readers to communicate and express their emotions. The most effective tool to sublimate Xing Fa Gan Dong is to recite a poem.

Yeh believes that classical poetry's creation and criticism are of great significance in traditional Chinese poetry's theory, which sets the quality of Xing Fa Gan Dong (also means recitative as an effective tool to express profound feelings) in poetry (Yeh, 1997). It refers to the inner emotional effects triggered by external objects. It is considered to be the essence and basic element when writing poetry. In contrast, in poetry, Xing Fa Gan Dong comes alive by provoking our emotions sensitively and directly as the outside world integrates with our inside world (He, 2017). Literati will recite their emotions of Xing Fa Gan Dong, and readers will recite out to appreciate the innate emotion conveyed by the poem. As a bridge between literati and recitative, Xing Fa Gan Dong has made recitative very popular among literatus since the very beginning. Merely style to language is insufficient in expressing the feeling of Xing Fa. Coupled with music, it can build an intimate relationship between language expression

and inner spirit, overcoming the regret that readers cannot precisely feel the author's emotions.

## **Research Objectives**

The aim of this research is to:

1. Enable learners to equip with the ability to compose recitative melodies for Chinese classical poetry and
2. Can sing at the same time.
3. The third goal is to find out an efficient way of teaching.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Budding of Recitative**

The earliest record of recitative was found in the Zhou Dynasty. In *Rites of Zhou, Offices of Spring*, "Da Si Yue" (a court music institution in ancient China) using music to teach noble students, including Xing, Dao, Feng, Song, Yan, Yu (Xu & Chang, 2014)." "Xing" means that reading poetry requires readers to feel inspired. Only if the poem inspires readers do they produce emotions. "Dao" refers to the meaning of guidance, which will affect readers' emotions and guide them to understand the meaning expressed by poetry. It transforms the reader's inspiration into emotion and then uses it flexibly. Da Si Yue educated noble students that to learn a poem, one must feel it using his heart, feeling the poem's emotion under guidance to understand its meaning.

On top of that, recitative poems and reading poems rhythmically or with tones are "Feng" and "Bei." "'Bei' (same pronunciation to Chinese character of recite) is called 'Song' means reading with cadence (Yeh CY, 2022)." "Feng" refers to recitative, and "Song" refers to reading rhythmically. Sun Yi Rang interprets "Feng" into bare reading and "Song" into recitative due to its tone (Xu & Chang, 2014). It indicates that the imperial music academy of the Zhou Dynasty advocated recitative in rhythm or with tones when conducting music education. "Yan" and "Yu" refer to speaking and responding, aiming to write poetry and communicate ideas after learning to read and recite. It proves that from Zhou Dynasty, it was proposed that learning poetry has to recitation. At that time, Xing Fa's moving theory had been put forward.

In *Li Ji* (a Confucian philosophy book), *King Wen as son and heir*, "In teaching the heir-sons (of the king and feudal princes), and young men (chosen from their aptitude) for 'learning,' the subjects were different at different seasons...In spring, they recited (the pieces), and in summer, they played on the string instrument, being taught by the master in the Hall of the Blind." It means that the teaching of the prince and the noble descendants must be carried out

according to the four seasons. In spring, they recited poetry, and in summer, they played string instruments to perform. All of these were taught by masters (Hu & Zhang, 2017). In *Li Ji, Nei Ze* illustrates the teaching approach and mentions the recitative of poetry. "At thirteen, he learned music, repeated the odes, and danced the ko (of the duke of Zhou)." It means when children were thirteen years old. They begin to learn music, recite poetry and learn to dance (Hu & Zhang, 2017). It can be inferred that recitative constituted a branch of noble education in royal schools. In ancient times, the education of poetry recitative at an early stage was related to musical education.

### **The Appearance of Literati's Recitative**

The earliest literary work recorded recitative in the narrow sense was *Xue Ji of Li Ji*. "According to the teaching system nowadays, (the masters) hum over the tablets which they see before them, multiplying their questions. They speak of the learners' making rapid advances and pay no regard to their reposting (in what they have acquired)." "Shen" means recitative. "Zhan Bi" means reading characters on the Jian Ce (ancient wooden or bamboo sticks for writing) to teach students (Hu & Zhang, 2017). Zheng Xuan interpreted that, "Even though today's teachers couldn't understand the meaning of Ji, they would watch the text on Ji and recite it. It's difficult to answer questions (Li, 2017)." The quoted sentence evaluated the teaching condition at that time, meaning that teachers knew nothing about the meaning of the scriptures, and they could only recite the text on the Jian Ce. The consequence is that they were unable to explain the meaning and principles to the students and taught them before they could figure out and comprehend the meaning of the article. They paid excessive attention to the teaching process and neglected students' comprehension of the text. Recitative, in this way, refers to the literati's tonal recitative method. The reason is that literati also created the singing tune for the poetry. Still, the melody of the recitative tone tends to be closer to the structure of the character's tone and intonation. Its purpose is to express the literary and theoretical nature of the poem, contributing to clear communication via words and sentences. Recitative musical tone aims to enlighten literati when reading poetry, and it exposes their inner feelings through the recitative melody and rhythm. Singing tends to be a form of art meant to be performed, and the relationship between the tune and Chinese characters is not as close as the relationship between recitative tunes and words.

From the perspective of the evolution of Chinese characters, another factor that contributes to it is that the language of the pre-Qin period was a pitch-accent language rather than a tonal language, which means that there is a relationship between high pitch or low pitch tones. Their tone values do not cross each other (Xu, 2019). The meaning will be distinguished by pitch rather than by tone. Being a unique way of expression in tone-based language, the

literati's recitative tone will convey the meaning of the text by recitative according to the development of the character's tone to make listeners understand the poetry's content. Pitch-accent language doesn't use tones to distinguish meanings. To make its meaning clear, the meaning of poetry can be clearly delivered by singing the high and the low pitches, with no necessity to recite it out. Therefore, recitative in the pre-Qin period refers to recitative in a broad sense. The melody is not created strictly according to the tone structure of Chinese characters in terms of expression. The narrow sense of literati recitative demonstrates the content of poetry using a cadence tone, being another musical expression besides singing. Meanwhile, it is another way to conduct the Xin Fa Gan Dong, contributing to the literati's pursuit of poetry's rhythmic beauty.

### **The High Development of Literati's Recitative**

Tang Dynasty is the golden age of poetry recitative with many Ku Yin (poet of painstaking recitative) poets appearing, which means "poet of painstaking recitative." After ancient-style poetry, metric poetry came into being. Compared with the ancient-style poems, the recitative method of the metric poetry had new rules relating to metric on the perspectives of the Ping and Ze tones, metric verses, and rhyme endings. As the metric poetry developed prosperously, recitative Shi and writing fu became very stylish, and many outstanding poets and masterworks sprouted up (Ji, 2022). In Li Bai's poetry, he always depicts the scene in which he recited and created poems. Such as "Writing poems and articles under the north window," "Recitative is rewarding, feeling guarded by the gods," "I am also good at recitative, but there is no wise general to listen to," "Who sang the song of WuKuailast night" and "Drink your wine and write poems for you" (Zhu, 2015). More than that, in the mid-Tang Dynasty, poets even showed a high pursuit of the art of recitative.

Zhu Lixia evaluated these people as "poets of painstaking recitative"-Ku Yin, which can be found in poetry. Fang Gan said, "Recitative a five-character poem, exhausting all my energy." Meng Jiao learned hard at night for the imperial examination, committed to revising the poem, "Studying all day long, even the ghosts and gods are worried," and said, "I've been writing poetry all my life, and I'm getting old unknowingly." Han Yu said he heard Meng Jiao recitative hard at night in *A poem about Meng Jiao*, "Quietly facing each other at night, my hair turns white as I recite the poems." Du Xunhe, the master of Ku Yin, also said, "Can have something unsatisfactory for a long time, and can't stop writing poetry every day." "I won't stop writing poetry as long as I live." The world is so big; there is no place for me; I can only recite poetry." He proposed extreme Ku Yin as his own merits, "Ku Yin and no free time, more and more gray hair (Zhu, 2015)."

During the Tang Dynasty, literati pursued the ultimate development of recitative, which greatly improved their creative techniques of recitative. The literati who could write poetry and compose tunes simultaneously became the poets widely admired in this period, and recitative had formed an inseparable relationship with the study, creation, and appreciation of poetry. At such a level in music and literature, literati recitative can be said to be formed along with the evolution and development of poetry and is a unique artistic pursuit of poets for poetry creation.

### **Recitative Rules of Chinese Classical Poetry**

Taking the Tang Dynasty as the demarcation line, the poetry before then is called ancient style poetry. The poems after that are referred to as modern style poetry, both of which differ in the poetic structure and the recitative style.

The modern style poetry observes the rules of composition, such as "character-based cadence" ("Yi Zi Xing Qian" 依字行腔), "meaning-based cadence" ("Yi Yi Xing Diao" 依义行调), "low level and high oblique" ("Ping Di Ze Gao" 平低仄高), "long level and short oblique" ("Ping Chang Ze Duan" 平长仄短), and "short Ru tone and long rhyme" ("Ru Duan Yun Chang" 入短韵长); the recitative rules followed by ancient style poetry include "character-based cadence" ("Yi Zi Xing Qiang" 依字行腔), "meaning-based cadence" ("Yi Yi Xing Diao" 依义行调) and "short Ru and long rhyme" ("Ru Duan Yun Chang" 入短韵长).

### **Research Methodology**

The research method is the action research model presented by Kurt Lewin (1890-1947). In 1976, Richard A. Johnson (1935-2019) proposed the theory according to Lewin's action research model in 1946 in his paper "Action Research and Minority Problems (Johnson et al., 1976)." The original model is hard to use in practice directly. Thus, the research method is taken from Richard's diagram. The flowchart below applies to this teaching research, with the specific educational process being carried out as per this figure.

The three stages of action research are unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. Richard Johnson uses the language of system theory to describe the three stages of action research, namely the input stage, transforming stage, and output stage. As shown in the picture, the planning stage is an unfreezing stage, and the subjects begin to realize the problem's existence. The action stage is a stage of behavior change. Subjects began to learn new behaviors to solve the problems of the entire research system. The result is the refreezing stage of behaviors, in which new behaviors are implemented. If successful, it means that the research has successfully solved new problems.

Researching process based on Kurt Lewin's action research model is the qualitative research method. Research conductors will participate in the research process, using interview surveys and observation to make narration descriptions and describe the practical situation in the whole process to prove the research objectives. Qualitative research needs to be able to make adaptive changes to the educational method during the research process. The reflection stage in Lewin's action research model meets this requirement.

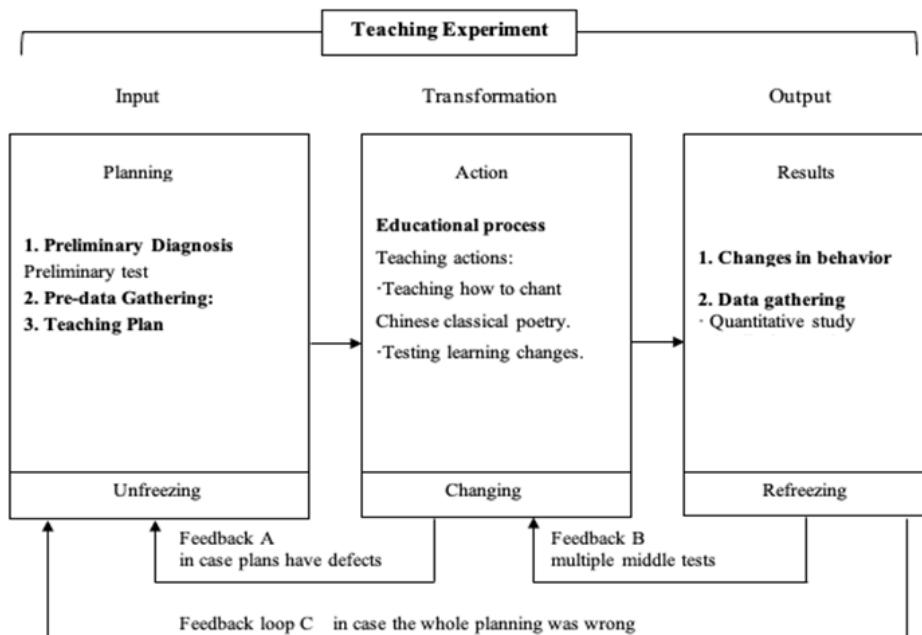


Figure 1. The process of teaching research. This flowchart is created according to Richard A. Johnson's research model.

Teaching research consists of three parts. First is the planning phase, otherwise known as the information input phase. A preliminary diagnosis is performed at this stage. Interviews and observation study collected the preliminary data to evaluate the subjects' knowledge of recitative classical Chinese poetry and prepare an educational action plan for the recitative knowledge course. From the analysis of the initial reflection, it has been concluded that there are 7 participants who are aware that classical Chinese poetry can be recited, 8 participants are aware of the concept of recitative, and 6 participants have previously listened to the recitative tune of poetry in a live setting. Additionally, 7 subjects have expressed a willingness to participate in this study, and 3 are neutral, indicating a strong willingness of the recruited subjects to be part of this study, which avoids the implementation of feedback loop A in the action research procedure.

The second phase is the behavioral transformation phase, where subjects undergo a behavioral transformation and acquire new knowledge. The educational plan involves ten sessions, with two sessions per week spanning more than one month. Formative assessments are utilized during instruction to deliver timely feedback on learning, adjust subsequent learning plans, and enhance students' metacognition of self-learning to make improvements whenever needed. A summative assessment is carried out at the end of educational research to provide a final judgment regarding students' learning outcomes. This summative assessment is primarily designed to present information about the learning tasks that have been completed at a given time. It aims to facilitate learning, which is always immediately followed by a reflection session (Dolin & Robert, 2018).

As a result, each lesson goes through a three-step research process of "setting educational plan-implementing educational action-organizing reflective discussion," followed by a third stage of outputting results at the end of each lesson. By using measurement tools, data is collected on the learning feedback of the lesson. The reflective discussion is conducted to adjust the educational plan for the next lesson adaptively or to override the educational activities of the previous lesson, redesign the educational plan, and execute it again. A circular, forward-moving educational model is established to generate the optimum educational outcome.

At each time after going through the action research process in the second phase, it ran to the third phase for the action results output. In comparison with both, the learning behavior of each lesson has been progressively modified compared to the previous one.

## Results

The result found that students can create their original recitative melodies according to the composing rules and sing the melodies. The researcher creates a new teaching method by exploring the recitative methods of Chinese classical poetry. According to the recitative rules, the teaching method cultivates students' ability to compose music for classical poems.

This teaching method cultivates the learner's Bi-Musicality. While studying a music culture, one must learn how to sing it. If you only understand the chanting music of Chinese classical poetry, you are still a layman in terms of the culture itself. Therefore, cultivating students' Bi-Musicality has been embodied in teaching methods throughout the whole process. The training objectives and testing standards are also arranged in three aspects: song skills, creating skills, and reflective learning ability. The learners can form a triad of learning abilities of creation and singing.

Researcher Teach and observe these three aspects based on Bloom's classification of educational goals. The training of the cognitive, psychomotor, and emotional domains corresponds to teaching knowledge, movement, and emotion, respectively. Knowledge refers to creating chanting tunes by teaching learners about different genres of Chinese classical poetry. Movement means that the learners can sing the chanting melodies, and the tunes should be created by themselves. The emotional aspect refers to the teacher's teaching methods to arouse students' interest in chanting culture. Students will actively participate in classroom teaching, actively reflect on learning after class, cultivate thinking skills, and strengthen their knowledge and motor skills.

The cultivation of reflective learning ability coincides with the operation mode of the Lewinian action research because the reflective part is the key factor that determines the operation of this research process. If researchers or learners are dissatisfied with a certain teaching part, they need to repeat it. They have to reset the educational plan, implement educational actions, and arrange a new reflection. In teaching chanting music, the author arranged a teaching reflection after each class, including collecting students' feedback through summative and formative evaluation to trace learning trends promptly

during the teaching process. It will be used to adjust the subsequent study plan. After the entire educational research is over, a summative evaluation is carried out. The final judgment of the students' learning results is made based on the interview investigation and homework. The teaching process used in the article can reflect the teaching results from the feedback survey of learners and the chanting tunes they created.

There are seventeen tests; each test includes ten questions, each question is out of 5 points, and the total score for each test is 50 points. As the exam progressed, everyone's scores generally improved. There are no failing grades, and everyone's grades are very good. The teaching research was successful, and the students learned how to chant Chinese classical poems.

It can be seen from the first test that students are less interested in attempting to chant poems on their own. However, in the second and third tests, the researcher's practicability of the recitative rules of ancient and modern poems is highly recognized.

The consent rate decreased from the fourth test, and students showed relatively low approval of their ability to create a recitative tone and accompaniment tone by themselves. The consent rate increased from the sixth test, and the seventh test dropped again, indicating that the 10 learners were still incapable of playing and singing the melody composed by themselves. Because mastering the ability to create and sing requires practice, the practice time for only eight lessons is relatively short, and some learners do not practice after class, which leads to a drop in the consent rate for this question. In this case, the researcher arranged another 9 lessons. All 17 lessons can make participants able to compose their recitative songs. The rest of the lessons are teaching practice of the scores in the textbook. From the homework feedback, more than half of the learners can be considered qualified.

The other purpose is to spread the chanting culture of Chinese classical poetry overseas. An innovative teaching method has been constructed to train learners to avert cultural dissemination on merely a superficial level. They can chant poetry and play the accompaniment instrument by themselves. The tunes sung and created are all by the learners themselves to attain the teaching goals of creating and singing by themselves simultaneously.

The primary theories applied to construct the new teaching method involve the theory of Bi-Musicality, Lewinian action research, and Bloom's classification of educational goals. By referring to the theories in ethnomusicology, this study avoids being dogmatic in understanding a nation's music culture and reinforcing the importance of learning its performance and singing ability. This immersive learning mode contributes to a true grasp of a nation's music culture. Bloom's classification of educational goals is derived from this. Using this theory strengthens the concept of Bi-Musicality training and scientifically plans the training orientation.

From the perspective of educational psychology, the educational goals of Chinese classical poetry chanting knowledge are divided into three areas. The cognitive, psychomotor, and emotional areas correspond to cultivating students' melody skills, singing skills, and reflective learning abilities. And each target area also sets different levels of phased learning goals. Students will reach high-level goals from low-level goals with the education process moving on. This process will let students form speculative thinking using the reflective part in action research. Through testing their learning behavior, students make continuous improvement and progress. The research reflects that the educational process improves students' learning outcomes by analyzing students' learning feedback. Teachers can help students achieve the goals of each stage and truly achieve multi-faceted training of students' ability to chant Chinese classical poetry and realize the in-depth study of Chinese classical poetry chanting culture. It enables the learners to possess the ability to spread chanting culture again, instead of just learning on the surface, avoiding introductory and shallow education methods, and achieving genuine dissemination of the educational significance of Chinese chanting culture overseas.

## **Discussion**

This paper the research reflects that the educational process improves students' learning outcomes by analyzing students' learning feedback. Teachers can help students achieve the goals of each stage and truly achieve multi-faceted training of students' ability to chant Chinese classical poetry and realize the in-depth study of Chinese classical poetry chanting culture. Recitative poems as a culture are also an ancient Chinese musical event. Recitative music is an extraordinary embodiment of a cultural form that integrates music and literature. In addition to purely instrumental music and music for people to sing, literati music is a unique Chinese traditional music culture. This article aims to spread the recitative culture of Chinese classical poetry overseas. An innovative

teaching method has been constructed to train learners to avert cultural dissemination on merely a superficial level.

## Conclusion

Recitative Chinese classical poetry has been regarded as a minority culture in that very few scholars are studying in this area. It is a cultural activity that is about to be extinct. However, recitative poems as a culture are also an ancient Chinese musical event. Recitative music is an extraordinary embodiment of a cultural form that integrates music and literature. In addition to purely instrumental music and music for people to sing, literati music is a unique Chinese traditional music culture. This article aims to spread the recitative culture of Chinese classical poetry overseas. An innovative teaching method has been constructed to train learners to avert cultural dissemination on merely a superficial level. They can not only recite poetry but also compose the melodies by themselves. Although there is plenty of teaching content, seemingly difficult to achieve, the application of the Lewinian action research solves these problems. Students can accept and master the knowledge rapidly, proving the teaching process is beneficial to improving students' learning outcomes.

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