

The imagery of Tang poems on things (yongwushi 詠物詩): a semiotic approach.

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Introduction

The Tang dynasty (618–907) was the time when poetry flourished in China. The poetic language which took final shape during that time and largely resorted to citations, allusions and different types of intertextuality was later considered to be “classic”. A distinct feature of such language is its lexicon: the tropes, symbols and, more generally, images, constituted a complex “system” used for poetic creation. Given the notion that writing a poem required reciting verses considered prominent in the tradition, imitating the style of other poets, and appealing to a large number of well-known historical events, anecdotes, philosophical texts, etc., this system was prone to the appearance of certain recurring patterns and clichés.

Materials

The research concentrates on *shi* 詩 poetry of the Tang period, and limits itself to a number of *yongwushi* 詠物詩 or 'poems on things'. *Shi* poetry in its two basic forms *gutishi* 古體詩 'ancient style poetry', and *jintishi* 近體詩 'recent style poetry' is very suitable for formal analysis:

- There is a set number of characters in a line
- Structure of a poem is defined by many rules (especially in 'recent style poetry')
- Parallel lines present information on what concepts were opposed to each other in poetic language
- Prosodic rules, such as tonal patterns and rhymes constrain the vocabulary usage

Basic research objectives

- Define the “images” or units of figurative language in poems on things
- Analyze paradigmatic relationships between images (i.e. between those, that can take the same place in a semantic structure)
- Analyze syntagmatic relationships (i.e. the ones that make the text coherent: in a poem a moon or a river can be watched, but most probably not food)
- Describe the clichés associated with these images
- Describe the conventions of reading, what was expected by a reader when he or she saw a certain image

Possible DH methods

- Advanced filtering of large corpus and extraction of relevant data
- Statistical information on usage of separate images
- Searching for recurring patterns or images that often co-occur within the same poem

Example of co-occurrence of words in poems from “Quantangshi” (for 白雲, white cloud):

詞彙	頻率	詞彙	頻率
明月	61	清露	10
流水	40	青壁	7
芳草	29	秋草	7
滄海	28	丹灶	5
紅葉	17	青鏡	2
黃葉	16	青玉	2
青草	14	皇道	1

From: Chao-Lin Liu 劉昭麟, Chun-Ning Chang 張淳寧, Chu-Ting Hsu 許筑婷 et al. “《Quantangshi》de fenxi, tankan yu yingyong – fengge, duizhang, shehui wanglu yu duilian” 《全唐詩》的分析、探勘與應用-風格、對仗、社會網路與對聯 [Textual Analysis of Complete Tang Poems for Discoveries and Applications- Style, Antitheses, Social Networks, and Couplets]. In: *The 2015 Conference on Computational Linguistics and Speech Processing ROCLING 2015*, pp. 43-57

