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Friendship has been throughout history a contributing factor to great literature and often has served as a stimulus to creative imagination. For people with imagination are stimulants to one another and they can help persons of lesser talent to achieve what would be impossible or difficult for them alone. When one thinks of the Romantic Movement of the Nineteenth century, one is reminded of the constant intellectual contacts among the Lake poets in England. And on the continent, Goethe's aesthetic theories, for instance, were sharpened by his friendship and correspondence with Schiller. The Preface to Wordsworth's Literary Ballads could very well be "half a child" of Coleridge's brain as the latter claimed, because of the input from Coleridge during its germination stage.¹ Further exchanges between Coleridge and Wordsworth during the intervening years helped to formulate the critical concepts in the Biographia Literaria. In our own century, the Waste Land of T. S. Eliot might have remained a "waste land" in its original form; or worse, it might not have been completed and published at all had it not been for the drastic editing of Ezra Pound who, aside from performing the "Caesarian Operation,"² had given Eliot "the support of a constant affection, encouragement, and belief."³

Likewise, literary friendships have played significant roles in the lives of Chinese poets, who seem to have treasured friendship even above love of the opposite sex. Chinese literary history is full of records of famous friendships. When one speaks of Tang poets, for instance, one can hardly ignore the friendship of Li Po and Tu Fu, and that of Wang Wei and P'ei Ti. But no friendship can rival the unique friendship of Yuan Chen and Po Chu-i which has been regarded as a sort of national literary institution. Arthur Waley in his Life and Times of Po Chu-i said of their relationship: ". . . so intimately were their affections entwined during this whole period (i.e. 802-831) that it was not possible to write the life of Po Chu-i without making it to some extent also a life of Yuan Chen."⁴

We know for a fact that the friendship between Yuan Chen and Po Chu-i began in 802 when they passed the Placing Examination together and shared youthful aspirations for a great future. Yuan Chen expressed these aspirations in his lines to Po Chu-i: "The loosened thoroughbred took its first flight, / The unleashed falcon soared from the captor's glove-- / Speeding ahead we feared the earth might be too narrow: / Looking upward we felt the skies could be too low."⁵

Their friendship continued until the death of Yuan Chen in 831. As Po Chu-i put it, "My lifelong friendship with the deceased Chief Minister Yuan Chen could only be terminated by death- It was our respective karma that joined our hearts as one."⁶ And again in his "In Memorium to Yuan Chen," Po wrote: "In poverty or in prosperity, it never made any difference to us. The firmness of gold and stone, the adhesion of pitch and glue are not strong enough analogies to describe our friendship."⁷

The purpose of this paper is not to refute the celebrated friendship of these two poets, which seems uncontestable. However, since from time to time there have been speculations and intimations of latent frictions and possible fissures in their friendship, it behooves us to examine closer the existing evidence in order to re-evaluate this friendship with greater discernment. This is not for the sake of idle curiosity but for clarification of certain doubts raised by literary gossips.

Since time does not allow me to present the background of this friendship adequately, I shall quote Howard S. Levy's observations on the traditional view of Yuan Chen and Po Chu-i:

The literary outlook of the two men was so similar that there were references to them in the T'ang as Yuan-Po, but Confucian-oriented historians viewed them quite differently in relating their written advocacies to social-political behavior. Po was considered superior to YUan in adhering to the ideals he professed while Man was criticized as having been a sham Confucian A Japanese scholar who noted this discrepancy in treatment believed it must have stemmed from YUan Chen's desire to achieve political prominence, a desire so great that he was ready to avail himself of any and all chances to become a chief minister. Po Chu-i, by contrast, adhered to the ideals he had professed in earlier years and remained untouched by cliquishness and political factionalism. Thus his political and moral behaviors were correlated much more closely and he avoided becoming an object of derision.⁸

Indeed, time and history seem to have conspired against Yuan Chen and dealt with him unfairly compared with Po Chu-i. For instance, a hundred or so years after his death, more than half of his poetic output was lost. Once an illustrious poet as popular as Po Chu-i, YUan Chen was overshadowed by his friend's increasing reputation, and has been remembered by posterity more for his connection with Po Chu-i rather than for his own literary merit.

The old adage that a man is judged by his friends must have embarrassed some of Po Chu-i's proponents. They tried hard to disassociate their man of virtue from his friend, who was supposed to have been a man of vice, by saying that, although the two shared social and political ideals in their youth, they grew apart when YUan Chen became the Chief Minister in 822. As proof they referred to the fact that Po Chu-i did not write poems to congratulate Yuan Chen on this august occasion. Could the

reticence on Po Chu-i's part be due rather to the fact that, as Aeschylus says, few men have the strength to honor a friend's success without envy? Some critics have seized Po ChU-Pu close friendship with Liu Yu-hsi (772-842) in later years as another indication of his growing distance from Yuan Chen because of the latter's political ambition. Put this distance could well be only physical or geographical. For we know that even as late as 827, Yuan Chen sent forty-three poems with "exceedingly difficult" rhymes to Po Chu-i challenging his friend to harmonize them in that specially devised rhyme scheme known as tz'u yin (i.e. to write with the exact rhyme words in the exact sequence as they appear in the original poems).⁹ Of these Po Chu-i harmonized only twenty-three, possibly because they were too taxing on his imagination. It is a pity that only Po Chu-i's twenty-three poems are extant and that none of Yuan Chen's forty-three poems survive.¹⁰ According to Po Chu-i's preface to the second collection of his Collected Works, there were altogether seventeen chuan of poems exchanged between himself and Yuan Chen--over a thousand poems at least.¹¹ Worth scrutinizing is Po Chu-i's own statement about Yuan Chen in his preface to the collected poems that he exchanged with Liu Yu-hsi:

In the past I exchanged numerous poems with Yuan Chen; many of which are still in circulation by word of mouth. I used to say to Man Chen in jest, "It has been my fortune and my Misfortune to have you as a literary friend and poetic rival for these twenty some years: fortunate, because we have shared our sentiments and spread our fame together . . . Now when the public speak of literary genius they refer to Yuan-Po. But on account of you I cannot excel as the only literary giant striding the districts of Wu and Yueh. Isn't this my misfortune?" Growing old now I meet my match again in Liu Yu-hsi. Could this be my second misfortune?¹²

Jest or not, there is a definite feeling of professional jealousy openly expressed, even though without rancor. If jealousy did exist, it would explain why Po Chu-i made no effort to preserve the numerous poems Yuan Chen sent to him, except for the two short poems Yuan Chen gave him in 829 before they said good-bye to each other for the last time. These two quatrains, which have greater emotional impact than literary merit are included in Po's "In Memorium" to his friend who died in 831. They are preserved by accident and read as follows:

1

Don't chide me for lingering here still
However I try, I cannot bring myself to say good-bye.
Allow me to tarry a little longer; of our white-haired friends,
few are left,
Tomorrow you may never have the pleasure of my company.

2

Since we became friends, three long separations we endured.
This time *we* are together my beard has become white also.
That I find it hard to depart, you ought to understand--
Who knows if we will ever meet again.¹³

If friendship demands more self-giving than self-love, Yuan Chen was unquestionably true and constant to his friends even though he was branded as an inconstant lover by literary historians, based upon the biographical elements found in his Ying-ying chuan (or Hui then chi), a short prose romance.¹⁴ Seven years Po Chu-i's junior and dead fifteen years before his friend, Yuan Chen had given more than he had received in return. As Po Chu-i himself stated, whenever he sent poems to Yuan Chen he always received in return some encouraging notes and constructive criticism. The most tangible service Yuan Chen rendered to his friend *was* the editing and arranging of Po Chu-i's collected works, and giving them the title Po-shih Ch'ang-ch'ing chi as a counterpart to his own collected works, Yuan-shih Ch'ang-ch'ing chi, which he had completed a year earlier *in* 823.¹⁵ Moreover, in his preface to Po's collection, Yuan Chen praised his friend's achievement in the most generous and superlative terms with utter sincerity.

In addition, in the same Po-shih Ch'ang-ch'ing chi are included 75 articles of pithy prose on contemporary problems of a social and political nature, grouped under the title Ts'e lin ("Forest of Policies").¹⁶ By Po ChU-i's own admission in his introduction to the series, it was the result of collaboration between himself and YUan Chen when they were studying together during those cloistered summer months of 806 in the Hua-yan Temple while preparing for their upcoming Palace Examination that winter. That the Ts'e lin series is found in Po's Collected Works compiled by Yuan Chen is a clear indication that the inclusion not only had Yuan Chen's full knowledge and consent but, most likely, was at his insistence as a gesture of generosity or even appeasement. (For Yuan Chen surpassed Po Chu-i in the Palace Examination and had his name on top of the list; and he immediately received the official appointment of Tso-shih-yi, post of higher rank and importance than that received by his friend).

Perhaps YUan Chen could afford to be generous, since he was aware of his superior native intelligence. Whether or not the facts that he did better in both of the examinations they took together and that **he had** held higher political positions are sufficient evidence to support this speculation, one cannot help noticing that in all their joint literary ventures and poetic innovations, Yuan Chen was the initiator or originator. It was Yuan Chen who first advocated the simple, classical style in drafting rescripts; it was he who devised the use of the tz'u yin which became the predominant Yuan-ho style, widely imitated by poets of the Yuan-ho period. And in their joint experimentation with the new yiieh-fu poems, Po Chu-i

composed his only after receiving those composed by Yuan Chen.¹⁷ Even Po's aesthetic and critical theories in his "Letter to Yuan Chen," written in the last month of 815, echo distinctly the ars poetica enounced by Yuan Chen in 813 and reiterated in his letter to Po ChU-i in the autumn of 815.¹⁸ If the above observations are indications of 'Man Chen's superiority in native intelligence, one could dismiss the following lines of Po as nothing more than bantering remarks or friendly teasing: "My "Song of Everlasting Sorrow" is full of romantic air; / My "Laments in Ch'in" approaches the voice of rectification. / I often allow Old 'Man to steal my rhymes; / My verse has brought Short Li to submission."¹⁹ This verse, addressed to YUan Chen and Li Shen, was written as a postscript of his yUeh-fu songs in fifteen chUan.²⁰ Could not Po's bragging be interpreted as a self-consolation for his not having been the initiator of their literary venture?

Did Yuan Chen, who never tried to conceal his own literary brilliance and critical acumen, recognize his own superiority compared with his friend? Was he always submissive to the older poet out of respect? Not always. In one poem, "To Po ChU-i for Sending me a Poem in Spring," Man Chen writes: "The parrot is bright, the sparrow dull, / Why are they both trapped in the cage? / Shunning the whales, you are left in the perilous sea; / Chasing the snakes, I am lost in the malarial fog."²¹

Undoubtedly, the parrot and the sparrow are symbols for Po and Yuan Chen respectively. Their similar social and political roles are further defined and clarified with another set of metaphors in the second couplet. By virtue of the logic of the sequence of images, it is clear that the parrot stands for the second personal pronoun "you" (i.e. Po Chu-i) and the sparrow corresponds to the first personal pronoun "I" (i.e. Yuan Chen).

To compare Po to a parrot which is colorful and showy was an obvious eulogy of his friend's apparent worth. One wonders, however, whether in the analogy there is an irony intended for his lack-luster friend whose worth rests on parroting others rather than on inventiveness. The implication of Po's passive social role becomes apparent in the second couplet in which he stresses the adverse predicaments suffered by both Po ChU-i and himself. Here YUan Chen clearly states that Po was "left in the perilous sea" for "shunning the whales," which is a passive act; whereas he was "lost in the malarial fog" for an active endeavor of "chasing the snakes."

Yuan Chen's consciousness of his superiority is further demonstrated in another poem to Po ChU-i entitled "Six Additional Rhymes to Express my Overflowing Feelings After Responding to Lo-t'ien."²² Its first line reads: "LU and LU are homonyms, so are the persons I and you." (Lu lu tung sheng, wo erh shen) LU and LU are indeed homonyms. But when juxtaposed, LU-LU is also a technical term for an unusual musical artifact which was the earliest tuning device. It was supposedly invented by Ling Lun, a minister of the semi-mythical Yellow Emperor, Huang Ti, who used it for the purpose of standardizing musical pitch. This instrument was made of twelve bamboo pipes of varying lengths in the shape of pan-pipes, and they were arranged in two whole-tone scales. It was modeled after the wings of the phoenix with six tones on the left representing the major notes known as Yang LU (literally the "male notes") and those on the right representing the minor notes known as the yin-LU (or "female notes"). With this information at hand, let us go back to the line with its word order in mind. In Chinese as in English, the common way of saying "you and I" is to mention the second person before the first person, and not "I and you." Since there is not prosodic or stylistic reason for the poet to make this unusual switch, because both wo and erh belong to the shame shang tone, we may safely assume that he did so deliberately in order to make the pronoun "I" to correspond to the yang la and the pronoun "you" (meaning Po Chu-i) to correspond to the yin-LU. For traditionally the yang element has always been considered to be superior to the Lin element in Chinese cosmology, and by extension, social norm and personal status. Even though in the second line Yuan Chen pays Po ChU-i an explicit compliment by saying, "In prose you are a Ling Lun,"²³ there is no mistaking Man Chen's implication that he was superior to his friend in poetry.

If YUan Chen was the superior talent as he implied, Po ChU-i, on the other hand, was the more worldly wise of the two. This is shown by his ability to steer clear of political strife and to remain a neutral party between two political factions during his life-time, whereas Yuan Chen offended people of influence left and right. But it was poetry as well as political ideals which cemented their life-long friendship and genuine affection. Notwithstanding the professional envy and twinge of jealousy Po felt, he was no less sincere in his affection and admiration for the younger man to whom he wrote: "When we are in favorable circumstances we exchange poems for mutual edification; when we are in adversity we use poems to encourage each other; when we are apart we write for mutual consolation; when we are together we write to amuse each other."²⁴ When YUan Chen was unjustly banished for his muckraking, Po ChU-i risked his position and personal safety by sending off three memorials to the throne on Yuan Chen's behalf protesting the injustice.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that while each was a talented poet to the point of being called a literary genius, their mutual criticism and constant exchange of ideas and rivalry must have greatly enhanced the literary achievements of both. The most important consideration of all is that Yuan Chen found in Po ChU-i the one human being in whom he could confide his most private experiences and innermost thoughts.²⁵ If Po Chu-i could value YUan Chen's friendship above personal rivalry, he would have repaid his friend's services to him in kind by edition Nan Chen's poems sent to him after the completion of Yuan-shih Ch'ang-ch'ing chi in 823, thereby saving those later poems of Yuan Chen from being lost to posterity. Possibly Yuan Chen sent so many poems to Po Chu-i in the hope that his friend might preserve them. But if those poems of YUan Chen had survived, then Po ChU-i would have had to share the

limelight of fame with Yuan Chen forever and risk losing the opportunity of being considered the only literary giant of the Yuan-ho period by many traditional literary historians.

Notes

¹ Coleridge in his letter to Southey in 1802 wrote: "Although Wordsworth's preface is half a child of my brain, and arose out of conversations so frequently that, with few exceptions, we could scarcely either of us, perhaps, say which first started any particular thought . . . yet I am far from going all lengths with Wordsworth . . ." Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Ernest Hartly Coleridge (Boston & New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1895), p. 386.

² In a letter to T. S. Eliot written in Paris [24 December, 1921], Pound included a poem titled "Sage Homme," which begins: "These are the poems of Eliot/by the Uranian Muse begot;/A Man their Mother was,/A Muse their Sire./How did the printed Infancies result/From Naptials thus doubly difficult?/If you must needs enquire/Know diligent Reader/That on each occasion/Ezra performed the Caesarian Operation." Cf. D. D. Paige, ed., The Letters of Ezra Pound (New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1950), p. 170.

³ See Helen Cardner, "The Waste Land: 1922," in Eliot in His Time, ed. A. Walton Liz (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), p. 75.

⁴ Arthur Waley, The Life and Times of Po Chu-i (London, Allen & Unwin, 1949), p. 179.

⁵ llan-shih Ch'ang-ch'ing chi (hereafter as YSCCC) (Tokyo: Chubun Shuppansha, 1972), chuan 59, p. 124E

Ch'ang-ch'ing chi (hereafter as PSCCC) Szu-pu ts'ung-k'an edition, chuan 59, p. 329.

⁶ Ibid., chuan 60, p. 334.

⁷ Howard S. Levy, Translations from Po Chu-i's Collected Works (New York: Paragon Press, 1970), vol. I, p. 90. The name of the Japanese scholar, as indicated in a note, is Yokoyama Hir6, author of Haku Rakuten (Tokyo: Jinbutsu Oraisha, 1967).

⁸ The more common practice in harmonizing another's poem was to use the same end rhymes that appeared in the original poem, without, however, observing the original order of sequence. The tz'u yiin means to use the exact rhyme words in the exact sequence prescribed by another poem. This particular prosodic invention or innovation, as far as I know, began with Yuan Chen, who admitted that he devised it in order to test the craftsmanship of his friend Po Chu-i. Po Chu-i admittedly was not Yuan Chen's equal in this particular performance. Cf. PSCCC, chuan 52, p. 283, "Introduction to Harmonizing YUan Chen's poems (Ho Yuan Wei-chih shih erh-shih-san shou).

⁹ Ibid., chuan 52, 283.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., chuan 71, p. 396.

¹² Quoted in "Chi Wei-chih wen," Ibid., chuan 60, p. 334.

¹³ This love story in the form of ch'uan ch'i style by Yuan Chen has been traditionally regarded as autobiographical. It contributed greatly to his reputation for moral rectitude.

¹⁴ Ch'ang-ch'ing (821-824) was the reign period of Mu-tsung, during which Yuan Chen compiled both his own (823) and Po Chu-i's Collected Works (824); for that reason he named both Chang-ch'ing chi.

¹⁵ PSCCC, chuan 45-48, pp. 236-65.

¹⁶ YUan Chen's fifteen new yieh-fu (only 12 extant) poems were written to harmonize Li Shen's poems in that style (none of which survive). He sent his, and possibly Li Shen's as well, to Po Chu-i, who, aside from harmonizing Yuan Chen's, composed more on his own and brought out 50 yieh-fu poems are better, than Ylian's, because each poem sticks to one central theme, whereas YUan Chen's poems are much more diffused and complicated in subject matter. Cf. Chen Yin-k'o, Yuan Po shih-chien cheng-kaol (Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chU, 1963), pp. 119-23, passim.

¹⁷ Arthur Waley, The Life and Time of Po pp. 107-14, et passim.

¹⁸ PSCCC, chuan 16, p. 89.

¹⁹ I.e. Yuan Chen and Li Shen; the latter was also nicknamed "Short Li."

²⁰ YSCCC, chuan 21, p. 260. For more elaborate symbolic meanings of these birds, see Edward H. Schafer, "The Auspices of the T'ang," Journal of American Oriental Society, 83 (1963), 197-225.

²¹ YSCCC, chuan 22, p. 274.

²² Ibid.

²³ PS000, chuan 28, p. 144.

²⁴ For example, Yuan Chen confided to Po Chu-i his disappointments in love and politics in a long poem, Meng yu ch'un ("Dream of a Spring Excursion"). In a letter to Po Chu-i which prefaced the poem Yuan Chen wrote: "These things must not be made known to those who do not know me. On the other hand, they should be known to those who really know me. Since you, Chu-i, who know me best, how dare I conceal from you?" This passage is quoted by Po in his preface to his own poem titled Meng yu chun, which is a response to Yuan Chen's confessional poem. See PSCCC, chuan 14, pp. 75-76.