A Study of the Literary Relationship Between Wang Wei and Meng Hao-ran

ABSTRACT

Wang Wei (王維) and Meng Hao-ran (孟浩然) were two great poets of the Tang Dynasty. Historically, they have always been associated and, even today, the duo have their own place. No one, however, has studied the reasons for this partnership. This academic exercise attempts from various angles, to trace and analyse the reasons for this relationship by using the poets' own works and commentaries on them, and thus to present a systematic explanation for their association.

The first chapter is an introduction. The fact that the works of these two poets have survived till today in spite of the fiercely competitive literary scene of that period warrants this study. While many sources have pointed out the association between the two, none has given any detailed explanation. An attempt to do this is made here.

The second chapter looks at the contacts, experiences and life-styles of the two poets. The close relationship between the two struck later analysts and critics who came to associate them closely. This was in fact the start of their association.

In chapter three, I study the influence of the poems praising the poems of Wang and Meng by Li Bai (李白) and Du Fu (杜甫) and later scholars' commentaries on these poems. It was noticed that Wang and Meng were also associated because they were considered by many Chinese scholars to be the best poets after Li Bai and Du Fu in that dynasty.
In the fourth chapter, from the number of Wu yan shi (五言詩), from some commentaries describing their high quality, and from an actual examination of some of these poems, it can be seen that the association of the two poets from the point of view of this particular literary style (especially Wu yan lu shi 五言律詩) is very appropriate.

After an appropriate definition of style, chapter five looks at this aspect of the poets' works. From relevant commentaries and reviews, it is evident that the two have largely similar styles. This is further substantiated with examples taken from their own poems.

Chapter six is an examination of the relationship between the poets and Tao Qian (陶潛). First, from commentaries discussing the relationship between the two poets and Tao Qian as seen through their poems (more specifically, the respect and admiration Wang and Meng accorded the elder poet), and then from an actual analysis of the works of the three poets, it can be understood why some Chinese poetry critics associate the two poets through this link.

The last chapter is a conclusion of this thesis. With the results of the different approaches used, the reasons for the association of Wang Wei and Meng Hao-ran are briefly summarised.

An appendix dividing the poems of Wang and Meng (taken from three anthologies) according to their form is presented in connection with chapter four. Explanatory Notes and References follow the appendix.