

## **CHAPTER I**

### **Han Shan The Poet**

#### **1.1: Name and Identity**

Some poets are well-known during their lifetime but are forgotten after their death. Some are not recognized during their lifetime but become famous after their death. The poet Han Shan, falls under the second category. He is a man whose influence grows with time. He was not one of the most popular poets of his own period, but several years after his death, poets began to realize that he was a great master of his art. Eleven centuries after his death, scholars began in earnest to collect his works, to edit them and to provide them with commentaries. They began to study the incidents of his life in the light of his own poems and to understand his poetry in terms of his life and time. Thus the admiration of the man came from the fascination of his poetry, and the admiration of the poetry was further strengthened by the more detailed knowledge of the poet's life. Therefore, before we proceed further to his poems, it is necessary to look more closely at the poet's life.

The name Han Shan had been forgotten, neglected and buried along with his work, for over a thousand years. This happened irrespective of his fame and reputation during his time of life. His failure to keep any diaries, memoirs or notes resulted in him becoming a total mystery to modern readers. We can say that it is luck that his three hundred odd poems have been handed down to this generation.

Han Shan can be called his own best biographer. This becomes evident as we study deeper into his poems. The name Han Shan, translated directly into English, means "Cold Mountain". Han ( 寒 ) stands for "Cold" and Shan ( 山 ) stands for "Mountain". Strangely this name adds somewhat to the nature of his own character, though it was named after the place he lived in.

His real name is unknown and the name "Han Shan" was formed according to the name of the deep and secluded place called

“Cold Mountain”<sup>1</sup> in Tian Tai Mountains ( 天台山 ), where he spent his life in retreat since he was thirty years old or more. Situated some seventy miles west of the district town of Tang Xing ( Tang Xing Xian 唐兴县 ), this retreat was famous for its numerous monasteries, both Buddhist and Taoist. Han Shan often went to the Guo Qing temple ( *Guo Qing Si* 国清寺 ) situated nearby, where he visited his good friends Feng Gan ( 丰干 ) and Shi De ( 拾得 ).

Both Feng Gan and Shi De were his good friends. He visited them from time to time. In one of his poems, he has mentioned his valued friendship with them and his frequent visit to them.

Accustomed to living in a secluded, retired spot,  
惯居幽隐处  
Suddenly I head off to the heart of Kuo-ching.  
乍向国清中

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<sup>1</sup> Du Guangting's ( 杜光庭 850-933 ) "Xianzhuan shiyi" ( 仙传拾遗 ), cited in Five hundred Juan of Taiping Miscellany ( *Taiping Guangji Wubai Juan* 太平广记五百卷 ), Juan 55, says that Han Shan "retired to live on Kingfishergreen Screen Mountain ( *Cui Bing Shan* 翠屏山 ) in the Tian Tai range. This mountain is deep and far away: even in summer there is snow. It is also named Cold Cliffs. As a result, he called himself Master Cold Mountain." ( see Li Fang 李昉, *Taiping Guangji Wubai Juan*, Shanghai: Saoye Shanfang, 1930, Vol.4, p.38. ) "Records of the Transmission of the Lamp" ( *Jing De Chuan Deng Lu* 景德传灯录 ), Juan 27, has "Seventy miles west of district town of Shi Feng ( 始丰县 ) there are two cliffs, one called Cold and the other called Bright. Since he lived on Cold Cliff, it is from this that he took his name." And, Zhi Nan ( 志南 ), in his postscript of 1189, says that "Cold lived and dwelt on a cold cliff, seventy miles to the west of district town of Tang Xing ( 唐兴县 ), and from this he took his name."

On occasion I visit with Old Feng Kan,  
时访丰干老  
And as before come to see Master Shih.  
乃来看拾公

Feng Gan is a Chan master who pounded and hulled rice for monks in the Guo Qing temple, where Shi De worked in the kitchen of the temple. It is said that, Shi De used to save leftovers in a bamboo tube for Han Shan to take home, whenever Han Shan visited them. He is called Shi De (the foundling) because he was found by Feng Gan at the Chi Cheng (赤城) road side when he was still very young.

All three of them were always linked together and called “the three saints of Tian Tai” ( *Tian Tai Sansheng* 天台三圣 ). Han Shan and Shi De especially had a strong bond of friendship between them. They grew up almost like brothers. This has been mentioned in two of Shi De’s own poems:

(i) “ I’m always the Foundling,  
从来是拾得  
It is not a name called once in a while;  
不是偶然称  
I have no other relatives,  
别无亲眷属  
Han Shan is my brother,  
寒山是我兄

Both of us are similar in mind"<sup>2</sup>  
两人心相似.....

(ii) "When I'm free, I go to Tian Tai Cave,  
闲入天台洞  
I visit people, but they don't know me,  
访人人不知  
Han Shan is my companion,  
寒山为伴侣  
Under the pine tree, together we eat the glossy ganoderma."<sup>3</sup>  
松下啖灵芝.....

Their friendship was one of a kind. They looked like poor fellows and acted like madmen. Almost like lunatics, free and unfettered, they recited poems to one another and shared the same views about nature and literature. Being close friends of nature, they constantly act and talk in a nonsensical way, gaily clapping, laughing, singing and dancing in a joyful manner. For example, the following story is told of an encounter between Han Shan and Shi De while the later was sweeping:

"Shi De was one day sweeping the ground when the head of the monastery, passing by, questioned him: "You are called a foundling, because you were found by Feng Gan. However, what is your real name? And where do you live?" Shi De put down the broom and stood with his hands crossed. When

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<sup>2</sup> See A Complete Collection of Tang Poetry ( *Quan Tangshi* 全唐诗 ), Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1960, Vol.12, juan807, p.9105.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.9107.

asked once more, he took the broom again and resumed his sweeping. At the sight of this, Han Shan beat his own breast and repeated: "Good heavens! Good heavens!" Shi De was quite amazed. "Why are you doing this?" he asked. Han Shan replied, "Don't you know, when a man dies in the east house, the west house neighbours should show their sympathy by groaning." Both burst into laughter, danced, cried, and left."<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, Han Shan was always called by others as a "crackpot" or "nut".<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Refer Zhi Nan (志南), "Han Shan Shiji Tiantaishan Guoqing Chansi Sanyin Jiji" (寒山诗集天台山国清禅寺三隐集记), Han Shan Shiji (寒山诗集), in Siku Tangren Wenji Congkan (四库唐人文集丛刊), Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1992, p.4. In addition to the sweeping story cited above, more stories concerning Han Shan could be read *ibid.*, pp.5-6.

<sup>5</sup> Han Shan has written lines like this:

(i) The many who live on Ti'en T'ai  
Do not recognize Master Han-shan  
None of them knows my true thoughts;  
They simply call it "idle talk".

(ii) When People of this age see Han-shan,  
They all say, "This is some nut!"  
"His face- not fit to be seen by human eyes;  
His body wrapped only in cotton-fur robes."  
But my words they don't understand  
And their words are things that I wouldn't say!  
My response to these visitors is,  
"You too can come look at Han-shan!"

(iii) A guest criticized Master Han-shan;  
"sir, your poems make no sense at all!"  
[To which I replied]"When I look back at the ancients,  
Poverty and low station were no cause for shame."  
In responding, he laughed at these words;  
"Your remarks-how vague,distant, and imprecise!  
I want you, sir, to be up to date;  
money's the only urgent matter."

(iv)Han-shan sets forth these words;  
I repeat them, like some crazy man.  
When I have something to say, I say it right to your face;  
Hence, I have earned the resentment of men.

In one of Shi De's poems, he evokes the question of their names and where they originated from, as he writes:

“Han Shan is so called because he lives in Han Shan,  
寒山自寒山  
Shi De is because, he's a foundling.”<sup>6</sup>  
拾得自拾得

Even then, a mystery has always prevailed, where the actual names of these poets are concerned. A later research reveals that Han Shan had a surname “Pang” ( 庞 ). A calligraphy written by Huang Tingjian ( 黄庭坚 ), a famous northern poet, was found among the masterpieces of Chinese calligraphy in the National Palace Museum. It consists a semi cursive script of three of Han Shan's poems. The scroll is signed and contains: “A dedication by Fu Weng ( 涪翁 )<sup>7</sup>: Han Shan Zi Pang Jushi's poems, two scroll.”( *Han Shan Zi Pang Jushi Shi*

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If the heart is sincere, the words set forth are direct;  
With a direct heart, there is no behind.  
When you draw near to death and cross the river Nai-ho,  
[Then you will ask,]“Who was that babbling fool?”

<sup>6</sup> A Complete Collection of Tang Poetry, op.cit., p.9105.

<sup>7</sup> Fu Weng is Huang Tingjian's nickname or Hao ( 号 ), because he lived in exile in the state of Fu, so he was called Fu Weng too.

*Liangjuan, Fu Weng Ti.* 寒山子庞居士诗两卷, 涪翁题. )<sup>8</sup>, This calligraphy writing also appeared in “Huang Tingjian Moji Dagan” ( 黄庭坚墨迹大观 ).<sup>9</sup>

According to calligraphy tradition, it is the practice of the calligrapher to write down the name of the poet at the end of the scroll after they have copied their poems. The Huang’s copy itself contains three of Han Shan’s poems which is in the existing collection of his works. At the end of the scroll, Huang wrote: “Han Shan Zi Pang Jushi’s poems, two scroll.” which means the poems were written by Han Shan Zi and Pang Jushi ( 庞居士 ). Therefore, Han Shan Zi is Pang Jushi. According to another rule of Chinese calligraphy writing, the writer would sometimes write the name of the poet with his title at the end of the scroll as a way of paying respect to the poet, after copying down the poems in their scroll. In this respect, Huang wrote “Han Shan Zi Pang Jushi’s poems, two scroll.”, at the end of his scroll. This means that Pang Jushi is the title addressed to Han Shan Zi. Pang is obviously

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<sup>8</sup> Masterpieces Of Chinese Calligraphy in the National Palace Museum Supplement ( *Gugong Fashu Xuancui Xuji* 故宫法书选萃续辑 ), Taipei : National Palace Museum, 1973, p.20.

<sup>9</sup> Zhu Chongyue ( 朱仲岳 ), Huang Tingjian Moji Dagan ( 黄庭坚墨迹大观 ), Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1996, pp.135-143.



the surname and Jushi means lay Buddhist. This is to say that Han Shan is a lay Buddhist whose surname was “Pang”.

Above is the real evidence to prove that Han Shan’s surname was indeed “Pang”. A point already made by Yi Zhongda ( 易中达 ) in his essay, “A research of the poet Han Shan” ( *Shiren Han Shan De Yanjiu* 诗人寒山的研究 ). He mentions that he saw this piece of calligraphy in the National Museum when he paid a visit there.<sup>10</sup> This is regarded as a valuable discovery because Huang was a greatly reputed poet during his period ( 1045-1105 ) and was even in his own time highly regarded for his calligraphy. He was one of the four best known calligraphers in Song dynasty.<sup>11</sup> Hence, this evidence is conceded as a rare piece that clears many doubts. We can also safely conclude that Han Shan’s surname is “Pang”.

Regarding Han Shan’s designation or “zi” ( 字 ), Yi

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<sup>10</sup> Yi Zhongda ( 易中达 ), “A research of the poet Han Shan” ( *Shiren Han Shan De Yanjiu* 诗人寒山的研究 ), *Zhongguo Shijikan* ( 中国诗季刊 ), Taipei: Zhongguo Shijikanshe ( 中国诗季刊社 ), 1972, Vol.3, juan3, p.2.

<sup>11</sup> The four best known calligraphers were Su Shi ( 苏轼 ), Huang Tingjian ( 黄庭坚 ), Mi Fu ( 米芾 ), and Cai Xiang ( 蔡襄 ).

Zhongda in his essay states briefly that Han Shan's designation is actually "Renyun" ( 任运 )<sup>12</sup>. He stated two of Han Shan's poems to explain this point of view:

\*\*\* (i) Once at Cold Mountain, troubles cease,  
一住寒山万事休  
No more tangled, hung-up minds,  
更无杂念挂心事  
I idly scribble poems on the rock-cliff,  
闲于石壁题诗句  
Taking whatever comes, like a drifting boat.  
任运还同不系舟  
( Renyun huan tong bu xi zhou )

\*\*\* (ii) I settled at Cold Mountain long ago,  
粤自居寒山  
Already it seems like years and years,  
曾经几万载  
Freely drifting, I prowl the woods and streams;  
任运遁林泉 ( Renyun dun lin quan )  
A linger watching things themselves.  
栖迟观自在

This point of view arouses a lot of doubts and we find it hard to be accepted. Out of more than three hundred poems written by Han Shan, only two mention the word "renyun". Hence, "renyun" is closely linked to the doctrine of Chan which means natural and unrestrained, elegant and unconventional and to be in a state of blissful abstraction. Many other poet monks also used the word "renyun" in their poems. For

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<sup>12</sup> Yi zhongda, op.cit., p.3.

example in “The Recorded Sayings of Linji” ( *Linji Yulu* 临济语录 ), we have a line that reads:

When it's time to get dressed, put on your clothes.  
任运著衣裳 ( Renyun<sup>13</sup> zhuo yi shang )

Besides that, Chan master Shi Tou ( 石头禅师 ) replies to Chan master Yaoshan Weiyao ( 药山惟俨禅师 ) in this manner:

Since of old we have been living together  
without knowing the name,  
从来共住不知名  
Hand in hand, as the wheel turns, we thus go.  
任运相将只么行  
( Renyun<sup>14</sup> xiang jiang zhi me xing )

Although Han Shan likes to place his name in his poems ( *qianming shi* 嵌名诗 ), as said by Yi Zhongda, most often than not, he used the word Han Shan instead of Renyun. Of the approximately three hundred over poems that have survived, about 34 poems mention the word Han Shan either to indicate his name, the Cold

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<sup>13</sup> “Zhenzhou Linji Huizhao Chanshi Yulu” ( 镇州临济慧照禅师语录 ), Essential Sayings of Ancient Worthies ( *Gu Zun Su Yulu* 古尊宿语录 ), in Chanzong Jicheng ( 禅宗集成 ), Yiwu Yinshuguan, 1968, Vol.11, juan4, p.7351.

<sup>14</sup> Pu Ji ( 普济 ), “Yaoshan Weiyao Chanshi” ( 药山惟俨禅师 ), Wu Deng Hui Yuan ( 五灯会元 ), in Zhongguo Fojiao Dianji Xuankan ( 中国佛教典籍选刊 ), Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1984, juan5, p.257.

Mountain or indeed just a reflection of his state of mind. At the beginning of Arthur Waley's introduction to his translation of 28 poems by Han Shan, he says that in Han Shan's poems, the Han Shan (Cold Mountain) is often the name of a state of mind rather than of a locality.<sup>15</sup>

We can be very sure to say that Han Shan's surname is Pang, but as for his designation or Zi, we still have no literary evidence to answer the question one way or the other.

Now, I shall discuss Han Shan's identity which is still a mystery to some extent. In many books or essays written by researchers, or even dictionaries, it is said that Han Shan was a monk during Tang Period and this argument has been universally and generally accepted. But, I find this argument not really obligatory. The calligraphy written by Huang Tingjian is a great help to conform that Han Shan is a lay Buddhist rather than a monk. Hence, in one of Huang's poems entitled "Zai Da Bing Jian Kang Guo Xiongdi Sishou" (再答并简康国兄弟四首) he says :

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<sup>15</sup> Waley, Arthur, *Chinese Poems*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1983, p.105.

“Han Shan is very eloquent and he is a lay Buddhist.”<sup>16</sup>  
妙舌寒山一居士

This proves that Han Shan was a lay Buddhist.

It is safe to call Han Shan a Buddhist recluse. It seems unlikely that Han Shan ever took monastic vows and became ordained as a monk. In fact, one of his great delights is criticizing, making fun of and satirizing established clergy. There are two poems in the collection in which Han Shan has given advice or criticised the monks and nuns:

(i) I've seen these people who've "left home";  
我见出家人  
They don't really get into their "leaving home" studies.  
不入出家学

(ii) I address you, the "leaving home" group;  
语你出家辈  
What is it you call "leaving home"?  
云何为出家  
Wasteful and extravagant, you seek to maintain your lives,  
奢华求养活  
To continue on without end, your family with its clan names.  
继缀族姓家

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<sup>16</sup> Yu Zhang Huangxiansheng Wenji ( 豫章黄先生文集 ), Sibü Congkan Chubian ( 四部丛刊初编 ), Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuguan, Vol.54, p.146.

One of Han Shan's poems suggest that he had actually taken vows. The poem begins: " Ever since I 'left home' " ( 自从出家后 ). "Left home" ( *chujia* 出家 ) is the Buddhist term for entering monastic life or being ordained. However, one should consider that the word "chujia" does not necessarily mean 'to become a monk or a nun'. In "Chinese Dictionary" ( *Hanyu Dacidian* 汉语大词典 ), it is stated that the word "chujia" has two meanings. One means 'left home' and the other means 'become a monk or a nun'.<sup>17</sup> Probably, Han Shan is a man who left home to look for happiness and peace in life. After reading through his three hundred odd poems, one might get a notion of how Han Shan lived his life. He himself has stated all too frequently that he had lived a life of a hermit, alone in the cold mountains. We can see it for ourselves, in these poems:

\* (i) Among a thousand clouds and ten thousand streams,  
千云万水间  
here lives an idle man,  
中有一闲士  
in the daytime wondering over green mountains,  
白日游青山  
at night coming home to sleep by the cliff.  
夜归岩下睡

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<sup>17</sup> Chinese Dictionary ( *Hanyu Dacidian* 汉语大词典 ), edited by Luo Zhufeng ( 罗竹风 ), Shanghai: Hanyu Dacidian Chubanshe, 1994, juan2, p.492.

Swiftly the springs and autumns pass,  
倏尔过春秋  
but my mind is at peace, free from dust or delusion.  
寂然无尘累  
How pleasant, to know I need nothing to lean on,  
快哉何所依  
to be still as the waters of the autumn river!  
静若秋江水

(ii) When recluses escape from life among men,  
隐士遁人间  
Many go to the mountains to sleep.  
多向山中睡  
Bluish -green creepers- sparsely placed,  
in profusion they grow;  
青萝疏麓麓  
Emerald-green mountain streams-  
their tinkling sounds unbroken go on.  
碧涧响联联  
Steady and slow- moreover, contented with joy;  
腾腾且安乐  
Unhurried, at ease- they keep themselves both calm and pure.  
悠悠自清闲  
Avoiding contact with the tainted affairs of the world,  
免有染世事  
Their hearts remain spotless like white lotus blooms.  
心静如白莲

The nature of the first poem is clearly confessional. The use of the first person pronoun 'I', shows how the poet conveys through poetry the state of idleness he lived in; wondering alone among the "green mountains" in the daytime, and at night coming home to sleep by the "cliff". The second poem links this state of living, to the life of a recluse. It also shows that the idle man and the recluse here, is the poet himself. It indicates that Han Shan was not really bothered, whether he

was a monk or a lay Buddhist. It made no difference to him. Becoming a monk is just an external image that he made for himself. Free mind and peace is more important to him. This point will be proved later on in my research.

## **1.2: Han Shan's Date Of Birth**

Han Shan's date of birth is a matter of controversy. Since the exact date is unknown, scholars have suggested various other dates. Several scholars have in fact suggested a date much later than the popular one. The argument goes on endlessly, between the various parties involved. The process of discovering Han Shan's date of birth, is by no means complete until now. However, everyone seems to agree that the place to begin looking into, is the preface to the poems of Han Shan and Shi De, written by the Governor of Tai Prefecture ( *Taizhou Cishi* 台州刺史 ) of the Tang dynasty, named Lü Qiuyin ( 闾丘胤 ). Lü's account begins with the statement that "no one knows just what sort of man Han Shan was." Then, the preface continues with the remark that "he was a poor and eccentric scholar with a crazy character, who lived in retirement at a place called Cold Cliff in the Tian Tai Mountains,



some 70 miles west of the district town of Tang Xing.” Furthermore it states that he often went down to the Guo Qing temple which is situated nearby, where a man named Shi De worked in the kitchen of the temple. He would sometimes save leftover food, hide them in a bamboo tube and wait for Han Shan to come and take it away.<sup>18</sup>

It is from the Lü’s preface that we obtain our first impression of Han Shan. It is hard to say just how much truth there are in the preface. But, these legends, nevertheless, have their own values, for they are the only sources that provide information about the poet. The preface is undated, and it has almost no indication of the date of the events that took place in Han Shan’s life. They have no record of any incidents in detail and have left out important facts about Han Shan like the date of his birth or death. This is one of the reasons that created many complications and doubts about his age.

However, Lü’s name having appeared in “Tai Zhou Fu

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<sup>18</sup> For the Lü’s preface, see Shi Han Shan ( 释寒山 ), Han Shan Shiji ( 寒山诗集 ), Siku Tangren Wenji Congkan ( 四库唐人文集丛刊 ), Shanghai : Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1992, pp.3-4.

Zhi” ( 台州府志 ) Juan 5 and “Jia Ding Chi Cheng Zhi” ( 嘉定赤城志 ) Juan 8 seem to have given some scholar a clue to prove Han Shan’s time was in Zhen Guan era ( 贞观 627-649 ). It is mentioned in both the texts that Lü was the governor of Tai Prefecture during the middle of Zhen Guan era. In the preface, Lü has mentioned that he had met Han Shan in the Guo Qing temple, therefore, Han Shan should have lived during his time (Zhen Guan era). And, it is not until 1189, when Zhi Nan ( 志南 ) wrote a postscript to the poems entitled “Tiantai-shan Guoqing Chansi Sanyin Jiji” ( 天台山国清禅寺三隐集记 ) which says that:

“The Chan master Feng Gan lived at Guo Qing temple on Tian Tai in the early years of the Zhen Guan era of the Tang.....and Han Shan lived in Cold Cliff which was 70 miles west of District town of Tang Xing”<sup>19</sup>

Both Zhi Nan and Lu’s preface mention the District of Tang Xing. But it is very doubtful because, the district of Tang Xing only appeared during the second year of Shang Yuan era ( *Shang Yuan*

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<sup>19</sup> Zhi Nan, op.cit., p.4.

*Er Nian* 上元二年 ).<sup>20</sup> Shang Yuan is the reign title ( *nianhao* 年号 ) of Emperor Gao Zong ( 高宗 675 ) and Su Zong ( 肃宗 761 ). So, only the year 675 or the year 761 can be taken as true. Han Shan could not have lived during Zhen Guan era ( 627-649 ) where the District of Tang Xing had not been found yet.

To return to the preface, the great Sinologist Hu Shi ( 胡适 ) doubted its authenticity as early as the 1920s. He says that the place mentioned in the preface, Tang Xing, did not go by that name before 675 (the second year of Shang Yuan era), and that therefore the preface could not have been written in early Tang.<sup>21</sup> Hu Shi failed to note that in reality there were two Shang Yuan era in Tang - the first is 675, the second is 761. If the second Shang Yuan era, indeed year 761 is taken into consideration, this presumably pushes the date of Han Shan back further into mid or late Tang. He set aside Lü's Preface and turned to other sources to look for a date for Han Shan. He did

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<sup>20</sup> Tiantai-shan Ji ( 天台山记 ) and Yuan He Jun Xian Zhi ( 元和郡县志 ) recorded that the second year of Shang Yuan of Su Zhong is 761. Xin Tangshu Dili Zhi ( 新唐书地理志 ) recorded that the second of Shang Yuan of Gao Zhong is 675.

<sup>21</sup> Hu Shi ( 胡适 ), Baihua Wenxueshi ( 白话文学史 ), Hong Kong: Qiming Shuju ( 启明书局 ), 1962, p.175.

his own research and compared his work with Du Guangting's ( 杜光庭 ) "Xianzhuan Shiyi" ( 仙传拾遗 )<sup>22</sup> and other historical materials and finally made a decision that Han Shan's lifetime was within the years 700-780.<sup>23</sup> His argument is supported by Yu Jiayi ( 余嘉锡 ) in his "Shiku Ti Yao Bianzheng" ( 四库提要辩证 ).<sup>24</sup> He points out that Lu's preface cannot be relied on. He holds the same view with Hu Shi .

Of course, there are other ways to approach this problem. For example, to find information regarding Han Shan by reading his poems and analysing their contents. Since Han Shan's poems are filled with Chan symbols and themes, and since we normally date the beginnings of creative developments in the Chan sect to the early eighth century and the teachings of Hui Neng ( 638-713 ), the sixth patriarch of the Chan sect, we can also conclude that Han Shan lived during high Tang and mid Tang period. In fact, the following poems of Han Shan can really prove my above conviction:

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<sup>22</sup> Du Guangting, *op.cit.*, p.38 says that Han Shan was a recluse in Kingfishergreen Screen Mountain during Da Li ( 大历 766-779 ) era.

<sup>23</sup> Hu Shi, *op.cit.*, p.177.

<sup>24</sup> For more details, kindly refer to Yu Jiayi ( 余嘉锡 ), *Shiku Ti Yao Bianzheng* ( 四库提要辩证 ), *Yiwen Yinshuguan*, 1965, juan 20, p.1259.

(i) Cold or hot we must judge for ourselves;  
冷暖我自量  
Never believe the lips of the servant.  
不信奴唇皮

These lines are more directly related to the conversation between sixth patriarch and a monk named Hui Ming ( 惠明 ), where the later, having been enlightened by some remarks of the sixth patriarch, says: "I was under the fifth patriarch many years but could not realize my true self until now. Through your teaching I find the source. A person drinks water and knows himself whether it is cold or warm. May I call you my teacher?"<sup>25</sup> This puts Han Shan after Hui Neng.

(ii) You may use all your strength polishing bricks,  
用力磨碌砖  
But can you ever turn them into mirrors?  
那堪将作镜

These two lines are allusions taken from the famous exchange between the Chan master Huai Rang ( 怀让 ) and his student Ma Zu ( 马祖 ), where meditating in hopes to become Buddha is likened to polishing a

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<sup>25</sup>"*Xingyou Diyi*" ( 行由第一 ), Liu Zu Dashi Fabao Tanjing ( 六祖大师法宝坛经 ), in Da Zang Jing ( 大藏经 ), Taipei: Xinwenfeng Chuban, 1983, Vol.48, p.349.

brick or tile in hopes of making it shine which will never happen.<sup>26</sup> Huai Rang's life time is between the years 677-744 and Ma Zu's lifetime is between the years 709-788. He renounced as a monk in the year 729. Therefore, this speech with his master Huai Rang should have taken place after he became a monk, which was indeed after the year 729. If Han Shan had really lived during the Zhen Guan era, how could he have mentioned the said lines which happened in the High Tang period ? Therefore, Han Shan's date of birth should be later than the year 729.

(iii) I've seen Seng-yu, by nature rare and unique;  
 余见僧繇性稀奇  
 Skillful and clever, "born in-between," at the time of the Liang.  
 巧妙间生梁朝时  
 [The painting of] Tao-tzu, airy and graceful-that was his special mark;  
 道子飘然为殊特  
 The two Masters so good at drawing, when with their hands they  
 wielded the brush.  
 二公善绘手毫挥

Sheng-yu ( 470-550 ) is recognized as one of China's greatest painters and he worked for the Emperor Wu ( *Wu Di* 武帝 ) of Liang ( 梁 ) dynasty where Tao-tzu was a famous painter, who was

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<sup>26</sup> For the famous exchange between the Chan master Huai Rang and Mazu Daoyi on polishing a tile in hopes of turning it into a mirror, see Shi Daoyuan ( 释道原 ), "Chan master Nanyu Huairang" ( 南岳怀让禅师 ) in Records of the Transmission of the Lamp ( *Jing De Chuan Deng Lu* 景德传灯录 ), Taipei: Zhenshanmei Chubanshe, 1973, fourth edition, juan5, p.92.

very skillful in drawing Buddhist images in Tang dynasty. His lifetime was between the years 700-792. Han Shan must have admired his painting very much. If Han Shan lived during Zhen Guan era, how did he get to know Tao-tzu who was later than him? Therefore, this puts Han Shan in the mid or late Tang.

(iv) When the bark is done falling away,  
皮肤脱落尽  
The only thing left is "what's really real."  
唯有真实在

A similar saying is attributed to the Chan master Yaoshan Weiyang (751-834), his famous lines: "When the bark is falling away, all that remains is only the core of truth" ( *pifutuoluojin, weiyangyizhenshi* 皮肤脱落尽, 唯有一真实 ).<sup>27</sup> This again puts Han Shan to the mid and late Tang.

(iv) This is what poor scribe  
个是何措大  
Who repeatedly comes to be tested at Southern Court?  
时来审南院

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<sup>27</sup> Pu Ji, "Yaoshan Weiyang Chanshi", op.cit.

The “Southern Court” was established either in the year 734 or in 740 as a part of the Personal Board “responsible for determining.”<sup>28</sup> Therefore, either the year 734 or 740 can be taken to conclude Han Shan’s lifetime to be later than both years mentioned.

Han Shan’s name appear more in Buddhist writings than in Chinese writings. Many Buddhist books and records hold Han Shan’s short biographical sketches like, “Wu Deng Hui Yuan”(五灯会元), “Records of the Transmission of the Lamp” ( *Jing De Chuan Deng Lu* 景德传灯录 ), “Biographies of Eminent monks” ( *Song Gaoseng Zhuan* 宋高僧传 ), “Recorded Sayings of Chan sect” ( *Chanzong Yulu* 禅宗语录 ), “Essential Sayings of Ancient Worthies”( *Gu Zun Su Yulu* 古尊宿语录 ), “Collection of the Patriarchal hall” ( *Zu Tang Ji* 祖堂集 ) etc. In “Biographies of Eminent monks” Juan 2 and “Records of the Transmission of the Lamp”, it is recorded that Chan master, Ling You ( 灵佑 ) went to Tian Tai and met Han Shan during the year of 793 ( 9<sup>th</sup> year of Zhen Yuan 贞元九年 ). Ling You’s lifetime was 771-853.

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<sup>28</sup> According to Li Zhao’s ( 李肇 ) *Guoshibu* ( 国史补 ) said that the “Southern Court” was established since the 22<sup>nd</sup> year of Kai Yuan ( *Kai Yuan Er Shi Er Nian* 开元二十二年 year 734 ) and Wang Pu’s ( 王溥 ) *Tanghuiyao* ( 唐会要 ) said it was established in 28<sup>th</sup> of Kai Yuan ( *Kai Yuan Er Shi Ba Nian* 开元二十八年 year 740 ).



Moreover, in “Essential Sayings of Ancient Worthies” Juan 14, “Wu Deng Hui Yuan” and “Recorded Sayings of Chan sect”, it is mentioned that the Chan master Zhaozhou Congshen ( 赵州从谗禅师 ), once met Han Shan in 795 ( 11<sup>th</sup> year of Zhen Yuan 贞元十一年 ), and even had a conversation with Han Shan. Chan master Zhaozhou Congshen’s life period was 778-897. Therefore, after getting some evidence through Han Shan’s poems and making comparisons with : Ling You ( 771-853 ) and Zhaozhou Cong Shen ( 778-897 ), we finally come to a conclusion that Han Shan’s lifetime would probably be around 740-850

### 3.3 : Han Shan’s Early Life And Life As A Poet

Legends concerning Han Shan tell us nothing about the main events of his life. We know next to nothing about Han Shan’s early years, he opens one of his poems by saying: “From birth I’ve been a farmer,” ( 从生是农夫 ) and he also mentions of his parents;

Father and mother left me plenty of books,  
父母续经多  
fields and gardens - I long now for nothing more.  
田园不羨它

These words, suggest that Han Shan might have been born in quite a rich peasant family. In another poem, he talks of his vigorous and unrestrained life in his late teens:

On and on I'd race my white horse;  
联翩骑白马  
shout out the hares, release the green hawks.  
喝兔放苍鹰

Lines like this give us an indication that Han Shan is more like a young aristocrat than some poor farm boy. Also, in another poem, he talks of travelling all over China as a young man to visit famed spots of scenic beauty.<sup>29</sup>

Han Shan had brothers, as he mentions here:

(i) When I was young, I'd take the classics along when I hoed;  
少小带经锄  
Originally I planned to live together with my elder brother.  
本将兄共居

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<sup>29</sup> Han Shan has a poem:

I remember before, all the places I went to see.  
Among men, I chased after the very best sights and scenes.  
Delighting in mountains, I climbed peaks eighty thousand feet high;  
Loving the waters, I floated on one thousand streams.  
I saw off guests at P'i-p'a Valley,  
Carried my lute to Parrot Isle.  
How could I know I'd end up at the base of some pine,  
Arms wrapped round my knees, as the cold wind sighs and moans?

(ii) Last year in spring I heard the birds sing;  
去年春鸟鸣  
At that time I thought of my brothers.  
此时思弟兄

The claim that “I’d take the classics along when I hoed” shows devotion to study and a commitment to eventually succeed in the realm of scholars and officials. It was a tradition for every man during Tang’s era, to obtain some kind of achievement in imperial examinations, in order to gain merit and fame which would therefore ensure a good livelihood. Moreover, Ancient Chinese people held on to the concept that if any of their family members managed to have the opportunity to join the government service, it will glorify and illuminate their ancestors. In the same way, Han Shan, may have been much expected by his brothers and later his wife to do so too. In this respect, he was involved in both literary and military training since he was young. He was not only well versed in literature studies, he was also active in martial or physical arts such as Wushu ( 武术 ), swordplay etc. It can be said that he was well educated and trained in military practices from a young age. One of his poems state thus:

I first was a student of books and swords,  
一为书剑客  
And secondly met with a wise sagely lord.  
二遇圣明君 .....

I studied literature and I studied war;  
学文兼学武  
I studied war and I studied literature.  
学武兼学文

Did Han Shan take the examinations to become an official? Apparently he had intended to pass in imperial examination. There are some poems that speak of this issue:

This is what a poor scribe,  
个是何措大  
who repeatedly comes to be tested at Southern Court?  
时来省南院  
Years? Possibly thirty or more;  
年可三时许  
Already passed through four or five selections.  
曾经四五选

Here, Han Shan seems to hold a position as a scribe, in some government office. According to Chen Huijian ( 陈慧剑 ), the “Southern Court” ( *Nan Yuan* 南院 ) is where the list of names of people selected for office was posted. However, this refers to the examination administered to men who had attained a degree but as yet received no appointment.<sup>30</sup> Here, Han Shan might not be talking about himself, but the evidence

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<sup>30</sup> Chen Huijian ( 陈慧剑 ), *A Research on Han Shan Zi* ( *Han Shan Zi Yanjiu* 寒山子研究 ), Taipei: Dongda Tushu Gufen Youxian Gongsi, 1989, pp.25-26.

from the poem below somewhat suggests that Han Shan might have passed his degrees:

My writing and judgement were perfect-they were not weak;  
书判全非弱  
But they detested my looks, so I did not receive an appointment.  
嫌身不得官

And yet, at the end he says:

Certain it is that it's all related to fate;  
必也关天命  
Still this winter again I'll try and see.  
今冬更试看

"I'll try and see" seems to allude to a "second" examination ( "selection" examination ).<sup>31</sup> And yet, Robert G. Henricks points out that the "selections" mentioned in the fourth line seems to point to someone who by scholastic achievement was eligible for appointment to

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<sup>31</sup> Han Shan's reference appears to be to the "selection" examinations administered to holders of degrees. ( there were three degrees in early Tang- the Xiucai 秀才, Mingjing 明经 and Jinshi 进士 )- to determine who in the pool would actually receive appointment as an official. In this second examination, the candidates were examined in terms of their "writing and judgement" ( *shupan* 书判 ) and then their "appearance and speech" ( *shenyan* 身言 ). See Wang Pu ( 王溥 ), Tang Hui Yao ( 唐会要 ), Guoxue Jiben Congshu ( 国学基本丛书 ), Taipei: Shangwu Yinshuguan, Vol.76, juan 75, pp.1369-1373 or Chen Huijian, *Ibid*.

office but did not make it.<sup>32</sup> According to this, I suppose Han Shan was probably an educated, brilliant man who had studied for, and perhaps passed the official examinations, but he did not choose to become a government servant. At some point in his life, he chose to become a farmer instead.

Han Shan was a man from Northern China and his hometown was most probably “Chang An” ( 长安 ). In a poem, Han Shan tells about his brothers who lived in the Capital Hsien. ( *Xian Jing* 咸京 )<sup>33</sup> :

Last year in spring I heard the birds sing;  
去年春鸟鸣  
At that time I thought of my brothers.  
此时思弟兄

He ends by saying:

Sad it is! In this life of one hundred years,  
哀哉百年内  
It tears my insides to remember the Capital Hsien.  
肠断忆咸京

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<sup>32</sup> Henricks, Robert G., *The Poetry of Han-shan: A Complete, Annotated Translation of Cold Mountain*, New York: State University of New York press, 1990, p.10.

<sup>33</sup> Capital Hsien would normally mean Xian Yang ( 咸阳 ) in Northwest of Shan Xi, the capital of China during the Qin ( B.C.221-209 ). But it also stands for Chang An, the capital during the Tang.

Han Shan was a married man. He mentions about his wife and son a number of times in such poems like this:

(i) Mountain fruits, hand in hand my son and I pick;  
山果携儿摘  
Marshy field, together with my wife I plow.  
皋田共夫锄

(ii) My wife works the shuttle- her loom goes 'creak!creak!'  
妇摇机轧轧  
Our son is at play- his mouth babbles 'wa! wa!'  
儿弄口啾啾

(iii) In turning down the king's carriage,  
I followed the words of my virtuous wife;  
投辇从贤妇  
For my officer 'Lord of the Cart,' I have my filial son.  
巾车有孝儿

He clearly indicates a period when he had farmed and enjoyed country life with his family. But, eventually he left them. His poem also tells " I was, even more, treated coldly by my own wife." ( 剩被自妻疏 ) Was it because he had failed to become an official? Chen Huijian says that it is because of his failure in the examination, the relationship between him and his family turned bad.<sup>34</sup> But the truth of this is still questionable.

Han Shan says that he became a wanderer at the age of thirty:

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<sup>34</sup> Chen Huijian, op.cit., pp.140-141.

\* Thirty years ago I was born into the world.  
 出生三十年  
 A thousand, ten thousand miles I've roamed,  
 当游千万哩  
 by rivers where the green grass lies thick,  
 行江青草合  
 beyond the border where the red sands fly.  
 入塞红尘起

In another poem, he comments that he was born thirty years ago but “today” had come home to Han Shan (Cold Mountain). So, we might say that Han Shan left his family and went to Cold Mountain (at the age of thirty or more), where he lived for the rest of his life. Since then, he lived as a recluse in retreat. His Taoist life and later on, Buddhist life, was cultivated during this time. The Taoist temples such as “Tong Bo Guan” (桐柏观), “Fu Shen Guan” (福圣观), and the Buddhist “Guo Qing temple” had given him spiritual sustenance. These visits evoked a religious conviction in him, which influenced him throughout his life. It is certain that he took part in Taoist practises at first but, eventually became a Buddhist recluse. Before becoming a Buddhist recluse, he had enjoyed learning the arts of immortality, such as breathing exercise, callisthenics, eating long life herbs, reading Taoist books and writing Taoist poems. For example:



\* (i) My house is at the foot of the green cliff,  
 家住绿岩下  
 my garden, a jumble of weeds I no longer bother to mow.  
 庭芜更不芟  
 New vines dangle in twisted strands  
 新藤垂缭绕  
 over old rocks rising steep and high.  
 古石竖谿岩  
 Monkeys make off with the mountain fruits,  
 山果猕猴摘  
 the white heron crams his bill with fish from the pond,  
 池鱼白鹭衔  
 while I, with a book or two of the immortals,  
 仙书一两卷  
 read under the trees—mumble, mumble.  
 树下读喃喃

\* (ii) If you're looking for a place to rest,  
 欲得安身处  
 Cold Mountain is good for a long stay.  
 寒山可长保  
 The breeze blowing through the dark pines  
 微风吹幽松  
 sounds better the closer you come.  
 近听声逾好  
 And under the trees a white-haired man  
 下有班白人  
 mumbles over his Taoist texts  
 喃喃读黄老  
 Ten years now he hasn't gone home;  
 十年归不得  
 he's even forgotten the road he came by.  
 忘却来时道

Han Shan didn't get along with Taoism for long. As  
 the reader will see, sometimes he approves, sometimes he expresses his

doubts towards Taoism. In fact, his attack upon those who sought to become “immortals” by alchemical or other means is ironically supported by the following poems:

\* (i) The greatest sages from ancient times

自古诸哲人

have not shown us life immortal.

不见有长存

What is born in time must die;

生而复死

all will be changed to dust and ashes.

尽变作灰尘

\* (ii) Often I've heard how emperor Wu of the Han

常闻汉武帝

and the First Emperor of the Ch'in before him

爱及秦始皇

delighted in tales of immortals and spirits

俱好神仙术

and tried in vain to prolong their lives.

延年竟不长

Now their golden towers are broken,

舍台既摧折

their palaces have vanished away,

沙丘遂天亡

while the grave at Mou-ling and the tomb of Mount Li

茂陵与骊岳

are today a wilderness of weeds.

今日草茫茫

\* (iii) Living in the mountains, mind ill at ease,

山客心悄悄

all I do is grieve at the passing years.

常嗟岁序迁

At great labor I gathered the herbs of long life,

辛勤采芝术

but has all my striving made me an immortal?

披斥讵成仙

(iv) Who is it that lives forever and doesn't die?  
 谁家长不死  
 The business of death, from the beginning  
 has treated us all the same.  
 死事旧来均  
 No sooner do you start to remember your tall eight-foot man,  
 始忆八尺汉  
 Than all of a sudden he turns into a pile of dust!  
 俄成一聚尘

After a certain point, we may safely conclude that Han Shan was a Buddhist. The symbolism he employs, the technical term he uses, his general outlook on life, for example: his belief in karma (cause and effect, rebirth and reincarnation), in all these ways he was a Buddhist, who showed specific interest in Chan. His poems widely reveal ideas of Buddhism. In one of his poems he says:

Not reading Diamond-sūtra  
 不念金刚经  
 Would make even a bodhisattva get ill.  
 却令菩萨病

( Bodhisattva- a being destined to attain fullest enlightenment or Buddhahood. This term is applied to a Buddha in his various states of existence previous to attaining Buddhahood.)

Throughout the rest of his life, Han Shan deepened his understanding of Buddhism to a degree which perhaps made him the most learned Buddhist layman of his era. The experience which he gained from

practising Buddhism thus whetted his appetite for Buddhist theology. It was during this time he produced numerous Buddhist poems that were of good quality and also deep in meaning. His best known poem "My mind" (according to the two beginning words of the poem) written at this time, expresses in simple language the genuine nature of a clear minded man:

\* My mind is like the autumn moon;  
吾心似秋月  
shinning clean and clear in the green pool,  
碧潭清皎洁  
No, that is not a good comparison,  
无物堪比伦  
tell me, how shall I explain?  
教我如何说

The Buddhist poems Han Shan wrote during this period is the most valuable of all his works. Hippies in the west and Japanese in the east were interested in him because of these poems.<sup>35</sup>

The exact date of Han Shan departure from this world, is still a mystery. He went to Cold Mountain when he was around

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<sup>35</sup> Han Shan's poems were popular among American scholars and Japanese during twentieth century. They made explanatory notes on his poems and produced many different editions. In America, Han Shan was admired by Hippies as an idol, especially because of the eccentric quality in his character as well as his poems. ( Hippies- were a particular group of people in America, who lived during the 1950's, and who dressed and behaved in a certain manner. )

thirty or more. After that, he speaks of returning home once (after he had been gone for about thirty years), only to find that more than half of his relatives and friends were already dead. The poem reads:

Once I sat down facing Han Shan;  
一向寒山坐  
And I've lingered and tarried here now thirty years.  
淹留三十年  
Yesterday I came looking for relatives and friends,  
昨来访亲友  
But more than half have gone to the Yellow Springs.  
太半入黄泉

Yet, in another poem, he speaks of returning home again, having been gone for seventy years:

To places I travelled in former days  
昔日经行处  
Today I returned after seventy years.  
今复七十年  
Of old friends, there are none who still come and go;  
故人无来往  
All buried in their old, high graves.  
埋在古冢间

Therefore, I think, Han Shan's age must have been one hundred or more. He retired to Cold Mountain in his thirties, he came home once, after having been away for about thirty years and came home again seventy years later. According to this calculation, Han Shan's age is estimated to

be about a hundred or more. He himself mentions his age to be over one hundred in one of his poems:

Old and sick in my final years, already one hundred and more;  
老病残年百有余  
Face yellow, hair white- but I love living here in the mountains.  
面黄头白好山居

“Face yellow, hair white” alludes to an old man of a very old age. Eventually, the old man disappeared from the world in a quiet manner. He died as he had lived, philosophical, eccentric and full of mysteriousness. He did not keep a diary or even notes about his life. With his eccentric character, he produced beautiful poems that he wrote on cliffs, walls, stones and bamboos. He did not write poems for the sake of writing them, but nonetheless, they are very valuable pieces of art. Although we are now unable to read his complete work of poetry, yet from the existing three hundred over poems still available now, we are able to see and evaluate the outstanding features and achievements of his poetry. He wrote for no other reason than that he enjoyed writing, and today we enjoy his writing for no other reason than that he wrote so beautifully, generously and out of the pristine innocence of his heart. In this manner, we should say that we are lucky to have the chance to read them now.