

A Semiotic Approach to Wang Wei's  
*Wang River Sequence*:  
An Exploration of the Principle of Equivalence and  
the Principle of Disjunction

*Tim-hung Ku*

I

"Semiotics can be informally defined as a science that studies all possible varieties of signs, the rules governing their generation and production, transmission and exchange, reception and interpretation. Concisely put, semiotics has two complementary interdependent aspects: communication and signification."<sup>1</sup> (Thomas Sebeok, 1978) When applied to the study of poetry, this definition implies that the semiotic approach is interested in understanding poetry as a semiotic system, in understanding the aspects and principles by which the poetic text signifies and communicates itself. The semiotic approach is in general poetics-oriented; even in a piece of practical criticism, the poetics and the analysis of the texts are necessarily interpenetrating. The present paper is no exception.

The fundamental force in signification as perceived by De Saussure is the correlation between the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic: "the syntagmatic relation is in *praesentia*. It is based on two or more terms that occur in an effective series. Against this, the associative relation unites terms in *absentia* in a potential mnemonic series."<sup>2</sup> Later, Roman Jakobson persuasively made a correlation between the phenomenon of *aphasia* and the De Saussurean two-axes view of signification. The paradigmatic relation, or the selection, is based on "similarity," while the syntagmatic relation, or the combination, is based on "contiguity."<sup>3</sup>

In poetics, Jakobson proposes the principle of equivalence or the poetic function in order to answer the question "What makes a verbal message a work of art?", a question getting into the core of poetics:

The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination. Equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of sequence.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, when "similarity" exerts its power upon the construction of the sequence, the constituents of the sequence become equalized and the message takes on a poetic dimension. Jurij Lotman pursues the principle of equivalence within his theoretical framework of dialectics, information, and secondary modeling.<sup>5</sup> For Lotman, the principle of equivalence permits correlation and tension of the textual units: the coincidence on a certain level entails the non-coincidence on other levels. This increase of structural alternatives eliminates "automatism" on the one hand and permits storing a high "volume of information" on the other. The formal elements become "semanticized" when correlated with the "content" and the semantic of the text becomes "structured" when correlated with the "form." "form" and "content" interpenetrate each other in the poetic text. Consequently, "a text is poetic means that all its elements are semanticized" (p. 146) and that it "can contain an exceptionally high concentration of information" (p. 297).

Indeed, as recently re-affirmed by Jakobson and Waugh, "the tension between two structural principles — contiguity and similarity — permeates the whole of language," and "poetry, as a purposeful, mythopoeic play, is the fullest, universal accomplishment of the synthesis between contiguity and similarity."<sup>6</sup> A task assigned to the present paper is to pursue further the varied manifestations of the principle of equivalence — the interaction of contiguity and similarity — by examining Wang Wei's 王維 (701-761) *Wang River Sequence* 輞川集. I shall develop, in the paper, the principle of disjunction in connection to the signification of motive in poetry. By "motive," I mean something similar to what we usually call "meaning," to what Michael Riffaterre calls "significance,"<sup>7</sup> to what Kenneth Burke calls "motive,"<sup>8</sup> and to some other similar terms derived from different perspectives. A further description would be: motive is dependant upon but to be differentiated from the semantic of the poetic text. It is the signified intersected with what constitutes the human in opposition to the natural — in short, it is a human "smell." A well-codified motive will be what we call a "motif" in the sense of an idea conveyed (*carpe diem* motif is a typical example), not in the sense as a narrative unit as used in folktale scholarship and narrative poetics.<sup>9</sup> Often, as I shall show later, the motive is revealed in

the contextual disjunctions when the disjunctive parts are motivatedly connected again. The principle of disjunction is an attendant principle of the equivalence, a simultaneous presence of contiguity and similarity.

The *Wang River Sequence*, twenty poems in total, is perhaps Wang's most celebrated and characteristic work.<sup>10</sup> The *Sequence* is a poetic response to the twenty scenic places of Wang's estate in the Wang River valleys formerly owned by the distinguished poet Sung Chin-wên 宋之問. According to the *Preface* to the *Sequence*, it was in Wang's late years upon his retreat in the Wang River estate when Wang wrote these poems in company with his friend P'ei Ti 裴迪 — P'ei also wrote twenty poems in corresponding to Wang's. Wang also drew the famous Wang River Scroll 輞川圖 to describe the sceneries, of which now only certain late imitations or paraphrases survive. The origin of the naming of the places in the *Sequence* is no longer available, and this impoverishes the rich allusion of the poems and our understanding. However, the present paper is not an attempt of describing the semiotic system of the *Sequence*, but rather an exploration of the principle of equivalence and its attendant principle of disjunction by examining the *Sequence*. But, since the principle of equivalence and the principle of disjunction are essential to the signification, a substantial discussion of how these two principles are at work in the *Sequence* will contribute to our understanding of the *Sequence*. A balance between poetics and the analysis of texts will be maintained in my presentation, so that we may not lose sight of any of them.

## II

The principle of equivalence has proved its usefulness in a variety of researches, including its application to the study of Chinese literature.<sup>11</sup> Here I would like to pursue the principle of equivalence as a force superimposed upon the construction of the sequence, and as a force to participate the signification of the poetic text, by closely analysing "Mêng Wall Gorge" 孟城坳, the first poem of the *Wang River Sequence*. To facilitate such a close analysis, I am obliged to provide the Chinese text, the Romanization, and the word-to-word denotation of the poem as below:

新	家	孟	城	口
hsin	chia	mêng	ch'êng	k'ou
new	home	(a family name)	wall	mouth

古	木	餘	衰	柳
<i>ku</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>yü</i>	<i>shuai</i>	<i>liu</i>
ancient	tree	remain	withering	willow
來	者	復	爲	誰
<i>lai</i>	<i>chê</i>	<i>fu</i>	<i>wei</i>	<i>shui</i>
come	person	again	be	who/whom
空	悲	昔	人	有
<i>k'ung</i>	<i>pei</i>	<i>hsi</i>	<i>jên</i>	<i>yu</i>
empty / in vain	grieve	ancient / former	man	have

(“*lai-chê*” in the third line and “*hsi-jên*” in the fourth line are compounds; the former means “the person coming after” while the latter means “the person coming before.”)

A literal translation may read as follows:

New home at the Méng Wall mouth –  
Ancient trees and remain withering willows.  
Who will be the person coming after again?  
In vain to grieve over having the person coming before.

The English rendition is, necessarily, awkward, but it serves the present academic purpose – and in fact, my rendition retains the hyperbaton in the second line, retains the word “having” in spite of clumsiness. The poem is written in the verse form of five-character four-line curtailed poem, therefore, a metrical pattern is superimposed upon the sequence as in any verse – needless to say, metrical pattern is an instance of the principle of equivalence. Lines 1, 3, and 4 are rhyming lines (-ou, -iu, -yu) and this may have exerted an influence on the choice of the characters “mouth” (-ou), “willow” (-iu), and “have” (yu). If the axis *in absentia* is too obscure to re-construct, the word-order deviation in the last line is a manifestation of the superimposition of the metrical pattern upon the axis *in praesentia*: the word “have” is moved to the end to match the rhyming pattern, while in the normal order of the line the word should occupy the third position as approximated in my English rendition. Indeed, rhyming, and other metrical elements as well, manifests itself as a force acting upon the construction of the poem.

Lineation is an important device, which, from the viewpoint of equivalence, makes possible the metrical pattern on the one hand and makes more perceptible the varied parallelisms within the textual space on the other. Since "equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of sequence" in poetry as said by Jakobson, it follows that to draw equation will be a legitimate strategy of reading. In fact, the principle of equivalence, which is another form of binary opposition, is not a mere invention of the Jakobsonian poetics, but has manifested itself in the variety of poetry and critical commentaries, including classical Chinese poetry and poetics.<sup>12</sup> In this poem, as in every poem, a variety of parallelism may be defined. The first kind is parallelism within the line. "New home" may be equated to "Mêng Wall mouth" in the sense that they both are noun-syntagms — but the very parallelism employs a contrast in the number of words of the syntagms: two contrasting three. In the second line "old trees" and "withering willows" form a perfect parallelism: 1) both contain a noun preceded by a modifier; 2) these two syntagms are marked out by a word in between so that their parallelism becomes more perceptible. The second kind is parallelism between the lines. If we follow the strategy of reading and draw an equation between the first two lines, we may not find much interaction between them, except the apparent contrast between "new" and "ancient"; each occupies the first position of the line. The reason for this may be the metonymical predominance in this couple of lines: Mêng Wall is metonymical to the new home, and ancient trees and withering willows are in turn metonymical to the Mêng Wall.

An equation may be drawn between lines 3 and 4: the former is in the form of a question and the latter is in the form of an answer although the answer does not respond to the question in a direct manner on the semantic plane. A parallelism within this parallelism can be defined: an equation may be drawn between *lai-chê* (i.e., the person coming after) and *hsi-jên* (i.e., the person coming before). But this equation implies two contrasts: 1) on the semantic plane: coming after is in opposition to coming before; 2) on the positional plane: *lai-chê* occupy the first two positions in the former line while *hsi-jên* occupy the third and the fourth positions of the latter line. The third kind is parallelism between units or syntagms larger than the line. In the case of Wang's poem, by drawing an equation between the first two lines and the last two lines, one may find that the former is primarily descriptive while the latter non-descriptive. But within the difference, we may find a similarity: the opposition of new and ancient in the former unit

may parallel the opposition of after and before in the latter unit. The strategy of the principle of equivalence thus practised shows exactly what Lotman says: "the coincidence of some elements entails the non-coincidence of others."<sup>13</sup>

Based on the above descriptive analysis, I shall show 1) parallelism as a structural force superimposed on the poetic text and on the reading as well, and 2) as a force of signification in the poetic text. In the first line, the word "home" may function as a verb as well as a noun. As a verb, the sentence means: "Newly take a home at the Mêng Wall mouth." But parallelism in poetry accustoms us to take "home" as a noun so that it parallels the noun-syntagm that follows and ignore another reading which expresses the S-V-O syntax. In the second line, the verb "remain" should head or end the sentence in the Chinese normal word order. But the normal word order may lose the power of parallelism without the word "remain" to mark out these two syntagms for comparison. The hyperbaton resulted from maintaining the parallelism ambiguates the syntax by giving out a deceptive S-V-O pattern. To be sure, the ambiguity resulted from the interference between parallelism and syntax may be one of the dynamic powers of poetry.

The equation on the formal plane, whether it is a phonological, grammatical or any other formal equation, reveals either parallel or contrast on the semantic plane. The formal features thus take on a significative function since they participate in the process of the signification of the semantic. This phenomenon is what Lotman calls by the name of semanticization. To start with the form may be a heritage from the Russian Formalism — form provides us with a guide to the semantic. At the moment when the formal components are semanticized, the semantic plane becomes to take on a form. As Jakobson has said, "in poetry not only the phonological sequence but in the same way any sequence of semantic units strives to build an equation."<sup>14</sup> Notice that equation and its attendant parallel and contrast is itself a form. In Wang's poem, the binary "new" and "ancient" and the binary "coming after" and "coming before" do not significantly participate by their semantic value alone, but also by their formal feature as a binary. Again, these two binaries may be built into an equation: ARB equals to CRD (R signifies Relation). What would be the common denominator of these two binaries? Notice that the relation between "new" and "ancient" and between "coming after" and "coming before" is a relative or transitory relation: today's "new" will be tomorrow's "ancient," and today's "after" will be tomorrow's "before." Eventually, these binaries in the process of

equalization enter into a semantic universal which they share: the transitoriness of the humans, including the human achievement.

### III

Principle of equivalence implies a contiguous relation, a disjunction, a gap, a blank, between the two sides of the equation. This force of disjunction, which I deliberately omitted in order not to complicate my former analysis, will be taken up now. The function of disjunction is essential to the signification of poetry and has been practiced by poets and noticed by critics. Michael Riffaterre calls this disjunction "ungrammaticality" on the mimetic plane, and when this "ungrammaticality" is made "grammatical" again, we find ourselves entering into the "significance" of the poem: "any ungrammaticality within the poem is a sign of grammaticality elsewhere, that is, of belonging in another system."<sup>15</sup> Wolfgang Iser, who calls this disjunction the "blank," fully recognizes its significant role in signification: "the blank in the fictional text induces and guides the reader's constitutive activity. As a suspension of connectability between perspective segments, it marks the need for an equivalence, thus transforming the segments into reciprocal projections."<sup>16</sup> The poetic device *hsing* 興, which has been practised in Chinese poetry and had been noticed since the Han Dynasty if not earlier, is almost exactly a motivated disjunction as I observed in a former study.<sup>17</sup> The *hsing* device, in my observation, is first a disjunction and then a motivated relation between two large syntagms on or above the sentence level, and when these two syntagms are made equivalent again by allowing an interaction between them, we are led to what I called the motive of the poem. The dual nature of the *hsing* device, disjunction and motivatedness, is almost identical to what Iser has described about the blank: "As blanks mark the suspension of connectability between textual segments, they simultaneously form a condition for the connection to be established."<sup>18</sup> Theoretically, the disjunction may be of varied kinds, but it appears that the contextual or semantic disjunction may be most dynamic and pertinent to the signification of the motive. In Wang's poem, a contextual conjunction can be seen between the first two and the last two lines: one descriptive and one non-descriptive as mentioned before. This conjunction makes possible and elicits a motivated interaction between the syntagms (to be sure, here is the organic perception of the poetic text at work): the equation between the two binaries is revealed. Another contextual disjunction may be located

between the question and the answer in the last two lines. As said before, the answer does not respond to the question at all. The disjunction gives rise to a semantic leap: the transitoriness, the transitory procession of the before, the present, the after, may be thus signified.

In fact, the transitoriness as the motive or the semantic universal of Wang's poem is rather already "told" in the last two lines. This knowledge in advance gives us an opportunity to test as well as to validate the principle of equivalence involved in the process of reading. I would like now to look at the second poem in the *Wang River Sequence*, whose motive or semantic universal is obscure, to see how the principle of equivalence and its attendant principle of disjunction are at work. But this time I will proceed in a rather brief manner. Below is the poem "*Hua-tzu Hill*:" 華子岡

飛鳥去不窮  
連山復秋色  
上下華子岡  
惆悵情何極

Flying birds fly and fly without closure –  
Mountain and mountain with one autumn color.  
Up and down the *Hua-tzu Hill* –  
The feeling of-sadness has no end!

In my English rendition, I double the word "fly" for the sake of cogency, and I think the doubling of the action "fly" is implied in "without closure." The second line may be rendered in a more Chinese but ungrammatical manner: mountain after mountain, autumn color and autumn color again. A more literal rendition of the last line would be: How will my feeling of sadness have an end? But I think this quasi-question bears an exclamatory more than an interrogative value.

What kind of sadness does the poet conceive? The answer will lead us to the motive of the poem. Two textual disjunctions may be defined: one between the first two and the last two lines, and one between the last two lines. Moving upward, we may first ask about the motivated relation entailed in the disjunction between "up and down the *Hua-tzu Hill*" and the "sadness," and then the motivated relation entailed in the disjunction between this puzzling drama and the landscape preceding it.

The disjunction between "up and down the *Hua-tzu Hill*" and "the feeling of sadness has no end" is rather difficult to bridge until the whole syntagm is made equivalent with the preceding syntagm. When these two

syntagms are made equivalent, a contrast may be registered by us between immense nature and human transitoriness: birds' flying without end, mountain and mountain with one autumn color are in opposition to a person's climbing up and down the *Hua-tzu* Hill. When this motive is registered, we begin to know more clearly that the immense character of nature is already beautifully signified by the beautiful equation between the first two lines: they share the immensity as their semantic universal. Meanwhile, the potential sense of transitoriness of "up and down" is moved to the foreground — notice that it is a kind of time compression, and notice that the action is performed against the background of the unchangeable *Hua-tzu* Hill. Further, "up and down" and "has no end" in the last two lines start to activate each other. In short, the syntagmatic units are set into reciprocal projections ignited by disjunctions, and the motive is thus signified and registered. To be sure, eternal nature and human transitoriness as a recurrent motive (thus, a motif) in Chinese poetry also plays a role in orienting our reading as such — and this is where the convention manifests itself as an influence in the process of signification and reading. As we know well now, as convincingly shown by Umberto Eco, any iconic sign implies the working of conventionality,<sup>19</sup> so does the motivated relation defined between two disjunctive syntagms; the recognition of the motivated relation can not exempt from, if not depend on, the influence of conventionality. The dynamic tension between iconicity and conventionality in signification is most important, but in the present moment I can only hint at it in passing.

## IV

Notice that to contain a motive is almost self-indicated in the above two examples and the motives they conveyed are well codified in our poetic tradition and become established motifs. But if the containment of a motive is not self-evident and the motive is not codified, can we define the motive from a poetic text through disjunctions? Let us test our principle of disjunction by looking at some examples. Below is "Bamboo Grove House" 竹里館, No. 17 in the *Sequence*:

獨坐幽篁裏  
彈琴復長嘯  
深林人不知  
明月來相照

Alone I sat amidst the dark bamboo wood,  
 Strum the lute and draw long whistlings.  
 Grove so deep, no one knows I am;  
 The bright moon comes to shine upon me.

In the Chinese original, all the first person pronouns are elided, and this ellipsis is quite all right with the Chinese syntax. This may give rise to an illusion that there is no subject in the scene; but, as the non-elliptical English rendition indicates, the subject in fact situates the poetic text. The motivated disjunction may be seen between the third line and the fourth line: solitude in the human world and intimacy in the nature. (This solitude is already set up by the first word of the poem: alone.) "No one knows" and "the moon comes" conveys a delicate disjunction and motivation within it, and the former syntagm superimposes a human smell upon the latter. It is the very human smell which composes the definition of motive.

Another example – "Apricot Wood House" 文杏館 (No. 3 in the *Sequence*):

文 杏 裁 爲 梁  
 香 茅 結 爲 宇  
 不 知 棟 裏 雲  
 去 作 人 間 雨

Apricot trees cut into beams,  
 Fragrant reeds woven into a roof.  
 Unaware that clouds amidst the pillars  
 Go to make rain to the human earth.

The disjuncture between the first two and the last two lines leads us to the awareness that the house in the former is not just a simple apricot wood house as suggested by the title but the dwelling of Taoist Travelling Immortals 遊仙. The house is up in the air and the clouds gathered amidst its pillars will go to make rain to the below human world. Two worlds are in opposition: the world of the Taoist Wandering Immortals and the world of the humans. The positional difference between these two worlds – one in the sky and one on the earth – is revealing enough. To take the poem as an signification of the motive of the Taoist Wandering Immortals rather than just a kind of fantasy is another example of the influence of conventionality: the poetry of Taoist Wandering Immortals is a well established

genre. To be sure, other evidences also contribute to such an interpretation: 1) the *Sequence* containing some poems more specifically belonging to this genre, and 2) "clouds amidst the pillars" being an intertextual reference to one of Kuo P'u's 郭樸 (277-324) Poems of Taoist Wandering Immortals. Here we can see that signification is a network of forces and relations.

Allusion is also an instance of motivated disjunction: a simultaneous contiguity and similarity between what is present and what is alluded to. "White-Rock Rapids," 白石灘 No. 15 of the *Sequence*, may be an example:

清淺白石灘  
綠蒲向堪把  
家住水東西  
浣紗明月下

Clear and shallow, White Rock Rapids;  
Green rush-leaves all close to hand.  
I live east and west to the water,  
Washing gauze beneath the bright moon.

Almost definitely, the last two lines need a female speaker. Even we take the poem as a ballad sung by a woman, the last two lines remain in opposition to the first two lines: the latter is rather a description of the surroundings. In my reading, the last large syntagm is an allusion to the story of the Beauty Hsi Shih (西施), who washed gauze in the Juo Yeh stream 若耶溪 before she became a court lady. The significant disjunction comes from the contiguity between the presence, the White Rock Rapids, and the allusion, the Juo Yeh stream. The motive of the poem may be defined as the superimposition of the allusive past upon the present, but how the Hsi Shih allusion is motivatedly correlated to the present remains an indeterminacy. The motive of the poem is not as codified as those in the early examples.

To be sure, codification is a matter of degree, and perhaps, a matter of interpretation. The problem of codification of motive, or the dialectic between codified and uncoded motive, is intrinsic to the question of signification, but unfortunately, it seems to me, the problem remains an underdeveloped area. I follow the semiotic belief that the poem signifies but how and what is signified is another matter. The present paper places the investigation on *how* rather than *what* is signified: one of the significant mechanisms is, needless to say, the device of motivated disjunction. To be

sure, the *how* can not be entirely separated from the *what*, and this is why I always *pointed to the what* when I defined the *how*.

Do those poems which Wai-lim Yip would describe as “the scenery *speaks* and *acts*”<sup>20</sup> also contain motive and motivated disjunction as significative device? Let us consider “Rill of the House of the Luans” 樂水瀨 (no. 13) as an example:

颯 颯 秋 雨 中  
 淺 淺 石 溜 瀉  
 跳 波 自 相 濺  
 白 鷺 驚 復 下

Patter-patter, in the autumn wind-rain;  
 Fast-fast, stream over smooth rocks.  
 Leaping beads splash by themselves;  
 White egrets are startled: then down.

What would be the motive of this kind of poems? Where to define the motivated disjunction? The significant disjunction may be defined not within the poem but outside it. What is presented is nature itself; therefore, the whole text can be seen as a motivated disjunction from the human world. We may simply call this kind of motive by the name of nature motive. Notice that the drama of nature acted out in the poetic text is perceived, fictionally or non-fictionally, by the poet. The natural drama is, in the last analysis, co-created by the poet's perception or imagination (the word *tzu* 自 or by themselves and the word *ching* 驚 or startle more or less signify the presence of the subjectivity), and the poem is written down in human language with, ultimately, an intention. To call it a nature motive against the human world as the background is justified.

## V

The variety of equivalence and motive of the *Sequence* has not been fully observed in the above discussions, but at least we have obtained a good glimpse of it. Instead of pursuing this variety – obviously, this is not my present purpose – I would dwell on some theoretical implications of these two principles in closing this study.

Equivalence is itself a form. When the equivalence manifests itself on the sound level and even on the syntactical level, this equivalence may be seen

as purely formal. But when the very formal feature is correlated with the semantic, or when the equivalence is defined on the level of the semantic, the form enters the "content" and the "content" takes on a form. Principle of equivalence offers itself as a graspable way to enter into the form, and a way to enter into the perceptible unity of form and content, which has been an essential concept in poetics of both East and West even though the formulation of this unity has been rather obscure. Jakobson is right to qualify the Jakobsonian poetic function by saying that "Any attempt . . . to confine poetry to poetic function would be a delusive oversimplification."<sup>21</sup> But the equivalences manifested on the varied planes of the poetic text will give rise to a formal pattern, similar to a piece of music, with its equations, parallelisms, and contrasts. This, needless to say, is pertinent to the artistic foundation of poetry.

The "meaning" of the poetic text has been a most elusive area of poetics. My proposal of defining a motive plane somewhat beyond the semantic is an attempt to get into what may be most intrinsic to the "meaning" of poetry, or I would say, to the signified of the poetic text as an integral sign. The endless but delicate dialectics between the uncodified motive and the codified motive (the motifs as in the sense of a cultural concept exemplified by the *carpe diem* motif) is one of the major dynamic powers of poetry, and consequently, of culture. The motive is codified into motifs, and motifs are broken up again into uncodified motive. Whether the motive is codified or uncodified is rather vague and indeterminate — but it is exactly this vagueness and indeterminacy which allows for the immense exercise of the energy of culture and humanity.

The disjunction, the gap, the blank, is where we may be led into the plane of motive. A relation between self-sufficient syntagmatic units in our daily conversation or writing is usually expected and taken for granted, so that this habit tends to hide from us an important opposition and its meaningful correlation, namely, conjunction and disjunction. Now we know that the simultaneous presence of the conjunctive relation (i.e., the motivatedness) and the disjunctive relation (i.e., the disjunction or blank) is essential to the signification of poetry. A disjunction, a gap, a blank, is necessary everywhere, between the signs, between the physical elements — without such a contiguity, signs, and things as well, can not interact; a lumpy whole alone can not work at all. The blank is a structural entity in the semiotic system and the physical world as well.

"What fetters the mind and benumbs the spirit is ever the dogged

acceptance of absolutes." This motto, put down by Edward Sapir and shared by Jakobson and Waugh,<sup>22</sup> is here quoted as a sign of some kind of self-deconstruction and defense. I am aware of the fact that in defining the principle of equivalence and the principle of disjunction, and their varied manifestations in the *Wang River Sequence*, by no means could I exempt myself from exerting my own subjectivity on them. Semiotically, this kind of investigation is, to use Umberto Eco's metaphor, "more like exploring a forest where cart-trails or footprints do modify the explored landscape, so that the description that the explorer gives of it must also take into account the ecological variations that he has produced."<sup>23</sup>

### Notes:

1. Preface to *Sight, Sound, and Sense*, ed. Thomas Sebeok (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1978).
2. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), p. 123.
3. Roman Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," *Collected Writings* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), II, pp. 239-59.
4. Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics," in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas Sebeok (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1960), pp. 350-77. For the quotation, see p. 358.
5. Jurij Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, trans. Gail Lenhoff and Ronald Vroon (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1977).
6. Roman Jakobson and Linda Waugh, *The Sound Shape of Language* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1979), p. 236.
7. Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1978); see esp. Ch. I.
8. Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1945) and *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1950).
9. In the folktale literature, Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson have succeeded in preparing a substantial list of motifs, 2340 in total; see Antti Aarne, *The Types of the Folktale*, trans. and enlarged by Stith Thompson, 2nd revision, *Folklore Fellows Communications 75* (Helsinki, 1961). I do not know whether it is possible to come up with a list of motifs in the sense of a cultural concept as exemplified in the *carpe diem* motif, comparable to Aarne-Thompson's, and I do not know either how useful such a list may be. As to the Russian formulation of the motif as a narrative unit, see, for example, Boris Eichenbaum, "Thematics," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. and trans. Lee Lemon and Marion Reis (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 61-95.
10. The Chinese text I follow in this paper is the authoritative *Ssu-pu pei-yao* 四部備要 edition of Wang's complete work: *Wang Yu-ch'eng chi-chien-chu*, 2 vols. 王右丞集箋注, annot. Chao Tien-ch'eng 趙殿成 (Taipei: Chung-Hwa, 1965). In preparing my English rendition of *Wang River Sequence*, I freely adopted certain phrases or

even sentences from G. W. Robinson and Wai-lim Yip's translations, and I would like to express my indebtedness to them. For their translations, see G. W. Robinson, *Poems of Wang Wei* (New York: Penguin, 1973); Wai-lim Yip, *Hiding the Universe: Poems by Wang Wei* (New York: Grossman, 1972). In spite of Wang Wei's consistent popularity, critical studies on him, both in Chinese and other languages, are rather meager. Pauline Yu's "The World of Wang Wei's Poetry: An Illumination of Symbolist Poetics" (Diss. Stanford Univ., 1976) and Marsha Wagner's *Wang Wei* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1981) are the most up-to-date researches on Wai Wang in English. I have been of the opinion that the simplicity and naturalness of Wang's nature poetry may imply a highly artistic manipulation, and I am pleased to find out that Marsha Wagner expresses a similar idea: "Even within the poems which on the surface appear simple, there is deeper level of artful complexity" ("Preface" to her book). Indeed, as Jurij Lotman, from a semiotic perspective, points out that "the effect of simplifying was achieved by sharply increasing the degree of complexity of the text's structure" (p. 270). This complexity is, I think, pertinent to the varied manifestations of equivalences and disjunctions as profiled in this paper from Wang Wei's Wang River Sequence. The origin of the naming of the places in the *Wang River Sequence* (there may be stories behind the names!) may promote our understanding of the Sequence, but it is not available even in the most pertinent book *Lan-t'ien hsien-chih* 藍田縣誌, a history and geography of the Lan-t'ien county, of which the Wang River Valley is a part, in spite of the fact that the book contains some "paraphrases" of the Wang River Scroll.

11. For example, Yu-kung Kao and Tsu-Lin Mei, "Meaning, Metaphor, and Allusion in T'ang Poetry," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 38 (1978), pp. 281-356; and Tim-hung Ku, "Ts'ung Ya-k'ê-shên tê yü-yen hsing-wei mo-shih i chien-li hua-pen hsiao-shou tê chi-hao hsi-t'ung - chien-tu Nien-yü-kuan-yin," 從雅克慎底語言行為模式以建立話本小說的記號系統一兼讀「碾玉觀音」 *Chung-Wai Literary Monthly*, 10, No. 11, (Apr. 1982), pp. 148-75. In the former study, the Jakobsonian principle of equivalence is applied to the T'ang poetry, especially its figurative and allusive dimensions. In the latter study, Jakobson's speech model (the model of six aspects and six functions of speech wherein the poetic function is defined) is applied to the study of the Chinese oral-text stories flourishing in the Sung and the Ming Dynasty, so that the semiotic system of the oral-text stories, defined in terms of the Jakobsonian model, may be formulated.
12. The Chinese Regulated Verse may be the example *par excellence*, wherein a syntactic-semantic parallelism must be maintained in the two middle couplets aside from the requirement of a metrical pattern, which is itself a manifestation of parallelism. Early in the fifth century, Liu Hsieh 劉勰 (465-522), the most important critic of ancient China, has noted the universal nature of parallelism and its manifestation in the language of poetry, saying that "Nature, creating living beings, endows them with limbs in pairs. The divine reason operates in such a way that nothing stands alone. The mind creates literary language, and in doing this it organizes and shapes one hundred different thoughts, making what is high supplement what is low, and spontaneously producing linguistic parallelism." (Chapter "Linguistic Parallelism"). See Liu Hsieh, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* [*Wen-hsin tiao-lung*] 文心雕龍, trans. Vincent Yu-chung Shih (Taipei: Chung-hwa, 1970), p. 270. 造化賦形，支體必雙；神理為用，事不孤立。夫心生文辭，運裁百慮，高下相須，自然成對。

13. Jurij Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, p. 80.
14. Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics," p. 370.
15. Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry*, pp. 164-65.
16. Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978), p. 202.
17. See Tim-hung Ku, "Towards a Semiotic Poetics: A Chinese Model in a Comparative Perspective" (Diss. Univ. of California, 1981), pp. 51-82. In that chapter, I correlate the motive axis (the motivated disjunction as its index) to the figurative axis and the non-figurative axis to form a three-axis co-ordination. Ying-hsiung Chou, based on Jakobson's concept of metaphor and metonymy, comes up with a similar observation of the *hsing* device, saying that "*Hsing*, as we have ascertained, involves a special transference of meaning in which two terms are combined, but with a semantic gap interposed between them." See his "The Linguistic and Mythical Structure of *Hsing* as a Combinational Model," in *Chinese-Western Comparative Literature: Theory and Strategy*, ed. John Desseney, 1980, pp. 51-78. For the quotation, see p. 77.
18. Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading*, p. 195.
19. Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1976), esp. 3.5., pp. 191-217.
20. Wai-lim Yip, "Wang Wei and Pure Experience," a Preface to *Hiding the Universe: Poems by Wang Wei*, p. vi.
21. Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics," p. 356.
22. Sapir's words are quoted by Jakobson and Waugh as an epigraph to their book *The Sound Shape of Language*.
23. Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, p. 29.