

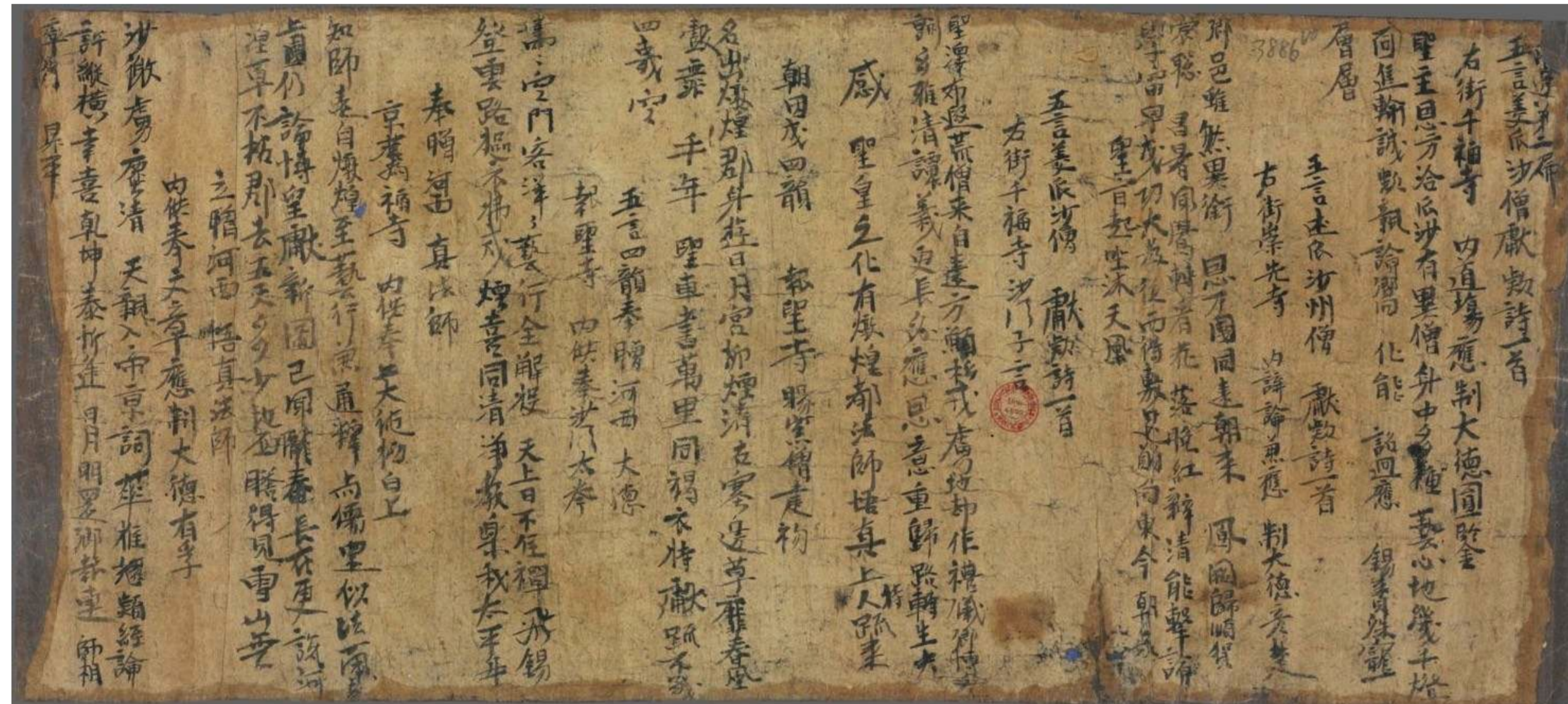
# Late Medieval Chinese Exchange Poetry (820-960): A Network Analysis

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The resulting graph is a **bird's-eye view** of the late medieval poetic world in extant sources. It is a representation of the **collective literary imagination** of the time, which is **not identical** (but likely bears some relation) to **social reality**.

An **exchange poem**, broadly defined, is any poem that mentions a **person's name** in its **title**. This genre of poetry was the most **popular** and **ubiquitous** of the medieval period yet is often **ignored** by scholars because it is deemed formulaic or artistically inferior. Some varieties include parting poems 送別詩, matching rhymes 唱和詩, linked verses 聯合詩, and poems inscribed on walls 題壁詩.

This Dunhuang manuscript (Pelliot chinois 3886) is a collection of poems exchanged between **Buddhist monks** at Chang'an, the capital of the Tang empire, in 851. Such collections are an important source of literary historical data that has rarely been systematically studied before.



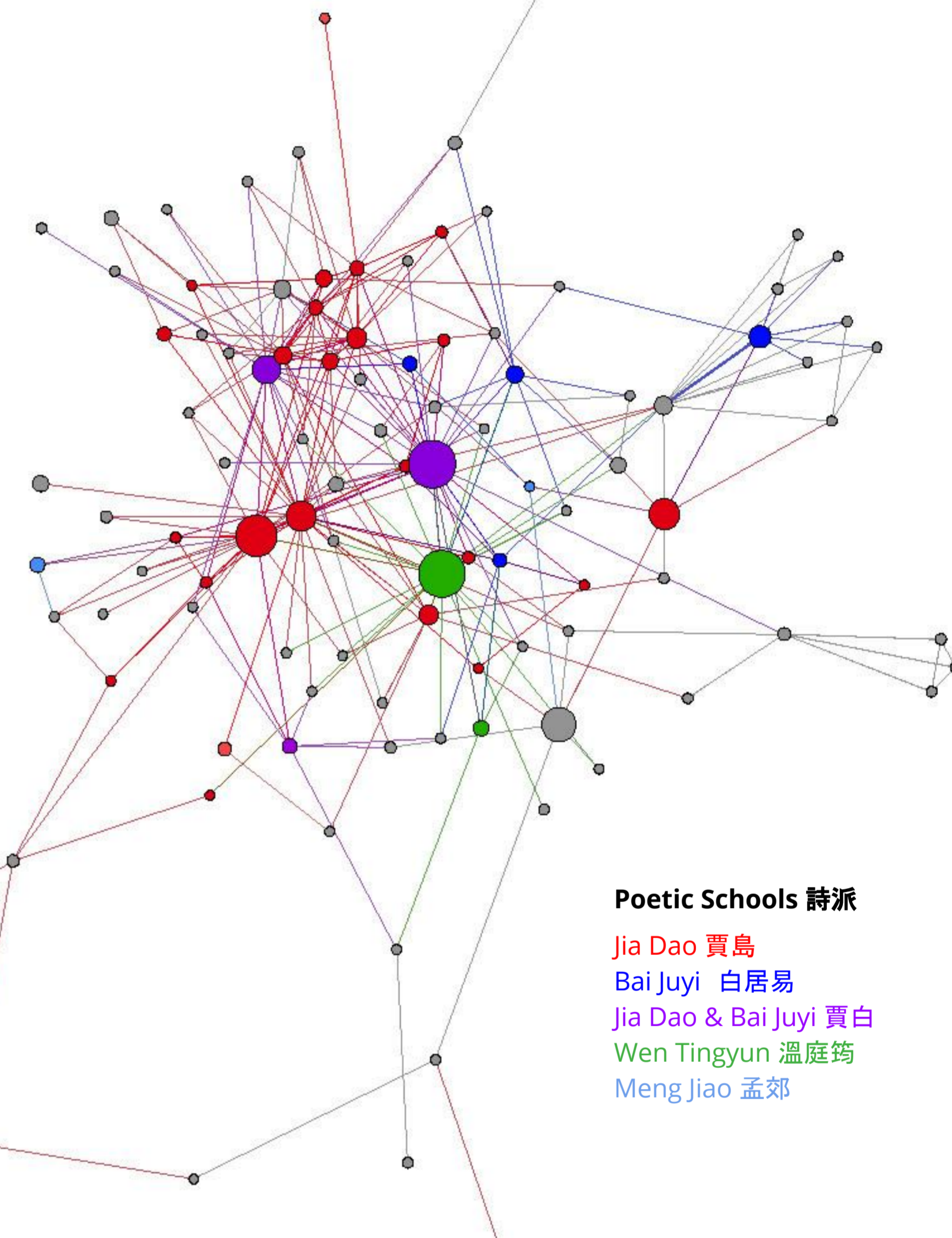
By representing these poems' titles **schematically** and combining the data with poets' biographical information, we can produce a **network map of literary relations**, which can then be examined using the tools of social network analysis.

Source	Target
Qibai 棲白	Wuzhen 悟真
Taicen 太岑	Wuzhen 悟真
Cao Song 曹松	Qibai 棲白

becomes

becomes

Poet	Dates	Clergy?
Qibai 棲白	820?-870?	Buddhist
Taicen 太岑	850s	Buddhist
Wuzhen 悟真	850s	Buddhist
Cao Song 曹松	830-903	No



**Poetic Schools 詩派**  
 Jia Dao 賈島  
 Bai Juyi 白居易  
 Jia Dao & Bai Juyi 賈白  
 Wen Tingyun 溫庭筠  
 Meng Jiao 孟郊

“Poetry can serve as a means for forming groups.”  
 詩可以群 —Analects 論語 17.9

Our analysis demonstrates the **importance of Buddhist monks** to literary networks of the late medieval period. Contrary to later depictions of monks as hermits isolated from the outside world, they were in fact some of the most well-connected **hubs** of exchange. As such, they could be considered **brokers of literary power**.

“Ever facing the realm of men, we are trapped in the net.”  
 長向人間被網羅 —Luo Yin 羅隱 (833-910), from “Language” 言

One of our most striking **preliminary conclusions** is that the **poetic schools** posited by much traditional and modern criticism **bear almost no relation to the network map**. Members of the various schools are often very tightly bound together through their exchanges. Thus “schools” 派—a concept which blurs together social and aesthetic categories—is **not a productive framework** for the writing of **late medieval literary history**.

In the coming year, as we continue to catalogue exchange poems, we will experiment with **clustering algorithms** and other tools of social network analysis to propose **new ways of thinking about literary relations**. By combining these **quantitative methods** with **close readings** of poems, prefaces, critical essays, letters, biographies, excavated epitaphs, and other texts, we hope to essentially **rewrite the literary history of late medieval China**.

Poet	Eigenvector Centrality
1 Jia Dao 賈島	1.000000
2 Qibai 棲白	0.766589
3 Li Pin 李頻	0.665219
4 Xu Tang 許棠	0.634654
5 Fang Gan 方干	0.615033
6 Xue Neng 薛能	0.575693
7 Chen Tao 陳陶	0.545568
8 Yu Tanzhi 喻坦之	0.517166
9 Qingyue 清越	0.506543
10 Zaowei 造微	0.459143

4 of the 10

best-connected poets are **Buddhist monks**.

For fuller, interactive versions of these graphs, visit [tommazanec.com/network-maps](http://tommazanec.com/network-maps).