



# On the Unique Significance of Han Yu's "Shan Shi"

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## ABSTRACT

As a representative work of Han Yu, "Shan Shi" is highly praised by Su Shi. This contains a distinct writing logic of temporal and spatial order, which makes reading immersive. In addition, the most eye-catching aspect of "Shan Shi" is its artistic technique of "reviving the spirit" and "incorporating literature into poetry", which has an irreplaceable and unique significance and role in the history of Chinese poetry.

## KEYWORDS

"Shan Shi"; Xinghui Shendao; Translate Text into Poetry.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Han Yu's poem "Shan Shi" is titled "Shi", but it is not a poem about mountains and rocks, but a poetic travelogue of mountains and rivers. This poem narrates the observations and feelings of visiting Huilin Temple in chronological order, depicting the serene scenery from dusk to nightfall and then to dawn, expressing the author's unwillingness to be bound by the secular world. The narrative runs from dusk to late night until dawn, with clear layers and interlocking elements that complement each other. It is thought-provoking. I think Han Yu's poem "Shan Shi" is very distinctive and holds an irreplaceable position and significance in the history of ancient Chinese literature and poetry.

## 2. TEXT ANALYSIS

### 2.1. Original Text of "Shan Shi"

The mountains and rocks are clear and the path is gentle. At dusk, bats fly to the temple.

Ascending the hall and sitting on the steps, the new rain is abundant, and the banana leaves and gardenia are plump.

The monk said that the ancient wall Buddha was well painted, using fire to illuminate what was seen.

Making the bed, brushing the mat, and preparing soup and rice, even the sparse and rough food is enough to satisfy my hunger.

In the deep night, I lie still, surrounded by a hundred insects. The clear moon rises from the mountains, and the light enters my door.

At dawn, there is no road to go alone, and entering and exiting from high and low, the smoke is thick and thin.

The mountains are red and the streams are verdant and picturesque, and from time to time, pine beams can be seen all around.

When the stream barefoot steps on the stream stones, the sound of water stimulates the wind and blows clothes.

Life is so self indulgent, why restrain oneself from being human?

Alas, my party's two or three sons, how can they live until old age without returning?

## 2.2. Overall Context

In his poem "Yuan Shi", Ye Xie, a Qing Dynasty scholar, said: "Taking one sentence from Han Yu's poem, one can see his bones and edges everywhere. He looks down on everything, but when he advances, he cannot tolerate the court, and when he retreats, he refuses to be alone in the wilderness. His illness and evil are severe, and he is eager for talent. This is the face of Han Yu." Although "Shan Shi" only describes an ordinary experience of traveling to the mountains, the love for free life and the disgust for officialdom expressed in the poem are thought-provoking. This is also an important reason why this mountain poem has been widely loved by readers throughout history.

The first four lines of "Shan Shi" describe what one sees when visiting the temple at dusk, highlighting the scenery of early summer; The four sentences of "monk's words" describe the warm reception of monks; The two lines "deep at night" describe the tranquility of a mountain temple night and the comfort of staying overnight; The six lines "Heavenly Dawn" describe the morning scenery of resigning in the early morning and seeing and hearing along the way; The four sentences of "life" describe the longing for the beauty of nature and human emotions in the mountains. The main theme of the entire poem is "Life is so self indulgent, there is no need to be narrow-minded." The entire poem showcases Han Yu's characteristic of "using literature as poetry", with a powerful and magnificent style, which has been praised by later generations.

Although the paintings in the poem are all bold lines and there is no depiction of dense branches and leaves, the feeling it gives is extremely meticulous. The characters "foot", "big", and "ba" are considered vulgar and unappealing by some, but poets can rule out these vulgar views and regard vulgarity as elegance and reason as novelty. The pure and simple essence of nature is reflected from these three characters. A brief thunderstorm swept over the roof, and in early autumn, the banana leaves seemed to stretch out larger than usual. The thick white jade like mast flowers appeared even more warm and emitted a rich fragrance. In the deep night, I lay still with a hundred insects, and the clear moon rose from the mountains and the light entered my door. Everything in the late night of the mountain temple fell asleep. No need to spend too much pen and ink, one word for "stillness" flies another word for "jue", and the scene of silence is reproduced. Autumn Moon seems to have a deep understanding of the poet's interests at this moment, and specially flipped over from the mountains to accompany her. With one word for "out" and one word for "in", she transformed the static environment into a dynamic one.

"The mountain red cave is lush and colorful, and the pine trees and machinery are all ten kingdoms at times." It depicts the scenery that the poet sees in his eyes, with a high style and magnificent spirit. The flowers are red, the stream water is green, and the pine trees and poplar trees are tall. How unpretentious and magnificent nature is. When the stream barefoot steps on the rocks of the stream, the sound of water stimulates the wind and blows clothes, it is written in the poet's ears. The village clothes wade through the water, the wind blows and the clothes float, allowing one to freely come and go.

### 3. ARTISTIC FEATURES

#### 3.1. Poetry Evaluation

The discussion of the writing characteristics of Han Yu's "Shan Shi" cannot be separated from the overall evaluation of Han poetry by later generations. Han Yu's poetry has been debated by various schools of thought, with later generations praising or belittling it. According to the "Cold Studio Night Talk", during the Northern Song Dynasty, Shen Kuo, Lv Huiqing, Wang Cun, and Li Chang discussed Korean poetry together. Shen Kuo said, "The poetry of retreat, with its rhyming style, is beautiful and rich, but it is not poetry in the end." Lv Huiqing retorted, "Poetry is just as it is. I say there is no poet who has retreated like this." Wang Cun supported Shen Kuo's view, while Li Chang stood on Lv Huiqing's side. The four of them questioned each other for a long time but did not make a decision. Shen Kuo and Lv Huiqing have completely opposite views. Shen Kuo's criticism of Han poetry as "not poetry" can be described as very harsh.

In the Qing Dynasty, Wang Fuzhi further pointed out in his "Jiang Zhai Shi Hua": "Han Tuizhi praised the cleverness of his writing style with his dangerous rhymes, peculiar characters, ancient sentences, and dialects, which were both clever and sincere. However, he had nothing to do with his mood and was suitable for drinking."

So, is it true that Han poetry is not poetry in the end? Does Han Shi really have nothing to do with the mood? I think as long as you read "Shan Shi" carefully, you will find that Shen and Wang's arguments are biased, because this poem vividly expresses the poet's "mood and enthusiasm".

#### 3.2. The Influence of Later Generations

"Shan Shi" was written in July of the 17th year of the Zhenyuan era (801), when Han Yu and his friends traveled to Huilin Temple in northern Luoyang. Two hundred and sixty-three years later, Su Shi traveled to Nanxi with his friends in Fengxiang, stripped off his clothes and washed his feet, and loudly recited the poem "Mountain and Stone". "It is a pity to know why he was so happy and forget that he was hundreds of years away.". Su Shi also rhymed the poem "Mountain and Stone" sentence by sentence, and the couplet at the end said, "Why is life so easy to enjoy? Who in the world is willing to return from me!" If the poem "Mountain and Stone" had nothing to do with mood, how could it make readers two hundred years later "know with emotion what they enjoy"? Later, Su Shi saw a landscape painting hidden by his friend Wang Jinqing and associated it with the poem "Mountains and Stones", and wrote a seven masterpiece.

In his commentary on "The Book of Yimen", He Zhuo, a Qing Dynasty scholar, commented on "Shan Shi": "A straight book is the eye, without the intention of seeking craftsmanship, but the text is from the beginning." This means that Han Yu directly narrates what he sees and experiences, without the intention of pursuing exquisite craftsmanship and extraordinary vigilance. This actually contains two layers of meaning. Firstly, regardless of whether the scenery is beautiful or interesting, seeing it is like reading, and one has never picked gold or sand; The second is to strictly follow the chronological order of the narrative, without deliberately arranging the structure and meaning.

It is precisely because the scenery and narrative in "Shan Shi" are detailed and vivid, and the lyrics are full of enthusiasm that future readers will feel as if they have seen the scenery, experienced the events, and resonated with them warmly. Undoubtedly, Han Yu's poetry does contain elements of "dangerous rhyme, peculiar characters, ancient sentences, and dialects", and this situation is still quite serious in some of his works. But I believe that we cannot generalize or abandon the essence due to flaws, and we cannot ignore the excellent works in Han poetry that narrate the ups and downs of life experiences and express inner grievances.

### 3.3. Xinghui Shendao

"Shan Shi" is a typical work that follows the order of words and is also a free expression of the author's emotions. The entire poem unfolds in chronological and spatial order, as if the reader follows the poet, from dusk to night and then from night to dawn, up the mountain into the temple and out the mountain down the mountain. Therefore, "Shan Shi" makes readers vividly remember and feel the poet's whereabouts, thus arousing a strong resonance. Otherwise, how could Su Shi, over two hundred years later, "know why he was so happy and forget that he was hundreds of years away"? We say that "Shan Shi" has no intention of seeking work, which does not mean that it has any "non work". In fact, what He Yimen said, "a straight book is the eye," has also undergone a process of refinement. For example, the second sentence "Bats fly to the temple at dusk" is certainly what the poet saw when he entered the temple at dusk, but is such a sentence really generated automatically without refinement?

As is well known, dusk is very difficult to write about. Han Yu keenly caught the bats dancing vertically and horizontally in the dusk, and wrote a timeless poem praising the dusk. At dusk, there will be swarms of bats flying out to search for food. The vast twilight gradually faded away. The scenery, while bats shuttle horizontally and obliquely, creates a dynamic sense of imagery, making dusk a tangible and perceptible object. Literally speaking, this sentence only uses the words "to" and "fly" to connect the three nouns of dusk, temple, and bat into a simple and clear sentence. However, after reading it, if you close your eyes and think about it, it feels like you are in person. This is the uniqueness of Han Yu's "Shan Shi".

The Qing Dynasty scholar Cha Wanqing commented on "Shan Shi" and said, "When writing about scenery, there is no carving, no language, no seclusion. The path is endless, and there is no turning without intention. After repeatedly passing through the ancient temple of the barren mountains, I feel ashamed that I have not spoken a single word at the beginning of reading this. It has been seized by Dongpo Weng and followed by him." The last sentence roughly means that the strengths of the landscape narrative in "Shan Shi" have been surpassed by Su Shi. Indeed, Su Shi's reference and study of Han poetry art can be described as a gem of exploration, which is difficult for future generations to reach. But we should pay more attention to what Cha Shi said, "Repeatedly passing through barren mountains and ancient temples, reading this is a shame for not having spoken a single word."

Many works in Han poetry do not focus on major themes, but instead use ordinary and trivial daily life as poetry material. This poem "Shan Shi" is a typical example. The description in "Shan Shi" is not about famous mountains and temples, but just an ordinary ancient temple on a barren mountain. The experience depicted in "Shan Shi" is much more interesting than fishing, but it was just a fairly ordinary trip to a mountain temple. However, the poet wrote it vividly and vividly. The poem describes the hospitality of the temple monks, saying: "The monk said that the ancient wall Buddha was well painted, and he used fire to illuminate the sparse view. He made the bed, brushed the mat, and prepared soup and rice, which was also enough to satisfy my hunger." Originally, when I entered the temple at dusk, the top priority was to arrange food and accommodation. But perhaps because the guests were all literati (including Hou Xi, Li Jingxing, and Wei Chifen who traveled with Han Yu), the temple monk first recommended the ancient murals that the temple was proud of to the guests. Even if a torch is lit to illuminate everything, it is blurry and dim, and what is seen is very rare. How disappointing this is! However, the simplicity of the monks and the disrepair of the temple are still present in history. Even when it comes to arranging food and accommodation, everything is very simple. However, the enthusiasm and diligence of the temple monks, as well as the simplicity and hardship of temple life, are vividly portrayed. The scenery is ordinary yet beautiful, life is ordinary yet joyful, all thanks to the poet's brilliant pen, they are portrayed so vividly. Han Yu is a true artist who has discovered beauty and poetry in his ordinary life.

## 4. TRANSLATE TEXT INTO POETRY

Han Yu cleverly used the technique of "spreading literary works" in the style of Fu in "Shan Shi", making the momentum of the poem more vigorous and the style more magnificent. The concept of "using literature as poetry" was already evident in the poetry of Du Fu in the prosperous Tang Dynasty, but it was not until Han Yu in the middle Tang Dynasty that it developed into an important part of the artistic style of Han poetry. He uses the vocabulary, syntax, and structure of prose culture to write poetry, without or less using rhetorical devices such as metaphor, symbolism, imagination, and exaggeration. He does not use jumping syntax and structure, but instead uses the method of "fu" to vividly narrate the process of events. Twenty one lines of the poem, without changing rhymes, one rhyme lasts until the end. The main manifestations in "Shan Shi" are the following two aspects.

### 4.1. Discussing Life

The last paragraph of the poem expresses one's personal feelings and emotions through argumentation, blending clear discourse into the poem. The last few lines of "Shan Shi" express the poet's inner emotions and his conflicting desire to retire and serve, "Life is so self indulgent that there is no need to restrain oneself from killing others. Alas, my party's two or three sons are content to stay old and never return."

### 4.2. Loose Style

Introduce the structure, syntax, and typology of prose into poetry in creation. Han Yu attempted to change the external form of poetry that had become standardized and orderly in the Tang Dynasty, pursuing harmonious rhythms and neat sentence structures. He eliminated parallel lines, made poetry loose and deformed, and achieved an artistic effect of ups and downs and changes. He then made the poetry longer or shorter, striving to create a beauty of scattered lines.

In terms of rhyme, this poem adopts the rhyme pattern of "entering the first sentence with rhyme, rhyming every other line", and uses a flat tone with a slight rhyme, one rhyme to the end. However, in terms of its language style, tone, and grammatical structure, it is a sketching style prose style. For example, phrases such as "At dusk, bats fly to the temple", "Use fire to illuminate the sparse view", "Make the bed, brush the mat, and prepare the soup and rice", "When the stream flows barefoot, step on the stream stones", "Alas, my party's two or three sons", and so on, spread throughout the entire poem.

In terms of syntax and rhythm, Han Yu does not like to follow tradition. Seven character poetry is generally divided into two syllable groups of "4-3", with a rhythmic pause in between, which is also commonly used as a gap in meaning. For example, "The boundless falling wood rustles down, and the endless Yangtze River rolls in." However, Han Yu deliberately disrupts this rhythm. In the poem "Mountain and Stone," there are various innovative attempts. The "2-4-1" style, "2-2-3" style, and so on, these lines clearly break the fixed syntactic rhythm, making the neat seven character sentence structure present uneven phonological rhythms.

The ever-changing rhythm also breaks the rules of couplets. Although ancient Chinese poetry did not have a strict requirement for parallelism, it was influenced by the rules of rhythmic poetry, and Tang Dynasty poets had an unconscious tendency towards rhythmicity when writing poetry. However, the entire poem "Shan Shi" had no parallelism. Perhaps in this ordinary reality lies a deeper sense of beauty and poetry. Therefore, the sincerity and straightforwardness in the dangerous and strange may be the true essence of Han Meng's poetic style.

## 5. SUMMARY

Han Yu incorporated the planning, layout, and structure of prose into his poetry in "Shan Shi", along with the momentum of continuity and integration. He applied the techniques of depicting events, characters, and objects in prose to his poetry. In the poem "Shan Shi", the narrative sequence of general landscape travelogue prose is adopted, starting from traveling to the mountain temple, what is seen around, watching murals at night, making beds and eating, hearing at night, seeing at night, and leaving the temple in the early morning, all the way down the mountain to experience the scenery. The storytelling gives people a feeling of experiencing the scenery.

Han Yu's "Shan Shi" is not only an excellent landscape travelogue poem, written in chronological and spatial order. The author's emotions can be felt between the words and lines, which is the author's creative inspiration and an important embodiment of the theory of "incorporating literature into poetry". Therefore, Han Yu's "Shan Shi" holds an irreplaceable position in the history of Chinese poetry.

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