

# The Cold Mountain Master Poetry Collection:

## Introduction

### Authorship and reception

*The Cold Mountain Master Poetry Collection* (*Hanshanzi shi ji* 寒山子詩集) is a corpus of over three hundred poems attributed to a legendary Tang (618–907) era recluse who took the name Hanshan (Cold Mountain) from the isolated hill on which he lived in the Tiantai 天台 Mountains. In pre-modern times, editions of the collection usually included fifty-some poems attributed to Hanshan's monk companion Shide 拾得 (“Foundling”) and two poems attributed to another monk, Fenggan 豐干. This translation is a complete rendering of what is generally assumed to be the earliest surviving edition (called by bibliographers the *Song ying ben* 宋影本, “edition printed in the Song”), which was produced before 1170, probably in the 1130s or 1140s; it was reprinted in the *Sibu congkan* series in 1929. There is another line of transmission in which the poems are ordered somewhat differently.

The collection seems to have been widely popular in Chan Buddhist circles in the Song, considering the frequent quotation of lines in *Song yulu* 語錄 (“recorded sayings [of Chan masters]”) and the number of legends that have Hanshan encountering various Chan patriarchs. The Song also saw the beginning of Hanshan verse imitations, authored almost entirely by monastic poets (though the most famous is probably a cycle of twenty poems by the statesman Wang Anshi 王安石 [1021–1086]). The collection spread to Korea, Japan, and Vietnam with the rise of the Chan movement, and attained even greater popularity in those countries. The major Rinzai Zen reformer Hakuin Ekaku 白隱慧鶴 (1686–1768) wrote an extended commentary. Hanshan's modern fame as a participant in “world literature” largely derives from the Beat poet Gary Snyder's encounter with the texts in the 1950s and his selected translations; Snyder's enthusiasm was in turn fictionalized in Jack Kerouac's novel, *The Dharma Bums* (1958).

Date of composition continues to be a mystery. References to the putative authors and to the poems may begin in the ninth century,

though whether these are genuine allusions is open to debate.<sup>1</sup> Two eleventh-century book catalogues mention the collection's existence; one of the listings describes a text likely to be the same as or quite similar to the *Song ying ben* that we have today. Use of internal methods for dating has produced contradictory opinions among scholars, depending partly on the degree to which one assumes that some of the poems are autobiographical (more on this below). Broadly speaking, there tend to be two schools of opinion. Western scholars often cite an article by E. G. Pulleyblank from 1978; in this, he argues that the rhymes in the collection may put two-thirds of the collection in the seventh century or earlier, and that the other third is quite definitely late Tang.<sup>2</sup> Most Chinese scholars follow the bibliographer Yu Jiaxi 余嘉錫 (1884–1955), who argues for the eighth century.<sup>3</sup> It is doubtful that this question will ever be resolved satisfactorily; in any event, the poems' impact on East Asian culture can only be charted from the Song dynasty on.

Much of the debate on the collection's origins revolves around the Preface. It was supposedly composed by an early Tang official by the name of Lüqiu Yin 閻丘胤. The author first describes Hanshan as a lay recluse living at a "Cold Mountain" or a "Cold Cliff." Hanshan occasionally visits the Guoqing 國清 Temple in the Tiantai Mountains, where he has befriended an equally eccentric kitchen monk named Shide. Throughout, Hanshan fits the classic description of the antinomian madman: he annoys the monks with his singing and laughing, until the monks are forced to drive him out. The narrative then turns to Lüqiu himself. Before he embarks on a journey to Tiantai to take up an administrative post, he is cured of a headache by a mysterious monk named Fenggan, also from Guoqing. Fenggan advises him to seek out Hanshan and Shide, and hints that they are the incarnations of bodhisattvas. After Lüqiu arrives at his headquarters, he soon encounters the two men, who merely laugh at him and refuse to talk to him. When he attempts to

1 See, for example, a comprehensive list of possible allusions before the Song era in Chen Yaodong 陳耀東, *Hanshan shi ji banben yanjiu* 寒山詩集版本研究 (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe), 312–22.

2 E. G. Pulleyblank, "Linguistic Evidence for the Date of Han-Shan," in *Studies in Chinese Poetry and Poetics, Volume 1*, Ronald C. Miao, ed. (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1978), 163–95.

3 His arguments appear in his monumental *Evidential Analysis of the Catalogue of the Four Treasuries* (*Si ku tiyao bianzheng* 四庫提要辨證), 1937, rev. ed. 1958.

become their patron by supplying them with shelter and basic necessities, they disappear permanently. Hanshan's departure is particularly dramatic: he enters into a mountain cave, which closes up behind him. Lüqiu then commissions one of the Guoqing monks to copy surviving poems by Hanshan and Shide, all of which had been written on the walls of buildings or on trees and cliffs. The narrative obviously contains elements in keeping with monk hagiographies, including gestures toward the fantastic. Yu Jiayi argues that the text is a forgery: not on the basis of its supernatural elements, but on the basis of its use of anachronistic place names. He dates it to the late ninth century. Most scholars agree with his assessment (regardless of when they think Hanshan lived); but this has not kept nearly everyone from assuming the concrete existence of the three eccentrics.<sup>4</sup> Once one discounts the Preface, the earliest account of Hanshan that may be dated reliably is an anecdote found in the *Comprehensive Records of the Taiping Era* (*Taiping guangji* 太平廣記, ca. 978); it is attributed to a lost work by the Daoist polymath Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850–933), and describes Hanshan as a Transcendent (*xian* 仙).<sup>5</sup> There is also a biography in Zanning's 贊寧 *Biographies of Eminent Monks Composed during the Song Dynasty* (*Song gao seng zhuan* 宋高僧傳; ca. 982), which is essentially a condensed version of the preface.<sup>6</sup>

Faced with such unreliable accounts, many modern scholars have turned to the poems as a source for reconstructing a biography. This is in keeping with the dominant hermeneutics of Chinese poetry reading since at least the Qing dynasty. However, those who attempt such a reconstruction are faced with a bewildering number of events, careers, and life experiences in which the narrative voice seems to have participated—poverty, wealth, military heroism, bureaucratic success and failure, Daoist self-cultivation, contented bucolic reclusion *à la* Tao Qian, community monasticism, and radical Buddhist eremitism—all seem to be within the experience of the supposedly autobiographical

4 One may note that only one poem attributed to Hanshan (HS 40) mentions Shide and Fenggan. FG 1 mentions both Hanshan and Shide. The Shide collection mentions Hanshan in SD 15, 16, and 31, and Fenggan in SD 15.

5 *Taiping guangji*, juan 55.

6 Taishō Tripitaka, T. 50, no. 2061, 831b2–832b9. This is a collective biography of Fenggan, Shide, and Hanshan.

speaker (and none of which can be attested by outside historical documents). Many Western readers of Hanshan view him in a similar way, putting the emphasis on his identity as a charismatic dissident. Snyder's championing of the poems resulted in Hanshan becoming a sort of countercultural hero, whose personality was an essential part of his appeal.<sup>7</sup> This essentially autobiographical reading still influences modern Western takes on his poetry. Such a view, though significant as a contribution to modern literature and culture, is largely untenable. There is little evidence that readers before the twentieth century were concerned with discovering traces of a confessional poet in the collection, or that such a reading served as the poems' chief attraction for them.

This also ignores what is probably the most reasonable set of conclusions about the collection—that it was composed by more than one poet over the course of the Tang dynasty (possibly by many poets), that all or most were probably Buddhist monks connected with the Tiantai temple complex, that gradually a myth evolved around the collection that attributed it to a classic antinomian monk precisely at a time when such antinomianism became highly popular in late Tang Chan literature, and that poems were possibly added to the collection later on that deliberately adopted the voice of this monk.

However (as I have argued elsewhere), neither of these perspectives gives us a clue as to how the collection was probably read in pre-modern times.<sup>8</sup> The Preface is quite explicit in identifying Hanshan as an incarnation of the bodhisattva of wisdom, Mañjuśrī; it also identifies Shide as Mañjuśrī's companion Samantabhadra, and Fenggan as Amitābha. The frequent mention of this identification in later Chan literature (as well as the deification of the three as a popular Chinese cult) suggests that this was more than just a rhetorical gesture. Such an identification leads us in seeing the poems as a form of "skillful means" (*upāya*) meant to aid the believer in attaining his or her spiritual goals.

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7 Snyder helped create this persona through the poems he chose to translate: ones in which the poetic voice explicitly names himself or the place that he lives (twenty-one out of the twenty-four). Overall, the collection mentions Hanshan (place or person) in only thirty-nine poems.

8 Paul Rouzer, *On Cold Mountain: A Buddhist Reading of the Hanshan Poems* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), 51–65.

This view, of course, posits a Buddhist reader, and the collection does seem to have had its greatest impact on the Buddhist community, though Daoists read him with enthusiasm as well. It is not surprising that both groups would find congenial material in the poems. The Tang era saw many syncretic tendencies in the two faiths, and Buddhist and Daoist believers often adopted each other's vocabulary and concepts. Moreover, most Hanshan poems do not explicitly convey a religious message at all, but can be easily redeployed for religious purposes when viewed from a doctrinal perspective (this is characteristic, for example, of many of Hakuin's allegorical readings). However one reads the religious intentions of the poems, it should also be pointed out that a number of "meta-poems" (HS 1, 141, 305, and 313) express the idea that the collection contains a deeper meaning that the wise will uncover through close attention. The poems were probably read as a didactic text, as a source of practical advice, and as a guide for deeper spiritual inspiration and contemplation. As the poet asserts in HS 313:

If your house has Hanshan's poems,  
That's better than reading the sutras.  
Write them down on a screen,  
And read one now and then.

This didactic aspect is one reason why the collection was not considered "literature" as it was traditionally understood in China. Its closest relations are the Wang Fangzhi 王梵志 collection—a corpus of about four hundred poems found in the Dunhuang manuscripts, and which are primarily popular Buddhist in content; and the poems attributed to Layman Pang 龐 (d. 815), which tend to have more of a Chan flavor. There are elements in Hanshan's style as well that may be found in the *gāthā* traditions that were evolving out of the Chan movement (this is especially true of the five-character quatrains: HS 51, 81, 88, 166, 167, 181, 299, 304). None of this poetry, though, could remotely be perceived as mainstream contributions to the history of Chinese verse.

## Style and themes

The collection itself is fairly uniform stylistically: it heavily favors the pentasyllabic octet (248 poems out of 313). This may reflect the increas-

ing influence of the regulated verse form in Tang literature, even though the poems largely ignore regulation and elite parallelism. There are also thirteen heptasyllabic octets; sixteen quatrains (both pentasyllabic and heptasyllabic); twenty-nine pentasyllabic poems longer than eight lines; six poems with trisyllabic lines; and one with irregular lines. Though simple parallelism is common, it often manifests through folk-style repetition (see HS 36 and HS 70 for examples). The poems largely eschew the “tripartite form” described by Stephen Owen,<sup>9</sup> often employing their short length artfully to create small narrative and philosophical vignettes, with the last couplet as a sort of “punch line” (in many cases, a proverb):

That’s a mosquito biting into an iron ox—  
No place for him to sink his teeth! (HS 63)

If you can’t be as straight as an arrow,  
At least don’t be as bent as a hook. (HS 122)

Once you’ve closed the eyes of the kestrel,  
The sparrows will dance in their pride. (HS 223)

There are many Tang vernacularisms, though not as many as in the Wang Fanzhi collection. There is also a marked movement away from the parataxis that characterizes elite poetry, especially regulated verse. Instead, poems often contain an argument (narrative or philosophical) that stretches over couplet divisions and may have to be intuited in the absence of subordinating conjunctions:

Your tattered clothes come from your karma;  
Don’t curse the body that you have now.  
If you say they result from the site of your graves,  
Then you’re really a complete idiot.  
In the end, when you become a ghost,  
Why would you make your children poor?  
This is quite clear and easy to understand—  
Why are you so unperceptive? (HS 252)

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9 Stephen Owen, *The Poetry of the Early Tang* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1977), 9–11.

Many of the poems share the same phrases and images—not enough to indicate formulaic composition, but enough to suggest a circle of poets who repeatedly used the same rhetorical devices. A fair number of poems (particularly satiric ones) begin with a phrase that introduces the topic to be discussed: “I see the people in this world” (*wo jian shijian ren* 我見世間人), or “There’s a kind of fool in the world” (*shi you yi deng yu* 世有一等愚) and variants thereof.

Thematically, the poems fall into a number of obvious groups. Probably the most famous (at least to modern readers) are the poems of radical reclusion, which can be affiliated relatively easily to the hagiography found in the preface. These often mention Cold Mountain (the place) as the site of this reclusion, describing it in mysterious or quasi-mystical terms (e.g., HS 38, 154, 177). HS 9 suggests that the mountain is a state of mind:

How did someone like me get there?  
Because my mind is not the same as yours.  
If your mind were like mine,  
You’d be able to get to the middle of it. (ll. 5–8)

Hakuin makes this clear in his commentary: “There is no place that is not Cold Mountain, so it is not necessary to enter there; you already are there.”<sup>10</sup>

However, these reclusion poems only make up about a fifth of the collection. More typical are verses that convey the received wisdom of society (or, contrarily, satirize that wisdom). Some of these themes are common in pre-Tang poetry, particularly the twin themes of *carpe diem* and *ubi sunt*:

If you have ale, invite others to drink;  
And if you have meat, call others to eat.  
Whether you come to the Yellow Springs early or late,  
When you’re young and hale, you must go all out!

10 *Notes on the Lectures on Cold Mountain’s Poems at Ichchantika Cave* (*Kanzan shi sendai kimon*) (1741), in *Hakuin Oshō Zenshū*, 4:14–15.

Jade belts only flourish for a time,  
 And gold hairpins will not adorn you for long.  
 Gaffer Zhang and Goody Zheng—  
 Once they're gone, we'll hear no more of them. (HS 53)

Such themes often lead to a certain religious interpretation, found either in the poems themselves or in the context of the collection overall—a Buddhist awareness of Impermanence (*wuchang* 無常) or a Daoist desire to cultivate the art of Transcendence. The result of such contemplation often brings us back to Cold Mountain:

Since I've hidden away at Cold Mountain,  
 I've been eating fruit, nourishing my life.  
 What do I have to worry about in this existence?  
 I pass through this world following my karma.  
 Days and months pass like a departing stream,  
 Time is just a flash from a flint stone.  
*You* may change along with Heaven and Earth;  
 But I'll delight in sitting here on my cliff. (HS 171)

A number of poems offer fairly conventional advice of a non-religious nature. One particularly appalling example suggests how to raise your daughters:

We fear having too many daughters;  
 But once one is born, we must train her carefully.  
 Force her head down and compel her to be careful,  
 Beat her on the back to make her shut her mouth.  
 If she never understands how to use loom and shuttle,  
 How can she serve with dustpan and broom?  
 As Granny Zhang said to her donkey's foals,  
 "You're not as big as your mother!" (HS 175)

But these are relatively rare. The poetic voices of the poems are much more comfortable with righteous anger, jeremiad, and satire. The chief targets are the wealthy, the ignorant, poor scholars, and venal members of the clergy. Some examples:

The new grain has yet to ripen,  
While the old grain's already run out.  
So I go to borrow a measure or so,  
Hesitating outside of their gate.  
The husband comes out, tells me to ask the wife;  
The wife comes out, sends me to ask the husband.  
Being stingy won't save those who lack;  
When your wealth is great, you're even more stupid. (HS 126)

I was rather poor in past days,  
But this morning I'm most poor and cold!  
Nothing I do works out the way it should,  
And everything turns to grief and hardship.  
When walking through mud I always slip and fall;  
When I attend the season festivals I get indigestion.  
And now when I've lost my tortoiseshell cat,  
The rats are circling the rice jar. (HS 158)

There's a kind of fool in the world,  
Muddle-headed, exactly like an ass.  
He may understand what you have to say,  
But he's porcine in his greed and lust.  
He's a deep one—you can't fathom him,  
And his "words of truth" will turn to falsehood.  
Who can have a word with him  
And convince him to not live here? (HS 75)

To see such poems (as recent scholars have) as autobiographical is to deprive the collection of a distinctive poignancy and wit that is largely absent from Chinese literature until the late imperial period.

Another distinctive category consists of explicitly religious poems. There are verses sympathetic to Daoist practice (e.g., HS 22, 48, 79), but a similar number reject Daoist cultivation (e.g., 39, 220, 248). Buddhist content is much more common. Buddhist themes can be divided broadly into two types. In the first, warnings are offered to those who act without compassion or who are unwilling to face the truth of Impermanence:

How limitless the Three Evil Paths;  
Murky and dark without a sun.

Eight hundred years of human life  
 Don't fill out half a nighttime there.  
 All the fools of this type  
 To tell the truth, are really pathetic.  
 I urge you sir, to seek release,  
 And acknowledge the Prince of the Dharma. (HS 90)

While greed and selfishness are frequently attacked, meat-eating emerges as one of the principal sins—and often rebirth in a Hell realm is held out as the punishment for carnivores.<sup>11</sup> These religious sermons are frequently found in the Wang Fanzhi collection as well; they may represent the closest the Hanshan collection comes to the most popular forms of didactic verse.

The second type of Buddhist poem conveys a discussion of some doctrinal point, or employs a metaphor to illustrate a Buddhist truth. These poems particularly attracted Chan/Zen readers in later centuries, since most of them focus on the concept of the Buddha Nature (*fo xing* 佛性, *Thatāgata-garbha*) or the primacy of the sudden experience of enlightenment as opposed to gradual practice or good works. The Buddha Nature is often described as a jewel (HS 199, 204, 245), sometimes as the moon (HS 51, 200, 287); at other times it is something mysterious within us that we must learn to identify and contact:

I tell all of you who practice the Way:  
 Vain to labor your spirit in striving.  
 People have a pure essence within,  
 Without a name, without a sign.  
 Call it and it clearly answers,  
 Yet has no hidden place to dwell.  
 Be careful to guard it always—  
 Don't let it have a spot or scratch. (HS 179)

Those enamored of the antinomian madman of the preface may be disappointed to find that there are relatively few poems that dramatize

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11 The frequent mention of this sin in the collection is quite striking. See HS 56, 70, 74, 76, 95, 159a, 186, 207, 233, 260, 269; and SD 2, 4, 5, 12, and 39.

this figure, or that use paradox to critique duality (as in the classical Chan/Zen koan tradition). Nonetheless, there are poems that emphasize the “outsider” status of the speaker (HS 25, 221, 275, 289), both in terms of mainstream society and in terms of the monastic community. HS 187 and 288 self-consciously reject elite poetic style, condemning it as merely a tool used by the ambitious to obtain fame and wealth.

There are a few other poems here and there that do not fall into the categories mentioned above. Worth noting are a number of parable-poems, some of which are open to interpretation (e.g., HS 12, 34, 117, 232). Particularly troubling for pre-modern religious readers may have been a number of mildly erotic poems that draw heavily on popular poetry tropes (HS 23, 35, 50, 60–62).

## The Shide Collection

The Shide collection does not add anything substantially new to the mix—none of the poems here (except for the ones that mention the putative poet’s friendship with Hanshan) would be surprising if they had been attributed to Hanshan originally. In fact, a number of them are identical to Hanshan poems except for unimportant variants. Buddhist satire (of wicked laypeople and of worldly clerics) seems to be more prevalent here than in the Hanshan collection overall.

## Text and translation

As I noted above, this is a complete translation of the *Sibu congkan* edition. This includes the Preface, the biographical notes on Fenggan and Shide, and a few editorial comments.<sup>12</sup> In order to replicate the original reading experience of this edition as closely as possible, I have not substituted variant readings in the Chinese text itself. If my translation accepts a variant reading, I have indicated this in the notes. There are a number of cases where variants yield a more aesthetically satisfying reading, but I have avoided using these for the sake of consistency;

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12 The editor also occasionally included pronunciation notes for obscure characters. These I have not translated.

I usually accept variants only if it makes the meaning of an otherwise garbled poem clear.

Understanding of the collection took a giant leap forward with the publication of Xiang Chu's commentary, which surpasses all previous commentaries in terms of detail and erudition.<sup>13</sup> His familiarity with both secular and sacred sources is awe-inspiring, and I find myself usually agreeing with his reading. I have noted specific cases of indebtedness to him in the appropriate places. I also have adapted his numbering system for the poems.

The Hanshan collection was probably meant for a less erudite audience than the verse of a Wang Wei or Du Fu, but this does not always mean that it is always easy to read today. The poems frequently use vernacular expressions, and they also show a fondness for miscellaneous particles and function words whose exact nuance is at times unclear (one may note for example the frequent use of the word *que* 却 as an adverb or as a verbal complement). In such cases, one must be careful not to tend too much to a character-by-character reading. There are also many poems that are intelligible only through the addition of subordinate clauses, adverbials, hypotheticals, and the like; this is true of all Chinese verse, but is particularly true of such a "chatty" collection of poems that are intent on making an argument or on telling a story. I have not hesitated to add words in my translation in order to make the poems clear, and I am sure that some readers will disagree with my interpretations. I have also not hesitated to explain possible allegorical or symbolic readings in the notes if I think such readings would be obvious to most pre-modern readers.

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13 Where there are minor variants I typically follow those used by Xiang Chu 項楚 in his *Hanshan shi zhu fu Shide shi zhu* 寒山詩注附拾得詩注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000). These are the versions that appear in the accompanying Chinese text.