

## “Mental Space Mapping in Classical Chinese Poetry: A Cognitive Approach”

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### **1 Introduction**

Primary verbal composite modelling, as manifested in cognitive poetry, raises serious theoretical questions over the nature and function of the linguistic sign (Stockwell 2002). If language as a conventional symbolic system qualifies as the Peircian Thirdness, it cannot possibly be at the same time a Firstness. Rather than getting once again into the infinitely boring debate on the naturalness or arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, or compromising himself by opting for a both-and solution, the author of this chapter has chosen to delve into the empiricism of reading classical Chinese poetry, mainly that produced before and in the Tang Dynasty of the seventh and eighth centuries, where the special use of imagistic language, quite different from its various English counterparts, has evoked heated debate on poetic iconicity over the past four decades.

The debate has been complicated by the supposedly ‘ideographic’ (and popularly but wrongly held ‘iconographic’) nature of the Chinese writing system which has remained virtually unchanged since the second century when the script was codified. A classic statement on poetic diction in the 1970s reads: “Chinese nouns are close approximations of universals.” (Kao and Mei 1971: 104). The underlying assumption is a kind of simplistic iconicity existing between substantives -- “unadorned archetypal nouns” -- and natural phenomena (Kao and Mei 1971: 81).

The above statement was made, ironically, during the heyday of structural linguistics and poetics when they were belatedly introduced and applied to the study of Chinese poetry (Jakobson 1966, Kao and Mei 1971, 1978, Guillén 1971-72, Cheng

1982 [French original 1977]). At the same time, such lexical and syntactical iconicity, when introduced into the Chinese speaking world, was warmly received by traditional interpreters, who, harbouring a similar vision of mimesis, found the idea congenial to their favorite *shi hua* (i.e. ‘poetic talks’ or critical fragments), such as *qing jing jiao rong* (“emotion and scenery convergence”), *jing jie* (“poetic boundary”), etc. The irony lies in the fact that, in the 1960s and 1970s, structural poetics based on the Saussurian linguistic model did not catch on and has never taken root, probably due to traditional literary scholars’ general lack of training and interest in linguistic analysis and suspicion of linguistics-informed poetics, especially when it is imported from the West. The only exception is probably Kao and Mei (1978), but their application remains largely eclectic, marred by burdens of the past.

Curiously, the next paradigm, cognitive linguistics, has rarely been appropriated to deal with classical poetry either, partly because it takes to commonalities that operate across all kinds of discourses, and partly due to researchers’ interest predominantly in language cognition’s more immediate contextuality and its concern with “common operations in everyday life” (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 17). Lacking perhaps the refined sophistication of textual analysis of the previous generation, the cognitive approach, with its focus on human conceptualisation and language cognition, however, may have something to say on the reading of Chinese poetry. For instance, the renewed interest in, and novel articulation of, categories and prototypes may shed light on both the semantic and pragmatic aspects of poetry, and may provide theoretical input on the traditional concept of iconicity. And the kind of poetic ‘space’ (e.g., “scenery” and “boundary” included), whose ‘iconicity’ has appealed to professional exegetes and common readers, when examined in the light of contemporary thinking on spatial cognition and its language representation, may turn

out to be a misnomer and will have to be re-conceptualised and re-articulated (Landau and Lakusta 2006, Levinson 2003, Levinson and Wilkins 2006).

One could re-read classical Chinese poetry, especially that which deals with the prototypes of time and space, in terms of cognitive ‘commonalities’, and rethink the problematic why classical poetry in general lacks figurative and imagistic intricacy, characteristic of highly conceited English poetry, such as in the metaphysical and modernistic traditions. Specifically, it would be interesting to analyse the ways in which mental spaces in Chinese poetry are mapped, for example, how vital relations, scales, force-dynamics, and image-schemata, are integrated or ‘blended’ in creating mediated poetic ‘space’ (Fauconnier 1997). Through close reading of sample poems, which are noted for their representations of ‘space’, in terms of current Language and Space studies (Jarvella and Klein 1982, Svorou 1994, Bloom, Peterson, Nadel, and Garrett 1996, Pütz and Dirven 1996, van der Zee and Slack 2003, Levinson 2003, Levinson and Wilkins 2006, Hickmann and Robert 2006), the author hopes to show that the commonly assumed iconicity in classical Chinese poetry, to return to the Peircian terms that opens this chapter, should be more properly called poetic indexicality.

## **2. Classical Chinese poetry and its American mediators**

Accordingly, this chapter will be divided into two parts. Part 1 gives some background information about Chinese poetry studies over the past four decades, and by so doing expose some of their shortcomings, and Part 2 is an application of current Language and Space studies to the so-called *gu ti shi* (Ancient Style poetry). For readers who are not familiar with Chinese poetic traditions, a short history of seems necessary, but for technical reasons, including space limits, it cannot be given here. The readers are referred to writings by Liu (1962), Yip (1969), Kao and Mei (1971,

1978), Owen (1985), and Yu (1987) in the References section. The following is a very brief account of the scholarship by North-American sinologists in the 1960s and 70s, with particular reference to their conceptualisations of Chinese poetic semantics, mostly under the misnomer of concrete-universal. I have chosen these scholars because they are generally regarded as academic celebrities, who served as mediators between Chinese poetry and its English readership, at a time when Roman Jakobson was experimenting with his analytical method, especially on poetic parallelism (Jakobson 1966).

The earliest example in this line of ‘modernist’ thinking is arguably the late James J. Y. Liu of Stanford University. In his *The Art of Chinese Poetry* (1962), Liu takes note of classical Chinese’s lack of inflection.

This is at once a source of strength and of weakness, for on the one hand *it enables the writer to concentrate on essentials* and be as concise as possible, while on the other hand it leads easily to ambiguity. In other words, where Chinese gains in conciseness, it loses in preciseness. As far as poetry is concerned, the gain is on the whole greater than the loss, for, as Aristotle observed, the poet is concerned with the universal rather than the particular, and the Chinese poet especially is often concerned with presenting the essence of a mood or a scene rather than with accidental details.

(Liu 1962: 40)

The example Liu gives is from the eighth-century Wang Wei (701-761). As the modern interpreter sees it, in the lines:

- (1) *yue chu jing shan niao*  
 Moon rise surprise mountain bird  
*shi ming chun jian zhong*

Occasionally cry in spring valley

it is of no consequence whether “mountain”, “bird”, and “valley” are singular or plural. According to Liu, one can translate these lines as: “The moonrise surprises the mountain bird/That cries now and again in the spring valley”, or “The moonrise surprises the mountain birds/That cry now and again in the spring valley (or valleys)” without changing the meaning. (Liu 1962: 40) Liu asserts that this sense of timelessness and *universality* created by lack of inflection is further enhanced by the frequent omission of the subject in Chinese poetry (Liu 1962: 40). How these grammatical features can be said to contribute to Chinese poetry’s “impersonal and *universal* quality” remains open to debate (Liu 1962: 41). However, Liu’s curious argument lacking linguistic grounding has turned out to be quite popular among Chinese scholars mediating their own source language and a Euro-American academic community using an alien target language, be it English or French.

A little later than Liu, another promulgator of a distinctively Chinese poetics based on non-inflective language is Wai-lim Yip of the University of California at San Diego, who had published his Princeton doctoral thesis on Ezra Pound’s rewriting of *Cathay* in 1969. Quite congenial to Liu without his own awareness, Yip (1969) believes that Chinese poetry has “a special mode of representation of reality constituted or made possible by the peculiarity of the Chinese language itself.” (Yip 1969: 12). Commenting on various English renditions of Li Po’s (701-762) “Taking leave of a friend”, Yip observes that “In the original, or in the translations that observe the original structure, we *see things in nature*” whilst in some Westernized versions, “[w]e see the process of analysis at work rather than the things acting themselves out before us.” (Yip 1969: 16). To Yip, the grammaticalisation of Chinese, modelled on a Western language, such as English, is a “syntactic commitment” (Yip 1969: 19), it

shows “analysis at work” and “the logic of succession -- all of which destroy “the drama of things”, “unanalytical presentation”, “simultaneous presence of two objects”, and “objects in their purest form uncontaminated by intellect or subjectivity” (Yip 1969: 19). Yip concludes that classical Chinese verses, as represented by

(2) *ji sheng mao dian yue*

cock crow/thatch inn/moon

*ren ji ban qiao shang*

man trace/wood bridge/frost (Yip 1969: 25)

present a special poetic vision. “[L]ike the shots in the movies and the montage technique, [they] have touched upon the realms of painting and sculpture, although, unlike the movies, the objects are projected only on the screen of imagination, not literally before our eyes.” (Yip 1969: 26) This is what Yip famously describes as the unmediated pure experience. Throughout his writings, Yip has untiringly pushed the same argument that de-syntaxisation represents a primordial mode of cognition unknown to Western poetics. This unique lexical philosophy against the grain of language and human cognition, e.g., temporality, has provoked a torrent of reactions from various fronts. In this way, Yip can be said to have ironically forestalled even cognitive linguistics well ahead of the linguistic paradigm-shift in the 1980s.

About the same time when Yip was working on his idiosyncratic theory, Kao Yung-kung of Princeton University and Mei Tzu-ling of Cornell University were collaborating on the analyses of Recent Style poetry of the Tang Dynasty (Kao & Mei 1971, 1978). In the early essay, they invoke the American New Critic William K. Wimsatt’s “verbal icon” to support their argument that words in Tang poetry represent “the universals” whilst being “concrete” (Kao & Mei 1971: 69-79). The co-authors further Wimsatt’s rehash of the paradoxical concrete-universal (Wimsatt 1954: 73-83) in the Aristotelian and Hegelian tradition. They elaborate on this paradox by moving

upward and downward in the Aristotelian- Porphyrian hierarchy of biological classification, but they can go no farther than genus and species, in the same way as Kant and Hegel have limited their discussions to ‘species’ and ‘individuals’ (Wimsatt 1954: 72). The problem is that ‘individual’ is not a biological class in opposition to species, because, as a vague quantity concept rather than a class concept, it can also be accommodated by domain, kingdom, phylum, class, order and family. Such terminological fault-finding may not be fair to Kao and Mei because it would miss their assertion on Chinese poets’ general penchant for universality.

Kao and Mei argue that “Chinese nouns are close approximations of universals” (Kao & Mei 1971: 104); and the poet uses “unadorned archetypal nouns,” or “archetypal or primitive terms that stand at the head of each genus” (Kao & Mei 1971: 81), such as “man”, “bird”, “flower”. Wang Wei’s four-line poem, already cited earlier by Liu (Liu 1962), is a typical example.

(3) *ren xian gui hua luo*

Man at leisure, laurel flower fall.

*ye jing chun shan kong*

Night silent, spring mountain empty.

*yue chu jing shan xiao*

Moon rise, startle mountain bird,

*shi ming chun jian zhong*

Time to time sing amidst spring brook.

Here “man”, “night”, “bird”, and even the qualified “mountain” and “flower” are “unadorned archetypal nouns” that constitute the World – with a capital letter *W*! This kind of “undifferentiated” “imagistic language” (Kao & Mei 1971: 128), as Kao and Mei see it, testifies to the principle of equivalence. And – Here follows a non-sequitur! -- “making things equivalent is the attempt to restore the primordial oneness

after the fall.” (Kao & Mei 1971: 129) It is inconceivable that such a bizarre reading of Jakobson based on free association should have been published in the prestigious *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*. Or, the fact shows how Asian Studies has often been ghettoised in certain journals and never really got integrated with the mainstream of poetics.

With historical hindsight, or perhaps in an attempt to redeem their earlier whims, the co-authors attempt to apply Jakobson’s principle of equivalence in the 1978 sequel. Here they observe: “Since Chinese is a language weak in syntax ... the result is that the metaphoric relation dominates over its complement, the analytic relation.” (Kao & Mei 1978: 287). Kao and Mei apply this principle of equivalence to both the lexical and syntactical levels of poems whose “themes” and “motifs” may attract the cognitive linguist interested in the domain of space.

Certain common themes in T’ang poetry also call for the use of contrast [as a manifestation of equivalence]; the very nature of themes such as bidding farewell, looking into the distance, and mediating on history invites the poet to make comparisons—between the past and the present, the far-away and the near-at-hand, or the imagined and the real. (Kao & Mei 1978: 287)

However, to deal with such themes, Kao and Mei retrieve – albeit a bit belatedly, one must say, -- the Jakobsonian model of poetic principle, i.e., the projection of selection unto combination, as a way of fine-tuning the Ransomian dialectic of local texture and logical structure, advanced in their 1971 essay (Kao & Mei 1978: 286).

Kao and Mei’s application covers two major figures: metaphor and allusion, which are “special instances of the principle of equivalence in action” (Kao & Mei 1978: 293). Thus the famous lines by Li Po

(4) *fu yun you zi yi*



Floating cloud, wanderer's mind;

*luo ri gu ren qing*

Setting sun, old friend's feeling

are explicated to be containing a pair of metaphors where human sentiments are likened to natural phenomena, or the other way around (Kao & Mei 1978: 289). By the same logic, Wang Changling's (circa. 698-756) couplet,

(5) *dan shi long cheng fei jiang zai*

If Winged General of Dragon City were present

*bu jiao hu ma du yin shan*

He would not let the Hunnish cavalry cross Mount Yin

which involves a historical allusion to the Han Dynasty General Li Guang, links the present to the past, presumably through the operation of equivalence. For all the richness of their materials -- Just imagine the huge corpus of Tang poetry! -- Kao and Mei never go beyond the structural model of Jakobson, whether or not their reading is acceptable being another matter. This is reflected in their commentary on the principle of equivalence:

Equivalence, consisting of similarity and contrast, is one of the two basic modes of arrangement in ordinary language. In poetry it assumes an even more important role. For example, rhyme and alliteration, prosody and parallelism, are all constituted at least in part by the principle of equivalence. In the general area of meaning, we noted several promising avenues of analysis. When two terms are related by similarity and contrast, new meaning is generated. (Kao & Mei 1978: 293)

### 3. **Equivalence: A structural feature or a cognitive category?**

This last sentence from the above quotation – with its implications of conceptual

blending or coupling, can lead us out of the anachronistically introduced structural paradigm to the cognitive paradigm which was on the rise at the time when Kao and Mei were writing (cf. Rosch 1975; Rosch and Lloyd 1978). But before we deal with the cognitive approach, we should examine in greater detail Kao and Mei's approach to see what is missing.

One may have several reservations about Kao and Mei's 'formalistic' approach, but I shall highlight just two theoretical issues: equivalence and universals. Firstly, their subject matter is the Recent Style poetry or what is generally called *lü-shi* (Regulated poetry) because of its dominant feature of equivalence, which is manifested in diction, couplet verse line, and balanced stanzaic form, as demonstrated by examples (4) and (5) above. It would be quite easy to identify parallelism, on whichever linguistic level, in this kind of poetry. This dominant feature is so cast in foreground that one tends to lose sight of the poetic language's pragmatic functions, such as the cognitive process performed by the speaker/actor but entrusted (or indeed initiated) by the reader. For instance, the metaphors in (4) do not generate themselves automatically by the two pairs of terms: "floating clouds" and "wanderer's mind"; "setting sun" and "old friend's feeling". The two domains have to be blended -- through speech act perhaps, and crossed to make metaphors possible. Similarly, in (5), the couplet suggests two tempo-spatial domains, two 'mental spaces', that of the enunciation and enunciator (i.e., here and now), and that of the enunciated (i.e., there and then), which have to be negotiated pragmatically in the first place. And the 'space builder' that mediates and blends the two domains is none other than the textually suppressed enunciator 'I', whose presence is however suggested by the conditional "If" (*dan shi*).

The much-abused equivalence constitutes one of the two poles of language

structure conceptualised by Saussure, and elaborated by Jakobson and others. Saussure calls it “rapports associatifs” in opposition to “rapports syntagmatiques” (Saussure 1959); these are later codified by Jakobson and André Martinet as paradigm versus syntagma or metaphor versus metonymy. However, its foundation is opposition, including both the positive and negative dimensions -- identification and differentiation -- that begins on the supposedly ‘lowest’ phonemic level, and moves up to other phonological, semantic, and syntactic levels, and as such can be said ubiquitous in language. To show equivalence in poetry is in fact to state the obvious, and one sees equivalence everywhere to confirm only viciously this equivalence model. Moreover, this linguistic phenomenon, albeit based on basic binary logic, cannot be freely appropriated to blend with other metaphysical entities, such as “primordial oneness” before the Fall, or the Aristotelian concrete-universal. Finally, there are as many ways of conceptualising the world as there are many natural languages. Therefore, cognitive universality cannot be derived from the particularity of a natural language, such as classical Chinese. This is what I have termed elsewhere in my critique of Leibniz, Hegel and Derrida as “hallucinations”.

The reference to the concrete-universal leads us to the problem of category, a common concern of all the Chinese critics I have discussed above, Liu, Yip, Kao and Mei. Their interest in linguistic categorisation is, however, unnecessarily complicated by the fuzzy concept of concrete-universal charged with value, and the assumption that [one type of] Chinese poetry represents primordial images only. It may not be strange that Chinese, as with other *homo loquens*, have been concerned with categorisation. Kao and Mei’s 1971 discussion of genus and species was echoed by James Liu’s student Pauline Yu (Yu 1987) from an indigenous Chinese perspective. Yu comments on the Confucianist notion of *lei*, or “categorical correspondences” (Yu

1987: 41) in the following statement:

In other words, meaning is not attached externally and arbitrarily to an image but follows logically from the fact that objects and situations were believed traditionally to belong to one or more non-mutually exclusive, *a priori*, and natural classes. (Yu 1987: 42)

One could detect herein the same line of thinking that subscribes to natural morphology, iconicity included.

Category is probably the first and foremost, but also the most challenging task for cognitive studies. The Kantian *a priori* categories of time and space have received renewed attention by cognitive linguists. Ronald Langacker (1987) calls these “basic domains.” As such they are capable of forming, through blending, more complex concepts. Where terminology is concerned, John R. Taylor’s (1989) “prototype” may not be a more beautiful word than Kao and Mei’s “archetype” and “universal”, but the currency gained by ‘prototypical categorisation’ in the late 1980s clearly points to a paradigm-shift. Interestingly, universal categories discussed by Kao and Mei in 1971, and metaphor and allusion discussed in 1978, continue to be discussed in different linguistic and literary contexts, but by cognitive linguists and critics from other perspectives. Researchers have suspended purely theoretical discussions, but tend to adopt an eclectic approach which reconciles the *a priori* and *a posteriori* positions. For instance, deictics or indexicality can be regarded as a language universal, but it is at the same time culture-specific and under socio-historical, and, surely, linguistic constraints (Fillmore 1997). The common themes of space and time, treated in passing by Kao and Mei, are prime categories, as long been asserted by Aristotle, Leibniz and Kant, but one no longer cares about bird, flower, mountain and river as primordial images, but now turns to more specific space configurations, and addresses such topics as vector grammar, representation of direction, blending of mental spaces, etc.

The second part of my paper will be a preliminary exploration into this area, and my data will be taken from the Ancient Style poetry before the Tang Dynasty.

#### 4. Sample analyses of space in *Ancient Style* poetry

Since the earliest recorded times, twelfth – fifth centuries BCE, Chinese poets have been obsessed with space, and have established as poetic convention a network of spatio-temporal configurations. The oldest anthology *Shi Jing* (The Canon of poetry) abounds with examples showing directions, orientation, and movement. Example (6) is the opening of an ancient rhyme about an event which took place presumably in the pre-Confucian Zhou Dynasty, and it was recorded no later than the first century A.D. in the Grand Historian’s *Annals*.

(6) *den bi xi shan xi*

[I] am climbing up yonder West Mountain

*cai qi wei yi*

To gather its wild beans!

(Ancient Rhymes, Anonymous)

There are at least two instances of spatial language, i.e., linguistic expressions describing spatio-temporal configurations: (i) the spatial variable “West Mountain” that indicates “object location”, and (ii) the present participial phrase “climbing up” that indicates “object movement”. These two variables are common motifs in Ancient Style poetry. A most popular example is probably

(7) *cai ju dong li xia*

[I] plucked chrysanthemums under the East hedge

*you ran jian nan shan*

And by chance glanced South Mountain

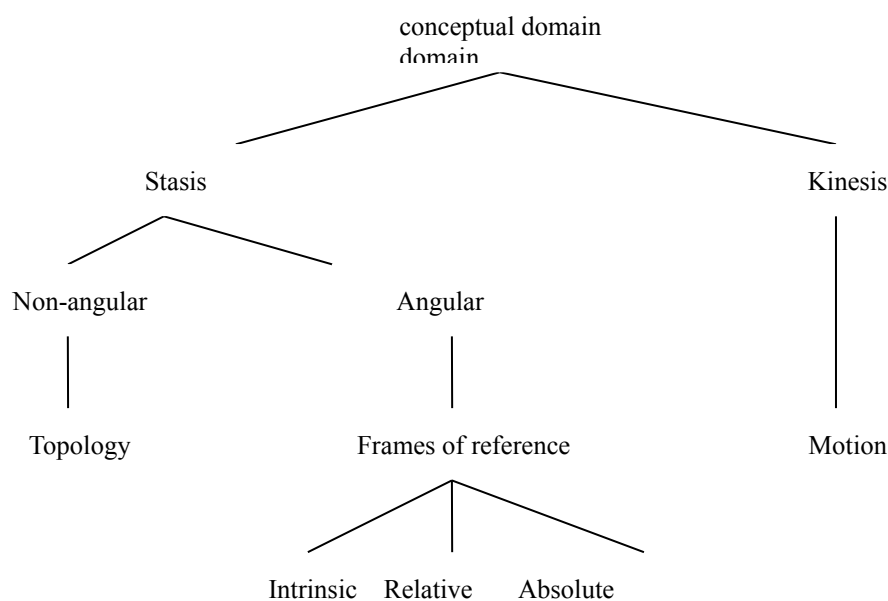
(Tao Qian [circa. 365-427])

While both (6) and (7) involve topology, they evoke, respectively, two states of

human existence, kinesis and stasis, with (6) suggesting frames of reference and vector and motion, and (7) only frames of reference established by the speaker/actor's perspective. Now a whole spectrum of spatial concepts that constitute the larger spatial domain can be evoked: frame (Lee 2001), profile (Langacker 1987, 2000), orientation, movement, frames of reference, construal, perspective-taking (Levelt 1996), ground and figure (Levinson and Wilkins 2006), landmark and trajector (Langacker 1987), trigger and target (Fauconnier 1997), base space and projected space (Stockwell 2002). In Example (6) West Mountain is the landmark, and the speaker/actor, or his persona, will be the trajector. One could also label West Mountain as target 1, the wild beans target 2, both of which serve to trigger the speaker/actor's kinesis, i.e., bodily movement from the 'here and now', the moment of enunciation to the 'there' of 'yonder' West Mountain. The case of Example (7) is more subtle. First of all, one would have to pose the questions: Whose orientation do the lines suggest? Does the perspective belong to the landmark or the trajector? In either case, who or what are they? A chain of relationships can be arrived at: In line 1, "I" is the trajector (T1), and "chrysanthemum" the landmark (L1) but once at the East hedge, chrysanthemum becomes the trajector (T2) and East hedge the landmark (L2). Beyond the semantic universe, the whole line 1 becomes a trajector whose landmark is line 2. Thus in reading process, the action of "plucking chrysanthemums by the East hedge" serves as a trajector (T3) for the new landmark (L3) "glancing in leisure South Mountain". This is where semantics and pragmatics merge.

How are domains blended? Jakobson would suggest his projection of selection onto combination. Fauconnier is never very clear about this. Compare (6) and (7), (6) looks dynamic because of the space-builders "climbing up" and "plucking" and because there is no indication of initial bodily location, whilst at first glance (7) looks

static (Levinson and Wilkins 2006: 3) because there is no bodily movement that changes the speaker/actor's location, save the relatively static "plucking" and perspective-taking "glancing". However, if we did a detailed analysis, we would find (7) more dynamic than (6) because of the chain-reactions of landmark/trajector or target/trigger. The series of landmark and trajector belong to different types of mental spaces: "time spaces", as in (5), "space spaces", as in both (6) and (7), "domain spaces", as indicated by "climbing" in (6) and "plucking" in (6), (7), and "glancing" in (7), and "hypothetical spaces", as the subjunctive in (5) (Stockwell 2002: 96). A diagram to compare the conceptual domain in (6) and (7) can be borrowed from Levinson and Wilkins (2006: 3).



First of all, in both (6) and (7), the spatial domain is angular rather than topological. There are relative frames of reference between landmark and trajector, East hedge, South Mountain, West Mountain, and there is motion in the trajectors of both. If classical Chinese poetry used universals only, then its spatial domain would be topological, as in the sub-domains in (8).

(8) *da mo gu yan zhi*

Large desert lone smoke straight [vertical]

*chang he luo ri yuan*

Long river setting sun round [circular]

(Wang Wei)

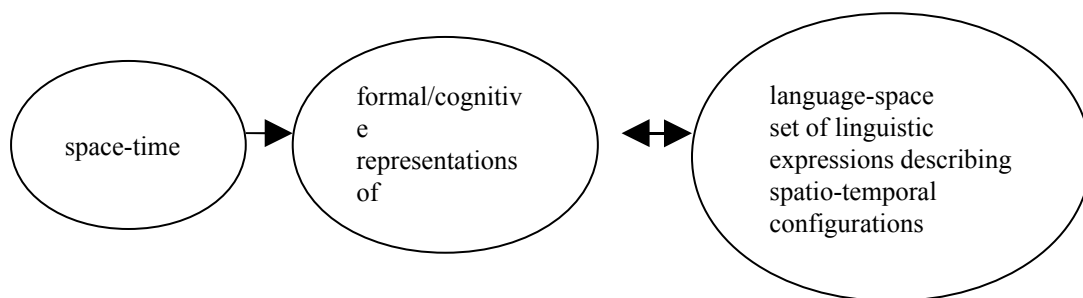
Although *da* (big, large, broad, etc.), *chang* (long), *zhi* (straight-line), *yuan* (round, circle, spheric) are primordial, once set in relation to other components, i.e., once syntactic relations are established, the whole spatial domain becomes angular and kinetic. This would be a counter example to Yip's and Kao and Mei's argument for Wang Wei's "non-analytical" landscape.

In (6) and (7), the chain reactions between landmarks and trajectors, or between mental spaces that are to be blended, can only be explained, if explained away, to be culture-specific, the formalistic constraint, such as genre, being in itself a second-order signification on top of the primary model of Chinese (Which Chinese?). One such constraint is -- as all students of Chinese poetry would immediately recognise -- the timeless motif (or "domain space") of flower "plucking", and plucking chrysanthemum, in particular, has become almost a literary institution (a domain larger than allusion) since Tao Qian. In other words, and with due respect to Fauconnier & Co., there is a time space of the timeless space of domain space which remains a hypothetical space because it belongs to another reality space which is poetry. Now all these need blending. Whatever serves as a better blender than our old but outlawed friend syntax or the axis of combination?

Another culture-specific constraint is surely directions, a key domain in vector grammar. In both (6) and (7), there are the "space spaces" of directions, which John O'Keefe defines, not without a touch of irony, as "parallel, infinitely long vectors" (O'Keefe 2003: 70). For thousands of years, Chinese houses, especially in northern China, have been built according to one almost exclusive formula: they are seated



North, facing South, with gardens on the East, and ‘towers’ on the West. Without this knowledge one would not be able to understand (7). This spatial cognition is infinitely reflected in poetry, that is, once it has entered language or, more precisely, having been already created by language at the first instance. This would lead us again into the *a priori* versus *a posteriori* circular argument. Let us stop that and accept the diagramme of van de Zee and Slack (2003) (cf. Jackendoff, 1996).



We concede that the Chinese, say, in the fourth to fifth-century Jin Dynasty where Tao Qian flourished, had an agreed construal of spatial configurations expressible in the poetic language of songs (*yue fu*) and Ancient Style poetry, of which they could not have anticipated the later appellations. These expressions and cognition are mutually implicated, as indicated by the double arrow. The two-way traffic can be suggested by Tao’s using the ancient formulaic “plucking” to blend his daily life domain and creative domain. In fact, this recurrent motif was so popular that it ceases to be realistic, but serves only as a space builder, a *xing* or poetic rising, which blends the mental space that is the larger and longer lyrical tradition and the mental space which is the inmost recesses of poetic imagination.

Other such domain spaces include, no doubt, the poet’s sense of directions. In the following I shall read a most famous Ancient Style poem “Jiangnan” (South of the Yangtze River), supposedly a folk song collected by literati during the Six Dynasties (third-sixth centuries). The lyric was obviously quite popular during the time,

because scholars agree that it was tuned and sung in the public. Although it was admitted to most anthologies, few people take the verse seriously as an example of good poetry. It's time to right the wrong.

(9) *jiang nan ke cai lian*

One could pluck lotus seeds in Jiangnan (River South)

*lian ye he tian tian*

How rich the lotus leaves grow [How like ploughed fields]

*yu xi lian ye jian*

Fish frolic amidst lotus leaves

*yu xi lian ye dong*

Fish frolic to the east of lotus leaves

*yu xi lian ye xi*

Fish frolic to the west of lotus leaves

*yu xi lian ye nan*

Fish frolic to the south of lotus leaves

*yu xi lian ye bei*

Fish frolic to the north of lotus leaves

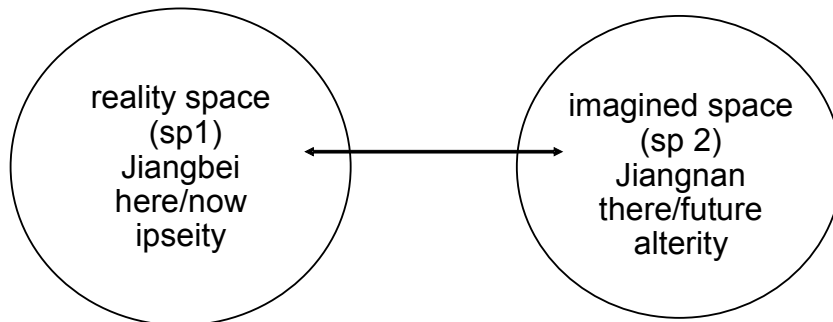
The poem's authorship is unknown, and the only plausible conjecture is that it was a popular song in the *xiang he* ('echoing') style, and the refrain formed by the last four lines suggests that it was sung by the chorus or several parts of it in alternation.

Because of its seeming simplicity and lack of artistic sophistication, the poem has been regarded as belonging to the folk tradition. So much for the poem's background, and now the space domain is in order.

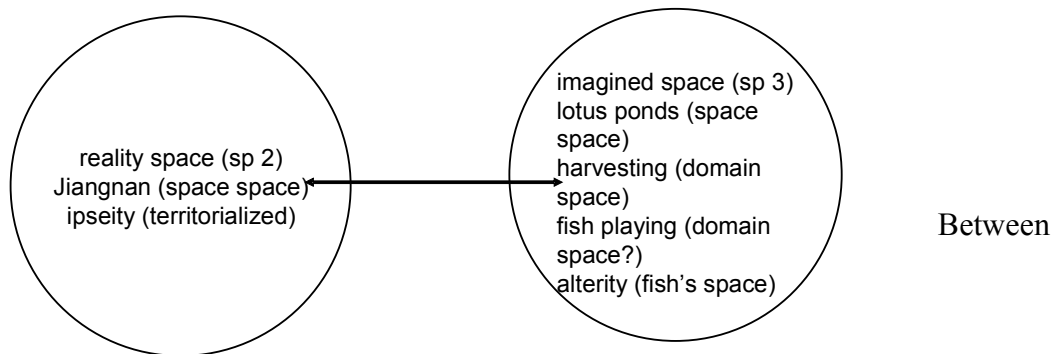
As with (6) and (7), the first thing one notices is the directions. All the four directions are evoked in the refrain, in a rather mechanical order. For Chinese language users throughout the centuries, however, the four directions follow an old colloquial usage. Even today, we still give the directions in that order: starting with

the east, proceed to its opposite west, next move counter-clockwise to the south, and finally end in the latter's opposite north. Another order, more recently, is the clockwise east/south/west/north. In both cases, one starts with the east, and ends in the north. This space configuration, traceable probably to ancient fertility myth and the cyclical concept of time, is lent to the fish which frolic in the same order. Now the space-blender is obviously the lexical string in colloquialism, linked not by syntax, but dictated by inherited cultural convention. It is an unconscious meme, as it were, that the north is least preferred.

This fore-knowledge leads us to the title, "Jiangnan", literally, the region to the south of the Yangtze River, i.e., the warmer part of China. In Chinese literature Jiangnan is not only represented as a land of plenty, it has also become a symbol of cornucopia, partly as a result of politicised north-south divide. For this reason, one can safely surmise that there is a reality space that belongs to the hidden impersonal speaker, and that reality space is the north, Jiangbei, or the region to the north of the Yangtze River. From the northerner's point of view, Jiangnan is an imagined space, a space of alterity. The blender of these two mental spaces is one modal word: the concessional and conditional adverbial *ke* (may, could), showing a possibility rather than actuality. The relation of the two spaces is shown in the diagram.



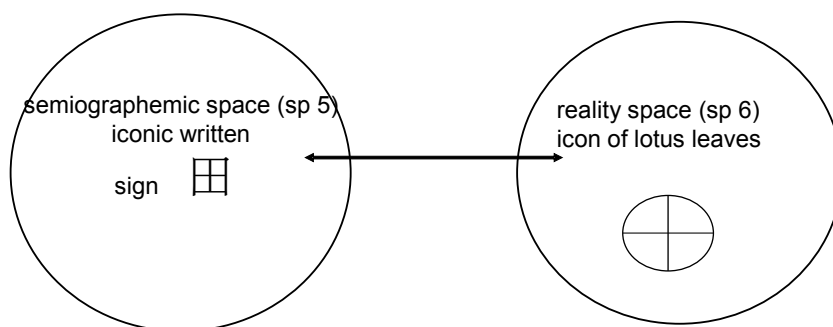
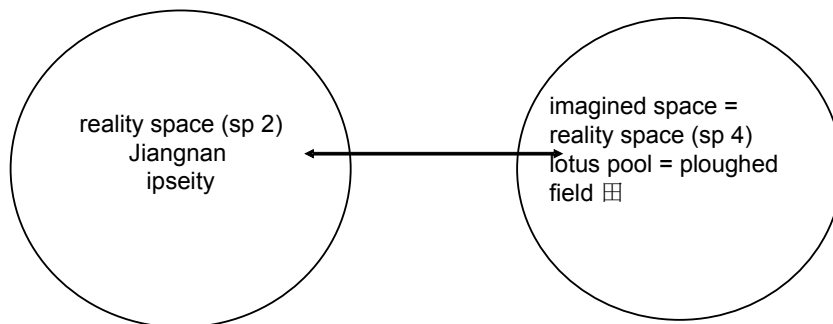
In Fauconnier's terms, Space 1 serves as a trigger and Space 2 its target. Once the two spaces are built and blended by the conditional *ke*, and by two modalities, the alethic and the axiological, showing respectively probability and value, the poem is ready to move to a third space, lotus ponds, where people can gather (*cai*) lotus seeds and fish frolic (*xi*), or people watching fish frolic, another culture-specific space domain that goes back to the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi (Chang 2005).



line 1 and line 3, where two spaces are blended, i.e., human pleasure of gathering lotus seeds and fish frolicking are identified, there is a strange intrusion by line 2. The Chinese reads: /lian/ /ye/ /he/ /tian/ /tian/, which can give rise to two different renditions due to the polysemy of /tian/: “How rich the lotus leaves grow!” or “How the lotus leaves look like *tian* (i.e., ploughed fields in the north, or water rice pads in the south)!” One reading says the repeated *tian* is an adjective, meaning ‘rich’ or ‘vigorous’ [in growth], to qualify lotus leaves, But originally the written word of *tian* 田 is an icon, a pictograph of divided ploughed field, with two footpaths crossing in the middle, thus dividing the plot of land into four pieces, east, west, south and north, provided that one moves the square sign slightly clockwise until it becomes a diamond or lozenge, with an angle facing north, another facing south. That is why a second-century lexicographer explicated the written sign as composed by four reduplicated square mouth, /kou/ 口, divided by a vertical footpath and a horizontal footpath. The two intersecting lines that make right angles and a cross +

that divides the space-space (as the signified concept, *la signifié*) are in fact morphographemes (as the signifying visual form, *le signifiant*, with or without the sound signifier) of another graphic sign which is pleremic (meaning-full) in its own right. The sign + means number *ten*, and the idea is derived from its components: the horizontal line —, referring to the West and the East, and the vertical line of |, referring to the North and the South, with their intersecting pointing to the centre. This explains beautifully the four, nay, five directions in which the fish play. (Guo 2006: 42. Xu Shen, *Shuowen jiezi*)

Now what kind of mental space is this? We are back to the realm of sign, not the Saussurian linguistic sign constituted by the signifying sound and the signified concept, but a more intricate phonographic sign, consisting of the triply articulated phonic and graphic *signifiants* and their shared *signifié*, or, more precisely, two coexisting *signifiants*, pointing to two *signifiés*. Our spatial cognition is therefore put to the test. There are now three other pairs of mental spaces, developed on the logical semantic level, and the purely formalistic, semiographemic level (Chang 1996).



For a poet who has not been to Jiangnan or whose experience is mediated by previous texts, there is, however, another route to satiate his/her vicarious experience. Perhaps by accident, or through his unconscious (partially mental) space, the poet manages to get to the imagined space of Jiangnan through writing, indeed through the magical function of a written sign. The fish frolic in both fields, the lotus leaves that

resemble *tian* , quartered watery rice field, which is iconic to the pictograph sign. Thus line 2 *lian ye he tian tian* can be translated -- instead of “How rich the lotus leaves grow!” or “How the lotus leaves look like ploughed fields!” – as, miraculously, “How lotus leaves are like the 〈tian〉 word?” This kind of special cognition where literacy and Nature merge is quite common amongst Chinese. We often say, even today, “Lo, the geese fly like a human word [*ren zi*]!” “She is wearing slippers with a human word [*ren zi*] (flip-flop).” or “He sleeps like a big word [*da zi*].” Does writing map Nature, or the other way round? The semiographemic mediation is also seen in the two space-building words, *cai* (pluck) and *xi* (frolic), which link the human world and the piscine world by pointing to the identical biological domain of *Umwelt*. Such semiosis bears witness to mental space mapping of Chinese poetry in general.

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