

Poetry and Literary Diplomacy: On the Literary Exchange Between Vietnamese Envoys and Chinese Literati*

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This paper mainly discusses the diplomatic way of Vietnamese envoys through literature during their mission to China, including the group, communication mode and reason of the literary exchange between Vietnam envoy and Chinese literati. The article points out that the Chinese literati contacted by Vietnamese envoys could be divided into Lingnan literati group (Guangdong and Guangxi provinces), Huguang literati group (Hunan and Hubei provinces), Jiangnan literati group (Southern Anhui and Jiangsu provinces), and Northern literati group (Henan & Hebei provinces and Beijing). There are three main ways of literary communication between Vietnamese envoys and Chinese literati: the first is to give poems to each other according to fixed rhythm; the second is to communicate by writing; the third is to comment on poems each other. There are two main reasons for the literary exchange between Vietnamese envoys and Chinese literati: on the one hand, they wanted to achieve the purpose of “poetry diplomacy” with literature, and took the initiative to communicate with Chinese literati; on the other hand, Chinese literati were curious about Vietnamese envoys, so they asked Vietnamese envoys to give poems, or even paid for their literary works. The literary exchange between Vietnamese envoys and Chinese literati is a direct reflection of the literary exchange between China and Vietnam, from which we can see that the Chinese literature of Vietnam in the feudal period is an important part of the Chinese cultural circle.

Keywords: Vietnamese envoys, Chinese literati, literary exchanges

Introduction

Under the system of Tributary Relations between China and Vietnam, the diplomatic relations between China and Vietnam have always centered around “tributary” and “conferring” as the core, and the exchange of envoys has become a rule, and the mission is the political purpose of each diplomatic mission. In every Vietnamese mission, the envoys sent to China not only have the explicit mission of diplomatic relations between the two countries, but also shoulder some implicit missions, such as visiting China’s local conditions and customs, and even some military purposes. The Vietnamese imperial court will also choose different personnel to send envoys according to different missions, but basically they will send envoys with literary talent. Only when there

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was a military dispute or a dispute between the two countries, they would choose the relevant ministers to send envoys. In ancient times, China was the patriarchal state in the Sino Vietnam relations, so “Do not insult the image of the state” became the most important purpose when Vietnam envoys to China.

As Wu Huilin, a envoy in the Xishan Dynasty in Vietnam, said, “Is it easy to be an envoy? The respect or disdain of the people of the suzerain state is related to the image of the vassal state. Therefore, people who are not erudite and prestigious can not serve as envoys.... It is the duty of every envoy to live up to the diplomatic mission entrusted to him by his country” (Wu, 2010, p. 296). Fan Shizhong, an envoy of the Ruan Dynasty, said: “I studied in my childhood, became an official when I was an adult, and had to serve as an envoy under the emperor’s orders.... Only by being able to send envoys to various places without tarnishing the image of the country can we be called a gentleman” (Fan, 2010, p. 128). It can be said that in the process of Vietnamese envoys to China, the mission of envoys has been throughout. Therefore, during their stay in China, Vietnamese envoys had been maintaining their national image of “Little China” in culture, and their communication with Chinese literati in poetry and literature could be achieved through the diplomatic means of literary identity to Chinese identity.

Group Types of Communication Between Vietnamese Envoys and Chinese Literati

During their mission to China, the Vietnamese envoys had extensive literary contacts with the Chinese literati along the way. Just take the Qing Dynasty as an example, the Vietnamese envoys left 86 poems with 63 accompanying officials, 170 poems with 153 local officials, and 161 poems with 112 local officials. These numerous poems not only outline the daily literary activities of the envoys, but also reflect the literary exchanges between Chinese and Vietnamese literati to a certain extent. Because the Vietnamese envoys could only stay in a certain place for a short time on their way out, the most common poems between them and Chinese literati were poems written in accordance with each other’s rhythm and farewell poems. The literary intercourse between Vietnamese envoys and Chinese literati is closely related to the regions they went through. Therefore, Chinese literati can be divided into the following categories according to regions:

Lingnan Literati Group (Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces)

Because Guangdong and Guangxi are connected with Vietnam, there are frequent personnel exchanges between China and Vietnam in these two provinces. Guangxi, as the first destination of Vietnamese envoys, is also the transit station of official documents in the diplomatic relations between China and Vietnam. The local officials of Guangxi often had correspondence with the Vietnamese courtiers because of the relationship between China and Vietnam. Some of them were even appointed as envoys by the Chinese emperor and sent to Vietnam. For example, Lao Chongguang was appointed as an envoy to Vietnam in 1849. During Lao Chongguang’s diplomatic mission to Vietnam, Pan Huiyong, Fan Zhixiang, Ruan Wenchao and others had literary exchanges with him, and these people were appointed envoys of Vietnam to China.

Therefore, literati in Guangxi province had more contacts with Vietnamese envoys, not only local officials, but also local literati. For example, in volume 4 of Li guidun’s *Beishi Tonglu*, it is recorded that when Qianlong was stationed in Guangxi in 1761: “Li Xintian sent paper for poems and couplets, the envoy wrote one poem and one couplet, one deputy envoy wrote two poems, and the other deputy envoy wrote two couplets. Then they give it to Li Xintian together” (Li, 2010, p. 318). Although Guangdong is not a regular route for envoys, it is a place

where Vietnam often sends people to official business or purchase goods. Some Vietnamese envoys also went to Guangdong on official business and often stayed in Guangdong for several months.

For example, Zheng Huaide, Li Guangding and others, the first envoys of the Nguyen Dynasty, arrived in Guangdong on official business and stayed for several months before they were officially dispatched. These Vietnamese envoys in Guangdong had extensive and in-depth literary exchanges with the literati in Guangdong. Li Wenfu, a descendant of a Chinese from Fujian Province, went to Guangdong three times and was even praised as a “relegated immortal” by the literati in Guangdong. In addition, some literati in Guangdong met with envoys because of their participation in accompanying. Just like Liu Zheji, the accompanying civil servant mentioned by Ruan Zong Gui, was from Zhaoqing, Guangdong. Ruan wrote a poem for him

Huguang Literati Group (Hunan and Hubei Provinces)

Hunan and Hubei Provinces are the places where famous literati gather, and their cultural accumulation is also high. Some of the areas have profound history and culture, such as Qu Yuan and Jia Yi, the natural landscape formed by Xiangjiang River and Dongting Lake, and the cultural name cards of Yueyang Tower, Huanghe Tower and Yuelu Academy. On the one hand, the Vietnamese envoys felt the landscape and culture there, on the other hand, they had a lot of poetry exchanges with Huguang literati. They not only exchanged poems with local officials in Huguang, for example, Ruan had three accompanying officials in Hunan, including Chen kuijin, Tian Kuotang and Chen Dingjin, but also had contacts with many local officials in Hunan, such as Tian Mingshan, Wu Chungu, and Ma Weixu. At the same time, the Vietnamese envoys and Huguang literati also traveled together in the local landscape and wrote poems according to the same rhythm. Some Chinese literati in this area also got along well with Vietnamese envoys, for example, Pei Wenyi expressed their deep friendship in his poem to Sheng Xiwu, the accompanying official of Hunan Province.

Jiangnan Literati Group (Southern Anhui and Jiangsu Provinces)

In history, the culture of Jiangnan is very profound, but it is not located in the traditional tribute road of Vietnamese envoys, and it is far away from Vietnam in the region, so there is less intersection between Vietnamese envoys and Jiangnan literati. However, there are still some envoys who had contacted with Jiangnan literati. When Ding Ruwan was sent to Nanjing, his contacts with Nanjing literati had attracted the attention of Chinese researchers (Zheng, 2013, pp. 174-180). Nanjing, as a famous cultural place, has many cultural celebrities. When Vietnamese envoys went to Nanjing, they used to visit local cultural literati. For example, Ding Ru finished his communication with Wang Ji. Zhu Hui put a note on the title of his poem “Congratulations on Mr. Wang Bicao’s 80th birthday”: “Annam tribute envoy Ding mozhai once visited Wang Ji and asked him for poetry”. Not only Ding Ruwan, but also other envoys from Vietnam had close contacts with Nanjing literati, such as Ruan Zongfu’s association with Zhang Zhuoshan and Gao Shanyang, Li guidun’s association with Shen Jianqiu, etc. In the past, Vietnamese envoys made friends not only with Nanjing literati, but also with literati groups in other areas of the south of the Yangtze River, such as Li Bancun in Huaiyin of Jiangsu province, Wu Lang in Quanjiao of Anhui province. The envoys who did not come to Jiangnan also met with them because of the flow of Jiangnan people, such as literati in Jinhuafeng of Zhejiang province who Ruan Gongkang met during his trip to Jiangnan, and Li Fufan who Ruan Silian met, etc.

Northern Literati Group (Henan& Hebei provinces and Beijing)

The Vietnamese envoys traveled only half the way to Hankou, Hubei Province. Before that, they all traveled by boat. Starting from Hankou, their journey was changed from land to Beijing. However, in the poetry concentration of Vietnamese envoys, their literary contacts with the northern literati group decreased significantly. They left only a few poems with local officials in the northern provinces. The reason may be that it was convenient for the envoys to travel and write poems by boat while the northern land travel was limited to the narrow space of the carriage, which made it difficult to write poems.

It is worth noting that the number and frequency of contacts between Vietnamese envoys and Chinese literati are not evenly distributed. Some envoys had extensive exchanges with Chinese literati, such as Tao Zhengyi's poems of Li Dynasty, which collected 43 poems, and 40 of them were poems exchanged with Chinese literati. Another part of the envoys, such as Pan Huishi and Ding Xiangfu, did not mention a word in their poems. On the one hand, the reason lies in the loss of personal documents of Vietnamese envoys. For example, there are only 19 poems in Pan Huishi's poems recording the process of the mission, but the original style is not known. On the other hand, Li Wenfu, a descendant of Chinese in Fujian Province, had been to Fujian Province once and Guangdong Province three times before he became an envoy. As a result, there are a lot of poetry records about his association with Chinese literati in his poetry collection, while Ding Xiangfu, as a minor representative of the Qing Dynasty emperor, in his poems, there are only two poems about his association with Chinese accompanying officials.

It can be seen that more or less of the literary exchanges between Vietnamese envoys and Chinese literati are related to both the envoys' personal situation and the means of transportation. Of course, it is also related to the social situation of China in different periods.

The Way of Communication Between Vietnamese Envoys and Chinese Literati

In ancient China, the word "diplomacy" has many interpretations, including the communication between countries or between individuals and foreign countries, as well as the communication with friends and outsiders. Vietnamese envoys have a national mission to travel between the two countries. Their "diplomacy" mainly represents the interests of the country. In their poems with Chinese scholars, they also pay special attention to the identity of their envoys. Specifically, there are several ways of communication between Vietnamese envoys and Chinese scholars.

Poet Writing and Communication

The Vietnamese envoys and Chinese literati met in a hurry, and poetry communication became the best means of interpersonal communication for them from strangers to acquaintances, from acquaintances to farewell.

Most of the poems presented by Vietnamese envoys to Chinese literati became general because of their shallow friendship. However, their harmony poems with Chinese literati groups are noteworthy. The most typical ones are Pei Wenyi's diplomatic mission's friendship with Hunan literati group in 1876, and Li Wenfu's friendship with Guangdong literati group in 1876. In these two times, many Chinese literati participated in the communication, and there were also poetry collections including all the poems. The former left the poetry collection *Zhongzhou Huiying*, while the latter left the poetry collection *Xiancheng LvHua* and *Zhujiang Qunyinghui*. Yang Enshou also printed the poems they exchanged with Vietnamese envoys and handed them the

printed books after Pei Wenxi returned from his mission to Beijing. He said in the preface, "It is a great honor for me to make friends with overseas gentlemen in order to express my country's tenderness and the prosperity of Chinese between us" (Yang, 2010, pp. 199-200). The poems of Li Wenfu and Guangdong literati were compiled by Miao Gen. In the postscript of his poetry collection, Miao Gen said: "The meeting of the Pearl River literati is amazing! Although we belong to different countries, we use the same language and are in the same culture. What's so strange about using the same kind to meet the same kind? Although our costumes are different, they are also influenced by Confucian culture. What's so strange about learning to write by writing? Go boating on the Pearl River to enjoy the autumn moon and the water of the Pearl River. Communicate with poems and enjoy the beautiful scenery with people with the same interests. Only people like us can do it". The recognition of Chinese Han culture is exactly the historical value of Sino Vietnamese literary exchange embodied in the diplomatic relations between the envoys and Chinese literati.

Among the poems of the Vietnamese envoys, the most popular one is the poetry communication with Chinese accompanying officials and local officials. According to Chinese law, after Vietnamese envoys enter China, there are two kinds of envoys: short accompanying official and long accompanying official. The short delivery time is generally about one month, while the long delivery time is as long as one or two years. Therefore, during the journey, Vietnamese envoys often presented poems to each other with accompanying officials. At the same time, they also developed deep friendship. When they parted, Vietnamese envoys often wrote poems for them. The number of poems with Chinese local officials is the largest. This reflects the frequent interaction between envoys and local officials. Although the poems of Vietnamese envoys and local officials had some personal feelings, they were mostly for the purpose of "poetry diplomacy",

Communicate by Writing.

Written talk is considered as an important form of Sino-Vietnamese literary communication by researchers (Yu, 2013, pp. 108-116). Because of the difference of Chinese and Vietnamese pronunciation, Vietnamese envoys and Chinese literati communicated with each other by means of written talks. During their diplomatic mission to China, Vietnamese envoys had a wide range of opportunities to communicate with Chinese literati through the special way of writing.

The contents of written talks between Vietnamese envoys and Chinese literati are very extensive, involving the politics, history, customs and culture of China and Vietnam. Ruan Shu, for example, recorded in his *Diary of going to Tianjin* that he communicated with the officials of the Qing Dynasty by writing many times.

Literature is also an important part of their written conversation. When Sun Yiyan was transferred to Jiangning in February 1877, Vietnamese envoys Pei Wenkui, Lin Hong and Li Jixiang went to see him accompanied by Yang Enshou. Sun had a long communication with the three Vietnamese envoys, involving their names, official positions, Vietnamese imperial examinations, official ranks, clothes and clothes, as well as their poems and essays in China And so on. It can be seen that the communicate by writing preserved precious materials for the exchanges between Chinese and Vietnamese literati.

Comments on Poetry and Prose

Most of the Vietnamese envoys were outstanding in the Vietnamese literary world. They had a deep knowledge of Chinese literature. Therefore, after they came to China, although most of them could not

communicate with Chinese literati in language, poetry evaluation was a more direct way of literary communication. For example, when Pan Huizhu arrived in Guangxi, some Guangxi literati, such as Yin Jichang and Zhang Lianbi, exchanged comments on poems or articles. Pan Huizhu wrote in his poems that Zhang Lianbi had come to meet him, asked to see his poems, and then brought them back for comments. Correspondence has become an important way of communication for them to comment on poetry. For example, Ma Xiandeng's 1868 correspondence with Vietnam's Sui Gong mission Li Jun, Ruan Sijuan, Huang Cong and others was included in the diary of sending Vietnam's tribute envoys again. Among the letters, there are many articles about poetry selection, sentence making, poetry appreciation and so on.

The Reasons for the Communication Between Vietnamese Envoys and Chinese Literati

In ancient China, the word "diplomacy" has many interpretations, including the communication between countries or between individuals and foreign countries, as well as the communication with friends and outsiders. Vietnamese envoys have a national mission to travel between the two countries.

Literature as a Means of Diplomacy

"Poetry diplomacy" has a certain history in China, which can be traced back to the Spring and Autumn period. The core of poetry diplomacy lies in "diplomacy", which uses poetry as a diplomatic discourse to convey position and information on diplomatic occasions or foreign affairs. The envoys were ordered to travel between the two countries. Their "diplomacy" mainly represented the interests of the country, so their "poetry diplomacy" was to convey the diplomatic message of the country.

When foreign envoys come to China, their destination is Beijing. They are in a hurry all the way. They can only stay in one place for a few days at most, except for the weather, war and other irresistible factors. For example, when Vietnamese envoys pass through Dongting Lake, they will stay there for more than ten days because of the heavy rain and strong wind. Another example is that in the late Qing Dynasty, the Taiping Taigu movement often blocked the way of the Vietnamese envoys, so Pan Hui spent two more years on the mission than the regular mission. In this situation, the Vietnamese envoys and Chinese literati met in a hurry, and poetry communication became the best means of interpersonal communication for them from strangers to acquaintances, from acquaintances to farewell. Because as a foreigner can skillfully use Chinese poetry will immediately draw closer to the feelings between the Chinese people. It is through cultural identity that Vietnamese envoys achieve the recognition of the suzerain to themselves, so as to achieve the recognition of their own country.

Their "diplomacy" mainly represented the interests of the country, so their "poetry diplomacy" was to convey the diplomatic message of the country. From the communication between Vietnamese envoys and Chinese local officials, we can see that they claimed that "Chinese and Vietnamese culture is one" to achieve the purpose of diplomatic identity.

The Curiosity of Chinese Literati

The other reason why Vietnamese envoys had extensive literary contacts with Chinese literati was that Chinese people came to ask Vietnamese envoys for poems and even bought poems from them. Because the Vietnamese envoys gave their poems to the Chinese people they didn't even know, for example, some Chinese people who came to seek poems through Chinese local officials or accompanying officials, or Chinese literati

whom the Vietnamese envoys met in passers-by, they often only met once. At that time, where Vietnamese envoys went, Chinese people often came to watch, and it was common for Chinese people to ask for poems. The reason for this lies in the curiosity of Chinese literati towards foreigners, and the fact that the literary works of foreigners are different from those of Chinese people. They will show off the “rarity” of the poems written by Vietnamese envoys. In order to get the literary works of the Vietnamese envoys, they even spend a lot of money on it.

However Chinese people have repeatedly asked Vietnamese envoys for poems, which makes them feel impatient and tired. They often write a few poems casually. For example, Zheng Huaide gave poems to two literati named Wei and Jin in Hanyang, but after Zheng Huaide returned to Vietnam, he wrote a preface under these two poems, saying that the two of them came over with a painted fan and asked him to write a poem on the fan. However, shortly after he finished drinking and eating, he was not clear headed, so he wrote it casually with a pen.

Eliminate the Boredom of the Journey

Vietnamese envoys have been on missions for a long time and have a long journey. In the process of their missions, poetry has become the main way for them to travel and enjoy themselves. As Hu Shidong in Li Dynasty in Vietnam said, “There are more than 9000 miles to and fro all the way, and there is nothing to eliminate the dullness of the journey except literary creation” (Hu, 2010, p. 5). They also launched a series of literary activities through poetry, which had become an important activity in their mission. According to Chinese law, neither Chinese soldiers nor ordinary people could have private contacts with foreign envoys, because the rulers are worried that they will disclose political, military and other information related to the country. But from the collection of diplomatic poems left by Vietnamese envoys, we can see that there are many Chinese literati who had private contacts. The collection of Chinese literature and humanities also includes poems and articles of communication with Vietnamese envoys, among which there are many famous writers, such as Yuan Hongdao, a famous poet in the Qing Dynasty.

Conclusion

During his diplomatic mission to China, Vietnamese envoys left behind a large number of poems and essays with Chinese scholars, which became an important cultural phenomenon in the history of Chinese and Vietnamese literature. Because these poems span a long time and involve a large number of people, they are also rare literary phenomena in the communication between Chinese and Vietnamese literati. The literary exchanges between Vietnamese envoys and Chinese literati were mainly for diplomatic purposes, but also for killing the boring time on the journey. Because as envoys, they achieved the purpose of diplomacy through literary communication and mediation. After all, in the suzerain vassal system, the suzerain’s identification and affirmation will bring a lot of diplomatic benefits to the vassal states. In a word, the significance of the literary exchange between Vietnamese envoys and Chinese literati has surpassed that between ordinary literati. It has both the significance in the history of literary exchange and the implication in political diplomacy.

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