

## 5 *SHUYUAN* AND CHINESE WRITING TRAINING AND PRACTICE

Chinese writing has a long tradition, dating back to writing training and practice in traditional Chinese schools, the *Shuyuan*. In this chapter, we shall provide an overview of the *Shuyuan*, including its history, structure, curriculum, book collection, and academic activities. This overview may help readers understand what ancient Chinese students, writers, and scholars read and wrote, and the implications of this for contemporary Chinese writing.

Originating in the Tang Dynasty (618-907), the *Shuyuan* flourished during the Song (960-1279), Yuan (1271-1368), and Ming (1368-1644) Dynasties, lasting until the end of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912). They are commonly known in English as academies or private establishments for classical learning. Over 7,000 *Shuyuan* or academies are recorded as existing throughout the history of China. The four best known, the so-called Great Academies, were the Yuelu Academy, the White Deer Grotto Academy, the Yingtian Academy, and the Songyang Academy. These all existed during the Northern Song period (960-1127).

According to Yang and Peng, “A Chinese *Shuyuan* was essentially a comprehensive, multi-faceted cultural and educational institution, and it served multiple functions, as a school, a library, a research centre or institute, and others including religious and spiritual functions” (1). There are thus many different aspects of the *Shuyuan*, including school education, book collection and printing, academic research, the study of the religious and the philosophical systems of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, architecture, archive-management, and cultural communication. This chapter focuses on the *Shuyuan*’s curricula, book collection, and academic research and study activities in relation to Chinese reading and writing.

The *Shuyuan* played a key role in the Chinese history of education. The historical facts and records that are presented in this chapter show that the

most significant developments in ancient Chinese education, i.e., teaching and learning, knowledge creation and transmission, and academic exchange and activities during the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, have been closely related to the evolution and development of the *Shuyuan*.

## THE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE SHUYUAN

The administrative structure of the *Shuyuan* reflects the structure of contemporary Chinese universities. However, the *Shuyuan* structure was of a much smaller scale, which, to a large extent, helped make the influence of the *Shanzhang* (a person similar to the contemporary chair professor, president, or vice chancellor of a university) over the *Shuyuan* activities and academic development much more tangible. The following is a description of the *Shuyuan* structure, based on Yang and Peng (5–15).

*Shanzhang* 山长<sup>16</sup> (a position equivalent to combining a modern chair professor, and college president) headed a *Shuyuan*. The *Shanzhang* normally had a certain social, political and academic status over the region or the nation. A *Shuyuan*'s educational and administrative systems centred around a *Shanzhang*. Under the leadership of the *Shanzhang*, there was a deputy *Shanzhang* who took care of teaching, administrative and management duties on a daily basis. Other *Shuyuan* employees included teaching assistants, lecturers, managers (government representatives, who audited and monitored the *Shuyuan*), finance and estate officers, student affairs officers, assistant president (who assisted the *Shanzhang* with bureaucratic chores such as file-keeping and addressing enquiries), class monitors, logistics officers, receptionists (taken up by students in turns), subject monitors or representatives, administrative officers, and student representatives. In addition, there were also cooks, door keepers or cleaners, hall men, hall administrative staff, patrol staff, pavilion and stone carving managers, librarians, and security guards (night shift only, and who were also responsible for sounding the time).

This administrative structure of *Shuyuan* has some semblance to that of contemporary universities. However, contemporary universities have distinct faculties, departments and research centres, and these cover a wide range of disciplines from sciences, (e.g., physics, chemistry, biology and geology), social sciences (e.g., sociology, economics, politics, cultural and media studies, and psychology), arts and humanities (e.g., language studies, fine art, and religious studies), and applied disciplines (e.g., business and management, philosophy, health, and engineering). While *Shuyuan* had a comprehensive structure, their disciplinary focus was more integrated than the fine disciplinary divisions we find in contemporary universities. In addition, *Shuyuan* focused on the training of literacy skills, e.g., reading and

writing, so that the students could prepare for the imperial examinations to become government officials of various categories, including ministers of major national departments, provincial governors, education commissioners, district magistrates, and other high-power positions. Contemporary universities, on the other hand, have far wider scope, teaching and training their students to become qualified professionals in virtually all fields in society. The following discussion on the curricula of the *Shuyuan* shows how the literacy skills of the students were systematically taught and trained in ancient Chinese *Shuyuan*.

### THE CURRICULUM OF SHUYUAN HAD A FOCUS ON READING AND WRITING

The teaching and curriculum in *Shuyuan* usually enjoyed more freedom than in government institutions. Nevertheless, it also followed a certain model or pattern. The curriculum of *Shuyuan* evolved steadily alongside social, political, economic and academic developments. In the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties, the curricula of various *Shuyuan* were relatively rich and extensive. In general, they centred around the studies of the *Jing* (the Classics, e.g., the Five Classics and the Four Books) and the *Shi* (histories, e.g., The Book of Historical Records). (Yang and Peng 15)

The major curriculum component for the *Shuyuan* in the Song dynasty was the “Five Classics”. It was not until the later Southern Song dynasty that the “Four Books” (with Zhu Xi’s connotations and commentaries) took the place of the “Five Classics”. Ever since then, the “Four Books” became the required texts for various *Shuyuan* and schools, and they were regarded as “standard keys or answers” to the Chinese Imperial Examinations, the historical civil service examination system of China (Yang and Peng 15). The Five Classics and the Four Books include the *Yi Jing* (the Book of Change), the *Shu Jing* (the Book of History), the *Shi Jing* (the Book of Songs), the *Li* (the Book of Rites), the *Chun Qiu* (Spring and Autumn Annals), the *Lun Yu* (the Analects), *Mengzi* (Mencius), the *Da Xue* (the Great Learning), and the *Zhong Yong* (the Doctrine of the Mean).

The historical civil service examination system of China, known as the *Keju* system, is commonly regarded as originating in the year 606 and officially ending in 1905, with a total span of 1,298 years. Through the *Keju* exams, Chinese emperors identified

individuals who would either immediately or eventually serve as grand councillors, ministers of major national departments, provincial governors, education commissioners, district magistrates, and in other high-powered positions. These positions bestowed financial rewards, prestige, power, fame, and many advantages to the official's entire extended family, including all descendants. Additionally, within hierarchical Confucian society, overall class, power, status, and prestige were generally reflected by such official positions won through success in these exams. (Suen and Yu 48)

Given the importance of the civil service examinations in China, the *Shuyuan*'s curriculum played a key role in developing the reading and writing skills of *Shuyuan* students. Apart from the "Five Classics" and the "Four Books" being the required texts or courses, there were also elective texts or courses, including "The Thirteen Classics with Commentaries", "The Records of the Grand Historian", "The Book of Han", "The Book of Later Han", and "The Records of Three Kingdoms". The students were expected to select one of these elective texts and then study it thoroughly. The learning styles, according to historical records, included reading the sentences aloud, adding annotations and commentaries, copying key selected texts, and elaborating on texts. The students were provided with a diary so that they could record what they did according to the pre-determined schedule. These learning styles show that, in Imperial China, much emphasis was laid on the relationship between reading (including reading the texts aloud), memorisation of classic texts, and writing. In other words, writing was heavily dependent on what the students read, how much they could memorise of what they had read, and how much of what they had read they could understand and elaborate on.

Since reading was so important in the *Shuyuan* curriculum, a detailed description of the readings is essential in helping readers understand how the *Shuyuan* curriculum was structured. The teaching and learning content of *Shuyuan* centred around the *Jing* (classics) and *Shi* (histories). There were eight major subjects in the curriculum, namely:

- (i) The *Jing* classics: In the Song dynasty, this included nine classics, e.g., "Mao's Poetry" (Mao Shi), "Documents of the Elder" (Shang Shu), "the Books of Rites" (Zhou li, and Li ji), "the Book of Changes" (Zhou yi), "the Spring and Autumn Annals" (Chun qiu zuo shi zhuan), "the Analects" (Lun Yu), "Mencius" (Meng Zi), and "the

Book of Filial Piety” (Xiao jing). The total number of words in the nine classics is approximately 480,090.

- (ii) The *Shi* histories: In the Qing dynasty, the study of history comprised four topics, namely biographies, chronicles, historiographies, and studies of decrees and regulations.
- (iii) Classical Chinese literary studies, e.g., the study of selected works of a particular school of scholarship. For example, during the Qing dynasty, there was a school of writing, named “Tongcheng school”, in which Yao Nai—whom we shall meet again in Chapter 8—was an influential figure. He had been a *Shanzhang* (Head of *Shuyuan*) for over 40 years, and many writers had been students at his *Shuyuan*.
- (iv) Poetry: *Shuyuan* promoted poetry reading and writing. The Imperial Examination also included poetry writing. Most *Shuyuan Shanzhang* and their students were poets. The commonly adopted poetry books in *Shuyuan* included “The Complete Tang Poems” (*Quan Tang Shi*), “The Selected Poems of the Song Dynasty” (*Song Shi Chao*), “The Selected Poems of the Yuan Dynasty” (*Yuan Shi Xuan*) (in three volumes), and “The Total Collection of Ming Dynasty Poetry” (*Ming Shi Zong*).
- (v) The study of written Chinese characters, their etymology and phonology: In teaching this subject, the *Shuyuan* would use “*Erya*” and “*Shuo Wen Jie Zi*” as key textbooks. The *Erya* is a dictionary or glossary. It contains definitions of abstract words and concrete words such as items of flora and fauna, including grasses, trees, insects and reptiles, fish, birds, wild animals, and domestic animals. The *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* is a comprehensive Chinese character dictionary from the Han Dynasty with detailed analyses of the structure of the Chinese characters.
- (vi) Mathematics, Arithmetic: the key text for this subject in the *Shuyuan* was “The Nine Chapters on the Mathematical Art” (*Jiu Zhang Suan Shu*).

- (vii) *Bagu* eight-legged essays and *Shitie* poems: Since the Southern Song and Early Yuan dynasties, the *Shuyuan* had evolved towards official or government institutions in terms of providing preparation courses for imperial examinations. In the Qing dynasty, there was a shift towards an “examination-oriented” curriculum centring around the *bagu* essays. *Bagu* essays were primarily based on Zhu Xi’s Collected Notes on the Four Books. Zhu Xi was regarded as the leader of the neo-Confucian school. Scholars in those days complained about the “shift” of the teaching focus in the *Shuyuan*, and some *Shuyuan Shanzhang* even regarded the *bagu* as “an enemy” (吾道之敌). However, since the civil service imperial examinations required it, they had to read and write these Neo-Confucian texts. Some *Shuyuan* took the reading of these “contemporary texts” as compulsory. The *Shuyuan* promoted the reading of around 100 Qing contemporary texts and some 20-30 Ming texts to help students learn how to write *bagu* essays appropriately.
- (viii) Natural science and technology: although the *Shuyuan* curriculum was heavily oriented towards the Classics and the Histories, there were also courses in natural sciences and in mathematics, physics, chemistry, astronomy, geography, biology (including medical science and agriculture). Nevertheless, the knowledge of these disciplines was taught primarily through the learning of Confucian classics, not as independent disciplines. For example, the “*Shi Jing*” (*the Book of Songs*) provides knowledge of biology, phenology, meteorology, and agricultural science. (Yang and Peng 16–21)

## THE TEACHING OF READING AND WRITING IN THE SHUYUAN

The *Shuyuan* advocated learner autonomy or self-study. Lectures were only given by *Shanzhang* to the students two to three times per month. The remaining time would be for the students to engage themselves in self-study. The learning activities of the *Shuyuan* students comprised attending lectures and self-study.

One of the roles that *Shuyuan* would play was to monitor the students' learning activities and progress. Unlike contemporary university students, who have more flexibility and freedom in determining their individual learning activities, the *Shuyuan* students had to record what they read on a daily basis into their learning schedule books. These schedule books were then carefully examined by the *Shanzhang* on a regular basis.

The teaching of reading and writing in the *Shuyuan* was arranged in such a way that progressive training was implemented in three major stages, equivalent to the contemporary primary, secondary, tertiary and postgraduate education (Yang and Peng 22). During the first stage, students between the ages of 8-15 would spend seven to eight years learning eleven course books. These included the *Xiaoxue* (books on Chinese characters, etymology and phonology), the *Daxue* (classics and biographies), the *Lun Yu* (*The Analects of Confucius*), and *Mengzi* (*The Book of Mencius*). They also included the Five Books and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. It should be noted that students at this stage were exposed to the reading of the Classics, regardless of how much of them they could understand. They would be required to read the texts aloud, copy the texts, and memorise the texts. There was not much creative writing involved at this stage, with "writing" often being interpreted as copying Chinese characters or texts.

During the second stage, students between fifteen and twenty-two years of age would spend three to four years reading course books, such as *Questions on the Great Learning*, *Collected Notes on the Analects*, *Collected Notes on Mencius*, *Questions on the Doctrine of the Mean*, and the Five Classics. There were also the original classical texts that they had read during stage one, but with connotations and commentaries. Their learning styles were not very different from those for stage one, but they were required and expected to understand the major texts they were reading. They would still copy and read aloud as their major learning activities. They would then spend another two to three years (equivalent to contemporary tertiary education) focusing on the *Tong Jian* (Documents of Ancient Books), the *Han Wen* (texts and grammar), the *Chu Ci* (*The Songs of Chu*), and the *Tong Dian* (*The Universal Encyclopedia of Statecraft*).

During this second stage, the students were not only expected to comprehend the texts that they had read during stage one, but also to start writing texts based closely on what they had read and comprehended. Reading and writing at this stage were integrated. The training of writing skills was particularly evident in the reading of texts and grammar sections. This training comprised analysing and understanding the discourse patterns and rules and the lexical and sentence grammar in the texts that students read. Intensive reading, instead of extensive reading, was emphasised at this stage, where the students were required to focus on reading one or two texts, by reading them over one hundred times. This differs

from the reading requirements for contemporary school and university students in that disciplinary and cross-disciplinary extensive reading is now emphasised and encouraged. One of the advantages of this type of intensive reading for the *Shuyuan* students, however, is that they could not only understand the content of what they were repeatedly reading, but also figure out and internalise the outline structures and the rhetorical devices through which meanings and intended meanings had been encoded by well-known and well-established authors. This process would lay a good and solid foundation for the *Shuyuan* students in terms of their writing output. Quality writing in *Shuyuan* focused both on structure and content. One of the desirable outcomes of the *Shuyuan* intensive reading was that the students could take the classic texts as models, and write similar well-constructed and content-rich texts with appropriately chosen or imitated rhetorical devices. *Shuyuan* students were well motivated because this intensive reading approach could lead to, in their own belief, achieving first-class learning, writing first-class essays, and becoming the educated elite, which would, in turn, lead them to promising and prestigious careers. The *Shuyuan* education had a good reputation for quality. It focused on both the process and the product in Chinese literacy development. While students at the first two stages of *Shuyuan* education were well trained in terms of accumulating subject knowledge for writing, they also acquired skills during the process of reading and writing process in order to focus explicitly on the writing product in the final stage of their education. This model of process- versus product -oriented Chinese writing also applies to contemporary teaching of Chinese writing, where primary and secondary school education are process-oriented while post-secondary and particularly post-graduate studies focus on writing output of the students. Students in post-graduate studies primarily learn to write, and write to learn.

Stage three was the stage where students were engaged in more advanced studies. This was also the final stage of their *Shuyuan* studies in the sense that the students rigorously prepared for the imperial civil service examinations. By this time, the *Shuyuan* students would normally be between twenty-two and twenty-five years old. The exclusive focus of this stage was on writing (learning to write), practicing contemporary writing, and practicing *bagu* writing, with the ultimate aim of achieving a first-class result in the imperial civil service examinations. All *Shuyuan* at the provincial and municipal levels became examination oriented, particularly during this third stage.

Although this third stage focused on writing, reading still occupied the majority of the students' learning time. The usual time allocation and study pattern was that the students would read for nine days, followed by a day of writing in whatever genre they were practicing. The rationale behind this



was that, by the time of the writing day, the students had already studied and internalised the writing style and the content. The reading days were seen as writing preparation time. On the writing day, when the topic was released, the students were thus usually well-prepared and confident enough to set up their theses or themes and develop the rhetorical structure, while recalling what they had read over the previous nine days. They were able to come up with a draft very quickly and to revise and fine-tune their essays. The power of brush strokes could become sharp and unstoppable, as the Chinese would say. In terms of the content, the theses and themes were expected to lead the whole text or discourse in its opening and conclusion through twists and turns. To adopt the metaphor of writing as a “battlefield”, the theses or themes were like a commander with a bugle horn. Sentences were like generals, words and characters were like soldiers. The previous readings and writing material were like weapons. The “soldiers” would centre around or follow the generals. As far as the magic key to success in writing is concerned, Su Shi, one of the eight prose masters of the Tang and Song Dynasties, suggested that “The theme is what the writing is all about. Other aspects of writing have all been scattered through the *Jing* classics, the *Shi* histories, the works of the philosophers, and collections of essays. It is only when the theme is settled, can other things then be taken up or considered” (Cheng D. 487). What leads to poor writing is that, by the time of writing, the discourse, theme and the structure are still unsettled. Then no matter how much effort and heart one puts into the writing, it will not be done appropriately.

This third *Shuyuan* stage was important in that it integrated the writing skills with all the previous training of reading and preliminary writing (merely in the form of copying characters and texts). According to Cheng Duanli of the Yuan Dynasty, if all the three stages were completed successfully, by the time a student reached twenty-two to twenty-three, or twenty-four to twenty-five, he should be able to have read enough to write good essays. Even if a student missed some time, or did not follow the exact sequence, he could still make it up before reaching thirty by spending two to three more years on additional reading and writing. “Writing an essay is like planting and harvesting. Haste makes waste, and the cart cannot be put before the horse” (Cheng D. 488).

## THE EXAMINATION-ORIENTED ASSESSMENT OF THE SHUYUAN

In later years, the examination courses of the *Shuyuan* laid exclusive emphasis on writing *bagu* essays (eight-legged essays) and *shitie* poems (standard exam poems). These were an indispensable part of the *Shuyuan* curriculum,

particularly during the Qing Dynasty. However, in the earlier Song dynasty, the *Shuyuan* put an emphasis on the writing of prose masters or *Shanzhang*, and down-played the role of being examination preparation courses. The *Shuyuan* students studied, what were for them, contemporary essays on their own rather than reading the Classics and Histories in their preparation for the imperial civil service examinations. However, by the time of the Northern Song Dynasty in the thirteenth century, examination courses had become an essential component of the *Shuyuan* curriculum.

Examination courses became even more dominant in the Ming and Qing dynasties (Yang and Peng 25). Examinations fell into two types: those held by the government; and those held by the local government officials. In addition, there were also examinations within the *Shuyuan* and which were administered by the *Shanzhang*. The frequency of examinations varied from *Shuyuan* to *Shuyuan*, ranging from one to six examinations per month.

The major content of the *Shuyuan* examinations included one *baguwen* based on Four Books, and one *shitie* poem (standard exam poem). The examination courses were primarily to prepare students for the Imperial Examination (or Civil Service Examination). There were also awards for top achievers.

As *shitie* poems and *baguwen* essays comprised the major content of the imperial civil examinations, it is important for the readers to have some background knowledge of these unique genres of writing. We have discussed and illustrated *baguwen* essays in the previous chapter, so we briefly describe the *shitie* poem in this section. The *shitie* poem was a format for testing poetry writing in the imperial civil service examinations during the Ming and Qing dynasties, basically from the mid-seventeenth century until the turn of the twentieth century. In addition to the encoded and implied meanings in the poetry, the very specific requirements for rhyming, symmetry, tonal balance and couplet styles also make these *shitie* poems difficult to write or compose. In this, they resemble the medieval *cursus*. The form originated in the Tang dynasty. Like the *baguwen*, the format of *shitie* poem changed over time. In the Tang and Song Dynasties, it comprised four or six couplets, while in the Qing Dynasty, it became eight couplets to complement the eight-legged style. Each couplet contained two five-character verses, and the verses had to be rhymed in various ways. There were many other specific requirements for composing *Shitie* poems. For example, certain rhymes such as a repetition rhyme and a synonym rhyme had to be avoided. The titles of *Shitie* poems were usually taken from a verse in a classical poem, or from a proverb. Those who took the civil service examinations had to be very knowledgeable about these verses and proverbs so that they could elaborate on them, and follow the explicit regulations for *shitie* poem writing. This made the intensive and extensive reading in the earlier stages of *Shuyuan* education described earlier so essential.

## THE SHUYUAN'S COLLECTION OF BOOKS

One of the major functions of the *Shuyuan* was to collect and print books. The *Shuyuan's* collection of books fell into three categories, namely “books for the public”, “books for teaching and learning”, and “academic books”. The “books for the public” offered an extensive range, covering *Jing* (Confucian classics), *Shi* (historical records), *Zi* (philosophical writings), and *Ji* (belles-lettres). The “books for teaching and learning” included textbooks and other curriculum teaching materials and references, and they were mostly related to specific courses within the curriculum. The “academic books” included research findings of *Shuyuan* staff and students. The latter two categories were unique to *Shuyuan*, and they were accorded high value.

The “books for the public” were classified into four sections, namely the Classics, the Histories, Philosophy and Belles-lettres pieces. Even though some will by now be familiar to readers, here we give a full list of titles under the Classics and Histories categories to show how diverse these were. Section 1 included “Jing (Classics)”, and comprised the *Yi Jing* (*The Book of Change*), the *Shu Jing* (*The Book of History*), the *Shi Jing* (*The Book of Songs*), the *Li Ji* (*The Book of Rites*), the *Yue* (*The Book of Music*), the *Chun Qiu* (*The Spring and Autumn Annals*), the *Xiao Jing* (*The Classic of Filial Piety*), the *Si Shu* (*Four Books*), i.e., the *Lun Yu* (*The Analects*), the *Mengzi* (*The Book of Mencius*), the *Da Xue* (*The Great Learning*), the *Zhong Yong* (*The Doctrine of the Mean*), the *Xiao Xue* (*The Lesser Learning*); and a number of dictionaries such as the *Erya*.

Section 2 included *Shi* (Histories), comprising the *Zheng Shi* (*Standard Dynastic Histories*), the *Bian Nian* (*Annals or Chronicles*), the *Ji Shi Ben Mo* (*Historical Events in their Entirety*), the *Bie Shi* (*Alternative Histories*), the *Za Shi* (*Miscellaneous Histories*), the *Zhao Ling Zou Yi* (*Edicts and Memorials*), *Zhuanji* (*Biographies*), *Shi Chao* (*Historical excerpts*), *Zaiji* (*Regional Histories*), *Shi Ling* (*Seasonal Ordinances*), *Di Li* (*The Geographical Gazetteer*), *Zhi Guan* (*Offices: official ranks and titles*), *Zheng Shu* (*Political Treaties and Ordinances*), *Mu Lu* (*Bibliographies*) and *Shi Ping* (*Historical Critiques*).

Section 3 focused on the major philosophers including the Confucians, the Buddhists, the Taoists and a number of other sects and texts, including books on agriculture, medicine and magic and divination.

Section 4 comprised *Ji* (*Belles-lettres*) which is where the *Wenxin Diaolong* was found as were other books of literary criticism and general collections of prose and poetry.

The “books for teaching and learning”, included annotations and commentaries of the classics and histories by influential scholars and the final category of “academic books”, included academic works by various *Shuyuan* staff

and students as well as famous scholars, including Zhou Zunyi, Cheng Hao, Cheng Yi, Zhang Zai, and Zhu Xi. This category also includes works by *Shuyuan Shanzhang*, and *Shuyuan* masters, and also collections of well-written pieces by *Shuyuan* students.

## THE ACADEMIC RESEARCH OF SHUYUAN

As far as the academic research atmosphere was concerned, *Shuyuan* placed a significant emphasis on self-study and academic interaction among the staff, as well as between staff and students. *Shuyuan* masters would generally aim to inspire learning, rather than “duck-feed” (spoon-feed) their students. For example, they would give one example for students to grapple with and understand so that they could then come up with three comparable examples themselves. Such an atmosphere created a positive influence for the development of creative and critical thinking skills in students’ writing.

There were three types of academic activities in *Shuyuan*: the normal day to day teaching activities within the *Shuyuan* (e.g., the various courses); academic exchanges between *Shuyuan*; and activities that were open to the general public. In the Southern Song dynasty, academic exchange activities were extremely popular. One example was the famous Neo-Confucian scholar, Zhu Xi, becoming involved in in-depth discussions with Zhang Shi, another famous Song dynasty scholar. Records show that the two masters argued for three days and nights over the meaning of “Doctrine of the Mean”.

In some ways, the influence of the *Shuyuan* can be seen in contemporary Chinese universities. For example, the types of interaction between students and staff, academic exchange activities, and community service, in particular providing books and seminars for the general public reflect *Shuyuan* practice. Contemporary Chinese university students and staff interact in many ways, not only through lectures, tutorials and seminars, but they also engage in face-to-face and online communication. They advocate learning and teaching autonomy. They do not, of course, write poetry or *baguwen* as *Shuyuan* students did, but they read and write academically within their disciplines and follow explicit and implicit discipline-specific academic writing rules and conventions.

Contemporary Chinese university students and staff also engage in academic exchange activities. They participate in exchange programs and attend local, regional and international conferences through which academic ideas are disseminated, exchanged and debated. Contemporary students and staff also realise the importance of serving the community and try to apply what they have learned and researched within the ivory tower to real and relevant issues

of concern to the community. In this way, universities aim to make students professionals who are able to serve the society in much the same way as the *Shuyuan* aimed to produce literate and educated people who could take up various important social roles in traditional Chinese society.

## THE TRANSFORMATION OF SHUYUAN IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

After a history of more than a millennium, the *Shuyuan* were abolished towards the end of the Qing Dynasty at the time of major social and political change, which we consider in detail in Chapter 8. Western influence and China's desire for modern knowledge and science undermined the role of the *Shuyuan* and created an urgent need for modern schools and universities. Chen Pingyuan (63-4) lists the following reasons to account for the demise of the *Shuyuan* in the twentieth-century China:

1. The irresistible Western learning (to be discussed in Chapter 8). Chinese in the twentieth century were desperate to learn about science, democracy and law. The establishment and dissemination of such disciplinary knowledge required a new educational system, which differed significantly from the traditional *Shuyuan*.
2. The propensity for "practical science". The Chinese education in the twentieth century wanted science rather than humanities. As we have seen, the major curricula of the traditional *Shuyuan* were not science-oriented.
3. Traditional *Shuyuan* lacked efficiency because of its high cost in terms of human resources. Western "class" teaching provided strong economic advantages.

Chen (63-4) also points out, however, that the traditional *Shuyuan* has contributed to the current universities in many ways. For example, the tradition of holistic and whole-person education has been inherited from the *Shuyuan*.

In this chapter, we have reviewed the history of Chinese *Shuyuan* particularly in their relation to Chinese academic reading and writing. Chinese has a long tradition of reading classics, the histories and other iconic texts in order to prepare students to write. This tradition helps explain why modern Chinese students

may have a propensity to quote the classics without explicit referencing, as this shows their competence, their extensive reading, and their remarkable ability to memorise. This chapter also shows that Chinese have traditionally paid great attention to the symbiotic relationship between reading and writing, especially in terms of what, how and when to read for subsequent writing activities. In addition, while the examination-oriented *bagu* essays and *shitie* poems are heavily dependent upon form, Chinese scholars, such as Chen Kui and Su Shi stressed that the meaning or theme was important. So meaning was often the primary concern, despite the apparent rigidity of the forms. The chapter concluded with reasons for the demise of *Shuyuan* and the rise of modern schools and universities, while indicating certain *Shuyuan* influences that can still be seen in contemporary Chinese universities.

In the next chapters, we move from the historical background and propose a number of fundamental principles of rhetorical arrangement and sequencing in Chinese.