**friendship/友谊(Yǒu Yì)**

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The ancient Chinese book the *Book of Rites* says: “The Chinese character for friendship, *peng* (朋) is glossed as ‘those having the same master.’ While another term for friendship, *you* (友) is glossed as ‘those with the same aspiration.’ Friends get together to discuss and learn moral principles.” The dictionary *Shuowen Jiezi* (*Discussing Writing and Explaining Characters*) of the Eastern Han Dynasty once again emphasizes that people who have the same aspiration are to be called *you* (friends). In other words, “friends” are defined as like-minded people. Friends are to improve morality together, “the friendship between *junzi* (gentlemen, noble person) is based on morality,” and “a *junzi* always learns and shares with friends.”

In *Zilu* of the *Analects*, Confucius says: “among his friends, earnest and urgent; among his brethren, bland.” Here the “friends” he referred to can encourage and urge each other, and mutual help mainly occurs at the level of spiritual needs. In *Ji Family* of the *Analects*, Confucius puts forward three principles for making friends: “Friendship with the uplight; friendship with the sincere; and friendship with the man of much observation – these are advantageous. Friendship with the man of specious airs; friendship with the insinuatingly soft; and friendship with the glib-tongued – these are injurious.” He does not pay attention to making powerful friends who can bring material benefits, but emphasizes the integrity of friends. In other words, “friends” are needed to meet high-level spiritual pursuit and promote each other in spirit. Friendship is the association of the souls, even beyond time and distance, a view that is highly idealistic.

However, in oracle bone inscriptions, the word *you* (friend) is two hands stretched out in the same direction. That is, when you are doing something, someone lends you a hand. In this sense, “friendship” is a kind of blessing and provides extra benefits. In other words, in the original sense of the charaxter *you*, friends provide mutual assistance and bring benefits to each other, which is more in line with the modern understanding of “friendship”: friends are helpers, sponsors, supporters and consultants, and sometimes even partners in action. That is to say, in China, there is certainly a market for the mutually beneficial altruistic view of friendship and the alliance model of friendship. This is obviously different from the friendship described in the above ancient classics.

Therefore, in China, there may be a deep division in the view of friendship between the bottom class and the elite.

People of the bottom class are more in line with the mutually beneficial social interaction mode described by modern sociology and economics. When seeking friendship, they take more account of benefits. Therefore, people of the bottom class believe in making friends from all walks – “the more friends you have, the more ways and options you'll have in your life.” The Righteousness of Jianghu is closer to the alliance model, people who believe in it always attach great importance to reciprocity between friends – “courtesy demands reciprocity,” “give a plum in return for a peach.” "Friends" are not only people who share common interests and common likes, but more importantly, they cooperate. They are people who can face difficulties together, help you when you are in difficulties, and even “travel cross a river in the same boat” and face life and death together. Therefore, people at the bottom think that the best friend is to “send charcoal in snowy weather (provide timely help)”, not to “add flowers to the brocade (make perfection still more perfect)”.

Under the idea of “more friends mean more options,” the Chinese people at the bottom – that is, most Chinese people create a differential order pattern of “friends” based on their closeness to them. They arrange a broad pedigree of friends in their life, from very indifferent and distant friends to very close friends.

From the very distant friends such as “someone you have a nodding acquaintance with” or “brothers in debauchery,” the friend relations formed by common interests, such as gambling friends, drinking friends and poetry friends; Gradually develop into deep and meaningful exchanges and become close friends, bosom friends and profound friends; To long-term contacts and become old friends or even develop friendship spanning two or more generations; Then to the best friend, from “friends with complete mutual understanding” of “everything you say is right” to “bosom friends who are willing to die for one another,” “a gentleman is ready to die for his bosom friends.” At the highest level, best friends become family members. Men call each other "brothers" and women call each other "sisters". People establish a virtual blood relationship, that is, “becoming sworn brothers or sisters.” The so-called “become true confederates and blood brothers” refers to the exchange of the Gold and Orchid Card at the sworn ceremony. People in the rituals often pledge each other in wine in which blood has been mixed, which shows the essence of its “alliance.”

In daily life, ordinary Chinese people skillfully meander through relationships with relatives close and distant, friends close and unfamiliar. keep in touch and interact with each other constantly, and maintain friendship that is not as deep, so as to call "the power of weak relationship" in case of need. There are many taboos and cumbersome etiquette between such relatively alienated friends, which shows that the cost of maintaining the relationship is not low.

At the same time, for the deeper community of interests, the Chinese people are very dependent on and attached to it, and also invest quite deep feelings to build their own sense of belonging and value. At the same time, the Chinese people are very dependent on and attached to common-interest communities, and also invest quite deep emotions to build their own sense of belonging and value. At this level of relationship, friends will be more casual with each other, they can often share private thoughts or come to your house uninvited, because they can't help thinking of you, and friends have the responsibility to understand and tolerate it.

In the deepest friendship, the Chinese at the bottom also require that the "true friendship" must be unswerving for life. They trust it very much. Once they are betrayed, they will be deeply hurt, and the whole society will agree to retaliation. Even Jianghu gangs can “carry one's heart upon one's sleeve” and “shed one's blood for his/her friends.” People regard “personal loyalty” as an important creed, and those who betray will be severely punished. The legendary Guan Yu was forged into the patron saint of righteousness.

The creed of “a gentleman is ready to die for his bosom friends” has also been used to train and mentally kidnap assassins for suicide attacks. Sima Qian mentioned several famous historical assassins in *Legends of Assassins of the* *Records of the Grand Historian*, such as Yu Rang, Zhuan Zhu, Nie Zheng and Jing Ke, all of which were given favors at ordinary times, and then ordered to pay their confidants with death.

There are two most famous stories about friendship in ancient China. One is the Oath of Brotherhood in the Peach Garden, sworn by Liu Bei, Zhang Fei, and Guan Yu, which describes the model of building a mutually beneficial community at the bottom. The other is the legend of Yu Boya and Zhong Ziqi – High Mountain and Flowing Water, which reflects the non-utilitarian spiritual communication respected by the elite. This kind of non-utilitarian spiritual contact is regarded as “friendship between ganoderma and orchid.” It was said in *The Tree on the Mountain* of *Zhuangzi*: “And the friendship between *junzi* is as tasteless as water, while that of *xiaoren* (immoral men) is sweet as sweet wine.; But the tastelessness of the *junzi* leads on to affection, and the sweetness of *xiaoren* to aversion.”

Such friendship is not for solviing difficulties in life, but for spiritual perfection and improvement. That is, in the mind of *junzi*, a beneficial friend can “help perfect one's virtue.” In the story of “High Mountain and Flowing Water,” the establishment of this predetermined spiritual community is greatly mystified. Its occurrence does not even require mutual understanding and cognition, daily interaction, and the same experience or background – the real confidant’s hearts and feelings find a perfect response in a mysterious way.

The relationship formed by mutually beneficial interests is belittled as the relationship between *xiaoren*. Confucius said: “*Junzi* is broad-minded and not a partisan. *Xiaoren* is a partisan and not broad-minded.” This statement has gradually evolved into harsh words of "*junzi* unites people with morality, while *xiaoren* only pay attention to self-interest” or “*xiaoren* gathers for benefit.” “If you make friends based on benefits, once the benefits are exhausted your friendship will end; Those who make friends by the standard of power and influence will lose their friendship when the power is cut off; Those who make friends by affection will be hurt badly once the affection is gone; Those who make friends based on a sincere heart and see living a simple life as one's ideal will not lose their friends.”

Since non-utilitarian friendship is regarded as the highest level of friendship, gradually, a belief sprung up among Chinese literati: Friends can lack daily communication like Yu Boya and Zhong Ziqi, or they can be good friends who never meet at ordinary times. Friends who believe that “a bosom friend afar brings a distant land near” may still care about each other and write to each other. Du Fu said in his poem: “Though I can be regarded as a hermit in Lu county, I adore him like my own brother. After getting drunk at night, we sleep under the same quilt, and stroll about during the day hand in hand.” In today's view, it may easily be mistaken for an overly romantic same-sex relationship. The more extreme requirement is not to miss each other, like stated in *Zhuangzi*: “When the springs are dried up, the fishes collect together on the land. Than that they should moisten one another there by the damp about them, and keep one another wet by their slime, it would be better for them to forget one another in the rivers and lakes.”

Under the guidance of this idea, the Chinese elite literati, that is, *junzi*, have gradually gone down the path of performing solitude. Because lonely people are likely to hold more stringent standards for choosing friends, they are considered to be more noble. Therefore, in history, there has been repeated claims by people that “only plum blossom is a bosom friend” – only certain plants, such as plum blossom, orchid or bamboo, or stone, cloud or water, or the ancients, have the most profound friendship with them.

Said Bai Juyi, a poet of the Tang Dynast: “water, able by its nature to be serene, has been my friend; bamboo, understanding its core to be empty, is my teacher.” This poet has another poem saying: “Turning my head around, I ask the pair of rocks: ‘Can you keep companywith an old man like myself?’ Although the rocks cannot speak,They promise that we will be three friends.” Xie Fangde, a poet of Song Dynasty said in his poem: “People with noble moral integrity love to align with mountains and rivers.” Mi Fu, also a calligrapher in the Northern Song Dynasty, said that when he saw a stone, he straightened his hat and bowed to the stone: “I've wanted to see you, brother Stone, for twenty years! This stone is enough for me to worship.” Gao Xi’en, a poet of the Qing Dynasty, named his study Youshi Zhai (the study of friendly stone). One of the most extreme cases is the Southern Song Dynasty poet Lin Hejing, who is said to take the plum blossom as his wife and a crane as his son. Therefore, for a junzi, the symbol of noble friendship is not the Oath of Brotherhood in the Peach Garden, but the Three Friends of Winter that comprises the pine, bamboo, and plum. In this way, all the literati who claim that they are so alone that they can only associate with plants and stones have formed a public body of mutural preference.

This kind of friendship between junzi obviously has its sense of romance. It denies mutual benefit as the basis of friendship, and believes that friendship is the result of spiritual connection, so as to successfully excludes the relationships between colleagues, associates, and fellow townsmen which are based on common interests and background.

But people occasionally question such exaggerated views, hence the saying “most of those who stress righteousness are ordinary people engaged in humble occupations, while knowledgeable people often do things that go against their conscience and betray their ties of camaraderie.”