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<i>Student Name: Yushi Ye</i>	
<i>Module Code: SICH5005</i> <i>Module title: Phonology</i>	<i>Student number: 1902852</i>
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Usefulness of Phonology

——Benefit to the Appreciation of Chinese Poetry

Student name: Yushi Ye

SID: 1902852

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(Can you see my PowerPoint slides? Ok, I'll start.)

Venerable Shengmiao and Miss Deng good morning. My name is Ye Yushi, today I'd like to share with you the topic of 'Usefulness of Phonology—Benefit to the Appreciation of Chinese Poetry'. The presentation will be divided into four parts. First is the introduction of phonology, then a brief overview of Chinese poetry. Thirdly, we will discuss the usefulness of phonology on Chinese poetry. Finally, it's the conclusion.

1. Introduction

1.1 What is Phonology?

First of all, we should have a basic concept of phonology. Phonology is a Chinese traditional study. Before the Republic of China, philology, phonology and exegesis are all known as *Xiaoxue* 小學. *Xiaoxue* is the study on form, sound and meaning of Chinese character. 'Phonology' is different from 'phonetic' which mainly studies the physical phenomena and analyses the actual process of pronunciation. 'Phonology' mainly involves the laws of historical evolution and the pronunciation system in each period.

1.2 Why do we need to learn Phonology?

People may ask why do we need to learn Chinese phonology? Firstly, *xingsheng* 形聲(form and sound), *zhuanzhu* 轉註 and *jiajie* 假借 in *Liushu* 六書(the six principles theory)¹ are closely related to phonology. Pronunciation was different between ancient and modern, North and South. So, phonology can reduce the difficulty of reading classics. Secondly, it's helpful to better understand the modern Chinese.

Thirdly, phonology is a necessary tool for the study of literature, especially traditional Chinese poetry. when we read Chinese classical poetry, there are two major difficulties. One is to distinguish the rules of *ping* 平(even tones) and *ze* 仄(uneven tones). The other one is to analyze the phenomenon of rhyme Phonology can help us to trace back to the phonetic state of that period, to appreciate the beauty of poetry.

2. A Brief Overview of Chinese Poetry

According to *shi daxu* 詩大序, 'Poems is the expressing of people's mind. The aspiration exists in mind, then expressing in word, which calls "poetry".' (詩者，志之所之也，在心爲志，發言爲詩。)²

China has been known as a country of poetry. The collection of poems 詩經 recorded lots of folk songs in the pre-Qin period. They are usually composed of four

¹ Translated by Gilbert L. Mattos and Jerry Norman, Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭, *Chinse Writing* 文字學概要(The Society for the Study of Early China, 2000), p.539-547.

² Translated myself, Annotation by Mao Heng 毛亨 and Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, Commentary by Kong Yingda 孔穎達, *Maoshi Zhengyi* 毛詩正義(Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), p.13.

characters 四言, each with a rhyme. Then in Han dynasty, five-character 五言 poem (*yuefu shi* 樂府詩) started to prosper. When the Southern Qi dynast 南朝齊, Shen Yue 沈約 advocated the four tones into poems. In order to make it more sonorous and harmonious when reading, which called *Yongming ti* 永明體. Then in the Tang Dynasty, Shen quanqi 沈佺期 and Song Zhiwen 宋之問 created a new style with complete *gelv* 格律(the rules of poems), named *lvshi* 律詩, with eight sentences per poem. Besides, four sentences per poem named *jueju* 絕句 also began to prevail in the latter period. Both composed of five characters 五言 and seven characters 七言.

According to *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 of Liu xie 劉勰, ‘Different initial consonants alternate with each other, which called “harmony”. The same sound repeated in each sentence, which called “rhyme”.’ (異音相從謂之和，同聲相應謂之韻。)³ The unique rules of Chinese poetry were gradually formed after the Qi and Liang dynasties. In the Tang Dynasty, the imperial examination began, and poetry were required. So, there were no scholars who could not write poetry in the later generations.

3. The Usefulness of Phonology on Chinese Poetry

After knowing that the appreciation and writing of poems are very important for us, we can discuss the usefulness of phonology.

3.1 Distinguish the rules of *ping* (even tones) and *ze*(uneven tones)

³ Translated myself, By Liu Xie 劉勰, Annotation by Zhan Ying 詹鐸, *Wenxin diaolong yizheng* 文心雕龍義證 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chuabanshe, 1989), p.1228.

To begin with, I will talk about the rules of *ping* (even tones) and *ze* (uneven tones) in poems. The ancient four tones are divided into *ping* 平, *shang* 上, *qu* 去, and *ru* 入 (the entering tone), *ping* belongs to even tones and *shang*, *qu*, *ru* belong to uneven tones. Briefly conclude, *ping*, *shang*, *qu* of ancient tones are generally equally to the first, second and third tone of the modern Mandarin. But when talking about *ru* (the entering tone), we will find that the entering tone has been incorporated into the other three tones. So, if we read Tang poems in modern Chinese, we may misunderstand the entering tone (uneven tones) into even tones, then the rules of poems are wrong.

For example, the poem *jiangxue* 江雪 of Liu zongyuan 柳宗元 says, ‘There were no birds on the mountains around, and there was not even a trace of people on the path. Only in a boat on the river was an old man, wearing a straw raincoat and a bamboo hat, fishing alone in the cold river.’ (千山鳥飛絕，萬徑人蹤滅，孤舟簑笠翁，獨釣寒江雪。)

According to *Guang yun* 廣韻, the three final rhyme characters, jue 絕 (*qingxue qie* 情雪切), mie 滅 (*wanglie qie* 亡列切), xue 雪 (*xiangjue qie* 相絕切) of the poem belong to *xue* 薛 rhyme of the entering tone. The entering tones end with /-p// -t// -k/, reading short. When we read the poem with the entering tones, we can feel the loneliness of the old man. But in the modern Mandarin, they are respectively classified into the second, fourth and third tone. So, this kind of feeling is greatly reduced. Professor Chen Xinxiong 陳新雄 also summed up the eight

principles of distinguishing the entering tone in *shengyun xue* 聲韻學,⁴ which is helpful for beginner.

3.2 Analysis of *gelv* (the rules of poems)

When talking about *gelv*, professor Wang li 王力 summed it up as follows: firstly, *ping* and *ze* alternate in this sentence, such as ‘*ping ping ze ze ping ping ze*’ (平平仄仄平平仄). Secondly, *ping* and *ze* are in opposition in couplets, such as ‘*ping ping ze ze ping ping ze, ze ze ping ping ze ze ping*’ (平平仄仄平平仄, 仄仄平平仄仄平).⁵ Because poems are intended to express feeling and ideas, *ping* and *ze* sometimes may broke for the sake of content. The rules of *ping* and *ze* of the first, third and fifth character in the poem can be ignored, but the second, fourth and sixth character should be distinct. We should also try to avoid the situation of *guping* 孤平 (two characters of *ze* with one character of *ping* in middle).

For example, the poem *zaochun* 早春 of Han yu 韓愈 says, ‘The light rain is moist in the street. When I look from a distance, the grass is dimly connected, but when approach it is sparse. The most beautiful scene of the year is this early spring, it is far better than full of green poplars in the late spring.’ (天街小雨潤如酥，草色遙看近卻無，最是一年春好處，絕勝煙柳滿皇都。)

The poem basically meets the rules of *ping and ze*. Especially the first sentence 天街小雨潤如酥，草色遙看近卻無 is completely match ‘*ping ping ze ze ze ping ping, ze ze ping ping ze ze ping*’ (平平仄仄仄平平, 仄仄平平仄仄平), making it easy to read. For the last sentence 絕勝煙柳滿皇都, it should be ‘*ping ping ze ze ze*

⁴ By Chen Xinxiong 陳新雄, *Shengyun xue* 聲韻學 (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 2007), 1216-1218.

⁵ Translated myself, By Wang Li 王力, *Shici gelv* 詩詞格律 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2014), p.14.

ping ping’(平平仄仄仄平平). But the character *jue* 絕(*qingxue qie* 情雪切) belongs to entering tone, in other word *ze*. In order to avoid the situation of *guping*, the later character *yan* 煙 should be a character of *ping*. Finally, the last sentence’s *gelv* is ‘*ze ze ping ping ping ze ze, ze ping ping ze ze ping ping*’(仄仄平平平仄仄，仄平平仄仄平平).

3.3 Understanding of Rhyme

When we read some poems in modern Mandarin, we often find that the rhymes of the poems are not harmonious. In fact, original rhyme of the poem was harmonious, but the pronunciation has changed now. So, we need to use rhyming book to trace back to the phonetic system of that period.

Chinese rhyming book appeared very early. In Sui Dynasty, Lu Fayan 陸法言 compiled *Qie yun* 切韻, setting one hundred and ninety three rhymes. Then Sun mian 孫愐 in Tang Dynasty wrote *Tang Yun* 唐韻, divided into one hundred and ninety five rhymes. Based on *Qie yun*, *Guang Yun* 廣韻 compiled by Chen Pengnian 陳彭年 in the Northern Song Dynasty, with two hundred and six rhymes. However, the rhymes of *Qie yun* and *Guang yun* were too trivial. So in the early Tang Dynasty, Xu Jingzong 許敬宗 asked for *tongyong* 同用(Combining characters that sound the same but are in different rhymes) for need of the imperial examinations. In the Song Dynasty Jia Changchao 賈昌朝 put forward it again. Later, Liu Yuan 劉淵 of Pingshui 平水 in the Southern Song Dynasty combined the same rhymes into one hundred and seven rhymes. Later generations settled on one hundred and six rhymes, it was called *Pingshui* rhymes 平水韻. In the later period, *Pingshui* rhymes were widely used in poetry writing.

For example, the poem *song youren* 送友人 of Li bai 李白 says,

Green hills lay on the north side of the city and moats surrounded the east.
We are about to leave here; you are about to embark on journey of thousands
of miles like wild goose. The white clouds floating in the sky, like you. The
sun cannot bear to sink, also like our friendship. We waved goodbye and
went our separate ways. Your horse seemed unable to bear to leave, hissing,
adding to my sorrow of parting. (青山橫北郭，白水繞東城。此地一為
別，孤蓬萬里徵。浮雲遊子意，落日故人情。揮手自茲去，蕭蕭班馬
鳴。)

The rhymes of this poem *cheng* 城, *zheng* 徵, *qing* 情 and *Ming* 鳴 seem not totally match rhyme. For the end pronunciation of *cheng* and *zheng* is /-ɲ/, while that of *qing* and *ming* is /-ɲ/. However, if you go to check *Pingshui* rhymes, you will find that these four words all belong to *Geng* 庚 rhyme.

4. Conclusion

Mrs. Ye Jiaying 葉嘉瑩 once said, ‘When ancient Chinese wrote poems, they took their life experiences, idea and aspiration into the poems. They wrote out their feelings, and when we read their works thousands of years later, we can still feel the same feelings. This is the life of Chinese classical poetry.’⁶ Chinese classical poetry contains the sincere feelings, cultivation, and wisdom of the ancients. even today it’s still necessary for us to deeply understand and explore the charm of it. Phonology can help us to identify *ping* and *ze*, *gelv*, and rhyme of poetry, which is of great help to our appreciation of Chinese classical poetry.

⁶ Translated myself, Comp. by Ye Jiaying 葉嘉瑩, *Gei haizi de gushici* 給孩子的古詩詞(Beijing: zhongxin chubanshe, 2016), p.1-2.

This is all for my presentation. Any feedback and suggestion would be appreciated. Thank you very much.

5. Bibliography

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