

[*15] I wrote quite extensively about this conundrum in *In Dreams* (as I mention above) under the aegis of the term “misunderstanding,” suggesting that the sorts of “stories” we either invent or borrow from others to account, via “consecutive reasoning,” for the “mysteries” at the core of lived human experience and the material universe, are by definition reductionist. Essential maybe to promote communal enterprise, even sanity, but never, either singly (especially) or in combination fully adequate.

It's not a matter of which of us (Jin or me) might be right or wrong. It's more a matter of what difference method makes: Jin seeks out and finds reams of external documentation to piece together his paradigm for Bai's life, (mis)understanding him from the outside-in. His chosen title for the book implies that he is highly conscious of both the power and the limitations of his method: His subtitle is, after all, “*A Life of Li Bai*” not “*The Life of Li Bai*,” implying that there are other, even many other, ways of making sense of this “larger than life” character. One of them may be mine: I read and react to Bai's poems and end up with a different one from his, (mis)understanding him from the inside-out, which is not to say that my take is more authentic or deep: In the end, every one of us is “larger than life” when it comes to composing and telling a “story” about that life—our own or someone else's—in words, such a feeble currency for this purpose. Both Jin and I project over the densely granular texture of Bai's “life” a pattern of “understanding” that is as much our own as it is Bai's. I'm very happy I have now acquired Jin's. And I am very happy I had mine to feather out the hard lines Jin marks over and around Bai's life-line. And I will be pleased to add other layers of (mis)understanding to my relationship with Bai, should they come along.