ABSTRACT

This paper aims at examining the values of an anthology, a source which has long been overlooked in the field of Chinese literary criticism. An Anthology of Tang Poetry (唐诗别裁集) compiled by Shen Deqian (沈德潜)(1673 - 1769 A.D.) has been selected for this study because of its popularity and widespread influence.

As this study focusses on the analysis of the poetic theory of Shen Deqian, only those relevant aspects which reflect Shen's view on poetry are included. These include the aims of compilation, the criteria used in the selection of poems, the viewpoints from which he assesses the poems and comments given to both the poets and their work. Apart from qualitative analysis, this study also considers the quantitative aspects such as the number of poems each poet possesses in this anthology.

It is far more complicated to read the poetic theory of a critic from an anthology than from his theoretical writings because its comments are often disorganised, fragmented and non-analytical in nature. However, in piecing together the scattered comments over the anthology, and by using the principle of inductive and deductive reasoning, one should be able to reconstruct the theoretical framework of Shen Deqian as illustrated in the findings of this study.

The findings prove that a probe into an anthology does provide us with an indepth understanding and a more rounded picture of Shen's poetic theory than other scholarly works based mainly on his theoretical work. Hence, an anthology is an essential source of material which should not be ignored in the study of Chinese literary criticism.