

# Research on the Communication of Chinese Literature Between the Envoys of Vietnamese and Korea

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## ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the literary exchanges between Vietnam and Korea during the tribute period to China. Because both Vietnam and Korea used Chinese characters as official characters in feudal times, this paper is based on literature review and literature comparative study. The study points out that there were three forms of communication in Chinese Literature between them: one was to give a fan with Chinese poems as gifts, the other was to write and reply in poems using the same rhyme sequence, and the last was to write letters to each other. This paper also points out that there is a phenomenon that needs special attention in their Chinese literary communication. That is, although the Vietnamese envoys thought that the Korean Envoys had a higher level of Chinese literature than their own, and showed a humble attitude in front of them during the diplomatic missions in China, they actually want to compete with them secretly. And their literary achievements were generally described as much higher than the envoys of Korea in Vietnam. Finally, this paper argues that the literary communication between them could not only reflect the social political and cultural order between China and other countries in East Asia in the feudal period, but also show the political and cultural relations between those countries in Chinese culture circle.

**Keywords:** envoys of Vietnam, envoys of Korea, cultural communication

## I. INTRODUCTION

Vietnam and Korea are the two most important vassal states in China. Generally speaking, they had sent envoys to pay tribute to China every three years. So the envoys of the two countries often met in Beijing, and the poems and writings of them became the most important part of the literati's communications. The envoys are responsible for the country's mission, and all their words and deeds in the envoys represent the image of the country. Due to the similar position of Vietnam and Korea in the circle of Chinese culture, the potential purpose of literature and politics was often revealed in their poetry communications. Some scholars also studied the literary communication between Feng Kekuan and Li Suiguang, an envoys of Vietnam and Korea respectively in the Ming Dynasty. Lu Xiaoyan and Ye Shaofei discussed the political undercurrent of Questions and Answers in the Poems of Envoys of Korea and Annan that was a collection of poems and essays of Feng Kekuan and Li Suiguang in the twenty-five years of Emperor Wanli period of Ming Dynasty

[1]. Fu you and Huang Lin also paid attention to the missions. Focusing on this book, they discussed the cultural identity and the curiosity and writing of the custom figures of the three countries in the Chinese cultural circle: China, Korea, Vietnam and Ryukyu [2]. The existing studies on the Chinese literary communication between the envoys mainly focus on the single mission, or on individual envoys. However, the overall situation of the envoys in Vietnam and Korea is still worthy of attention. This paper focuses on the Chinese literature communication between the envoys of Vietnam and Korea in Beijing during the feudal society. It mainly discusses four forms of Chinese literature exchange between the envoys of the two countries. At the same time, this article also concern that the attitude of the two envoys' communication was not the same. On the surface, it seems that Korean envoys attached great importance to literary exchanges with Vietnamese envoys, but behind the scenes they did not care about it, even a little disdained. Meanwhile, although the envoys of Vietnam paid homage to the Korea's, they actually have a cultural contest with them. The study of the Chinese literature communication between the envoys of Vietnam and Korean is of great significance to the study of the influence of China in the Chinese cultural circle.

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**II. FOUR FORMS OF COMMUNICATION IN CHINESE LITERATURE BETWEEN KOREAN ENVOYS AND VIETNAMESE ENVOYS**

Vietnam and Korea, as countries with profound influence of Chinese culture, were the representatives of the Chinese culture of the two countries. Many envoys even the members in the their mission were famous scholars at that time, such as Piao Zhiyuan (1737-1805), who was a representative of Northern Learning School of Korea in Li dynasty. After arriving in Beijing, the envoys of Vietnam and Korea had the convenience of communication because they lived in the same place. Pan Huizhu, the ambassador of Vietnam, once described the Four Translation Hall where they lived: "The building scale of this hall is very magnificent. Our ambassadors lived in it separately from the Korean and Ryukyu's. Only the three countries write in Chinese, which is the same as China and different from other countries." Since Chinese characters were still used as official characters in Korea

and Vietnam, it makes them important members of the Chinese culture circle. So poetry and prose in Chinese became diplomatic tools for their envoys during in China.

Due to the lack of available information, we can not know whether there was any interaction between Vietnamese envoys and Korean envoys during the Song and Yuan Dynasties. But we know whether Vietnam's relationship with China or Korea's relationship with China has a long history, it can even be traced back to the Xi Zhou Dynasty more than 2000 years ago. Since Vietnam broke away from China in Song Dynasty and became an independent country, it has been sending envoys to China to pay tribute. At present, most of the materials record the communication between the envoys of Ming and Qing Dynasty, especially the frequent interaction in Qing Dynasty. Here is a brief summary of the time and personnel of their contacts with the envoys of Korea from the records of the envoys of Vietnam. ("Table I")

TABLE I. STATISTICS OF THE POETS AND PROSE CONTACTS BETWEEN KOREAN ENVOYS AND VIETNAMESE ENVOYS IN QING DAYNASTY

Time	Vietnamese envoys	Korean envoys
1702	He Zongmu	Li Doufeng
1718	Ruan Gongkang	Li Shijin, Yu Jiye
1760	Li Guidun	Hong Qixi, Zhao Rongjing, Li Zhizhong
1771	Wu Huiting, Duan Ruanchu	Chen Sheng, Li Zhizhong
1778	Hu Shidong	Li Guang, Zhen Wuchun
1789	Ruan Ti	Li Xiangyuan, Xu Youfang
1790	Pan Huiyi	Li Suiguang
	Wu Huiting	Li Suiguang, Piao Qijia
	Duan Ruanjun	Li Suiguang
1845	Fan Zhixiang	Li Yuyuan
1868	Ruan Sixian	Jin Youyuan, Nan Tingshun, Zhao Binggao

It can be seen that the literary exchanges between the envoys of Vietnam and Korea are very extensive. In general, there are three main types of Chinese literature communications between them.

*A. Presenting Chinese poems as a gifts*

As we know that China is a country of poetry, poetry permeates all aspects of people's life. In the period from Tang Dynasty to Qing Dynasty, giving poems to relatives or friends was regarded as a way of interpersonal communication, which also affected other countries in the Chinese cultural circle. They made friends with poems, and expressed their aspiration with poems. So when they miss something, they often gave

poems to their relatives and friends to show their feelings. Because the transportation was inconvenient in ancient times, it took a long time for the literati to meet again after they left. Therefore, they often gave poems to each other to express their yearning or gratitude. Vietnam envoys and Korea envoys experienced a short time together, and the chance of meeting each other after their separation was very slim. So they used to give poems to each other when they were apart. Many of these poems can be seen in their poetry collection, such as those written by Hu Shidong to Li Guang and Zhen Wuchun in 1778. In this kind of poems, there is also a special kind of poems that are written on fans. It is more artistic and practical to write poems on fans and give them to others. Fans was the

daily necessities that ancient literati often carry in China. Korean envoys often brought some fans as gifts when they came to China. They also sent fans with Chinese poems to Vietnamese envoys. For example, in 1790, Piao Jiaqi, a Korean envoy, sent fans with Chinese poems to the envoys of Vietnam. After receiving the fan presented by the Korean envoys, the Vietnamese envoys would also give back the fan inscribed with Chinese poems. In 1845, Fan Zhixiang wrote poems on fans to Li Yuyuan of the Korean mission. It was a common behavior in the communication of giving poetry fans to each other between Vietnamese envoys and Korean envoys. Fans became the medium of poetry communication.

*B. Writing and replying in poems using the same rhyme sequence*

When envoys from Vietnam and Korea came to China, they often presented Chinese poems as the main form of mutual communication and understanding. A common form of poetry communication is to give the poem written by oneself to the other, and the other writes another poem according to rhyme. The key to the work of "singing and harmony" is to cooperate with each other in content. The harmony poem should be consistent with "singing" poetry not only in poetic sense, but also in theme and style. In this process, both sides of the poem writers reach resonance and understanding. Vietnamese envoys and Korean envoys were not able to understand each other's language. Through the form of Chinese poetry, they achieved ideological communication. For example, in 1790, many envoys from various countries came to Beijing to celebrate the 80th birthday of Emperor Qianlong. Among the envoys in this grand ceremony, the Vietnamese delegation was honored when Ruan Quangping made the pilgrimage as a king of Vietnam. In this mission, the Vietnamese diplomatic corps represented by Pan Huiyi, Wu Huijin, Duan Jun had an extensive communication with Korean envoys in Chinese poems and prose. Either the envoys of Vietnam or the envoys of Korea send a poem first, and then the receiver sent another poem in the same rhythm.

*C. Writing letters to each other*

No matter the envoys of Vietnam or Korea, only a few of them could speak Chinese. However, the number and rhythm of Chinese poetry are limited, they couldn't express their ideas clearly through Chinese poetry. As a result, letters had become a necessary means of their communication. During the time in Beijing, Vietnamese envoys and Korean envoys communicated by writing letters at times.

Since Chinese characters are the official languages of Korea and Vietnam, they are not the national languages of these two countries after all. Although local literati learn to use Chinese characters, they do not

speak Chinese. The communication between Vietnamese envoys and Korean envoys in China could only be achieved by means of written conversation. No matter they wrote poems on fans to give to each other, or sing or write poems, they all use Chinese to achieve the purpose of mutual communication.

### **III. TWO CULTURAL DIFFERENT POSITIONS OF ENVOYS IN VIETNAM AND KOREA**

Although Vietnam and Korea were in the Chinese culture circle, the cultural contest between them had never stopped. The envoys of Vietnam and Korea, who met in their diplomatic missions, often competed with each other in culture. However, in different cultural writings, the cultural position of the envoys of the two countries is opposite.

*A. The envoys of Vietnam showed their lower status than the envoys of Korea in China*

In the face of the envoys of Korea, the envoys of Vietnam used to show their humility, even the leading literary experts in Vietnam. As Li Guidun once described the scene of meeting with the envoys of Korea in 1760: "The envoys of Korea are all literary masters for a time, not discriminating for cultural backwardness, but always communicating with us. When I reciprocate with them in writing, I was lucky not to be ridiculed by them, but to be praised even more." It can be seen from their words that they agreed psychologically that the Chinese cultural status of the Korean envoys were higher than their own. Not only did Li Guidun have this psychology, but also in the works of other Vietnamese envoys. In 1772, when he met Korean envoys in Beijing, Wu Huiting said that although he deeply knew that he was a countryman and his works could only make them laugh, he could still give them his writing to show the elegance of meeting each other in thousands of miles. In the communication between Vietnamese envoys and Korean envoys, we can often see their humble attitude towards Korean envoys. In contrast, the envoys of Vietnam seldom mentioned the envoys of Ryukyu who are also in the Chinese culture circle. Even if they mentioned it occasionally, they also hold a high attitude. When Li Wenfu mentioned the envoys of Ryukyu, he said that their hair was also decorated with hairpins like a woman, and the clothes they wore also had the characteristics of barbarians. It can be seen from the language of Vietnamese envoys that they have great respect for Korean envoys.

Unlike the Vietnamese envoys who respected the Korean envoys and belittled the Ryukyu envoys, the Korean envoys put the Vietnamese envoys in the same position as the Ryukyu envoys. This can be seen from their poetry exchanges. In the 19th year of Hongwu (1386), Li Chongren, a Korean envoy to Jinling, wrote

two poems about Vietnam and Ryukyu respectively[1]. Li Suiguang also edited the poems he wrote to the envoys of Vietnam and Ryukyu into a book respectively[4]. Other Korean envoys kept the same contact with Ryukyu envoys as well as with Vietnamese envoys.

Because of China's different attitude towards Korea and Vietnam, the status of Korean envoys in China was higher than that of Vietnam envoys. For example, according to the standards of rites stipulated in the Qing Dynasty, the status of Vietnamese envoys was only the same as those of "small countries" such as Myanmar and Siam in Southeast Asia. So Emperor Mingming even complained on the envoys being placed behind the Ryukyu, and deliberately sent the following mission to China's court to request the Vietnamese envoy to be placed in the front row [5]. Because the status of the Korean envoys in China was higher than that of the Vietnamese envoys, the Vietnamese envoys always kept humility in front of them during their stay in China.

*B. The envoys of Vietnam were showed higher status than the envoys of Korea in Vietnam*

In contrast to the humility of Vietnamese envoys, they were superior to Korean envoys in intelligence and talent in their native Vietnamese literature. According to *The Rough Records of the Old Window*, when Mo Tingzhi pay his respect to the Chinese emperor, he happened to encounter foreign fans paying tribute, and the emperor ordered him to write an article with the Korean envoys to praise them. The envoys of Korea wrote first. Mo Tingzhi knew the content when he looked at his pen, so he wrote an article according to the content of Korean Envoy. After they handed in the article, the emperor praised Mo Tingzhi since his article style was better, and later awarded him the champion of the two countries[6]. Because Vietnamese scholars had always called themselves "Little China" and was proud of the status of "Chinese orthodoxy". When they faced the Korea, which also occupied an important position in the Chinese cultural circle, Vietnamese scholars tried to show that their cultural status was superior to that of Korea through the role of envoys.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Vietnamese envoys not only communicated frequently with Chinese literati, but also interacted with Korean and Ryukyu envoys in Chinese literature during their diplomatic missions to China. As a literary exchange between foreign envoys, Vietnamese envoys obviously had many contacts with Korean envoys, but they ignored Ryukyu in the same Chinese cultural circle. Although they ostensibly respected the Korean envoys, they actually wanted to fight against them secretly in culture. This shows that countries in the

Chinese cultural circle were both cultural communications and attempts to highlight their own cultural status.

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