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Michael Nylan

## On the antique rhetoric of friendship

**Abstract:** Rhetorical tropes of intimate friendship (*you* 友) employed in the classical era in China present a stark contrast to those that survive in Latin and classical Greek sources. For this ideal form of friendship was described far less often in terms of the material and psychic advantages that can accrue from alliances outside the immediate family circle than in terms of the propensity for true friendships to foster the development of the singular traits and potentials of each partner in the intimate friendship. This essay argues, contra many social historians, that moderns cannot extract any underlying social realities from the early discussions of the theme, even if our sources allow us to see how certain social exchanges were construed, valued, and promoted by members of the governing elite.

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Early writers of classical Chinese, like those employing classical Greek or Latin, had mixed feelings about rhetorical speech. On the one hand, they knew that only finely crafted rhetoric could likely deliver the message in a sufficiently powerful way for it to be heard and acted upon. At the same time, they were suspicious of fine rhetoric, since it could deliver an unwanted message in an all-too powerful way. One need only contrast Mencius's talk of "good rhetoric" (*shan yan* 善言) with the *Analects'* disparagement of "glib speech" (*qiao yan* 巧言) for that ambivalence to become abundantly clear.<sup>1</sup> But to understand how rhetoric functioned in the classical world, one needs to move well beyond that preliminary insight to explore individual themes in rhetoric. Hence this paper's focus on the rhetoric of friendship.

At the outset I would emphasize that my topic is the "rhetoric of friendship", not an attempt to uncover some underlying social reality gleaned or glimpsed through early rhetoric.<sup>2</sup> Frankly, it is impossible at this remove to "extract" or

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Mencius 3A.2; 3A.8, 4B.20; *Analects* 1.3 (*qiao yan* 巧言). *Analects* 7.18 speaks of "elevated rhetoric" (*ya yan* 雅言), showing it is not rhetoric *per se* that is bad.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Williams 2012, chap. 1.

“recover” aspects of reality from the distant classical past. Too much time has elapsed, and what is more, the early writers rarely felt the need to lay out their reasoning to the small textual communities, already “in the know”, whom they addressed.<sup>3</sup> Besides, the early writings on friendship acknowledge the inherent difficulty of transcribing the precise timbre of a friendship after the fact. Thus to study the rhetorical constructions favored by authors and compilers must suffice, particularly as the best classical writers deemed rhetoric to be vitally important. It therefore matters not a whit to this historian whether the stories told about famous friends are accurate, so long as these legendary figures personified for members of the elite the pleasures of intimate friendship down through the ages.

The classical-era writings in China tend to be interested in explicating the character of, expectations for, and function of intimate friendship (*you* 友). Only near the end of the classical era, in the late second century CE, do the rhetorical tropes turn to the problems of false friends, as well as the practical difficulties of distinguishing intimate friendships from less demanding social relations, alliances, acquaintanceships, collegial relations, and contacts (often signified by such terms as *pengyou* 朋友, *liaoyou* 僚友, and *jiao* 交) – those far less liable to provide reliable help in a crisis. One could speculate about the reasons for this shift in the rhetoric (but perhaps not in the social reality), but, given how few sources we have from the period under consideration, the wiser course is to remain silent.<sup>4</sup>

The rhetoric of intimate friendship in early China exhibits several key departures from modern expectations, beginning with the fact that the classical writings have no expression like our formula “we’re just friends”. In contrast to nearly all modern philosophical treatments of the topic, the classical writings do not presuppose the voluntary nature of intimate friendship. Instead they treat an intimate friendship as something a person is “lucky to encounter” (*yu* 遇), dragging in complicated notions of fate, fortune, and coincidence. In addition, the classical writings seem to expect a good friendship to involve less conversation and more quiet; they do not mandate for intimate friendship’s habits of self-disclosure, unlike many modern Western philosophers. A shared experiential past is no guarantee of intimacy, in their view. Nor is there a requirement in early

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<sup>3</sup> Roman Jakobson 1980, *passim*, spoke to the crucial distinction between unmediated and mediated speech decades ago.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Kern has guestimated the survival rate of Han *fu* 賦 to be roughly 1/1000th (personal communication, 2004). Jean-Pierre Drège’s work on libraries and loss suggests that the level of destruction is comparable, if not higher for the Eastern Han and Six Dynasties period (Drège 1991). In the essay, therefore, the phrase “classical writings” refers to “classical writings at our disposal” necessarily.

China that friends be equal in status or attainments, pace Aristotle and all Christian notions.<sup>5</sup> In describing the benefits to health and well-being of intimate friends, they necessarily conjure up a different type of body and bodily processes than we find in modern biomedicine. Intimate friendship is chiefly beneficial insofar as it facilitates the tricky process by which a true friend becomes his or her own best self. This description of friendship so manifestly contradicts aspects of the better known Western notions as to belie the truism that friendship is universal across time and space.

One last preliminary comment: with few exceptions, the paltry secondary literature on friendship in China has insisted that friendship was regarded as the least important and most dangerous of all the human relations, on two grounds, first that friendship appears to be the only “horizontal” tie, in contrast to other “vertical” relations exemplifying hierarchical power, and second, that friendship comes last in the listing of the “Five Constants” (*wu chang* 五常), the paradigmatic social relations. Supposedly, friendship poses a threat to those more orderly human relations.<sup>6</sup> Aat Vervoorn made a compelling case that friendship, far from being the least important relation, is the most important of the five in pre-Song texts.<sup>7</sup> I would push Vervoorn’s insight further to lodge a surprising assertion: that ideally in early China all the other four “constant relations” (father-son, ruler-subject, elder sibling-younger sibling, husband-wife) aspired to the intimacy associated with friendship.

There is hardly time to develop this startling conclusion here, because a full demonstration would take us far afield from the topic of this essay, but a few words might be said. Friendships are one of the three relations constitutive of

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<sup>5</sup> See *Nicomachean Ethics* 1156b 7–8, 1157a 11–12.

<sup>6</sup> Kucher 2000, *passim*, on friendship as transgressive by nature; cf. Rouzer (2006), who does, however, concede that true friendships could conceivably supply “counter-models of political association that tended towards instability and violence” (Rouzer 2006: 59). Hall and Ames prefer to argue that “*all* relationships were ultimately construed in familial terms”. See Hall/Ames 1994; esp. p. 90. Similarly, Zhou Yiqun (2010: 154) asserts that “kinship provided the paradigm for all strong relationships that could be described as ‘dear and friendly’ in the Zhou ideology of sociability”. But, as Alexander Nehamas (2008) notes in his Gifford Lectures 1 and 6, the vocabulary of friendship is not particularly well developed in any society, ancient or modern. For the comparable case of early imperial Rome’s “invisible” subjects, Knapp (2011) notes that very few relations (husband-wife, parent-child) were problematized, since no other choices existed for either gender, unless the male or female were among the most privileged members of society. One example where “one treats one’s elder brother affably” (*you qi xiong* 友其兄) is *Maoshi*, Ode 241 (“*Huang yi*” 皇矣).

<sup>7</sup> See Vervoorn 2004.

good order, according to Xunzi 荀子, to take one example.<sup>8</sup> Yuri Pines has shown that early rhetoric portrayed the ideal ruler-minister relation as one of “true friends”, implying the good ruler’s receptivity to his advisors’ remonstrances.<sup>9</sup> As we all know, the very word *you* 友 “friend” is part of the compound *xiongyou* 兄友, signifying affable sibling relations. And, in a striking departure from Western tradition (which casts friendship as a pale imitation of eros, sexual passion), writings in classical China draw an analogy between conjugal love and friendship when a strong commitment prevails.<sup>10</sup> Least of all did I anticipate finding friendliness routinely coupled with filial duty in the binome *xiao you* 孝友, but to cement enduring relationships beyond the family circle is described as part and parcel of the filial duty owed one’s parents, since good friends can expect mutual aid and comfort from one another.<sup>11</sup> As Aat Vervoorn observes, the Western Zhou bronzes often still use the term *you* in relation to kinship, because the word refers to a *type* or *quality* of a relationship, rather than to a specific category or role of persons, so that “friends” and “kin” are never mutually exclusive.<sup>12</sup> In a later paper, no doubt, I will return to expound this idea further. What matters here is that the rhetoric of intimate friendship required, according to the classical writ-

<sup>8</sup> *Xunzi* 荀子, chap. 23 (“Xing e” 性惡); the ruler’s good friends are key to his efforts to become a hegemon as well (chap. 32, “Yao wen” 堯問). *Liji* 禮記, chap. 8 (“Wen wang shi zi” 文王世子) makes friendships one of four props for good order, the others being filial duty, love for one’s children, duty, and precedence by age.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., *Shuoyuan* 說苑 1.20. A good ruler said to “treat as old friends those with old ties to the state” (*you gu jiu* 友故舊) (*Guoyu* 國語 10/90a). See Pines 2002. Many examples can be adduced, especially from the *Shuoyuan*, which was compiled centuries after Pines’ anecdotes. See *Shuoyuan* 1/2, which says the best rulers make friends of their best officers, rather than treating them as subordinates; cf. *Shuoyuan* 13/26. The Guodian 郭店 *Yu cong* 語叢 says, “Friendship is the way of the ruler and subject” (*you, jun chen zhi dao ye* 友，君臣之道也); see *Yucong* 209, 197 (strips on p. 97, 179). To my mind, the closest the ancient Greek tradition comes to this is near the *Phaedrus*, where Phaedrus asserts that he wishes to be Socrates’ friend, and dialogue or dialectic is only possible with friendship. Remonstrance is one of the favors that friends offer friends (see below).

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., *Maoshi* no. 34, where the word *you* refers to a lover.

<sup>11</sup> To cite but a few examples: *Liji* 25.35, “The Meaning of Sacrifice” (“Ji yi” 祭義); Legge, p. 226, says, *pengyou bu xin, fei xiao ye* 朋友不信，非孝也; cf. *Lüshi Chunqiu* 吕氏春秋 14.1 (“Xiao xing lan” 孝行覽); *Hanshi Waizhuan* 韓詩外傳, 9.25, which calls the aid that friends render one of three types of pleasure the just man knows; *Shiming* 釋名 4.1 defines “friendship” as “abundance, to be protective of one another” (*you ye, xiang bao you ye* 有也，相保有也). *Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋 2.22 makes being trustworthy with friends well a partial definition of filial piety.

<sup>12</sup> See Vervoorn 2004. As Vervoorn recognizes, the family is primary only because it is generally the earliest setting in which socialization takes place; hence the family aids in moral development. But Kongzi 孔子 is preoccupied with extending feelings of mutual affection and care well beyond the family to other human beings.

ings, a profound appreciation of the other's commitments – that and nothing more.<sup>13</sup>

## 1 General background to the topic

At first glance, it might seem that the classical Chinese writing about friendship played second fiddle to the dominant rhetoric of political life, as it did in classical Greece and Rome.<sup>14</sup> But the prevailing cultural anxieties among members of the governing elite apparently made intimate friendship – not casual acquaintances, bureaucratic colleagues, or temporary allies at court – the preferred focus of much writing in the classical era.<sup>15</sup> And once the reader explores beyond a few set vocabulary items, the Chinese sources relating to friendship become too numerous to catalogue, let alone fully explore.<sup>16</sup> After all, the topic of friendship directly

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<sup>13</sup> The *Shuowen* 說文 (3B: 116b) defines “intimate friends” (*you* 友) as *tong zhi* 同志 (“having the same commitments”).

<sup>14</sup> Konstan 1997: 15, cites Evans (1996), who examined 18,000 documents in classical Greek, of which only a mere 203 contained the words *philia* or *philos*. Nor does the vocabulary of “friendship” figure much in Roman inscriptions, according to Williams 2012. Few works of modern scholarship treat the topic of friendship in China, although those that do are usually quite good. See Vervoorn 2004; Henry 1987; Blakeley 2008. Ames 1988 has some discussion, as does Shields 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Study of the excavated “daybooks” (*rishu* 日書), including those from Yinwan 尹灣, may allow us to penetrate a social stratum somewhat below the members of the governing elite, since these texts appear in a wider range of non-noble tombs. Typically the daybooks express two types of anxieties: that felt by subordinates when approaching their bureaucratic superiors or that felt by a man at any rank who believed it necessary to ask his partner in an existing binding relation to help him form a binding relation with a third party unknown or insufficiently known (today's *tuo guanxi* 託關係). The nature of trust and predictability among friends, of course, had huge legal ramifications in antiquity.

<sup>16</sup> Konstan 1997, for example, mainly looks to the words *philia* and *philos*, while Williams 2012 looks to *amicus/amica* and *amicitia*. My own initial impulse was to focus on *you* 友 and *peng* 朋, although it soon became clear that these vocabulary items did not suffice to identify concepts relating to friendship. To give readers some idea of the ubiquity of sources relating to friendship, a basic search of these two characters using a modern electronic database (the ICS Concordance Series) turns up no fewer than 53 pages of Han and pre-Han passages relating to friendship, despite the propensity of this particular database to abbreviate multiple references that occur in the same chapter. The topic of friendship warrants at least thirty explicit mentions in the “Confucian” *Analects* alone, beginning with the opening lines exalting the pleasures of “friends coming from afar” (*you peng zi yuan fang lai* 有朋自遠方來), and including the lengthy passage where the disciple Dian recounts his fervent wish to partake of the spring lustration rites in the company with friends who “would take the air at the Rain Dance altars and go home singing” (風乎舞雩, 詠而歸).

colors discussions of trust, ritual, and music. The sources take for granted the fact that friendships, especially intimate friendships, are rooted in a concatenation of evanescent pleasures tied to the fragmentary moment, pleasures equally reliant upon silences as on tones, movements, or gestures.

Intimate friendship, as portrayed in these classical writings, tends to be both pre-verbal and post-verbal. Both these characterizations cry out for further explication, and it is vital to understand that my use of these terms does *not* denote my belief in the “pre-logical” survival of aspects of “primitive man” in a more advanced species, *homo sapiens*, traveling triumphantly along a single evolutionary trajectory. Instead, I use “pre-verbal” to point simultaneously to several key facets of human experience, as noted by writers in classical Chinese. First and foremost, the antique theories parsed the world less often in terms of mechanical cause-and-effect than in terms of sympathies, affinities, and resonances both subtle and moving, whose laws reigned supreme in the rhetorical constructions of friendship and music. Put another way, all early passages on music and friendship presupposed the existence of unseen sympathies weaving the cosmic and social worlds together. In suitably developed people, these affinities could grow so strong as to indelibly stamp the character, attitudes, actions, and even the lifespans of these charismatic people. For already by 300 BCE, the first time we see datable excavated manuscripts relating to this topic, one mysterious effect relating to music had struck early thinkers forcefully: that a string always vibrates, producing *the same note*, in response to a tuning fork or stringed instrument played some distance away.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, hearts “where the *qi* and its intentions are in sync” (*qi zhi bu wei* 氣志不違) were dubbed “soundless music” (*wu sheng zhi yue* 無聲之樂) capable of “pervading all the Four Quarters” (*shi ji si hai* 施及四海) of the known world, while crossing through the usual physical barriers.<sup>18</sup> Thus my use of the terms “pre-verbal” and “post-verbal” indicates the unquestioned belief in antiquity in cosmic regularities likened to “friendships and hatreds”. As people

17 *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露, chapter “Tonglei xiangdong” 同類相動 says: “Try tuning musical instruments. The *gong* 宮 or *shang* 商 note struck upon one lute will be answered by the *gong* or *shang* note from other stringed instruments, which *sound by themselves*.” (試調琴瑟而錯之，鼓其宮則他宮應之，鼓其商而他商應之，五音比而自鳴。) Cf. *Zhuangzi* 莊子 24; *Shiji* 史記 24.1235.

18 See the (unprovenanced) *Shangbo* 上博 *Min zhi fumu* 民之父母 ms., which speaks of “music without sound, and rites without physical expressions” (*wu sheng zhi le, wu ti zhi li* 無聲之樂, 無體之禮). This sort of paradox, once thought to appear first in Six Dynasties’ “pure talk” (*qingtan* 清談), we now can trace to much earlier times; note that the same passage appears in the transmitted *Liji* chapter entitled “Kongzi xianju” 孔子閒居. Yang Xiong 楊雄, for example, compares himself to the “The painter who would paint the formless / Or a zither player who strums to music without sounds” (*pi hua zhe yu wuxing, xianzhe fang yu wusheng* 謐畫者畫於無形，弦者放於無聲). See *Hanshu* 87.3577.

supposedly could either enhance or destroy the harmony of the spheres, the most elevated forms of social order and polite arts were designed to foster harmony by increasing sympathies.<sup>19</sup> We need to take this understanding seriously, for the Ancients “did not only see things differently; they saw different things”.<sup>20</sup>

Second, the words “pre-verbal” and “post-verbal” register the obvious facts that (a) large swaths of human existence cannot be verbalized or explained easily and well, no matter how hard the person tries, and (b) people often sense whom they will like long before a single word is uttered. Friendships are often cemented before the parties fully understand them or how they came to be. Moreover, once an intimate friendship is formed, the friendship is often sustained less through words than through the smallest of gestures, a laugh, perhaps, or a shrug, a shared mat or a piece of fruit – there being no set script for intimate relations. Friendships aim merely to sound the “tone” or tenor that marks an easy back-and-forth, the antiphonal improvisations.<sup>21</sup> So when friends share a piece of music or a poem set to music, “singing freely, with abandon” (*xuyong haosi* 虛詠濠肆)<sup>22</sup> they employ the perfect medium to communicate their sublime feelings,<sup>23</sup> regardless of the lyric or the decibel.<sup>24</sup> Close friends are so exquisitely attuned to each other’s moods and feelings that they can often anticipate them; hence their propensity to speak in a kind of shorthand to each other.<sup>25</sup> Sometimes intimacy is best expressed by saying nothing whatsoever; either the intimate friends feel no need to talk or they may be overwhelmed by the basic immediacy of the sensory

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<sup>19</sup> Lehoux 2012: 139, citing Pliny, *Natural History* 37.61: “Here the peace and war of Nature with itself be told, the hatreds and friendships of things deaf and dumb, [...] which the Greeks call *sympathy* and *antipathy*, in which all things participate”.

<sup>20</sup> Lehoux 2012: 6. Neither in China nor in Rome did they tend to talk in terms of mechanical cause-and-effect. Due to this coherence and connectivity among cosmic and social phenomena, one known truth in one branch of knowledge was thought to reveal hidden truths in another.

<sup>21</sup> In *Zhuangzi* 18/6/61 (Da zong shi 大宗師), two story sets about four exemplary friends show them not answering the questions posed; the friends instinctively prefer to “look at each other and smile” (*xiang shi er xiao* 相視而笑).

<sup>22</sup> The phrase comes from Yuan Qiao’s 袁喬 (Jin dynasty) letter to Chu Pou 褚裒 (305–350), in the *Jinshu* 晉書 83.2167–2168 (see below).

<sup>23</sup> Shen Pei’s 申培 (ca. 219–135) commentary defines the gift of a poem (chanted to music in this period) to a friend, a *fu* 賦. Music and friendship are in this way brought together.

<sup>24</sup> Another phrase used is “to allow oneself to take liberties” (*suqing zixu* 素情自許), as in the *Nan shi* 南史 story of Liu Xuanji 劉玄季, cited in Qian Zhongshu’s 錢鍾書 essay on friendship. See Qian Zhongshu 2010: 1574.

<sup>25</sup> Recall Wang Xizhi’s 王羲之 (303–361) letters to his friends, which Antje Richter (2013) has so movingly translated. Thomas Kuhn, in the Acknowledgements in his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (vol. 1), thanks a friend whom he identifies as the only person with whom he was ever able to communicate completely in incomplete sentences.

experiences attached to the relation.<sup>26</sup> As one famous letter puts it, “Given the true feeling between us, is it even necessary for me to say this, before you will understand it?”<sup>27</sup>

On the “post-verbal”: as so often the main object of exchanging words is to convey trust, talk becomes unnecessary when tacit trust already exists. Verbal exchanges may be crucial glue in a few legendary friendships in Chinese history (particularly that between the happy logic-choppers Zhuangzi 莊子 and Hui Shi 惠施),<sup>28</sup> yet the classical texts generally present close friends as chary of speech.<sup>29</sup> Then, too, as what is experienced cannot be said, and what is said cannot always be experienced, how is a friend ever to employ ordinary language to communicate that sense of being in one’s element in the company of close friends and liable to despair when not? The difficulty of depicting true friendship, in literature or in the visual arts, is plain: the often repetitive, incremental, insignificant, and ephemeral acts that create or promote intimacy hardly make for exciting narratives, yet collectively they turn a friendship into something that seems well nigh “inevitable”.<sup>30</sup> Hence, the “aesthetics” of friendship and the consequent impulse to read texts for what they do not say, as well as for what they are explicit about. The use of silence in music, the void in painting, the empty spaces in architec-

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**26** This is Blakely’s point (Blakely 2008: 320). Then, too, the basic distinctions such as life-death, pleasing-non-pleasing, are misleading, but language is built upon dichotomies, and so founders when they are left behind. But Confucius in the *Zhuangzi* stories appreciates the three friends know something he does not know; but he knows it without being able to act on it or verbalize it adequately. *Zhuangzi* 18/6/61.

**27** “True knowing” is wordless or preverbal. As Han Yu 韓愈 (768 – 824) writes, “Given the true feeling between us, is it even necessary for me to say this and only then have you understand it?” (與足下情義，寧須言而後自明耶) (“Letter to Cui Qun” 與崔群書); translation of *Quan Tangwen* 全唐文 552.5593, borrowed from Shields 2004: 71. Also, laughter allows agreement to be reached, confirming the bonds of true friendship without recourse to explanation/regular prose.

**28** Zhuangzi and Hui Shi are hardly the only friends to talk obsessively, however. A letter (“Letter to Zilin” 與子琳書) quoted in *Quan Han wen* 全漢文 13.125–126 says, “I have heard that you and your friends talk until late in the night about the Classics and traditions”. (頃來聞汝與諸友講肄書傳，滋滋晝夜，衍衍不怠). One should also note the excitement that is sometimes expressed at the receipt of a friend’s letter, as in the letter sent by Ma Rong 馬融 (79–166) to Dou Boxiang 寶伯向, in *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚, cited in Zang Rong 2009: 51. “Conversational companions” (*tanxiao* 談交) is a whole category in itself, with men like Lu Jia 陸賈 (ca. 240–180) slotted there, not to mention the “pure talk” (*qingtan* 清談) figures of late Eastern Han and Six Dynasties.

**29** *Analects* 4.24, 5.25, 12.3, 17.19, for examples of Kongzi’s wariness about speaking much or being glib. Hence the modern presupposition that intimacy follows self-disclosure is more or less absent in accounts of friendship in early China.

**30** Here I reiterate the point that the early writers of classical Chinese see friendships as somehow fated or inevitable. Needless to say, no actions are ever, perhaps, with human beings, foregone conclusions. This point has been stressed by Nehamas 2008, in his sixth Gifford Lecture.

ture, the fundamentally “unshowy” and “undemonstrative” character of friendships – all these elegant punctuations of palpable form contribute to the decision to avoid declaiming. For those in the know, the very intensity of the companionable silences projected incredible energy almost certain to lead to still deeper engagements.<sup>31</sup> As Kongzi 孔子 [a.k.a. Confucius] comments in the *Analects*, “Words are merely for [ordinary] communication” (*ci da er yi yi* 辭達而已矣).<sup>32</sup>

Needless to say, the search for intimate friends is a search for predictability in relations, and notably, the early Chinese take the antonym to “pleasure” (*le* 樂) not to be pain, since pain inevitably afflicts all people and often cannot be remedied, but “insecurity” (*bu an* 不安) or “anxiety”/“worry” (*you* 憂). For the person feeling insecure or anxious is unlikely to feel much pleasure either in the moment or in prospect, even if a great opportunity for pleasure-taking exists in a given situation. The antonyms for *xi* 喜 (“short term, non-relational delight”) include “anger” (*nu* 怒), “fear” (*ju* 懼), *bei* 悲 or *ai* 哀 (“feelings of loss”), and “hatred” or “resentment” (*hen* 恨) toward another.<sup>33</sup> The benefit accruing from true intimacy is that it produces a state of being, temporary or prolonged, that is “unruffled”, “unflappable”, or “calm” (*yi* 怡) in social exchanges. In that state, the *qi* 氣 is adequate and attuned to the task at hand, the heart is tranquil,<sup>34</sup> and a keen awareness of this feeling is “sweet”.<sup>35</sup> Calm, by all accounts, facilitates the exercise of good judgment when making evaluations or deciding one’s commitments – both of which are necessary if a member of the governing elite is to work productively

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31 See Fingarette 1983: 341, for the “intense moment of silence”.

32 *Analects* 15.41. One communicates meaning through language, but there is so much more to communicate in life.

33 Classical Chinese has words for “to anticipate a good outcome” (*wang* 望) but the quality of “hope” found in American blind optimism unattached to a precise outcome of specific activities simply does not exist. The closest word in Chinese to “hope” is *wang* 望, then. Notably, no word in classical Chinese corresponds to the American virtue of cheerfulness either. The word *kai* 懨 is used in the context of displays of martial prowess; Legge gets it right when he translates *kai* as “in triumphal array”. The sense of powerful forces stirred or roused is palpable in the word, and perhaps because it is used so often to describe superior forces, as well as the breeze that enlivens things with which it comes in contact, it conveys whiffs of the same meaning as the Greek virtue of “great-souledness” or “magnanimity” (*μεγαλοψυχία*), except that it is not a virtue, strictly speaking, but a role or an activity.

34 *Huainanzi* 6.203 (*xin yi qi he* 心怡氣和), used in a description of the best charioteers. For the tranquil heart, see *Quan Hou Han wen* 71.724.

35 *Cai Zhonglang ji* 9.9/50/27: (*Rang Gaoyang hou yinshou fuce biao* 讓高陽侯印綬符策表): “[In accepting this honor], I do not feel any calm or sweet pleasure.” (*cheng wu an ning gan yue zhi qing* 誠無安甯甘悅之情), contrasts with his expectations for friendship.

and eventually earn a fine reputation.<sup>36</sup> This rich vocabulary of the emotions describes intimate friendships, though it is not exclusive to those friendships, since warm trust can prevail among close family members, for example, or between husbands and wives and parents and children.

The rhetoric of false friendships used a better-defined and more restrictive set of concept clusters. Fair weather friends eager for commodified relations were known to “grasp each other’s arms, clutch each other’s wrists, and, bowing to heaven, swear oaths of lasting friendship, pleading for favors and special treatment, without calculating the degree of commitment involved”.<sup>37</sup> This cluster of set phrases signals duplicity, flattery, lack of concern, and superficiality of contacts.<sup>38</sup> By contrast, the relation between intimate friends is “understated”, “unshowy” or “undemonstrative” (*su* 素), based as it is in a willful *méconnaisance* (literally, “misrecognition”) of the supreme debt that true friends owe each other.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See, e.g., the Preface to Du Yu’s 杜預 (222–285) *Chunqiu Zuozhuan* 春秋左傳, in *Wenxuan* 45.2033–2036. For the contrary lamentable state of *not-yi*, see, e.g., *Wenxuan* 60.2571 (“Qi Jingling Wenxuan wang xingzhuang” 齊竟陵文宣王行狀), *Cai Zhonglang ji*, 4.3 (“Hu gong bei” 胡公碑).

<sup>37</sup> See Xu Gan’s 徐幹 (170–217/8) “Qian Jiao” 講交 essay in *Zhong lun* 中論; Makeham 2002: 168–169. Many such gestures are mentioned in the “Shu du fu” 蜀都賦, in *Wenxuan* 4.175–199, as typical (if lamentable) behavior (see fn. immediately below). Cf. *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 82.2705.

<sup>38</sup> I thank Trenton Wilson for alerting me to this list of gestures. To those named here, readers can add “glibly chat” (*ju tan* 劇談) and “playfully analyze or opine” (*xi lun* 戲論) or “talk which is exaggerated or boasting or pompous” (*gao tan da yu* 高談大語); cf. men who “stab their palms [to make a point]” (抵掌), “cast their eyes” (*zhi mu* 撇目), or “whose eyebrows are raised archly” (*yang mei* 揚眉). Worse of all, is the adoption of the “mannerisms” or “attitude of a servant girl” or “concubine” (*bi qie zhi tai* 婢妾之態). The stabbing of palms and raising of eyebrows happens after the sycophants grow more confident of their patronage by the powerful. One should note that the phrase “dust off one’s cap” (*tan guan* 彈冠) is unusual, in that the term operates in contradictory ways, although it always describes friendships among members of the governing elite. So far as we know, the expression first appears in the *Chuci* 楚辭 7/19/16 as a gesture indicating one’s firm intention to “rid oneself of the filth and corruption” associated with office-holding, as when the old *Chuci* fisherman dusts off his cap and “washes his capstrings” (*zhuo wu ying* 灌吾纓) to indicate his adamant refusal to talk with any career-minded opportunists. But the same expression soon reappears as a moving gesture signifying the gratification friends take in each other’s accomplishments (usually in office), as well as a willingness to yield or defer to the other. This attitude is illustrated through the story of the two intimate friends of the Western Han dynasty, Wang Ji 王吉 (d. ca. 48 BCE) and Gong Yu 貢禹 (ca. 126–44 BCE) in *Hanshu* 漢書 72.3066.

<sup>39</sup> Bourdieu 1970 emphasizes the lack of clarity about when and where the gift between real friends will be paid; the importance of the gift lies in the imprecision attached to it, since monetary transactions are precise by nature. Cf. Davidson 1997, esp. 119, which remarks that something about the nature of money epitomizes prostitution and enslavement, and so differs from the economy of ritual gifts exchanged through friends.

## 2 What do the story cycles tell us?

A charming cycle of stories illustrates the sunny continuum from music to harmony to friendship, centering round the legendary figures of Bo Ya 伯牙 and Zhong Ziqi 鐘子期, who lived sometime prior to 221 BCE. The basic story goes something like this: In olden times, the lute player Bo Ya strummed his lute and Zhong Ziqi knew what was on his mind. If he was thinking of a man, Ziqi knew it, and if he had his mind on a river, Ziqi knew it. Zhong Ziqi always grasped whatever came into Bo Ya's heart and mind. Once Bo Ya was roaming on the north side of Mount Tai, when he was caught in a sudden rainstorm. He took shelter under a cliff, and feeling somewhat pensive, he took up his lute and strummed it. First he composed an air about the persistent rain, then he improvised the sound of crashing mountains. But whatever melody he played, Zhong Ziqi never missed the direction of his thoughts. And so Bo Ya put away his lute and remarked with an admiring sigh: "Good! good! How well you listen! What you imagine is just what is in my heart and mind. Is there nowhere for my notes to flee to?" Later, when Zhong Ziqi unexpectedly died, Bo Ya broke up his lute, for he knew that no matter how well he might play, he would never again in his lifetime experience such a good listener as Zhong Ziqi.<sup>40</sup>

Bo Ya knew that his friend listened in such a way as to immediately divine his own heart. Zhong Ziqi did far more than merely recognize the melody, in other words; he understood the timbre, phrasing, motivation, and mood that led Bo Ya by turns to take up his lute and strum or put down his lute and retreat into silence. Thanks to the strong sympathies binding Bo Ya and Zhong Ziqi through life and death, for over two millennia the single binomial phrase "knowing the tone" (*zhi yin* 知音) has evoked the unique satisfactions of good music and good friendship.<sup>41</sup> In early texts, this phrase is sometimes altered to *zhi yin* 至音 (the "ultimate tone") when describing the "ultimate conversation" apt to be misconstrued by the ordinary run of men.<sup>42</sup> After all, an "appreciation of music resides not in

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<sup>40</sup> The fullest version of this story is told in the *Liezi* 列子, 5/31/1–5 ("Tang wen" 湯問); see Graham 1960, 109–110. I have used Graham's version, but combined it with material from other sources.

<sup>41</sup> *Qianfu lun* 潛夫論 chap. 11 ("De hua" 德化) uses a line from the *Zhouyi* 周易 (*ming he zai yin*, *qi zi he zhi* 鳴鶴在陰, 其子和之, "calling crane in the dark; the right man harmonizes with it") to describe the search for true friends' utterances through the vehicle of sound and music. See "Zhong fu" 中孚 (Hexagram 61) Line Text/ Nine in the Second/ 37. Cf. *Maoshi* no. 184.

<sup>42</sup> See *Hou Hanshu* 36.1230: *fu zhi yin bu he zhong ting, gu Bo Ya jue xian* 夫至音不合眾聽, 故伯牙絕弦 ("[knowing that] the ultimate tone does not accord with the hearing of most men, therefore Boya broke the strings [of his instrument]"). The status implications of the first phrase are obvious.

individual tones, but in the relationship between one tone and another", in this mimicking friends' responsiveness, appreciation, and empathy.<sup>43</sup>

The natural place to begin after Bo Ya and Zhong Ziqi is with Guan Zhong 管仲 (d. 645) and Bao Shuya 鮑叔牙, whose legend appears, with variations, in many story cycles.<sup>44</sup> During the Chunqiu 春秋 period, Guan Zhong was the most famous prime minister to hold office in all the Central States;<sup>45</sup> he served Lord Huan 桓 in Qi 齊 with great distinction, paving the way for Qi to assume the role of hegemon, i.e., effective overlord over all the princes nominally allied with the weak Zhou 周 royal house. So impressive were Guan's achievements at unifying the various states in the north China plain that Confucius purportedly remarked that the Central States inhabitants would have been forced to give up their ceremonial robes for nomadic garb, had it not been for Guan.<sup>46</sup> That said, Guan Zhong was meanwhile held responsible for the ignoble last days of Duke Huan's reign, since Guan had been derelict in his duty to remonstrate with the aging duke sunk in wine and women. So by the time of Duke Huan's death, encoffinment, and funeral (the first hastened and the last two grotesquely delayed by the Qi court's mismanagement), critics were ready to castigate Guan Zhong for wasting Qi's moral, political, and financial capital and turning it into "the laughingstock of the empire".<sup>47</sup> Many were ready to term Guan's long service to the duke not "great loyalty" but "second-rate [i.e., superficial] loyalty", given Guan Zhong's stupendous failure to reform the duke and thereby achieve Qi's long-term security.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> DeWoskin 1982: 11. He continues, the five tones (*wuyin* 五音) were not conceived as fixed pitches usually, rather as a "movable doh scale" (DeWoskin 1982: 44). This refers to five relata without fixed pitch but with *intervallic significance*. He points out that tones differ from sounds in two ways: (1) tones never occur singly, rather they exist dynamically in graduated array; and (2) tones are the object of intelligent apprehension, intelligent production, or both (De Woskin 1982: 96). That Jizha 季札 accurately appraises the histories and fortunes of various domains by observing the performance of music and odes associated with them. See *Zuozhuan* 左傳, Lord Xiang 襄公 29.13, which shows that "knowing music" (*zhiyin*) is also "knowing people" (*zhiren* 知人), for he offers unerring advice to contemporary statesmen on how to negotiate the dangers of public life.

<sup>44</sup> Other early tales of friendship that are clearly not between relatives come from the *Zuozhuan*, which recounts the friendship between Wuju 伍舉 and Shengzi 聲子 whose fathers were "you", and Wuju's descendant, Wu Zixu 伍子胥 and Shen Baoxu 申包胥 who were also close friends. Clearly, the possibility of close relations existed between non-kin by Chunqiu 春秋 times. I thank Li Wai-ye and Maria Khayutina for directing me to these stories.

<sup>45</sup> Zichan 子產 of Zheng 鄭 was also famous, but his state was puny compared to Qi 齊.

<sup>46</sup> *Analects* 17.7.

<sup>47</sup> *Analects* 3.22, for example.

<sup>48</sup> *Hanshi waizhuan* 4/3; Hightower 1952: 127–128. Of course, Guan Zhong's influence over Lord Huan was never in doubt.

Even if Guan Zhong proved less than a paragon as prime minister, his reputation as friend to Bao Shuya earned him a secure place in history. Before Duke Huan's rise to the throne, a fierce succession struggle had taken place among the Qi princes. Guan Zhong, a partisan of the future duke's chief rival, had tried to kill the man who became Duke Huan, but, as luck would have it, a metal clasp on the duke's robe deflected Guan's arrow. The duke not only survived the assassination attempt; he went on to vanquish all his rivals, including Guan Zhong's prince. Upon assuming the throne in Qi, Duke Huan immediately named Bao Shuya as his chief advisor. Given Guan Zhong's earlier attack on Duke Huan, Bao Shuya had his work cut out for him when he decided early on in his tenure to recommend that Guan Zhong replace him as prime minister.<sup>49</sup> Bao Shuya argued that his friend Guan Zhong excelled him in five areas, which both separately and together made him the better candidate for the post:

寬惠柔愛，臣弗如也。忠信可結於百姓，臣弗如也。制禮約法於四方，臣弗如也。決獄折中，臣弗如也。使士卒勇，臣弗如也。

In generosity and concern for the people, I, Bao, am not his equal. In loyalty and fidelity, the very qualities that attach him to others,<sup>50</sup> I am not his equal. In managing rituals and mandating laws in the four quarters, I am not his equal. In deciding lawsuits equitably, I am not his equal. In [...] inspiring troops with valor, I am not his equal.<sup>51</sup>

Bao Shuya was adamant in Guan Zhong's defense; moreover, Bao refused to permit his ruler to act upon past history or private biases – not when the destiny of his beloved Qi polity was at stake. So Guan Zhong eventually became prime minister, and Guan's attention to diplomacy and finances during the first part of Duke Huan's reign set Qi firmly on the path toward political greatness for a time. That Bao so persistently backed Guan's promotion was all the more surprising, given that Guan, by conventional standards, had acted dishonorably toward Bao more than once; a less astute friend would have renounced all contact with Guan.

Five incidents are named in one of the longest cycle of stories: When Bao and Guan were in business together, and Guan appropriated more than his fair share of the profits, Bao let him do so, since his friend was poor. When Guan made plans for Bao, Bao never blamed him when the plans came to nothing; instead, Bao decided that the times were simply not ripe for the execution of such plans. When Guan was dismissed from three low-level offices at court, Bao never berated him for incompetence; he saw that Guan had not been offered the right job

<sup>49</sup> See *Guoyu*, “Qi yu” 齊語, 6.1; also *Zuozhuan*, Lord Zhuang 莊公 9.

<sup>50</sup> My circumlocution, since different editions have “princes” or “common people” for those to whom Guan Zhong is attached.

<sup>51</sup> *Hanshi waizhuan* 10/2; Hightower 1952: 319 (mod.).

suited to his unusual talents. When Guan fled the battlefield three times, Bao did not deem him a coward, since Guan had an aged mother to support. And while convention dictated that Guan accompany his lord in death when Guan's patron, the senior prince of Qi and rightful heir, perished during the succession struggles, Bao celebrated Guan's practical wisdom in refusing to commit suicide. Plainly, Guan would never willingly die before he had made his name. In all five instances, Bao had discerned Guan's true character, despite the incriminating appearances. Ergo, the truth of Guan Zhong's summary judgment late in life:

生我者父母，知我者鮑叔也

My father and mother are the ones who bore me, but the one who knew me really well was Bao Shuya.<sup>52</sup>

The only true basis for friendship in the classical literature lies in accurate assessments about a friend's character and actual set of potentials.<sup>53</sup>

Accordingly, many acclaimed Bao Shuya a far greater figure than Guan Zhong. In one imaginary dialogue, Kongzi told his disciple Zigong 子貢 that Bao Shuya was responsible for Qi's ascendancy, since it was Bao Shuya who had forcefully recommended Guan Zhong for the prime minister's post:

知賢、知也，推賢、仁也，引賢、義也。有此三者，又何加焉。

To recognize a sage is to be wise.

To advance a sage is to be humane.

To introduce a sage [to one's ruler] is to do one's duty.

Who, then, is greater than the man who possesses these three virtues?<sup>54</sup>

Writing of the “three great difficulties and two bars to excellence” (*da nan san er zhi shan er* 大難三而止善二) at court, Huan Tan 桓譚 lamented a lack of meeting of the minds between ruler and minister, whose working relation was ideally “intimate and stable”, and “full of trust”. Ascribing an ideal relation forged among Guan Zhong, Bao Shuya, and Lord Huan of Qi, Huan insisted,

割心相信，動無閒疑 […] 則難以遂功竟意矣。

Unless they are willing to tear out their hearts for one another, unless their actions are above suspicion and doubt, [...] it will always be difficult [for those in power] to carry out their proposals and bring their ideas to fruition.<sup>55</sup>

52 *Liezi* 6/35/1. I am indebted to Henry 1987, for these references.

53 Cf. Sima Qian's 司馬遷 remark in his “Letter to Ren An” (*Bao Ren An shu* 報任安書), recorded in *Hanshu* 62.2738. Much more on this letter will be found in a forthcoming essay from a book on this letter (scheduled for publication by the University of Washington Press, 2015).

54 *Hanshi waizhuan* 7/24; Hightower 1952: 247 (mod.). *Fengsu tongyi* 風俗通義 6.236, has Bo Ya visualizing a mountain and a river, etc.

55 See n. 56 below.

For “depraved, disobedient, and rebellious ministers” are all greedy men determined to damage “eminent gentlemen of extraordinary talent and ability” by pointing out their trifling mistakes. Bao Shuya, by contrast, was a model of magnanimity.<sup>56</sup>

In the “official” histories of the friendship between Guan Zhong and Bao Shuya, Guan was the lucky recipient of Bao’s disinterested professionalism and perspicacity in character assessment. In other legendary friendships premised on a similar perceptiveness, the friendship was both unofficial and more reciprocal. In the *Zhuangzi’s Inner Chapters*, the warm friendship between Zhuangzi and Hui Shi takes center stage in several anecdotes. Hui Shi, a sophist par excellence, traveled around seeking employment at court after court, lugging the five cart-loads of manuscripts he had accumulated during his travels. The last years of Hui’s life, according to traditions in the received literature, were spent puzzling over such abstruse matters as “hardness and whiteness” (i.e., how attributes of an object relate to the object itself)<sup>57</sup> and generating paradoxes like “I set off for Yue today and arrived yesterday”, “Linked rings can be separated”, and “The thing born is the thing dying”. A “wisdom bag” who could reduce any conventional language to absurdities, Hui certainly succeeded in spurring fellow rhetoricians to devise comparable lines (“An egg has feathers”, “Wheels never touch the ground”, and “Fire is not hot”). But it was far from clear if such word games served any real purpose in life. Worse, Hui’s good friend Zhuangzi saw that Hui failed to gain any serenity or pleasure from his unrelenting efforts. So Zhuangzi employed the most exquisite logic-chopping to ridicule logic chopping, hoping to nudge his friend toward greater insights about life’s mysteries. At one point, Zhuangzi even composed a satirical verse in Chinese doggerel about his friend:

天選子之形 [\*tʃeŋ]

子以堅白鳴 [\*m.reŋ]

Though Heaven has made you a shapely sight

You care only about ‘hard and white’.<sup>58</sup>

Despite such mockery, the Zhuangzi of legend shared Bao’s bemused attitude toward his friend’s foibles, as is clear from a famous exchange between Zhuangzi and Hui Shi, in which Zhuangzi taught a valuable lesson in the gentlest possible way:

<sup>56</sup> See Huan Tan, *Xin lun* 新論 13/5a–6a; Pokora 1975: 16–18 (mod.).

<sup>57</sup> Hui Shi supposedly drafted the state laws on behalf of King Hui of Wei 魏惠王 (400–319). See *Huainanzi* 12.380.

<sup>58</sup> *Zhuangzi* 15/5/24 (“De chong fu” 德充符).

莊子與惠子遊於濠梁之上。莊子曰。「儻魚出遊從容，是魚樂也。」惠子曰。「子非魚，安知魚之樂？」莊子曰。「子非我，安知我不知魚之樂？」惠子曰。「我非子，固不知子矣；子固非魚也，子之不知魚之樂全矣。」莊子曰。「請循其本。子曰『汝安知魚樂』云者，既已知吾知之而問我，我知之濠上也。」

Masters Zhuang and Hui were strolling along the dam of the Hao River when Zhuangzi said, “See how the minnows come out and dart around where they please! That’s what fish really enjoy!” Huizi said, “You’re not a fish, so how do you know what fish enjoy?” Zhuangzi replied, “You’re not I, so how do you know that I don’t know what fish enjoy?” Huizi, in some exasperation, replied, “I’m not you, so I certainly don’t know what you know. All the same, you’re no fish, so that still proves you don’t know *what* fish enjoy!” Zhuangzi said, “Let’s go back to your original question, if you will. You asked me *how* I know what fish enjoy, so you already knew I knew it when you asked me the question. I know it by standing here beside the Hao River”.<sup>59</sup>

Zest for such battles of wit bound the two friends in mutual attraction, so much so that Hui Shi’s death left Zhuangzi utterly lamenting at Hui’s graveside that he would no longer have anyone to “talk with anymore” (*wu yu yan zhi yi* 無與言之矣).<sup>60</sup> Gone forever were these pleasures of raillery and repartee, the true relish of life for the odd couple.

The book ascribed to this same Zhuangzi supplies other moving portraits of perfect friendships, all underscoring the idea that close friends, like the Dao itself, allow each other to evolve naturally, each in his own distinctive way.

子祀、子輿、子犁、子來四人相與語曰：「孰能以無為首，以生為脊，以死為尻，孰知生死存亡之一體者，吾與之友矣。」四人相視而笑，莫逆於心，遂相與為友。俄而子輿有病，子祀往問之。曰：「偉哉！夫造物者，將以予為此拘拘也！曲僂發背，上有五管，頤隱於齊，肩高於頂，句贅指天。」陰陽之氣有滲，其心閒而無事，蹠足而鑑於井，曰：「嗟乎！夫造物者，又將以予為此拘拘也！」子祀曰：「汝惡之乎？」曰：「亡，予何惡！浸假而化予之左臂以為雞，予因以求時夜；浸假而化予之右臂以為彈，予因以求鵠炙……且夫得者時也，失者順也，安時而處順，哀樂不能入也。此古之所謂縣解也，而不能自解者，物有結之。且夫物不勝天久矣……俄而子來有病，喘喘然將死，其妻子環而泣之。子犁往問之曰：「叱！避！無怛化！」倚其戶與之語曰：「偉哉造物！又將奚以汝為？將奚以汝適？以汝為鼠肝乎？以汝為蟲臂乎？」子來曰：「父母於子，東西南北，唯命之從。陰陽於人，不翅於父母，彼近吾死而我不聽，我則悍矣，彼何罪焉！夫大塊載我以形，勞我以生，佚我以老，息我以死。故善吾生者，乃所以善吾死也。今之大冶鑄金，金踊躍曰『我且必為鎮鄉』，大冶必以為不祥之金。今一犯人之形，而曰『人耳人耳』，夫造化者必以為不祥之人。今一以天地為大鑪，以造化為大冶，惡乎往而不可哉！成然寐，蘧然覺。」

Masters Si, Yu, Li, and Lai were all four talking together. “Who can look upon formlessness as his head, on life as his back, and on death as his rump?”<sup>61</sup> Who knows that life and death,

59 *Zhuangzi* 47/17/11-14.

60 *Zhuangzi* 70/24/3 Watson 1968: 269 (mod.).

61 *Wu* 無 (literally “not-having”) is often (mis)translated in the pre-Buddhist context as “non-being”; in early cosmogonic texts it refers instead to whatever is “formless” or invisible (*wu xing*

existence and annihilation, are all but a single body? I will be that person's friend!" The four men looked at each other and smiled, there being no disagreement in their hearts, and so the four became friends.

Sometime later, Master Yu fell ill quite suddenly, and Master Si went to ask how he was faring. "Amazing! The Great Fashioner is making me all crookedy like this! My back sticks up like a hunchback; my vital organs are on top. My chin is buried in my navel. My shoulders are up above my pate, and my pigtail points to the sky. It must be some dislocation of yin and yang!" Yet he seemed calm at heart and unconcerned. Dragging himself by fits and starts to a well, he looked at his own reflection in the water. "My, oh my! So the Fashioner is making me all crookedy like this!"

"Do you resent it?" asked Master Si.

"Why no, why should I? If the process continues, perhaps in time it will transform my left arm into a rooster, in which case I'll keep watch in the night. Or perhaps in time it will transform my right arm into a crossbow pellet and I'll shoot down an owl for roasting [...]. I received life because the time had come. I am losing it because the order of things is passing on. Be content with this time; dwell in this order; and neither cares nor extraordinary pleasures can touch you. In ancient times, this attitude was called "unloosing the bonds". There are those who cannot free themselves because they are bound by things, but nothing can ever win against Heaven!"

Suddenly Master Lai grew ill. Gasping and sneezing, he lay on the point of death. His wife and children gathered round in a circle and began to cry. Master Li, who had come to ask how he was, said, "Shoo! Get back! Don't disturb the process of change". Then he leaned against the doorway and talked to Master Lai: "How marvelous the Fashioner is! What is it going to make out of you next? Where is it going to send you? Will it make you into a rat's liver? Will he make you into a bug's arm?"

Master Lai replied, "A child, obeying his parents, goes wherever he is told. And yin and yang, how much more are they to a man than his parents? Now that they have brought me to the verge of death, how perverse it would be if I refused to obey them! The Great Clod burdens me with form, labors me in life, troubles me in old age, and rests me in death. So if I think well of my life, I must think well of my death. If a skilled smith casting metal had the metal leap up and say, 'I insist upon being made into a Moye sword,' surely the metal would be deemed very inauspicious metal! Now, having had the audacity to take on human form once, were I to say, 'I don't want to be anything but [to continue as] a man,' surely the Fashioner would think me a most inauspicious sort of person. So now I think of the cosmos as a great furnace, and the Fashioner as a skilled smith. Where could he send me that would not be alright? I will go off to sleep peacefully, and then with a start wake up".<sup>62</sup>

Though few scholars have noted it, much the same quality of discerning and capacious friendship is imputed to Kongzi in the early sources, and also to the "Confucian" virtues. For example, in the *Shuoyuan* 說苑 truly "humane" (*ren* 仁)

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無形), whereas *you* 有 (literally "having") refers to the visible things and relations, people and events.

<sup>62</sup> *Zhuangzi* 17/6/22 (With some abbreviation by myself). Watson 1968: 80–82 (mod.).

behavior connotes being alert to the hidden capacities of others, and acting upon this profound grasp of others' natures.<sup>63</sup>

Though "close friendships" (*qin you* 親友) promised to provide one of life's most sustaining pleasures, intimate friendships typically only led to happy endings if the friends helped each other to mature, while keeping each other from excess and harm. Hence the tragic tale of a famous Western Han friendship between Dou Ying 竇嬰, Marquis of Weiqi 魏其, and General Guan Fu 灌夫, as recorded in the *Shiji*.<sup>64</sup> In brief the story goes like this: desperate for talent during the Seven Kingdoms Revolt of 154 BCE, Jingdi 景帝 (r. 157-141 BCE) felt he could only trust men born into the clans related by marriage to the imperial house. "Looking closely at the members of his mother's family," Jingdi "discovered that no one could match Dou Ying for practical wisdom" (*shang cha zongshi zhu Dou wuru Dou Ying xian* 上察宗室諸竇母如竇嬰賢). At first, Dou Ying (son of a cousin of Jingdi's mother) wisely refused office, since he knew he had offended Jingdi's mother. But Jingdi thrust upon Dou a variety of important posts, most importantly, the office of generalissimo-in-chief, followed by a gift of one thousand catties of gold. Dou Ying told his junior officers that the money was theirs to use in a military emergency; he refused to add the smallest coin to his own coffers.

At the start of the revolt, Dou Ying marched east to seize the strategic city of Xingyang 榮陽, after which he oversaw troop movements in the east and center of the empire. His strategies proved so successful that the revolt was swiftly quashed, and Jingdi, for the rest of his reign, placed absolute trust in Dou Ying's advice in policy matters. Favors were heaped on Dou by the emperor and the empress dowager alike, but Dou, as scion of an old and distinguished family, sometimes acted stubborn and proud, with the result that he offended some of his fellow officers at court. Before long, Dou had acquired a reputation for self-righteousness and for being "rather too fond of having his own way" (*hao quan* 好權).<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, Dou lavished all his time and attention upon his closest friend, Guan Fu 灌夫, a war hero who had miraculously survived multiple wounds on his southern campaigns. The two were well suited to be firm friends, for Guan, like Dou, was honest to the point of bluntness and generous towards his subordinates. The friendship

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<sup>63</sup> This builds upon Eric Henry's forthcoming translation of the *Shuoyuan* (University of Washington Press). One anecdote that ascribes such admirable qualities to Kongzi is *Shuoyuan* 17:23: "The Master cultivates the way so as to await the arrival of everyone in the realm. He turns away no one who approaches him [...] This means that there is nothing that the great do not admit into their presence" (夫子脩道以俟天下，來者不止 [...] 言大者之旁，無所不容).

<sup>64</sup> *Shiji* 107.2386–2393.

<sup>65</sup> This second heir did not hesitate to retaliate by seeing that Dou was once refused entrance into the palace.

between Dou and Guan was said to be so close that their friendship was likened to that between father and son:

相得驩甚，無厭，恨相知晚也。

They never tired of the pleasures they shared and their only regret was they had come to know each other so late in life.

Emboldened by their longstanding friendship, perhaps, Dou and Guan did not hesitate to convey their disdain for the careerist Tian Fen 田分, when he was appointed chancellor under Jingdi's successor. That started the trouble, and eventually the three men's continual sniping led the emperor to refer the quarrel to his court officials for adjudication. Perhaps not surprisingly, Guan Fu, as the man least well connected, was soon identified as the scapegoat, while Dou was sentenced to house arrest. Anxious to intervene on his friend's behalf, especially as he was ultimately responsible for Guan's predicament, Dou decided upon a risky course of action: he would use a deathbed decree from Jingdi granting Dou the extraordinary privilege of a private audience with the new emperor. But when the duplicate copy of Jingdi's testamentary edict failed to be found in the imperial archives, Dou was charged with forging an imperial edict, a capital crime meriting public execution in the marketplace. In the end, both Dou and Guan died the most excruciating deaths in the year 131–130 BC. The common wisdom held that while “both men tried to help one another, they only succeeded in bringing disaster down upon themselves” (*liang ren xiang yi, nai cheng huo luan* 兩人相翼，乃成禍亂).

Two other tales alert us to other important criteria for successful intimacies. In the first, a certain Wei Sheng 尾生 made an engagement to meet his girlfriend under a nearby bridge. The girl, stopped by a huge downpour, failed to turn up at the appointed time. The water began to rise steadily. Instead of leaving when the going was good, Wei wrapped his arms around an upright beam of the bridge, as he vowed to drown rather than break his bond. In the main, those who retold this story condemned Wei, believing that he was so “ensnared by thoughts of reputation” that he did not place enough value on his own life (*li ming qing si* 離名輕死).<sup>66</sup> Proverbially, “a true gentleman worthy of the name (a *shi* 士) dies for the sake of the person who profoundly understands him” (*shi wei zhi ji zhe si* 士為知己者死).<sup>67</sup> But close friendships were meant to enlighten the parties and enlarge

<sup>66</sup> *Zhuangzi*, 89/29/22, Watson 1968: 229–230. “Wei Sheng died by drowning; trustworthiness being his curse” (*Wei Sheng ni si, xin zhi huan ye* 尾生溺死，信之患也). (Watson 1968: 334).

<sup>67</sup> Yu Rang 豫讓 and Sima Qian say this in the *Shiji* 86.2519. *Zhanguoce* 戰國策18: 4/617 also says this, suggesting a proverbial saying.

their capacities, rather than the reverse. The complete trust that defined true friendship required far more than mechanical adherence to some inflexible rule, as on automatic pilot. In rare instances, fidelity to a close friend might even require the parties to ignore previous promises while using their powers of discretion to advance each other's welfare.<sup>68</sup> When all was said and done, what enterprise did Wei's conscious choice further? In what sense did his actions conduce to his girl's development or her best interests? Although the classical emphasis on the abiding pleasures to be gained from intimate friendships make a hash of modern moral judgments couched in terms of egotism vs. altruism,<sup>69</sup> Wei's decision was clearly too self-involved; there is no sign that he ever considered the potential effects of his decision on the girl or others who depended upon Wei to act more wisely.

An equally curious story describes a certain Xu Zhi 徐稚 (97–168), a person famous for steadfastly refusing all offers of employment in the realm. However, that reputation hardly prevented Xu Zhi from traveling long distances to the gravesite to mourn a would-be patron after his death. Xu's habit on such occasions verged on the comical:

常於家豫炙雞一隻，以一兩緜絮漬酒中，暴乾以裹雞，徑到所起冢隧外，以水漬緜使有酒氣，斗米飯，白茅為藉，以雞置前，釀酒畢，留謁則去，不見喪主。

Xu would go straight to the site of the burial mound [of the would-be patron] and soak a piece of cotton he had wrapped around a cooked chicken in wine to release the odor of the wine. He would set out a platter of rice on a mat of white rush, with the chicken in front of it. When the libation of wine had been duly poured, he would leave his formal calling card (*ye* 謁) on the funeral mound. He then left immediately, without even trying to have a word with the chief mourners at the funeral.<sup>70</sup>

The community reaction at one such event was not atypical: the crowd of funeral-goers “thought his behavior bizarre; none of them understood the reason for his actions” (*zhong guai, bu zhi qi gu* 眇怪，不知其故). But the anecdote gives us some inkling of Xu's motivation: only after his would-be patron's death was Xu

**68** This is a near paraphrase of Baier 1991: 117, which clarified for me the point of the Wei Sheng story. I thank Henry Rosemont, Jr., for recommending Baier's work. In answer to Baier's rhetorical question (p. 167), “Is fidelity adequately analyzed as doing precisely what one assured another one would do?” I answer, “No! One might, in order to be a faithful friend, do something quite unexpected”.

**69** Baier 1991: 142–143, writes, “Is our pleasure in each other's company, and our preference for a life that gives us opportunities to get some pleasure, egoistic or non-egoistic?”

**70** See Xie Cheng 謝承 (182–254), *Xie Cheng Hou Hanshu* 3.2b. Cf. *Hou Hanshu* 53.1747, which tells of Xu Zhi's mourning for Guo Tai's 郭泰 mother; the same story appears in *Fengsu tongyi* 3.162–167, where Ying Shao 應劭 criticizes Xu.

willing to go to any length to advertise his unswerving attachment to the man who had earlier discerned in him a set of sterling qualities, for then the patron was in no condition to entreat him to accept an office. And while we might wonder, along with the early mourners, how this expression of loyal friendship conduced to the good of the deceased, we should not perhaps be overhasty in our judgments. By acknowledging his psychic debts to the dead, in the absence of expectations, threats, or contractual obligations, Xu dramatized the sort of truly disinterested friendship open to true gentlemen, which in turn duly honored the deceased.<sup>71</sup> However, such tales of friendship can carry the modern reader only so far, as the classical writers hardly needed to spell out the stories' underlying ethical concerns for their original readers, who like them were members of the governing elite "in the know".

Sociability was sought in a potential or actual candidate for office looking to make a living (*zhi sheng* 治生), but constructing a life truly worth living (also *zhi sheng* 治生) required intimate friendship.<sup>72</sup> By common consensus, friends became intimates not through any cost-benefit analysis, but through ineffable laws of attraction – a fact quietly registered in the myriad passages employing the word *xiang* 相 ("mutual") as shorthand for the binomial expression *xiang gan* 相感 ("mutually attracting and affecting"). Such attractions supposedly represented a compelling force in people's lives, though they seem to have been experienced mostly as the "way things are", rather than as something demanding logical explication. As noted above, music was thought to provide the single best cosmic "proof" of this especially subtle yet moving attunement between "things or people of the same type" (*wulei xianggan* 物類相感). For harmony could "enter the spirit", transforming it profoundly.<sup>73</sup> *Analects* 13.28 shows just how crucial intimate friendships were thought to be in the complex processes of self- and social-transformation ("cultivation in the Way"): the exemplary person was

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71 Cf. *Xunzi*, *juan 19* ("Li lun" 禮論), which stresses that while ordinary people believe mourning feeds and comforts the dead, the true gentleman realizes that mourning has the capacity to define the gentleman who acknowledges his debts to others, without threats, sanctions, or contracts forcing him to do so (see esp. 19/98/1–3). As Baier 1991: 143, notes (contra Robert Nozick and others), the "ego" or "self" is a "fairly fluidly bounded thing ... apt to get entangled with others and caught in the outer fringes of other living things". The same point for the early Chinese texts has been made by Nyland 2001; and, more recently, by Sommers 2008.

72 See *Shiji* 129.3282; also Nyland 2014.

73 See *Hanshi waizhuan* 1.16: "This expresses the idea of ... [objects with] with similar tones responding. The Ode says: 'With bells and drums we show our delight in him'" (*tong sheng xiang ying zhi yi ye*. *Shi yun: zhonggu yue zhi* 同聲相應之義也。詩云: 鐘鼓樂之). Hightower 1952: 25. The phrase "enters the spirit" occurs in connection with *xianggan* in the *Zhouyi* 周易, "Xici" 繫辭下 (*Zhouyi* 3/46).

“exacting in his attention towards his intimate friends, and cordial toward his brothers” (*peng you qieqie, sisi, xiongdi yiyi* 朋友切切、偲偲，兄弟怡怡). Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200), the Eastern Han moralist, was hardly the first to remark, “From the emperor on down to the common people, there is no one who does not need friends to accomplish things” (*zi tianzi zhiyu shuren, wei you bu xu you yi cheng zhe* 自天子至于庶人，未有不須友以成者) and to help identify the priority rightly placed upon the development of the person’s singular human potential.<sup>74</sup>

Some early Chinese texts claimed that friendship is the very “stuff” out of which mature human beings form their second natures. Others argued that it is only friends who can lend the proper polish to the bare material of the human being.<sup>75</sup> “Wise men made friends in order to expand their wisdom” (*xian lian you yi guang zhi* 賢連友以廣智), as the proverb went.<sup>76</sup> For while a family or community could foster the child’s initial formation, it is the knowing care of “friends without qualification” that lent the mature person the confidence, the heart as it were, to become the “best” possible version of her singular self.<sup>77</sup> Put another way, friends existed for each other’s benefit and pleasure, for when one friend ascribed to the other a compelling persona, that attribution somehow “enlarged” or “broadened” the friend, enabling her to regard herself as somewhat larger, finer, or better than before. As the proverb put it, “it is human beings who broaden the Way, and not the reverse” (*ren neng hong dao, fei dao hong ren*. 人能弘道，非道弘人).<sup>78</sup> Ideally, close friends, like the beneficent Dao itself, offered each other a sense of dignity and value.<sup>79</sup>

74 Preface to “Fa mu” Ode 165, in the *Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 9.3/142C.

75 For the first, see *Zhuangzi* 70/24/3 (“Xu wu gui” 徐無鬼), talking of the loss of Hui Shi: “I have no longer any basic material to work on, no one with whom I can discuss it” (*wu wu yi wei zhi yi, wu wu yu yan zhi yi* 吾無以為質矣，吾無與言之矣), which is quoted above (p. 1240): at n. 60; for the second, see *Fayan* 法言 2.2.

76 *Hanshi waizhuan* 8.11; Hightower 1952: 266.

77 For the phrase “friends without qualification” ( $\alpha\pi\lambda\omega\varsigma\varphi\iota\lambda\omega\iota$ ), see Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1157b4, which says this of friends whose character is good ( $\alpha\gamma\alpha\theta\delta\varsigma$ ).

78 *Analects* 15.29. Friendship, then, provides both the focus and motivation to act upon that image; one is inspired to live up to that heroic vision. Contrast this with the tests that show that we act as we believe others will act. Thus when Confucius describes the most enlightened person as “one who loves and spares himself” (rather than causing “others to love him” or even altruistically “loving others”), it is the intimate friend, presumably, who has facilitated this magnificent achievement, which consists of learning the high art of cultivating one’s best self – and gradually moving toward becoming it, which state or condition generally prompts movements in other things and people toward their own realizations.

79 For dignity, see Kateb 2011; Nylan 2012; Rosen 2012. According to modern theorists of friendship, “When interpreted from within the perspective of love, the experience of loneliness is transformed into an awareness of our singular identity. This identity is accepted and affirmed by

夫人之相知，貴識其天性，因而濟之 [...] 蓋不欲以枉其天才，令得其所也。

What is esteemed in human relationships is the just estimate of another's inborn nature, and helping him to realize it [...]. Anxious lest you pervert or damage its innate quality, [the true friend] would rather see it find its proper place.<sup>80</sup>

Thus “individuality” plays an expectedly large role in accounts of early friendship, even when talk of “individualism” (not to mention “altruism”) in the modern sense is absent.<sup>81</sup>

Crucially, the early texts tell us, only close friends having the requisite insights into their friends' defining features and characters are apt to offer useful criticism without causing offense. Since the norms of sociability enjoined tolerance and forbearance of others' flaws, few relations aside from intimate friendships permitted frank talk about another's shortcomings.<sup>82</sup> And since people barely listen to their enemies, only the dear friend had a prayer of correcting his friend. Thus the expectation that a true friend would criticize and contest, as well as comfort and assist.<sup>83</sup> By the early definitions, close friends need not know everything about each other, nor did they need to share all things. In the end, close friends sustain their relation through a keen appreciation of the very qualities that each held to sources of pride or of vital concern – an appreciation fostering the profound “self-understanding” (*zhi ji* 知己) and “self-realization” (*zide* 自得) that allowed the lucky friends to relinquish power over others and take greater satisfaction in acting in constructive ways.<sup>84</sup> Put another way, exemplary friends

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a true friend” (Sadler 1970: 201). “The person who is a friend must be appreciated as a unique self rather than simply a particular instance of a general class” (Suttles 1970: 100).

<sup>80</sup> Ji Kang 嵇康, “Letter to Shan Tao 山濤” (“Yu Shan ju yuan juejiao shu” 與山巨源絕交書) translated in Wang and Yi 2011: 466 (slightly mod.).

<sup>81</sup> Knowing friendships alert people to human differences; friendship is moreover a mechanism of individuality, as is art (especially music, as the chief art in early China). Our close friendships make us feel differently and interpret actions differently; we see our friends as more unique and consequential than they are, and we see ourselves in their actions (also as more unique and consequential than we are). Fingarette 1983: 332 argues that there is no “self” in the modern sense in Confucius; “to cultivate the self” or “to conquer oneself” means merely to “commit one's energies to developing according to ritual” (where ritual is something external to the self); this insight grounds much of what follows. The Kongzi of the *Analects* places most emphasis on the social self, as do all the other early thinkers for whom we have masterworks.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Sennet 2012: 120, on Castiligione's view that “civility, more than a personality trait, is an exchange in which both parties make one another feel good about the encounter ... It is a win-win exchange”.

<sup>83</sup> This point is highlighted in *Qianfu lun* chap. 30 (“*Jiao ji*” 交際 [“On forging connections”]), which deems making friends a basic “human” inclination.

<sup>84</sup> After all, exemplary people who prove compelling to others may fail to understand many things, but they had better not fail to understand themselves.

bound and improved through this radical empathy could in theory achieve an enviable state where they felt their movements to be fundamentally unhindered (“unfettered”, “unencumbered”, and “un-enslaved” in the classical parlance), until death, the final transformation, came to claim them.<sup>85</sup> Not surprisingly, this intangible but enlivening gift of unqualified trust elicited in both parties, we are told, a strong desire to requite the favor, sometimes even recklessly, i.e., in defiance of ritual or status considerations, as well as family or community interests.<sup>86</sup> No writer of classical Chinese fell into the Facebook trap of positing intimate friendship as a “private relation” that can be freely taken up or left without doing serious harm to one’s sense of self and of belonging; since “intimate friendship” supposedly increased both the person’s capacity and opportunities to derive pleasure from sociable acts, strong commitments inevitably ensued. Small wonder, then, that the antique rhetoricians located the practice of friendship outside the circumscribed realm of everyday rules, rituals, and norms, somewhere nearer the sacred.

Fortune favors intimate friends, and true friends consider themselves stupendously lucky to have encountered one another somehow. Thus intimate friendship in the antique models hardly qualifies as “voluntary” in the modern sense.<sup>87</sup> To cite an example: many of us today resist the notion of a father “choosing friends” for his son, but this situation did not strike early readers of classical Chinese as atypical or oxymoronic. As David Konstan notes, when speaking of friendship in the classical Mediterranean,

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<sup>85</sup> *N.b.*, I am trying very hard here to avoid the language of “debt” and “obligation”, both of which derive from “market” contacts and monetary transactions.

<sup>86</sup> One good example comes from the Han-era *Baihu tong* 白虎通, which said that one could not only share property with a friend, but die for him, if the parents are not living. See Tjan 1952, 2: 562–563. The *locus classicus* of “dying for a friend” comes from the Han-era *Liji*. See “Qu li shang” (曲禮上) 1.13. For further information, see Kutcher 2000: 1620. During the Eastern Jin 東晉 dynasty (317–420), Vice Censor Fu Xian 傅咸 defiantly celebrated his friendship with Lu Hongji 魯宏濟, though Lu had been disgraced at court, which disgrace might have landed Fu in trouble. The *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 gives one tale of a reckless friendship, in defiance of ritual: “Wei Jun-zhang 衛君長 [Wei Yong 衛永] served under Wen 溫 [Qiao 嶠]. Wen was very close to him. Wen would often pick up some wine and dried meats and visit Wei. They would sit across from each other, legs spread apart, drinking all day. When Wei visited Wen, he would do the same” (衛君長為溫公長史，溫公甚善之。每率爾提酒脯就衛，箕踞相對彌日。衛往溫許，亦爾。). See *Shishuo xinyu* 23.29; Mather 1976: 410.

<sup>87</sup> I argue, contra many, that *you* 友 does not “require a measure of personal autonomy”. See Rouner 1994: 1. The intensity of the longing for friendship when that longing goes unfulfilled is the subject of many famous poems in classical Chinese, as well as the majority of “hypothetical discourses” (*she lun* 設論). For the latter, see Declercq 1998. Both custom and morality mandated allegiance to one’s ruler.

An achieved relationship does not necessarily mean one that depends essentially upon free or personal choice ... . The role of election in friendship, though commonly insisted upon in modern accounts, appears to be historically variable.<sup>88</sup>

Thankfully, a few modern philosophers have decried the current propensity to cast all significant actions as “chosen” and “voluntary”, thinking this characterization contradicts good evidence culled from earlier times.<sup>89</sup>

These are huge claims, of course, but I would argue that the overwhelming thrust of the early texts at our disposal presupposed these claims, as the dominant focus of the rhetoric of intimate friendship shifts over time. If the extant sources are any guide to the early sources, the first lyrical bursts celebrating the joys of intimate friends (*you*) came eventually to be outnumbered by angry diatribes bemoaning the petty man’s failures to correctly prioritize a wide array of less-than-intimate contacts forged with colleagues (often *liao* 僚), allies (often *peng* 朋), acquaintances and contacts (*jiao* 交).<sup>90</sup> However, the main outlines of the antique constructions requires us to query, and probably jettison altogether, the pious platitudes alleging first, the Chinese devaluation of “horizontal” friendships as compared with the hierarchical relations of ruler-minister, husband-wife, parent-child, and older-younger sibling; and second, the Western inclination to exclude the possibility of intimate friendship between the sexes.

To reiterate the points that merit our attention, all early descriptions of intimate friendships, regardless of origin,<sup>91</sup> define intimate friendship in much the same way. “Friends act to help their friends realize their potentials”, what we might today call “their personal bests”. Both types of friendships, the intimate and the less-intimate, were conceived as reservoirs of resources; intimate friendship promised more: that a person could learn the satisfactions of long-term sus-

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<sup>88</sup> See Konstan 1997: 1. Some argue, as Konstan’s “Introduction” notes, that friendship did not even exist in the West (or elsewhere, by implication) before the Renaissance. This chapter disputes this factoid, as does Konstan’s book. Cooper 1997: 645, concurs: “But clearly enough, in the actual course of events, the first meeting may well be quite accidental and subsequent stages in the development of the [friends’] relationship quite unmotivated”. Cooper continues: “It is clear ... that, on Aristotle’s view, civic, and not just personal friendship is an essential component in the flourishing human life” (Cooper 1997: 648). Aristotle’s *Politics* 1252a recognizes that many human ties do not result from deliberate choice. Of course, Pico della Mirandola’s oration (posthumously entitled *Dignitate hominis*, “On the Dignity of Man”) sets the tone for most modern rhetoric, in claiming that what sets man apart is his free will. Man chooses his own destiny.

<sup>89</sup> See the work of such philosophers as Gilbert Ryle, Elizabeth Anscombe, and Herbert Fingarette.

<sup>90</sup> For the latter, see *Shiji* 24.1178. See Nylan (2014, forthcoming), on *Shiji* 129, “Assets Accumulating”.

<sup>91</sup> Some would try to label certain stories Confucian, Daoist, or Legalist. This sectarian view of the distant past is anachronistic.

taining relations, and thereby attain freedom from his or her baser impulses and actions.<sup>92</sup> Friendship straddled an important divide that normally separated official duties from the domestic sphere, for while “private” or “solitary” pleasures were apt to be labeled “ugly” (*e* 惡) and anti-social,<sup>93</sup> music and friendship somehow evaded such dichotomies. Entertaining friends and guests, for instance, could be “public” in the specific sense that wide circles of people were meant to learn of the proceedings and be edified by them, even when the actual guest list for the party excluded all but a select few.

### 3 Tales of severing relations

The rhetoric of severing relations that survives from antiquity is, if anything, more memorable than the rhetoric of true friendship. It is, after all, so much easier to dramatize a break than to portray a quiet and sustained harmony. Noting that it was sometimes impossible to end a friendship, Aristotle nonetheless advised his followers to try, if one friend became convinced that the other was not a good person.<sup>94</sup> By contrast, in early China, as we have seen, ritual propriety advised

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<sup>92</sup> *Zhuangzi*, Chapter Two (“Qi wu lun” 齊物論), for example, imagines the air or *qi* 氣 as moving through things via the panpipes of heaven, earth, and man, setting off all manner of sounds, but ideally in such a way that “each gets to be itself” (*shi qi zi ji* 使其自己) and nothing forces the sounds “roaring like waves, whistling like arrows, screeching, gasping, crying, wailing, moaning, howling” (*jizhe, xiaozhe, chizhe, xizhe, jiaozhe, haozhe, yaozhe, jiaozhe* 激者，謫者，叱者，吸者，叫者，謷者，寔者，咬者). *Xunzi* 10/43/4 and early commentaries, including the Mao preface to *Maoshi*, Ode 165 (“Fa mu” 伐木), insist that “from the Son of Heaven on down to the common people”, every single person needs friendship and music “to complete and perfect him” (自天子至于庶人，未有不須友以成者).

<sup>93</sup> But service to government is not always opposed to making close friends. The *Liezi* 4/23/15 (“Zhongni” 仲尼), has a passage describing the good life of a man plagued by illness, who could not serve in government, but who could contact his friends (*gu bu ke shi guojun, jiao qinyou, yu qizi, zhi puli* 固不可事國君，交親友，御妻子，制僕隸).

<sup>94</sup> Rouner 1994: 71. The modern notion of friendship, East or West, plainly derives from Aristotle’s division of friendships into three kinds: those based in mutual pleasure or utility (friendships that retain some degree of self-centeredness, despite the precondition for friendship, that the one friend wish the other well *for his own sake*), or, ideally, in mutual regard for the friend’s good character (which also implies “wanting for the friend what he thinks good”). For Aristotle, only the last of the three types signifies “perfect” or “complete” friendship of good will toward the other. For the inherent self-centeredness of the first two types of friendship in Aristotle, see Cooper 1997: 625. Yet, as Cooper says, “Friendship requires, at a minimum, some effective concern for the other person’s good (including his profit and his pleasure) out of regard for him” (Cooper 1997: 644). Otherwise, the people are not friends, but sexual partners or partners in a commercial transaction.

the avoidance, if at all possible, of any public break with a person once deemed an intimate, on two practical grounds: (a) how badly a longstanding or intense tie to an unworthy character would reflect upon the erstwhile friend who wanted to make a break, and (b) how bereft the unworthy person would be of opportunities for potentially humanizing contact, if left entirely to his own devices. The first consideration was especially important in an era before the “blind” civil service examinations initiated in the eleventh century in China, for a man was deemed qualified or disqualified to serve in office, depending on the character assessments compiled by local dignitaries in thick dossiers.<sup>95</sup>

In antiquity, all civilized forms of sociability presupposed some use of the arts of tactful withdrawal, no less than those of tactful invitation, artful equivocation being an admired form of rhetoric with recognized social functions. The hope was therefore that faithful adherence to the ritual prescriptions would allow the disappointed friend to “retreat without leaving a bad taste in [either] mouth”,<sup>96</sup> letting the once intense friendship die down gradually, without too overt a rupture. Especially during times of political upheaval, even the most subtle maneuverers might worry how best to break off relations with an intimate friend. One must not appear to be acting out of pique; instead, one must instantiate for his peers at court and also for later generations the ideal *manner* and *timing* of a highly ritualized break, so as not to jeopardize one’s standing as a man of cultivation and character. Hence the admonition, “The true gentleman, severing his relations, emits not a single ugly word” (*junzi zhi jiao jue wu e sheng* 君子之交絕無惡聲).<sup>97</sup> (One idly wonders if the sharp upsurge in use of the term “dear friend” [*qin you* 親友] in Six Dynasties literature does not itself point to fear of reprisals.)

That said, the extant sources do not hesitate to remind us how often and how quickly “fair weather friends” forsook those who relied upon them, demonstrating their lack of humanity. One passage describes the reprehensible ways of so-called “friends” motivated by self-interest:

有勢則賓客十倍，無勢則否，況眾人乎！下邦翟公有言，始翟公為廷尉，賓客闐門；及廢，門外可設雀羅。翟公復為廷尉，賓客欲往，翟公乃大署其門曰：一死一生，乃知交情。一貧一富，乃知交態。一貴一賤，交情乃見。

<sup>95</sup> Hence the frequency with which the reader encounters *xiangli* 鄉里 stories, where local men and women judge people’s character and propensities. See the *Qian Han ji* 前漢記, 21.397, for a “local saying” about Wang Yang 王陽 and his wife. Relevant here is Matthias Richter 2005, on characterology.

<sup>96</sup> In Qian Zhongshu 2010: 1575, the phrase is *jiaoyou er gan tuiji jiao ji zhe you zhi* 交友而甘退居交際者有之.

<sup>97</sup> *Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓 12.8 (“Wenda shiyi” 問答釋義).

When men are in power, their clients and retainers gather in droves, but should they lose power, their hangers-on disappear. How much more is this the case with ordinary men! They say of Honourable Zhai of Xiagui, when he served his first term as Commandant of Justice, that his clients and retainers filled his gates, but as soon as he was demoted, he could set up nets for sparrows outside his doors [so quiet was his neighborhood]. Later, when Zhai was reappointed to the same ministerial post, his former clients and retainers tried to come back [for further patronage], but Zhai barred the entrance to his house, saying, ‘Only in matters of life and death does a person come to know how to assess one’s social contacts properly. And only with alternations of poverty and wealth can one learn the right attitude to adopt in social contacts. And only with dramatic shifts in rank will the motivations for forging social contacts appear clear as day.’<sup>98</sup>

Thereafter the “setting up sparrow nets” metaphor described the “experience of abandonment by the very people whom one once mistakenly regarded as dear friends”<sup>99</sup> – a metaphor all the more trenchant for the contrast it presents to the busy “rubbing of shoulders” that took place among those anxious to advance their careers by networking.<sup>100</sup> A second story from the same source conveys much the same message, this time with its protagonist the Lord of Mengchang 孟嘗君 (fl. 301–284 BCE), a figure whose household “guests” included thousands of people at the apogee of his power. When Mengchang at one point lamented the disappearance of all the old “friends” who once formed his retinue, an astute would-be advisor surnamed Feng 馮 chided him for his obtuseness: patron-client relations are much more like market transactions than like trusted friendships, so the swift departure of Mengchang’s clientele was only to be expected.<sup>101</sup> To excoriate such people for their fickle natures was both self-righteous and counter-productive, since Mengchang would do better to look to his own failures to assess men properly.<sup>102</sup>

By pre-imperial times, the charge that careerists sought to “cultivate contacts, so as to secure their posts and salaries” (*yang jiao an lu* 養交安祿) was already

<sup>98</sup> *Shiji* 120.3113–3114. The first time Zhai Gong 翟公 was Superintendent of Trials was in 130–127 BCE; his reappointment is not dated. Gong is a courtesy title. This Zhai Gong is not the father of Zhai Fangjin 翟方進, though they may be related. See Loewe 2000: 671.

<sup>99</sup> See, e.g., Lu Sidao’s 盧思道 (531–582) essay cited in *Suishu* 隨書 57.1400.

<sup>100</sup> Compare Nietzsche’s notion of “ladder friendships” in *Human, All Too Human*, the idea that one acquires and drops friendships as one climbs the ladder of success.

<sup>101</sup> *Shiji* 75.2362: 今君失位，賓客皆去，不足以怨士而徒絕賓客之路。“Now you have lost your high position, so your guests have all left. This is insufficient reason to blame these men and cut off all intercourse with [potential] clients and retainers [like me].”

<sup>102</sup> See *Zhanguoce* 戰國策, 136a/67/1–5 (“Qi ce” 齊策). Cf. *Zhanguoce* 30.1108; *Shiji* 80.2433, which cite the proverb alleging that the Ancients, in severing relations, “did not speak ugly words” (*bu chu e sheng* 不出惡聲).

such a well-worn trope for a travesty of real friendship<sup>103</sup> – as we can see from Wang Fu's 王符 (ca. 76–ca. 157) *Qianfu lun*<sup>104</sup> and Liu Zongyuan's 柳宗元 (773–819) “Song Qing zhuan” 宋清傳<sup>105</sup> – that readers of classical Chinese often found even more thrilling the tragic essays and letters composed by people of breeding who had decided to publicly sever their relations with former friends, sometimes at considerable risk to their own reputations (see below).<sup>106</sup> Predictably enough, many, if not all the formal letters of severing friendship allude to the real dangers of maintaining an intimate friendship at a time when the power differentials between the parties are shifting toward greater inequality. In response, the letters sent by the less powerful of the two parties frequently sought to re-assert a sort of equality of honor, and a letter writer's adamant refusal to accept his unequal status might actually serve to lower the social standing or reputation of the letter's recipient, so long as the letter writer was skillful enough in his rhetoric to avoid self-repudiation while appealing to higher values or more rarified forms of trust.<sup>107</sup> At the same time, many writers of the requisite social standing registered acute discomfort when asked to trumpet their trustworthiness and sociability in the full glare of publicity at court, for any overplaying of their hands in social

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**103** See, e.g., *Shiji* 24.1230; *Guanzi* 管子, 15.5/112/23 (“Mingfa” 明法): “Petty officers maintain their posts and salaries by cultivating contacts, rather than by attending to their official duties” (*xiaochen chilu yangjiao, bu yi guan wei shi* 小臣持祿養交，不以官為事); *Han Feizi* 韓非子 16/29/13 uses the same expression *chilu yangjiao* 持祿養交, as does *Xunzi* 16/65/10. *Zhuangzi*, 54/20/20 equates “roaming to make contacts” (*jiao you* 交遊) as “forming groups chaotically” (*luan qun* 亂群). For this sort of roaming, one might watch the episode of “Parks and Recreation”, where one character is described in this way: “He's a tourist. He vacations in people's lives, takes pictures, puts them in his scrapbook, and moves on. All he's interested in are stories. Basically, ... he's selfish”.

**104** Wang Fu, a rough contemporary of Zhu Mu's 朱穆 (100–163) and Cai Yong's 蔡邕 (133–192) (see below), was a self-described recluse, who was fond of loudly complaining about his peers' failure to elevate him to office. If Wang is to be believed, his contemporaries were apt to prize “new acquaintances” and forget “old friends”, on the grounds that the poor and friendless only drain one's resources while damaging one's reputation. See *Qianfu lun* 2:20, “On Friendship and Contacts” (“Jiao ji” 交際), found in Ebrey 1993: 69–71 (omitting a few passages).

**105** *Liu Zongyuan ji* 17.471–472.

**106** That social censure generally attached to such absolute uncompromising behavior, however, as Ying Shao's 應劭 *Fengsu tongyi* and many other texts demonstrate. See *Fengsu tongyi*, chapters 3–5.

**107** To take one example: Ji Kang in his letter asserts that he trusts Shan Tao in many conventional respects, but Ji does not trust that Shan Tao will act to further Ji's own development. In the hierarchy of important trusts, the highest place goes to trusting another to further one's own unique potentials. This Shan Tao has failed to do.

exchanges was apt to leave their motives open to suspicion.<sup>108</sup> Thus we ought to accept the premises that any formal break between men at court was *never* private and *never* an artifact of individual agency or autonomous choice, adopting a less anachronistic approach to the “severing relations” essays and letters that have come down to us from the early eras.<sup>109</sup>

Given the risks of severing relations, some prominent figures at court preferred to anticipate the need for a break, lest a later public break prove more ruinous to the parties concerned. Here the key requirement was for the party initiating the break to soften the blow by emphasizing his heartfelt regrets over the decision he had finally come to. With a sufficiently well-crafted “dissolving connection” letter conveying an air of authentic emotion, the author could hope to escape the full measure of blame, as the story of Yuan Qiao 袁喬, recorded in the *Jinshu*, shows. Yuan Qiao had long been friends with Chu Pou 褚裒, an equally fine man. But once Chu’s daughter became empress,<sup>110</sup> Yuan could foresee the day when he, a mere minister, out of sheer carelessness, when drunk or teasing, might “slip into a relation of [criminal] irreverence with the empress’ father”. As Yuan explained,

平昔之交，與禮數而降。箕踞之歡，隨時事而替。雖欲虛詠濛肆，脫落儀制，其能得乎！來物無停，變化遷代。豈惟寸晷。事亦有之。 [...] 願將軍怡情無事，以理勝為任，親杖賢達，以納善為大。執筆惆悵，不能自盡。

So this old friendship must come to an end, as the demands of ritual have shifted. With the passage of time, the joys of sitting together with legs splayed far apart [in relaxed fashion, ignoring all ritual propriety] will be replaced [by other sorts of relations]. Although I might want to sing freely with you, letting my words flow out unrestrained, and throw off the burden of perfect decorum, would I be allowed to act in such a way [with impunity, now that your daughter is empress]? Things constantly shift and change. As they say, when the sundial moves an inch, it’s a whole different situation [...]. I hope that you, general, continue happy and unburdened by things; that you will serve with principles always in mind; that you will rely on the virtuous and employ the good. As I hold this brush [to write this letter

<sup>108</sup> See Knechtges 2001: 230. Hence the (disgusting) Eastern Han four-character expression for sycophants: *shun yong shi zhi* 吻癰舐痔 (or *shun yong er wu lin se* 吻癰而無恠色); cf. *po yong kui cuo* 破癰潰痔 (“suck boils and lick piles”). On the tensions within the tradition, see Nylan 1996; Baier 1991: 112.

<sup>109</sup> Like a few medieval historians of Europe, notably those collected in Althoff et al. 2002, I would argue that the early, as well as middle period China had a very highly developed sense of public space, though that “space” tended to be letters and stories, rather than courts and halls and plazas, where events played out in such considered ways that even displays of extreme emotions could be intentional, masterfully choreographed tools of communication.

<sup>110</sup> Chu Pou’s daughter, Emperor Kang’s 康 legal consort, became empress dowager and regent in 357 CE. Once Chu’s daughter became empress dowager, most people at the court felt that Sima Yu 司馬昱 should allow Chu Pou to “hold the principal power at court”. See Mather 1976: 59, 16.

dissolving our relation], I can hardly give full expression to the mingled melancholy and nostalgia that I am feeling now.<sup>111</sup>

All who read this letter, the histories tell us, deemed it entirely “in accordance with the rituals”; an unusual turn of fate made it nearly impossible for the heart-to-heart confidences to continue in their old easygoing way.

If few friendships were formally severed because of the dangers of *lèse-majesté*, such dangers seem to have been real enough. By the early empires, men in high position would have had ample opportunity to ponder the moral of the story told of Mi Zixia 弥子瑕, the beloved male favorite of the Lord of Wei 衛 in antiquity. As legend has it, Mi was once strolling in the garden with his ruler, when he bit into a peach (then a luxury), and, finding it particularly sweet, suggested that his lord and ruler partake of it as well. During that garden stroll, the Lord of Wei, right then in the first flush of erotic passion for Mi, took his lover’s generosity to be a sure sign of extraordinary love. But as time passed and Mi’s looks faded, the Lord of Wei, coolly recalling the incident, decided to execute Mi for offering him a half-eaten peach.<sup>112</sup>

To understand this “severing relations” literature, readers could hardly do better than consider the analysis offered by the upright official Zhu Mu 朱穆 (100–163) during the reign of Shundi 順帝 (r. 125–44) in two separate essays devoted to the topic.<sup>113</sup> Zhu Mu’s “On Upholding Tolerance and Magnanimity” (“Chonghou lun” 崇厚論) famously argued that the Confucian injunctions “to offend no one” and “to give no cause for complaint” lest a person endanger himself and his family members could never be reconciled with a third Confucian injunction: to offer “praise and blame” (*baobian* 褒貶) as needed. In point of fact, nearly always the delivery of forthright criticisms riled the criticized. A second essay by Zhu, “On Severing Contacts” (“Jue jiao lun” 絶交論), took up a similar conundrum. There an unnamed interlocutor asks his master whether a refusal to maintain the usual contacts with others does not risk provoking their resentment and impeding his career. Zhu Mu stoutly declared that he, at least, can “bear the scorn” (*shouji* 受疾) of others, since the current crop of officials merely “steal their reputations” (*qieyu* 竊譽); they do not perform their duties faithfully or regard their

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<sup>111</sup> *Jinshu* 83.2167–2168. Jansen 2006: 362 refers to this letter but offers no comment on it.

<sup>112</sup> The story of Mi Zixia is repeated in many sources, including *Shuoyuan* 17:04.

<sup>113</sup> See Jansen 2006: 352–355, 361–362. Zhu Mu’s essay, “On Severing Contacts”, written in the form of a hypothetical dialogue (*she lun*) is very short; it may be only a fragment of the original. This essay is dated to the 150s CE, when Zhu Mu had reached high office in the provinces, if not the capital. Liu Jun 劉峻 (464–522) wrote a long “expansion” of this piece, now included in *Wenxuan* 文選 55.2365–80.

emperor with sufficient awe. That being the case, Zhu Mu concluded that he would prefer to take the risk, since observing the usual court niceties of entertaining and being entertained might thoroughly compromise his reputation, and then what future prospects for service to the court would he have? To accept convention and enter into close relations with men who are fundamentally corrupt would “abrogate ritual” (*fan li* 犯禮) and “undermine the common good” 背公. Zhu Mu notes that “the Ancients” (*guzhe* 古者) were content enough to display their “awesome bearings” in the formal settings afforded by the court and by community banquets (*xiang jian yi gong chao, xiang hui yi li ji* 相見以公朝, 享會以禮紀). Absent true friends of proven worth, a person can do very little except focus on mending his own shortcomings. (One wonders whether Zhu Mu wrote this essay after defending himself against slanderers a court.)<sup>114</sup> The essay ends with a poem comparing an unnamed former friend with a rapacious owl, “gluttonous and greedy, stinking and rotten” (*taotie tanwu choufu shi shi* 饑饕貪汙臭腐是食) while Zhu reserves the status of phoenix for himself.<sup>115</sup>

Cai Yong 蔡邕, at court half a century later, was a fervent admirer of Zhu Mu inclined to vent in the same vein. Legend has Cai making a pilgrimage to Zhu’s family home after Zhu’s death, where he copied Zhu’s manuscripts, and we know that Cai wrote an essay expanding upon Zhu’s points.<sup>116</sup> Cai’s essay entitled “Correcting Contacts” (“Zheng jiao lun” 正交論) emphasizes the extreme caution that the exemplary person must show before making a friend, lest he later come to regret the association. Since the cautious person of true virtue, like Confucius himself, neither “waits upon the rich and influential” (*bu dai fu fu gui* 不待夫富貴) nor “holds the poor, the young, and the low-ranking in contempt” (*bu jiao fu pin jian* 不驕夫貧賤), he need never fear that he will go without friends during his lifetime. He will simply lack the sort of disingenuous friends who are prone anyway “to desert old friends” (*qi jiu* 棄舊) in hard times.<sup>117</sup> Throughout his career, his assessments of other men’s characters will be more accurate, insofar as they are disinterested; that explains why friendships forged between men of

<sup>114</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 43.1468; cf. *Qian Hou Hanwen* 前後漢文 28.630. The former friend, Liu Bozong 劉伯宗, possibly acted inappropriately when he took off mourning while paying his visit to the local district magistrate’s office, which Zhu Mu then occupied. Jansen (2006: 353) remarks that this is the only case known to him of a letter “severing relations” ending with this sort of a corroborative poem. Zhu’s former friend was the only one to have acted inappropriately.

<sup>115</sup> A probable reference to the “Qiushui” 秋水 chapter of *Zhuangzi*.

<sup>116</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 43.1474. Cai supposedly deemed Zhu’s essay on severing relations a “genuinely moving piece showing [admirable] self-possession” (貞而孤).

<sup>117</sup> Cf. *Analects* 1/15–16; 4/14; 12/23; 14/13.

exemplary character will reap significant rewards,<sup>118</sup> a claim underpinning the popular characterological treatises in late Eastern Han and post-Han.<sup>119</sup>

Somewhat later in time, we have an equally notable contribution to the “severing relations” rhetoric in Ji Kang’s (223–262) famous “lofty and grand” “Letter to Shan Tao”, supposedly sent not long before Ji’s execution in 263 CE, at the age of 40.<sup>120</sup> For years, Ji had sought to avoid court service, sensing (rightly) that his marriage ties with the Cao family, the nominal rulers, would only endanger him at a court presided over by would-be usurpers in the Sima 司馬 family. When Shan Tao, possibly himself between a rock and a hard place, invited Ji Kang to become Shan’s subordinate at court, Ji roundly berated Shan as one “who, in fact, did not get it!” (*zuxia gu bu zhi zhi* 足下故不知之).<sup>121</sup> According to Ji, the most exemplary figures from the past shared only one thing in common: they had found a way “to follow their own commitments” (*neng zhu qi zhi zhe ye* 能遂其志者也). So while Ji Kang not only admitted to, but also boasted of a wide range of character flaws, flaws that made him quite unsuited to office-holding, he asked in the letter to live out his days in peace, “nourishing life” (*yang sheng* 養生) and avoiding potentially “polarizing” activities and occasions.<sup>122</sup> And then Ji offers the curious remark that this approach seems all the more desirable now that he has belatedly “come to realize that it is possible for a few men with lofty principles to exist”, so long as they are under the protection of powerful people.<sup>123</sup> Most

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<sup>118</sup> *Analects* 1/6; cf. 15/20. Only friendships with cultivated men of noble actions can be advertised anyway.

<sup>119</sup> E.g., Liu Shao’s 劉邵 *Renwu zhi* 人物志 (compiled ca. 230 CE). How to separate the genuinely worthy men from the untrustworthy sycophants, cronies, and partisans constituted one of the chief problems in governing the realm well. Xu Gan 徐幹 (171–218), a junior contemporary of Cai Yong, wrote his “Castigating Contacts” to push this same theme further, since the ability to form proper associations was so fundamental to unofficial and official life.

<sup>120</sup> Ji’s letter is called “truly lofty in its commitments and preeminent in its writing style” 實志高而文偉 in *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 25.929. For the text of the letter, see *Ji Kang ji* 270–284; cf. Holzman 1997.

<sup>121</sup> Here, the second *zhi* (usually thought to stand for Ji Kang himself, “you do not understand me”) is more likely to mean “you do not get it [the situation]”.

<sup>122</sup> Ji’s admitted character flaws included arrogance, slovenliness, and bluntness to the point of rudeness. Still worse, he could never hold his tongue and he was accustomed to lambaste both the conventional models inherited from antiquity and the “new men” of ambition who won such general acclaim in his own age. I translate *wu wei* 無為 as “to avoid polarizing” or “oppositional” behavior, following a suggestion by Shigehisa Kuriyama 栗山茂久 (Jan. 26, 2013, private conversation).

<sup>123</sup> Ji Kang specifically mentions Ruan Ji’s 阮籍 (210–263) protection by Sima Zhao 司馬昭 (211–265) – protection he could not expect to claim, as kin to the ruling family about to be overthrown, and also an arch enemy of Zhong Hui 種會 (d. 264), a successful general and long-time advisor to the Simas.

likely, this formulation by Ji holds the key to any reading of his character, but it is a marvel of ambiguity. Perhaps it drips with sarcasm, alleging that there are no decent men at the court. Or perhaps it represents a last-ditch naked appeal for patronage from the Simas. Then again, it may simply be a way to justify the break with Shan Tao, whom Ji had taken for a good-enough friend in more cynical days. As a friend, Shan Tao should know better to think that he, Ji, would be tempted by the prospect of mere fame and court distinctions.

若趣欲共登王塗，期于相致，時為權益，一旦迫之，必發其狂疾，自非重怨，不至  
于此也。

If you force me to join you in the ruler's service, expecting our rise together to be a source of pleasure and help to one another, one day you may find that the pressure has instead driven me quite mad. Only my bitterest enemy would go this far [to harm me]!

Did Ji Kang really think that Shan Tao had sunk so low as to aimlessly “drift along with the vulgar habits” (*liusu* 流俗) of the other courtiers, in his craven desire to curry favor with his bloody patrons, the Simas? That is the question that has intrigued readers, generation after generation.

Several modern scholars, Lü Lihan 呂立漢, Thomas Jansen, and Wang Yi among them,<sup>124</sup> have raised doubts about the traditional understanding of the letter advanced in the *Wenxin diaolong* compiled less than a century after Ji Kang's execution. How is the reader to square Ji Kang's ostensible self-denigration with his evident disdain for Shan Tao? Was Ji Kang determined to insult Shan Tao?<sup>125</sup> If so, why would Ji Kang have assured his son, shortly before his execution, that he, the son, “would never be alone, so long as [Shan Tao] lived” (*Juyuan zai, ru bu gu yi* 巨源在，汝不孤矣)?<sup>126</sup> Did Ji anticipate that he would soon be charged with a capital crime, so his only recourse was to try to save his good friend Shan Tao from being implicated in his crimes? Was Ji Kang really determined not to serve as Shan's subordinate, because he foresaw – and honestly deplored – Shan's clumsy attempts to silence him (well-meaning or otherwise)? Or did Ji Kang want to claim superior status as a lofty recluse, heedless of any possible future repercussions for himself and Shan Tao? Ji's letter is replete with half-developed arguments that, pushed, could support any of the readings above. This may explain why

124 Lü Lihan 1995; Jansen 2006; Wang and Fu 2011.

125 Lü Lihan 1995 speculates that Ji Kang's self-denigration was meant to forestall criticism, and therefore save Ji Kang's skin once he accepted a high court office. Jansen 2006 argues that Ji Kang meant to save his friend from trouble, so that the letter becomes a “precautionary measure to exculpate Shan Tao from any doubt concerning his loyalty to the [Sima] regime” to whom Ji Kang was openly opposed.

126 *Jinshu* 43.1223.

later generations have read the letter so obsessively, a second letter by Ji Kang not garnering a fraction of the attention.<sup>127</sup> Are there clues to be gleaned from another anecdote, in which Ji Kang, on the eve of his execution, calmly plucks the zither strings to the tune of his own “Melody of Guangling” 廣陵 composition, then lets the melody die with him rather than teach it to anybody else?<sup>128</sup> Certainly this anecdote highlights Ji’s apparent lack of feeling for any friends and family members. He appears to be a lonely man habituated to a “selfish” and disconnected way of life that was anathema to many Confucian exemplars, who advocated forging close friendships with honorable men, when possible, or with “friends in history”, the legendary exemplars of the past, when not.<sup>129</sup>

## 4 Conclusion

No Chinese thinker, so far as I know, would agree with Seneca’s pronouncement that “the wise man is self-sufficient”, “living happily even without friends”.<sup>130</sup> From early on, the rhetoric in classical-era China cast intimate friendships as the best possible way to expand one’s perspectives and thereby lead oneself down the path of cultivation necessary for the development of one’s own singular and unique talents. Many before me have commented that only in early China can one seek intimate “friends in history”, engaging the authors or stock characters of finely wrought texts so deeply in one’s imagination that they shape one’s character and thinking.<sup>131</sup> Judging from the extant sources, however, in later centuries, the pitfalls and perils of intimacy with false friends became a more frequent topic of discussion. In both types of rhetoric, the negative or positive associations of intimate friendship reflected the primacy of friendship among the social relations

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**127** Jansen 2006 speculates that the lack of historical allusions in the second letter, “Letter to Lü Changti Severing the Friendship” (“Yu Lü Changti jue jiao shu” 與呂長悌絕交書) also made it less compelling to later readers. Cf. *Shishuo xinyu* 15.3; Mather 1976: 356.

**128** “The Melody is no more” anecdote, from *Shishuo xinyu* 6.2; Mather 1976: 190. For a picture of Ji Kang, see Laing 1974, fig. 1-2; also Spiro 1990, *passim*. The metaphor comparing Ji Kang to a solitary pine tree comes from Shan Tao, quoted in *Shishuo xinyu* 14.5; Mather 1976: 331.

**129** One sees why in early times to teach another a favorite melody was to bestow a special favor not easily granted to any but one’s closest friends. The story says of Ji Kang that he finally repented his refusal to teach a melody to Yuan Zhun 袁準, but it was too late. The melody was “no more”. See *Shishuo xinyu* 6.2; Mather 1976: 190. For “friends in history”, the locus classicus is *Analects* 7.5; *Mencius* 5B/8.

**130** Seneca (rpt. in Pakaluk 1991: 122).

**131** I find this ideal in other cultures (e.g., those in Latin), though it may be more pervasive in China.

that defined the mature adult. Nearly a decade ago, Aat Vervoorn opined that intimate friendship (*you*) figured in fine rhetoric not as the least important of the social relationships but as the most developed of the social virtues.<sup>132</sup> This essay builds upon his too often neglected insight.

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