

# Analysis of the "Poetry Inscription" Written by Vietnamese Envoys

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## ABSTRACT

Vietnamese envoys traveled between China and Vietnam, leaving precious documents recording about cultural exchanges. "Poetry Inscription" written by Vietnamese envoys was one of them, some of which had various forms, such as being written in fans, paintings, walls, stones, etc. It reflected the poetry exchanges among literati between of China and Vietnam. Meanwhile, it showed the Vietnamese literati' observation of Chinese secular customs and local customs in the "foreign eyes". The poems inscribed by Vietnamese envoys reflect the cultural exchanges between China and Vietnam, and some of them are rare materials in Chinese regional literature.

**Keywords:** Vietnam, envoys, poetry inscription, cultural exchanges

## I. INTRODUCTION

Literary writing is closely related to the region. In the process of regional flow, literati often integrate the landscape scenery, local folk customs and their own experience into literature, such as a large number of Landscape Poems and relegation poems in ancient China. The envoys of Vietnam are a special group of literati under the suzerain vassal system of China and Vietnam, who are not only the leaders of Vietnamese Chinese literature creation, but also the important media in the cultural exchange between China and Vietnam. During their mission from Vietnam to China, Vietnamese envoys wrote poems to record the geographical landscape along the way, and made a detailed observation on the geographical features and folk customs of China through the "eyes of foreign lands". They also made extensive literary contacts with Chinese literati in the form of poems. Poetry inscription is a common literary style in ancient Chinese poetry. Because of its unique creation and communication mode, it has always been valued by researchers. It also has a far-reaching impact on novels, opera, painting, calligraphy and other literary arts. The form of poems inscribed in ancient poems has also been inherited by Korean and Vietnamese literati in the Han cultural circle. Ge Zhaoguang once paid attention to the poetry inscription phenomenon of Korean Envoys [1], and Cui Xiongquan also discussed the painting poems of Korean scholars [2]. However, many poems written by Vietnamese envoys on their way to China have not received due attention. In recent

years, the study of Vietnamese envoys' literature mainly focuses on the application of philology and history, and there is still further development in literature. Based on the poems written by Vietnamese envoys, this paper sorts out and classifies these poems and points out the content categories and characteristics of these poems. At the same time, this paper also focuses on the literary significance and cultural connotation behind this phenomenon.

## II. THE FORM OF POETRY INSCRIPTION BY THE ENVOYS OF VIETNAM

Ancient literati often leave poems and inscriptions on walls, cliffs, post stations and other places, as well as on small objects such as fans, leaves, handkerchiefs and utensils. Vietnamese envoys also left many poems on their way to China. They not only wrote many poems on fans and paintings to the Chinese literati and local officials who communicated with them along the way, but also left poems on the walls and stones when they were watching the landscapes, towers and temples in China, which formed various forms of poems.

### A. Poems wrote on the fans

Fan was not only a common thing in the daily life of ancient literati, but also had profound cultural heritage in Han culture. Writing poems on fans reflect the elegant taste of literati. Fans are easy to carry and spread, and are often used as a tool for poetry creation and communication among literati.

The poems on the fan became the carrier of human relationship between Vietnamese envoys and Chinese literati. Vietnamese envoys often received fans with poems from Chinese literati during their missions to China. For example, Fan Zhixiang, the envoy of Ruan Dynasty, wrote two poems to thank Liu Mingzhi (Da Lie), the magistrate of Sicheng, for giving him a couplet poem fan. Pei Wensi also wrote a poem to thank Ouyang Shifu for his gift of Tuan fan and poem. They also gave poetry fans as gifts to Chinese literati, for example, Li Guangding wrote poems on three fans, which were presented to Mr. Xu, Lu Yu, the magistrate of Xiangtan, and Tangjing of Changsha Prefecture respectively. Ruan Sixian wrote a poem on the fan and presented it to Li Fuzhu of Xiangyin County. Poetry writing on fans is not only a way of communication between Chinese and Vietnamese envoys, but also one of the common ways of communication in East Asian Chinese cultural circle. For example, at the end of the 18th century, a Vietnamese envoy to Beijing, Wu Shiren, wrote a poem to thank the Korean mission member Piao Qijia for presenting the fan with the poem. In the 19th century, Fan Zhixiang also wrote a poem on a fan and presented it to Li Yuyuan, a member of the Korean mission. It can be seen that fan and poems have also become an important communication medium between Korean and Vietnamese envoys.

Poetry and prose not only enhance the feelings between the literati, but also show their talent. Writing poetry on the fan adds to the taste and elegance of the literati. In the performance of fans with poems, Vietnamese envoys used it to exchange poetry creation with Chinese literati.

#### *B. Poems wrote on the paintings*

Poems inscribed on a picture are poems written by poets according to the contents of the pictures, or expressing their aesthetic feelings by commenting on the artistic value of paintings, or expressing the feelings of their families and countries by means of painting inscriptions, or discussing painting theories by analyzing painting styles. These poems can be independent of the picture, but they complement each other when they are integrated with paintings. "Poetry is an invisible painting, and painting is a tangible poem." Poetry Painting convey the mutual integration and complementary relationship between poetry and painting. Poems be written on paintings further improve the taste and style of paintings. There are two main types of poems on paintings by Vietnamese envoys: one is chanting on the objects in the paintings, for example, Pan Hui wrote poems on the paintings of pine, plum, chrysanthemum, peony and lotus, and Li Wenfu wrote poems on the picture of orchid and Phoenix In this kind of poetry,

they directly described the objects in the paintings with the images of poems. The other is to compose poems on the artistic conception of the painting, and in this way, the poetry and painting are integrated to form an organic unity. In this kind of poetry, they did not specify the scenery in the painting, but used the techniques of metonymy and metaphor to expand the realm of the painting. Some envoys themselves are also familiar with calligraphy and painting. For example, Zhang Haohe was very good at painting in the Ruan Dynasty in Vietnam.

In this kind of poems, there is a special one, i.e. writing a poem on a personal portrait. Feng Kekuan, an envoy to Vietnam in the Ming Dynasty, wrote poems on the portraits of Zhao Bangqing. In the later period, personal portraits become photographs. For example, in the 19th century, Zheng Huaide, the envoy of Ruan Dynasty, wrote two poems on the photograph of Xu Tizhai. In such poems, they should not only directly describe the appearance of the characters, but also highlight the inner temperament and spiritual connotation of the characters.

#### *C. Poems wrote on the walls*

There is also a special form of poem inscription that poems are written on the walls or pillars of hotels, post stations, temples and Taoist temples. This method was popular in the Tang and Song dynasties. At that time, the literati generally used to write poems on the walls. In the process of mission, Vietnamese envoys also had the habit of inscribing poems on the walls.

One is to follow the poem on the wall when they see others. Pavilion post station is a place with strong mobility of personnel. Ancient literati often wrote poems here when they had a rest. The broad wall is conducive to the inscription of poems, and it also leads to the poetic interest of later literati. Therefore, there is often a wall with many literati writing poems. Vietnamese envoys also wrote many continued poems in their missions, some of which were based on the poems written by Chinese literati. In these poems, they often find old titles on the walls of post stations, temples and other buildings, and then write a poem with the original rhyme in the blank space beside them. Pan Huizhu went on a mission again in 1831. On his way to visit Xiangshan temple, he found his Uncle Wu Shi's poem inscribed on the wall. Wu Shi Wei was sent to China twice in 1809 and 1820, and he died of illness on his last mission in Nan Ning in China. At this time, his uncle had passed away. When he saw his uncle's poem on the wall, he felt that things remained as ever, yet man were no more the same ones. The other is the poet improvised a poem on the wall, that is, the Vietnamese envoys suddenly think and write poems to the wall. They missed

their hometown in special seasons, such as Dragon Boat Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival and Spring Festival. At this time, they often wrote a poem on the wall passing by to express their psychological feelings.

#### *D. Poems wrote on the stones*

Stone inscription poetry is also a common type of poem writing by ancient literati when they boarded the expedition. In the prosperous period of poetry in the Tang and Song Dynasties, many literati often left stone inscription poems in the world. Due to the special objects of the poems, such as the stone inscriptions on the cliffs or the stone tablets, the literati often couldn't directly inscribe, but needed to make special carvings with the help of stone workers.

Some of them were engraved on the stone tablets of Taoist temples and pavilions. For example, there are two poems left by Zheng Huaide in Lvbian temple in Handan, one in Xianxian Temple by Ruan Zonggui, one by Hu Shidong in zhongfuzi temple, etc. Some of them were engraved on the stone in scenic spots, such as Duan Jun in Tengwang Pavilion, Ruan Shou in Baiquan Pavilion and Yellow Crane Tower, etc. Some inscriptions are of great value. The monument of King Annan in Feilai temple, Qingyuan County, Guangdong Province, is an example. Feilai temple has a long history, and most of the inscriptions of literati in past dynasties, such as Zhang Jiuling, Han Yu, Su Shi, Yuan Mei, etc., have been preserved. In 2008, it was listed as a key stone inscription protection area by the Guangdong government.

Others were engraved on the smooth stones of the mountain. There are a lot of rock carvings in famous scenic spots in China. These rock carvings also inspired Vietnamese envoys to leave their inscriptions. For example, many Vietnamese envoys wrote poems on stones or stone tablets in Wu Xi, Hunan Province. In 1765, Ruan Huiying had left a poem On Stone Mirrors in it. Ruan Huiying recorded in his article: "After a few miles to Wuxi, Mr. Ruan chiseled a stone like a wine bottle and wrote a poem on it" [3], Pei Wenxuan also said: "At the middle of the mountain, there is a stone which is more than a foot high and can be two feet wide. The stone was polished black and shiny. It was like a mirror that could shine on people. The word Mirror Stone was engraved on it. The rocks around the mountain are full of ancient and modern poetry." [4]

### **III. THE CONTENT CATEGORY OF POETRY INSCRIPTION BY THE ENVOYS OF VIETNAM**

Vietnamese envoys wrote poems and couplets on folding fans, paintings, walls and stone tablets, expressed their thoughts and feelings. They used

the special way of communication to convey rich content, just as Tao Gongzheng mentioned that: "The poems I wrote were all expressions of the moment. Some poems were about watching the scenery, some were about communicating with Chinese ministers, and some were talking about poetry creation with my colleagues." [5] From the existing poems written by the envoys of Vietnam, the contents mainly include the following categories:

One is about farewell. The ancient means of transportation were backward, and they would not see each other for several years, so they paid special attention to farewell. When they parted, the Vietnamese envoy, as a foreigner, and Chinese literati almost never met. In the process of their mission, almost all of them were in a hurry. Wu Huijing wrote in his books "We came from Guangxi, Huguang, Henan and Zhili, and traveled day and night." [6] Although it was short to get along with Chinese literati, they still needed to follow the usual interpersonal communication mode when they leaved. Poem writing had become the most convenient means of communication between Vietnamese envoys and Chinese officials. They often wrote poems on fans and paintings as gifts when they were parting. Many envoys, such as Wu Shiren, fan Zhixiang and Pei Wenzhen, all sent fans with their poems when they parted with Chinese officials. These poems were only a way to communicate and express feelings.

The second is about viewing the scenery. In the poems of the envoys of Vietnam, the poems describing the scenery of mountains and rivers along the way are the most preserved poems. On the one hand, Vietnamese envoys entertained themselves with poems. They had been sent to China for at least a year or more. As Hu Shidong said, "The journey is more than 9000 miles, and nothing can be used to amuse the dullness of the journey except writing poems." [7] On the other hand, they also sighed about the landscape of China, such as Pei Wensi said: "When I read Chinese character books, I envy the beauty of Chinese landscape and characters. Now I come to China in person and record it." [4] So, they describe the scenery they saw when they arrived in their poems.

The third is about expressing their emotion. Vietnamese envoys often missed ancient people and deeds when they went to places of interest and historic sites in China. They also combined history with reality, lament personal experiences and attack social reality. For example, Wuxi in Hunan Province is famous for Yuanjie's poems and Yan Zhenqing's words. When Vietnamese envoy passes through Wuxi, they always remembered these two literati who had been dead for hundreds of years.

The fourth is about the bitterness of the journey. Vietnam envoys traveled thousands of miles to China when they were on a mission to China. They were often extremely difficult in the regional flow, and sometimes even faced death threats. Most of them died during their diplomatic mission, such as Shen Yi "served as an envoy to China and died of state affairs", including Ruan Run, Zheng Shiji, Ruan Weihong and Wu Shiwei et.. In *The Record of Laws and Systems of Qing Dynasty (Da Qing Hui Dian)*, there were also special decrees for foreign envoys to die in China: "If a foreign envoy died of a disease on the way, the inner court would write a memorial message. The local political envoy would prepare the items for the sacrifice and send officials to sacrifice once. At the same time, tombs should be built and stone signs should be erected. If any of the envoys who came with the envoys voluntarily brought back the bones, they were allowed to bring them back." Because of the long journey and long time, these envoys often thought about their hometown and country when they entered China. Therefore, they often wrote images such as "traveler", "lonely boat", "rainy night" and so on.

#### **IV. THE ARTISTIC FEATURES OF POETRY INSCRIPTION BY VIETNAMESE ENVOYS**

Most envoys of Vietnam came from the imperial examinations and were famous for their literature. Many of them were very good at writing poems, such as Wu Huiting, Ruan Youli, Ruan Wenchao, all well-known poets in 19<sup>th</sup> century in Vietnam. In *The Record of Da Nan (Da Nan Shi Lu)*, it is recorded that one of the criteria for the emperor in Ruan Dynasty to select envoys was one's literary talent. Due to the differences in personality and talent of Vietnamese envoys, their poetic styles are different, but similar artistic features can also be analyzed. Generally speaking, there are differences in form, language and rhyme.

In terms of form, these poems mostly use metrical poems and are skilled in antithesis. Chinese literati often chose quatrains in their poems and five character poems, because their compact system is easy to memorize and spread. However, the Vietnamese envoys rarely wrote five character poems, on the contrary, they usually used seven character poems. The reason was that Vietnamese literati had been deeply influenced by Tang poetry for a long time, and they respected it as the standard. The metrical poetry are neat and uniform, and the antithesis is neat and elegant, which accords with the status of Vietnamese envoys as "state envoys". In these poems, the two couplets of neck and jaw are in strict antithesis. Among these inscriptions, Vietnamese envoys also created some seven character quatrains, such as Feng Kekuan's poems written on fans when he was in Guangdong

Province. A total of 11 poems were all started with "Annam guest envoy does not know the poem".

In terms of language, there are not only elegant and vigorous works, but also simple and straightforward language. Because most of the time they had to hurry on with their journey, Vietnamese envoys had no time to deliberate on the words and sentences. For example, Ruan Huiyu's poems *On Stone Mirrors* are simple and natural, and no matter the words or sentences are a little too simple. However, by comparing the poems inscribed on the inscriptions with the same poems collected by his later poetry anthology, we can find that the language of later is beautiful and there are many differences between them. This should be the result of his revision and embellishment of the original poems after he returned home. There are also some poems written by Vietnamese envoys, whose words and sentences are more casual, with fewer allusions and close to popularization. For example, another poem written by Nguyen Sixian, which is written in the picture of plum blossom and litchi, has 51 characters, which is completely colloquial. It mainly lies in the fact that some poems written by Vietnamese envoys are mostly for dealing with interpersonal communication, especially with some lower class literati. Therefore, the poems they wrote were mostly close to the secular world, without obscure words.

In rhyme, these poems rhyme strictly. Because most of the poems written by Vietnamese envoys are metrical poems, one of the characteristics of metrical poems is paying attention to rhyme. Therefore, they pay special attention to rhyme in their poems. When poems are used for interpersonal communication or on walls, the words "poem according to the rhythm of the previous poem" are often found in their poems. For example, when Zheng Huaide was visiting laojunyan, he saw Zhao Zhujun's poem in Guangxi on the stone wall on the mountain. He wrote another poem according to the original rhythm. Because the Chinese literature learned by Vietnamese envoys inherited from Chinese literature, they also followed the pattern of Chinese poetry when they wrote poems. Zheng Dechang said in the preface to *The Collection of Poetry Rhymes (Shi Yue Ji Yao)*: "Now this book about poetry rhythm has been spread to Vietnam, and Vietnamese scholars know that they regard it as a treasure."

#### **V. CONCLUSION**

To sum up, Vietnamese envoys, as a link in the cultural exchange between China and Vietnam, deepened their friendship with Chinese literati by writing poems on fans or paintings, and left ink marks in Chinese landscape in the way of writing poems on walls or stones, which became precious

foreign literature in Chinese regional culture. The poems written by Vietnamese envoys during their missions to China are not only for the literati to show their talents and express their emotions and aspirations, but also for the deeper political and cultural factors: On the one hand, as envoys, they should ease the diplomatic relations between China and Vietnam by writing poems and promoted the integration of the two countries' relations. On the other hand, they needed to use poetry as a way of communication in interpersonal communication to enhance their understanding and feelings with Chinese and Korean literati. The unique form and artistic features of these poems make them important literary forms in the history of Ancient Vietnamese literature, and their description of Chinese regional scenery and local customs has become an important local literature in China. These poems are also the best examples of cultural exchanges in the East Asian Han cultural circle.

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