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EXPLORATION OF THE PROFOUND ROLE AND TEACHING STRATEGIES OF THE COURSE *Appreciation of Chinese Classical Paintings*

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ABSTRACT
The course Appreciation of Chinese Classical paintings, rooted in the discipline of art history and falling within the scope of Chinese art history, is a rich, ideologically significant, and far-reaching course. This paper explores the course from two aspects: its profound role and teaching strategies. The profound role addresses the importance of offering courses in the appreciation of Chinese paintings; the teaching strategies focus on how to achieve effective classroom outcomes in such a course. These two issues are raised in response to the current state of the course, and therefore, this paper emphasizes analysis and proposes solutions.
KEYWORDS: *Appreciation of Chinese Classical paintings, Course, Teaching Strategies*

1. INTRODUCTION
The course *Appreciation of Chinese Classical paintings*, rooted in the discipline of art history and falling within the scope of Chinese art history, is a rich, ideologically significant, and far-reaching course. Broadly speaking, it can also encompass related appreciation courses such as *Chinese Art History*, *Appreciation of Chinese paintings Through the Ages*, and *Introduction to Art* offered in art schools, comprehensive universities, and general colleges and universities. These courses are characterized by strong general knowledge, engaging content, and artistic value. However, the current situation reveals that post-2000s university students, who have grown up surrounded by electronic devices, exhibit a lack of interest in such courses. They fail to recognize their profound significance, and schools themselves do not give sufficient attention to these courses, resulting in their marginalization and unsatisfactory teaching outcomes. In order to help modern university students delve deeper into the study of China's outstanding traditional culture, accumulate a high level of cultural and artistic literacy, and lay a theoretical foundation for future professional practice, the author believes it is necessary to specifically discuss the profound role and corresponding teaching strategies of the *Appreciation of Chinese Classical paintings* course.

2. COURSE BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE
The course *Appreciation of Chinese Classical paintings* occupies an important position in the current education system, primarily due to its role in both cultural inheritance and aesthetic education. This course not only aims to preserve and promote the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation, but also seeks to enhance students' artistic literacy and aesthetic abilities by guiding them in the appreciation of classical paintings.

From the perspective of cultural inheritance, the *Appreciation of Chinese Classical paintings* course selects the most representative classical paintings in Chinese history as teaching content. These works contain rich historical and cultural information as well as the spiritual essence of the nation. Through this course, students can gain a deeper understanding of the vastness and profundity of Chinese traditional culture, showcase the diversity and uniqueness of national culture, and foster a sense of cultural confidence and pride.

From the perspective of aesthetic education, the process of appreciating classical paintings is also a process of spiritual immersion through visual culture. This allows the realization of the aesthetic education goals of "educating people with beauty, beautifying people with beauty, and nurturing people with beauty". It cultivates students' artistic perception and aesthetic taste. During the appreciation process, students not only need to focus on artistic elements such as composition, color, and lines, but also explore the historical context, cultural connotations, and emotional

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expressions behind the works, thereby comprehensively improving their artistic and humanistic literacy. In addition, this process can stimulate students' creative thinking and imagination, laying a solid foundation for their future artistic creation and professional development. Therefore, this course plays an indispensable role in both cultural inheritance and aesthetic education.

3. ANALYSIS OF PROFOUND ROLES AND CASE ILLUSTRATION

The course *Appreciation of Chinese Classical paintings* encompasses an extensive range of Chinese paintings from various dynasties. These invaluable artistic heritage pieces serve as cultural, environmental, and temporal snapshots, reflecting the political, economic, and social conditions of their time. As the French art critic Hippolyte Taine stated, "The nature and appearance of material and spiritual civilization depend on three factors: race, environment, and epoch" (Danna, 1998). Similarly, Lü Sibai, a prominent 20th-century Chinese oil painter and art educator, noted, "An artwork often encapsulates history, customs, and human emotions, making it the most educational form of culture" (Lü, 2003). Thus, classical paintings transcend time, visualize history, and enhance contemporary understanding of ancient culture while fulfilling the societal function of "moral transformation and social education". These works instill proper cultural values and contribute to shaping a correct cultural outlook.



Figure 1: *Zhang Zeduan's* "Along the River During the Qingming Festival" (Northern Song Dynasty), part : Hongqiao Bridge.

For example, the *Along the River During the Qingming Festival* by Zhang Zeduan of the Northern Song Dynasty (5278 × 248 cm, currently housed in the Palace Museum, Beijing) offers a vivid depiction of life. The painting can be divided into three sections: rural fields, the Bian River, and the bustling urban streets, with the Rainbow Bridge area being a focal point filled with continuous narrative and rising action. Over 130 figures are portrayed with varied identities, attire, expressions, and movements. The scenes include crowded bridge traffic, dignitaries in sedan chairs, servants shouting for passage, and commoners stepping aside. On the bridge's sides, people admire the river and observe boats. Beneath the bridge, turbulent waters challenge boatmen, with one vessel partially through and another precariously off-course due to strong currents. The desperate boatmen shout and struggle to regain control. This lively, chaotic, and intense scene is masterfully conveyed, showcasing Zhang's ability to portray grand narratives within limited space.

The painting offers a detailed depiction of daily life, reflecting the social conditions of the late Northern Song Dynasty. It acts as a "social encyclopedia" for studying the era's clothing, commerce, architecture, social customs, and regional characteristics, highlighting its historical value. This value stems from several key aspects: the relatively liberal political environment of the late Northern Song, which ensured stability while concealing latent crises; the economic landscape, marked by the removal of marketplace restrictions, encouragement of trade, and flourishing commerce that facilitated both interethnic and international exchanges; and the artistic ecology, where rulers showed a greater appreciation for art compared to previous eras, thus elevating the status of artists and commodifying artistic works.

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These works were often displayed in shops and taverns, and many celebrated artists achieved remarkable accomplishments. In terms of formal analysis, the painting's detailed and realistic portrayal of characters and scenes uses traditional Chinese techniques such as "scattered perspective" and the long scroll format, "left open, right closed". The seamless integration of architectural drawing, landscape, and figure painting demonstrates Zhang's adept organizational skills and mastery of traditional artistic principles. This meticulous approach, combined with his rigorous practice, culminated in the creation of this masterpiece. In conclusion, a great artwork conveys far more than just visual imagery; it encapsulates historical context, cultural traditions, and societal norms while adhering to the stylistic and temporal principles of its time. In-depth analysis of such paintings allows students to elevate their understanding of art from a technical medium to a cultural and historical discourse, broadening their professional perspectives and fostering an objective evaluation of both the artists and their works through a historical lens.

Based on this case, a structured appreciation model can be summarized: Image Interpretation → Contextual Analysis → Formal Appreciation → Comprehensive Evaluation. Through repeated practice of this framework, students accumulate rich aesthetic literacy, fulfilling the dual objectives of cultivating art professionals and audiences. As Yin Shaochun, a professor at Capital Normal University, aptly remarked, "Art education in general schools does not aim to cultivate specialized art professionals but provides specialized art schools with an inexhaustible resource of talented individuals. More importantly, it nurtures numerous appreciators of art culture—members of society who have a strong interest, certain knowledge, and some practical experience in art" (Yin, 2000). Thus, the profound role of the *Appreciation of Chinese Classical paintings* course becomes self-evident. The process of deeply appreciating classical paintings is a journey into China's outstanding traditional culture, an exploration of the creative processes behind the classics, and a means of cultivating aesthetic ability and cultural literacy. This foundational process supports students' lifelong aesthetic education, career development, and academic research.

4. TEACHING STRATEGY EXPLORATION

To fully leverage the profound role of the *Appreciation of Chinese Classical paintings* course, appropriate teaching strategies are crucial. By adopting the right teaching approaches, instructors can guide students towards a deeper understanding of the material. For instance, thematic teaching, where students explore specific topics or historical periods through representative classical paintings, can enhance their engagement. Multimedia methods—using audio, video, and other forms of content—can enrich the lesson and stimulate greater student interest and participation. Moreover, hands-on teaching activities, such as organizing visits to art galleries, museums, or other art institutions, allow students to experience the charm of artworks firsthand. However, no teaching method exists in isolation; rather, an integrated and context-sensitive approach is necessary. Below, the author discusses several aspects of effective teaching strategies.

4.1 Selection of paintings and Strengthening Cultural Interpretation

In art appreciation courses, selecting representative paintings and deepening cultural interpretation is an effective way to fulfill the dual mission of "teaching" and "educating". Classic paintings, having withstood the test of time, are precious cultural treasures that offer much more value than ordinary works. For example, the Ten Great paintings of Chinese Art—such as *The Nymph of the Luo River*, *The Palace Ladies of the Tang Dynasty*, *Five Oxen*, *Night Revels of Han Xizai*, *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains*, *Along the River During the Qingming Festival*, *The Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*, *Spring Dawn in the Han Palace*, and *Hundred Horses*—are essential works for discussion in this course.

Since the goal of university-level art education is not solely to prepare students for exams but to cultivate their aesthetic judgment and moral education, it is important to recognize that college students already have ample learning pathways and are well-versed in reading, comprehension, and writing. As a result, students have higher expectations for classroom experiences. Teachers must shift their role from mere knowledge transmitters to guides, drawing content not only from textbooks but also from visual materials, videos, independent writing, and critical evaluations. This transition demands that instructors possess a high level of competence in researching and integrating artistic works, historical contexts, and evaluative commentary, delivering the content in a logical, accessible manner that engages students while maintaining clarity.

To achieve the "educational" goal, teachers must also analyze the ideological elements embedded in the paintings and use them appropriately to foster students' moral character and aesthetic qualities. For instance:

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- Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty, renowned for his mastery in flower and bird painting, founded China's first imperial academy of painting but also had a notorious habit of inscribing his name on works by court artists.
- Qi Baishi, despite enduring the hardships of war and relocating to Beijing in his later years, remained devoted to painting and ultimately became one of China's most celebrated traditional artists.
- The Lingnan School of painting, which blended traditional Chinese techniques with Western styles and boldly innovated during revolutionary periods, reinvigorated the vitality of Chinese ink painting.

Lu Xun, a famed Chinese writer, once insightfully noted the relationship between art and morality: "Art can support morality. While the purposes of art may not always align with those of morality, its power is great enough to deepen human nature and elevate people's preferences, thereby assisting morality in governance" (Lu, 1998). If teachers effectively incorporate such examples, students are more likely to remember the artists and their works, and these examples can subtly influence students' thinking and behavior, ultimately achieving the ideological education objectives.

4.2 Using Multimedia Tools to Create a Positive Classroom Atmosphere

In today's educational landscape, multimedia tools are diverse and abundant, ranging from smart classroom platforms like "Rain Classroom", to art videos, micro-lectures, live streaming, and more. However, as facilitators of learning, instructors must encourage students to ask questions, engage in discussions, and solve problems. If certain topics cannot be resolved during the class, they can be revisited and explored further after class. This approach not only fosters an atmosphere of inquiry but also encourages students to express their opinions, critique each other's ideas, and create an open learning environment characterized by self-directed learning, cooperative learning, and exploratory learning.



Figure 2: *Liu Xiaohui* teaching at Zhaoqing Art Museum, 2024. Photograph by *Ma Xiaochun*.

In the classroom, using high-definition images and videos to analyze artworks is a common and effective method. High-resolution images can offer a more authentic representation of the artwork, while adding elements such as questioning, discussion, critique, and role-playing can significantly enliven the class and engage students' attention, thus enhancing the overall learning experience. For example, using apps like *Palace Museum Calendar 2025: The Innocent Edition* and *Night Revels of Han Xizai* allows for an interactive experience. Online resources such as *National Treasures, When the Louvre Meets the Forbidden City, Is Art Difficult?,* and *Palace Museum 100* are also excellent digital materials. These resources feature concise content, engaging commentary, and beautiful imagery—some even include animations—which can greatly enhance the learning experience when integrated into the classroom.

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4.3 Fostering Course Interaction and Experience, Integrating Theory into Practice

With the advent of the 21st-century digital age, promoting course interaction and enhancing art experience have become essential strategies for enriching classroom learning. For example, the *Rain Classroom* smart teaching app combines online and offline teaching functionalities. It supports live-streaming, video sharing, and more, and can also be adapted for in-person classes. Features such as real-time bullet comments, student submissions, group discussions, online quizzes, and homework feedback contribute to an interactive and engaging classroom environment. These tools not only make the classroom more dynamic but also improve overall teaching efficiency.



Figure 3: *Gu Kaizhi's* "Admonitions of the Instructress to the Court Ladies" (Eastern Jin Dynasty).

One particularly effective method for fostering interaction in the *Appreciation of Chinese Classical paintings* course is creative sketching or imitating classic paintings. After students complete their sketches in class, they can project them on a screen for the teacher to provide feedback. This often sparks lively discussions, creating an engaging and joyful classroom atmosphere and elevating the course experience to new heights. This approach perfectly aligns with the educational concept of "learning through play", highlighting the value of classroom interaction and experiential learning.

Moreover, instructors can use data analytics from platforms like *Rain Classroom* to gain insights into students' performance and engagement, allowing them to continuously refine their teaching methods and optimize the learning experience. When used effectively, such smart classroom tools serve as valuable teaching aids, benefiting both the instructor's teaching and the students' learning.

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Figure 4: Student reproduction of *Gu Kaizhi's* "Admonitions of the Instructress to the Court Ladies". Reproductions by *Yu Jiayi, Zhang Jing*, and *Chen Ruifang*.

While in-class interactions and digital tools are powerful, they cannot replace the immersive experience of art institutions. Taking students out of the classroom and into art galleries, museums, and cultural centers provides them with the opportunity to directly engage with works of art. This form of experiential learning—"reading thousands of books" while "traveling thousands of miles"—offers students a more direct and profound connection with the art they study. Engaging with artworks or artifacts in person is a much more powerful form of art education than classroom instruction alone, and it represents an invaluable aspect of the *Appreciation of Chinese Classical paintings* course. This kind of hands-on, immersive learning is essential for cultivating a deeper understanding of Chinese classical art and should be strongly encouraged.

In summary, the *Appreciation of Chinese Classical paintings* course plays a significant role in the realms of cultural inheritance and aesthetic education. It is essential in enhancing students' artistic literacy and preserving Chinese culture. However, several considerations must be made: the selection of course content should emphasize both its classic and educational value, guiding students to appreciate the paintings deeply and understand their historical, cultural, and multifaceted significance. Teaching methods must evolve with the times, combining lectures, inquiry-based learning, and practical experiences, while also strengthening museum-based learning to enhance students' aesthetic abilities and analytical skills. Moreover, such an approach will help foster a deeper appreciation and continuity of Chinese culture among university students.

Finally, it is hoped that this paper will provide theoretical foundations and practical guidance for the reform of art appreciation courses, offering valuable insights for teaching in other art-related disciplines. In the future, schools should expand the scope of research, place greater importance on the profound role of the *Appreciation of Chinese Classical paintings* course, and deepen exploration of teaching strategies to meet the ever-changing demands of education and the contemporary era.

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