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by the Famous Lingnan School painter He Jianshi 何劍士,
Xiu Jinhua, *Huanghua gang gongyuan* [The Huanghua gang
Park], Guangzhou: Lingnan Meishu Chubanshe, 2001, p.53.

FRIENDSHIP IN ANCIENT CHINA



Introduction

Friendship in Chinese history is a strangely neglected theme. If we judge a topic's social and historical importance by its exposure in literature, then friendship clearly has been an abiding concern of the Chinese. From earliest times it attracted the attention of historians and philosophers; the number of poems friendship has inspired probably runs into thousands, and friendship is a dominant theme in many of China's greatest works of fiction. Although in the West there has been a renewal of intellectual interest in friendship in recent years, and this has led to some work on friendship and the allied phenomenon of *guanxi* 關係 or connections in contemporary China,¹ there has been remarkably little done on the history of friendship in China.² What has been done has tended to present friendship as being at odds with core values of an increasingly conservative Confucian tradition—after all, it was ranked last of the Five

/1998), pp.253–69; Norman Kutcher, "The fifth relationship: dangerous friendships in the Confucian context," *American Historical Review* 105.2 (December 2000): 1615–29; Whalan Lai, "Friendship in Confucian China: classical and late Ming," in *Friendship East and West: philosophical perspectives*, ed. Oliver Leaman (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1996), pp.215–50; S. Lin, "Looking for friends in history: Li Po's friendship with Hsieh T'iao," *Tamkang Review* 20.2 (1989): 131–50; B. Lundberg, "A meditation on friendship," in *Wandering at ease in the Zhuangzi*, ed. R. T. Ames (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); J. P. McDermott, "Friendship and its friends in late Ming," in *Academica Sinica, Family process and political process in modern Chinese history* (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1992), vol.1, pp.67–96; S-H. Tan, "Mentor or friend? Confucius and Aristotle on equality and ethical development in friendship," *International Studies in Philosophy* 33.4. (2001): 99–122; Maria Khayutina, "Friendship in Early China: Western Zhou—Chunqiu Epochs", at <<http://www.ruhr-uni.bochum./OVER>

¹ A recent overview of research on the topic is provided by Thomas Gold, Doug Guthrie and David Wank, "An introduction to the study of *guanxi*," in *Social connections in China: institutions, culture, and the changing nature of guanxi*, ed. Thomas Gold, Doug Guthrie and David Wank (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.3–20.

² Studies of friendship in pre-modern China include: K. Folsom, *Friends, guests and colleagues: The mu-fu system in the late Ch'ing* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1968); D. L. Hall and R. T. Ames, *Thinking from the Han: self, truth, and transcendence in Chinese and Western culture* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press,

de/gpc/khayutina/friendship.html>. Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, *Gifts, favors, and banquets: the art of social relationships in China* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), esp. pp.216–44, links the modern practice of *guanxi* back to ancient Confucian concepts of a ritualised, personalised state and society.

³ Ricci's letter is cited by Jaques Gernet, *China and the Christian impact: a conflict of cultures*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge and Paris: Cambridge University Press and Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1985), p.141. The success of Ricci's work encouraged Father Martino Martini in 1661 to repeat the exercise with *Qiu you pian* 求友篇 [In search of friends].

⁴ For critical discussion of this concept, see Hsu Dau-lin, "The myth of the 'five human relations'," *Monumenta Serica* 29 (1970–71): 27–37; also Kutcher, "The fifth relationship," pp.1615–17.

Relationships (*wu lun* 五倫), and if mentioned in traditional clan rules it was primarily to warn the young men of the family of its dangers. Further, it is often argued that Chinese ideas about friendship are quite different from Western ideas.

This study shows that in ancient China, from around the beginning of the Zhou 周 period (c.1045 BCE) to the end of the Warring States 戰國 period (221 BCE), ideas of friendship played an influential role in social and political thought. Friendship provided a way of conceptualizing ideals of personal conduct beyond the kinship group, a basis for thinking about moral obligations towards the wider society and the state. Socially, friendship focused attention on mutual regard, shared ideals, trust, and the obligation to support and help each other. From a personal perspective, ideas of friendship helped to articulate principles of autonomy, choice, moral responsibility, and equality. In the late Spring and Autumn 春秋 and Warring States periods (from around 500 BCE to 221 BCE), even the ideal ruler/subject relationship was conceived by many according to a friendship model, emphasizing its voluntary nature and the individual's responsibility to choose which of the many rulers of the time he would serve. For Confucius 孔子 (551–479 BCE) and his followers, friendship was essential for good government and the creation of a moral society.

It is reasonable to assume that, like food and drink, friendship is a basic human need, fundamental to individual well-being everywhere. This does not necessarily mean that friendship is understood or operates in the same way in all societies, any more than the universal experience of hunger and thirst means that people everywhere consume the same foods and beverages, but it does suggest that the core ideas associated with friendship will be similar. It is significant that the first work written in Chinese by a European was Matteo Ricci's (1552–1610) anthology of classical European writing entitled *On Friendship* (Jiaoyou lun 交友論). Ricci's work, written at the request of a Ming prince, proved very popular with Chinese scholars, so much so that Ricci commented in a letter in May 1599: "This little treatise on friendship has brought more credit to me and to our Europe than anything we have done hitherto."³ For an exercise in cross-cultural bridge building, clearly, ideas about friendship were an excellent choice.

Cultural bridges notwithstanding, the evolution of dominant social concepts has to be traced in the culture to which they belong. In China, for example, the tradition of thinking of human interaction in terms of the Five Relationships,⁴ goes back to the Warring States period, when under the influence of *wu xing* 五行 or Five Phase Theory, there was a general tendency to conceptualise social and natural phenomenon in terms of five-fold categories and look for causal patterns in terms of synchronicity and the order in which one phase gave way to another. One of the earliest extant statements of the Five Relationships is that by

Mencius 孟子 (d. 289 BCE): “The Sage Kings ... taught the human relationships: love between father and son, duty between ruler and subject, distinction between husband and wife, precedence of the old over the young, and trust between friends 聖人 ... 教以人倫: 父子有親, 君臣有義, 夫婦有別, 長幼有敘, 朋友有信.”⁵ Possibly predating Mencius is the *Doctrine of the Mean* (Zhong yong 中庸), widely believed to have been written by Zisi 子思, the grandson of Confucius who was one of Mencius’ teachers. The *Doctrine of the Mean* says that “the universal way of the world has five aspects: [the relationships between] ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, and the interaction between friends 天下之達道五 ... : 君臣也, 父子也, 夫婦也, 昆弟也, 朋友之交也.”⁶

These influential Confucian texts do not list the relationships in the same order: Mencius places the father/son relationship first, while for Zisi it is the ruler/subject relationship. Nor do they agree whether the older/younger relationship should be articulated in reference to siblings only or in terms of age difference more generally. But one feature they do have in common, as already noted, is that they place friendship last. Although this was usually interpreted as indicating that friendship was not to be regarded as important as other social relationships, it is unlikely that Mencius or Zisi were ranking them in order of absolute importance. In terms of Five Phase cosmology, all the phases are equally important because all are essential for the generation of the natural world and human affairs. If there is any significance in the order in which the Five Relationships were listed, most likely it is in terms of the developmental or social order in which the various types of relationships are entered into.

Be that as it may, as the family-centred system of Confucian values became increasingly institutionalised during the imperial period (from around 140 BCE), “officially” friendship did come to be regarded as secondary. The bonds of friendship were informal in ways that the bonds between family members and between ruler and subject (also conceived largely in terms of the family analogy) could never be informal—or so it came to be believed. Yet for Confucius himself and the scholars of the Warring States period, the informality of friendship and the fact that it was a relationship of choice were reasons for valuing it highly. Those aspects of friendship also help to explain why it was to play such a prominent role in Chinese social history and literature. The increasingly formal emphasis on the obligations entailed by kinship links made friendship all the more valued as a sphere of relative informality and autonomy in social interaction. It led outspoken figures such as He Xinyin 何心隱 (1517–79) and Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 (1865–98) to declare friendship the most important of the Five Relationships *because* it is free and unconstrained. “Interaction is complete in friendship 交盡於友也,” says He Xinyin, who compares it to the interaction of Heaven and Earth.⁷

⁵ Yang Bojun, *Mengzi yizhu* [Mencius: translation and commentary] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1960), 5.4/125; D. C. Lau, trans, *Mencius* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 102.

⁶ *Liji zhengyi* [The true meaning of the Book of Rites], in *Shisan jing zhushu* [Commentaries and sub-commentaries on the Thirteen Classics, hereafter *SSJZS*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1980), 52/401B; James Legge, *The sacred books of China: Li Ki*, Sacred Books of the East, vols 27 and 28 (1885, reprint ed., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964).

⁷ He Xinyin (Liang Ruyuan), “Lun you” [On friendship], in *He Xinyin ji* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1960), p. 28.

⁸ Tan Sitong, “Renxue” [The study of humanity], *Tan Sitong quanji* [Complete works of Tan Sitong] (Beijing: Sanlian Shidian, 1954), p.66; trans. Mark Elvin, *Self-liberation and self-immolation in modern Chinese thought*, George Ernest Morrison Lecture in Ethnology, no.39 (Canberra: The Australian National University, 1978), p.3.

For Tan Sitong it is “the least harmful to human life of all the Five Relationships, and the most beneficial, with no trace of bitterness and a delight like that of fresh water 五倫中於人生最無弊而有益，無纖毫之苦，有淡水之樂，其惟朋友。”⁸ The tendency to see friendship in late-imperial China as being at odds with dominant socio-political values makes it all the more important to consider carefully how it was regarded in the formative pre-Qin 秦 period (before 220 BCE).

Early Development of Concepts and Terminology

⁹ My discussion draws particularly on Zha Changguo, “You yu liang Zhou junchen guanxi de yanbian” [Evolution of the connection between friendship and the ruler/minister relationship in the Zhou period], *Lishi yanjiu*, 5 (1998): 94–109, who develops further arguments by scholars such as Zhu Fenghan, “‘Pengyou’ kao” [A study of ‘friendship’], in Zhu Fenghan, *Shang Zhou jiazhu xingtai yanjiu* [Research on Clan Forms of the Shang-zhou Period] (Tianjin: Tianjin Guji Chubanshe, 1990), and Qian Zongfan, “‘Pengyou’ kao” [A study of friendship] (pts.1 and 2), *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* [Collected essays on Chinese literature and history], no.8 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1978), pp.272, 282.

¹⁰ Maria Khayutina, “Friendship in early China: Western Zhou—Chunqiu epochs,” <<http://www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/gpc/khayutina/friendship.html>>, p.2.

In recent years it has been argued by a number of Chinese scholars that during the pre-Qin period the meaning of the main Chinese word for friendship, *you* 友, changed considerably. Bronze inscriptions from the Western Zhou 西周 period (1045–771 BCE), it is said, indicate that originally *you* meant kinsman or clansman (*zuren* 族人), and in the clan-based polity of the time was used to refer to the bonds between elder brother and younger brother, father and son, and ruler and subject.⁹ A similar conclusion is reached by Maria Khayutina who, in her study of Western Zhou inscriptions, says that *you* was “a common name for associates among kin,” it meant “‘friendliness’ or ‘fraternal love’.”¹⁰

It has been suggested by Zha Changguo 查昌国 that the primary meaning of *you* related to the ideal relationship between elder brother and younger brother, and from there was extended to kinship obligations of mutual support, loyalty and solidarity more generally. In other words, brotherhood became a metaphor for relationships and obligations between kinsmen overall, a metaphor that was both normative and descriptive, expressing expectations of how kinsmen *should* treat each other rather than simply asserting the kinship bonds between them. During the Spring and Autumn period, Zha argues, as clan structures weakened and the separate household became more significant in socio-political matters, the various social bonds between different sorts of kinsmen began to be expressed in terms of distinctive ideals. Confucius, who lived in the late Spring and Autumn period, used the term *you* to refer to people who shared similar aspirations and ideals regardless of whether they were kinsmen or not, though much of the time he seems to have assumed that they would be members of the same social class, the scholar-knights (*shi* 士). It was at this time that trust or fidelity (*xin* 信) came to be emphasised as the essential virtue in friendship. In other words, friendship ceased to refer to the obligations of mutual support and regard that were thought to constitute the essence of kinship, and began to refer instead to relationships between unrelated individuals who sought each other's company because of mutual compatibility, shared interests and

ideals that were not necessarily kinship based. Confucius and his followers understood this new concept of friendship largely in terms of a shared quest for self-improvement and moral development, a concept they believed to be as relevant to the ruler/subject relation as any other. It was this push to see the ruler/subject relation in terms of friendship that in the late Warring States period was to arouse strong opposition from Legalist 法家 thinkers.¹¹

Although this line of argument draws attention to some important conceptual developments over time, it goes beyond what the evidence can sustain. Contemporary written sources for the Western Zhou period are extremely limited. Those that do exist—some bronze inscriptions on sacrificial and funerary objects, and a small number of texts difficult to date accurately—all relate, inevitably, to the dealings of the socio-political élite. The fact that some of these sources use the terminology of friendship primarily in relation to members of that élite and their kinship links cannot be taken as evidence that the terminology did not and could not apply to other social groups or other sorts of social bonds. The suggestion that people in China around 1000 BCE had no need for, and no words to articulate, mutually supportive, affectionate and respectful relationships beyond their clan seems very odd, even if we make due allowance for the fact that, particularly for those near the bottom of the social pyramid, the range of everyday social interaction was probably narrow. Further, it is seriously misleading to imply that the categories of friendly and unfriendly relations coincided with the categories kin and non-kin, or that people in ancient China did not find some of their relatives more compatible than others.¹²

The root meaning of the term *you*, I would argue, was to help or assist, to work together for a common purpose, which commoners may do no less than aristocrats, animals no less than humans. It is reasonable to assume that the term had general social applicability. If there was indeed a separate terminology for friendly, supportive relationships beyond the sphere of kinship, then it has yet to be identified. This being the case, it is much more probable that the terminology of friendship was in fact used to characterise “friendly” relations both inside and outside the clan than that nobody in ancient China had such relations with non-kin, or that if they did they had no language to describe them. It would be a mistake to assume that in ancient China a single terminology could not have served for both political friendships and everyday personal ones, in much the same way it does today. This seems to have been the case in ancient Greece and Rome,¹³ and surely the situation was not very different in Western Zhou China. So as far as the argument by Zha Changguo is concerned, that it was only from the late Warring States period that the term *you* or friendship gained general social applicability, there is good reason to reject it.

¹¹ Zha Changguo, “You yu liang Zhou junchen guanxi de yanbian,” pp.94–109.

¹² D. Konstan, *Friendship in the classical world* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.6–8, 53–6, 58–9.

¹³ W. R. Connor, *The new politicians of fifth-century Athens* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971); H. Hutter, *Politics as friendship: the origins of classical notions of politics in the theory and practice of friendship* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1978); P. A. Brunt, *The fall of the Roman republic and related essays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1988); and Konstan, *Friendship in the classical world*, pp.60–7, 128–9.

¹⁴ Olga Lang, *Chinese family and society* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1946), pp.166–7.

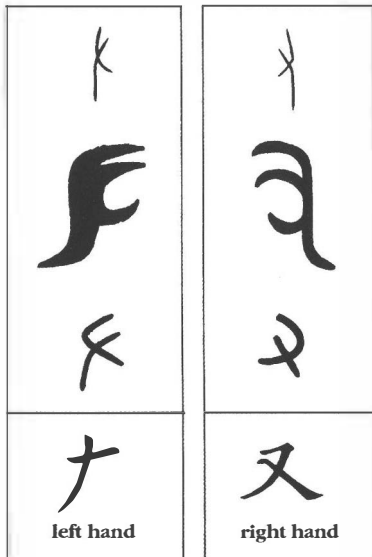
¹⁵ See the brief but useful discussion by Sandra Bell and Simon Coleman, “The anthropology of friendship: enduring themes and future possibilities,” in *The anthropology of friendship*, ed. Sandra Bell and Simon Coleman (Oxford: Berg, 1999), pp.6–8.

¹⁶ Yang Bojun, *Lunyu yizhu* [*The Analects: translation and commentary*], 2nd ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1980), and Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. D. C. Lau (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 8.2, 18.10.

¹⁷ Wolfgang Bauer, *Guo yu yinde* [Concordance to the *Talk of the States*], Research Aids Series, No.11 (Taipei: Chinese Materials and Research Aids Service Center, 1973), 10/90a.

Figure 1

Cecilia Lindqvist, China: empire of the written symbol, trans. Joan Tate (London: Harvill, 1991), p.36 (reproduced courtesy of the author)



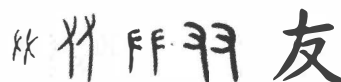
Any inclination to assume that the categories of kin and “friend” are either identical or mutually exclusive must be resisted. Once we accept the basic idea that *you* refers to a type or quality of a relationship rather than a relationship with a particular category of person (hardly a radical notion), there is little problem in coming to terms with the idea that friendship has always been an issue for everyone, regardless of the size or status of their kinship groups. Olga Lang, in her study of Chinese family and social attitudes in the 1930s, found that most people did not think of friends and relatives as mutually exclusive categories; some relatives were good friends, others could not be looked to for warm and supportive interaction. Kinship degree was regarded as much less significant than friendship in determining the quality of a relationship with a kinsman. “Good relations with kinsmen depend on friendship” was a widely expressed opinion.¹⁴ Similarly, those studying friendship in contemporary societies still dominated by extended kinship groups find it difficult to make sense of friendship unless they do away with the simplistic assumption that “friend” necessarily designates someone other than a “relative.”¹⁵

Other than *you*, the word most commonly used in early sources to refer to friendship in the pre-Qin sources is *peng* 朋. The two terms sometimes occur together in the compounds *pengyou* 朋友 (as in modern Chinese) and, less frequently, *youpeng* 友朋. However, these are by no means the only terms used. Also commonly used are *jiu* 舊 and *gu* 故, both meaning “old” and thereby referring to an acquaintance, supporter or friend of long standing, a relationship that has stood the test of time. These words too are used in combination, *gujiu* 故舊, as in the Confucian *Analects* (Lunyu 論語) where the term is variously translated as “old friends,” “old acquaintances,” “old ties,” “old officials.”¹⁶ Although in later times *gujiu* certainly was often used to mean “old friend,” in the pre-Qin period its use tended to emphasise the enduring and dependable nature of a relationship rather than its intimacy. This is clear, for example, from a passage in the *Talk of the States* (Guo yu 國語), which says that one of the things a good ruler does is “*you gujiu* 友故舊,” that is, treats in a friend-like manner families that have long served the state faithfully.¹⁷

The graphs for both *peng* and *you* are very old, occurring in Shang 商 oracle-bone inscriptions of around the fifteenth century BCE. Early versions

Figure 2

Cecilia Lindqvist, “friend, friendly” China: empire of the written symbol, p.37 (reproduced courtesy of the author)



of the graph for *you* represent a pair of hands facing the same way, that is to say, not a pair of hands but rather the hands of two people doing something together. (The modern graph is different in that its elements show a left hand and a right hand.) The meaning implied is that of

people doing things together, giving a helping hand.¹⁸ Maria Khayutina suggests that in Shang oracle-bone inscriptions *you* designates a reciprocal relationship between men and their ancestral spirits. The “men carried on offerings to the ancestors, and this act was called *you*. The ancestors in response sent them their divine support—*you*.”¹⁹ It seems more likely that it is the mutually supportive nature of the exchange that is *you*, rather than the fact that the individuals involved share a common line of descent. In some early Zhou texts, such as the *Book of Songs* (Shijing 詩經) as discussed below, *you* is used to refer to one of a pair of animals, suggesting that its provenance was similar to that of the modern English word “mate.” The idea of co-operation or working together naturally implies a shared purpose or aspiration, and this emphasis on a common outlook or shared ideals became stronger over time, without necessarily distinguishing between help in the political sense of allegiance and friendship in the everyday personal sense. These basic points were formally set out at the end of the first century CE in *Graphs Explained and Characters Elucidated* (Shuowen jiezi 說文解字): “those with common aspirations are friends 同志為友,” says this early lexicon; friendship is “the mutual interaction of two [people or animals] 从二又相交.”²⁰

The graph for *peng* represents two strings of cowries, an early medium of ritual and economic exchange, and sometimes in ancient texts—for example, the *Book of Changes* (Yijing 易經) and the *Book of Songs*—it carries that pictographic meaning.²¹ In some bronze inscriptions it seems to function as a measure word or a group noun, so that *pengyou* means a “string” or group of friends,²² while elsewhere, including in the *Book of Songs*, it can mean “identical to, equal, peer,” from the similarity rather than the number of shells it depicts.²³ The meanings of similarity or likeness, shared characteristics, members of groups who share common features, remain dominant in later usage. Also significant, however, is the fact that in early texts the graph *peng* was used interchangeably with the same graph with the man radical added, *peng* 朋, meaning helper, assistant, supporter, ally.²⁴

While in general *you* is the more widely used of the two in relation to friendship, sometimes *peng* is predominant. Nor is it always easy to detect systematic differences in meaning. In the earliest parts of the *Book of Changes*—the hexagram and line texts—for example, *peng* appears nine or ten times, whereas *you* is used only once. As just mentioned, on two occasions in the *Book of Changes*, *peng* is used with its original meaning of strings of cowries, but on all other occasions it seems to mean simply “friend,”²⁵ and there is nothing in its elliptical utterances that would enable us to assert that a particular sort of friend is intended, such as political ally, intimate associate or beloved kinsman. Any such specificity would be a serious problem in a divination text since

¹⁸ Cecilia Lindqvist, *China: empire of the written symbol*, trans. Joan Tate (London: Harvill, 1991), pp.36–7. See also footnote 74 below.

¹⁹ Khayutina, “Friendship in early China,” p.1.

²⁰ Duan Yucai, *Shuowen jiezi zhu* [Commentary on *Graphs Explained and Characters Elucidated*] (Taipei: Lantai Shuju, 1974), 3B/20a; B. Karlgren, *Grammatica Serica Recensa* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1972), pp.261–2.

²¹ *Zhouyi zhengyi* [The true meaning of the *Zhou Changes*], hexagram 41 line 5 and hexagram 42 line 2, *SSJZS* 5/41B–C; Gao Heng, *Zhouyi gujing jinzhub* [The *Zhou Changes*: ancient classic, modern commentary] (Hong Kong: Zhonghua Shuju, 1963), pp.141–3; “Thick grows the tarragon,” (*Qingqing zhe e*), Mao, song no.176, *Maoshi zhengyi* [The true meaning of the *Mao Songs*], *SSJZS* 10.1/154B–C, translated in Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973) (hereafter Waley), song no.111.

²² Khayutina, “Friendship in early China,” p.1.

²³ “Pepper,” (*Jiao liao*, Mao, no.17, *Maoshi zhengyi*, 6.1/94C–95A; Waley, no.8), “Seventh month,” (*Qi yue*, Mao, no.154, *Maoshi zhengyi*, 8.1/122C–125A; Waley, no.159), “Closed temple,” (*Bi gong*, Mao, no.300, *Maoshi zhengyi*, 20.2/346C–350B; Waley, no.251).

²⁴ *Zhongwen da cidian* [The great Chinese dictionary] (Taipei: Zhongguo Wenhua Daxue Chubanshu, 1973), 4/1530; Bernhard Karlgren, *Grammatica Serica Recensa*, pp.235–6.

²⁵ *Zhouyi zhengyi*, hexagrams 2 (judgment), 16 (line 4), 24 (judgment), 31 (line 4), 39 (line 5), 40 (line 4), *SSJZS* 1/5C, 2/20A, 3/26C, 4/35A, 4/39C, 4/40B; Gao Heng, *Zhouyi gujing jinzhub*, pp.6, 61, 85, 109, 136, 137. In traditional versions of the text, but not in the Ma-wangdui version, *peng* is also used in hexagram 11 line 2. See *SSJZS* 2/16B; Gao Heng, *Zhouyi gujing jinzhub*, p.41. In his discussion of hexagram 2, Gao Heng argues that there *peng* can be read as meaning either friend or cowries.

²⁶ *Zhouyi zhengyi*, hexagrams 24 (judgment), 31 (line 4), 39 (line 5), *SSJZS* 3/26C, 4/35A, 4/39C; Gao Heng, *Zhouyi gujing jinzhub*, pp.85, 109, 136.

²⁷ *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 4/41A; Gao Heng, *Zhouyi gujing jinzhub*, p.141.

²⁸ Xu Weiyu, *Lüshi chungqiu jisbi* [Collected commentaries on the Annals of Lü Buwei] (Beijing: Wenxue Guji Kangxingshe, 1955), 6.5/270; John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel, trans., *The Annals of Lü Buwei* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 167–8. Knoblock and Riegel use the word ‘friend’, but *you* does not appear in the original.

it would restrict its applicability in particular contexts. What is clear from the *Book of Changes*, however, is that in ancient China friends were seen as good fortune, as being of assistance in avoiding bad fortune. “Friends come without blame 朋來无咎”; “Friends come one after another, as you wished 憧憧往來，朋從爾思”; “Great frankness, friends come 大蹇朋來.”²⁶ For those who used this system of divination, having friends on hand, to give a hand, was desirable.

The one time that *you* is used in the *Book of Changes* is in hexagram 41 line 3: “If three men travel one is lost; if one man travels he finds a friend 三人行則損一人，一人行則得其友.”²⁷ There is no obvious reason why *you* is used here rather than *peng*. It could be that *peng* is used two lines later (line 5) to mean strings of cowrie and so *you* is used to avoid confusion; or it could be, as Gao Heng 高亨 suggests, that line 3 was part of a familiar story of the time, and the whole line, using *you*, was incorporated from another source. But this is mere speculation.

Although in pre-Qin texts the meanings of *peng* and *you* overlap, and both are used separately to mean “friend,” one difference should be noted: whereas *peng* may carry a negative value, as in the common expression *pengdang* 朋黨, meaning clique or faction, *you* always has positive overtones. A *you* relationship might in a given context be judged inappropriate, but the nature or quality of the relationship itself is still regarded as desirable. For example, while a gang of robbers may do evil, the friendship they share may nevertheless be genuine, and to that extent represent something good. The *Annals of Lü Buwei* (Lüshi chungqiu 呂氏春秋, c. 239 BCE) provides a clear indication of the invariably positive meaning of *you*. In a passage that describes a negative version of the Five Relationships, it is notable that *you* is avoided; the word can be used in reference to true friends only; it cannot be used to designate false friends: “In the transformations of extreme disorder, ruler and subject rob one another, old and young murder one another, father and son forsake one another, older brother and younger brother slander one another, familiar acquaintances deceive one another, and husband and wife malign one another 至亂之化，君臣相賊，長小相殺，父子相忍，兄弟相誣，知交相倒，父妻相冒.”²⁸ Acquaintances (*jiao* 交) who deceive each other are merely acquaintances, they cannot properly be called friends (*you*).

The Book of Documents and the Book of Songs

An examination of the use of *you* in the *Book of Documents* (Shujing 書經) and the *Book of Songs* supports the argument that while in early sources *you* was commonly used in reference to kin relationships, it was the quality of the relationship rather than the kinship *per se* that was *you*. Both classics contain material that varies in date of composition and so have to be used with caution, but while some of it is thought to

be relatively late, probably dating from the eighth century BCE, some also almost certainly dates from as early as the eleventh century BCE. In general, use of the word *you* in the *Book of Documents* fits with the view that it refers primarily to supportive aristocratic kinsmen; the text is, after all, a collection of political speeches and others documents directly concerned with matters of state. In the *Book of Songs*, on the other hand, the usage of *you* is much more varied, reflecting the diverse subject matter in the songs and the circumstances of their composition.

In the various proclamations and speeches purportedly by the early Zhou kings in the *Book of Documents*, *you* is often applied to the members of the audience being addressed, as an adjective meaning “friendly” in a political sense. Typical is “The Great Proclamation” (*Da gao* 大誥) of King Cheng of Zhou 周成王 (reigned c. 1042–1006 BCE), who says to his audience, “Thus I tell you, princes of my friendly states, you local officials, you various officers and managers of affairs 肆予告我友邦君, 越尹氏, 庶士, 御事.” Although many, perhaps most, of his supporters will have been kinsmen, there is no reason to assume they all were.²⁹ Elsewhere in the text *you* is used as a noun referring to friends who are not kinsmen and to the people of friendly or allied states.³⁰ So if we were to accept the view that *you* originally was a kinship term, meaning something like “fraternal,” we would have to assume that it was used metaphorically as well as literally. Where *peng* is used in the *Book of Documents*, it too seems to refer to allies and supporters generally, not only to supportive kinsmen.³¹

In the *Book of Songs*, although *you* could sometimes be interpreted as meaning something like “kinsmen and allies of the ruler,” most of the time its usage does not fit with this pattern. As might be expected, cases that are amenable to interpretation in kinship terms tend to occur in songs occasioned by clan assemblies and sacrifices, political myths and proclamations. For example, in “Majestic” (*Huangyi* 皇矣), a Zhou dynastic hymn, *you* refers to friendship between brothers. Wang Ji 王季 is described as “of heart friendly and accommodating, / Friendly to his elder brother 因心則友, 則友其兄” Taibo 太伯.³² Sometimes, too, the brotherly support and help celebrated on these occasions is the sort of mutual assistance later to be stressed by Confucian scholars. For example, “When Drunk” (*Ji zui* 既醉),³³ addressed to a lord, says, “The friends that helped you, / Helped with perfect manners. / Their manners were irreproachable 朋友攸攝, 攝以威儀.” On the other hand, “Enduring Plum” (*Chang di* 常棣),³⁴ also occasioned by a clan feast, systematically contrasts brothers and friends—and in the process uses both *peng* and *you* to refer to friends. The first five stanzas go as follows:

The flowers of the mountain plum,
Are they not truly splendid?
Of men that now are,
None equals a brother.

²⁹ “Da gao,” *Shangshu zhengyi* [The true meaning of the Book of Documents], SS/JZS 13/86C, 87B, Bernhard Karlgren, trans., *The Book of Documents*, in *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 22 (1950): 37; “Mu shi” [Oath at Mu], *Shangshu zhengyi*, 11/71A.

³⁰ “Pan geng san” [Pan Geng, Part 3], *Shangshu zhengyi*, 9/57B, Karlgren, 21; “Shao gao” [Proclamation of Shao], *Shangshu zhengyi*, 15/101C, Karlgren, p.51.

³¹ “Luo gao” [Proclamation at Lu], *Shangshu zhengyi*, 15/102C–103A, Karlgren, 52.

³² Mao, no.241, *Maoshi zhengyi*, SS/JZS 16.4/251A–254C; Waley, no.243.

³³ Mao, no.247, *Maoshi zhengyi*, 17.2/267C–269B; Waley, no.202. This song was popular with Warring States writers moralising about friendship; it is quoted, for example, by Xunzi (Li Disheng, *Xunzi jishi* [Collected commentaries on Xunzi], 2nd ed. [Taipei: Taipei Xuesheng Shuju, 1981], 27/6270), the *Zuo Commentary* (Yang Bojun, *Chunqiu Zuo-zhuan zhu* [Annotations to the Zuo Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals] [Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1981], Duke Xiang 31.13/1194) and the *Ziyi* [Black robes] (in Jingmenshi Bowuguan, *Guodian Chumu zhujian* [Silk manuscripts from the Chu tombs at Guodian] [Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe, 1998], p.131).

³⁴ Mao, no.164, *Maoshi zhengyi*, 9.2/139C–141A; Waley, no.194. Waley, in the opening line, translates *di* as cherry tree, but it is a type of wild plum.

³⁵ Mao, no.249, *Maoshi zhengyi*, 17.3/272C–273B; Waley, no.172, and Mao, no.256, *Maoshi zhengyi*, 18.1/286B–288C; Waley, no.271.

³⁶ Mao, no.165, *Maoshi zhengyi*, 9.3/142C–144A; Waley, no.195. I have amended Waley, who in the third last line translates *yousheng* as “friends and kin,” and renders the last line as “harmonious and friendly.”

When death and mourning affright us
 Brothers are very dear;
 As ‘upland’ and ‘lowland’ form a pair,
 So ‘elder brother’ and ‘younger brother’ go together.

There are wagtails on the plain;
 When brothers are hard pressed
 Even good friends [*peng*]
 At the most do but heave a sigh.

Brothers may quarrel within the walls,
 But outside they defend one another from insult;
 Whereas even good friends [*peng*]
 Pay but short heed.

But when the times of mourning or violence are over,
 When all is calm and still,
 Even brothers
 Are not the equal of friends [*yousheng* 友生].

常棣之華，鄂不韡韡，丸今之人，莫如兄弟。
 死喪之威，兄弟孔懷，原隰裒矣，兄弟求矣。
 脊令在原，兄弟急難，每有良朋，況也永歎。
 兄弟鬩于牆，外禦其務，每有良朋，烝也無戎。
 喪亂既平，既安且寧，雖有兄弟，不如友生。

Whatever “friend” may designate in this song, it certainly is not “brother”; nor is there any reason to think that it refers only to more distant kinsmen. Similarly, in “Great Happiness” (*Jiale* 假樂) and “Dignified” (*Yi* 抑)³⁵ although the lord or noble’s friends mentioned clearly are not commoners, we have no reason to assume that they therefore include only kinsmen.

“Chopping wood” (*Famu* 伐木)³⁶ is another song occasioned by a clan feast, but it too supports the argument against equating friendship with kinship in the Western Zhou period:

Ding, ding goes the woodsman’s axe;
 Ying, ying cry the birds,
 Leave the dark valley,
 Mount the high tree.
 ‘Ying’ they cry,
 Each searching for its mate’s [*you*] voice.

Seeing that even a bird
 Searches for its mate’s voice,
 How much more must man
 Needs search out friends [*yousheng*].
 For the spirits are listening
 Whether we are all harmonious and at peace.

伐木丁丁，鳥鳴嚶嚶，出自幽谷，遷于喬木，嚶其鳴矣，求其友聲。
相彼鳥矣，猶求友聲，矧伊人矣，不求友生？神之聽之，終和且平。

In the remaining stanzas the singer mentions in turn various categories of male kinsmen—"fathers" or paternal uncles, elder brothers and younger brothers—assuring them that there is plenty to eat and drink, and urging them all to join in. While it is possible, but ill-considered, to interpret the expression *yousheng* in the fourth line of the second stanza as referring only to patrilineal kinsmen, the word *you* definitely does not carry this meaning in the opening trope of birds calling for their mate. The songs in the collection tend to rely on the opening image or *xing* 興 to establish a cognitive and emotional framework through which the subject of the song is interpreted. It is this image which is primary; hence, in this example, the word *you* is applied literally, not metaphorically, to mating birds, and the song goes on to depict men as birdlike rather than the other way about. The point is, surely, that *all* men, not only kinsmen, need helpmates, as is stated by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200 CE) in his prefatory comment to the song: "from the Son of Heaven down to the common people, there is no-one who does not need friends to accomplish things."³⁷

Very similar is "Lucky Day" (*Jiri* 吉日).³⁸ This portrays a hunt following a royal sacrifice, in which all kinsmen able to participate would do so, since, as the song says, they are "anxious to please the Son of Heaven." The hunters are pursuing deer, which are described in terms Arthur Waley translates as "Scampering, sheltering, / Some in herds, some two by two 儻儻俟俟，或群或友." A more literal translation would be "Some in groups, some in pairs." We have to assume that here there is no allusion to mating pairs, since, as experienced hunters, the composer and his audience would have been familiar enough with the social and sexual habits of grazing animals to know that, for breeding purposes, deer do not establish extended relationships entailing a division of labour and mutual help.

In other songs the meaning of *you* is little more than "help" or "support." In the first song in the collection "Guan Cries the Osprey" (*Guan ju* 關雎),³⁹ there are these lines relating to the bride of a lord: "Shy is this noble lady; / With lute and zither we hearten her 窈窕淑女，琴瑟友之." Quite clearly, the lady is not a patrilineal kinsman, though she is to be the lord's mate. In other songs the term is used by a woman to refer to her lover. For example, "The Gourd Has Bitter Leaves" (*Pao you ku ye* 匏有苦葉),⁴⁰ which establishes a parallel between birds seeking a mate and girls seeking a lover, concludes:

The boatman beckons and beckons.
Others cross, not I.
Others cross, not I.
'I am waiting for my friend [or mate / *you*].'

招招舟子，人步印否，人步印否，印須我友。

³⁷ *Maoshi zhengyi*, 9.3/142C.

³⁸ Mao, no.180, *Maoshi zhengyi*, 10.3/161B–162A; Waley, no.262.

³⁹ Mao, no.1, *Maoshi zhengyi*, 1.1/5B–6B; Waley, no.87.

⁴⁰ Mao, no.34, *Maoshi zhengyi*, 2.2/34C–35C; Waley, no.54.

⁴¹ Mao, no.92, *Maoshi zhengyi*, 4.1/63B–C; Waley, no.263.

Another noteworthy feature of the vocabulary of friendship in the *Book of Songs* is that in some songs clearly about friendship, *you* is not used at all. Particularly important in this regard is “Rising Waters” (*Yang zhi shui* 揚之水),⁴¹ for in it ideal friendship is expressed in terms of brotherhood:

Even the rising waters
Will not carry off thorn-faggots that are well bound.
Brothers while life lasts
Are you and I.
Do not believe what people say;
People are deceiving you.

Even the rising waters
Will not carry off thorn-faggots that are well bound.
Brothers while life lasts
Are we two men.
Do not believe what people say;
People are certainly not to be believed.

揚之水，不流束楚，終鮮兄弟，維予與女，無信人之言，人實迂女。
揚之水，不流束楚，終鮮兄弟，維予二人，無信人之言，人實不信。

The song does not work if we try to interpret “brothers” literally. In that case, *of course* brotherhood would endure until death; it is only where there is an element of choice about remaining “brothers,” such as between friends, that there is anything to sing about. What this example confirms, then, is that in ancient China interpersonal relationships in many respects tended to be conceptualised in ways similar to those common in contemporary society: ideals of friendship were often expressed in terms of unbreakable kinship bonds, just as ideals of kinship were often expressed in terms of empathetic and supportive friendship.

The Contribution of Confucius

An appreciation of the way people of the Western Zhou and early Spring and Autumn periods thought about friendship, as revealed by bronze inscriptions, the early layers of the *Book of Changes*, the *Book of Songs* and the *Book of Documents*, makes it possible to understand developments that followed, especially the contribution of Confucius. In this, as in so many aspects of social and political thought, his contribution was to be crucial in determining how later generations treated the topic. There can be little doubt about the significance Confucius attached to friendship. Acutely aware of the inadequacy of traditional

kinship-based ways of conceptualising social and political issues, Confucius was casting around for a new model for thinking about society. Like many others in other parts of the world since then, he discovered that alternative models are hard to come by, and that the most attractive model, perhaps the only readily available model for the sorts of issues that preoccupied him, was friendship.

Confucius conceived of a socio-political system ordered by affinity, if not *instead of* consanguinity then certainly *in addition to* it. In many ways it resembled a social-contract model of society, a conception of social and political interaction that emphasised mutual respect and regard, empathy, mutual support, trust. In such a society action does not spring from a desire for power or fearful obedience, but rather from a wish to participate with like-minded individuals in social action that is esteemed and socially beneficial. It is a model of social interaction that, certainly for his time, was radically egalitarian and libertarian: social standing is to be determined by the degree of moral cultivation rather than by rank, and to the extent that individuals are committed to the quest for virtue they are all equal.

It may be objected that the notion of conceptual models was not around in Confucius' day and that there is nothing to suggest that he approached social issues in the systematic way implied. That is true. Nevertheless, reading through the comments attributed to him and reflecting on the pattern of ideas they contain, it does seem that he was working at least semi-consciously towards what may be called a friendship theory of society. He would not necessarily have been prepared to accept all the implications of that model, but ideals of friendship did guide his thinking on key issues. No less significant for his influence in later periods was the portrait of his personal life communicated by traditional accounts, particularly those dealing with his interaction with his disciples. Those accounts portray him as committed to the practice of friendship as well as its theory, and were to be invoked constantly by later advocates of friendship.

The argument that Confucius was seeking to escape from the limitations of a kinship model of society is not as odd as it may first appear. If Confucius emphasised the primacy of family and the virtue of filial piety, it was not because he believed that socio-political relations generally should be modelled on family relations, but rather because he was preoccupied with the problems of moral development and psychology. It is within the family that mutual affection, care, moral feelings and understanding of mutual obligations first arise. The question is, how can those affections and concerns, that moral sensitivity and understanding, be extended beyond the family sphere, if not to that totality we now call humanity, then at least to all those with whom one can feel some affinity. On occasion Confucius may have used the family analogy—his

⁴² Ibid, 12.5.

⁴³ *Lunyu yizhu/Analects*, 1.1. Liu Baonan, *Lunyu zhengyi* [The true meaning of the *Analects*], Zhuzi Jicheng edition (Shanghai: Shijie Shuju, 1935), 1/2–3, argues that *peng* here means disciple or student rather than friend, reading the passage autobiographically and referring to the definition that became standard during the first century AD, *tong men wei peng* 同門為朋: “[those who study at] the same gate are friends.”

⁴⁴ *Lunyu yizhu/Analects*, 12.23, 13.18.

⁴⁵ *Lunyu yizhu/Analects*, 11.26.

⁴⁶ *Lunyu yizhu/Analects*, 5.26.

⁴⁷ *Lunyu yizhu/Analects*, 5.17.

⁴⁸ *Lunyu yizhu/Analects*, 4.15 and 15.24; *Lunyu zhusu* [Commentary and sub-commentary to the *Analects*], SSJZS 4/15C, 15/62A. Lau discusses the meaning of *shu* in his Introduction to the *Analects*, pp.15–16. He refers to a relevant passage in the *Shizi* [Master Shi] but does not quote it in full. What the *Shizi* says is, “*Shu* means using oneself as a measure. What you yourself do not like, do not impose on others. Rid yourself of what you do not like in others; seek in yourself what you like in others: this is *shu*.” Clearly, this is more than just a statement of the Golden Rule. See *Shizi*, ed., Wang Jipei, in *Zhongguo sixiang mingzhu* [Famous works of Chinese thought] (Shanghai: Shijie Shuju Yinhang, n.d.), vol.9, A/15. According to Yan Shigu’s commentary to the bibliographic section of the *Han shu* [History of the Han Dynasty] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1962, 30/1741), Shizi, personal name Jiao, was Lord Shang’s teacher. When his powerful pupil was executed in 338 BC, Shi Jiao fled to Shu.

disciple, Zixia 子夏, in any case, was prepared to say that for a gentleman who shows courtesy, considerateness and respect towards others, “all within the four seas are his brothers 四海之內，皆兄弟也”⁴²—but something more was needed. That something was friendship, for friendship serves as a bridge between family and society, an avenue for extending personal affection, intimacy, understanding, care and commitment to others, in accordance with mutual empathy, shared needs and aspirations. The bonds of friendship are freely sought, the obligations they entail willingly entered into.

Confucius developed a concept of the state in which participation in government was conditional upon moral fitness for the task rather than descent (though in a society where descent had religious significance these things were not necessarily unconnected). This requirement applied both to the ruler and to his officials. There is no evidence to suggest that Confucius went as far as Mencius by arguing that a ruler who failed in his duty to nurture and protect his people should be overthrown. He did, however, believe that it was the duty of the *shi* to choose which ruler he would serve, and then to help him by adopting the role of teacher and friend, guiding him to a full understanding of the obligations incumbent on his position and encouraging him to be zealous in fulfilling them. Confucius admired the Duke of Zhou 周公, who, when King Cheng came to the throne (probably in 1042 or 1035 BCE), intervened by taking up the role of regent, playing the part of wise uncle, elder brother, teacher or friend (call it what you will) of the king. The Duke of Zhou’s position seems to have been quite irregular—irregular enough to cause a civil war—but it was a model that inspired Confucius despite, or perhaps because of, its irregularity. For Confucius aspired to an analogous position.

Confucius saw friendship as a source of joy and a means of personal fulfilment. To have friends come from afar is delightful (有朋自遠方來，不亦樂乎).⁴³ Friends provide “loyal advice and good guidance 忠告而善道” in serious matters such as moral self-improvement and conscientious public service, in pursuit of which they are demanding of each other.⁴⁴ However, it is also in the company of like-minded friends that we best enjoy everyday pleasures, such as swimming in the river on a warm day, then sitting together to enjoy the cool breeze before going home singing.⁴⁵ It is his aspiration, Confucius says, “to bring peace to the old, to be true to my friends and to cherish the young 老者安之，朋友信之，少者懷之.”⁴⁶ Someone who “excels in social relations,” he observes, “still treats old acquaintances with reverence 善於人交，久而敬之.”⁴⁷

In a passage that has prompted considerable discussion, Confucius’ disciple Zengzi 曾子 says that the unifying thread of the Master’s teaching is “loyalty and reciprocity, that’s all 忠恕而已.”⁴⁸ At first glance it seems a little odd to be told that the single thread has two parts, but what is

meant is a single mode of behaviour towards two categories of people: loyalty means remaining true to the ruler, reciprocity means being true to friends; both entail acting in accordance with an ideal, when what obligates us may be our personal sense of honour rather than social indebtedness actually incurred. Elsewhere in the *Analects*, Confucius says, "Put loyalty and trust above all else 主忠信," and it is observed that his teaching was based on four things: "culture, practice, loyalty and trust 文行忠信."⁴⁹ Reciprocity, it could be said, is not only a matter of mutual respect and support, but also about building trust, which requires focusing on the good others do and responding to that, rather than allowing ourselves to become preoccupied with the bad. Reciprocity, in this context, comes close to what psychologists refer to as positive reinforcement. By focusing attention on the essential nature of mutual trust for harmonious and constructive social interaction, Confucius was taking a new step in Chinese social thought.

Etymology enthusiasts will note that the logograph *xin* 信 has two components, which separately mean "man" and "speech," making it possible to interpret it as denoting directly "a man of his word." Whether this derivation is correct or not, the concept appears first to have emerged in the uncertain world of Spring and Autumn politics,⁵⁰ while it is Confucius who is credited with turning it into a moral concept. For Confucius, *xin*, trust or fidelity, was not just a matter of honouring one's word by doing what one said one would on this or that particular occasion; in a sense the virtue *xin* encapsulated his ideal of moral self-realisation: to be *xin* is to make one's conduct match one's ideals, to live up to the lofty principles one professes.

The concept of trust or fidelity is crucial for understanding friendship not only because the gap that arises so often between speech and action marks the boundary between true and false friendship; it also relates directly to the fact that friendship is voluntary, a matter of personal preference, affinity, autonomy. Unlike the interpersonal obligations that come with kinship, those that friendship imposes are assumed by choice, they are nowhere formally spelt out and are not legally enforceable; it comes down, in the end, to the commitment and integrity of the individual. It is the voluntary nature of friendship that makes it so precious and also so open to misrepresentation and pretence. Fidelity is the only safeguard in a relationship based upon nothing more secure than mutual regard.

It was, of course, the fragmentation of the Zhou empire that introduced the idea of choice into the ruler/subject relationship. By the time of Confucius the role of the *youshi* 游士 or wandering scholar-knight was well established, but it seems to have been Confucius who turned traveling from state to state into a moral imperative: a *shi* has a moral duty to search for a ruler and colleagues who are morally compatible, with whom he can work without self-compromise to establish good government.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 1.8, 7.25, 9.25.

⁵⁰ Yan Buke, "Chunqiu Zhanguo shi 'xin' guannian de yanbian ji qi shehui yuanyin" [The concept of "trust" in the Spring and Autumn–Warring States period: its evolution and social impact], *Lishi yanjiu* 6 (1981): 3–12; Zha Changguo, "You yu liang Zhou junchen guanxi de yanbian," p.99.

⁵¹ *Lunyu yizhu/Analects*, 14.2.

⁵² See, for example, Claude Fischer, *To dwell among friends: personal networks in town and city* (Chicago, Ill.: Chicago University Press, 1982); G. Herman, *Ritualised friendship and the Greek city* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); J. T. Fitzgerald, "Friendship in the Greek world prior to Aristotle," in *Greco-Roman perspectives on friendship*, ed. J.T. Fitzgerald (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1997), pp.13–34; Konstan, *Friendship in the classical world*, pp.8, 26.

⁵³ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, Duke Xiang 14.6, 3/1016–17.

"A *shi* attached to a settled home is not fit to be a *shi* 士而懷居, 不足以為士矣."⁵¹ It is probable that this emphasis on personal geographic mobility was itself another reason for attaching importance to friendship, one which seems very modern. Individual mobility of this sort makes it more difficult to rely on family members for companionship, emotional and practical support; the social isolation that results may make finding compatible friends that much more urgent.⁵² There is little in early Chinese texts that would enable us to attribute a growing preoccupation with friendship directly to a sense of social isolation resulting from greater individual mobility and experience of urban life. In this connection it is interesting to note, however, that the *Zuo Commentary* (Zuozhuan 左傳) at one point suggests that it is only *shi* who need friends: "The Son of Heaven has his dukes, the lords of the realm have their grandees, the grandees establish their collateral houses, the grand officers have their cadet lines, the *shi* have their friends, the common people, craftsmen, merchants, office attendants and stable hands have relatives to turn to: all have someone to support and help them 天子有公, 諸侯有卿, 卿置側室, 大夫有貳, 士有友, 庶人工商阜隸牧圉, 皆有親暱, 以相縶輔."⁵³ This passage may reflect the growing inter-state mobility of the *shi* as an occupational group, which by the time of Confucius had become a fact of life but was to become much more prevalent in the Warring States period. Those who moved from place to place in pursuit of their career needed friends in ways those in sedentary occupations did not.

Texts of the Spring and Autumn Period

References to friendship in texts whose contents date largely from the Spring and Autumn period—especially the *Talk of the States*, *Zuo Commentary* and the *Rites of Zhou* (Zhou li 周禮)—indicate that before Confucius there certainly were ideas in circulation regarding friendship and its role in public affairs. Even though the importance he attached to friendship seems to have been unprecedented and much of what he had to say on the subject was new, Confucius was in fact drawing on ideas and values present in the Zhou tradition. The textual evidence that friendship was already a topical subject amongst the élite before Confucius is of two kinds. One is that, during the Spring and Autumn period, *you* was used as in personal names, implying that friendship was widely identified as a social good at the time. The most interesting example is Cheng Jiyou 成季友, also referred to as Prince (*Gongzi* 公子) You or simply Jiyou 季友. Jiyou was the youngest son (*ji* 季) of Duke Huan of Lu 魯桓公 (r. 711–694 BCE), who according to the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and the *Zuo Commentary* played a crucial role in resolving the succession struggle that followed the death of his brother Duke Zhuang 魯莊公 (r. 693–661 BCE). The *Zuo Commentary* relates that before Jiyou's birth a

diviner was summoned, who foretold that it would be a male child whose name would be You, that he would win renown and prove to be a prop for the ducal house. When the baby was born there were lines on his hand in the shape of the character *you* and he was named accordingly. Under Duke Xi 魯僖公 (r. 659–627 BCE) he served as Chancellor until his death in 644 BCE. So highly was he regarded that Ji was made the name of his lineage.⁵⁴ Other individuals from the same period whose personal name was Friend (*You*) include Gongsun You 公孫友, Xian You 先友, Wang Ziyou 王子友 and Shen You 審友.⁵⁵

The other type of evidence, the references in the texts to friendship itself, indicates that during the Spring and Autumn period the word *you* continued to carry much the same range of meaning as found in early sections of the *Book of Documents* and the *Book of Songs*, and that Confucius was drawing on conventional ideas but elaborating them in new ways. Sometimes “friendship” is said to pertain to the interaction between brothers, sometimes not.⁵⁶ At times the roles of friend and teacher are mentioned together.⁵⁷ One passage in the *Zuo Commentary* emphasises the idea that friends help each other and draws on the *Book of Songs* for support: “The Zhou *Songs* says, ‘The friends that helped you, / Helped with perfect manners 周詩曰：朋友攸攝，攝以威儀，’ meaning, according to the speaker, that “the way of friendship demands mutual instruction and guidance by means of perfect manners 朋友之道必相教訓以威儀也.”⁵⁸ According to the *Rites of Zhou*, friendship was an official concern of the Zhou state, essential for social harmony and well-being, and raising the moral level of society generally. For example, the role of the Master Tutor (Shishi 師氏) was to instruct the Heir Apparent in “the three virtues 三德” and “the three modes of conduct 三行.” The three modes of conduct were filial conduct, “which entails being a true son to his parents 孝行以親父母,” friendly conduct, “which entails honouring the worthy and good 友行以尊賢良,” and deferential conduct, “which means serving his teachers and elders 順行以事師長.”⁵⁹ More generally, “the Chief Censor monitors the people’s virtue and promotes it, while friends correct their conduct and reinforce it 司諫掌糾萬民之德而勸之，朋友正其行而強之.”⁶⁰ There is no suggestion here that friendship is relevant or possible only for the socio-political élite; everyone needs friends to help them stay on the correct path. This differs from the passage in the *Zuo Commentary*, written from the perspective of the *shi*, cited earlier, which suggests it is only *shi* who need friends.

⁵⁴ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, esp. Duke Zhuang 27.3/236; Duke Min 1.4/256, 2.4/263–64; Duke Xi 16.2/368; Duke Shao 32.4/1519–20. See also Sima Qian, *Shiji* [Records of the Historian] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1959), 33/1532–34. In the *Guanzi* (sect. 18, 1/91.10–11; W. Allyn Rickett, *Guanzi: political, economic, and philosophical essays from ancient China, Volume 1* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), p.303), Jiyou is described as “a man who is respectful and pure of heart, well versed in the rites.”

⁵⁵ For Gongsun You, see *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, Duke Wen 7.3/556; Xian You and Wang Ziyou are referred to in *Guoyu yinde*, 7/68a and 19/144a, and *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, Duke Min 2.7/269–71; Shen You is mentioned in *Guanzi*, sect. 20, 1/106.2; Rickett, *Guanzi*, 1/335.

⁵⁶ *Guoyu yinde*, 10/90a, 10/93a, 18/136a; *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, Duke Xi 33.6, 1/502 (citing a passage no longer extant from the “Kang Proclamation” in the *Book of Documents*), Duke Wen 18.7/638, Duke Shao 26.2/1480.

⁵⁷ *Guoyu yinde*, 14/113a.

⁵⁸ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, Duke Xiang 31.13/1194.

⁵⁹ *Zhouli zhushu*, SSJZS 14/92B.

⁶⁰ *Zhouli zhushu*, SSJZS 14/93C.

Friendship in the Warring States Period

The intense political and philosophical disputes of the Warring States period produced many texts in which friendship features as a topic of discussion. While the discussions tend to be brief, when considered

⁶¹ *Mengzi yizhu*, 10.3/237; Lau, *Mencius*, p.152.

⁶² *Mengzi yizhu*, 8.30/200; Lau, *Mencius*, p.135.

⁶³ *Xunzi jishi*, 27/633, 29/653; John Knoblock, *Xunzi: a translation and study of the complete works*, 3 vols. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988–94), 3/232, 3/253.

⁶⁴ *Liji zhengyi*, 54/412A.

⁶⁵ *Lunyu yizhu/Analects*, 1.8, 9.5; also 12.24.

⁶⁶ Sun Yirang (1848–1908), *Mozi xiangu* [Notes on *Mozi*], Zhuzi Jicheng edition (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1935), 3/10; Yi-Pao Mei, *The ethical and political works of Mozi* (London: Probsthain, 1929), p.11.

⁶⁷ *Liji zhengyi*, 36/295B; Legge, 28/86–87.

together they add up to a sophisticated understanding of the subject that parallels in many respects the way it was approached by early Greek and Roman philosophers. In view of the fact that it is so difficult to date the constituent parts of Warring States written sources, the following presentation of ideas is arranged thematically, in support of the modest claim that in the late Warring States period this mix of ideas about friendship was in circulation, without attempting to say anything too precise regarding the details of their evolution.

One of the most dominant ideas concerning friendship in the Warring States period was that expressed in the *Book of Songs* and the *Zuo Commentary*, and emphasized by Confucius: a shared commitment to virtue is the basis of true friendship. That is what we should look for in friendship and what we should offer others. “In making friends with someone you should do so because of their virtue, and you must not rely on any advantage you possess 友也者，友其德也，不可以有挾也，” says Mencius.⁶¹ It is the pursuit of virtue that unites friends; virtue is the goal towards which they help each other. That “friends demand goodness from each other 責善，朋友之道也”⁶² was a view particularly dear to the followers of Confucius. “Choose only good men as one’s friends and be ever careful—this is the foundation of virtue 取友善人，不可不慎，是德之基也，” Xunzi 荀子 (d. c. 238 BCE) instructs. “In private life the gentleman conducts himself earnestly and in public life makes friends of the worthy 君子入則篤行，出則友賢.”⁶³ Friends should help us to “perfect [our conduct] 朋友以極之，” according to the *Book of Rites* (Li ji 禮記).⁶⁴ Closely associated with this view is the maxim articulated several times in the *Analects*: “Do not accept as friend anyone who is not as good as you 無友不如己者.”⁶⁵ The fact that this principle, if adopted by everyone, would make friendship largely impossible, did not prevent it from being widely espoused.

Most of the texts of the Warring States period that have come down to us were written by men preoccupied with issues of statecraft, socio-political order and morality. One of their preoccupations was education, not only moral education but the acquisition of knowledge and skills more generally. In this, friendship was seen to play an important role. Mozi 墨子 (fifth century BCE) argues that just as states have “colouring agents,” strong influences that give them their distinguishing characteristics, so too do *shi*. “The friends of the *shi* are all fond of benevolence and righteousness 其友皆好仁義,” he says.⁶⁶ Education, clearly, is one major area in which social isolation may be particularly damaging. According to the *Book of Rites*, “Learning alone and having no friends makes one solitary, boorish and uninformed 獨學而無友，則孤陋而寡聞，” but having the wrong friends may be worse than having no friends. “To seek pleasure with peers is to go against one’s teacher. To seek pleasure with low types is to set one’s learning at naught 燕朋逆其師，燕辟廢其學.”⁶⁷

Not surprisingly, the roles of a friend were seen to overlap to a large extent with those of a teacher. In the texts of the period, “teacher and friend 師友” is a recurring phrase, sometimes referring to two separate people, sometimes to one who is both. A gentleman (*junzi* 君子), says the *Garden of Persuasions* (Shuiyuan 說苑), “has worthy teachers and good friends at his side 賢師良友在其側.”⁶⁸ “He who comes to me with censure is my teacher; he who comes to me with approbation is my friend 非我而當者, 吾師也; 是我而當者, 吾友也,” says Xunzi, and stresses that to be the best of men one must have a worthy teacher and good companions with whom to associate.⁶⁹ According to the *Guanzi* 管子, “When the teacher retires his students each seek out their friends, to cut and polish and refine their sense of what is right 先生既息, 各就其友, 相切相磋, 各長其儀.”⁷⁰ How are the roles of teacher and friend to be distinguished from each other? The *Annals of Yan Ying* (Yanzi chunqiu 晏子春秋) attributes to Confucius the remark, “I have heard that when a gentleman surpasses another he makes him his friend, and when he does not measure up to another he makes him his teacher 君子過人以為友, 不及人以為師.”⁷¹ While this contradicts the Confucian maxim cited earlier, that a gentleman should make friends only with those better than himself, it is reflected in Confucius’ own relationship with his students, as well as in the widely held view that a *shi* should be friend and teacher to the lords of the realm. It seems also to lie behind a comment attributed to Zengzi in the *Analects*: “A gentleman makes friends through being cultivated, but looks to friends for support in benevolence 君子以文會友, 以友輔仁.”⁷² In other words, you first have to cultivate yourself if you want to win any friends at all. The same point was to be made more explicitly later by Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE): “a gentleman studies with application and acts with determination. He adds value to his goods and only then enters the market place, cultivates his person and only then interacts with others, perfects his plan and only then moves to achieve the Way 君子彊學而力行; 珍其貨而後市, 修其身而後交, 善其謀而後動成道也.”⁷³

It is difficult for modern scholars to appreciate the full significance in the Warring States period of the idea that the *shi* should be a friend and teacher of the ruler, and why it was so popular. Although sceptics may interpret it as the pursuit of self-interest by self-aggrandising *shi*, there was much more to it than that, as is evident from the discussion of Confucius above. Most importantly, friendship served as a new model for the ruler/subject relationship in a state structure that was no longer based solely on kinship. The essential point is made most clearly in the *Collection of Sayings* (Yu cong 語叢), one of the early (probably late fourth century BCE) Confucian texts found in a tomb at Guodian 郭店 in 1993: “Friendship is the way of ruler and subject 友, 君臣之道也 ... The relationship between ruler and subject, and between peers and friends,

⁶⁸ Lu Yuanjun, *Shuiyuan jinzhu jinyi* [Garden of persuasions: modern commentary and modern translation] (Taipei: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1982), 16/528. As my translation of the title indicates, following Japanese scholars I read 說 as *shui* (“persuasion”) rather than *shuo* (“discussion”).

⁶⁹ Xunzu *jishi*, 2/23, 23/558; Burton Watson, *Hsün Tzu: basic works* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), pp.24, 170; also Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 1/151.

⁷⁰ *Guanxi*, Guoxue Jiben Congshu edition (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1968), sect. 59, 3/27.14; W. Allyn Rickett, *Guanzi: political, economic, and philosophical essays from early China, Volume 2* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), p.291.

⁷¹ Wu Zeyu, *Yanzi chunqiu jishi* [Collected commentaries on the *Annals of Yan Ying*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1962), 8.4/501.

⁷² *Lunyu yizhu/Analects*, 12.24.

⁷³ Wang Ronghao, *Fayan yishu* [Explication of the meaning of the *Model Sayings* (of Yang Xiong)] (1933, rpt. Taipei: Yiwen Yinshuguan, n.d.), pp.144–5.

⁷⁴ *Guodian Chumu zhujian*, pp.209, 197: “友，君臣之道也。... 君臣，朋友，其擇也。” The two passages quoted occur independently of each other in the text. I have linked them because logically they fit together. I follow the transcription of the non-standard characters in the silk manuscripts provided by the editors of *Guodian Chumu zhujian*. Note that the non-standard character here transcribed as 友 retains the ancient pictographic element representing two right hands, unlike the modern graph which represents a left and a right hand. See also footnote 18 above, and the accompanying illustrations. See also footnote 18 and Figures 1 and 2 above.

Figure 3

Jingmenshi Bowuguan, Guodian Chumu (Silk manuscripts from the Chu tombs at Guodian) (Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe, 1998), p.209 (mod.), p.97 (bamboo)


君臣、朋習（友），其擇（擇）者也。



Figure 4

Jingmenshi Bowuguan, Guodian Chumu zhujian p.197 (mod.), p.84 (bamboo)

習（友），君臣之術（道）也。長弟，孝之紡（方）也。



is a relationship of choice 君臣，朋友，其擇者也。”⁷⁴ Given the political situation of the Warring States period, even more than in the Spring and Autumn period it made good sense to see the ruler/subject relationship in this way.

The idea of being friends with a ruler was difficult to put into practice, no matter how attractive it might be in theory. In Warring States texts there are numerous variations on the theme. For example, it could involve a *shi* having a formal position at court and drawing a salary, while at the same time trying to remain a friend or teacher of the ruler, intimate and supportive, but at the same time frank and demanding, urging him on to goodness. This idea is expressed in the *Garden of Persuasions*: “The minister of an emperor has the title minister but his actual role is teacher; the minister of a king has the title minister but his actual role is friend; the minister of an overlord has the title minister but his actual role is retainer; the minister of a state in danger has the title minister but his actual role is prisoner. 帝者之臣，其名臣也，其實師也；

王者之臣，其名臣也，其實友也；霸者之臣，其名臣也，其實賓；危國之臣，其名臣也，其實虜也。”⁷⁵ Needless to say, such a course brought many dangers with it. An alternative, possibly clearer ethically and safer strategically, was to adopt the roles of teacher and friend while refusing to hold an official post or draw a salary. Perhaps the most famous example involves Marquis Wen of Wei 魏文侯 (d. 396 BC), at whose court Zixia 子夏, Tian Zifang 天子方 and Duangan Mu 段干木 played these informal roles after declining formal positions.⁷⁶ In the *Annals of Lü Buwei*, a follower of Mozi called Meng Sheng 孟勝, when describing his own relationship with a ruler, indicates how these options were seen in relation to each other. The thrust of his remarks is that since he is subject, friend and teacher of the ruler all at once, he owes the ruler three sorts of obligations. His words leave no doubt as to how they should be ranked: “if not his teacher,” he says, “then I am [still] his friend, if not his friend then I am [still] his subject 非師則友也，非友則臣也。”⁷⁷ In other words, to be his teacher is special, to be his friend a little less so, whereas to be his subject is unavoidable.

There is reason to assume that being a friend of the ruler in this radical way would not normally have been possible for a *shi* in his native state, since he could not set aside his duty as subject just because he wished to do so. However, for the wandering scholar-knights or *youshi*, who travelled from state to state, this would have been less of a problem. The fact that a *shi* could decide to leave his home state to seek a political patron elsewhere did lead to the idea that the *shi*'s relation with the ruler of his native state was one of choice. Nonetheless, in practice such a relation could not have been established unilaterally by the *shi*; ultimately, it would still have been at the ruler's discretion, and, quite clearly, some did not care for the idea at all. Presumably this is one reason “honouring worthy men as teachers” is a theme present in most Warring States texts, and was a mode of conduct regarded by many *shi* as evidence of a ruler's fitness to hold power. It is easy to overlook the fact that almost without exception those texts portray the famous philosophers and advisors of the time in the role of teacher of this or that ruler, instructing and admonishing the supreme authority in the way that might be expected of a wise teacher and friend.

Any discussion of friendship and rulers during the Warring States period, as in relation to earlier periods, cannot ignore the issue of political friendships or friendship between states. Being the friend of a ruler, in ancient China as elsewhere, could certainly also carry the meaning of being an ally, political supporter, or well disposed neighbour. In the *Guanzi*, the term *pengyou* is sometimes used in reference to political allies, for example: “When a state is in disorder wise men cannot manage its domestic affairs and friends are unable to unite with it 夫國之亂，智人不得作內事，朋友不能相合摺。”⁷⁸ Xunzi sees friendship as being import-

⁷⁵ *Shuiyuan jinzhu jinyi*, 1/20. Much the same idea is expressed in *The Canon: Law* (Jing fa) and *Stratagems of the Warring States* (Zhanguo ce). See Robin D. S. Yates, *Five lost classics: Tao, Huanglao, and Yin-Yang in Han China* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), p.159; *Zhanguo ce* (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1978), 33/1180.

⁷⁶ *Lüshi chunqiu jishi*, 19.8/918, 21.2/995, 21.3/998–1000; *Annals of Lü Buwei*, pp.507, 552, 555–6.

⁷⁷ *Lüshi chunqiu jishi*, 19.3/885; *Annals of Lü Buwei*, p.488.

⁷⁸ *Guanzi* sect. 18, 1/86.14; Rickett, *Guanzi*, 1/293.

⁷⁹ *Xunzi jishi*, 9/169–171; Watson, *Hsün Tzu: basic works*, pp.39–41.

⁸⁰ *Wuzi* [Master Wu] (traditionally ascribed to Wu Qi 吳起, 440–381 BC), in *Wujing qishu zhuayi* [Seven militarist classics: commentary and translation] ed. Zhongguo junshishi bianxiezue (Beijing: Jiefangjun Chubanshe, 1980), 1/8/433.

⁸¹ *Wenzi* [Master Wen], Zhuzi Baijia Congshu edition (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1989), 5/33a. Master Wen is said to have been a disciple of Laozi and contemporary of Confucius, but the text cannot be earlier than the late Warring States Period.

⁸² *Yanzi chunqiu jishi*, 8.4/501. See also *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, Duke Wen 18.7/638; in Duke Xi 33.6/502 a similar idea is attributed to the “Kang Proclamation” in the *Book of Documents*.

⁸³ *Mozi xiangyu*, sect.16, 4/80.

⁸⁴ *Erya zhushu* [Commentary and Sub-commentary to *Examples of Refined Usage*], SSJS 4/25C.

⁸⁵ *Lunyu yizhu*, 12.5; *Analects*, 12.5.

⁸⁶ *Lüshi chunqiu jishi*, 14.1/529 *Annals of Lü Buwei*, p.303. There is a parallel passage in the *Book of Rites*, *Liji zhengyi*, 48/370B–C; Legge, 28/226.

tant for a ruler who aspires to the role of overlord, but not for a true king. A true king relies only on his own virtue, whereas the semi-informal position of overlord depends on being able to win the respect and co-operation of other rulers.

He who commands the allegiance of the lords of the realm may become a king; he who wins their friendship may become an overlord; but he who incurs their enmity is in danger ... If he treats them as friends and equals and is respectful in his dealings with them, he will win their favour ... He can win their favour by treating them as friends and equals, but if he shows any inclination to treat them as subjects they will reject him 臣諸侯者王，友諸侯者霸，敵諸侯者危 ... 修友敵之道，以敬接諸侯，則諸侯說之矣 ... 所以說之者，以友敵也，臣之見，則諸侯離矣。⁷⁹

Much the same argument is made in the militarist text *Wuzi* 吳子.⁸⁰ Sometimes, in Daoist texts such as the *Wenzi* 文子, conventional wisdom about the ruler's need for friends is given a radical twist: “When the Three Emperors and Five Kings regulated the world ... above they made friends with the Dao, below they modelled themselves on Change. 三皇五帝經天下 ... 上與道為友，下以化為人。”⁸¹

If in one direction ideas of friendship blur with the public and political roles of teacher and ally, in another direction they blur with family roles of brother and son. Sometimes friendship is identified as the ideal relation between brothers, usually (but not always) on the part of the elder brother: “where the elder brother loves, the younger brother is respectful ... the elder brother loves and so is a friend 兄愛弟敬 ... 兄愛而友,” says the *Annals of Yan Ying*.⁸² “The elder brother must be friendly,” instructs Mozi, “the younger brother must be dutiful 為人兄必友，為人弟必悌.”⁸³ “Good conduct towards parents is filial piety, good conduct towards brothers is friendship 善父母為孝，善兄弟為友,” according to the *Examples of Refined Usage* (*Er Ya* 爾雅).⁸⁴ On other occasions friendship is conceived in terms of ideal brotherhood, the best-known instance being that attributed to Zixia in the *Analects*.⁸⁵ The connection between friendship and the quintessential family virtue of filial piety is construed in a variety of ways. Sometimes filial piety is regarded as incorporating all other ideals of conduct, including friendship, because any form of misconduct is to fail in one's duty towards one's parents: “A person who is undignified at home and at rest, disloyal in serving his lord, careless in managing his official duties, undependable with friends, or lacks courage in battle is not filial 居處不莊，非孝也；事君不忠，非孝也；莅官不敬，非孝也；朋友不篤，非孝也；戰陳無勇，非孝也.”⁸⁶ More frequently, friendship and filial conduct are simply mentioned together as two types of ideal conduct. In the *Annals of Lü Buwei* a true *shi* is

described as “filial to his parents, loyal in serving his lord, truthful to friends and acquaintances, and respectful to the elders of his community. 事親則孝，事君則忠，交友則信，居鄉則悌 ... 此真所謂士已。”⁸⁷ The *Shizi* 尸子 offers a negative version of the same point, identifying being unfilial to one's parents, disloyal to one's lord, and untrue to one's friends as the three types of behaviour that will undermine the civilised world.⁸⁸ Elsewhere, the practise of filial conduct when young is said to lead to the achievement of other ideals of conduct later. Mencius, for example, states that someone who “in serving his parents fails to please them ... will not win the trust of his friends 事親弗悅，弗信於友矣，”⁸⁹ meaning it in the developmental sense that someone who has not learnt to do his best for his parents will be unlikely to do so for his friends. Similarly, the *Doctrine of the Mean* says that being well regarded by one's superiors follows from being true to one's friends, which follows from being deferential to one's relations.⁹⁰

The above exposition of friendship is heavily moralistic in its pre-occupations. It goes without saying that there must have been many people in Warring States China whose friendships were based on shared interests that were less refined or idealistic. Philosophers and political activists are not necessarily reliable guides to the social concepts and values that inform the lives of ordinary people. Popular impatience with holier-than-thou ideas of friendship seems to have been expressed in the view that “The company of a gentleman is as bland as water; that of a petty man, as sweet as rich wine 君子之交淡若水，小人之交甘若醴.”⁹¹ The basic idea that “those with the same aspirations are friends 同志為友，” which had by the end of the first century AD become a standard dictionary definition,⁹² certainly was conventional wisdom during the Warring States period. But it is important to note that while the term *zhi* 志 was often interpreted in a moral sense as “ideal” or “aspiration,” its meaning could be so broad as to refer simply to whatever someone had in mind or on their mind, which might have little or nothing to do with morality. The general principle that friends share a common outlook is clearly expressed by Zhuangzi 莊子 (d. 286 BCE):

Masters Si, Yu, Li and Lai were all four talking together. ‘Who can look upon non-having as his head, on life as his back, and on death as his rump?’ they said. ‘Who knows that life and death, existence and annihilation, are all a single body? I will be his friend’. The four men looked at each other and smiled. There was no disagreement in their hearts and so the four of them became friends 子祀子與子犁子來四人相與語曰：孰能以無為首，以生為脊，以死為主尻？孰知死生存亡之一體者，吾與之友矣。四人相視而笑，莫逆於心，遂相與為友。⁹³

⁸⁷ *Lüshi chunqiu jishi*, 16.8/728; *Annals of Lü Buwei*, p.402.

⁸⁸ *Shizi*, A/11.

⁸⁹ *Mengzi yizhu*, 7.12/173; Lau, *Mencius*, p.123.

⁹⁰ *Liji zhengyi*, 53/404A.

⁹¹ Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi* [Collected commentaries on *Zhuangzi*] (Taipei: Huazheng Shuju, 1980), 20/685; Burton Watson, *The complete works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p.215.

⁹² *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 3B/20a.

⁹³ *Zhuangzi jishi*, 6/258; Watson, *The complete works of Chuang Tzu*, pp. 83–4.

⁹⁴ *Zhuangzi jisbi*, 1/39–40, 5/220–23, 18/614–15, 24/843, 26/936–37, 27/952–53; *The complete works of Zhuangzi*, pp.34–5, 75–6, 191–2, 269, 299, 305.

⁹⁵ *Zhuangzi jisbi*, 24/843; Watson, *The complete works of Chuang Tzu*, p.269.

⁹⁶ *Zhuangzi jisbi*, 33/1098–9; Watson, *The complete works of Chuang Tzu*, p.373.

⁹⁷ *Lüshi chunqiu jisbi* 14.2/537–8; *Annals of Lü Buwei*, p. 308.

The point of the story in this context is not that the sort of philosophical view of life and death the four friends share is different from that held by Confucians or philosophers of any other particular persuasion; rather, it is simply that they become friends *because they have no disagreement in their hearts*. It is this that is the basis for friendship, regardless of whether it is agreement about the nature of virtue and how to achieve it, or more prosaic interests such as crops, the pros and cons of military service, or the importance of sharing a good joke and cup of wine. One of the best portraits of a friendship in pre-Qin literature is that of Zhuangzi and his philosopher friend Huizi 惠子, presented in anecdotes about the pair scattered throughout the *Zhuangzi* text.⁹⁴ Those anecdotes show them disputing philosophical matters, to be sure, but also portray more commonplace sorts of friendly interaction, such as strolling beside a river, consoling each other on the death of a spouse, and simply appreciating each other's company. At Huizi's graveside, Zhuangzi says, "Since you died, Master Hui ... there's no one I can talk to any more 子夫子之死也 ... 吾无與言之矣."⁹⁵ The value of this portrait lies partly in the way it shows it is possible to overstate the extent to which a common outlook, shared values and aspirations are essential for strong friendship. Like Zhuangzi and Huizi, many good friends enjoy arguing and competing with each other. While the final chapter of *Zhuangzi* comments that "he made friends with those who have gotten outside of life and death, who know nothing of beginning or end 與外死生无終始者為友,"⁹⁶ it is clear that Zhuangzi also had friends who did not share his philosophical outlook.

That friends see the world in the same way, have the same aspirations, or follow a similar path, is closely associated with another basic idea of friendship: true friends understand each other in a way others cannot. The classic statement of this idea in China is the story about Bo Ya 伯雅 and Zhong Ziqi 鍾子期, the earliest extant appearance of which (around 239 BCE) is in the *Annals of Lü Buwei*:

When Bo Ya played the lute, Zhong Ziqi would listen to him. Once when he was playing the lute, his thoughts turned to Mount Tai. Zhong Ziqi said, 'How splendidly you play the lute! Lofty and majestic like Mount Tai'. A short time later, when his thoughts turned to rolling waters, Zhong Ziqi said, 'How splendidly you play the lute! Rolling and swelling like a rushing river'. When Zhong Ziqi died, Bo Ya smashed the lute and cut its strings. To the end of his life, he never played the lute again because he felt that there was no one in the world worth playing for. This applies not only to the lute, but to worthiness as well 伯雅鼓琴，鍾子期聽之。方鼓琴而志在太山。鍾子期曰：善哉乎鼓琴，巍巍乎若太山。少選之間，而志在流水，鍾子期又曰：善哉乎鼓琴，湯湯乎流水。鍾子期死，伯雅破琴絕弦，終身不復鼓琴，以為世無足復為鼓琴者。非獨琴若此也，賢者亦然。⁹⁷

Perhaps better known than this version of the story is the allusion to it by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (c. 145–87 BCE) in his *Letter Replying to Ren Shaoqing* 報任少卿書: “For whom do you do it? Who will you get to listen to you? Why did Bo Ya never play his lute again after Zhong Ziqi died? A gentleman acts for a friend who understands him, just as a woman makes herself attractive for her lover. 諺曰: 誰為為之? 孰令聽之? 蓋鍾子期死, 伯雅終身不復鼓琴. 何則? 士為知己用, 女為說己容.”⁹⁸

Closely related is the idea that, since friends share a common outlook, the best way to discover a person’s character is to observe his friends. According to Xunzi, it was traditional wisdom that “If you do not know a man, look at his friends; if you do not know a ruler, look at his attendants 不知其子, 視其友; 不知其君, 視其左右.”⁹⁹ The *Annals of Lü Buwei* makes the same point in an anecdote concerning a famous physiognomist who, when questioned about the art that enables him to read men’s fortunes from their looks, replies, “I cannot tell a man’s fortune from his looks, but am able to observe his friends 臣非能相人也, 能觀人之友也.”¹⁰⁰ In terms of the correlative thinking encouraged by Five Phase theory, it was a basic cosmological fact that like attracts like. “Things belonging to the same category naturally attract each other; things that share the same ethers naturally join together; and musical notes that are close naturally resonate with one another 類同相召, 氣同則合, 聲比則應.”¹⁰¹ If a *shi*’s acquaintances are unlike him, the *Annals of Yan Ying* advises, he should walk away without any further wish to communicate.¹⁰²

The view that friends see the world in the same way, have common goals and understand each other perfectly is closely linked with what was the most fundamental idea regarding friendship in ancient China: friends support each other, they help each other. “It is fitting for close acquaintances and friends to help each other 知交朋友之相助也宜,” says Han Feizi 韓非子 (d. 233 BCE), despite his wariness of friendship in public affairs.¹⁰³ Xunzi argues that unless friends do share a common understanding and purpose, it is difficult to see how they could help each other. “Friends are those who help each other. If they do not share the same path how can they help each other? 友者, 所以相有也. 道不同, 何以相有也.”¹⁰⁴ As discussed earlier, the idea that friends help each other is developed in many texts in terms of pushing each other towards virtue in private life and in public life providing support for the ruler, either in the basic sense of political allegiance, or as teacher and friend, pushing him towards goodness. A more conventional understanding of the idea that friends help each other is expressed by Mozi, when he contrasts the speech and conduct of a *shi* who embraces the principle of universality with that of a *shi* who embraces the principle of partiality. The former says, according to Mozi: “I have heard that an eminent *shi* is sure to look on his friend as his own self and look on his friend’s family

⁹⁸ *Hanshu*, 62/2725–36. The complete letter is translated by James Hightower in Cyril Birch, ed., *Anthology of Chinese literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), pp.120–7.

⁹⁹ *Xunzi jishi*, 23/558; Watson, *Hsün Tzu*, pp.170–1; Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 3/162.

¹⁰⁰ *Lüshi chunqiu jishi*, 24.6/1116; *Annals of Lü Buwei*, p.621.

¹⁰¹ *Lüshi chunqiu jishi*, 20.4/946, *Annals of Lü Buwei*, p.522.

¹⁰² *Yanzi chunqiu jishi*, 4.19/287.

¹⁰³ Zhou Zhongling, Shi Xiaoshi and Xu Weixian, *Han Feizi suoyin* [Concordance to *Han Feizi*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1982), 20.4/761.

¹⁰⁴ *Xunzi jishi* 27/629; Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 3/232.

¹⁰⁵ *Mozi xianggu*, 16/73; also 2/6: "He who will not share his possessions with others is not worthy to be a friend"; Mei, *Ethical and political works of Mozi*, p.7.

¹⁰⁶ *Yanzi chungiu jisbi*, 4.26/287.

¹⁰⁷ *Mengzi yizhu*, 2.6/40; Lau, *Mencius*, pp.66–7.

¹⁰⁸ *Xunzi jisbi*, 23/555; Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 3/160.

¹⁰⁹ *Shuiyuan jinzhu jinyi*, 16/535.

¹¹⁰ Bell and Coleman, "The anthropology of friendship," pp.8–15.

as his own 吾聞為高士與天下者，必為其友之身若為其身，為其友之親若為其親，" and so when they are hungry he feeds them, when they are cold he clothes them, when they are sick he nurtures them, and if they die he buries them. The latter says, "How can I look on my friend as my own self and my friend's family as my own? 吾豈能為吾友之身若為吾身，為吾友之親若為吾親?" When they are hungry he does not feed them, when they are cold he does not clothe them, when they are sick he does not nurture them, and if they die he does not bury them.¹⁰⁵

A number of passages emphasising the importance of trust between friends have already been cited when discussing Confucius and filial piety above. The *Annals of Yan Ying* states that being true to one's friends is one aspect of "glorious 榮" conduct.¹⁰⁶ According to Mencius, someone who goes abroad leaving his wife and children in the care of a friend, to discover on his return that they have been neglected should break off the friendship.¹⁰⁷ Xunzi was of the opinion that, like other sorts of virtuous conduct, trust between friends is not "natural" and has to be learnt: "Man's emotions are very unlovely things When a man has both wife and child, his conduct towards his parents becomes less filial. When he has satisfied his desires and wishes, his conduct towards his friends becomes less true. When he has attained high office and a good salary, his conduct towards his lord becomes less loyal 人之情甚不美 ... 妻子具而孝衰與親. 嗜欲得而信衰於友, 爵錄盈而忠衰於君."¹⁰⁸ The indispensable nature of trust or faithfulness in friendship is expressed with greatest clarity in the *Garden of Persuasions*: "A son who is not filial is not my son; an associate who is not true is not my friend. 子不孝, 非吾子也; 交不信, 非吾友也."¹⁰⁹

It is sometimes suggested that the voluntary and open nature of friendship, with which the virtue of trust is intimately bound up, are peculiarly modern Western preoccupations, ones that lead quickly to historical misunderstanding if applied to other periods, other cultures.¹¹⁰ As it has been argued here, however, these issues were certainly important in ancient China. While it is true that the free and open nature of friendship is particularly valued in modern Western society, the fact remains that it is impossible to understand friendship at all in the absence of some idea of personal choice and autonomy in interpersonal relations. In early China the cultural and social roles played by concepts of friendship make sense only if we see that personal autonomy and informality were regarded as lying at the heart of the bond between friends.

The reiteration in early Chinese texts of the need to be careful in choosing one's friends, to look for friends in virtue, to ensure that one only makes friends with those as good as oneself, only makes sense if it is generally assumed that individuals are able to exercise some discretion and follow personal preferences when forming friendships. Moreover,

it is only the assumption of personal autonomy and discretion in friendship that can account for the widespread theme in socio-political discussion already mentioned: that the ideal relationship between the ruler and a *shi* who advises him is friendship, or the relationship between teacher and student, and not the formal relationship between subject and ruler. If a *shi* is the ruler's subject and no more, he is obliged to carry out the duties entailed by his position and respect the ruler's authority. In the informal capacity of friend, however, or as teacher of the ruler, the *shi* may urge the ruler on towards benevolence and virtue in the way a friend should.

The concept of personal autonomy and discretion underlying such a relationship is articulated in the *Book of Rites*: "With the *shi* relations may be cultivated, but no attempt must be made to constrain him; near association with him can be sought, but cannot be forced on him 儒有可親而不可劫也; 可近而不可迫也."¹¹¹ Similarly, the *Annals of Lü Buwei* states that "Eminent *shi* cannot be made to submit through rudeness or recklessness 堪士不可以驕恣屈也."¹¹² The example of the most famous of all wandering scholar-knights, Confucius, is used by Zhuangzi, who portrays him as friend, not of the ruler of one of the many states Confucius visited in his travels, but rather of Duke Ai of Lu 魯哀公 (r. 494–468 BCE), his home state. Zhuangzi has Duke Ai declare, "Confucius and I are not subject and ruler, we are friends in virtue, that's all 吾與孔丘, 非君臣也, 德友而已矣."¹¹³ The most extended discussion of this idea, however, is by Mencius, who takes pains to point out that friendship with a ruler should not be allowed to infringe upon matters that properly are those of the ruler alone:

Take Duke Ping of Jin 晉平公 (r. 557–532 BCE) and Hai Tang 亥唐 for instance. He entered when Hai Tang said 'Enter'. Sat down when Hai Tang said 'Sit down', and ate his fill even when the fare was unpolished rice and vegetable broth, because he did not dare do otherwise. But Duke Ping went no further than this. He did not share with Hai Tang his position, his duties, or his revenue—all given to him by Heaven. This is the honouring of good and wise men by a gentleman, not the honouring of good and wise men by kings and dukes.

Shun 舜 went to see the Emperor, who placed his son-in-law in a separate mansion. He entertained Shun but also allowed himself to be entertained in return. This is an example of an emperor making friends with a common man.

晉平公之於亥唐也, 入云則入, 坐云則坐, 食云則食, 雖蔬食菜羹, 不啻不飽, 蓋不敢不飽也。然終於此而已矣。弗與其天位, 弗與治天職也, 弗與食天祿也。士之尊賢者也, 非王公之尊賢者也。舜尚見帝, 帝館甥于貳室, 亦饗舜, 迭為賓主, 是天子而友匹夫也。¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ *Liji zhengyi*, 59/441C; Legge, *Book of Rites*, 28/405.

¹¹² *Lishi chunqiu jishi*, 15.4/637; *Annals of Lü Buwei*, p. 352.

¹¹³ *Zhuangzi jishi*, 5/216; Watson, *The complete works of Chuang Tzu*, p. 74.

¹¹⁴ *Mengzi yizhu*, 10.3/237; Lau, *Mencius*, pp. 152–3.

¹¹⁵ *Mengzi yizhu*, 10.7/248, Lau, *Mencius*, pp.157.

¹¹⁶ *Han Feizi suoyin*, 8.5.25/739; Watson, *Han Fei Tzu: basic works* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), p.37.

These examples and the theme of friendship between ruler and subject more generally highlight another aspect of friendship that is certainly present in Chinese conceptions, but in the early period appears to have been articulated directly only rarely: the idea of equality in friendship. For the early Confucian thinkers, however, friendship has to be between equals to the extent that virtue operates independently of social or political position, status or wealth. If the individual's concern is solely to find someone as committed to virtue and self-refinement as himself, then clearly other factors should be extraneous or irrelevant. However, this issue may be complicated by the blurring of friendship with the teacher-student relationship, as discussed earlier. Since the teacher-student relationship assumes inequality in virtue, it may come into conflict with socio-political inequality, as Mencius indicates by drawing on a discussion between Zisi and Duke Miao of Lu 魯繆公 (r. 415–383 BC). According to Mencius, Zisi said, “In point of position you are the ruler and I am your subject. How dare I be friends with you? In point of virtue, it is you who ought to serve me. How can you presume to be friends with me? 以位，則子，君也；我，臣也；何敢與君友也？以德，則子事我者也，奚可以與我友？”¹¹⁵ Having highlighted the dilemma, unfortunately Mencius does not go on to suggest a way of resolving it.

Not surprisingly, there were plenty who objected strongly to this way of conceiving relations between ruler and subject. Such thinkers fiercely rejected any suggestion that the rulership between ruler and subject could be anything but formal and compelling. Legalists such as Shang Yang 商鞅 (d. 338 BCE) and Han Feizi resisted all moves to blur the distinction between ruler and subject or to introduce informality into public affairs. “Ruler and subject do not follow the same way,” Han Feizi states emphatically.¹¹⁶ Friendship they regarded as a manifestation of partiality, whereas socio-political order requires that all matters be handled impartially in accordance with the law.

Han Feizi's position on these matters is clear from the fact that whereas in the text that carries his name the compound *pengyou* (friend) appears only twice, the compound *pengdang* (faction or clique) appears eighteen times. Personal bonds of the sort usually labelled friendship, according to Han Feizi, lead to the formation of interest groups bent on pursuing the private interests of their members instead of serving the ruler. While he is familiar with positive aspects of friendship stressed so eloquently by many of his contemporaries, such as the importance of trust and the centrality of mutual help and support in friendship, he strongly rejects the idea that there is a place for friendship in government. Friendship between ruler and minister undermines the ruler's monopoly of power, while friendship between ministers results in their private interests being set against the impartiality of the law which must determine all things:

The way of the intelligent ruler is to make clear the distinction between public and private interests, highlighting rule by law and doing away with personal preference. For the ruler, public righteousness requires orders to be carried out and prohibitions put into effect; for a minister, private righteousness requires advancing private interests and being faithful to friends, unmotivated by reward and unconstrained by punishment 明主之道，必明於公私之分，明法制，去私恩。夫令必行，禁必止，人主之公義也；必行其私，信於朋友，不可為賞勸，不可為罰沮，人臣之私義。私義行則亂，公義行則治。故公私有分。¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ *Han Feizi suo yin*, 19.6/759.

¹¹⁸ *Xunzi jishi*, 13/189, 14/303; Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 2/198, 206.

¹¹⁹ *Guanzi*, sect. 14, 1/65.11; Rickett, *Guanzi*, 1/239.

¹²⁰ *Lüshi chunqiu jishi*, 20/477–8; *Annals of Lü Buwei*, pp. 271–2.

¹²¹ *Lüshi chunqiu jishi*, 22.4/1036; *Annals of Lü Buwei*, p. 575.

Clearly, in the late Warring States period there were also those who, while not espousing the harsher Legalist forms of authoritarianism, were nevertheless alert to the limitations of friendship as a model for political order, no matter how valuable it might be in personal life. Although Xunzi, Han Fei's teacher, appreciated the benefits of friendship in both private and political life, he was also alert to its dangers in government and warned against the problem of factionalism amongst high officials.¹¹⁸ The *Guanzi* lists "factionalism posing as friendship 以朋黨為友" amongst the kinds of things prohibited by a sage king.¹¹⁹ The conflicts that may arise between friendship obligations and political ones are articulated in the *Annals of Lü Buwei* in a passage concerning Viscount Xiang of Zhao 趙襄子 (r. 457–425 BCE) and his subject Qing Ping 青平, in which Qing Ping is said to have committed suicide because he could see no way out of the clash between his duty towards his ruler and his obligations towards an old friend he discovers intent on killing Viscount Xiang.¹²⁰ But most significant of all the passages relating to friendship in the text, in terms of the philosophical mood of the times, is the following:

Of all the things the Early Kings hated, what they hated above all else were things that could not be recognised for what they really were. Such indeterminant things destroy the boundaries that define the proper relations between ruler and subject, father and son, older brother and younger brother, friends and acquaintances, and man and wife. Nothing produces greater chaos than the destruction of the boundaries that define these ten relations.

As a general principle, the obligations between people depend on having the lines defining these ten relations in place. When they are allowed to deteriorate, humans are no different from deer, tigers, and wolves: the one with the most strength controls all the others. If these things are indeterminant, there will be no secure rulers, happy fathers, honoured elder brothers, close friends, or respected husbands.

先王所惡，無惡於不可知。不可知則君臣父子兄弟朋友夫妻之際敗矣，十際皆敗，亂莫大焉。凡人倫以十際為安者也釋十際則與麋鹿虎狼無以異：多雄者為制耳矣。不可知則無安君，無樂親矣，無榮兄，無親友，無尊夫矣。¹²¹

For order and harmony to prevail, everything has to be in its proper place. This applies even to a social good like friendship. The Five Relationships, like the Five Phases generally, interact, but each must be recognised for what it is. Treating one relationship as if it were another, confusing friendship and the relation between ruler and subject or father and son, is a sure path to disorder and conflict.

Conclusion

¹²² Compare the comments by David Konstan, *Friendship in the classical world*, pp.5–6: “Rather than conceiving of Greek and Roman friendship as seamlessly embedded in economic and other functions, I am claiming for it a relative autonomy comparable to the status it presumably enjoys in modern life [B]oth societies—perhaps for entirely distinct reasons—did produce a space for sympathy and altruism under the name of friendship that stands as an alternative to structured forms of interaction based on kinship, civic identity, or commercial activity.”

From the straightforward idea of people helping each other, the concept of friendship in ancient China developed into that of a mutually caring and supportive relationship based on shared values and a common way of seeing the world. Not only does friendship entail mutual understanding and concern, it is a relationship of choice, freely entered into, and because it is voluntary, it is essentially a relationship between equals, in which power should not come into play. Because friendship is inherently informal and goes beyond what rules prescribe, an expression of personal preference and commitment, it depends on trust, the expectation that friends will perform what they profess. Friendly supportive relationships like this may occur between kinsmen or relatives as well as between non-kin; they may also be said to occur between social groups and states as well as between individuals. However, the fact that the terminology of friendship served a range of purposes in ancient China, including political purposes, is no reason to try to reduce friendship to the pursuit of self-interest, political, economic or otherwise. Friendship in antiquity was more “modern” than we are sometimes led to believe.¹²²

Still, the agglomeration of practices, attitudes and values that constitute friendship has to be understood in its specific historical and cultural context, the institutions, customs and general belief systems that envelop it and with which it interacts. On the one hand, there are good grounds for holding that concepts of friendship in ancient China were given a distinctive stamp by the kinship-based political system of the Zhou rulers, which increased the convergence of friendship and kinship ideals, while when the Zhou system declined some were encouraged to adopt friendship as a model for society, with a strong emphasis on the pursuit of shared ideals as the essential business of friendship, and even the ruler/subject relationship being regarded as a relationship of choice. On the other hand, it is likely that to some extent this distinctiveness of friendship in early China is exaggerated, an illusion created by the restricted nature of the sources on which we are forced to rely. Once there is a wider range of material from which to draw information, especially personal information of the sort found in private letters and autobio-

graphical poetry, the friendship depicted starts to look much more familiar, much more universal. This happens with the advent of the Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE).

Given the core characteristics of friendship as identified in pre-Qin texts, it makes good sense that many educated men of the time found it attractive as a model for social and political relations generally. In the multi-state polity of the time it could usefully be applied to the ideal relationship between ruler and subject, as well as to amicable, supportive relations between brothers, between *shi* holding shared ideals and aspirations, teachers and their students, between an overlord and “friendly” states, and between political allies generally.

Nonetheless, Han Feizi and like-minded thinkers were right to insist that friendship as a model for the state carries dangers. The idea of virtuous men working together to achieve ideals of responsible and benevolent government is all well and good, but effective administration also requires the formal definition of functions and responsibilities, and a system of laws impartially applied. At the same time, however, the Legalists paid little attention to the importance of mutual trust and respect for any co-operative undertaking, whether by the state or private individuals. Genuine co-operation depends on willing care and support that go well beyond anything that might be formally spelt out in a pact or implied by the title of an official post.

Of course, friendship as a model for society has its limitations too. Confucius and those who came after him emphasised that a gentleman should only make friends with those better than himself, those with whom he could work together to improve the world in what might be called an alliance of the righteous. Mencius alerts us to one of the pitfalls of that idea when he declares that the best man in one village can befriend the best man in another village, the best men of one state can befriend the best men of other states, and the best men in the empire can befriend each other.¹²³ It is a formula unlikely to yield a rich and fulfilling social life. Over time, the belief that true friends inevitably are few became increasingly common. It could be argued that this is intrinsic to the very concept of friendship as commonly understood, since deep relationships require time and effort to maintain—a view widely expressed in the Western tradition.¹²⁴ In the context of early China, however, it is also evident that the conviction that real friends are scarce became more commonplace as the focus of what was meant by *you* shifted, in the atmosphere of increasing political pessimism characteristic of the Eastern Zhou period, from help or assistance to shared ideals or understanding. Where the ideals friends share are political ones—as encouraged by Confucianism—periods of political instability, opportunism, corruption, and violence inevitably encourage the perception that real friends are scarce indeed.

¹²³ *Mengzi yizhu*, 10.8/251; Lau, *Mencius*, p.158.

¹²⁴ The classic Western statement that true friends are few is by Aristotle, in *Nicomachean ethics*, trans. R. Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Bk 9, ch.10, pp.179–80. His position was rejected by Stoic thinkers, whose views were in turn criticized by Plutarch in his essay “On having many friends.” Michel de Montaigne, who greatly admired Plutarch, argued eloquently that it is impossible to have many close friends in “On friendship,” in Montaigne, *Essays*, trans. J. M. Cohen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), pp.100–1. See also Konstan, *Friendship in the classical world*, p.64; and C. White, *Christian friendship in the fourth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp.26–7, 38–40.

¹²⁵ *Mengzi yizhu*, 10.8/251; Lau, *Mencius*, p.158.

¹²⁶ The only occasion in pre-Qin texts where an implicit analogy between marriage and friendship is used is in *The Book of Lord Shang* (Shangjun shu), which says that where government is perfect, husband and wife, and friends, are unable to dissociate themselves from each other's evil or cover up each other's wrong-doing. See Institute of Chinese Studies, Chinese University of Hong Kong, *A concordance to the Shang-junshu*, ICS Ancient Chinese Text Concordance Series (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1992), 24/30/4–5; J. J. L. Duyvendak, *The Book of Lord Shang* (London: Probsthain, 1928), p.321. On friendship in marriage in the West, see Paul Vegne, "The Roman empire," in *A history of private life, 1: from pagan Rome to Byzantium*, ed. Paul Vegne, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press, 1987); Peter Brown, *The body and society: men, women, and sexual renunciation in early Christendom* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Ruth Abbey, "Back to the future: marriage as friendship in the thought of Mary Wollstonecraft," *Hypatia*, 14.3 (1999): 78–95; Mary Lyndon Shanley, "Marital slavery and friendship: John Stuart Mill's *The subjection of women*," in *Friendship: a philosophical reader*, ed. Neera Kapur Badhwar (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp.267–84; L. Denis, "From friendship to marriage: revising Kant," *Philosophical and Phenomenological Research* 63.1. (2001): 1–22.

One of the striking characteristics of discussions of friendship in early Chinese history is that lamentation over a lack of true friends and the predominance of false ones is as common as the celebration of real friendship, its indispensability for both personal happiness and the triumph of virtue in public life. The idea that the gentleman, failing to find friends who share his ideals, turns to history and befriends the great figures of the past, was articulated very early—by Mencius, in fact, who, when arguing that only friendship with our moral equals or superiors is permissible, commends "looking for friends in history" (*shang you* 尚友) as an alternative to social isolation.¹²⁵ During the Later Han dynasty, open letters breaking off friendship with acquaintances who have shown a lack of understanding or failed to live up to their ideals were to become a literary genre.

Most of the textual sources for pre-Qin history are of a general historical or philosophical nature; with few exceptions, there is not much that is personal or autobiographical in them. One obvious shortcoming of the passages dealing with friendship is that, with the major exception of the *Book of Songs*, there is no mention of women; friendship seems to be an all-male affair. It must be pointed out that in the context of the emergence during the Han period of personal forms of literature, including poems, letters and essays, as well as a preoccupation with biography as history, although there still are no textual sources relating to friendship between women, friendship did become a model for the ideal relationship between husband and wife, just as it did in the West.¹²⁶ This could be interpreted as a rediscovery of the ideal of mateship in the *Book of Songs*, the mutually supportive relationship between a mating pair, whether animal or human.

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