The Point of View --
The Narrative Quality in Wang Wei's Poems

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SUMMARY

This paper begins by pointing out that the famous Tang dynasty poet, Wang Wei, was also a painter and musician. Then, by close examination of half a dozen of Wang Wei's poems (including "Deer Walled," "Farewell in the Mountains," and "Sitting alone on an Autumn Night"), the author tries to explain exactly how Wang Wei's "painter's eye" influenced his poetic narration. The author concludes that Wang Wei often employs a shifting viewpoint (from first person to third, and back, etc.) in his poems which helps him to capture "a most significant moment," and sometimes maintain a "purely detached" narrative point of view.

KEY WORDS

Wang Wei
point of view
narration
"painter's eye"
shifting viewpoint
Bakhtin
emptiness
monologue
dialogue
travelogue

There are paintings in the poems of Wang Wei, and there are poems in his paintings.

-- Su Shih

(*Ch'üan T'ang shih* 125. 1234)

Wang Wei occupies a special position among the most famous T'ang poets for many reasons. One of the reasons for this, I think, is the narrative quality in his poems, especially his way of handling point of view. Wang Wei was mainly a poet, but also a painter and musician.[1] Naturally, when he writes poems with the brush-pen, Wang Wei may consciously or unconsciously write with a painter's eye and musician's ears which would enable him to add and cultivate some unique dimensions to his poetry. In the following discussion, I will explore the use of "point of view" in some of his most representative poems and his unique artistic features. According to Stanzel, "Point of view is a precise term" (Stanzel, 9). The general meaning of it is "viewpoint," "attitude toward a question." The special meaning of it is "standpoint from which a story is narrated or from which an event is perceived by a character in the narrative" (Ibid). Concretely speaking, the special meaning of "point of view" contains two functions: one is to narrate, "to transmit something in words"; the other is "to experience, to perceive, to know as a character what is happening in the fictional space" (Ibid). The term "point of view" I am discussing here is confined in its special meaning.

My main concern is to see how these two functional aspects of "point of view" work separately or overlappingly in Wang Wei's poems.

Visual Pleasure

In his *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry the High T'ang,* Owen says that "most of those who have written on his [Wang Wei] poetry have found something of the painter's eye in his work."[2] However, it would still be interesting to see how to define "the painter's eye" and how it affects Wang Wei's poetry. "The painter's eye" could be considered as a creative subjectivity in the process of creation, or as an aesthetic object set in the poem and perceptible to the sensitive reader. Here, I want to isolate the artistic work by ignoring the would-be poet's subjective activity in the process of his writing, and focus on the possible objective interpretation from a reader's appreciative perspective. For me, the so called "painter's eye" here mainly refers to a special visual quality in the written discourse. Concretely speaking, the reader in his/her reading may feel that he sees the described objects through an imaginary eye (implied author's eye), and observes the well-organized perspective layers by an adjustable zoom-lens, and finally gets the wholeness of a picture in the mind. Of course, the imaginary picture we may get from Wang Wei will have nothing to do with abstract, fragmentary modern or post-modern paintings. Instead, we should expect a classical Chinese brush-pen painting. It's flat rather than three-dimensional, impressionistic rather than detailed and realistic. When Lessing talks about the difference between painting (including sculpture) and poetry in his famous *Laocoön,* he points out that painting employs "figures and colors in space," and poetry "articulate[s] sounds in time." The objects and signs in painting are "coexistent" and those in poetry are "successive." That is to say, painting "can only avail itself of

one moment of action."[3] In this sense, what I try to do here is to find out how Wang Wei grasps a most significant moment, "the most pregnant" "by which what has gone before and what is to follow will be most intelligible."[4] Of course this fixed moment here appears in a written form, in a special Chinese poetic form, either the ancient-style (including *yüeh-fu*) or the modern style poetry. The poet cannot show the described objects in a moment to the audience all at once, like a real painting which allows the audience to choose where to start their seeing. The poet has to show it in successive sequence. But Wang Wei uses highly condensed language and limited lines to describe sometimes a special moment in his poems that may be called "narrating pictures." This kind of almost "frozen" moment is confined and framed in a nice quatrain with a painting quality. The audience is led line-by-line to grasp the whole picture in the poem. This line-by-line successive process may represent the movement of the painter's eye, only through which one can perceive the picture part by part, and then draw a whole picture in one's mind by the inspired imagination. The twenty poems in Wang Wei's *Wang Ch'uan Collection* are probably the most representative in terms of this painting or "painterly" quality. Each poem describes one famous scene of the Wang ch'uan estate. Let us first look at "Deer Walled," one among the twenty poems.

> Deer Walled[5] 鹿柴
>
> In the empty mountain no one is seen,
> Only heard are the echoes of someone's talking.
> Returning sunlight penetrates the deep woods,
> Once again illuminates the top of green moss.

Obviously these two couplets focus on describing one scene, but from two different standings. In the first couplet, the key word is "empty," which is both descriptive and allusive. The

mountain is empty, not because of lack of trees, plants and animals, but for lack of human beings. In this sense, we may interpret the meaning of "emptiness" as getting away or being remote from the human society, the worldly land. Further, "emptiness" could refer to the Buddhist term *sunyata* that "connotes a sense of fullness in the 'emptiness,' a void which is pregnant with implied meanings" (Wagner, 122). So, this is a paradoxical term which can be perceived only by someone holding a somehow transcendental standing. The second line of the first couplet actually reveals the paradoxical "emptiness" by telling us that the echoes of someone's talking can be heard. That is to say there are some people on the mountain. The seeming subversive second line at least conveys two messages: a) the viewer/implied poet must stand in a remote and distant spot to look and hear; b) a very few people are around the Deer Walled on this mountain. In other words, this first couplet tells us of the viewer's position, the emptiness on the mountain and the invisible but audible people. What a vague and blank picture. Suddenly the second couplet brings the colors and physical images into our imagined picture. The penetration of the sunlight into the deep woods brings lightness and warmth to the shadowy and cold spot, and to the green moss. Surprisingly the destination of the sunlight, or that of discourse is such a trivial moss in the deep woods. In other words, the viewer's/reader's eye is led from distant mountain to the close-up, from an abstract and vague impression to a concrete and clear perception, from generality to particularity. All the objects in the poem are still and quiet except the movement of the echoes and the sunlight that won't affect the stillness of the whole scene. It's almost a momentary catch. On the other hand, the viewer's eye has to move. In a sense, the movement of the viewer's eye follows the poet's eye, and builds up the appreciative process and therefore gains the visual pleasure. The balanced parallelism in the poem also enforces this pleasure, such as seeing and hearing, warmth

(sunlight) and coldness (green moss). The words "returning" and "once again" may indicate the time. But it is still ambiguous, because we are not sure whether it refers to the rising sun or the setting sun. All those concrete and visible images may contain implicit and suggestive meanings at a metaphysical level that definitely help make the audience more interested in speculating about the ambiguity and the philosophy of the poem.

If you say "Deer Walled" is dealing with a vision of both a visible and invisible realm, then the following poem seems simpler in a sense.

> The Bird Chirping Ravine[6] 鳥鳴磵
>
> While man is at leisure, cassia blossoms fall,
>
> While night is serene, spring mountains are empty.
>
> The appearance of the moon startles the mountain birds,
>
> Now and then they chirp within the spring ravine.

This is another modern-style (*chin-t'i*) landscape poem. It seems that the images here are clearer. "Man is at leisure," "night," "the moon" and the twice-appearing word "spring" convince us of the time: a moon-lit night in spring. In this moment, the poet nicely grasps two opposing audio-elements--the soundless "serenity" and the sound "chirping," which naturally lead to a visible scene. Because of the quietness, the falling of those tiny cassia blossoms can be heard; because the falling of those tiny cassia blossoms can be heard, the quietness is justified. This mutually supporting compound of cause and effect provides us a very quiet picture. But we don't know how far we can see. We may only hear the falling sound and sense the fragrant smell of "cassia blossoms." The sudden appearance of the moon not only startles the birds and breaks the quietness, but also brings light and the visibility to the world, and to the viewer. Then we may hear the echoes of the birds' chirping in the ravine

and see the ravine under the moon shine and probably birds as well. This is exclusively a nature picture, because the poet puts the human being aside from the very beginning. Here again appears the ambiguous "emptiness," otherwise the poem should have been easier to interpret. The "empty" mountain could refer to the darkness of the night, the quietness of nature, the hollowness of a ravine and the absence of human being. Like the "empty mountain" in "Deer Walled," its surface layer is denied immediately, because of the existence of birds and the ravine that under the moon comes to light. But the "emptiness" doesn't mean physically nothing, but nothing in the "nothingness" in the Buddhist sense, or in the epistemological sense. Just this "emptiness" adds some philosophical taste to the poem, like most of Wang Wei's landscape poems. Different from "Deer Walled," the viewer here seems to stand at the same spot to gaze at the spring ravine under the moon by hearing the birds' chirping and smelling the cassia blossoms. The viewer keeps his distance to observe this natural scene without moving. This is the second mode for the viewer or the readers to enjoy the visual pleasure in Wang Wei's poems.

Visiting the Temple of Accumulated Fragrance[7] 過香積寺

I don't know where the Temple of Accumulated
  Fragrance is,
After several *li* entering the clouded peaks.
In the ancient woods is a path without people,
Deep in the mountains where is the bell?
The gurgling of a spring is swallowed by the dangerous
  rocks,
The color of the setting sun cools the green pines.
In the light dusk by the bend of an empty pond,
Peaceful meditation overpowers the poisonous dragon.[8]

In this poem, we may clearly see the shifting viewpoint.

Here we can see several pictures rather than one. The narrating voice comes from the visitor, who may be a purposeful pilgrim or an accidental traveller. And the voice and the eye are identical except in the last couplet. Reading this poem is like following the progressive movement of a cinematic camera, the "eye," to the destination--the Temple of Accumulated Fragrance. We can see "the clouded peaks" from a certain distance, then are close enough to see the inside of the ancient woods, the path without people, and when we get deep enough in the mountain and hear the bell sound, we can see the "spring" and the "dangerous rocks," the "color of the setting sun" and "the green pine." The last scene is the temple that we cannot see but imagine, based on some suggestions, such as the "empty pond" that should be close by the temple and big enough to accommodate the allusive "poisonous dragon." The problem here is that we are likely to lose the original point of view. The previous viewer's (visitor's) eyes suddenly become ambiguous. We are not sure whether the viewer thinks of the allusion of overpowering "the poisonous dragon" by seeing the "empty pond" or watches a monk sitting there and meditating, or the viewer himself sits there and meditates. If it is the meditation of the viewer, then we, the audience, see the viewer's meditation by the other viewer's eye. This shifting point of view may stimulate the audience's contemplative pleasure, and fit the ambiguity and vagueness of the couplet. In his "Recalling my Brothers in the East of Hua Mountain during the Double Nine Festival," Wang Wei uses a similar method in the last couplet: "From the distance I know that you, my brothers, must climb to the heights. / All are wearing dogwood but find one person is missing." After the description of his nostalgic and home-sick sentiments from the viewer's/poet's point of view, the last line suddenly shifts the viewing angle and makes the "brothers" find the absence of the viewer/poet. This reversed subject and object also creates the other viewer by whose eyes the audience continues his

imaginary picture.

After the discussion of the three modes of using the point of view in Wang Wei's poems (changing the viewing distance; unchanged viewing stand; and shifting the viewers from one to the other), we can probably find out that we may develop a visual pleasure in reading Wang Wei's landscape poems, especially when we consider such a reading process as a viewing process and the narrator's "point of view" as perceiving.

Audio Effect

When talking about the audio-effect in Wang Wei's poems, I shall focus on the narrating voice rather than on other sounds such as a bird's chirping or a spring's gurgling.

In the poems analyzed above, we may notice that the reader's appreciative channel goes mainly through the "eyes" of the first person narrator "I." In other words, the narrator "I," whether visible or hidden, is an "experiencing self" (Stanzel, 202) who functions as protagonist and witness, besides narrating the poem. We may imagine that the "I" stands there and gazes at the empty spring ravine, or climbs the mountain to the Temple. However, in those landscape poems, the voice or the "I" is usually fading away and transformed into a visualized picture.

Now I want to explore the narrating voice by analyzing the following poems.

Farewell 送別

I dismount and invite you, Sir, to drink wine,
Asking where you are going.
You say "I didn't accomplish my wishes,
And am returning to live at the foot of Southern
  Mountain."[9]
Only go ahead and don't ask again,

White clouds don't have ending time.

"Farewell" is a popular topic for poets in general. Wang Wei's parting poem has its own strength. He is admirably able to treat the very complex emotional attachment of the friendship in a seemingly simple, even plain and detached way. In "Farewell," an ancient-style poem, the first line gives us two images, "horse" and "wine" that are commonly associated with parting and friendship. That the narrator "I" dismounts indicates that he comes all the way riding a horse to see his friend off. Then the "I" not only invites the second person "you" to drink wine but also talks with him. Therefore the single voice narrating turns to a typical dialogue: one questions and the other answers. It seems that the "I" doesn't know where the "you" goes. In other words, because the "you" couldn't accomplish the wishes and might be forced to leave, the "you" didn't tell friends about the leaving. Then the "I" found out and then hurried by horse to see the "you" off. A friend in need is a friend indeed. This simple dialogue reveals their would-be profound emotional tie. We can see the worries, concerns and attitude without snobbery of the "I" toward the "you" through the dialogue. Especially the last two lines express the warm concern and encouragement in a more explicit way. "White clouds" is the last metaphorical image in the poem. "White" is usually associated with purity and innocence, and "clouds" contains a floating and transcendental quality. The last line may be interpreted like this: you, like the white clouds, stand innocent and high, float away or keep distance from this world. There will be no limit or boundary for you in terms of time and space. According to Pauling Yü, "the impossibility of identifying the interlocutors has led many Western critics to conclude that 'Farewell' is actually a kind of soliloquy or internal monologue" (Yü, 130). It is possible that the narrator "I" is talking with the other "I" of his divided self, consulting the other "I" if the "I" should retreat

from court life. It is also possible that Wang Wei had such a modern sense to talk with his other self in the poem. However, it is still an uncertain hypothesis. It seems to me that there is an interlocutor anyway, whether it is the other self or a friend. So the dialogic form is certain and the two voices exist. We have to admit that such a dialogic and dramatic scene produces an audio-effect and a special appreciative angle. In another poem, "Unclassified Poem," by Wang Wei, we can see a simple questioning form.

> You, my lord, come from my home town,
> And should know the things there.
> The day you left, in the front of the silk window,
> Were the plum trees still in blossom?

Here, we seem to be able to hear one voice questioning. The absent interlocutor and unanswered question may evoke many echoes in the reader's mind, and show the eagerness and homesickness of the questioner/addresser. Such a special and sensitive question about "the plum tree" would be hard to answer even for someone from his home town. It seems to me this is more like an expressive monologue in a questioning form which does not necessarily expect an accurate answer, although there is a "you," a supposed questionee. In "Farewell in the Mountains," there is another type monologue in its second couplet.

> Farewell in the Mountains 山中送别
> In the mountains a parting is over,
> In the sunset I shut the brushwood gate.
> The spring grass next year[10] will turn green,
> Will the prince return or not?[11]

Right after the first very descriptive couplet, a monologue is again in a questioning form. But this question is obviously

asking the self of the addresser about the absent other. This monotonous voice not only expresses his concern for the friend ("Will the prince return or not?") but also creates an imaginary scene ("The spring grass next year will turn green"). In other words, the reader may see two scenes:one is current and "real," the other in the future and visionary. The real scene is narrated by the addresser to the reader, the visionary one by the same addresser but to himself. We as readers can sense the friendship and the relationship between the addresser and his absent friend.

> Sitting alone on an Autumn Night 秋夜獨坐
> Sitting alone I feel sad about the hair on my two
> temples,
> In the empty reception hall nearly at the time of the
> second watch.[12]
> In the rain mountain fruits fall,
> Under the lamp grass insects chirp.
> White hair is finally hard to change back,
> Yellow gold is impossible to be produced.
> If one wants to know how to get rid of sickness or age,
> The only way is to learn nonrebirth.[13]

This poem is in a monologue style too. But it is different. This is actually a kind of self-anatomical meditation. The first two couplets tell us the setting: a quiet and raining night, the empty hall; the mood: solitude and sadness; the sound: the falling rain and mountain fruit and the insects' chirping. The second couplet turns to the narrator's philosophical recognition of the self and life. This personal re-awareness is narrated in a persuasive and didactic way. Another similar instance can be found in the couple lines from "Visiting Monk Hsüan" (謁璿上人):[14]

> My early years are not worth talking about,

When I recognized the Way I was old in age.
How could I regret the things in the past?
The rest of my life can be luckily nurtured.

The narrator's denial of the past and his joyful new recognition of the truth, either "nonrebirth" or the "Way," lend a strong religious color to those meditative monologues. Still we can see the sadness and fear of the narrator for sickness and age as the undertone pervading the poem.

Six Casually Written Poems (VI) 偶然作六首
When old age comes, I am too lazy to write poems,
Only old age follows me as companion.
In this my life[15] I am mistakenly a poet,
In my previous life[16] I must have been a painter.
I am unable to give up lingering habits,
And am accidentally known by the people of this world.[17]
My given name and byname are just all showing this,[18]
But this heart is still not understood.

This casually written poem has a strong confessional quality. The sadness and fear are still haunting here. The narrator "I" seems more critical with himself and his relation with others. The repetition of "*chih*" (知), "knowing" or "understanding," sets up the tone for this confessional monologue. Here "understanding" is not the narrator's "understanding" of some truth ("nonrebirth" etc.) or the "self," but the other's "understanding" about him. In other words, the narrator is willing to open himself up to the other due to the existence of some misunderstanding about him. People know him as a poet and painter, but may not understand his heart. The narrator would like the people to take his given name (Wei) and byname (Mo-chieh) as his symbolic identity and a clue to read his mind because the combination of his given name and byname indicates his Buddhist belief which he considers as the

foundation of his thoughts, even more important than his being as a poet or a painter. In general, those self-anatomical or confessional monologues in Wang Wei's poems can also be taken as "solitary conversation with oneself" (Bakhtin, 145). Bakhtin says that "this is a new relationship to one's self, to one's own particular 'I'--with no witness, without any concessions to the voice of the a 'third person,' whoever it might be" (Bakhtin, 145). This "self" as the implied addressee is a more rational and spiritual "self" who only listens and never answers or argues. It may be the religious consciousness that makes Wang Wei write those soliloquies down. The voice in those poems is always intimate and private, and strongly invites the reader to enter the heart of the narrator/implied author.

The audio-effect of the narrating voice plays an important role in Wang Wei's poems. Whether in the dialogue or in the monologue, the first person voice, sometimes with a second voice involved, produces a special dramatic effect in this lyric form. Here, obviously the use of "point of view" functions as narrating and experiencing as well.

Narrator as Storyteller

When the narrator "I" hides himself behind the curtain, when the second person "you" disappears from the stage, the narrator becomes a third person "he," a storyteller. In other words, the narrator is talking about the other's stories rather than the story of his/self. Wang Wei's short quatrain "Lady Hsi" has this story-telling quality.

Lady Hsi[19] 息夫人

Don't let the favor of today

Allow her to forget the affection of the past.

Looking at the flowers, tears fill her eyes,

She doesn't speak to the king of Ch'u.

This poem is based on a historical story from the *Tso-chuan*. Of course it is almost impossible to have a complete story plot within these four lines. The poet only catches a most touching moment: "Looking at the flowers, tears fill her eyes," to describe the deep but unspeakable pain in the heart of Lady Hsi. The flowers become or symbolize the mirror image of the self of Lady Hsi, pretty but venerable like a doll in the other's hands. The first two lines tell us the reason of the sadness of the lady, the last line the result of it. Besides those, the poet makes the reader imagine all the rest of the story. This is not even a rhapsody, but has what Ching-hsing Wang calls "a quasi narrative quality" (Wang, 229). If we consider "Lady Hsi" a small portrait, then "Song of Li Ling" is more like a story.

Song of Li Ling[20] 李陵詠

In the Han dynasty there was general Li,
Offspring of three generations of generals.
With knotted hair[21] he already had wonderful strategies,
In youth he turned out a strong warrior.
Making a long drive pushing the enemies to the border,
He entered deep into the Shan *yü's* rampart.[22]
Banners were lined up facing each other,
Pipes and drums were mournful beyond description.
The sun dusked at the edge of the desert,
The battle sounds amid smoke and dust.
In order to cause the fall and demise of the barbarians,
How could he only demand the capture of the famous prince.
Since having lost the support of the strong army,
Then he was stuck in the yurts with shame.
In his younger years he received imperial favor from Han,
How could he bear sitting there, thinking of this?

Deep in his heart he wished to repay,
He devoted his body but was unable to die.
He stretched the neck and looked for Tzu ch'ing,[23]
"Except you, who will care for me?"

Portraying a historical figure in this poem, the narrator gives us a series of narrative displays, chronologically from Li Ling's family background, his glorious youth to his tragic climax (detained by the enemy and abandoned by the court). After narrating briefly the biographical facts of Li Ling, again the narrator creates a dramatic scene, like that in "Lady Hsi," of Li Ling's painful thinking of himself in the yurt. Even we can hear Li Ling's internal monologue that demonstrates and intensifies Li Ling's desperation for help and sympathy. This psychological description not only makes this character portrayal more vivid and profound, but also reflects implicitly the narrator's understanding and compassion. Based on these two historical figure-portrayal poems of Wang Wei, we are probably able to sum up two features: one is that the most touching and typical scene[s] is always created for a dramatic effect and deep exploration of the figure's psyche. The other is that the third person narrator is hidden in the narrating process. The narrative point of view here seems like purely detached narrating. Only in the special couplet--the emotional climax, the implied narrator's tendency may be discernible.

Some of Wang Wei's frontier poems may be considered "travelogues," where the narrating point of view is like a camera-eye following and picturing the most exciting events on the trip.

Marching Song 從軍行
Blowing horns push the marching men,
The clamor of the marching men arises.
The reed instruments sound sad and horses' neigh confused,
Struggling to ferry across the Gold River's waters.[24]

> The sun dusks at the edge of the desert,
> The battle sounds amid smoke and dust.
> Making efforts to tie up the neck of the famous prince,
> Return and present him to the son of Heaven.

Except the last couplet here that expresses the purpose and the confident promise of this military expedition, the "Marching Song," a poem in *yüeh-fu* style, provides us a series of picturesque scenes about this marching in a chronological order. The first scene shows how the marching starts: the sound of blowing horns, the clamor of the marching soldiers. The second scene is the troop crossing the Gold River. The third one is the battlefield. The movement of the changing scenes and time displays the process of the marching. The narrator's voice seems from the third person, who closely followed the marching but at the same time keeps a certain distance. In other words, the narrator is paradoxically a detached observer as well as an engaged participant in the marching. There is no personal pronoun in the poem, but the hidden narrator should be the witness or the observer, besides his main role as speaker of the travelogue. The last couplet reveals the narrator's tendency by showing a joyful mood about the coming victory for this marching. In other words, the narrator is not a neutral but tendentious observer and speaker. We, as reader, hear the narrator's voice and imagine the scenes which are based on his words and selected by his choice. We seem to follow the marching army along as we follow the narrator's voice or his camera-eye. This kind of travelogue quality can be found in many other of Wang Wei's poems, such as "Carrying Mission to the Frontier" (使至塞上), "Hunting Watch" (觀獵) and "Song of the Peach Fountainhead" (桃源行) etc.

We may see clearly from the discussion above that, when Wang Wei tells of historical stories, events or trips in his poems, he most likely employs a third-person narrator who is

omniscient and tells the stories of historical figures or events in an external perspective, or who is a witness or observer and depicts a trip or an event in a retrospective way. This third person narrator may be called a storyteller in terms of narrative quality, although those "stories" are actually only fragmentary episodes, or a series of picturesque descriptions, or lack of detailed plots.

In sum, narrativity plays a fairly important role in Wang Wei's poetic creation. In some of his ancient-style and *yüeh-fu* style poems, even some modern-style poems like "Lady Hsi," we can see the narrative quality by way of analyzing the narrating or experiencing narrator's point of view. Wang Wei amazingly changes his narrator's position quite often, such as from the first person narrator to the second, or to the third person, then the point of view changes correspondingly. These changes usually indicate or determine the distance between the narrator/signifier and the narrated/signified. Schorer considered "the uses of point of view not only as a mode of dramatic delimitation, but, more particular, of thematic definition" (Stanzel, 12). Just as Stanzel pointed out, "Form is the relativizing externalization of the content," (Stanzel, 21) the analysis of the use of "point of view" is actually an alternative approach to decoding the content of any literary discourse. My attention to the fairly complicated use of "point of view" in Wang Wei's seemingly simple poems intends to pave a smoother avenue toward a better understanding of Wang Wei.

Notes

[1] On Wang Wei's zither-playing, see *Wang Yu ch'eng chi chien chu* 王右丞集箋注, 1736, annot. Chao Tien-cheng 趙殿成, Preface, 8a, in the *Ch'in ting Ssu k'u ch'üan shu* (欽定四庫全書) edn. (rpt. Taipei: Shang wu, 1983)

[2] Stephen Owen, *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry: The High T'ang*

(New Haven: Yale UP, 198) 29.

[3] See G.E. Lessing, "Laocoön," trans. R. Phillimore. in *Critical Theory since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams. (New York:HBJ. 1971) 349

[4] Ibid.

[5] "Deer Walled" is the fourth poem among the twenty in Wang Wei's *Wang-ch'uan Collection* 輞川集. Deer Walled is one of the scenic spots in Wang-ch'uan estate which Wang Wei probably acquired about 740 and made periodic visits there. See Marshal L. Wagner, *Wang Wei* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), p.46.

[6] This poem is the first one in "Five Miscellaneous Poems Written at Huangfu Yüeh's Clouded Ravine" (*Huangfu Yüeh yun hsi tsa t'i wu shou*皇甫岳雲谿雜題五首). Huangfu Yüeh, according to T'ang Shu, can be found in the chart of prime minister's pedigree. He was the son of Huangfu Hsün 皇甫恂. But it is not sure if Huangfu Yüeh in the poem refers to the same person in the history. See *Wang Yu ch'eng chi chien chu* 王右丞集箋注 1736, annot. Chao Tien-cheng 趙殿成. 13,2a-b.

[7] The Temple of Accumulated Fragrance (Hsiang chi ssu 香積寺) was built in Shen ho yüan 神禾原, south of Ch'ang-an, in 681, the second year of "Eternal Ascendancy" 永隆, in the T'ang dynasty.

[8] The poisonous dragon may allude to that in *Nirvana Sutra* 涅槃經. It says, "There is a poisonous dragon at my home. It is very fretful. I am afraid that it may hurt others." See *Wang Yu ch'eng chi chien chu,* annot. Chao tien-ch'eng. 7.21a. Here in the poem, the poisonous dragon refers to bad desires and absurd ideas.

[9] Southern Mountain refers to Chung-nan Mountain 終南山, south of Ch'ang-an. It also has other alternative names, such as T'ai i 太乙, and Chung-nan 中南. See *Wang Yu ch'eng chi chien chu,* 1, 6a-b.

[10] Ku version 顧本 and Ling version 凌本 of *the T'ang shih p'in hui* 唐詩品彙 use "year by year" instead of "next year." See *the Wang Yu ch'eng chi chien chu,* 13. 12b.

[11] In "Summoning the Recluse" of *Ch'u Tz'u* 楚辭・招隱士, "The prince wanders and doesn't return, spring grass grows and becomes luxuriant." Here "prince" may refer to "my noble friend."

[12] "The second watch" 二更 refers to the period between 9-11 p.m.

[13] "Nonrebirth" (*Wu sheng* 無生, for the Sanskrit *anutpa-da*) refers to being free from the cycle of eternal rebirth or attainment of *nirvana*.

[14] Monk Hsüan was a famous monk and highly respected by Wang Wei. See *Wang Yu ch'eng chi chien chu,* 3.12b-13b.

[15] Chao Tien cheng gives "su shih" 宿世 instead of "tang tai" 當代 See *Wang Yu ch'eng chi chien chu,* 5. 7b.

[16] Previous life" (ch'ien shen 前身) also can be translated as "former life."

[17] *The Recorded Matters of T'ang Poetry* 唐詩紀事 reads "shih jen" 時人 instead of "shih jen" 世人. See the *Wang Yu ch'eng chi chien chu.* 5, 7b.

[18] His given name "*Wei*" and byname (*tzu*) "*Mo-chieh*" are the Chinese transliteration of the name of the Indian Buddhist sage *Vimalakîrti*.

[19] The allusion comes from a story in the *Tso-chuan* 左傳 that after the king of Ch'u defeated the country of Hsi, he made the Hsi king's wife his own. She bore him two children but never spoke to him. That is because she refused to betray her loyalty to her first husband. See M. Wagner, Wang Wei (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981) 27.

[20] Li Ling 李陵 (? BC-74BC), his byname was Shao ch'ing. He was the grandson of the famous general Li Kuang 李廣 (? BC-119BC). In 99 BC, the year of "Heavenly Han" (天漢) he was sent to attack the Hsiung-nu, the northern non-Chinese tribes. He penetrated deep into the enemies' territory and lost support. Being tightly surrounded by Hsiung-nu, he was forced to surrender. For defending Li Ling, Ssu-ma Ch'ien, the famous historian, was punished by castration.

[21] "Knotted hair" refers to childhood or youth, because the ancient men knotted their hair when they were children.

[22] *Shan yü* is the title of the *Hsiung-nu* chieftain.

[23] *Tzu ch'ing* 子卿 is the byname of *Su Wu* 蘇武 (140BC-60BC). He was sent as Han emissary to the *Hsiung-nu* and was detained instead. He stayed there as a shepherd for 19 years, and was finally allowed to come back to the Han court.

[24] The Gold River (Chin River 金河) is in Yün chung Prefecture 雲中郡. See *Wang Yu ch'eng chi chien chu,* 2. 3b-4a.

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