

# Punctuation in Language Art

## —Referring to the Absence of Punctuation in Chinese Teaching

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**Abstract** - Punctuation, as an essential component in language, should be attached great attention in Chinese teaching. However, due to the utilitarianism in Chinese teaching, the lack of punctuation knowledge, the deviation of teaching content position, etc, resulting in the absence of punctuation during the Chinese teaching. Analyzing the reason of that, is not only beneficial to improve this situation as soon as possible, enabling punctuation to earn its status as is deserved, but also aims to exalt its embodiment as is valued during practical application.

**Index Terms** - punctuation; important function; Chinese teaching; long- term absence; the resolving approach.

### 1. Introduction

Chinese is a basal subject, which serves as the tool of studying other disciplines and working. It imports basic linguistic knowledge, which shoulder the mission to passing on the national culture at the same time. Chinese teaching characterized by instrument and humanism. It is stipulated clearly in the Cause Standard of Chinese drafted by the ministry of education in 2011“Chinese is the unity of instrument and humanism.”Chinese teaching affecting students is not limited to the simple subject itself, but students’ other subject capabilities development, even the conformation of their values of life.

Chinese teaching cannot be replaced during primary and middle school education. In the past few years, although Chinese teaching obtain some achievements, there exist some problems, punctuation omission, for example, is one of those in Chinese teaching, to matter worse it has not been aroused wide attention, which cannot be regarded as no problem existing, not to mention no need to solve them. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, China started the new standard in Chinese, but the issue of punctuation absence in Chinese teaching has not been substantially solved yet.

Punctuation, as is indispensable for Chinese teaching, should be placed properly. Actually, many Chinese teachers ignore this point during teaching. Attaching no importance to punctuation during teaching, there could be negative influence on students obscurely, which can result in using comma from beginning to end in an essay, or some full stops added.to make matter worse, this phenomenon may be seen in some magazine or newspaper. Facing to this situation, we should not only give more attention, but take effective measures, in order to solve this problem as soon as possible.

### 2. The Significance of Punctuation Application in Writing

“Punctuation is defined as the symbols that assist characters to record language, which play organic part, in order to show the meanings of pause, tones, or the qualities and functions of expressions.” accurate statement for the concept of punctuation in *the use punctuation marks* drafted in 1996.This expression sets down the relationship between punctuation and characters. With regard to language recording, characters mainly applied, supplemented by punctuation, both of them are inseparable parts in formal language, irreplaceable with each other. Therefore, it is irremovable for expressing in writing to apply the punctuation.

#### 2.1 Punctuation’s function in stratified pause

It is known that a man will be very impressive who has a good appearance, dressed neatly and gracefully. Accordingly, punctuation plays the same role in an essay probably. What if there is no punctuation or mark in an essay? Therefore, not only speakers cannot express their ideas clearly, but receivers can hardly seize the main information conveyed exactly. For example, a student whose essays characterized by brilliant ideas, expressions and outstanding literary grounding. Once there was a writing competition in his school. His composition was excellent at its ideas, content, wording, and so on, however, the judges eliminated him unceremoniously. The reason was for nothing but the inappropriate punctuation applied. Afterwards, he added correct punctuation marks in his essay, making its paragraphs self-explanatory, only to render an admirable writing.

Another fun story can also explain that issue. Once a bookshop paid Lu xun for his works, but the payment only included its character amount, not counting the punctuation marks. After Luxun knew that, he help this bookshop to translate their compositions without clear paragraphs, or punctuation marks, or blank between characters from beginning to end. Soon after the paper sent to the bookshop, it was returned, with an saying : “ Please divide into paragraphs, and add proper punctuation marks, sir.”

Facts shows that punctuation is the vital means of grammar relation in writing, which play an important role in stratified pause.

#### 2.2 Punctuation’s function in express meanings and feelings

Punctuation, as a formal writing sign, assisting characters in expressing human’s ideas and feelings, should not be

underestimated. The famous educator Ye Shengtao said : “Nowadays, both books and magazine have paragraphs, punctuation. As for writers, it is helpful with expressing, while it is convenient for readers to go over the writing.”The same words with different punctuations convey different or even the opposite meanings and feelings.”

For example, during the war of resistance against Japan, Japanese arms attack our country from force to economy. During that time, there are some posters on the wall in the area occupied by Japan, saying like this:

There is no food provided to the eighth route army force.

Later, there added a comma in the sentence, going like this:

“There is no food provided, but to the eighth route army force.”

Little as a comma can change the meaning of the slogans totally, another example, a well- known typical story going like this:

Raining day is suitable for being a guest, but not mine. It obviously showed the host’s hostility. However, the guy who want to be his guest, just added a question mark, changing the meaning into the opposite, goes like“ rain day, a be-guest day, could I stay? Certainly.”

Adding a pause in tone makes a semantic double meaning, which changes the hostility into hospitality.

It is said that, at the beginning of the foundation of our country, once a leader from a western country, who tend to condemn Premier Zhou Enlai by using a proverb,“casting pearls before swine”. While, Premier Zhou just added a comma, changing the meaning into“a swine casting pearls before me”, having the arrogant guy appear ashamed, only to insult himself adversely, which therefore preserved our country’s dignity.

Punctuation is so important in the aspect of expressing ideas and feelings, as Guo Moruo said:“Punctuation is equal with characters in expressing, even it is more.”For example, there is a sentence in an essay titled *honor for oblivion*, going like“after being shot for ten times”, there is a exclamatory mark in the end of the sentence“So it is”, in which the mark greatly enriches the meanings of the sentence. The mark“ ! ”conveys the writer’s feelings of shock, regret, grieve, and anger deep from heart;“.....”shows the writer’s wordless expression as a result of his extreme grieve and anger, indicating the words and sentences beyond expressing, including the complex feelings of anger, choked with explanation to nobody unwillingly, presenting an art effect of less words is more impressive for readers to imagine freely.

### 3. The Cause of Punctuation Long-Term Absence in Chinese Teaching

“There are only comma and full stop used in the whole essay, in other words, from the beginning to end, except in the end a full stop used, only comma used among the passages; Sometimes, there are simply commas—or points used , which are not like comma or full stop, from the beginning to the end.”The phenomenon of those marks used informally, has

been widely found in both primary and middle schools, and colleges, even among the writers and editors. Chinese teaching should be responsible for that phenomenon with no doubt.

#### 3.1 the utilitarianism of Chinese teaching

Punctuation is the content of Chinese teaching since primary school. Although there is no obvious request for punctuation teaching, among the stage targets of reading and writing it has been put forward clearly from Grade 1 to 3. For example, request for understanding the common punctuation marks, and learning the expressing different meanings by question marks, exclamation marks, and full stops during reading(reading in Grade 1), and learning to use them in addition according the expressing requests(writing in Grade 1).During the process of learning sentences, comprehend the different uses between comma and full stop, and the main use of colon and quotation marks(reading in Grade 2). Make right use of colon and quotation marks, and such punctuation marks, according expression demands(writing in Grade 2).....

However, with the whole new standard of teaching, statement relevant to punctuation is no more than 1 percent, which consist of only 200 words. Besides, since there is pressure of admission to high education above teaching, scores play the decisive part. Therefore, during the teaching process, teachers will focus on the proportion and frequency of the examination. What’s more, recently, there is no exam questions for Chinese tests, competition , or even the high school and college entrance examinations, but one or two multiple choice questions. It is no wonder that teachers simply concern about the knowledge points of frequent and taking big proportion in exams, ignoring the uncommon emergence or small proportion knowledge of punctuation, in order to enhance students’ scores.

#### 3.2 the deviation of Chinese teaching content position

It is always the main focus that how and what to teach, while punctuation has never been regard as a content of importance to implement since ancient times.

In ancient times, people were used to dot where should make a full stop rather than use punctuation during reading, which is so-called “syntax”. Ancients believed that the meanings of essays can be got by reading for times to get the language knowledge, for they paid more attention to humanistic education that it call for the enlightenment of human’s thoughts. As for punctuation, the great Tang man of letters Han Yu said in his famous work *on teachers* “The teacher of his son teaches the child only reading and punctuation , which is not propagating the doctrine or resolving doubts as the aforementioned.”He supposed that teachers who taught the punctuation were not qualified teachers. “I don’t think it wise to learn from the teacher when one doesn’t know how to punctuate , but not when one has doubts unresolved , for that I find to be the folly of learning in small matters , but neglecting the big ones. Even medicine men , musicians and handicraftsmen do not think it disgraceful to learn from each other.” In his opinion,

“propagating the doctrine , and resolving doubts” is the “great knowledge”, while the punctuation is the “useless knowledge”.

During the Late Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the Republic China, our country acquired a set of punctuation created by western countries. However, in the past few years’ Chinese teaching practice, punctuation had never been defined its status definitely. As for punctuation, it is either ignored, or stressed, or slightly mentioned during Chinese teaching. Nowadays, punctuation has faded out, even there is no content mentioned on punctuation in the general course aims of *the Course Standard of Chinese*. The journals papers relevant to the reform of Chinese teaching, has hardly discussed the issue of punctuation in that.

It is intelligible that punctuation has become a blind point during Chinese teaching owing to the deviation of punctuation position for ages.

### 3.3 the deficiency of punctuation system

In the field of language studies, punctuation is always a frail part. Frequent as punctuation applied in writing—which has never been denied—not treated as a separated subject to study up to now. Punctuation, which is attached to Chinese graphology or grammar rhetoric, lack of independent system. Punctuation system has never embodied during the practical teaching or textbooks, for there is no special teaching for punctuation arranged, even though a few textbooks arrange, which only show some introductions of punctuation common sense. During the Chinese teaching, facing the burden of teaching task, teachers have to omit the punctuation. The long-term deficiency of punctuation in the textbooks, and the absence of punctuation teaching, makes students fail to know the definite usages for punctuation. It is no wonder that there are so many problems about that.

## 4. The Effective Means of Improving the Absence Situation of Punctuation in Chinese Teaching

Correct application of written language is associated with punctuation greatly, making up one of that vital factors as characters. It is surveyed that the rate of wrong punctuation applied is much higher than that of wrong words and sentences during studying and working. In the past few years, it is evidenced that there is more wrong punctuation than characters according the *section on journals quality control and inspection*. Although the issue of wrong punctuation use should not be attributed to Chinese teaching completely, to some extent, partly at least.

As the old saying goes, “It is of great wise to correct one’s mistakes.” (excerpt from Commentary on the 2nd of Duke Xuan) Therefore, how to offset the deficiency of punctuation in Chinese teaching? It is regarded as follows:

### 4.1 enhancing teachers self qualities, and exerting fully teachers’ leadership in teaching.

“Teachers should promote the students’ advantages while repair their disadvantages.”(excerpt from Book of Rites and Learning) Teachers, as the organizers and leaders in teaching, they should not only exert their leadership function, but also

enrich knowledge and theoretical attainment, to improve their own professional qualities and abilities.

Facing the deficiency of punctuation in Chinese teaching, teachers should realize the seriousness and jeopardy of that, meanwhile, they should change the passive situation by promotion and teaching and such like actions. In the other hand, they should converse their old conceptions, to realize the punctuation functions again, establishing the teaching aims of punctuation, composing textbooks that agrees with the teaching aims and students’ cognition practically. Says a proverb, “A premise for offering others’ a glass of water is that you should have a barrel.” As an educator, the teacher should improve their ability to apply the punctuation when they can integrate knowledge with Chinese teaching. Practice as that, twice as much can be accomplished with half effort in Chinese teaching.

### 4.2 taking effective teaching approaches, to rouse students’ interest to learning punctuation

It is said that the guidance of learning is motivated by interest, which play a foundational role in learning, and has been criticized by experts home and abroad from ancient to now. The famous Russian educator Ukrainian said, “No interest, and was compelled to carry out the study, would stifle students to acquire knowledge and the will.” The American educator Bruner said, “Learning is positive process, so the most effective way to motivate students’ internal cause is the interest to learning materials.” In the early two thousand years ago, the great educator Confucius showed his remarkable insights, “the learner who is enjoying learning is better than the one who is wondering to learn, is much better than the one who thinks that he has learned.” (excerpt from Pieces of Yongye the Analects of Confucius) As for teachers, taking effective teaching approaches to cultivate students’ interest is meaningful, for it can motivate students’ strong will for learning. Naturally, different teaching contents demand different approaches, punctuation, for example, teaching content like that require teachers to take some approaches full of fun to inspire and lead students , thus arouse their learning interest.

Actually, it is the most effective to teach the punctuation usages by some incidents relevant to life. For example, once there was a stingy landlord who hired a teacher. When he was making the rules of meals supply agreement with the teacher, he asked for signatures. The content goes like, “No chicken is OK, no fish is OK, just a dish of vegetable is enough.” Whereas the teacher did not agree on that, with adding some punctuation, the meaning changed completely, “No chicken fish is OK, a dish of vegetable added is enough.” The story is not only humorous, but also it can make students realize the importance of punctuation, so as to motivate their interest of learning.

Besides, ballad is another approach of punctuation teaching, making it easy to read and remember, which is beneficial to enhance students’ practical application ability.

The great writer Tolstoyan vein said, “Great teaching demands is rather than compelling, but inspiration.” Teachers

should exert their own intelligence to change students into “longing for learning” from “learn by compelling”, by various effective ways according to the students’ cognitive levels and practical teaching content. Better teaching effect can be obtained if interest is inspired.

#### *4.3 establishing the new teaching pattern, maneuvering students’ activity and positive motivation*

Premier Hu Jintao once said, “To change the simple implanting form of teaching, exploring creative teaching approaches, students should be more inspired to create, and to take the initiative when teachers occupy the leadership.” The traditional teaching approaches is just emphasizing the teachers leadership, ignoring the students’ motivation and creation, and initiative. The new development situation demands reforming the traditional one, instead of which is the subject spirit that students learn positively and innovatively, which can enhance their learning and creative abilities. As the famous educator B·A· Cyxomjnhcknn said, “At school, the meaning of learning does not lies in knowledge or techniques should be acquired, but the ability of learning and the initiative should be held.” The psychologist Piaget said, “All the truth should be acquired by students themselves, or by their discovering, or by their rebuilding, nor conveying to them directly.” So does the punctuation teaching. Leading in teaching, teachers should deal with the relationship between “teaching” and “learning”, when they are playing the leadership role. Managing to implement comprehensive bilateral activities, to exhume their potential completely, as Cyxomjnhcknn’s saying “There is a secret corner in every student’s heart, in order to create a resonance between teachers and students, we need pitching the tone with students’ inner strings, for a special string for a special rhythm.” Therefore Chinese teaching will achieve the goal for ideal combination of teachers’ leadership and students’ learning subject.

## **5. Conclusion**

Lv Shuxiang, the dean of the Chinese letters, said: “Chinese teaching is made up of half knowledge, half expressing art.” Facing the problem of the long-term absence of punctuation in Chinese teaching, we should appeal teachers and students widely to take actions to improve the situation with those who are engaged in writing. Chinese teachers should change their conception that they should not only attach importance to punctuation themselves, but teach students to realize that, while they are enhancing self-improvement. Besides, it is urged that teachers make efforts to study textbooks, improve their teaching approaches, and build a new teaching form, for bring students’ activity and initiative out to improve their innovation ability. Only if teachers, students and the society share their common efforts to practice the punctuation in teaching and working, can punctuation exert their functions completely.

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