Classical poetry enriches contemporary life

The summer of 2008 saw CityU’s Chinese Civilisation Centre (CCIV) marking its 10th anniversary. A celebratory feast was going on, punctuated by entertainment such as Kunqu opera arias accompanied by the sheng pipe. Unexpectedly, Dr Ma Ka fai, Assistant Director of CCIV, announced a special item that complemented the performances – an impromptu poem by an instructor of the Centre. Setting the theme for the composition, Professor Cheng Po-kai, Director of CCIV, revealed the poem would be about the 10th anniversary.

A young man went on stage and after pacing briefly, recited in a clear voice a seven character-line quatrain which roughly translates as follows:

A decade’s talent-grooming, with a decade’s fond love,
Like a flock at once chirping, we’ve echoed heart and soul;
Amid songs and music tonight, and festivities around,
Such bliss and high spirits – where else can be found?

That poet – a present-day classicist – is Dr Dung Chau-hung, one of the two tutors for the Xin Song Poetry Group, a band of poetry enthusiasts at CityU. His partner, Ms Sharon Cheung Wai-kwan, is also a tutor with CCIV. Both studied classical Chinese literature and both have been teaching courses in Chinese civilisation at the Centre. They set up the group in November 2005 to bring together students that love classical poetry and help preserve and promote a treasure of Chinese culture.

The group’s name, Xin Song, literally means “young pines” and was taken from an oft-quoted couplet by Du Fu, the famous Tang Dynasty (618-907AD) poet –

How I wish young pines would rise a thousand feet tall,
While evil bamboos be felled, ten thousands in all!

It was so named to signify the hope that budding poets would set their aims high and, like new saplings, grow in vigour and vitality towards maturity.

The group met monthly. Members gathered to discuss how to compose and appreciate poems, read one another’s exercises and compare notes on the subject. Each time, they would email their homework to Dr Dung and Ms Cheung a few days in advance. The meeting would then start with the aspiring poets talking about their verses, followed by comments and suggestions from their peers and winding up with a general critique by the tutors. Both Dr Dung and Ms Cheung brought their own poems to the group for discussion.

The monthly exercises over the past three years (except summer holidays) have resulted in a published volume, Collected Poems by Xin Song Group.

The tutors talked about their group and the Collected Poems with obvious satisfaction. And justifiably so, as it is CityU’s first published collection of classical poems by teachers and students. The past few years have seen very few poetry

(continued on next page)
groups formed or poems published in Hong Kong colleges or universities. Yet CityU, despite focusing on science and engineering, has been emphasising culture and liberal education for students. Xin Song Group and its *Collected Poems* is certainly a source of pride.

Some surmise that there is little point in learning to write poems in the classical style and question whether anyone can ever expect to surpass Li Bai and Du Fu, the paragon of poets from more than 1,000 years ago.

To this, Dr Dung remarked that people learning classical poetry do not aspire to eclipse the ancients but hope to promulgate their heritage and embrace their own cultural legacy and identity.

The doubts about “usefulness” only served to reveal a lack of confidence in one’s own culture, he said. No one doubts the value of Western classical music and ballet. So how can classical Chinese poetry be dismissed as irrelevant?

Moreover, he continued, classical poetry retains its vital power today, as evidenced by such themes as “electrical appliances” and “Christmas” in the *Collected Poems*, and by those pieces on recent events such as the Olympic torch relay and the disastrous 2008 Sichuan earthquake. The skills and devices of classical poetry have served well to express the heart and mind of people in modern times. Dr Dung was optimistic about the future of classical poetry.

Ms Cheung echoed her partner’s view. Gems of Chinese art such as painting and calligraphy, and the *qin* or Chinese zither, she noted, are still widely practiced. Forming a classical poetry group helped preserve the art.

So long as all of us do our bit with zest and sincerity, she believed, the heritage could be carried forward. An ardent lover of poetry, Ms Cheung also studied the history of Chinese painting and calligraphy in her university days and the past few years have found her enthralled by the ancient instrument, *qin*. These interests have embellished her teaching at CCIV. In handing down the torch of culture to the younger generation, Ms Cheung has been a doer rather than a mere talker.

As to how people should view poetical composition today, both Dr Dung and Ms Cheung agreed it would be advisable to preserve classical poetry without impeding modern poetry.

Moreover, they pointed out, the indigenous Cantonese tongue in Hong Kong still intonates the various sounds of traditional Chinese speech and age-old cultural traits still abound in local society. This can only serve to encourage classical poetry. The Xin Song Poetry Group has a promising future.  

---

**Mr Bernard Lee Sin-chuen**  
**Manager of Human Resources Office**  

The mission of the Human Resources Office (HRO) is to enable all staff members to fully utilise their capabilities for the benefit of the University. During my service at CityU’s HRO, I have witnessed the growth of our team and the evolution of the human resources role.

In my 25 years of service with CityU, my most unforgettable memories are from those historical days when the institute was officially awarded the status of a university in 1994. As CityU grows, the service requirements of HRO grow proportionately. New challenges arise almost every day, which is exactly what has inspired me to work here for 25 years. My work philosophy is clear and simple, and that is, to support the development of the University. I strive to help recruit and retain outstanding teachers and scholars and to attract and nurture high-quality students for the enhancement of CityU’s academic status.

As a young university, CityU has a higher degree of flexibility and adaptability without being overtly bound by tradition. Such an advantage, if fully utilised, can present CityU as a dynamic campus in the eyes of society. I hope CityU can go from strength to strength, with more breakthroughs, to become one of the top three local universities in Hong Kong.
A team formed by Mr Samuel Wu Wei-chang, Instructor of CityU’s Department of English, was crowned champion in The Amazing Race, a hugely popular US television series produced by AXN Asia Channel. The exciting action programme has dazzled millions of viewers, winning seven prestigious Emmy Awards in the category of Outstanding Reality-Competition Programme, highlighting the feat of Mr Wu’s team.

The competition required ten teams of two to find their own route across Asian cities to reach specific destinations. With very little money, they had to overcome a range of challenges before the team arriving first at the destination claimed the US$100,000 prize on offer.

A fan of the show, Mr Wu and his friend Mr Matthew Chung formed a team. All teams travelled across 11 Asian cities, surviving on three or four hours sleep a day, getting lost in the desert, using a rope to cross a river and eating unorthodox foods such as worms, scorpions and frogs. Without an optimistic attitude and a strong will, participants would soon give up, said Mr Wu. “My friend and I know each other very well. I’m good at analysing and he has excellent physical strength, so we make a very good team. We often encouraged each other during the competition, otherwise we definitely would not have been able to finish the contest.”

The competition attracted an enrolment of more than 3,000 teams. Mr Wu’s team was only nominated as a substitute but they were notified they could represent Hong Kong the day before the start of the competition.

Their own version of the amazing race began immediately as they confirmed their participation and within four hours set off to Bangkok. They also had to comply with the confidentiality clause of the competition, requiring all participants to refrain from revealing any details ahead of official announcements. This meant Samuel and his friend had to leave Hong Kong without telling families and supervisors their real purpose. Mr Wu said, “We are both teachers and know the importance of accountability. Fortunately, I had finished my classes and applied for one month’s leave by saying I needed to attend to some important matters, with the exact reasons to be explained later. It was a once-in-a-lifetime chance and I really didn’t want to miss it.”

Mr Wu, who comes from Singapore, enjoys and cherishes his teaching job with the Department of English and thanked the department head for her understanding.

The show was a life-changing event for Mr Wu. “Before the competition, I was rather passive and conservative and unwilling to take risks. Now I am more active and determined, with a new outlook on life. I learned that there is no impossible task as long as you are diligent and do not give up. I think my participation in the competition also serves to encourage my students, as some of them after watching the show share the pride in what I did.”

Mr Wu (top, left; bottom centre, front row) treasures the once-in-a-lifetime experience of participating in The Amazing Race.
Business faculty and students take to the hills

Eliza Lee

Taking advantage of the fact that Autumn’s pleasant weather presents the best time of the year for outdoor activities, about 100 staff and students from the College of Business (CB) in November enjoyed a day hiking in the Tai Po Kau Nature Reserve.

“CB had organised similar activities before but this was the first hike arranged for all Year 1 students of the College,” said organiser Dr Ron Kwok Chi-wai, Associate Professor of the Department of Information Systems.

The main purpose of this co-curricular activity was to offer a chance for students and teachers to take a break from their hectic study and work schedules and enjoy the countryside. Also, it enabled Year 1 students from different departments to get to know each other and adapt to university life.

As manager of CityU’s basketball team, Dr Kwok hoped the hike would also remind students to maintain good physical fitness to help manage their heavy study load and prepare for future career development. “CB graduates are the future powerhouse of the business sector. To best fulfil their future career plans, they should fully prepare their physical and mental health,” said Dr Kwok.

To organise a group hike is no easy task. The activity was a success thanks to the help of several colleagues handling the preparation work and about ten colleagues who participated in the event. Also, to ensure the route was suitable for students, Chair Professor Eden Yu Siu-hung, Associate Dean (Undergraduate) of CB, twice walked the route alone prior to the event. Also taking part was Mrs Suzanne Kuo, wife of CityU President Professor Way Kuo.

“The students’ response to the activity was overwhelming. The quota was filled in just three days after I sent out an email,” said Dr Kwok. More than 90% of participants returned very positive feedback about the activity, and about 70% agreed it could enhance understanding between teachers and students, expand their social circle, boost the sense of belonging to CB and improve their physical health. As it was so well received by students, CB will continue to host similar activities and may invite students in the Foundation Programme to take part.
Mission Possible: Make thousands of students feel at home

Residence life is an indispensable part of the fabric of the University. While students hone their social and interpersonal skills and independent living techniques, residence masters learn how to tackle challenging problems. In this issue, Dr Elaine Au Liu Suk-ching, Dr Kevin Downing, Mrs Peggy Wong and Chair Professor Matthew Lee Kwock-on share with us their hostel management experience.

One of the first residence masters appointed, Dr Au of the Department of Applied Social Studies, has been serving as the residence master for the Jockey Club Humanity Hall for seven years. She accepted the appointment out of a desire to develop her career and to live with young students. As the direction of the University’s education development has changed due to rapid growth, Dr Au said hostel culture has an important role to play. “I work with residence tutors to build a community life for students, by organising different hall activities in order to develop their potential,” said Dr Au.

The only foreign residence master on campus, Dr Downing, Senior Education Development Officer at the Office of Vice President (Student Affairs), accepted the appointment as residence master of HSBC Prosperity Hall last August. Through his inclination to meet with students, he believes he is better able to understand their needs. As the University emphasises internationalisation, he selected students of different nationalities and cultural backgrounds to be residence tutors. “I want to introduce different cultures and viewpoints to students. I also hope they build up self-confidence to adapt to today’s culturally diverse society,” said Dr Downing.

Having served as residence master of Jockey Club Academy Hall (JCAH), Mrs Wong is secretary of the Management Board, responsible mainly for administrative duties. She found that the position has enhanced her sense of belonging to the University through the subsequent close contact with students.

Students learn about the skills of managing their daily routines through living in the JCAH, one of the first halls to establish its Residence Association. “As it is a novel experience to live away from home for many of the students, they have to learn a lot about living independently. Hostel life allows them to hone their skills and help them grow,” said Mrs Wong.

Professor Lee, Associate Dean of the College of Business, has served as a residence master for the Jockey Club Harmony Hall for four years. As the number of students grows due to constant expansion of the University, Professor Lee has found that the opportunities to share close contact with students has reduced. He serves as a residence master to keep himself abreast of students’ current way of thinking. “As residence masters, we not only concern ourselves with hostel discipline but also the promotion of hostel culture. Therefore, we organise different activities to help students build up their confidence and sense of belonging towards the University,” said Professor Lee.
Sports are good for the physical and mental well-being and can cultivate team spirit. These are the objectives of the annual CityU Badminton Tournament and Table-Tennis Tournament organised by CityU Human Resources Office and Student Development Service (P.E. Section). The Badminton Tournament is divided into individual, staff/student, team and family events, while the Table-Tennis Tournament is divided into individual and staff/student events. Please remember to pay attention to the announcement for start of application.
Ms Jackie Leong Wei-ping
Executive Officer, Admissions Office
梁慧萍 招生處行政主任

A few minutes with...

Ms Jackie Leong Wei-ping
Executive Officer, Admissions Office
梁慧萍 招生處行政主任

Describe yourself in three words:
Studying in different countries has made me an independent and more mature person. Parents need to learn to let go of their children to explore the world at the right time.

Cheerful, optimistic, easygoing.

If you could spend a week in the shoes of HKSAR Chief Executive Donald Tsang, what would you try to achieve?
I would like to be remembered as a caring and loving person.

More hospitals put into action in districts that seriously need them.
I'd do a very detailed plan that could strengthen the Hong Kong economy in the face of the global economic crisis.

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?
New York City.

Do you participate in any sports? If so, what?
I enjoy walking and cycling occasionally.

What is your favourite dish?
Steamed fish with mushroom dip and garlic.

Do you have a favourite restaurant to recommend?
Malaymama, which serves Malaysian food. I recommend the prawn noodles and laksa.

Name the five living people you would invite to your fantasy dinner party (relatives excluded).
Tom Hanks, Richard Gere, Kesnu Reeves, Julia Roberts, Whitney Houston. With this combination, I am positive the dinner would be very Hollywood-style.

Describe your perfect holiday.
Sailing on a white and silky sand beach, with great dancers doing belly dancing, sipping a glass of tropical fruit juice, looking at the blue sky, reading a novel, chatting with my loved ones.

Name your favourite Hong Kong beach or countryside location.
Lantau Island.

What was the first paying job you ever had?
I worked as a part-time waitress in a Japanese restaurant in Taipei.

If you could retire now, what would you do to keep yourself occupied?
Learn gardening, take up Chinese calligraphy again.

Do you have anything in particular that has shaped your life?
I hope I can contribute to society in some way during my lifetime.

Communications & Public Relations Office
傳訊及公關處

Phone / 電話: 2788 9317
Fax / 传真: 2628 2812
Mail / 郵件: cpro@cuhk.edu.hk

Editor-in-chief / Shiyi Yung
總編輯 / 翁世英
Managing Editor / Longgen Chen
行政編輯 / 陳隆根
Executive Editor / Craig Francis
執行編輯 / 弗朗西斯
Associate Editor / Je Kam
副執行編輯 / 金楷änd
Design / Anise Wo
設計 / 楊慧碧

Issue 275 . January 2009