

Article

Research on the Contacts and Composition of Repartee Poems and Prose between Vietnamese and Joseon Envoys in China: Reports from Vietnam

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Introduction

Despite being geographically separated and obstructed, historical and cultural trajectories of Vietnam and Korea bear some resemblances. Right from the Middle Ages, the influence of Chinese civilization and the ties of tributary relations with Chinese monarchies made Vietnam and Korea have many historical and cultural similarities. Besides, the contacts between Vietnamese and Joseon envoys in China were an essential opportunity promoting the cultural exchange and understanding of the two countries. Studies on cultural exchange between Vietnam and Korea throughout history has attracted interest from many researchers, most of whom focus on studying these countries' cultural exchange through contacts amongst their envoys in China. By introducing the results of research on the meetings, contacts and the composition of repartee works using the same rhyme sequence between Vietnamese and Joseon envoys in China, the paper is expected to partly explain the cultural closeness and similarities of the two countries and at the same time to set the stages for intensive cooperations between Vietnam and Korea in various fields, including culture.

Overview of Research Works on Contacts and Repartee Poems and Prose Using the Same Rhyme Sequence between Vietnamese and Joseon Envoys

In terms of quantity, research works in Vietnam related to the contacts between Vietnamese and Joseon envoys so far totaled 26 works,¹ which are specifically as follows (Figure 1):

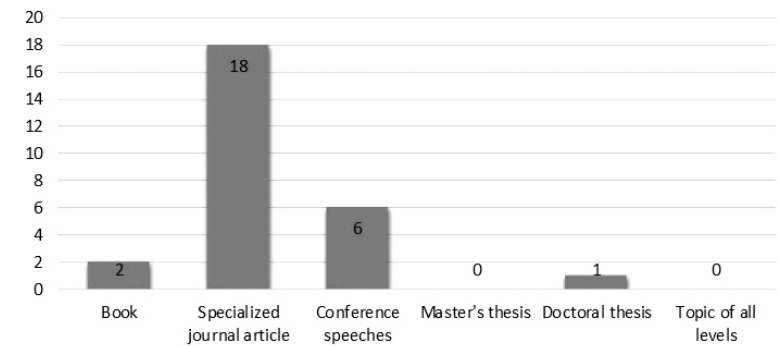


Figure 1. The Number of Research Works on the Contacts and Composition of Repartee Poems and Prose between Vietnamese and Joseon Envoys

Thus, most of those research works are articles published in journals, taking up to 18/27 works, 6 conference speeches, 2 books, and 1 doctoral thesis. Eighteen journal articles mainly focus on 2 journals named *Sino-Nôm Studies* and *Northeast Asian Studies*. Nevertheless, other articles are published in a number of journals such as *Literary Studies*, *Philosophy*, *Vietnam Social Sciences*, and *Research and Development* (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of Journal Articles²

| Name of journal | Number |
|--|--------|
| <i>Journal of Sino-Nôm Studies</i> | 8 |
| <i>Journal of Northeast Asian Studies</i> | 5 |
| <i>Journal of Literary Studies</i> | 2 |
| <i>Journal of Vietnam Social Sciences</i> | 1 |
| <i>Journal of Philosophy</i> | 1 |
| <i>Journal of Research and Development</i> | 1 |
| Total | 18 |

* This research is a result from the ministerial-level project of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) under grant number B2021-SPH-02.

1. Statistics as of 2020. The sources are the author's own statistics and references of Tham 2015 and Bac 2021.

2. Statistics as of 2020. The source are the author's own statistics and references of Tham 2015 and Bac 2021.

Regarding the team of authors, most of the above-mentioned works are of Ly Xuan Chung with 7 works, Bui Duy Tan and Trinh Khac Manh with three works, and Cho Jae Hyun and Nguyen Minh Tuong with two works. There are three co-authored works of which one book was jointly written by Trinh Khac Manh and Nguyen Duc Toan. Others are individual works.

The works of Ly Xuan Chung were published in *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies* (four works) and *Announcement on Sino-Nôm Studies* (two works), and one is a doctoral thesis (Table 2).

Table 2. Research Works of Ly Xuan Chung³

| No. | Name of research work | Journal/Book | Vol. | Year |
|-----|--|---|------|------|
| 1 | About the Repartee Poems and Prose between Lý Chi Phong 李芝峰 and Phùng Khắc Khoan 馮克寬 | <i>Northeast Asian Studies</i> | 4 | 2004 |
| 2 | About the Two Repartee Poems between Vietnamese Envoy Vũ Huy Tấn 武輝晉 and Joseon envoy Từ Hạo Tu 徐浩修 | <i>Northeast Asian Studies</i> | 5 | 2006 |
| 3 | Repartee Poems and Prose of Vietnamese and Korean Authors-Envoys: Research Achievements on Textology | <i>Announcement on Sino-Nôm Studies</i> | | 2009 |
| 4 | About Repartee Poetic Texts between Nguyễn Công Hãng 阮公沆 (Vietnam) and Du Tập Nhất 俞集一, and Lý Thế Căn 李世瑾 (Korea) during the Mission to China in 1718 | <i>Announcement on Sino-Nôm Studies</i> | | 2009 |
| 5 | The Special Amiability between Vietnamese and Korean Envoys during Their Missions to China | <i>Northeast Asian Studies</i> | 12 | 2012 |
| 6 | About 9 Repartee Poems Using the Same Rhyme Sequence of Nguyễn Đễ 阮提 with Joseon Envoys | <i>Northeast Asian Studies</i> | 10 | 2015 |
| 7 | Research and Evaluation of Repartee Poems and Prose with the Same Rhyme Sequence of Vietnamese and Korea Envoys | Doctoral Thesis | | 2009 |

3. Statistics as of 2020. The source are the author's own statistics and references of Tham 2015 and Bac 2021.

Among the research works, only three works are written by foreign authors: two works by Korean author Cho Jae Hyun under the titles of “Korea-Vietnam Relations in Medieval and Early Modern Periods” (1995) and “Korea-Vietnam Relations Past, Present and Future” (1996); a work of Japanese author titled “The Meeting between Vietnamese and Joseon Envoys in China Focuses on Events in the 18th century” (Shimizu 2001). Other works are by Vietnamese authors.

The Main Content of the Research Works are the Contacts and the Composition of Repartee Poems and Prose Using the Same Rhyme Sequence between Vietnamese and Joseon Envoys

The number of research works on the contacts and composition of repartee poems and prose using the same rhyme sequence between Vietnamese and Joseon envoys has increased significantly since Vietnam and Korea officially established diplomatic relations in 1992.

The paper first states the works which mention the contacts between Vietnamese and Joseon envoys.

The first work referring to the contacts between Vietnamese and Joseon envoys is the book named *Some Documents on Cultural Exchange between Vietnam and Joseon* (Giap 1969). The book is considered as an opening for studies on the contacts and the composition of repartee poems and prose with the same rhyme sequence between Vietnamese and Joseon envoys. While introducing 9 contacts⁴ between Vietnamese and Joseon envoys, Tran Van

4. Nine contacts mentioned in the work of Tran Van Giap are:

- Phùng Khắc Khoan 馮克寬 – Lý Túy Quang 李睟光
- Nguyễn Công Hãng 阮公沆 – Du Tập Nhất 俞集一 and Lý Thế Căn 李世瑾
- Nguyễn Tông Quai 阮宗乖 – Joseon envoys
- Lê Quý Đôn 黎貴惇 – Hồng Khải Hy 洪啟禧, Lý Huy Trung 李徽中, and Triệu Vĩnh Tiến 趙榮進
- Hồ Sĩ Đống 胡士棟 – Lý Quang 李光, Trịnh Vũ Thuần 鄭武純, and Doãn Phường 尹坊
- Phan Huy Ích 潘輝益, Vũ Huy Tấn 武輝晉, and Đoàn Nguyễn Tuấn 段阮俊 – Từ Hạo Tu 徐浩修, Lý Bách Hành 李百亨, and và Phác Tề Gia 樸齊家
- Nguyễn Đễ 阮提 – Lý Hanh Nguyên 李亨元 and Từ Hữu Phòng 徐有防
- Nguyễn Tư Giản 阮思儺 – Triệu Bình Cao 趙秉鏞, Kim Hữu Uyên 金有淵, and Nam Đình Thuận 南廷順
- Nguyễn Thượng Hiền – Kim.

Giap had phonetically transcribed and translated those repartee poems and prose to Vietnamese. However, the limitation is that the book does not have a version in Han script 漢字. This could make readers face difficulty while tracking the origin of the documents as well as collating translations.

In *Within the Four Seas, All Men Are Brothers: Encounters between Vietnamese and Joseon Envoys-Poets in Medieval China* (Tan 1995), Bui Duy Tan introduced many meetings between Vietnamese and Joseon envoys-poets to prove the special peaceful relations between the two nations. In particular, the work especially emphasized two most meaningful meetings. The first one, which is considered to have an opening significance in the diplomatic history between the two countries, is between Phùng Khắc Khoan and Lý Túy Quang 李暉光 in 1597. The second one, which is considered a noble communication with academic—cordial meaning in the Vietnam—Korea diplomatic history, is between Lê Quý Đôn 黎貴惇, Trần Huy Mật 陳輝謐, Trịnh Xuân Thu 鄭春澍, and the delegation of Hồng Khải Hy 鴻啟禧, Triệu Vinh Tiên 趙榮進 and Lý Huy Trung 李徽中 in 1760. These two meetings are also concerned topics of many researchers afterwards.

Some other works then introduced more specifically about those two important meetings of Vietnamese and Korean envoys.

In another work named *Lý Túy Quang-Phùng Khắc Khoan: Envoy-Poet Relationships, an Opening of Korea-Vietnam Friendship* (Tan 1999), Bui Duy Tan continued introducing and using documents of 18 repartee poems and 4 exchange prose between Lý Túy Quang and Phùng Khắc Khoan to affirm: “The meeting between the two envoys-poets is truly an important milestone, marking the enlightenment of Korea-Vietnam exchange relations” (Tan 1999).

The article “About the Meeting between Lê Quý Đôn-Vietnamese Envoy with Joseon Envoys in 1751” (Thinh and Son 1997) stated the meeting and gave an overview of bibliographical materials (mainly prose) related to the meeting between Lê Quý Đôn and Joseon envoys. It also affirmed the fact that both sides treating each other with sincerity, frankness in accordance with the acquaintance through literature had made them become brothers indeed.

The article “The Meeting between Vietnamese and Joseon Envoys in China Focuses on Events in the 18th century” (Shimizu 2001) contributed supplements to the published works on the meeting between Lê Quý Đôn and Joseon envoys. Apart from pointing out the friendly relationship in

cultural exchange of Vietnam and Korea through the meeting of the two countries’ envoys, it also suggested considering the exchange problems of Chinese literati with Joseon envoys, exchanges between Japanese literati with Joseon envoys, exchanges between Vietnamese envoys and Chinese literati, and more broadly, the East Asian cultural- diplomatic exchange including Ryukyu (Okinawa). These are essential suggestions for more profound research on cultural exchanges between Vietnam and Northeast Asian countries in history.

The article “Some Contacts between Vietnamese and Korean Envoys” (Tuong 2007) mentioned eleven contacts between Vietnamese and Korean envoys in China in 1597, 1718, 1747, 1760, 1766, 1773, 1777, 1790, 1795, 1864, and 1912-1913. In particular, it devoted a considerable amount of the content to present three immensely impressive contacts in 1597 (Phùng Khắc Khoan-Lý Túy Quang), 1760 (Lê Quý Đôn-Hồng Khải Hy), and 1790 (Phan Huy Ích 潘輝益-Từ Hạo Tu, Lý Bách Hanh 李百亨) respectively. The paper also pointed out that except for the meeting in 1773, the other ten meetings of the two countries’ envoys occurred with repartee poems using the same rhyme sequence.

In another writing named “The Contact between Envoy Lê Quý Đôn and Joseon Envoys Hồng Khải Hy, Triệu Vinh Tiên, Lý Huy Trung in Beijing in 1760” (Tuong 2009), Nguyen Minh Tuong spent a sustainable part of the content to present Lê Quý Đôn’s insights into Joseon’s history and culture through scholarly exchange and repartee using the same rhyme sequence with Joseon delegation. Nguyen Minh Tuong assumed that the envoy mission in 1760 brought Lê Quý Đôn three great joys in his life. In addition to successfully fulfilling the role as a Deputy Chief of Mission, “forming a close friendship with Joseon magnanimous men and more importantly, extending his huge funds of knowledge with a lot of historical and cultural understandings of the famous country with sublime landscapes that he always admired”) were two other great joys of Lê Quý Đôn (Tuong 2009).

Besides those focusing on two essential contacts in 1597 and 1760, some other articles also provide documents on other meetings of Vietnamese and Joseon envoys.

In the article “Contact between Vietnamese Envoy Lưu Đình Chất 劉廷質 and Joseon Envoy Lý Đầu Phong 李斗峰 in the 17th century” (Nhue 2009), Nguyen Duc Nhue introduced the contact between Lưu Đình

Chất and Lý Đầu Phong in 1613. It also mentioned two repartee poems that Lưu Đình Chất wrote and replied (“To Joseon Envoy Lý Đầu Phong” 簡朝鮮國使李斗峰 and “Extempore Poetry Rhyme with Joseon Envoy Lý Đầu Phong” 和朝鮮使李斗峰偶成詩韻) to Lý Đầu Phong using the same rhyme sequence.

The article “The Cultural Exchange between Dai Viet-Joseon Envoys in History” (Nhan 2012) listed 12 meetings between Vietnamese and Joseon envoys.⁵ It also introduced the bilateral understanding in cultures of Vietnamese and Joseon envoys. The paper affirmed that the meetings which used repartee verses and works with the same rhyme sequence between Dai Viet and Joseon envoys were historical proof for the cultural exchange of the two nations. The similarity in script and culture is a motivating factor for the closeness, which is the foundation for the contacts between Dai Viet and Joseon envoys. The meeting and homage to each other from both sides when carrying out tributary missions in China are the sympathy of the intelligentsia with national pride, resilience, and frankness as well as the awareness of cultural similarities between the two nations.

In addition to other articles on the contacts, meetings between Vietnamese and Joseon envoys in China, the number of research works on repartee poems and prose using the same rhyme sequence of two countries’ envoys take up a considerable quantity.

In “Four Additional Repartee Poems between Lê Quý Đôn and Joseon Envoy” (Tuan 1999), Nguyen Minh Tuan introduced four repartee poems using the same rhyme sequence of Lê Quý Đôn and Joseon envoy, which were recorded in books about this reunion. The article affirmed that the content of four poems demonstrated the friendship between the two delegations—representatives of Vietnam and Joseon. Such friendship was expressed in cherishing, remembering, and regularly sending letters to each other.

In the article “About the Two Repartee Poems between Vietnamese Envoy Vũ Huy Tấn and Korean Envoy Từ Hạo Tu” (Chung 2006), Ly Xuan Chung introduced two repartee poems of Phan Huy Ích with Vũ Huy Tấn, Từ Hạo Tu during their meeting in 1790 on Qianlong’s 乾隆 80th longevity

wishing ceremony. The highlight of this meeting was that the repartee did not belong to the Korean envoy but to the Vietnamese envoy. These two poems were collected in *Yên hành ký* 燕行記 at the Seoul National University Library, Korea.

In 2009, Ly Xuan Chung also successfully defended his doctoral thesis on “Research and Evaluation of Repartee Poems and Prose with the Same Rhyme Sequence of Vietnamese and Korean Envoys” (Chung 2009b). The thesis listed out 15 meetings between Vietnamese and Korean envoys in China,⁶ including 10 times with repartee poems. The author confirmed that there were 33 envoys (12 Vietnamese and 21 Korean) that had repartee works of 92 poems and 11 prose (Chung 2009b). Through specific presentation, the thesis affirmed that repartee poems and prose were evidence of diplomatic history between Vietnam and Korea, which was worthy of respect.

The article “Repartee Poems Using the Same Rhyme Sequence of Dai Viet Envoy—The Second-ranked Doctor Nguyễn Đăng 阮登 with Joseon Envoy—Lý Đầu Phong” (Manh and Toan 2012) introduced two poems of the Second-ranked doctor Nguyễn Đăng reciprocating to Joseon envoy Lý Đầu Phong during the mission of Vietnam delegation in 1613 through “Poetry Reciprocation in Response to Joseon Envoy Lý Đầu Phong, to the Long Poems Thiên” 和朝鮮國使李斗峰寄東長篇 and “Poetry Reciprocation in Response to Joseon Envoy Lý Đầu Phong, Eepiction of Planting Bamboo in Front of the Window” 和朝鮮國使李斗峰窗前種竹之作. These two poems are valuable documents, contributing to the study on the history of diplomatic relations between Vietnam and Korea in the medieval period through exchanges between the two countries’ envoys.

In another article named “A Survey on Repartee Poems and Prose Using the Same Rhyme Sequence of Vietnamese-Joseon Envoys in the Medieval Period” (Manh 2013), Trinh Khac Manh, who based on records in Han 漢字—based documents in Vietnam and Korea in accordance with the support from Korean specialists and colleagues at the Institute of Sino-Nôm Studies, had listed 16 times composing repartee poems and prose of Vietnamese and Joseon envoys. Indeed, those poems and prose were recorded in the works of Vietnamese and Joseon envoys during the mission to Yen

5. Compared to the statistics of Tuong 2007, Tran Thanh Nhan additionally introduced the meeting between Mạc Đình Chi 莫挺之 and Goryeo envoys as well as the meeting of Lê Thời Cũ and Tào Thần during the Later Le dynasty, but there was no meeting in 1766 and 1773.

6. Compared to the statistics of Tuong 2007, Ly Xuan Chung added five more meetings between Vietnamese and Chinese envoys before 1533. For more details, please see Chung 2009b, 42-43.

Kinh (China 燕京) which is currently archived in Vietnam, Korea, and a few in China. This is the most complete statistical table to date. The article also listed the total number of repartee poems and prose with the same rhyme sequence between Vietnamese and Joseon envoys, including 126 poems and 17 prose. In particular, there were 18 Vietnamese and 28 Joseon envoys that had repartee poems and prose. Vietnamese envoys had 72 poems and 2 prose, and Joseon envoys had 54 poems and 15 prose.

In the article “About Nine Repartee Poems Using the Same Rhyme Sequence of Nguyễn Đê with Joseon Envoy” (Chung 2015), Ly Xuan Chung introduced nine repartee poems of Nguyễn Đê to Joseon envoy. Those nine reciprocal poems presented as a gift by Nguyễn Đê and the two Joseon Deputy Chiefs of Mission state that although they did not have much time together but through Han bibliographies 漢字, especially direct meetings and written conversations for demonstratively exposing their feelings, they could gain profound knowledge about the country, people and civilization of both sides.

The article “Hoan Nam Emissary Nguyễn Đê Composed Repartee Works with Joseon Envoys” (Ai 2017) introduced nine repartee poems using the same rhyme sequence of Nguyễn Đê and two Joseon envoys named Lý Hanh Nguyên 李亨元 and Từ Hữu Phòng 徐有防 in two contacts in 1789 and 1795. In particular, Nguyễn Đê composed five works, including four proposal poems and one response poem; Lý Hanh Nguyên composed two response poems and Từ Hữu Phòng composed two response poems. Details are as follows.

1. To Korean Envoys 東朝鮮國使臣
2. Appendix: Joseon Deputy Chief of Mission, Minister of Rites, Lý Hanh Nguyên, Composed Repartee Poems Using the Same Rhyme Sequence 附錄朝鮮國副使禮曹判書李亨元和韻體
3. To Korean Envoys Again 再東朝鮮國使臣
4. Appendix: Joseon Deputy Chief of Mission, Minister of Rites, Lý Hanh Nguyên, Composed Repartee Poems Using the Same Rhyme Sequence 附錄朝鮮國副使吏曹判書李亨元和體
5. To Korean Envoy Lý Hanh Nguyên Again 再東朝鮮國使臣李亨元
6. Appendix: Joseon Deputy Chief of Mission, Minister of Rites, and Cabinet Academician, Lý Hanh Nguyên, Composed Repartee Poems

Using the Same Rhyme Sequence 附錄朝鮮國副使吏曹判書內閣學士徐有防和體

7. Response Poems for Joseon Deputy Chief of Mission, Từ Hữu Phòng and 答朝鮮國副使徐有防

8. Giving a Farewell Present to Joseon Envoys 贈別朝鮮國使臣

9. Appendix: Từ Hữu Phòng from Joseon Composed Repartee Poems Using the Same Rhyme Sequence 附錄朝鮮國徐有防和體

The article assumed that the collection of reciprocal poems as a gift between Hoan Nam envoy Nguyễn Đê and the two Joseon Deputy Chiefs of Mission during their joint mission in China was an important literary and diplomatic event between the two nations. Through quite ceremonious poems, the two countries' envoys are connected to each other in historical sympathies and aroused national pride and superiority in a situation that is both similar and antagonistic to China.

Based on research achievements in many years, in 2019, Trinh Khac Manh and Nguyen Duc Toan introduced and translated the book *Repartee Poems and Prose of Vietnamese-Joseon Envoys*. The book mentioned 126 poems and 17 prose of 16 meetings of Vietnamese and Joseon envoys in China. In particular, Vietnamese envoys composed 72 poems and 2 prose and Joseon envoys had 54 poems and 15 prose. This is the book that provides the most complete documentation of repartee poems and prose between Vietnamese and Joseon envoys up to the present time. These materials prove the vibrant cultural exchange between the two countries' envoys whenever there was a union in China.

Conclusion

Research on contacts and the composition of repartee poems and prose between Vietnamese and Joseon envoys has been focused on since Vietnam established official diplomatic relations with Korea in 1992.

In terms of quantity, the research works are mainly concentrated after 1992. However, the number of studies is still quite modest.

In terms of content, the works mainly focused on researching the indirect diplomatic relations between Vietnam and Joseon through China as

an intermediary country. Delegations of Vietnam and Joseon met each other during their periodic missions to China. The contacts and composition of repartee poems and prose between Vietnamese and Joseon envoys are the center of cultural exchange activities between Vietnam and Joseon. Therefore, it had consolidated the understanding of those envoys about each other's nations.

We assumed that, apart from some direct research on the relation in cultural exchange between Vietnam and Korea in history, research on cultural and historical similarities and interference of Vietnam and Korea also need more concern. The results of those studies would contribute to affirming the historical and cultural closeness and mutual understandings between Vietnam and Korea and at the same time setting the stages for more profound research on cultural exchange and relationship between Vietnam and Korea in history.

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Abstract

Regardless of the geographical separation, from historical-cultural perspectives, Vietnam and Korea had very early exchanges, especially in culture, as both countries mutually absorbed the influence of Chinese civilization. Being influenced by Chinese civilization and bound by tributary relations with Chinese monarchies, Vietnam and Joseon had many mutual understandings in historical and cultural spheres. Besides, the contacts between Vietnamese and Joseon envoys in China were an essential opportunity promoting the cultural exchange and understanding between the two countries. This paper introduces results of research on the contacts—the composition of repartee poems and prose using the same rhyme sequence between Vietnamese and Joseon envoys in China. It can thereby partly explain the cultural closeness and similarities of the two countries and simultaneously set the stages for intensive cooperations between Vietnam and Korea in various fields, including culture.

Keywords: envoy poetry, envoy, Vietnam, Joseon

