CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

Han Shan lived during the period when Chan and poetry were at their highest state of achievement. A period that was called the “Golden Age of Chan” (713-845). We have seen in the preceding chapters how Han Shan’s poems are influenced by Chan, both in the content and also the style of writing. Han Shan had retired from the world to lead the life of a recluse at the mountains in his thirties. Though at first he practised Taoism, he became a strong Buddhist follower later on in his life. He carried both Chan and poetry to a high level of interior vision. As a whole, his Chan poems reflect his calmer state of mind and quiet enjoyment of life.

If we study his poems, especially his retirement poems, we will be impelled to say that in the history of Chinese literature, his Chan poems are second to none. He has left behind many good Chan poems for the benefit of literary studies. It is not a wonder that his poems are deemed high by many Americans and Japanese scholars, who have proceeded to translate them into their own
languages. In this respect, we can say that Han Shan has attained an outstanding achievement that cannot be overlooked.

In fact, Han Shan’s poetry had had a great vogue during ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries. Two of Song’s works have mentioned Han Shan. Which are respectively (i) “Xin Tangshu Yiwen Zhi” (新唐书艺文志 11 century) which contains 7 juan (卷) of Han Shan’s poems written under the category of Buddhist poems,¹ and (ii) “Xian Zhuan Shiyi” which is written under the tittle “Taiping Guangji” (11 century). It has a record of events regarding Han Shan.² However, book (i) just mentions the number of juans in Han Shan’s poems, whereas, book (ii) dedicates only a very short passage to discuss Han Shan’s life. Therefore, we can say that in these two books of the history of Chinese literature, Han Shan is not accorded an appropriate evaluation or recognition. Even beginning from the period of twelfth century till early eighteenth century, writers of the history of Chinese literature had not noticed Han Shan’s contributions to Chinese literature.

¹ Ou Yangxiu (欧阳修), Xin Tangshu Yiwen Zhi (新唐书艺文志), Congshu Jicheng Chubian (丛书集成初编), Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1936, Vol.8, juan3, pp.50-51.

² Du Guangting, op.cit.
“Tangshi Jishi” (唐诗纪事) which was compiled in the twelfth century by Ji Yougong (计有功) consists 1155 Tang poems, but there is no reference made to Han Shan. Likewise has been done in Yang Shihong’s (杨士宏) “Tangyin” (唐音 14 century) and Gao Di’s (高棅) “Tangshi Pinhui” (唐诗品汇 15 century).

Therefore, we can say that Han Shan was not accorded an appropriate place in the history of Chinese literature until the early eighteenth century. Only during late eighteenth century, Han Shan’s poems were collected, compiled and added into the books of Chinese literature like “Siku Quanshu” (四库全书 1782) and “A Complete Collection of Tang Poetry” (Quan Tangshi 全唐诗). During the first quarter of the nineteenth century, scholars who conducted researches on Chinese literature affirmed the importance of Han Shan in the history of Chinese literature. In Hu Shi’s great work “Baihua Wenxueshi” (1928), Han Shan’s name is put together with the names of Wang Fanzhi and Wangji, as the three great masters of colloquial style of writing of early Tang period.”

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4 Hu Shi, op.cit., pp. 163-177.
Shan's poetry" (Han Shan Shiji 寒山诗集)\(^5\) can also be found in "Sibu Congkan" (四部丛刊 1929 ), a great collection of Chinese writings. Hence, Yu Jiaxi in his "Siku Tiyao Bianzheng" (1937) gives a detailed account of Han Shan and his poetry.\(^6\) Zheng Du's (郑笃) "Zhongguo Shuwenxueshi" (中国俗文学史) also mentions Han Shan and claims Han Shan's poems were influenced much by the colloquial style of Wang Fanzhi.\(^7\) Moreover, in the "History of Development of Chinese Literature" written by Liu Dajie, Han Shan is said to be the heir of Wang Fanzhi's poetry.\(^8\) Thereafter, Han Shan was forgotten again until the seventies and eighties. Unlike the scholars before them, scholars in the seventies and eighties gave more attention to the literary achievement of Han Shan and his contributions to Chinese literature. They were of the universal opinion that Han Shan and his poems (Chan poems) have attained a definite measure of achievement in Chinese literature and have made a valuable contribution to the world of Chinese literature. They

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\(^5\) A Collection of Han Shan's poetry (Han Shan Shiji 寒山诗集), Sibu Congkan Chubian (四部丛刊初编), Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuguan, Vol.35, pp.1-24.

\(^6\) Yu Jiaxi, op.cit.

\(^7\) Zheng Du (郑笃), Zhongguo Shuwenxueshi (中国俗文学史), Shangwu Yinshuguan (商务印书馆), p.125.

\(^8\) Liu Dajie, op.cit.
paid special attention to the study and research of Han Shan, as well as his poetry. Many of them reached an agreement that Han Shan’s poems contained thick Chan thoughts and categorized them as “Chan poems”. They had also made various comments about these poems. For example:

(i) The famous Buddhist scholar of modern times, Chen Huijian writes in great admiration of Han Shan’s poems. He says: “Han Shan’s poems are Chan and Chan is his poems.”

(ii) Gao Yuetian, in his “Du Dunlao He Han Shan Shi Hou Ping” (读钝老和寒山诗后评) says: “Han Shan’s poems are actually the songs of the second part of the three baskets (San Zang 三藏), which consist of five or seven words in a line to expound and propagate wisdom which serve as a reminder to the foolish.”

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9 Chen Huijian, op.cit., p.67.
10 Three baskets are: (i) Basket of discourses (Jing Zang 经藏), (ii) Basket of Discipline (Lü Zang 律藏), (iii) Basket of Ultimate Doctrine (Lun Zang 论藏).
(iii) Huang Boren (黄博仁) writes: “If you don’t know anything about Buddhism, you have no qualification whatsoever to talk about Han Shan’s poems.”

(iv) Yu Jiaxi says: “Everyone who wishes to understand Han Shan’s poems, should possess the knowledge of the poetic state of Han Shan.”

(v) Chen Dinghuan (陈鼎环) in his scholarly work “Han Shan’s Chan State and Poetic Expression” (Han Shan De Chanjing Yu Shiqing 寒山的禅境与诗情), highly values Han Shan’s Chan poems. He even compares Han Shan’s Chan poems to well known nature poems written by poets like Xie Lingyun and “poet Buddha” Wang Wei and found them not as good as Han Shan’s.”

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12 Huang Boren (黄博仁), Han Shan and His Poetry (Han Shan Ji Qishi 寒山及其诗), Taipei: Xinwenfeng Chuban, 1993, p.65.

13 Yu Jiaxi, op.cit.

These words of praises added to the informations gathered in the previous chapters (IV and V), shows that Han Shan is unquestionably one of the most exceptional figures ever to make his way into the pages of the history of Chinese literature.

Indeed, Han Shan's poetic world or more appropriately Han Shan's "Chan world" vividly possesses the following features:

(i) Han Shan's poetry, his life, his personal encounters and experiences as well as his religious faith in Buddhism are closely related to one another. The kind of sentiments revealed in his Chan poems are his own personal religious experiences and not really notes or commentaries of Chan philosophy. His poems reveal his true and genuine feelings and sentiments towards religious experiences. They serve as a mirror of his times and later generations, awakening the readers from ignorance and show the path towards enlightenment.

(ii) Han Shan is a pure and typical follower of Chan. After his encounter with Buddhism, he gave away all other beliefs and ideas, and
surrendered himself wholly to Buddhism. This is unlike Bai Juyi, Liu Zongyuan and Liu Yuxi (刘禹锡) who also wrote Chan poems. But, they have left significant Confucian marks in their works. Han Shan’s Chan poems contain very typical Chan ideas and show unity and strength. When we talk about nature poems, the person who naturally comes to our mind is the poet Tao Yuanming (陶渊明) and Xie Lingyun. When we say frontier poems, Wang Changling (王昌龄) immediately comes to our mind and when we think of love poems, Li Shangyin (李商隐) is the first person everyone will think of. Likewise, when Chan is discussed, many scholars feel that Han Shan is the one who comes to the mind first. He has been categorized a “Chan poet”, because of his outstanding achievements in the Chan style of writing.

(iii) The colloquial and simple use of language is another unique feature in Han Shan’s poems. In his exploration of language as a poetic medium, Han Shan is notable for his ability to write in a predominantly unrestrained style. He uses colloquialisms freely and without being vulgar. He frequently resorts to allusions and derivations without becoming too bookish.
(iv) The Chan thoughts in Han Shan’s poetry are obviously trended towards Southern Chan. He gives priority to the most important aspects of Southern Chan. He derives many sayings from “Six Patriarch Sūtra” which is a great representative work of Southern Chan. This point is evident in the preceding chapters.

(v) In the first place, Han Shan’s poems possess a very strong and prominent theme. All his three hundred odd poems have a distinct theme although they have no tittles. These themes range from detached spirit, spontaneity, exquisite sensibility and fine phraseology to intimate revelations of personality.

Han Shan is regarded very highly by some modern scholars as a great master of the “colloquial style”.\textsuperscript{15} If researches are done on poems of these characteristic that have Chan influence, Han Shan’s poems will be of primary consideration.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} Mentioned by Hu Shi, Zheng Du, Liu Dajie and Sun Changwu in their works.

\textsuperscript{16} Sun Changwu (孙昌武), Chanshi Yu Shiqing (禅诗与诗情), Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1997, p.249.
Today, Han Shan does not only belong to China, but to the world. Han Shan has claimed the attention of the world at large in both academic as well as religious fields.\textsuperscript{17} Seen in this perspective, Han Shan's poetry should be accorded a high place in the history of Chinese literature and his contributions are by no means limited to questions of later generations.

\textsuperscript{17} Song Bonian (宋柏年), op.cit., p.230.