As times goes by, the 13th Portuguese Poetry Recital Contest for Tertiary Education Institutions of China organized by the Portuguese Teaching and Research Centre of the Macao Polytechnic Institute has been held. The contest continued to receive support from the Tertiary of Education Services Offices and attracted 30 students from 12 universities in Macao and Mainland China. In the end, Liang Yingyi and Chu Xiaorui from Peking University and Liu Xingyu from Macao Polytechnic Institute won the first prize in the junior, intermediate and senior groups respectively. It is gratifying!

On the evening of 19 April this year, Macao Polytechnic Institute was particularly lively. The competitors from the Macao Polytechnic Institute, University of Macau, University of Saint Joseph, Macau University of Science and Technology in Macao, and Nankai University, Peking University, Fujian Normal University, Beijing International Studies University, Hebei Foreign Studies University, Communication University of China, Nanjing, Hainan Foreign Language College of Professional Education and Hunan Foreign Languages of Career Academy in Mainland China stood on the stage and recited their favourite Portuguese poetry. They were full of cheering teachers and students and the atmosphere was very lively.

The magazine interviewed leading teachers from five universities in the Mainland to listen to their preparations and stories, and their views on the contest. There are also winning tips, and tips for studying Portuguese of champions. Don’t miss it!

Preparation Sharing
of Leading Teachers

Hainan Province has just been designated as a “pilot free trade zone” by the central government. Hainan College of Foreign Studies in this province is the only institution in the island to offer a Portuguese program. It organized students to participate in the contest for the first time. Zheng Qi, the head of the program, said the college was very supportive of the three students participating. In addition to sending foreign teachers to train students in their pronunciation and intonation, they also appointed etiquette teachers in the tourism department to guide them in stage manners and styles, and train students’ emotions and expression skills on the stage.

The three students who respectively participated in the junior, middle and senior group contests were at their first, second and third year respectively. According to Zheng, the contest can stimulate students’ interest in learning, broaden their horizons and make them gain more experience. Portuguese is still a “minority language” in Mainland China. The introduction of such contests will encourage the students in the lower grades to study hard and get the chance to enter the contest. Meanwhile, it will also encourage more people who are interested in this language to apply for this major.

Wang Xiao is the deputy director of the Spanish and Portuguese Teaching Research Office in the Indo-European Language Department of the Fujian Normal University. She is also the leading teacher of this contest. “The students showed great enthusiasm for the contest. As a result, the whole class of the second-year students participated in the contest. Finally, two students were selected by the foreign teachers.” After a round of training in pronunciation, intonation and emotional expression, Wang thought that students performed better on the spot than they did in coaching.

She pointed out that many Portuguese programs in the Mainland are mainly teaching pronunciation and grammar, and that the poetry recitation contest enables students to learn more about the culture of Portuguese-speaking countries through Portuguese literature works. “They need to understand the life of the poet and the cultural background of the poetry in the process of preparation, which will increase their chances of contact and self-learning in Portuguese literature and culture.” This is a good attempt.

For Hua Lu, the head of the Portuguese
program of the Communication University of China, Nanjing, it is much easier to select students for the contest. “We have only one class (second year) and we have organized a contest for Portuguese poetry recitation before. The suitable candidates were soon selected.” Due to the lack of foreign teachers in Portuguese in the university, the students who would participate in the contest found the videos of foreigners’ recitation online by themselves. Fortunately, the students of the University had a lot of stage experience and got into a groove on the stage soon.

She also agreed that the poetry recitation contest has a greater role in promoting the culture of Portuguese-speaking countries. “The courses involving literature and culture are usually opened after the third year. The process by which a student chooses poetry for the recitation is the process of a comprehensive understanding of the background of the work, the author and other cultural knowledge.”

Hebei Institute of Communications is one of several private colleges in the Mainland that offer Portuguese language education. Nearly half of the 50 sophomores wanted to participate in the contest, said Yin Xuelu, the head of the Portuguese program at the Multilingual Teaching and Research Office of the university. Finally, three students were selected. The university made great efforts to train students, from choosing poems to correcting pronunciation, and foreign teachers guided them one by one. As a private university, the university’s Portuguese program is only eight years old. She is confident that the contest will help the public understand the Portuguese language major, encourage and promote a culture of learning and reading. This will help the overall development of this “new major”.

Min Xuefei, an associate professor of Spanish and Portuguese Department at Peking University, took two students to the contest this year. They lived up to expectations and won championships in the junior and intermediate groups. Min praised them for their outstanding performance, “It gives me a big surprise and I am very happy.”

Liang Yingi from Peking University, the champion in the junior group, was surprised to win the prize. She thanked the teacher who helped select poetry during the winter vacation and chose a poem she liked very much for her. “Poetry is about the author’s dialogue with an abstract person about life. It is very emotional and attractive,” she said. She admitted that the process of reciting poems was “intermittent” because of the numerous learning tasks. However, recitation is secondarily important. To practice emotional expression in place, she must read thoroughly the poet’s feelings, understand thoroughly the theme of the poem, and then listen to other poets’ interpretation of the same poem and gradually develop her own style.

It is impossible to imagine that she, who has never been to Portugal or Brazil, is infatuated with the Portuguese culture. She said that it all stemmed from the fanatical Samba culture she saw on books and television. “Samba culture is very charming and lively, and it resembles my character. Hah!” She did not dare to imagine attending Peking University at first, but studying Portuguese had always been her dream. When she applied for the university, she was very clear about her ideas, and finally entered Peking University to make friends and also an exercise for their self-presentation on the stage.

Winners Talk about Their Feelings

After the teachers’ sharing, it is the champion’s turn to talk about the experience. Liang Yingi from Peking University, the champion in the junior group, was surprised to win the prize. She thanked the teacher who helped select poetry during the winter vacation and chose a poem she liked very much for her. “Poetry is about the author’s dialogue with an abstract person about life. It is very emotional and attractive,” she said.

She believed that the students of Peking University have a high degree of learning consciousness and planning, which made her feel confident to give the students the right to prepare for the contest of their own. She was mainly responsible for selecting poems for the students to participate in the contest. “I have to pick works that they like personally, and that fit their own style,” she said. Since she is the Chinese translator of the works of the Portuguese writer Fernando Pessoa, she chose his poetry for one of the students. “The most important thing for students is to have a thorough understanding of the poet’s emotion, so that they can perform successfully.”

In her eyes, the participating teams have different styles. If it is not this contest, she believed that students of Peking University will hard to encounter students in Hainan, and it is difficult for them to exchange views on poetry, literature and learning Portuguese. The contest is a good opportunity for students majoring in Portuguese to make friends and also an exercise for their self-presentation on the stage.
The intermediate group champion Chu Xiaorui, also from Peking University, joked that his original intention to participate in the contest was to "take the opportunity to visit Macao" and he did not expect to win the championship. He loved the poetry of the Portuguese writer Fernando Pessoa chosen by his teacher for him because it reshaped modern values and was rich in meaning. "The author wants to overturn the old God's bondage to the modern man, so he derogates the old God, compares the bourgeoisie to a spitting corny man. He believes that the Holy Spirit is only a dove, and that the Virgin Mary is just a woman who knits, and then the new trinity that emphasizes reality and existence is remodeled for re-empowering life." He presented his understanding of poetry in recitation.

It is accidental that the name of Chu can be connected with the Portuguese language. As a student recommended for admission, he was able to choose any major he liked, but when he met Min Xuefei by chance, he felt that her teaching and research were fascinating and he decided to learn Portuguese. Later, he gradually discovered that there are many great writers in the Portuguese-speaking countries. They are rich in ideological connotation and naturally attracted him who loves literature. "From worshiping teachers to really loving Portuguese," learning becomes more interesting. Especially after a summer of exchange and study in Portugal, the study of Portuguese has become a particularly vivid and specific process.

He once lived in Italy for a short time and knows Latin and English. In addition, he learns music so he is sensitive to pronunciation. However, he believes that the best way to learn Portuguese well is to use the old language learning method of rote memorization. Reciting favorite texts and paragraphs is very helpful for learning grammar. He also has a unique secret, which is to record himself, to find out what is not good in the replay, and then to improve.

Liu Xingyu, a senior student majoring in Chinese-Portuguese translation at the Macao Polytechnic Institute, was awarded the champion of the senior group. She spent a lot of time preparing for the contest choosing "a poem that was a little difficult and that she loved." In the end, under the recommendation of the teacher, she chose a Brazilian poetry with great fluctuations in the emotions, which mainly described the strong feelings of the poet when he was exiled from his home. She tried to figure out the feelings in the poem for a long time, and even found a Brazilian reciter who had a better interpretation of this poem on Facebook and exchanged ideas on how to better present poetry. Her success was inseparable from the teacher and the senior’s guidance.

Surprisingly, Liu also participated in the senior team contest on behalf of the Macao Polytechnic Institute last year. She admitted that she had changed her mindset after losing her awards last year. She went through the mindset transition that she must win to relaxing and enjoying the show. This is probably the reason why she can play well and win the championship this time. She said, "If you want to win, you can’t lack luck, effort, or strength."

Liu has a special experience. She was transferred from the English Department to the Chinese-Portuguese Translation Department in the half way. "After studying English for a year, I felt it was a waste of such a good opportunity to learn Portuguese in Macao. Besides, if I study Portuguese at the Macao polytechnic Institute, I can also go to Portugal to study for a year." Of course, she also considered employment. "English is a common language and there are advantages in minority languages." With the close economic and trade exchanges between China and Portugal, there will be many opportunities for students studying the Chinese-Portuguese translation.

She believes that if students want to learn Portuguese well, they must first lay a solid grammatical foundation in the first and second year of university, which will have a great impact on the expression of the Portuguese in the future. She also warmly reminded the younger students that it is the best choice to listen to Portuguese news every day, which is very helpful to practice Chinese translation in the mind.