

Xue Xuan's 薛瑄 life was dull, but Li Mengyang's was not. Chaoying Fang's 房兆楹 entry on Li in the *Dictionary of Ming Biography* shows that he emerged from a social background of shiftlessness, irresponsibility, and poverty.<sup>2</sup> His official career was stormy. He spent a lot of time in prison for lodging political protests, including a protest against the court in 1505, and for championing a student strike in Jiangxi in 1511. In 1521, he was imprisoned again, and the next year he was reduced to commoner status. We now need a good biography of Li, dealing with his real-life personality and career and the connections these might have with his writings.

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***One Who Knows Me: Friendship and Literary Culture in Mid-Tang China.*** By Anna M. Shields. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015. Pp. ix + 363. \$49.95/£39.95.

*One Who Knows Me* is the first book-length exploration of friendship in Chinese tradition. Professor Anna M. Shields of Princeton University examines friendships among literati in medieval China, and their role in political advancement and literary creations. It is indispensable research for those interested in the perception and realization of friendship, as well as in the literary innovations and social values of writings about friendship in the mid-Tang. The book also sheds light on the reasons for the literati's experimentation with different literary topics, styles, and forms, and why they turned so often to writing about personal experience.

The contents are encompassing, informative, and scholarly, with ample citations and a comprehensive bibliography that covers research in different languages. At the beginning of each chapter is a relevant quotation from the literature. Within the chapter itself, quotations from texts are provided with the original Chinese. When a literary work is analysed, its full text or a major extract is often included. Although the author claims that the scope of the book is narrow, she has included a substantial number of literary works of different genres with a wealth of citations. This review will begin by discussing the nature of the book and its scope of study, before focusing on the content of each chapter.

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<sup>2</sup> *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368–1644*, ed. L. Carrington Goodrich (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), vol. 1, pp. 841–45.

This book provides a cultural history of friendship, as well as a literary history of the ways in which friendship propelled literary experimentation in the late eighth and early ninth centuries. It delves into the intriguing period after the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763), when the revival of the empire was spurring various changes in the political and social realm, but also in the literary arena. Many writers experimented energetically with styles and forms; and they often turned to writing about personal experience. Shields argues that the rising participation in Tang government of men from more diverse family backgrounds and the diminishing importance of the imperial court as a centre of literary composition were factors in this change.

The book focuses on the decades of the 790 to the 820s, in other words from late in the reign of Dezong 德宗 (779–805) to the end of the reign of Jingzong 敬宗 (824–827). This thirty-year span includes the reigns of Shunzong 順宗 (805), Xianzong 憲宗 (805–820), and Muzong 穆宗 (820–824).

This is a reasonable selection; during this time the structure of power was transformed. The most significant change was the rising power of military governors and eunuchs. On the one hand, literary writing flourished in the courts of regional military governors, as noted by Shields; on the other, civil bureaucrats implemented policies to rejuvenate the state. It is therefore a good choice of period for which to study the instrumentality of social connections.

Although writing about friendship is a phenomenon with no clear beginning, more could be said about the historical circumstances that contributed to its flourishing. It is true that potential officials were evaluated on the basis of reputation and proven talents at the time, and more so for men without powerful kin. In the mid-Tang, the presentation of literary works to potential patrons (*wenjuan* 溫卷, lit. “warming scrolls”) clearly demonstrated the need for candidates without connections to build their literary fame before taking the civil examinations. Under the empress Wu Zetian’s 武則天 reign (690–705), literati without influential families were encouraged to take the examinations. How was the situation in her reign different from the mid-Tang? This is worthy of further investigation.

The humiliation of Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831) and the assassination of Wu Yuanheng 武元衡 (758–815) showed the great risks outspoken officials could run; often the emperor himself was powerless to protect them. Is it possible that the change in the power structure at the Tang Court caused the literati to create groups of potential supporters consciously, for their own political or social security? If they did, how effective was the strategy? These are points that might be worth additional research.

To give one example: in 810, the Supervisor Censor Yuan Zhen was tortured by eunuchs under the command of Liu Shiyuan 劉士元. The ostensible reason was the competition for the superior lodging at the Fushui 敷水 courier station. The

underlying cause, however, was probably that Yuan had investigated the many crimes associated with eunuchs, military governors, and their favoured administrative officials. The eunuchs kicked open Yuan's suite, forcing him to flee barefoot, and Liu chased after him and slashed his face with a horsewhip.<sup>1</sup> Yuan's horse was seized, and Liu demanded arrows to shoot him.<sup>2</sup> Although Yuan was the victim, he was punished and exiled. In spite of memorials by Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), Pei Ji 裴垍 (750–811), Li Jiang 李絳 (764–830), and Cui Qun 崔群 (772–832) in Yuan's support, Xianzong did not reverse his decision.

In another instance, in 815 Chief Minister Wu was attacked on his way to court. The attackers pulled his horse by the reins for some distance, killed him, and took his head. A subsequent murder attempt was made on Pei Du 裴度 (765–839), who escaped death thanks to the thick felt of his hat and because his subordinate came to his aid at the risk of his own life. The suspects behind the attempt were clearly military governors, who had detested Wu and Pei for their campaign against them.<sup>3</sup> Bai Juyi pressed for a serious investigation, but the emperor Xianzong had his hands full fighting Wu Yuanji 吳元濟 (783–817), Military Governor of Huaixi 淮西 (modern Henan). In the end, Bai himself was expelled.<sup>4</sup>

In such an era, it seemed pressing for like-minded literati to form their own circle of support, even if this support was nothing more than a protest. Shields mentions that in response to the assassination case, Bai tacitly admitted in a letter to Yang Yuqing 楊虞卿 (*fl.* 810–827) that his profound knowledge of others and his deep mutual friendships were useless in this kind of crisis and political disgrace (pp. 227–28). The need for literati to support each other and to effect changes in politics eventually led, in the late Tang, to their forming various coteries. Confucius is quoted as saying that the noble man took companions like himself, but did not form factions. It would be interesting to see how this famous advice played out in the mid- and late Tang.

<sup>1</sup> See Liu Xu 劉昫 (887–946) et al., *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (1975; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), *juan* 166, p. 4331.

<sup>2</sup> See Bai's third memorial, "Lun Yuan Zhen di san zhuang" 論元稹第三狀, in *Bai Juyi ji jianjiao* 白居易集箋校, annot. Zhu Jincheng 朱金城 (1988; reprint, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2003), *juan* 59, pp. 3360–61.

<sup>3</sup> Both Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086) and Hu Sanxing 胡三省 (1230–1302) note that Li Shidao 李師道 (d. 819), Military Governor of Pinglu 平盧, was the one who orchestrated the assassination. See Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑, annot. Hu Sanxing (1956; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), *juan* 239, pp. 7713–15.

<sup>4</sup> Bai's personal response to the assassination is noted in chapter four, pp. 216–18, but little is said about the significance of this event to our understanding of the political and literary atmosphere of the time.

The mutual support of literati tended to be effective only when the issues concerned did not involve other powerful parties, namely eunuchs or military governors. Shields discusses the case of Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), who wrote “Jian ying fogu biao” 諫迎佛骨表 (Memorial on the Bone of the Buddha) in 819, which infuriated the emperor. Han Yu’s life was spared only through the strenuous intervention of his allies Pei Du and Cui Qun.

The discussion of the relation between Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819) in the introductory chapter highlights their mutual fidelity in spite of their philosophical and political differences. Liu had lived out Han’s expectation of faithfulness in a friendship; in return, after Liu’s death, Han performed all the duties expected of a friend. Han and Liu shared many values, including teaching and learning for self-cultivation. Chapter one mentions Liu’s “Shiyou zhen” 師友箴 (Admonition on Teachers and Friends), in which Liu criticized the overall atmosphere of the time, where those who wanted to help others learn were ridiculed, and the trend was to use friendship for advantage; a similar idea can be seen in Han Yu’s “Shi shuo” 師說 (On Teachers). The details of the relationship between the two essays might have added nicely to the discussion.

Since friendship is formed by choice, either laterally or hierarchically, it was often perceived as a potential threat to the central state, and, to a lesser extent, to the integrity of the kinship group. However, little is said in the book about the frequent suspicion toward such ties, especially when literati made open display of their friendships in their literary compositions, and relied on them for their own political advancement. During Dezong’s reign, the emperor monitored his chief ministers closely to prevent them from associating with others.<sup>5</sup> In 813, Xianzong questioned Li Jiang about a rumour that the literati were forming factions.<sup>6</sup> The solicitation of social connections for political support might backfire if not handled properly. It would be interesting to know if this was a concern for literati when they composed literary pieces extolling their friendships.

The scope of the corpus under examination in the book comes mainly from the two largest collections of the mid-Tang, those of Han Yu and Bai Juyi, in particular letters, poetic exchanges, farewell prefaces, and funerary texts that are overtly autobiographical or biographical. Instead of placing Han and Bai at the centre of their circles, tracing their relations to others radiating outward, Shields has chosen to follow the lead of the texts themselves. She takes great care to consider how the texts were transmitted and to mention the possible loss of certain writings. This is

<sup>5</sup> See *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 239, p. 7714.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7702–3.

a wise decision. With such a large body of texts from the period, those of Han and Bai serve well as focal points that connect to the works of other important literary figures. There is a large collection of letters, prefaces, and funerary texts in Han's compilation, and Bai's many correspondence poems with Yuan Zhen have long been celebrated. The mourning pieces they wrote for their deceased friends also present a wealth of information about their relationships and how they perceived their friendships. Moreover, both Han and Bai experimented with new literary genres. Han was particularly known for including argumentative elements in his writing, even in funerary texts; his epitaph for Liu Zongyuan is a perfect example. Bai used poetry both as a medium of communication and in literary competition with Yuan.

The different aspects of literary friendships are thoroughly discussed, primarily by focusing each chapter on one genre. The first chapter, "Contexts for Friendship in Mid-Tang Literary Culture," introduces the theoretical discourse and historical trends that fuelled the new interest in writing about friendship, and examines the social and political shifts of the late eighth and early ninth centuries that laid the foundation for the epochal transformations of the Tang-Song transition. It begins with an explanation of key terms and the cultural values embedded in them as texts developed from the pre-Han. The author then moves on to discuss these historical patterns in comparison to the European tradition, and the social and cultural contexts that allowed friendship to become a flourishing topic of literature.

A passage on the way of friendship is quoted from *Bai hu tong* 白虎通 on page 36, note 20. One line reads, "pengyou zhi dao you si yan, tongcai bu zai qi zhong" 朋友之道有四焉，通財不在其中。The latter half is rendered as "friends were required to share wealth when needed." A literal translation of the line would be, "There are four ways of friendship; sharing wealth is not one of them." However, this could simply be a typo, the omission of "not."

The second chapter, "Building Networks: Friendship, Patronage, and Celebrity," focuses on the functionality of friendship in social networking. Friendship could help men establish a reputation and obtain recommendations; their patrons were crucial to their careers. This chapter uses various cases to illustrate the importance of securing support from peers and patrons, and shows how a circle of friends shared a group identity, creating a social and cultural space rhetorically located outside the official, public domain. Literary writing was the one sphere where innovations were allowed.

In this chapter, the new poetic subgenre known as New Music Bureau poetry is discussed, but the use of "new" in the book sometimes creates confusion. "Music Bureau poems" (*yuefu* 樂府) originally referred to folk songs collected by the Han musical institution, which came to include later poems composed by literati with the same titles and similar themes. These poems serve as a mirror of governance. The "New" in New Music Bureau poems refers to the use of new titles to comment on

contemporary affairs. Note 20 on page 91 mentions that Yuan was the first, along with Li Shen 李紳 (772–846), to compose new *yuefu*, in 809, and that in 817, he composed more new *yuefu* and wrote a longer preface, “Preface to the New *Yuefu* to Old Titles” 樂府古題序. However, the “new” Music Bureau poems that Yuan composed in 809 and in 817 are not the same, in the sense that the former use new titles for new topics, while the latter use original titles of Music Bureau poems for new topics. The word “new” also does not appear in the title of Yuan’s preface. Literally, the preface can be translated as “Preface to Music Bureau Poems with Ancient Titles.” In the main text, on page 198, Shields notes that Yuan’s 817 series of *yuefu* poems to “old titles” were composed as responses to contemporary conditions. This is a much clearer explanation.

The third chapter, “Responding in Kind: Friendship and Poetic Exchange,” analyses different forms of poetic exchange, including response poems and linked verses. The plentiful examples reveal how circles of friends used poetry as a vehicle to communicate feelings and experiment with new styles, creating what Shields describes as specific, original, and powerful work. A group of trusted peers provided a safe environment for testing new styles and ideas. This part is enlightening, reviewing the actual interactions between friends manifested in poetic exchanges.

On page 157, she provides a translation of Bai’s preface to the ten poems he wrote in response to Yuan Zhen’s, ending with “But I will wait until I see you again, and then each of us will take out the poems we wrote and then edit out their tedious parts and clarify their meaning” 待與足下相見日，各引所作，稍刪其煩而晦其義焉。The phrase “*hui qi yi*” 晦其義, currently translated into “clarify their meaning,” probably means “obscure their meaning.” Earlier in the same preface, Bai points out that “when our intent was too obvious, our words were too provocative” 意太切則言激; he also mentions Niu Sengru 牛僧孺 (779–847), whose early career had suffered because of his critical texts. Bai is therefore proposing that he and Yuan tone down the critical voice in their poems.

The fourth chapter, “To Know and Be Known: The Epistemology of Friendship,” explores the idea of “recognition” so deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture. Shields examines letters written between friends, focusing on communicative issues: gratitude for sympathy and favours, complaints of not being understood, disagreements between friends, and laments over slanders by third parties. The chapter investigates the debates found in the letters over the issue of recognition, as well as the difficulty of relying solely on letters to communicate. This chapter analyses the dynamic relationships between friends, which went beyond sharing the same ideas, and it is enlightening on the use of letters in intellectual exchanges and disputes.

Bai Juyi’s letter to Yang Yuqing is discussed on page 218. Bai notes that he was demoted after demanding justice for the murder of Wu Yuanheng, and he writes, “xin

yu jin er bu xin yu yuan, yi he hen zai” 信於近而不信於遠，亦何恨哉。Here there appears to be a mistake in the translation. It is currently rendered as “. . . but to be believed by those near to one but not believed by those who are distant, is this not truly to be despised?” It might be better to translate *hen* 恨 as “regret,” making the line “What is there for me to regret?” But this is a minor point.

The fifth chapter, “For the Dead and the Living: Performing Friendship after Death,” focuses on funeral texts. It points out several major functions of these texts beyond the simple expression of grief. Funeral texts preserved the names and reputations of the deceased and bound the surviving circle of friends more closely through their remembrance. The language and form of the texts are also discussed, as well as their implications, and the duties of friendship.

The last chapter highlights the tension of sameness and difference in male friendships in the mid-Tang, concluding that the power of friendship to invigorate mid-Tang culture often came from differences of personalities, of opinions, and of styles. Friendship remained a bond formed by choice, although it provided instrumental and emotional support much as kinship ties did. The narration of personal experience in literary work encourages the understanding of oneself and others. As the title *One Who Knows Me* suggests, this kind of narration celebrates an ideal relationship of mutual understanding and faith, sharing core values, and embracing differences between friends.

There are some typos in the printed Chinese characters.<sup>7</sup> They stand out mainly because of the overall high quality of the research.

All being said, this book is essential for any serious student of Tang literature, or Tang culture in the broader sense. Professor Shields mentions the possibility of a future study on friendship in anecdotal literature and tales. If realized, it will certainly advance further our understanding of friendship in the mid-Tang.

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<sup>7</sup> The more noticeable ones are the following: 聰 is used instead of the correct 琮 for Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮 (p. 5 and p. 345); 陸 instead of 遼 for Lu Qinli 遼欽立 (p. 26, n. 1); 佐 instead of 左 for *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (p. 45); 氏 instead of 詩 for *Han shi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 (p. 47); 俛 instead of 勉 for Cen Zhongmian 岑仲勉 (p. 103, n. 47); 岡 instead of 岡 for Okamura Shigeru 岡村繁 (p. 126, n. 91); 儒 instead of 孺 for Niu Sengru 牛僧孺 (p. 156); 吳 instead of 武 for Wu Yuanheng 武元衡 (p. 191); and 楊 instead of 揚 for Yang Xiong 揚雄 (p. 249).