Discussion on Books Exchange Between China and Vietnam Based on Envoys from Vietnam

Yan YAN¹,a,*
¹School of Humanities and Education, Foshan University, Foshan, Guangdong, China
²yanyanwendy@126.com
*Correspondence author

Keywords: Envoys of Vietnam, Books, Communication, Cultural exchanges.

Abstract. Vietnamese envoys played an important role in the history of book exchange between China and Vietnam. During their mission, they not only spread the books of Vietnam to China, and also brought many books of China to their country, including the promotion of the circulation between Chinese and Vietnamese books. The last is a special phenomenon in the history of book exchange. On the one hand, Vietnamese envoys brought their own or Vietnamese literati’s works to invite Chinese literati to review the preface and postscript, then brought them back to Vietnam for printing. On the other hand, they modified and translated Chinese books and transmitted them to Vietnam, and then these works spread to China someday, forming the other circulation form of book exchange. Thus, the former was a circulation of Vietnam-China-Vietnam, while the latter was a circulation of China-Vietnam-China. It is of great significance for Vietnamese envoys to promote the exchange of books between China and Vietnam, since it promotes culture exchange and communication.

Introduction

It’s a long history of cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries. Books are an important medium of cultural communication, which promotes the communication between the cultures of the two countries. For a long time, when studying cultural communication, we must pay attention to the flow and communication of books. In the nineties of the last century, the history of book exchange between China and foreign countries has become the object of close attention of many researchers. For example, Zhu Xiaoqiu discussed the exchange of books in the Tang Dynasty[1]. Peng Feizhang combed the history of book exchange from Han Dynasty[2]. After that, the theory of "book circulation" further revealed the deep meaning of book exchange between China and foreign countries. Prof. Zhang Bowei clearly pointed out the specific connotation of "book circulation" is what we focus on is the "mental image" after the spread and reading of books. It includes the multi-directional circulation of the book itself in the dissemination, the interaction of reading, acceptance and response of the book content[3]. In the circle of Chinese culture, the cultural exchanges between China and Vietnam have lasted more than two thousand years. Liu Yujun once discussed the spread of Chinese classics and ancient books in Vietnam[4]. Li Qingxin also paid attention to the book circulation between Guangdong province in China and Vietnam[5]. Liu Yujun also talked about the book exchange between Guangdong and Vietnam [6]. However, there are still further discussions on the exchange of books between China and Vietnam, based on the flow of Vietnamese envoys. Because they promote the three situations of book exchange between China and Vietnam: (1) promoted the Chinese books spread to Vietnam, (2) promoted the Vietnamese books spread to China, and (3) promoted Circulation between Chinese and Vietnamese books. It must be pointed out that it is under the role of Vietnamese envoys that the cultural exchange between China and Vietnam have been promoted.
Promoted Chinese Books Spread to Vietnam

Because Vietnam's printing technology was relatively backward, they used to ship a lot of books from China in feudal society. In the Sino Vietnam relations, Vietnamese envoys should be sent to China once in three years. Under such political environment, the envoys of Vietnam became a fixed channel to carry Chinese books.

Bring Back the Books Given by the Chinese officials

In order to peddle Chinese culture, it was a common behavior for the Chinese imperial courts to give books to its vassal. For example, in 1726, when Fan Qianyi, an envoy of the later Li Dynasty in Vietnam, was sent to China. Emperor Yongzheng of China thought that the king of Vietnam advocated Confucianism, so he was rewarded with ancient literature Yuanjian, Peiwen Yunfu, Yuan Jian Lei Han, etc. At the same time, Vietnamese officials also applied to the Chinese government for books, for example, in the second year of Tianxi (1018) of the Li Dynasty, they sent foreign officials Lang Daoqing and Fanhe to China to beg for Buddhist scriptures.

Purchased the Books from Chinese

When Vietnamese envoys went to China, they also undertook the task of book procurement. Compared with the rough printing in Vietnam, Chinese books are exquisite, cheap and various. Annam (that is Vietnam) biography of History of Song Dynasty records that: at the beginning of Daguang (1107-1110), the Minister of tribute came to Beijing and asked for books, which was not allowed by the official in charge. But the emperor praised them for understanding the truth. In addition to some special books, such as forbidden books, Yin Yang books, arithmetic, imperial edicts, the books about foreign affairs and geography, other books were allowed to be purchased. In fact, Vietnamese literati liked to buy Chinese books very much. The official history of Vietnam also recorded the regulations of the emperor of Vietnam "forbidding buying Chinese books" [7]. Li guidun once recorded what he saw when he was an envoy staying in Guangxi province in 1761: "The master of Huangzhou's bookshop brought books here and sold them cheaply." Ruan Shu recorded in his mission diary in 1880, "I only like the low price of books in the market". They bought books not only for the court, but also for themselves. Many envoys had records, for example, Wu Shiwei bought books with his nephew and said that "the collection of money is not as extensive as the collection of books", when he was purchasing books in the process of his mission to China in 1809. Therefore, Vietnamese officials often sent people to China to purchase books, and they also made every effort to purchase "cheap" Chinese books in the process of their mission.

Received the Books from Chinese Scholars

When Vietnamese envoys went to China, their destination was Beijing, which required them to pass through many provinces of China. During this period, they used to communicate with and recite poems with Chinese literati, and also received many books from them. For example, in 1802, Xu Shigui, a successful candidate in the highest imperial examinations in China, sent two volumes of Senpu Preserved Manuscript to Ruan Jiaji, the envoy of Vietnam. Wu Xueqiao, the governor of Henan Province, also sent his collection of poems to Zheng Huaide and Li Guangding. In the seventh year of Tongzhi (1868), Li Daotai, who escorted Vietnamese envoys, sent Ruan Sixian and others a volume of eight volumes of the Poem Collection of Haoshan Lake. These personal poetry collections of Chinese literati were also brought back to Vietnam with the envoys.

Writed Down the Books They Had Seen

Vietnamese envoys often deliberately copied all kinds of documents they saw along the way, such as couplets on the door, poems on the wall, notices posted on the city gate, etc. For example, Li guidun tried to collect Chinese classics in various ways during his mission to China in 1760. He also claimed that when he saw the couplets on the pavilions, buildings and stone platforms, "he recited them in silence, and then wrote them down when he went back.". When Wu Shiren was appointed as an envoy in 1792, he copied all the steles, inscriptions and poems he saw along the
way into his personal collection *Huanghua Manual*. They also often transcribed Chinese books they had read. For example, *the Collection of Betya*, written by Ruan Huimin who was an envoy of the later Li Dynasty in Vietnam, is actually a copy of *the Whole Annals of Places of Interest* in China.

Among the books that they brought back to Vietnam, Vietnamese envoys especially liked education books, and often printed and spread the books back to Vietnam again, for example, Chen wenzhun was recorded in the actual records of the Great South ,"As an emissary, he went to China to get the five categories of Chen's heritage regulations, and then published and spread them after he came back".

**Promoted Vietnamese Books Spread to China**

Although the number of Vietnamese books circulated in China is very small in history, in the process of the limited flow of Vietnamese books to China, Vietnamese envoys also played an important role.

**Presented Their Collections of Poems to Chinese Scholars**

In order to communicate with Chinese literati, Vietnamese envoys often sent their poems to them for comments and prefaces. Because of their curiosity about foreigners and foreign lands, Chinese literati also asked Vietnamese envoys to present poetry collections. For example, after Zhao Zhitan, a Chinese scholar, saw Ruan Zongkui personal poetry collection, he asked him to give him a copy of the manuscript. Similarly, Zhang Lianbi also had requested to read pan Huizhu's poetry collection, and then took it back to read the comments.

**Presented Chinese Scholars with Their Own Books**

For a long time, when Vietnamese envoys went to China, they gave Chinese literati books with other literati of their country. For example, in the late Qing Dynasty, the poetry collection of Zhang Denggui who was an important Minister of Vietnam, spread to China through Vietnamese envoys. In 1871, Ma Xiandeng read Zhang denggui's poetry collection when he was the Chinese accompanying officer of the Vietnamese envoy. In 1883, Ruan Shu, an envoy of the Nguyen Dynasty in Vietnam, also presented Zhang denggui's poetry collection to Chinese scholars. Pan Zuyin, the master of Pang Xizhai, also had "four volumes and one volume of Zhang Guangxi's Remaining Works of Learning".

**Published Personal Manuscripts in China**

The publication of Vietnamese envoys' manuscripts in China is rare. At present, there is only one named "Poetry Collection of Caizhou Couplet" that the author is Pei Wensi and Yang Enshou. From 1876 to 1877, Pei Wensi was sent to China as an emissary, and Yang Enshou served as the Chinese escort officer. They discussed the art of composing poems together. That anthology records their poems of writing that time. It was published by Yang Enshou in 1877, sealed with the "The carved plates in Yang’s Tanyuan, Changsha". Yang Enshou (1835-1891), a famous poet and dramatist in the Qing Dynasty, was born in Changsha, Hunan Province.

**Promoted Circulation Between Chinese and Vietnamese Books**

Professor Zhang Bowei of Nanjing University first proposed the concept of "book circulation" when studying the flow of Chinese books, which means that books do not flow to one country in one direction, but to two-way flow, or to many countries[9]. This is also reflected in the book flow in China and Vietnam. Books not only spread in one direction driven by Vietnamese envoys, but also formed circulation phenomenon through their private unofficial communication. There are two circulation forms of Chinese and Vietnamese books:
From Vietnam to China and Back to Vietnam

Vietnamese literati brought these books in Vietnam to China, and then asked Chinese literati to write a preface and comment on them, and then brought them back to Vietnam. After returning to Vietnam, some of these books were printed with comments of Chinese literati. Due to the limitation of national boundaries, ordinary Vietnamese literati had no chance to step into China's territory in their whole lives. They asked their envoys to bring their works to China, and requested Chinese scholars comment on them, then brought them back to Vietnam. It was almost a fad. The collection of poems and essays of princes, ministers and even members of the royal family had been frequently brought to China through envoys in Qing Dynasty. For example, Fan Fushu's *the Complete Works of Sugarcane Garden*, the prince Ruan Mianshen's *Cangshan's Poems*, the princess Ruan Fu's *the Collection of Wonderful Lotus*, and even the emperor's own poems were also taken to China through the hands of Vietnamese envoys, and many Chinese scholars were invited to comment those works.

It is stated in *the Actual Records of the Great South* that in 1837, When Li Wenfu went to Guangdong province in China, Emperor Mingming ordered him to bring his own poetry collection for evaluation. After Li Wenfu returned to Vietnam, Emperor Mingming asked him, "what do the Chinese think of my work?" Li Wenfu replied: "The Chinese once said that there were so many poems of emperors in China, only Emperor Qianlong had the most, but not as plain as your emperor."[8] It's hard to judge whether Chinese literati would say that their own poems was inferior to those of foreign emperors, but it's quite appropriate to use "plain" to evaluate the differences between the two countries' poems. The poems of Vietnamese envoys and emperors have a long history. In 1877, Sun Yiyuan mentioned that he had seen the book of the Vietnamese emperor printed in the Ming Dynasty when he talked with Pei Wenqi in pen: "I saw a poetry collection of your country's emperors in the capital before, and now do you have any poetry collection of the former emperors in your country? I'm afraid it's hard for your country to get such books." Pei replied, "Emperor Hongde’s poetry was the best in Li Dynasty in our country, and we also have anthologies."

From China to Vietnam and Back to China

The history of sending envoys to each other between Vietnam and China is nearly one thousand years. "In the first year of Taiping in Vietnam (the third year of Kaibao in the Song Dynasty, 970)," Wu Shilian wrote in the history of the great Vietnam, "in the first year of Taiping in Vietnam, Captain Ding ordered Ruan Ziyou to go to China to establish diplomatic relations. "During this period, Vietnamese envoys returned to Vietnam with a large number of Chinese books. Some Chinese books were also introduced into Vietnam in the form of transcribing by Vietnamese envoys. After that, these copied books were published in Vietnam and brought back to China by Vietnamese envoys later. Some Vietnamese envoys would be affected after reading Chinese books during their diplomatic mission. After returning to Vietnam, they recreated it according to the Chinese books they read, and then these recreated books still flow back to China for dissemination. Among them, Ruan You's *Biography of Qiao* was the most influential. Ruan You went to China in 1813, during which he read about *Biography of Jin Yun Qiao* and *Biography of Xiao Qing*. When he came back to Vietnam, he created the *Biography of Qiao*, a poem written in national language of Vietnam in six and eight character style which was a new form based on the novels and poems. After Ruan you's *Biography of Qiao* was widely spread in Vietnam, a series of novels, dramas rewriting and Chinese translation, poetry and Fu appeared, such as Ruan Jian's annotation and performance of *Biography of Wang Jin*, Li Yu's translation of *Biography of Qiao in Chinese*, and *Record of Qiao*, Ruan Baoting's *Cuqiao Encounter Situation Poem*, etc. This also formed the "Qiao study" in later research. With the spread of Ruan you's Biography of Qiao, the original book of Qingxin Cairen *Biography of Jin Yun Qiao* was also sought after in Vietnam. However, compared with the upsurge of *Biography of Jin Yun Qiao* in Vietnam, there was hardly any introduction of it in China. Until Ruan you's book was translated and introduced into China by Huang Yiqiu in 1958. The spread of Ruan you's *Biography of Qiao* in China makes *Biography of Jin Yun Qiao* attract more attention in the Chinese literary world. Since then, it had been reprinted and published in Chunfeng Literature and Art Publishing House and Zhejiang literature and Art Publishing House. Since then, *Biography of Jin Yun Qiao* has become famous.
Vietnamese envoys not only promoted the spread of books between China and Vietnam, but also accelerated the development of printing technology between the two countries. For example, Liang Ruhu also learned the book printing technology through the opportunity of the envoys in 1443 and 1459, and then spread it in Hong Liao, Jialu County, Haiyang, his hometown. Hong Liao had became a famous printing place in Vietnam from then on.

Conclusion

Books are an important carrier of culture. It was a large-scale and long-term participation of Vietnamese envoys in the dissemination of books in China and Vietnam, which had made great contributions to the culture of sinosphere. They were not only "porters" of books between China and Vietnam, but also in-depth cultural exchanges between the two countries. The literati of China and Vietnam also strengthened the exchange of their poetry theory through the comments on the title sequence in the circulation of books. On the one hand, Vietnamese envoys spread Chinese books to Vietnam through four main forms of Chinese official and literati gifts, purchase by themselves, and copy by themselves. On the other hand, they brought Vietnamese literati’s books to China, and sent their works to Chinese literati in two main forms to bring Vietnamese books to China. In the interaction between the two, there was a circulation of books. In short, the envoys of Vietnam promoted the spread of culture between the two countries under the exchange of books.

Acknowledgment

I really appreciate the sponsors of this article. This paper is sponsored by the National Social Science Foundation Project "Collation and Research of Chinese Literature of the Envoys of Vietnam (18bzw094) ". I am deeply grateful of all those who helped me during the writing of this thesis, especial Prof. Niu Junkai, who had given me the most valuable suggestions and advice. And also I would like to express my thanks to editor, without whose assistance the publication of this thesis would have been impossible.

References