

# The influence of Chinese ancient poetry and literature on college students' mental anxiety

**Author:**Jie Chen<sup>1</sup> **Affiliation:**

<sup>1</sup>Chinese Teaching and Research Office, Zhumadian Preschool Education College, Zhumadian, China

**Corresponding author:**

Jie Chen,  
chenjiejk900119@163.com

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This study analyses the influence and infection of traditional Chinese culture, starting from the cultural influence of ancient Chinese poetry and literature, and explores the impact and healing effect of traditional Chinese poetry and literature on college students' psychological anxiety. Combining with traditional Chinese culture, it proposes intervention and treatment strategies for college students' psychological anxiety. Through volunteer recruitment, 100 college students were recruited for comparative experiments, and the subjects were divided into an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group participants regularly participate in Chinese ancient poetry and literature appreciation courses during the experimental period, and form an ancient poetry and literature learning group for discussion and learning. Research has found that psychological anxiety is a common psychological problem among contemporary college students, with most of them experiencing varying degrees of psychological anxiety. After the experiment, the number of patients with severe anxiety disorder decreased by 64.21%, while the number of patients with moderate anxiety disorder decreased by 57.36%. Under the artistic influence of traditional Chinese culture, the anxiety state of students with mental anxiety has been significantly improved, and the overall satisfaction score of students with treatment intervention plans is relatively high.

**Contribution:** This study uses the profound historical heritage of Chinese ancient poetry and literature to help contemporary college students adjust their psychological state and reach the psychological adjustment under the infection of Chinese tradition culture. During the learning and appreciation of Chinese ancient poetry, literature and culture, students can comprehend the literature advancement in Chinese society, also influenced by the excellent traditional Chinese culture, for enhancing the humanistic quality and mental health level. The results of this study can be utilised by scholars in the field of the psychology of religion and public theology.

**Keywords:** traditional culture; ancient poetry; college student; spiritual level; mental anxiety; literature; art therapy; psychological intervention.

## Introduction

Under the long-term selection and historical dust, there are certain works in the vast sea of ancient literature that still maintain their enduring vitality and purify the readers' spiritual world. Among these ancient literary works, on the whole, classical poetry can be regarded as a type of vitality and humanistic spirit. In recent years, with the increasing voice of building a 'humanities classroom', the importance of classical poetry as the essence of traditional Chinese culture is self-evident. Therefore, the government, educational institutions and schools continue to advocate new teaching concepts to strengthen quality education. The importance of classical poetry has been recognised by many educational reformers, scholars and front-line teachers in the field of Chinese teaching. Against the background of the new curriculum reform, the study of ancient poetry can help students improve their humanistic quality and enhance their aesthetic appreciation and cultural taste. The accumulation of students' knowledge of ancient poetry has been gradually decreasing in China, and the cultural tradition of poetry teaching has been difficult to sustain, especially in the modern information society, where the popularisation of new culture with TV and Internet as the means of communication has caused a huge impact on students' learning of traditional classics.

Classical poetry can be said to be a higher language art. The language is beautiful and vivid, and it gives the poet strong emotion. The requirements of ancient poetry on the refinement of language are different from our daily language, and even written language cannot match its

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value. Ancient poetry teaching can deepen students' understanding of traditional classical Chinese works and improve their language expression ability. Ancient poetry, as an elegant form of classical Chinese, is a cultural treasure left behind by the Chinese nation. The Chinese nation has stood among the nations of the world for five thousand years, not only experiencing the glory of a prosperous era, but also experiencing internal and external troubles. However, Chinese civilisation has not disappeared as a result. The artistic beauty of classical poetry is dazzling and beautiful, and in a certain sense, it cannot even be surpassed and copied. Therefore, it can be said that the study of ancient poetry is an important component of improving the humanistic cultivation of high school students. Humanistic spirit is a kind of inner spiritual power of human being. Strengthening the construction of students' humanistic spirit through the teaching of ancient poetry helps students to think about 'how to become a person with a healthy personality, how to realise their own value and give back to the society', so as to build their values and help them cope with psychological difficulties such as psychological anxiety in life.

Psychological anxiety is the feeling of panic and unease experienced by individuals when dealing with challenges or obstacles that they may not be able to overcome in a timely manner or that they fear they cannot resolve effectively. When experienced within reasonable limits, psychological anxiety can motivate individuals to engage in behaviours that increase their self-efficacy. However, if individuals experience excessive psychological anxiety, this can have a detrimental impact on their mental well-being, thus resulting in negative emotions (Skov & Nadal 2020). Psychological anxiety is an ordinary negative emotion that people often experience. Typically, the social environment not only presents people with a place to reside but also offers a platform for constant challenges. In this light, being under the influence of the societal environment can trigger anxiety among individuals. Social advancement entails people from different social classes collaborating, but societal pressure disproportionately weighs on certain individuals, leading to social anxiety among them (Denise & Tariman 2021). Numerous psychological treatments have been proposed to mitigate social groups' psychological anxiety, such as hypnotherapy and incentive therapy. During hypnotherapy, patients are guided into a deep sleep through hypnosis to alleviate subconscious psychological anxiety. Verbal motivation involves communicating with patients to reduce their trade-related pressure, understand their psychological changes and gradually alleviate their anxiety by constructing a conversation system based on this insight. Culture and art adjuvant therapy is also a common anxiety adjuvant therapy in psychology. It uses the strong appeal of art and culture to help patients alleviate their inner pressure and anxiety.

When people are faced with problems that cannot be handled or goals that cannot be achieved, they may suffer setbacks in

self-confidence and self-esteem. Strong frustration and guilt lead to tension and anxiety. With the advancement of social development and increasingly competitive social environment, students in colleges are facing pressure from society, family and others. The sense of competition is increasingly becoming stronger, and college students are under severe psychological pressure. Being under strong pressure for a long time will seriously hinder college students' health (both body and mind), make them fall into negative emotions and reduce the quality of life (Yin et al. 2021). Therefore, in recent years, college students' mental health problems has continued to draw attention. How to reduce or eliminate the tension and anxiety of college students has become a concern for all sectors of society. Colleges and universities offer a diverse range of teaching contents with students often undertaking several disciplines in a semester. The broad objective is to enhance their comprehensive abilities and qualities while establishing a fundamental education infrastructure that supports national talent development. Nonetheless, some students experience anxiety psychology because they find it challenging to meet the teaching demands of higher institutions and cope with the heavy workload. In general, two factors contribute mainly to the genesis of anxiety disorder among students. Firstly, personal psychological factors, such as a poor psychological tolerance to cope with varied learning contents, trigger anxiety psychology and further anxiety. Secondly, environmental factors, social environment and family environment have an impact on college students' anxiety, leading to the reduction of their mentally healthy level.

Many researchers have conducted comprehensive research on the generation and intervention mechanism of anxiety disorder. Jerling and Heyns have conducted a comprehensive study on the role and mechanism of image and music guided intervention and explored the impact on patients with mental health problems in the form of literature review, including relevant literature of groups and individuals. The research conducted comprehensive analysis in many aspects. The research objects include stroke patients, patients with mental disorders, healthy adults and other groups. The results show that image and music guidance intervention can effectively help different groups improve their emotional state, quality of life and cohesion (Jerling & Heyns 2020). Hurtado and other scholars studied the formulation of relevant clinical guidelines for the treatment of generalised anxiety disorder with adaptive methods sorted out the clinical guidelines according to the principle of adaptability and verified them in primary mental health service institutions in Spain. The study invited a number of authoritative family doctors, clinical psychologists and psychiatrists to conduct focus group discussions and delete the guidelines. The proposal of clinical guidelines for adaptive treatment of generalised anxiety disorder simplifies the relevant treatment process and provides a reference for improving the quality of treatment and nursing (Hurtado et al. 2020a, b). Brehl and his team proposed a treatment mechanism model based on

predictive neural biomarkers for the individualised treatment of anxiety disorder, defined three different neural markers and analysed the influence of amygdala reactivity on patients with anxiety disorder. The study found that there are potential differences in neurobiological mechanisms between patients, which corresponds to the individualised treatment choice in psychiatry. The study applied cognitive neuroscience theory to practical clinical inspiration, which has important guiding significance for personalised anxiety treatment (Brehl et al. 2020).

Classical poetry combines the essence of China's outstanding historical and cultural connotation and has a profound humanistic spirit. It can purify and cleanse the readers' hearts, help readers absorb the spiritual power transmitted from the words in the appreciation and understanding of classical poetry and thus establish a positive life philosophy. When an individual falls into a psychological crisis, the internal spiritual influence and appeal of classical poetry can help individuals achieve psychological relaxation, help individuals get rid of psychological barriers such as mental anxiety and alleviate individual psychological stress. In view of the powerful spiritual role of ancient poetry literature, this paper studies the introduction of literature and art therapy in the mental anxiety treatment for students in colleges, the use of classical poetry literature teaching for relieving the psychological stress of anxious subjects, the exploration of a new programme of psychological anxiety treatment and the verification of the effect of classical poetry literature in the psychological anxiety treatment for students in colleges through experimental comparison.

## Subjects and methods

### Study setting

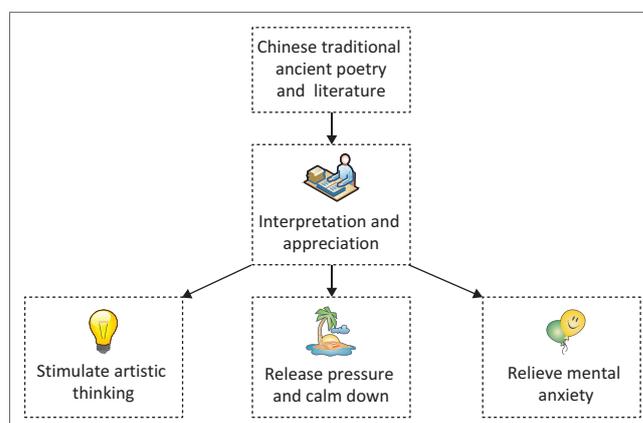
With the advancement of modern society, civil pace of life is accelerating day by day. People have been under heavy life and work pressure for a long time. Psychological anxiety has become a common mental health problem in modern society. With the increasing social competition, the incidence of psychological problems of modern people has increased year by year, and people's attention to mental health has gradually increased. Being in anxiety for a long time will affect people's life law, reduce the quality of life and endanger their health development both physically and mentally. It is required to actively explore the ways of relieving and releasing stress emotions, enrich anxiety relief means and enhance the quality of life in modern society. Therefore, the research takes Chinese traditional ancient poetry as the starting point to analyse the impact of ancient poetry and literature on students' mental anxiety.

### Design

With the advancement of modern society, the pace of life and work is accelerating. The intensification of social competition puts people under pressure for a long time. Anxiety is a common psychological problem (Brown et al. 2020). When people are faced with insurmountable obstacles or are unable

to achieve their own goals, their self-esteem and self-confidence will be affected, resulting in frustration, guilt and anxiety. Excessive anxiety will affect people's daily life, showing symptoms such as restlessness, physical fatigue and sleep disorder from the aspects of psychological state and physical representation, which greatly reduces people's quality of life (Wardenaar et al. 2021). Therefore, how to alleviate people's anxiety in modern society has become the focus of attention. All sectors of society actively explore ways to alleviate anxiety, providing reference for the relief and treatment of anxiety. In addition to drug therapy, art and culture adjuvant therapy is also a means of psychological anxiety treatment. The intervention of traditional culture can effectively alleviate anxiety and help patients relieve psychological pressure and anxiety. The influence of traditional ancient poetry and literature culture can help anxiety patients calm their anxiety and release the pressure accumulated in their hearts. The mechanism of traditional Chinese ancient poetry and literature culture on relieving anxiety is shown in Figure 1. Chinese traditional ancient poetry and literature culture has experienced thousands of years of precipitation, with unique form and profound aesthetic connotation. Through the interpretation and appreciation of Chinese traditional ancient poetry and literature, patients with mental anxiety can perceive the creative thinking and artistic taste in traditional ancient poetry and literature, which can effectively help patients with mental anxiety release their inner pressure while improving their aesthetic taste and obtain a calm and peaceful sensory experience (Hurtado et al. 2020a, b).

A total of 100 college student volunteers with mental anxiety problems were recruited for the experimental study. All the volunteers passed the examination of anxiety level, and the anxiety level was distributed in mild, moderate and severe levels. The volunteers were informed of the contents and requirements of the experiment in detail before the experiment, and all volunteers participating in the experiment sign the informed consent form. The volunteers were assigned into group of experiment and control. During the experiment, the experiment group subjects regularly participated in the course of Chinese ancient poetry and



**FIGURE 1:** Mechanism of Chinese traditional lacquer art culture on relieving anxiety.

literature appreciation and formed an ancient poetry and literature learning group for discussion and learning. The experimental group gave lectures on ancient poetry and literature twice a week for 90 min – 120 min. The control group subjects participated in no relevant activities and courses during the experiment and maintained the normal pace and arrangement of life. The experiment lasted for 3 months and ensured communication with the subjects at least once every half month to understand and record the changes of the subjects' anxiety state. The research uses the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0 to test and analyse the data of the collected questionnaire and makes a comparative study on the data statistical results. The rater reliability method is used to verify the validity of the data, and the reliability calculation function is expressed as follows:

$$\omega = \frac{\sum R^2 - \frac{(\sum R)^2}{N}}{\frac{1}{12} F^2 (N^3 - N)} \quad [\text{Eqn 1}]$$

Where  $R$  represents the sum of the grades of the subjects,  $F$  is the number of raters and  $N$  is the number of subjects.

## Results

The mental anxiety scores of 100 volunteers were statistically analysed. The statistical results of the anxiety level scores of the subjects are shown in Figure 2.

As can be seen from Figure 2, the subjects had different levels of mental anxiety, which met the standards of experimental volunteers. The number of students with mild, moderate and severe anxiety were 33, 31 and 36, respectively. The comparison of the effect of Chinese ancient poetry on the anxiety before and after the experiment is shown in Figure 3.

As can be seen from Figure 3, after the intervention treatment of Chinese traditional ancient poetry and literature, the number of patients with severe anxiety disorder decreased by 64.21% and the number of patients with moderate anxiety disorder decreased by 57.36%. Finally, the feasibility of Chinese traditional culture intervention treatment is reflected through the subjective evaluation of students. The degree of satisfaction from dissatisfaction to very satisfied is divided into 0 ~ 4 levels. The satisfaction evaluation results of the research object are shown in Figure 4.

As can be seen from Figure 4, among male and female target groups, with the increase of intervention treatment time, students' satisfaction with traditional culture intervention treatment showed an upward trend and finally gave a very satisfactory evaluation of the treatment scheme. Comparing the intervention effects of ancient poetry, and art therapy with group and basic psychological intervention therapy, on college students' psychological anxiety, the changes in

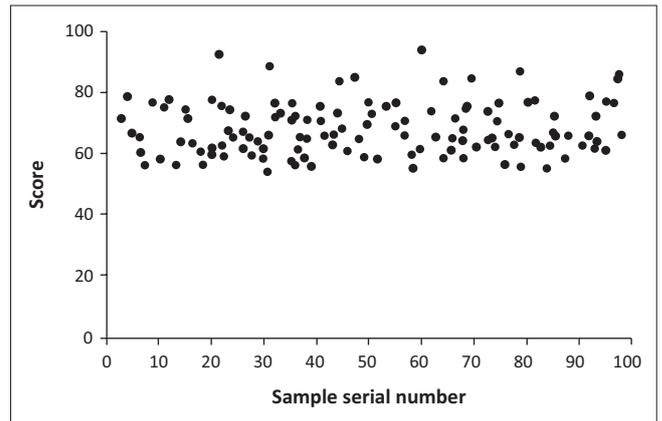


FIGURE 2: Statistical results of anxiety rating scores of 100 subjects.

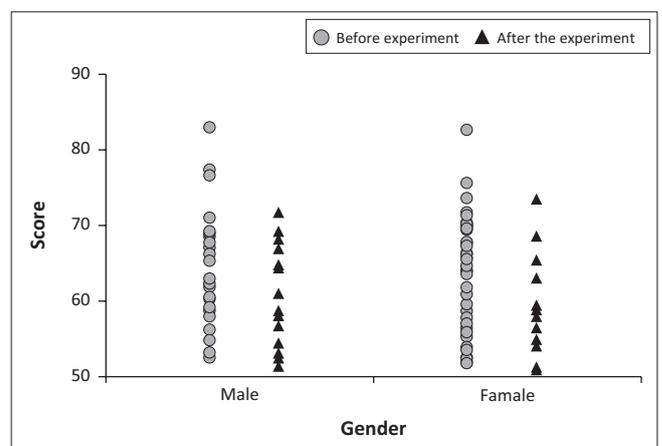
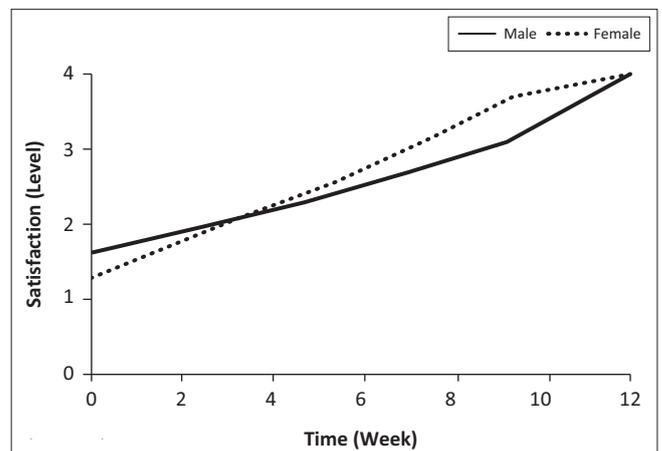


FIGURE 3: Comparison of anxiety scores before and after the experiment.

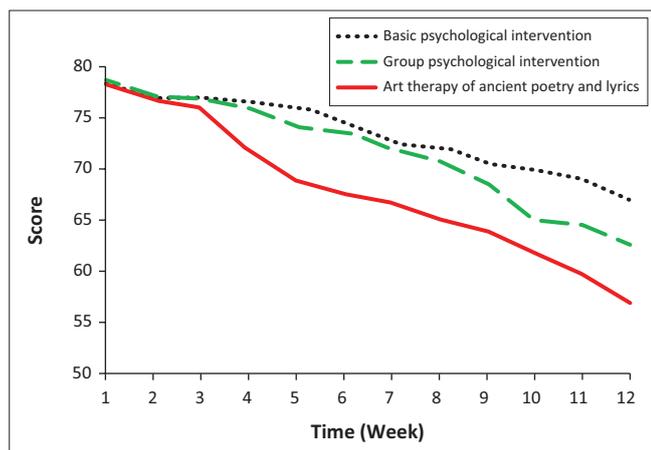


Source: Obtained from experimental statistics.

FIGURE 4: Satisfaction evaluation results of research objects.

college students' psychological anxiety scores under the three therapies are shown in Figure 5.

As evident from Figure 5, during the 3-month treatment, the subjects' anxiety score decreased fastest and the highest under the intervention of ancient poetry and art therapy. The average anxiety score decreased from 78.35 points to 57.14 points, effectively alleviating the anxiety problems, and the treatment effect was significantly better than group



**FIGURE 5:** Changes in psychological anxiety scores of college students under three treatments.

psychological intervention therapy and basic psychological intervention therapy.

## Discussion

From the research experimental results, it can be seen that after intervention treatment with traditional Chinese poetry and literature, the number of patients with severe anxiety disorder decreased by 64.21% and the number of patients with moderate anxiety disorder decreased by 57.36%. From the evaluation results of students' satisfaction with treatment, it can also be seen that the treated students generally have a high satisfaction with ancient poetry and art therapy. In both male and female target groups, with the increase of intervention treatment time, students' satisfaction with traditional cultural intervention treatment shows an upward trend, and ultimately, have given very satisfactory evaluations of the treatment plan. In comparison with group psychological intervention therapy and basic psychological intervention therapy, the ancient poetry and art therapy also showed significant advantages. Under the intervention of ancient poetry and art therapy, the anxiety score decreased the fastest and the largest.

Mental anxiety is a common mental health problem faced by contemporary college students. Because of the joint action of social environment, family background, personal development and other factors, contemporary college students generally have different degrees of mental anxiety (Horigome et al. 2020). The main anxiety causes of students in colleges are internal and external factors such as personality factors, students' lack of self-confidence, school reasons and family reasons. The university represents a critical transition stage for students where they begin to engage with society, exposed to varied ideological influences that bring about a rapid transformation of their mindset. Unfortunately, some students suffer mental distress as they get captivated by negative ideas, hold distorted values and display little sense of social responsibility coupled with blurry dreams and aspirations. Moreover, students tend to experience anxiety when facing different kinds of pressure, such as academic, employment and social pressures (Awano et al. 2020). Numerous studies emphasise that maintaining a moderate

level of anxiety can help students concentrate and study more attentively, ultimately improving their academic performance (Mars et al. 2021). However, when anxiety reaches an excessive level and persists over time, it negatively impacts students' physical and mental health, diminishes their interest in learning and ultimately leads to burnout that undermines their academic and personal life. Long-term and excessive anxiety can disrupt students' usual life routine, impair their physical and mental health and hinder their overall personal growth, impeding society's effort to develop a harmonious environment. Therefore, measures must be taken to mitigate students' negative emotions, alleviate anxiety and enhance their mental health levels.

A mental health level statistic study of college students is made. The results show that the subjects have different degrees of mental anxiety, among which the number of students with mild, moderate and severe anxiety are 33, 31 and 36, respectively. Anxiety disorder is a widely observed psychology disease in today's society. It is required to actively explore ways to relieve and treat anxiety disorder, help anxiety patients maintain mind health. Over the years, the pace of life has accelerated considerably, sparked by the swift process of economic globalisation. Consequently, stern competition in work, study and society has led to mounting mental health issues among people. College students who are yet to mature and possess inadequate psychological fortitude, are more prone to anxiety and negative emotions, leading to the possibility of eventually developing mental anxiety disorders because of a prolonged accumulation of negative emotions (Jin et al. 2021). Anxiety is a reaction caused by individuals experiencing a decline in the value characteristics of current or future happenings. The primary objective of anxiety is to stir people to take timely and appropriate steps, leveraging different value resources, to counteract the decline in value characteristics of reality or future happenings and steer them towards progress. Hence, appropriate levels of anxiety help individuals concentrate better and enhance their work and learning efficiency. However, severe anxiety can lead to emotional or physiological illnesses that significantly jeopardise patients' mental and physical health (Mousavi et al. 2021). It is imperative to identify an adequate approach to discreetly raise the mental health standards of college students, assuage negative emotions and subsequently alleviate mental anxiety disorders.

With the continuous acceleration of economic globalisation, competition has also become increasingly fierce. As a result, mental health problems have arisen. College students who are not mature enough in their thinking and have poor psychological qualities, make them more susceptible to stress. Long-term accumulation of negative emotions may cause disorder of anxiety among college students (Jin et al. 2020). Anxiety is an emotional reflection of a person's serious deterioration in the value characteristics of reality or future things. It serves as a mechanism designed to direct people towards prompt action, mobilise diverse values resources and effectively avert the profound decline of value characteristics pertaining to real or future circumstances,

steering them towards betterment. Thus, appropriate anxiety levels induce concentration, enhance work and learning efficiency, while severe anxiety can trigger emotional or physiological disturbances, inexorably compromising individuals' mental and physical well-being (Mousavi et al. 2020). Hence, a suitable way to subtly improve the student mental health level in college, alleviate their negative emotions and thus alleviate their mental anxiety disorder is imperative.

College students experience stress mainly from academic and social interactions. Unlike their high school counterparts, college learning models require students to possess high levels of initiative, autonomy, positive exploration and self-directed learning. However, some students struggle to adapt to these changes, resulting in learning disabilities, exam anxiety and general anxiety. Along with improving social and economic developments, parents nowadays overindulge their children, resulting in their decreased psychological resilience and defence mechanisms. Therefore, when leaving their family and entering a communal setting, students may exhibit low willpower and emotional control when tackling difficulties and setbacks, ultimately wrestling with negative emotions including mental anxiety during the problem-solving process (Han & Sun 2015). Therefore, the research focuses on Chinese traditional culture and uses ancient poetry literature for treating anxiety, aiming to open up students' minds and help students form positive values by virtue in traditional culture, so as to help students alleviate psychological stress and solve college students' psychological anxiety. The Chinese cultural heritage represents a primary source of spirituality within China. Remaining unchanged for over a millennium, traditional culture has significantly impacted the continued growth and development of Chinese civilisation. By incorporating traditional cultural values into everyday teaching practices, these invaluable cultural assets can be effectively preserved and inherited. It can also enrich students' spiritual world with the cultural heritage of traditional culture, helping them overcome the difficulties they face in life and study, thus relieving anxieties.

The study used comparative experiments to verify the effect of traditional Chinese poetry and literature on students' mental anxiety. The results showed that after intervention and treatment with traditional Chinese poetry and literature, the number of students with mild, moderate and severe anxiety significantly decreased and the anxiety level scores of the experimental subjects all decreased. This proves that traditional Chinese poetry and literature has a certain effect on alleviating mental anxiety in college students. After the experiment, the number of patients with severe anxiety disorder decreased by 64.21%, while the number of patients with moderate anxiety disorder decreased by 57.36%. Under the artistic influence of traditional Chinese culture, the anxiety state of students with mental anxiety has been significantly improved. From classic ancient poetry, it can be seen that literature is actually a form of human learning. Only by expressing the essence of life can literary works have long-lasting artistic charm. Many ancient poetry works in the current textbooks directly or indirectly

express life consciousness, reflecting profound philosophical principles. Specifically, it is manifested as the great ambition to serve the country and make contributions, the tranquil and leisurely spirit of enjoying the beautiful scenery with love for nature, the self-sufficient spirit of our path, the hard and sorrowful fate of being obedient and ambitious and the sorrow and sorrow of the fleeting time of life. Therefore, ancient poetry, as a precious cultural heritage, contains rich philosophical principles and enormous humanistic educational value. Leading students to experience this awareness and experience of life can help them comprehend profound philosophical principles in ancient poetry, which is of great significance for cultivating students' humanistic spirit and positive psychology, and thus has a therapeutic effect on students' psychological anxiety.

The study compared the intervention effects of ancient poetry art therapy with group psychological intervention therapy and basic psychological intervention therapy on college students' psychological anxiety. Under the intervention of ancient poetry art therapy, the average anxiety score of college students decreased from 78.35 points to 57.14 points, and the treatment effect was significantly better than group psychological intervention therapy and basic psychological intervention therapy. The research results demonstrate the effectiveness of ancient poetry in psychological intervention for college students and prove that ancient poetry can help college students establish a positive and upward attitude towards life. In the traditional classical culture of China, there is the traditional thought of unity of heaven and humanity, saintliness inside and kingliness outside. This thought is translated into poetry, which shows a kind of struggle against life that is not afraid of hardship and is aggressive. In poetry, it is transformed into the feeling of poetry and existence that appreciate life. This Confucian ideology of active utilisation of the world is a concentrated reflection of the profound cultural heritage of the artistic ideas of Chinese classical poetry. The positive and optimistic themes in ancient poetry and works are mostly inspired by a sense of self injury and self loss, evoking a sense of self-love, including a humanistic character that young people lack that never fails and encourages life. Such spirit makes us need to think about where our young people's morale and character lie. When encountering setbacks, they may feel depressed, abandoned or commit suicide. They ignore the value of their own life existence and abandon their sense of family and social responsibility. Today's youth should, through the essence of these classical poems, develop a yearning for a better life in the universe and nature and realise the value of each individual's life existence.

## Conclusion

The promotion of traditional Chinese poetry and literature not only helps to promote traditional Chinese culture and spirit but also helps people improve their cultural literacy and artistic taste, cultivate their artistic creative thinking and consciousness and enhance people's artistic aesthetic taste. At the same time, it enables people to obtain high-quality

aesthetic experiences, which to some extent helps modern people alleviate their anxiety in life and work, It has a certain therapeutic effect on audience anxiety treating. The study validated the therapeutic effect of ancient poetry and art therapy on college students' psychological anxiety through experiments. The results showed that with artistic influence of traditional Chinese culture, the anxiety state of college students was significantly improved under the intervention of ancient poetry and art therapy. After treatment, the number of patients with severe anxiety disorder decreased by 64.21%, and the number of patients with moderate anxiety disorder decreased by 57.36%. The overall satisfaction score of students with the treatment intervention plan was relatively high. The therapeutic effect of ancient poetry art therapy is significantly superior to group psychological intervention therapy and basic psychological intervention therapy. Under the intervention of ancient poetry art therapy, the average anxiety score of college students decreased from 78.35 points to 57.14 points, proving the effectiveness and superiority of ancient poetry art therapy. By interpreting and appreciating traditional Chinese poetry and literary culture, we can gain historical deposits and insights from traditional Chinese poetry and literary works and gain a peaceful sensory experience in the fast-paced and high-pressure modern life, thereby releasing the long-standing pressure emotions and alleviating anxiety. The study selected 100 college students for a comparative experiment, with a small sample size that is easily influenced by individual differences. Future research can further expand the sample size, analyse the therapeutic effect of ancient poetry art therapy through large-scale psychological intervention experiments and explore efficient treatment plans for college students' psychological anxiety.

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### Competing interests

The author declares that no financial or personal relationships inappropriately influenced the writing of this article.

### Author's contributions

J.C. is the sole author of this research article.

### Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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## Data availability

All data generated or analysed during this study are included in this published article.

## Disclaimer

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