

Identifying The Semiotic Meaning of Li Bai's Poetry to Support the Learning of Chinese Literature Courses

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the sign system in the form of icons, indexes, and symbols in three poems by Li Bai entitled 玉阶怨 [yù jiē yuán] 'Fretting on the Jade Staircase', 怨情 [yuàn qíng] 'Revenge', and 下江陵 [xià jiāng líng] 'down to Jiangling'. This research uses qualitative method and Peirce's semiotic analysis approach in the form of analytical description. The data sources in this study are three poetry texts contained in the book Tangshi Yibai Shou. The data were collected using reading and note-taking techniques. From the analysis, it can be seen that there is a whole system of signs, especially indexes and symbols that represent life in the Tang dynasty. This proves the existence of signs and relationships to the objects they represent. The relationship is in the form of similarity, convention, and existence to the object. The poems contain themes of longing, separation, sadness, and reflections on the relationship between humans and nature that represent life during the Tang dynasty. Semiotics in this study not only helps in interpreting Li Bai's poems, but also serves as a learning tool in Chinese literature courses. Through understanding the meanings in the poems, students can learn more about the culture and historical background that influenced the birth of these literary works.

Keywords: *Semiotic, Poetry, Li Bai, Chinese literature*

Introduction

Literary works are expressions of human feelings, thoughts, opinions, experiences, and feelings that are poured in written or oral form creatively and imaginatively. Literature is also called a form of creative art that uses language as its medium and human experience as its object. This life experience can take the form of the author's own experience or the experience of others who have gone through contemplation, appreciation, and imitation so that it becomes meaningful values for human life. Literary works are divided into three types, namely poetry, prose, and drama (Setiawan et al., 2020).

Poetry is a literary work that expresses the inner feelings of an author through the selection of words or diction that is beautiful, and dense and has a deep meaning. This is in line with the opinion of Hasanah et al., (2019) which states that poetry is interpreted as a

work of art that uses the medium of language as an intermediary to provide beauty that can be used as a means to express ideas according to the form of expression of the poet's feelings.

Poetry not only serves as a form of artistic expression, but also reflects profound cultural and social values, and classical poetry in Chinese society is no exception. According to Li (2014, 14) Chinese literary works in the classical period expressed more emotions through the use of symbols, idioms, and wordplay. The dominant language used is classical Chinese, which is characterized by elegance, simplicity, and density, and differs from everyday language. These characteristics give classical Chinese literature its beauty. During this period, poetry played a very significant role. The ability to write poetry was used as one of the benchmarks for recruiting employees through state examinations. According to Karsono (2015) during the war period known as the Chūnqiū Zhànguó period (770 BC-221 BC), poems began to be collected and recorded. Therefore, during this period, a collection of poems called (诗经 shījīng) was published. Thus, Chinese literature continued to develop until it reached its peak during the Tang dynasty.

Tang dynasty poetry (唐诗 tángshī) is one of the most famous classics of Chinese poetry. Many poems of this period depict the lives of the people of the Tang Dynasty (唐朝 táng cháo). According to Liang (2005:5), the most complete Tang Dynasty poetry was compiled in 1726, with more than 48,900 poems collected by the Qing Dynasty. To date, the number of collected Tang Dynasty poems has reached 50,000. The Tang Dynasty also gave birth to great and famous poets such as 李白 [Lǐ Bái], 杜甫 [Dù Fǔ], and 白居易 [Bái Jūyì]. 李白 [Lǐ Bái] was a legendary poet of the Tang Dynasty who wrote thousands of highly acclaimed poems and verses. Throughout his life, 李白 [Lǐ Bái] traveled extensively throughout China. 李白 [Lǐ Bái]'s poems often depict the beauty of nature, convey pleasurable things, and the beauty of life. Each stanza and rhyme in his poems contains deep meaning.

Understanding the deep meaning contained in poetry requires an understanding of the science that studies signs in a literary work, namely semiotics. Saussure (in Lagopoulos. 2020) defines semiotics as the study of meaning, specifically focusing on the place of signification. Semiotics examines the process of semiosis involving the creation and interpretation of signs that include various cultural systems such as language, literature, art, cinema, music, architecture, and clothing, all of which function as tools of signification. In the world of semiotics, language is considered as one of the important elements that make up the sign system in literary works. Meaning and beauty in poetry are created through the poet's careful selection of words and language. Therefore, in semiotic studies, language is seen as one of the main components that form the sign system in literary works.

One of the known semiotic models is that of Charles Sanders Peirce that helps identify and categorize the signs and meanings contained in poetry. Peirce's semiotic model classifies signs into three types, namely icons, which are signs that have similarities with the objects they represent; indexes, which are signs that have an existential relationship with their objects; and symbols, which are signs that have a conventional relationship with their objects (Sobur, 2002). Peirce's semiotics is a method for understanding signs by examining the relationship between the representamen and the object that can help reveal the various meanings in the signs contained in poetry. The application of the semiotic model in poetry analysis not only enriches the understanding of literary works, but also provides a tool to explore deeper and more complex meanings.

Literature learning in the Chinese Language Education Study Program at State University of Malang is an integral part of developing language skills and understanding Chinese culture. The Chinese Language Education Study Program provides a focus on understanding Chinese literature and culture which includes classic and contemporary works. In the Chinese literature course at the Chinese Language Education Study Program, students are expected to study the series of Chinese literature from the Qin Dynasty, the middle era of 中国近代文学/中国现当代文学 (1840-1949), to contemporary literature 中国当代文学 (1949-Present), the creators of Chinese literary works, the form of literary works from each period, and the meaning/message contained in a work in each era (German Language Department Catalog 2020, 2020).

In learning Chinese literature, poetry plays an important role not only as a means of language learning, but also as a door to understanding the culture contained in it. Chinese poetry has symbols that interpret meaning not only in the form of words but also as a description of the culture, values, and outlook on life of the people it represents, so literature is used as a medium for learning Chinese language and culture. However, based on the results of interviews conducted with 2021 students, many students only recognize poetry as a form of literature without knowing the meaning and culture contained in it deeply. Students only understand poetry in a literal way, that is, simply reading and enjoying the words without realizing the relationship between the signs in the poem and the broader meaning. Therefore, students need to understand semiotics to show a significant relationship with meaning so that they can understand poetry deeply.

Based on the above statement, it is necessary to study the poetry of the Tang dynasty, which is one of the periods of Chinese classical literature after the Qin dynasty, and the symbols that can represent the era. By studying these poems, learning Chinese literature can interpret the complex meaning behind the words and sentences read. In this study, the poems analyzed are three famous poems by 李白 [Lǐ Bái] contained in the book 唐诗一百首 [Tángshī yī bǎi shǒu] '100 poems of the Tang dynasty' namely: 玉阶怨 [yù jiē yuàn] 'Fretting on the Jade Steps', 怨情 [yuàn qíng] 'Vengeance', and 下江陵 [xià jiāng líng] 'Descending to Jiangling'. The researcher chose these three poems because they are the works of the great author Li Bai who can be a representation of other authors during the Tang dynasty. In the three poems, there are many symbols representing the Tang dynasty that can add to the understanding of culture and life at that time. The purpose of this study is to describe the sign system in the form of icons, indexes, and symbols in three poems by Li Bai.

This study refers to several previous studies, namely "Semiotic Analysis of Poetry by 杜甫 Dǔfǔ in the Book 唐诗一百首 [Tángshī yī bǎi shǒu] '100 Poems of the Tang Dynasty' by Nadya Soraya Rahman (2017), "Analysis of Semiotic studies in Chairil Anwar's poetry Charles Sanders Peirce Theory" by Ika Sari Rahayu (2021), and "Jerusalem in Nizzar Qobbani's Al-Quds poem (Charles Sanders Peirce Semiotic Study)" by Astri Aspianti Sahidadan Dedi Supriadi (2020). These three studies are in line with this research, namely analyzing the description of the relationship between the representamen and the object of Charles Sanders Peirce's theory. What distinguishes this research from previous studies is the object of research. This study discusses the semiotics of poetry by 李白 Lǐ Bái contained in the book 唐诗一百首 [Tángshī yī bǎi shǒu] '100 poems of the Tang dynasty'.

Method

This research uses a qualitative method and a semiotic approach that focuses on the results of analytical descriptions that describe the discussion based on the subject. This method allows a thorough study of the poem by paying special attention to the sign system consisting of icons, indices, and symbols. According to Bogdan and Taylor (in Nugrahani, 2008), qualitative research can be understood as a procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words obtained from informants or through observation of behavior. Meanwhile, Creswell (2014) states that qualitative research is an investigative process that aims to explore social phenomena and issues related to human life. Qualitative research is also seen as a strategy to seek meaning, understanding, concepts, characteristics, symptoms, symbols, or descriptions related to certain phenomena. The results of qualitative research are presented in a narrative form that describes in depth the object or event under study (Sidiq & Choiri, 2019).

Data collection in this study was carried out by reading and recording techniques. According to Mahsun (2012), if researchers find the use of language in written form, then in the data collection process researchers only use recording techniques. Researchers record various forms that are relevant and related to the research from the use of written language.

The data in this study are words, phrases, and sentences containing the types of semiotic signs of icons, indexes, and symbols in the poems by 李白 [Lǐ Bái] in the book 唐诗一百首 [tángshī yī bǎi shǒu] '100 poems of Tang dynasty'. This study uses data sources in the form of 3 poetry manuscripts contained in the book 唐诗一百首 [tángshī yī bǎi shǒu] '100 Poems of Tang Dynasty' by 李白 [Lǐ Bái]. Other data is in the form of previous research such as library sources, internet media and other media used as references. The main instrument in this research is the researcher himself who acts as a key instrument. The researcher is responsible as a research planner, data collector, analyst, and reporter of research results. The process of planning, collecting data, and preparing reports was carried out by the researcher by reading, recording, summarizing theories, and classifying data. The data that has been classified is then used as a basis for identification and analysis of the signs in the poem. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative method is a research approach that involves collecting and analyzing descriptive and in-depth data with the aim of understanding social phenomena in their original context.

This research uses an expert validator, namely one of the lecturers of the Chinese language program at the State University of Malang Dhevy Olivia Firdaus, S.Pd., MTCSOL to validate the validity of the data. The researcher collects, searches, and compiles information that will be used as a guide in identifying and classifying the trichotomous sign between the representamen and the object contained in the poem. This research uses the following data collection steps: 1) Reading the poems by 李白 [Lǐ Bái] in the book 唐诗一百首 [tángshī yī bǎi shǒu] '100 poems of the Tang dynasty' repeatedly. 2) Searching for literature sources related to the semiotic theory proposed by Charles Sanders Peirce. 3) Developing a sign trichotomy category sheet as a reference for data identification and processing. 4) Make a table identification sheet of the contents of the poems to be identified based on the categorization sheet.

In qualitative research, researchers as human instruments set the focus of research, select informants as data sources, assess data quality, analyze data, interpret data and make

conclusions on their findings (Sugiyono, 2017). The analysis steps in this study are as follows:

- 1) Reading the poems by 李白 [Lǐ Bái] in the book 唐诗一百首 [tángshī yī bǎi shǒu] repeatedly.
- 2) Classify the types of semiotic signs of icon, index, and symbol found in each word of the poem.
- 3) Marking the semiotic signs of icons, indices, and symbols in each sentence in the poem line.
- 4) Performing triangulation to test the validity of the data that has been collected.
- 5) Drawing conclusions on the results of the analysis of the types of semiotic signs.

Results

Peirce (in Senel 2007) explains that literature can be seen as a sign system consisting of verbal signs (such as words), nonverbal signs (such as images or symbols), and interpretive signs (meanings interpreted by readers). Literature as signs for human opinions, experiences, and imaginative feelings. Therefore, literature involves a semiotic process that includes three main elements, namely the object (the thing represented by the sign), the representamen (the sign that represents something), and the interpretant (the meaning or understanding by the reader). This research discusses the relationship between the object and the representamen influencing the interpretant, as well as how the relationship and interpretation reinforce the elements in the literary work.

Literary works have an important element of meaning that uses the thoughts or feelings of the reader. This can lead to differences in meaning, depending on who is reading it. Poetry is a form of literary work that has many elements related to meaning. Poetry is a written text that uses language to describe all forms of experience experienced by the author using sentences or paragraphs that correlate with meaning. Therefore, poetry is a form of literary work that prioritizes beauty and the importance of meaning.

This study analyzes 3 famous poems by the poet 李白 [Lǐ Bái] contained in the book 唐诗一百首 [tángshī yī bǎi shǒu] '100 poems of the Tang dynasty' which have many interesting signs and meanings to explore. The results of this study show that the poems contain various types of signs classified according to Charles Sanders Peirce's Semiotic model which includes Icon, Index, and Symbol.

Discussion

3.1 Analysis of the Semiotic Relationships of Icons, Indices, and Symbols in the Poem 玉阶 (sadness on the jade steps)

玉阶怨

(sadness on the jade steps)

玉阶生白露,

The jade staircase is covered in white dew,

夜久侵罗袜。

The long night creeps into the silk shirt.

却下水晶帘,

I grabbed the crystal curtain and pulled it down,

玲珑望秋月。

Through the crack, I looked up at the brilliant autumn moon.

Table 1. Categories of Sign types

No	Sentence/Word	Representation/Sign	Object	Description
1	玉阶生白露 The jade staircase is covered with white dew,	玉阶 [yù jiē] jade staircase	Symbol	The jade staircase symbolizes high social status, luxury and beauty, but also a life of seclusion and loneliness despite being in a luxurious environment.
		白露 [báilù] white dew	Icon & Index	白露 [báilù] or white dew is a description of a tranquil morning or evening atmosphere, where cold air and moisture envelop everything around.

In the first line there is a symbol contained in the phrase 玉阶 [yù jiē] which means ‘jade staircase’. According to Peirce (in Fiske, 2002), a symbol is a type of sign whose object relationship is based on predetermined conventions or agreements, so that its meaning is generally understood and agreed upon by the community. Therefore, this phrase can be categorized as a symbol. 玉阶 [yù jiē] symbolizes high social status, luxury, and beauty, but also reflects a secluded and lonely life despite being in a luxurious environment. Wang (2018) states that 玉阶 [yù jiē] reflects high social status and the accompanying loneliness. Wang explains the importance of jade during the late Neolithic period in eastern China, particularly in the Liangzhu culture (3300-2300 BCE), emphasizing its role in identity formation and social hierarchy reflecting the socio-political dynamics of the time. Furthermore, according to Laube (2022) the cultural and symbolic meanings of jade in Chinese society, particularly jade artifacts, are associated with status, power, and cultural heritage.

The first stanza is categorized as an icon and index simultaneously, characterized by the phrase 白露 [báilù] which means “white dew”. Peirce (in Fiske, 2002) defines an icon as a type of sign that has a resemblance or similarity to the original object. 白露 [báilù] or white dew is an icon of the transition of a calm morning or night atmosphere when the beautiful atmosphere of cold air and humidity envelops everything around. Then, the index of the white dew itself is humidity, cold atmosphere, and the impression of loneliness, Peirce (in Fiske, 2002) states that an index is a sign that has a direct relationship or relationship to the existence of its object. Peirce divides the trichotomous relationship of signs into three main categories, namely icons, indices, and symbols (Wulandari & Siregar 2020). Therefore, icons and indices can coexist in one sign. White dew can be found in Du Fu's poem "The Book of Songs" (诗经 Shījīng) translated and analyzed by Waley (2012) that the poem has a

relationship between humans and nature. This white dew in Chinese literature depicts the harmony between man and nature.

Overall, the first stanza of the poem reveals two important elements in human life, namely 玉阶 [yù jiē] ‘high social status’ as a symbol and 白露 [báilù] ‘the soothing peace of nature’ as an icon and index. In this case, it can be understood that although one reaches a high social level and lives in luxury, as reflected through the symbol (玉阶 yù jiē), such a life is not always free from loneliness. In contrast, (白露 báilù) reflects a simpler and more natural world that is rich in harmony. This suggests that despite the separation between nature and human life, balance can be found in a respectful relationship between the two. Therefore, the meaning contained in this stanza of the poem can be interpreted as a reflection of the journey of human life that seeks a balance between social achievement and material wealth reflected in (玉阶 yù jiē) with the peace and tranquility found in a deeper and harmonious relationship with nature symbolized by (白露 báilù).

Table 2: Categories of Sign Types

No	Sentence/Word	Representation/Sign	Object	Description
2	夜久侵罗袜。 Late night infiltrated the silk T-shirt.	夜久 [yè jiǔ] late night time	Symbol	Late night time depicts loneliness and long waits, the later it gets the deeper the feeling of solitude and emotional emptiness.
		罗袜 [luó wà] silk socks	Symbol	he thin silk socks reflect the physical and emotional softness of the woman who feels helpless, unable to protect herself from the cold of the night as her vulnerability.

In the second line there is a revealer 夜久 [yè jiǔ] which means “late night time”, this phrase is categorized as a symbol. Late night or 夜久 [yè jiǔ] describes loneliness and long waits, the later it gets the deeper the feeling of solitude and emotional emptiness. Yang (2007) states that Wang Wei's poem reflects feelings of loneliness and deep reflection which is in line with the concept of late night time as a symbol of solitude. Yang explains that the emotional and void elements in Wang Wei's poetry include the atmosphere of night which can depict emotional emptiness and deep waiting. Night as a mirror of the emotional void. According to Stillingner (2008) night is often used to describe feelings of melancholy and longing. Romantic poets William Wordsworth and John Keats used night as a setting to

express deep emotions including loneliness and emptiness. Night became a symbol of painful beauty and insatiable longing.

The phrase 罗袜 [luó wà] is also characterized by the symbol meaning “thin silk socks”. The thin silk socks reflect the tender and emotional woman who feels helpless, unable to protect herself from the cold of the night as a symbol of her vulnerability. Xia (2021) states that the relationship between poetry and emotion in classical Chinese literature serves as a medium to express a variety of emotions, including love, sadness, longing, and melancholy, including the themes of helplessness and vulnerability often experienced by women. In this case, the poem can reflect the feelings of women who feel unable to protect themselves from the loneliness and coldness of the night, thus portraying a deep emotional experience. The meaning of the sign conveyed in this stanza is a description of a lonely late night that reflects the physical and emotional tenderness of women who feel helpless and unable to protect themselves from the cold of the night.

Table 3. Categories of Sign Types

No	Sentence/Word	Representation/Sign	Object	Description
3	却下水晶帘， I grabbed the crystal curtain and pulled it down,	水晶帘 [shuǐjīng lián] crystal curtain	Symbol	The pure crystal curtain is a symbol of separation, protection, and a barrier between the outer world (nature and the beauty of the moon) and the inner world (silence or personal feelings).

The third line contains the phrase 水晶帘 [shuǐjīng lián] which means “crystal curtain”. This phrase symbolizes the separation, protection, and barrier between the outer world (nature and the beauty of the moon) and the inner world (silence or personal feelings). In Chinese Bead Curtains, Past and Present by Hector (2013), it is explained that crystal curtains function as space dividers, providing privacy and controlling the flow of air and light. Then, according to Philo (2008), understanding how humans feel and experience geographic space is not only related to physical location but also involves a person relating directly to the environment emotionally and cognitively. The meaning of the sign contained in this stanza is a crystal curtain to protect one's personal space from outside interference, but also a metaphor for emotional boundaries that are deliberately built to maintain depth of feeling and privacy.

Table 4. Categories of Sign Types

No	Sentence/Word	Representation/Sign	Object	Description
4	玲珑望秋月。 Through the crack, I saw the brilliant autumn moon.	秋月 [qiūyuè] autumn moon	Index & Symbols	The moon on an autumn night symbolizes longing and separation, as a symbol of a longed-for but unattainable object. The moon also reflects eternity and the passage of time, signifying the

character's
feelings that
remain even
though nothing
can change them.

The fourth line contains the phrase 秋月 [qiūyuè] which means “autumn moon”. The moon in the autumn night as a symbol of longing and separation as an object that is longed for but unattainable. 秋月 [qiūyuè] ‘autumn moon’ is also an index of beautiful time and atmosphere. Lavrač (2015) states that symbols associated with separation and longing such as the moon, nature, and other elements appear frequently in Chinese poetry. The phrase 月 [yuè] itself is translated as “moon”. The moon symbolizes longing, quiet beauty, and the inability to achieve true happiness, as well as pent-up hope. Sun (2016) states that the moon is depicted as a symbol of longing in separation as well as serene beauty. In Chinese literature and poetry, the moon is often associated with loneliness and feelings of separation from loved ones. Sun compares the symbolism of the moon in Chinese culture to western culture, where the moon in western culture is often associated with sadness or romanticism. However, in Chinese culture there is more emphasis on themes of family unity and the relationship between humans and nature. This comparison helps reveal differences in the understanding and interpretation of moon symbols across cultures.

3.2 Analysis of the Semiotic Relationships of Icons, Indices, and Symbols in the Poem 怨情 (Feelings of Revenge)

怨情
(Feelings of Resentment)
美人卷珠帘，

The beautiful woman rolled up the beaded curtains,
深坐颦蛾眉。

Sitting pensively with furrowed brows.
但见泪痕湿，

Only traces of wet tears are visible,
不知心恨谁。

But it is unknown who he hates in his heart.

Table 1. Categories of Sign Types

No	Sentence/Word	Representation/Sign	Object	Description
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1	美人卷珠帘, A beautiful woman rolls up the beaded curtain,	美人[měirén] Beautiful woman	Symbol	美人[měirén] 'Beautiful woman' refers not only to physical appearance, but also symbolizes luxury, elegance, and the sorrow experienced by the woman.
		卷珠帘 [juǎn zhū lián] Rolls up the beaded curtain	Symbol & Index	The act of rolling up the curtain reflects a gentle motion that suggests curiosity or emotional involvement.
		珠帘 [zhū lián] Beaded curtain	Symbol	Beaded curtains often symbolize luxury and elegance.

In the first line, the phrase 美人 [měirén], translated as "beautiful woman," appears. The term 美人 [měirén] does not solely refer to physical appearance but symbolizes luxury, elegance, and the sorrow experienced by the woman. According to Wang-Wolf (2021), the representation of women through a gendered lens in Chinese literature includes portrayals of women as characters within a broader narrative of sacrifice and death. The symbolism of beauty carries a deeper meaning in literature not only associated with luxury and elegance, but also as a symbol connected to social status, sacrifice, and tragedy.

The first verse also includes both symbolic and indexical categories, indicated by the phrase 卷珠帘 [juǎn zhū lián], which translates to "rolling up the beaded curtain." This gentle act of rolling up the curtain reflects curiosity or emotional involvement. Peirce noted that symbols and indices can coexist within a single sign. Suherdiana (2008) states that Peirce's triadic sign formation allows for an unlimited semiotic process, as long as an interpreter (idea) can comprehend and interpret the sign as a representation of meaning or signifier, which can then be understood by the next interpreter. Givens & White (2021) assert that small everyday gestures carry deeper meaning, expressing hidden feelings or motivations, such as facial expressions, body movements, eye contact, and the use of space. Givens also emphasizes that nonverbal communication varies across cultural and social contexts, influencing its interpretation.

The phrase 珠帘 [zhū lián] or "beaded curtain" is classified as a symbol. Beaded curtains symbolize luxury and elegance. In Chinese culture, their use reflects a desire to create a beautiful and luxurious space. Hector (2013) states that beaded curtains are associated with imperial symbolism, opulent interiors, and reclusive beautiful women, as written by Wang Jia of the Jin Dynasty (265-420).

The signs conveyed in this first verse include 美人 [měirén] as a symbol of "beauty and sacrifice," 珠帘 [zhū lián] as a symbol of "luxury," and 卷珠帘 [juǎn zhū lián] as an icon of "isolation." The beauty of the woman in this verse goes beyond mere physical appearance

and reflects an engagement with broader social contexts, where beauty is often accompanied by sacrifice and tragedy. The act of rolling up the beaded curtain adds a deeper emotional dimension, suggesting hidden feelings or motivations embedded in daily life. The beaded curtain serves as a symbol of luxury and elegance but also reflects a hidden or isolated life within that very luxury.

Thus, this verse creates a contrast between a life filled with beauty and opulence and the solitude and alienation that may accompany them. The meaning conveyed in this poem reflects the tension between outward beauty and a more complex reality—one involving elements of sacrifice, loneliness, and isolation, even within an environment rich in elegance and grandeur.

Table 2. Categories of Sign Types

No	Sentence/Word	Representation/Sign	Object	Description
2	深坐顰蛾眉。 Sits in deep contemplation, brows furrowed.	顰蛾眉 [pín é méi] Furrowed moth-like brows	Icon	顰蛾眉 [pín é méi] is a visual icon representing an expression of sadness or confusion.
		顰蛾眉 [pín é méi] Furrowed moth-like brows	Index	顰蛾眉 [pín é méi] The furrowing of the brows serves as an index of emotional disturbance or anxiety.

In the second line, an icon is indicated by the phrase 顰蛾眉 [pín é méi], which translates to "furrowed brows." Furrowed brows are a visual icon that depicts an expression of sadness or confusion. According to psychological studies, Hwang & Matsumoto (2016) in *Facial Expressions* explain that facial expressions are a crucial form of nonverbal communication in human interaction. They describe various types of facial expressions that can reflect emotions, such as confusion, sadness, fear, and anger, which trigger changes in overall facial appearance. In this context, furrowed brows are a commonly used facial expression that illustrates confusion or sadness, reflecting the emotional tension experienced by an individual.

Simultaneously, the phrase 顰蛾眉 [pín é méi], or "furrowed brows," functions as an index of emotional disturbance or anxiety. Fridlund (2014) states that facial expressions are not only used to express personal emotions but also serve to influence and regulate social interactions. For example, facial expressions can be used to show empathy, avoid conflict, or build social relationships.

The sign conveyed in the second verse is 顰蛾眉 [pín é méi] "furrowed brows" which serves as both a visual icon and an emotional index. In psychological studies of facial expression, the act of furrowing one's brows indicates emotional tension, such as anxiety or confusion, as a bodily response to a confusing or stressful situation. Thus, the furrowed brows become an index of emotional disturbance or anxiety.

Table 3. Categories of Sign Types

No	Sentence/Word	Representation/Sign	Object	Description
3	但见泪痕湿, Only visible wet tear tracks,	泪[lèi] tears	Index	泪 [lèi] 'air mata' 'tears' as an index of sadness, loss, or emotional suffering.
		泪痕湿 [lèihén shī] wet tear tracks	Index	泪痕湿[lèihén shī] 'wet tear tracks' wetting the face on the skin can be visually depicted by someone crying. The visual representation depicts tears falling or leaving wet marks on the cheeks indicating deep feelings.
		泪痕湿 [lèihén shī] wet tear marks	Index	泪痕湿 [lèihén shī] 'tear marks' indicates that crying has just occurred and depicts deep sadness.

In the third line, an index is marked by the phrase 泪 [lèi], which means "tears." Tears are a universal symbol of sadness, loss, or emotional suffering. In psychology, tears are often associated with deep sorrow or emotional distress and are considered a natural mechanism for the body to release emotional tension. Fischer & Manstead (2008) explain that emotional expressions, including crying, can influence social dynamics and interpersonal relationships. Crying can help strengthen social bonds and elicit support from others.

The third stanza falls into the category of indexical signs, indicated by 泪痕湿 [lèihén shī], which translates to "wet tear stains." The visual presence of tear stains on the skin can be interpreted as someone having just cried. This visual representation—of falling tears or lingering wet marks on the cheeks—reflects deep emotional experience and thus also functions as an icon. Keltner (2003) notes that wet tear stains on the skin are a visual representation of deep sadness or emotional suffering, offering a powerful indication of unspoken inner feelings.

The phrase 泪痕湿 [lèihén shī], or "wet tear stains," is an index of recent crying and symbolizes profound sorrow. These physical traces of tears can be seen as evidence of an individual's inability to suppress overwhelming emotions, indicating that the person has just gone through an intense emotional experience such as loss, disappointment, or grief. The lingering tear stains also suggest that these emotions are still present, not yet released or resolved. Dacher Keltner emphasizes that wet tear marks on the face are not only signs that crying has recently occurred but also symbolize the depth of sorrow that has overtaken the person's emotions.

The meaning conveyed in this third line centers on 泪 [lèi] ("tears") and 泪痕湿 [lèihén shī] ("wet tear stains"), which reflect deep emotional experiences such as sadness, loss, and suffering. Tears are not merely a physical reaction but also a means for the body to release overwhelming emotional tension. The tear stains left on the face indicate that someone has just cried, revealing an inability to hold back emotions and reflecting feelings that have not yet been fully processed or healed. Thus, both the tears and their lingering marks serve as indicators of unresolved, intense emotional experiences that continue to affect the individual

Table 4. Categories of Sign Types

No	Sentence/Word	Representation/Sign	Object	Description
4	不知心恨谁。 But it is not known who he hates in his heart.	不知心恨谁 [bùzhī xīn hèn shéi] But it is not known who he hates in his heart.	Symbol	The symbol of uncertainty about who is hated becomes a symbol of inner conflict or feelings that are not clearly defined, namely confusion, resentment, and emotion.

The fourth line contains a symbol, marked by the phrase 不知心恨谁 [bùzhī xīn hèn shéi], translated as *"Yet it is unknown whom her heart resents."* This phrase reflects emotional uncertainty and serves as a symbol of inner conflict or undefined emotional turmoil, encompassing confusion, resentment, and unresolved feelings. Lazarus (2013) explains that emotional confusion when an individual does not know whom to resent—illustrates internal tension and the inability to define the emotional conflict being experienced. The symbol 不知心恨谁 [bùzhī xīn hèn shéi] suggests the presence of an undefined inner struggle, representing the confusion and psychological tension felt by the individual. This uncertainty highlights a state of emotional disorientation where the subject is overwhelmed by emotions that are not clearly directed or understood. Taken as a whole, the poem reflects the complexity of suppressed emotions, unspoken inner tension, and deep sorrow or suffering that are difficult to articulate or express. The emotional ambiguity presented in this final line reinforces the overarching theme of quiet yet intense emotional depth throughout the poem.

3.3 Analysis of the Semiotic Relations of Icons, Indexes, and Symbols in the Poem 下江陵 (Descent to Jiangling)

下江陵
(Descending to Jiangling)

朝辞白帝彩云间,

At dawn I left Baidi City, amidst the glowing clouds,

千里江陵一日还。

A thousand miles to Jiangling overed in just one day.

两岸猿声啼不住，

On both riverbanks, the monkeys' cries echo endlessly,

轻舟已过万重山。

Yet my light boat has already passed ten thousand layered peaks.

Table 1. Categories of Sign Types

No	Sentence/Word	Representation/Sign	Object	Description
1	朝辞白帝彩云间， Morning leaving the charming white Emperor City	白帝彩云间 [bái dì cǎiyún jiān] Charming white Emperor City	Icon	the beautiful white Emperor City and the charming colorful clouds are real objects that can be illustrated to resemble charming natural scenery is an icon.
		白帝 [bái dì] Emperor City	Symbol	白帝 [bái dì] 'Emperor city' symbol of a beautiful and memorable place.
		彩云[cǎiyún] colored clouds	Icon	彩云[cǎiyún] 'colored clouds' visual splendor, hope, and beautiful serene atmosphere.

In the first line, there is the phrase 白帝彩云间 [bái dì cǎiyún jiān], translated as “*the majestic White Emperor City amidst colorful clouds.*” The White Emperor City, with its beautiful scenery and colorful clouds, is a real and visually rich image, making it an icon. In the study of art and literature, representations of nature are often used to create an atmosphere of serenity while also reflecting the connection between humans and the greater natural world. According to Popova (2023), Chinese poetry often conveys beauty through various elements, such as nature, emotions, and human experiences. In Chinese poetry, beauty is not only visual but also tied to meaning and the feelings it evokes. Therefore,

based on Popova's explanation, “*the majestic White Emperor City*” serves as a reference to a place or theme in Chinese poetry that conveys beauty.

The White Emperor City (白帝 báí dì) also acts as a symbol of a place filled with beauty and memory, evoking history, grandeur, and unforgettable experiences. According to Liu (2019), the White Emperor City symbolizes a magnificent place filled with memories, functioning as an emotional space that recalls the past and former glories.

This first line also features the icon 彩云 [cǎiyún], meaning “*colorful clouds*,” which visually express majesty, hope, and peaceful beauty. Williams (2012) discusses the symbolism of clouds in broader contexts, including their meaning and interpretation in art, mythology, and Chinese culture. In Chinese tradition, clouds symbolize good fortune, magnificence, and beauty. Similarly, Martin & Ronnberg (2010) explain that clouds carry multiple meanings, such as change, transition, and spiritual significance across various traditions. In Chinese culture, clouds may also represent hope and auspiciousness.

The semiotic meaning conveyed in this first line—through 白帝彩云间 [bái dì cǎiyún jiān] “*the majestic White Emperor City*” and 彩云 [cǎiyún] “*colorful clouds*” goes beyond mere visual beauty. These phrases serve as symbols of peace, splendor, and historical memory. The city of *Baidi* evokes a place rich with memories and past glory, stirring emotions of nostalgia and historical greatness. It becomes a reminder of a peaceful past. Altogether, this line merges natural symbolism and emotional depth to express the human connection with the past, hope for the future, and inner peace illustrating the harmony between history, nature, and human emotion.

Table 2. Categories of Sign Types

No	Sentence/Word	Representation/Sign	Object	Description
2	千里江陵一日还。 Downstream a thousand miles in a day Jiangling City is already in front.	千里江陵一日还 [qiānlǐ jiānglíng yī rì hái] Downstream a thousand miles in a day Jiangling City is already in front.	Symbol	"a thousand miles in a day" refers to a long journey made in a short time and the relationship between distance (a thousand miles) and time (a day) is a symbol that shows how fast the journey is or how close Jiangling City is despite the distance.

In the second line, the phrase 千里江陵一日还 [qiānlǐ jiānglíng yī rì hái], translated as “*a thousand miles to Jiangling, returned in a single day*,” refers to a long journey completed in a short time. The connection between distance (“a thousand miles”) and time (“a day”) serves as a symbol representing the swiftness of travel or the perceived closeness of Jiangling, despite its physical distance. This depiction of “a thousand miles in a day” not only describes the physical speed of travel, but also reflects a sense of emotional closeness or connectedness, as if the vast distance has been overcome. The destination feels much nearer than it should, suggesting a deeper symbolic layer. A similar idea appears in *The Journey to the West, Revised Edition, Volume 1*, edited by Anthony (2012) a classic Chinese

epic novel that tells the story of the monk Xuanzang's journey to India to retrieve sacred Buddhist scriptures. One of the core themes in the novel is traveling great distances in a short time, which becomes a key element not only of the physical journey, but of the spiritual and emotional transformation of the characters. The physical journey from China to India forms the backdrop for the inner development of the main characters—Xuanzang and his three disciples: Sun Wukong (the Monkey King), Zhu Bajie (the pig demon), and Sha Wujing (the sand monk). In this literary context, a journey often serves as a metaphor for the search for truth, enlightenment, and deeper understanding. The distances covered are not merely physical, but also reflect internal challenges, such as moral trials or emotional conflicts, that must be overcome.

The semiotic meaning conveyed in this line through the relationship between distance (a thousand miles) and time (a single day) highlights not only physical speed, but also emotional proximity and a profound sense of connection that transcends distance. It suggests that, even if a place or goal seems far away, with strong will or under special circumstances, it can feel close and easily reached. In this case, the city of Jiangling, which should have felt distant, instead seems remarkably close and attainable. This line can be understood as a representation of the human ability to overcome emotional or physical barriers in life. A long journey becomes not just a literal movement, but also a metaphor for the inner strength needed to confront and surpass life's obstacles, whether external or emotional.

Table 3. Categories of Sign Types

No	Sentence/Word	Representation/Sign	Object	Description
3	两岸猿声啼不住, The sound of monkeys on both banks of the river continuously calls out	两岸猿声啼不住 [liǎng'àn yuán shēng tí bù zhù] The sound of monkeys on both banks of the river continuously calls out	Index	The sound of monkeys becomes an index of the natural environment along the river, indicating the dense forest on both sides of the river.

The third line contains the phrase 两岸猿声啼不住 [liǎng'àn yuán shēng tí bù zhù], translated as “*the cries of monkeys on both riverbanks continue endlessly*.” The monkey cries function as an index of the natural environment along the river journey, indicating the presence of dense forests on both sides of the river. According to Yuan & Hawkes (1985), the sound of monkeys reflects the presence of wildlife, creating a vivid visual image of the surrounding untamed wilderness. As an index of the natural setting, the monkey calls suggest that the river journey passes through a remote, unspoiled region, rich in flora and fauna. This perspective shows that Li Bai's poem is not merely a visual depiction, but also a symbolic representation of pristine nature, which plays a significant role in setting the atmosphere and emotional tone of the poet's journey.

Table 4. Categories of Sign Types

No	Sentence/Word	Representation/Sign	Object	Description
4	轻舟已过万重山。	轻舟[qīngzhōu] Light boat	Symbol	轻舟[qīngzhōu] 'Light boat'

But the light boat has passed through thousands of layers of mountains.			a visual depiction of a small, light boat, usually made of wood, gliding effortlessly across the water symbolizing freedom.
	万重山 [wàn chóngshān] Layered mountains	Symbol	万重山 [wàn chóngshān] ‘layered mountains’ refers to difficult terrain, signifying a journey full of struggles but ultimately successful (life’s obstacles, long journey).

In the fourth line, there is a symbol indicated by the phrase 轻舟 [qīngzhōu], which means “light boat.” This light boat evokes a visual image of a small wooden vessel gliding effortlessly across the water’s surface. According to Soupez (2023), this type of boat is referred to as a *wooden boat*, characterized by its structural design, which emphasizes strength, stability, and durability—ensuring that it can remain afloat safely on the water. Meanwhile, Sin-wai (2020) explains that the light boat serves as a symbol of journey and harmony with nature, a common theme in Chinese poetry and literature. In Li Bai’s works, the image of a light boat gliding freely across clear waters conveys a sense of unrushed passage of time, aligned with the surrounding natural harmony.

This line also contains another symbol: 万重山 [wàn chóngshān], translated as “layers upon layers of mountains.” This symbolizes challenging terrain, signifying a journey filled with obstacles that are ultimately overcome. An article by Tian et al. (2022) titled “The Historical Transition of the Meaning of the Landscape of Mount Tai, China through Poetry Analysis” discusses how the representation of mountains in Chinese literature has evolved over time, reflecting broader shifts in cultural, philosophical, and social values.

The meaning conveyed in this line combines both visual and symbolic representations of the light boat (轻舟) and the layered mountains (万重山). In this poem, the light boat serves as a metaphor for a calm and harmonious journey, one that flows gently with time and reflects a deep connection to nature. It embodies a philosophical perspective in Chinese literature that emphasizes the importance of human-nature harmony as a foundation for a meaningful life.

At the same time, the image of layered mountains represents not just a physical landscape, but a symbol of life’s struggles and perseverance. These mountains are a metaphor for inner challenges and spiritual or personal growth. The passage through many mountains signifies a difficult yet meaningful process, one that leads to deeper understanding and valuable achievements.

3.4 Tang Dynasty Poetry as a Learning of Chinese Culture for Students of the Mandarin Language Education Study Program

Tang Dynasty poetry is one of China's most valuable cultural heritages and offers numerous important lessons for students in Mandarin Language Study Programs. According to Wulandari (2016), the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD) is recognized as the golden age of Chinese literature, particularly in poetry, producing renowned poets such as Li Bai, Du Fu, and Wang Wei. Tang poetry provides a rich depiction of Chinese culture, traditions, and social values during that era. Through these literary works, students can gain a deeper understanding of the historical and social contexts that influenced the creation of the poems. Therefore, analyzing these poems not only broadens students' cultural insights but also serves as a valuable tool for improving their Mandarin language skills—including vocabulary acquisition, grammar mastery, and exposure to diverse writing styles. Studying poetry also helps students develop analytical skills, such as the ability to interpret implicit meanings, understand symbolism, and appreciate the literary techniques employed by poets.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the three poems by Li Bai (李白) in the anthology *Tangshi Yibai Shou* (唐诗一百首) contain semiotic signs that can be classified into three main categories simultaneously, depending on their function and relation to the represented object. These categories include signs that relate through established conventions, causal relationships, or even signs that bear a direct resemblance to their objects. The most frequently identified types are symbols and indexes signs that reflect the influence of societal and cultural conventions internalized by individuals and demonstrate a direct connection with the existence of the object. The categorization and interpretation of signs in Li Bai's three poems reveal recurring themes such as longing, farewell, sorrow, and reflection on life, all of which are interwoven with the human relationship with nature—a central element in Tang Dynasty literature. In Li Bai's poetry, nature functions both as a backdrop and a medium for expressing emotions and existential values. These poems are melancholic in tone, characterized by poetic portrayals of emotion that reflect the complexity of human feelings, offering a profound experience for the reader through the use of symbols and indexes. Through these signs, Li Bai communicates the universal human experience, one that can be felt by individuals across various contexts, unbounded by time and place. This analysis highlights how the poetic elements contribute to a broader understanding of the human condition.

Semiotics not only enhances the understanding of Li Bai's poetry but also serves as an effective learning tool in Chinese literature courses. By interpreting the meanings embedded within the poems, students can gain deeper insights into the cultural and historical contexts that shape these literary works. Furthermore, future research is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of semiotic theory, particularly in relation to the signs found in classical Chinese poetry. This aims to expand knowledge and comprehension of semiotics as a discipline that explores how signs function to convey hidden meanings, symbolism, and the intricate relationships between language, culture, and society within literary texts.

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