

HISTORY AND CULTURE

**REPORT DOCUMENTS OF VIETNAMESE DIPLOMATIC ENVOYS
DISPATCHED TO THE QING DURING THE EIGHTEENTH AND
NINETEENTH CENTURIES**

YOSHIKAWA Kazuki *

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Abstract

This study investigated what Vietnamese diplomatic envoys reported to the Vietnamese courts and the manner in which they did so during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Envoys of the Lê-Trịnh government sent reports to the court—which were a memorial [khải] to the Trịnh lord—when they stayed in Guangxi province during both their outward and return journeys. The envoys entrusted the reports to messengers such as interpreters, secretaries, or attendants for delivery to Thăng Long during their stay in the Nanning prefectural capital on the return journey. During the Nguyễn period, on their outward journeys, envoys reported their itinerary when they stayed in the Guangxi and Hubei provincial capitals; on their return journey, before returning to Vietnam, they reported their itinerary and approximate time of return from Guangxi province. All of the envoys' report documents in the nineteenth century were memorials to the Nguyễn Emperor. In the nineteenth century, before Vietnamese envoys sent reports to the Nguyễn court, Qing officials such as the Grand Coordinator of Guangxi and Huguang's Supreme Commander would check their drafts.

Keywords: *Tribute relations, Lê-Trịnh government, Nguyễn dynasty, diplomatic envoy, report document.*

1. Introduction

In the early seventeenth century, the Lê dynasty (1428–1527 and 1532–1789) was divided into the northern and southern realms. In the northern

realm, the Trịnh family, referred to as Trịnh lords [*chúa Trịnh*], usurped the authority of the Lê Emperor and established their own court. This study refers to this court as “the Lê-Trịnh government.” In the 1660s, the Lê-

* Associate Professor, Faculty of Letters, Kansai University, 3-3-35 Yamate-cho, Suita-shi, Osaka 564-8680, Japan. Email: jichuan_hexi@yahoo.co.jp

Trịnh government dispatched envoys to the Qing for the first time; in 1666, the Qing decided to grant the Lê Emperor the title of Annan King (Niu Junkai 2012, 25–35). In the same year, the Lê-Trịnh government requested that the Annan King send a tributary envoy every six years for two regular tributes. After this, the Lê-Trịnh government dispatched 25 envoys to the Qing (Sun Hongnian 2014, 77–79). In 1789, Nguyễn Huệ, leader of the Tây Sơn dynasty, expelled the invading Qing army and took control of northern Vietnam, receiving investiture from the Qing. In 1792, tribute regulations were established, requiring tributes to be conducted every two years, and envoys conducting two tributes were to be sent to the Qing capital every four years (Suzuki Chusei 1975, 406). In 1802, the Nguyễn dynasty (1802–1945) gained control of northern Vietnam and established its rule over all of Vietnam. Then, the Qing decided in 1803 to invest Nguyễn Phúc Ánh as the King of Vietnam [*Việt Nam Quốc vương*]. This investiture ceremony was held in Thăng Long in the first month of the third year of Gia Long (1804). Similar to the earlier Tây Sơn dynasty, the tribute of every two years and the dispatch of envoys every four years continued between the Qing and Nguyễn dynasties (Sun Hongnian 2014, 71–72), Suzuki Chusei (1975, 460–466).

As an effort to facilitate smooth operation of the tribute relations between the Vietnamese dynasties and China, the author, in a previous study, examined the exchange of documents between the Lê-Trịnh government and the Qing before the sending of envoys (Yoshikawa Kazuki 2021). However, it should be noted that in the context of the communication between Vietnam and China regarding envoy missions, documents were also dispatched by the Vietnamese envoys to their home country during their stay in China. Revealing this information is important to understand how tribute relations were managed between Vietnam and China. Moreover, gaining insights into the content of the reports submitted by Vietnamese envoys to the court is a step toward elucidating the historical significance of sending envoys to China in Vietnamese history.

It is well-known that Vietnamese envoys dispatched to China historically engaged in a diverse range of intellectual activities, including visiting historical sites, gathering information, purchasing books and interacting with Chinese literati and diplomatic envoys from other countries. On the economic aspects, commercial activities by the envoys have also received attention from recent studies. There exists a substantial body of research on these topics. Vietnamese dynasties also actively instructed their envoys to China to collect and report information

(Takeda Rhuji 1975, 498–499). In order to behave as a “domain of manifest civility” (Kelley 2005, 28–36), it must have been important for pre-modern Vietnam to gather information about China, and the role of the envoys dispatched to China must have been important in this regard. However, few studies have investigated what among these activities the envoys reported to the Vietnamese courts and the manner in which they did so. Furthermore, previous studies failed to explore how Vietnamese courts used this information reported by the tributary envoys. Regarding the reports submitted by envoys, Nguyễn Hoàng Yến, who analyzed the records of Vietnamese diplomatic envoys dispatched to the Qing in the mid-nineteenth century, mentioned that envoys during the Nguyễn period sent documents called *hồi triệp* [回摺] to the Nguyen court during their stay in the Qing (Nguyễn Hoàng Yến 2021, 63). However, a detailed analysis of these documents has not been conducted. Although some well-known cases have received attention in previous studies (Hoàng Xuân Hãn 2017, 147–153), there have been no studies that have comprehensively analyzed multiple cases.

Therefore, this study analyzes the reports sent by envoys of the Lê-Trịnh

government and Nguyễn dynasty to the court during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, because there remain more extant records on envoys during this period. Specifically, this study highlights the locations from which envoys of the Lê-Trịnh government and Nguyễn dynasty sent their reports to the Trịnh and the Nguyễn courts during their outbound and return journeys.

2. REPORTS OF ENVOYS OF THE LÊ-TRỊNH GOVERNMENT

2.1. Case Recorded in Lê Quý Đôn’s *Bắc sứ thông lục*

Only volumes one and four of *Bắc sứ thông lục* (Lê Quý Đôn) currently remain. According to these records, the envoys, including Lê Quý Đôn, departed from Thăng Long on the twenty-eighth day of the first month of the twenty-first year of Cảnh Hưng (1760, twenty-fifth year of Qianlong).^{*} They reached Guangxi provincial capital in the fifth month of the same year, Hankou on the twenty-second day of the eighth month, Nanjing on the twenty-first day of the ninth month, and Beijing on the eighth day of the twelfth month. Subsequently, on the first day of the third month of the twenty-second year of Cảnh Hưng (1761, twenty-sixth year of Qianlong), they left Beijing and arrived at Hubei provincial capital on the eighth day of

^{*} *Bắc sứ thông lục* lacks volumes two and three, so there are no records available of their departure from Thăng Long. However, its volume one notes

that the envoys were scheduled to depart on the twenty eighth day of the first month of the twenty-first year of Cảnh Hưng (Lê Quý Đôn, vol. 1, 74a).

the ninth month, Guangxi provincial capital on the seventh day of the eleventh month, Nanning prefectural capital on the tenth day of the twelfth month, and Taiping prefectural capital on the twenty-fourth day of the same month. During their outbound journey to Beijing, they sent a memorial [*khải*] to the Trịnh lord during their stay in Guangxi provincial capital in the fifth month of the twenty-first year of Cảnh Hưng; however, the specific contents of the memorial are unknown due to the missing volumes two and three of *Bắc sứ thông lục*.*

There is no mention of the envoys sending reports to the Lê-Trịnh government upon their arrival in Changsha and Hankou. Therefore, it is presumed that on their outbound journey, they sent a report to the Lê-

Trịnh government only once during their stay in Guangxi provincial capital.

On their return journey, while staying in Nanning prefectural capital, the envoys prepared three memorials on the eleventh day of the twentieth month of the twenty-second year of Cảnh Hưng. Moreover, they entrusted these memorials, along with documents of the Qing's the Ministry of Rites and the Grand Coordinator of Guangxi, to the "previously dispatched messengers" [*tiền lộ hành nhân*] for delivery to Thăng Long (Lê Quý Đôn, vol. 4, 54a). This indicates that the envoys created report documents for the Trịnh lord during their stay in Guangxi province on both the outbound and return journeys. As volume four of *Bắc sứ thông lục* ends before their arrival at Trấn Nam pass, it is not possible to determine whether

* *Bắc sứ thông lục* contains a memorial sent by envoys to the Trịnh lord during their stay in Nanning prefectural capital on their return journey, which includes detailed information about their journey. The original text, written in classical Chinese and Nôm characters, is as follows [6] (vol. 4, 54b-59a):

奉差正使入侍陪從禮部左侍郎沛川侯陳輝瀝·副使入侍添差翰林院侍講穎城伯黎貴惇·待制會方伯鄭春澍等謹啓。叨褻皮違闕闕辭御哈 [Dộng lay bề trên muôn muôn năm ngự hay]。眾碎哪差郎役官，辭庚辰腦觚，典廣西省城 [Chúng tôi vâng sai sang việc quan, năm Canh Thìn tháng năm, đến Quảng Tây tỉnh thành]。嗚意眾碎包固啓遞衛朝 [Ngày ấy chúng tôi đã có khải đệ về Triều]。...腦黠嗚迕尅買典長沙 [Tháng bảy ngày mười chín mới đến Trường Sa]。腦糝嗚仁迕仁典漢口 [Tháng tám ngày hai mươi hai đến Hán Khẩu]。腦尅嗚仁迕蔑典南京 [Tháng chính ngày hai mươi mốt đến

Nam Kinh]。...腦臘嗚夢糝典北京 [Tháng chạp ngày mồng chín đến Bắc Kinh]。...腦眈嗚夢蔑眾碎奉旨回國 [Tháng ba ngày mồng một chúng tôi phụng chỉ hồi quốc]。...腦尅嗚夢尅買典漢口，時賧官欽差册封正使羅戶德·副使羅戶顧起陸出京仍頭腦糝，嗚仁迕松腦尅典蒂，嗚仁黠包黠廣西 [Tháng chín ngày mồng chín mới đến Hán Khẩu, thì nghe quan Khâm sai sách phong Chánh sứ là họ Đức, Phó sứ là họ Cổ khởi lục xuất Kinh nhưng đầu tháng tám, ngày hai mươi sáu tháng chín đến đấy, ngày hai bảy đã ra Quảng Tây]。...腦臘嗚夢迕南寧 [Tháng Chạp ngày mồng mười Nam Ninh]。嗚迕眈眾碎朱通事阮廷岸·中書陶登譽買仁隨人，強衛前路，遞啓買咨文官撫院衛朝朋公文官禮部例審時抄遞遞衛 [Ngày mười ba chúng tôi cho Thông sự Nguyễn Đình Ngạn, Trung thư Đào Đăng Dự với hai tùy nhân cường về tiền lộ, đệ khải với tư văn quan Phủ viện về triều bằng công văn quan Lễ bộ lệ thẩm thời sao ra đệ về]。

they submitted a report after their return to Vietnam.

The three memorials made during the envoys' stay in Nanning prefectural capital consist of (1) a report on their itinerary from Guangxi provincial capital on the way to Beijing to Nanning prefectural capital on their return journey as well as the scheduled date of their return to the Sino-Vietnamese border in a mixture of Chinese and Nôm characters, (2) a report on the results of their investigation of the Temple of Literature [*Văn Miếu*] in Beijing, and (3) a letter concerning carrier of the envoys' baggage after their return.

The translation of the first memorial in Vietnamese was already introduced (Hoàng Xuân Hãn 2017, 147–153; Lê Quý Đôn 2018, 246–253). The second memorial was already introduced by Yamamoto (2021). According to Yamamoto, envoys visited the Temple of Literature in Beijing and reported the results of their investigation in this memorial because the Trịnh lord ordered them to describe and report the coronation costume and ceremonial headdress [*gunmian* 衮冕] of Confucius at the Temple of Literature of the Qing before their departure. The first memorial also

mentioned that, on the seventeenth day of the twelfth month of the twenty-first year of Cảnh Hưng, envoys requested the Qing officials be allowed to visit the Directorate of Education [*Quốc Tử Giám*] because they received “a transmission of the Trịnh lord's order” [*phụng truyền*].* The report on the matter ordered by the Trịnh lord was sent in a memorial dispatched from Nanning prefectural capital; this means that dispatch of the memorial at this place was an official report of the envoys.

2.2. Case Recorded in Nguyễn Huy Oanh's *Phùng sứ Yến Kinh tổng ca tỉnh nhật ký*

In the case of the envoys including Nguyễn Huy Oanh, there is no mention of sending report documents during their outbound journey, but there is a mention of sending report documents during their return journey.

According to *Phùng sứ Yến Kinh tổng ca tỉnh nhật ký* (Nguyễn Huy Oanh), envoys passed through Trấn Nam pass and entered the Qing on the twenty-ninth day of the first month of the twenty-seventh year of Cảnh Hưng (1766) (ibid., 1b–2a). They arrived in Beijing on the nineteenth day of the twelfth month of the same year (ibid., 65a–b) and departed from Beijing on

* The original text, written in classical Chinese and Nôm characters, is as follows [6] (vol. 4, 54b–59a): 時進黜眾碎哪據齣奉傳納貝官提督嘖典國子監瞻拜先聖，貝嘖祐中朝礼樂文物 [Ngày mười bảy chúng tôi vâng cứ trong phụng truyền nói với quan

Đề đốc xin đến Quốc tử giám chiêm bái Tiên thánh, với xin xem trung triều lễ nhạc văn vật]. Phụng truyền was a type of official document that court officials serving the Trịnh lord sent to lower-rank officials to announce the Trịnh lord's orders (Yoshikawa 2021, 7).

the sixteenth day of the second month of the twenty-eighth year of Cảnh Hưng (1767) (ibid., 71a). Upon their return journey, they reached Guangxi provincial capital on the fourth day of the eighth or ninth month and informed the officials of the Zuojiang Circuit that they would send a report to the Lê-Trịnh government and dispatch officials to Trấn Nam pass. On the twelfth day of the ninth or intercalary ninth month of the following year, they arrived in Nanning prefectural capital and entrusted a memorial and copies of documents from the Ministry of Rites to interpreters [*thông sự*], secretaries [*trung thư*], and attendants [*tùy nhân*], sending them to Thăng Long ahead of their return (ibid., 76a). In the case of envoys including Lê Quý Đôn, interpreters and secretaries were listed in the envoys as messengers [*hành nhân*] (Lê Quý Đôn, vol. 1, 32a–b). While staying in Taiping prefecture, an official document arrived from the Zuojiang Circuit, informing the envoys of the scheduled date for the opening of Trấn Nam pass, which was set for twenty-sixth day of the tenth month (Nguyễn Huy Oanh, 76b).

After returning to northern Vietnam on the twenty-sixth day of the tenth month, Lạng Sơn provincial officials mobilized carriers to transport goods of envoys, and the envoys “reported to the capital” [*hồi Kinh phúc mệnh*] on the first day of the eleventh month, although the details are still unclear. Subsequently, they arrived at Ái Mộ village in Gia Lâm County, Kinh Bắc province,* on the seventh day of the eleventh month, and they crossed Hồng River the following day†.

The commonalities between the above mentioned two cases are as follows: First, the envoys sent reports to the court when they stayed at Guangxi province on both their outward and return journeys, and such reports were memorials [*khải*] to the Trịnh lord. Second, during their stay in Nanning prefectural capital on the return journey, the envoys prepared memorials and entrusted them to messengers such as interpreters, secretaries, or attendants for delivery to Thăng Long.

3. REPORTS OF ENVOYS OF THE NGUYỄN DYNASTY

Next, we discuss cases during the Nguyễn period. Khâm định Đại Nam

* According to Hoàng Việt nhất thống địa dư chí [Geographical Records of the Unified Imperial South] [5], there was a crossing point for the Hồng River at Ái Mộ village. The original text, written in classical Chinese, is as follows [5] (vol.4, 32a): 例有渡夫十八人。河之西岸屬壽昌縣東河坊，即懷德府界末。河之東岸，即京北鎮界首，乃嘉林縣愛慕社，故名愛慕津。

† The original text from Phùng sứ Yến Kinh tổng ca tịnh nhật ký [9] (77b), written in classical Chinese, is as follows: (十月二十六日) 午刻啓關。我使謁龍亭訖，渡候命官納甘結七十五道，公裝・私篋甫出關外。奉公番衙門粘取，諒山藩臣撥取民夫擡轎。西到團城副客家住，督鎮官照例引丁夫五十八人來，以催夫故仍留四夫。十一月初一日，回京復命。初七日，到愛慕村府長慶家住。初八日，奉差中勇軍護迎渡珥河，即詣府門寄拜。

Hội điển sự lệ [3] mentions that envoys were supposed to send memorials [triệp 摺] stating their itinerary on reaching the Guangxi and Hubei provincial capitals on both their outward and return journey * . Therefore, we extract cases where the report documents of the envoys are recorded.

3.1. Case Recorded in Phan Thế Trung's *Sứ Thanh văn lục*

3.1.1. Report documents sent within the territory of the Qing

According to Phan Thế Trung's *Sứ Thanh văn lục* [11], the envoys including Phan Thế Trung arrived at Trấn Nam pass on the ninth day of the second month of the eighteenth year of Minh Mạng (seventeenth year of Daoguang, 1837). They reached Guangxi provincial capital on the fourteenth day of the fourth month, Hubei provincial capital in the sixth month, and Beijing on the twenty-sixth day of the seventh month. After staying in Beijing for over a month and departing on the second day of the ninth month, they arrived in Guangxi provincial capital on the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month [11] (9b–10b, 12b–13a, 15b–16a, 21b, 23b–24a, 26a–28a).

On their outward journey, envoys reported their itinerary by sending an

official document called *bầm* [稟] dated the twenty-first day of the fourth month of the seventeenth year of Daoguang (1837) when they stayed at Guangxi provincial capital [11] (12b–13a). They also sent an official *bầm* document dated the tenth day of the sixth month of the same year when they stayed at Hubei provincial capital [11] (15b–16a). On the return journey, envoys reported the itinerary and the scheduled date of return by sending a *bầm*-type document, dated the twentieth day of the twelfth month of the seventeenth year of Daoguang when they stayed at the Guangxi provincial capital [11] (35a).

Bầm was a type of document that lower-rank officials sent to upper-rank officials. Although these documents were written as a type of *bầm* and bear the Qing dynasty's era name, they were actually memorials [*tấu*] to the Nguyễn Emperor. The following is the beginning and end of a *bầm* sent by the envoys during their stay in Guangxi province on their return journey.

The subjects who have been dispatched as envoys prostrate and respectfully send this *bầm*. We humbly hope for your [the emperor's] kind inspection of our distant situation. ... On the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month, we arrived at Guangxi

* The original text from vol. 128, Diplomacy [Bang giao], of Khâm định Đại Nam Hội điển sự lệ [3] written in classical Chinese, is as follows: 凡如清例，四年遣使一次。...使臣自河內進行抵關上等日，

各將日期摺奏，行抵清國之廣西・湖北等省亦各摺敘行走事宜，詳所在官，發回諒山轉遞<回期竝同>。

provincial capital, and Grand Coordinator Liang [Changqiang] decided that we would depart on the twenty-eighth day of this month, and that we would be escorted back to Trấn Nam pass in the late second month of the following year. ... We are now writing for your perusal a summary of the events that have taken place. We are afraid to be the envoys, and we cannot bear the feeling of longing for the palace from afar, and longing to see it from afar. We respectfully send this *bằ*m. On the seventeenth day of the twelfth month of the seventeenth year of Daoguang, [we wrote this] memorial [đề].*

The expressions “prostate” [kê thủ đốn thủ 稽首頓首] and “hope your [the emperor’s] inspection” [ngưỡng kỳ duệ giám 仰祈睿鑒] written at the beginning of these documents were idioms peculiarly used in memorials [tấu] to the Nguyễn Emperor. These documents end with the date and “đề 題,” which was also common in memorials to the Nguyễn Emperor.

Thus, these *bằ*m-type documents contain numerous expressions

characteristic of memorials to the Nguyễn Emperor during the Nguyễn period, suggesting that these documents were essentially memorials to the Nguyễn Emperor. Regarding the *bằ*m-type documents of envoys on their return journey, consider a memorial by Trần Ngọc Dao, who was the Grand Coordinator of Lạng Bằng. This memorial was dated the nineteenth day of the first month of the nineteenth year of Minh Mạng (1838) and was recorded in Châu bản Triều Nguyễn [1]. Nguyễn Đình Tây, squad commander the defending Văn Uyên pass [thủ Văn Uyên tấn đội trường], conveyed a set of “memorial between boards” [tấu triệp giáp bản 奏摺夾板] of the envoys, which was delivered by the Qing’s Taiping prefecture to Trần Ngọc Dao. In turn, Trần Ngọc Dao reported this to the Nguyễn court on the nineteenth day of the first month of the nineteenth year of Minh Mạng. † The memorial’s contents match those of the *bằ*m-type document recorded in *Sứ Thanh văn lục*, such as the departure from Guangxi provincial capital on the twenty-eighth day of the twelfth month

* The original text from *Sứ Thanh văn lục* [11] (35a), written in classical Chinese, is as follows: 奉派使務臣等稽首頓首謹稟，爲冒達遠情，仰祈睿鑒事。...十二月二十五日行抵廣西省城，承撫臺梁大人訂以本月二十八日起行，奉護於開年二月下旬回到南關。...輒敢具由洞達。臣等濫叨行价，遙望闕庭，無任瞻仰翹恋之至。謹稟。道光十七年十二月二十日題。

† The original text from Châu bản Triều Nguyễn [1] (Minh Mạng, sixty-second collection, 99a-b), written in classical Chinese, is as follows:

護理諒平巡撫關防署諒山布政使加貳級降壹級留任臣陳玉瑤謹奏。爲奏聞事。本日辰刻，據見屬轄守文淵

汛隊長阮廷西·委通言司黃鳳起齎到清國太平府札遞使臣范世忠等奏摺夾板壹副。臣奉循例開展照見，內敘「去年拾貳月貳拾肆日，抵廣西省城，訂以貳拾捌日起行。奉擬本年貳月內回到南關」各等因。仍奉依樣粘誌完好，輒敢具繇，并將此次原發使臣奏摺夾板壹副，由禮部臣題達。至如太平府公文壹角，一併發遞，由該部臣收閱。謹奏。明命拾玖年正月拾玖日，題。陳玉瑤記。奉閱布政使司經歷臣楊伯湍記。本月貳拾陸日，當直臣尹蘊·內閣臣黎慶禎恭閱。

of the eighteenth year of Minh Mạng, and the aim to arrive at Trấn Nam pass within the second month of the nineteenth year of Minh Mạng. Therefore, there is no doubt that this “memorial between boards” corresponds with the above-cited *bầm*-type document the envoys sent during their stay in Guangxi provincial capital on their return journey. The envoys’ *bầm*-type documents were referred to as a memorial in the memorial of Trần Ngọc Dao; this further confirms that these documents were, in essence, a memorial to the Nguyễn Emperor.

3.1.2. Report documents sent after returning to the Nguyễn dynasty’s territory

Sứ Thanh văn lục records an official document called a *phiến*, which was a *bầm*-type document sent by the envoys during their stay in Guangxi province on their return journey. This document begins with the following introduction:

– On a certain day of the third month of the nineteenth year of Minh Mạng, envoys dispatched to the Qing respectfully sent a *phiến*. We have written down all the information we were able to obtain about all the visits we made during our trip, and we have collected the original documents if they have already been published. We respectfully present the following list.*

* The original text from *Sứ Thanh văn lục* [11] (35a), written in classical Chinese, is as follows: 明命十九年三月日。如清使陪臣等奉片。此次一路往返所有行間諮訪，何係得之見聞，按款登記，何係已經印本，蒐取原本。謹奉一併彙列進呈。計開。

This document begins with the following format: “Date. Issuer respectfully send(s) a *phiến*.” This means that this type of document was a *phiến*. *Phiến* likely refers to a form of memorial called *phiến tấu*. † The character *trình* [呈] within the phrase “We respectfully present the following list” [cẩn phụng nhất tính vị liệt tiến trình 謹奉一併彙列進呈] at the end of the quoted passage is written higher than the other characters, which is an expression of respect to the Emperor. This also supports the natural conclusion that this document was intended for the Nguyễn Emperor. The document was issued in the third month of the nineteenth year of Minh Mạng, while the previous reports mentioned the envoy’s plan to return in the second month of the nineteenth year of Minh Mạng. Therefore, it is highly likely that this document was created by the envoys after their return. Following the above-quoted passage, a total of eight items are reported, detailing observations made during the journey and the contents of books that were presented [11] (35a–39a).

3.2. Case Recorded in *Lý Văn Phức’s Sứ trình chí lược thảo*

Sứ trình chí lược thảo [8] only contains information on the outbound

† *Đại Nam thực lục* [Veritable Record on Đại Nam] mentions two types of memorials submitted to the Nguyễn Emperor, *tập tấu* 摺奏 and *phiến tấu* 片奏. However, the distinction between the two remains unclear [2] (Fourth reign [Đệ tứ kỷ], vol. 41, 26a).

journey of envoys including Lý Văn Phúc. According to this work, in the first month of the first year of Thiệu Trị (1841), Lý Văn Phúc, Nguyễn Đức Hoạch, and Phạm Phụ Phong were appointed as envoys [8] (1a).^{*} On the first day of the third month of the same year, the envoys arrived at Hà Nội Public House [công quán]. On the twenty-first day of the third month, they received the scheduled date of opening of Trấn Nam pass from Lạng Sơn provincial officials and “awaiters of orders” [hầu mệnh quan].[†] Subsequently, on the third day of the intercalary third month, they departed from Hanoi, arriving in Lạng Sơn province on the seventh day of the same month and then entering the Qing’s territory on the tenth day of the same month [8] (15a–b).

Subsequently, the envoys arrived in Wuzhou on the twenty-ninth day of the intercalary third month. On the first day of the fourth month, the Grand Coordinator of Guangxi province suggested to the envoys that they should proceed at a slow pace and arrive in Beijing at the end of the eighth month. Regarding the matter of sending reports back to the Nguyễn court [phát bằh hời quốc nhất khoản 發稟回國一款], he informed the envoys

that if they wished to report the situation promptly, they could write the report [bằh] immediately. The envoys could have the report reviewed by the Qing official accompanying them, called long accompanying official [trường tống quan], and then send it from there, although Vietnamese envoys had previously sent the documents from the Guangxi provincial capital [8] (1a–5a). Therefore, the envoys wrote the report dated the third day of the fourth month of the twenty-first year of Daoguang and sent it on the second day of the fourth month from Wuzhou. The content of the report, as recorded in Sứ trình chí lược thảo, details the journey to Wuzhou and the contents of the documents received from the Grand Coordinator of Guangxi province [8] (15b–17a).[‡]

Upon arriving in Guangxi provincial capital on the twenty-third day of the fourth month, the envoys also requested the dispatch of a report [bằh] to the Nguyễn court [8] (19a–b). On the twenty-eighth day of the same month, they drafted the “return report” [hời bằh], which underwent a review by the long accompanying official, and officially wrote the report dated the

* The appointment of Lý Văn Phúc as an envoy is also documented in Đại Nam thực lục [2] (Third reign [Đệ tam kỷ], vol. 1, 13a–14b; Third reign, vol. 2, pp. 8b–9a).

† “Awaiters of orders” were officials dispatched to Trấn Nam pass to await the response of the Qing court (Kelley 2005, 66).

‡ The original text from Sứ trình chí lược thảo [8] (15b–17a), written in classical Chinese, is as follows: 初二日，委將回稟文，由驛發遞。稟云，奉派使務臣某某稽首頓首謹稟爲冒達遠情，仰祈睿鑑事。...謹稟。道光二十一年四月初三日，題<按此稟其年月日尙留空，尋拋轉示填入初三日>。臣某記，臣某記，臣某記。

first day of the fifth month of the twenty-first year of Daoguang. The content of the report included details of their journey to Guangxi provincial capital and the inspection of tribute items conducted at Guangxi provincial capital. On the twenty-ninth day of the same month, they arranged for it to be delivered by messengers [hành nhân] and interpreters [thông sự] and requested the Grand Coordinator of Guangxi province to facilitate the relay delivery to the Nguyễn dynasty [8] (21a–22a).

Envoys arrived in Hubei provincial capital on the seventh day of the fifth month. On the ninth day of the same month, they created a “return report,” which was reviewed by the Supreme Commander of Hubei province, and then sent it on the tenth day of the fifth month. The content of the report included details about the journey to Hubei provincial capital, the relatively faster progress compared with previous envoys, and the plan to proceed overland from Hubei provincial capital [8] (28a–29b).

Unlike other envoys dispatched to the Qing during the Nguyễn period, these envoys sent a “return report” during their stay in Wuzhou due to the delay in their schedule. However, the sending of report documents in both the Guangxi and Hubei provincial

capitals was consistent with the cases of other envoys dispatched to the Qing during the Nguyễn period.

3.3. Case Recorded in *Như Thanh nhật ký* by Lê Tuấn, Nguyễn Tư Giản, and Hoàng Tịnh

Envoys including Lê Tuấn, Nguyễn Tư Giản, and Hoàng Tịnh [7] entered the Qing’s territory by passing through Trấn Nam Pass on the first day of the eighth month of the twenty-first year of Tự Đức (1868) [7] (8a–9a). They arrived in Beijing on the twenty-ninth day of the first month of the twenty-second year of Tự Đức (1869) [7] (51b–52b). Afterward, they departed from Beijing on the tenth day of the fourth month of the same year and arrived at Trấn Nam Pass on the thirteenth day of the eleventh month. On their outward journey, envoys transferred a draft of their report called “return memorial” [hồi triệp] * to the Grand Coordinator of Guangxi province when staying at Guangxi provincial capital [7] (24b) [10] (50b). The Grand Coordinator checked the draft on the fourth day of the tenth month of the twenty-first year of Tự Đức (1837). The next day, the envoys requested the Grand Coordinator to send the report across to Vietnam [7] (25a).

On their outward journey, the envoys also transferred a draft of their

* The term hồi triệp consists of triệp, which refers to an imperial memorial, indicating that the reports sent by the Vietnamese envoys during their

stay in the Qing’s territory were memorials addressed to the Nguyễn Emperor.

“return memorial” to Huguang’s Supreme Commander when they stayed at Hubei provincial capital [7] (38a–b). The Supreme Commander checked it on the eighth day of the twelfth month of the same year. The next day, the envoys requested the Supreme Commander to send the report across to Vietnam [7] (38b).

This “return memorial” was mentioned in a memorial of the Ministry of Rites dated the twenty-first day of the third month of the twenty-second year of Tự Đức (1838), as follows:

– On the twenty-first day of the third month of the twenty-second year of Tự Đức, the Ministry of Rites submitted a memorial. We [Ministry of Rites] had recently received a memorial [triệp] from Đặng Toán, the Grand Coordinator [Hộ phủ] of Lạng Bằng, which said, “We have received the return memorial of the envoys to the Qing [sứ thần như Thanh], sent by the Taiping prefecture with a document [zha 札] and then sealed and dispatched by the Grand Coordinator of Guangxi province with an official document.” We [Ministry of Rites] investigated that the journey of the previous envoys to the Qing took forty-seven days in total from Hanyáng prefecture to Beijing by way of Zhili

province. Upon examining the return memorial, it has been confirmed that the envoys had agreed to depart from Hanyáng Prefecture on the eleventh day of the twelfth month of the previous year by the land route. Now it is currently late [third month], so they must have already reached Yanjing (Beijing). We humbly submitted [these contents] for your consideration. We respectfully forward one copy of the envoys’ return memorial, one copy of the official document from Guangxi, and one copy of the Taiping prefecture’s document [zha], all for storage by the Cabinet, following the precedent. We humbly request that, only on the memorial from the Lạng Sơn province [Đặng Toán], we humbly request that we receive the Emperor’s effect [chỉ] of “understood” [Trí đạo liễu].*

According to this memorial of the Ministry of Rites, the “return memorial” that the envoys sent from the Hubei provincial capital was transferred to the Nguyễn dynasty through Taiping prefecture of Guangxi province, and it was reported to the Nguyễn court through a memorial of the Ministry of Rites.

On the return journey, envoys sent a “report memorial” on the second day of the seventh month of the twenty-

* The original text from Châu bản Triều Nguyễn [1] (Tự Đức, 186th collection, 159a–b), written in classical Chinese, is as follows: 嗣德貳拾貳年參月貳拾壹日，禮部奏。去日接諒平護撫臣鄧算摺敘「接到清國太平府札發廣西巡撫公文封送如清使臣回摺」。等因。臣部奉照前課如清使臣行走，其自漢陽府經直隸省至燕京共四十七日。茲照該使臣訂以去臘十一日自該府起旱，□今正下旬現

已抵燕。輒敢聲敘。謹將進呈其使臣回摺並廣西公文·太平府札各一角，均請循例交內閣臣收貯。惟諒省摺請恭擬奉旨「知道了」欽此。臣阮瑄奉草攷。臣潘輝泳·臣尊室徹·臣朱廷計奉閱。恭閱內閣臣尊室禎記，科道臣阮濟美記。對照內閣臣尊室禎記，科道臣阮茂壽記。

second year of TỰ ĐỨC when they stayed at the Hubei provincial capital [7] (87a). They also sent a memorial [sơ văn 疏文] on the eleventh day of the ninth month of the same year when they stayed at the Guangxi provincial capital [7] (96b). The envoys passed through Trấn Nam pass on the fourteen day of the eleventh month of the twenty-second year of TỰ ĐỨC, reaching Lạng Sơn provincial capital [7] (104b). Although subsequent circumstances are not noted in *Như Thanh nhật ký*, it itself follows the format of a memorial dated the eighteenth day of the eleventh month of the twenty-second year of TỰ ĐỨC, indicating that it serves as a report document prepared by envoys after their return to Vietnam*.

3.4. Case Recorded in Lạng Sơn Đoàn thành đồ

Lạng Sơn Đoàn thành đồ [4][†], which was edited from the viewpoint of the provincial officials of Lạng Sơn province, includes the following

* *Như Thanh nhật ký* begins with the words, “The subjects who have been dispatched as envoys respectfully send this memorial” [7] (1b) and ends with the words, “the eighteenth day of the eleventh month of the twenty-second year of TỰ ĐỨC, [we wrote this] memorial [đề]. Lê Tuấn, Nguyễn Tư Giản, and Hoàng Tịnh” [7] (105a).

† The beginning of *Lạng Sơn Đoàn thành đồ* [4] contains an preface dating back to the nineteenth year of Cảnh Hưng (1758), mentioning the construction of Lạng Sơn provincial citadel. Subsequently, information concerning transportation routes, taxation, temples, and shrines has been added. As Trần Văn Giáp previously pointed out, this source is originally an integrated compilation of various descriptions rather than a complete book, and the name *Lạng Sơn Đoàn thành đồ* is derived from the opening

description on envoys, including Nguyễn Xuân Thanh, dispatched in the nineteenth year of Gia Long (1819) (Yoshikawa 2021, 20):

– On the twenty-ninth day of the third month of the eighteenth year of Gia Long (1819), the officials and soldiers in charge of guarding the envoy arrived at Lạng Sơn provincial capital. On the second day of the intercalary fourth month, the provincial [official], along with the official and military escort, envoys, messengers, and attendants, continued to advance to Đồng Đăng base. They arrived together at Trấn Nam pass on the morning of the third day [of the same month]. The pass opened during the time of the dragon [thìn] On the twenty-first day of the sixth month, [provincial officials of Lạng Sơn province] received official documents from the Grand Coordinator of Guangxi province [Zhao Shenzhen 趙慎畛] and “a return report” [hồi bẩm] of the envoy’s party [sứ bộ]. The report stated, “they had reached Guilin [Guangxi] provincial capital on the nineteenth day of the fifth month and rested there. On the ninth day of this month, they

section; it was not originally the title of the entire document (Trần Văn Giáp 1970, 381–382). Regarding its time of compilation, Trần Văn Giáp speculated that it was composed after the Gia Long era. However, it does not contain information about the administrative reforms during the Minh Mạng era, and *Lạng Sơn Đoàn thành đồ* also mentions an envoy dispatched in the eighteenth year of Gia Long (1819), which suggests that this source was likely compiled during the late Gia Long era to the early Minh Mạng era. It was likely complemented by some Lạng Sơn provincial officials after the nineteenth year of Cảnh Hưng and served as a record of cumulative information on the governance in Lạng Sơn province for provincial officials. Further discussion of this source is planned in a separate work.

proceeded by waterway and agreed to arrive in the capital [Beijing] around the twentieth day of the ninth month.” On the twenty-ninth day of the eighth month, [provincial officials of Lạng Sơn province] received official documents from the Substitute Grand Coordinator of Guangxi province and a report [hồi bẩm] of the envoys. The report stated, “on the twenty-second day of the seventh month, the envoy party reached Hubei provincial capital, and on the twenty-seventh day, they went ashore and rested at Hãn-khẩu Public House. On the third day of the eighth month, they changed [their route] and proceeded overland toward the capital [Beijing].” On the twentieth day of the second month of the year of Canh Thìn [the nineteenth year of Gia Long, 1820], Huang, the Prefect of Taiping prefecture, forwarded a “return report” [hồi bẩm] of the envoys with a document [zha]. The report stated, “on the second day [of the second month], they had returned to Guìlín provincial capital. They had agreed to arrive at Trấn Nam pass in the late third month”. A document [zha] from Taiping prefecture stated that they had decided to open Trấn Nam pass at the time of horse [ngựa] on the twentieth day. On the twenty-sixth day [of the second month], [provincial officials of Lạng Sơn province] received the envoy’s reply letter, which mentioned that the total number of boxes of both official and personal luggage was 227. On the twenty-third day [of the third month], the provincial officials, along with official and military escorts, arrived at

Trấn Nam pass to receive the envoy party. The return journey followed the precedents as when they departed last year.*

From here, it is evident that Nguyễn Xuân Thanh’s party arrived at Lạng Sơn provincial capital on the twenty-ninth day of the third month of the eighteenth year of Gia Long. The gates of Trấn Nam pass were opened, and they entered the Qing’s territory on the third day of the intercalary fourth month. Subsequently, on the twenty-first day of the sixth month of the same year, a document from the Grand Coordinator of Guangxi and a “return report” from the envoys arrived at Lạng Sơn provincial citadel. This report mentioned the envoys’ arrival in the Guangxi provincial capital of Guilin on the nineteenth day of the fifth month, their departure by water route on the ninth day of the sixth month, and their expected arrival in Beijing around the twentieth day of the ninth month. This is likely a report from the envoys during their stay at Guangxi provincial capital on their outbound journey. Then, on the twenty-ninth day of the eighth month, a document from the Substitute Grand Coordinator of Guangxi province and a “return report” from the envoys arrived, providing information about their arrival in Hubei provincial capital on the twenty-

* The original text, written in classical Chinese, is as follows [4] (14a–15a):

是年三月二十九日，在城官庫 [軍] 護遞使部抵鎮。潤四月初二日，本鎮同護接官軍·使臣·行

隨員人，進住同登屯。初三日太早時，齊就關上。辰刻啓關，...六月二十一日，巡撫照會公文並使部回稟開「於五月十九日，抵桂林省城安歇。是月初九日，由水路進程

second day of the seventh month and their departure by land route on the third day of the eighth month. This is likely a report from the envoys during their stay at Hubei provincial capital during their outbound journey. On the twentieth day of the second month of the first year of Minh Mạng (1820), the Taiping prefecture of Guangxi province forwarded a “return report” from the envoys, which indicated their return to Guangxi provincial capital of Guilin on the second day of the second month and their expected arrival at Trấn Nam pass in late third month. This is likely a report from the envoys during their stay at Guangxi provincial capital during their return journey.

Thus, in this case, envoys also sent *bầm*-type documents to the Nguyễn court when they stayed at the Guangxi and Hubei provincial capitals on their outward journey and when they stayed at the Guangxi provincial capital on their return journey.

The common points between above mentioned four cases during the nineteenth century are as follows: First, on their outward journeys, envoys reported their itineraries when they stayed at the Guangxi and Hubei provincial capitals. Second, on their return journeys, before returning to Vietnam, envoys reported their itineraries and approximate times of return from Guangxi province. Third, in the nineteenth century, before envoys sent reports to the Nguyễn court, Qing

officials such as the Grand Coordinator of Guangxi and Huguang’s Supreme Commander would check their drafts. Fourth, the envoys’ reports in the nineteenth century should have been memorials to the Nguyễn Emperor; the reason why some sources marked them as *bầm* is that envoys could not write “memorial” because the drafts were checked by Qing officials.

4. CONCLUSION

In this study, I investigated what the envoys to the Vietnamese courts reported back to them and the manner in which they did so. A comparison of the report documents of Vietnamese envoys during the periods of the Lê-Trịnh government and Nguyễn dynasty shows that the report documents sent from Guangxi by the Nguyễn dynasty’s envoys tended to describe only the itinerary and official business in Beijing, while reports made after their return to the territory of the Nguyễn dynasty tended to be more detailed. The likely reason for this simplicity of envoys’ report documents from Guangxi during the Nguyễn period is that the reports were checked by the Qing officials, and the envoys could not describe the contents in great detail.

However, I could not consider to some extent what the envoys reported to the Vietnamese court during their visit and how the Lê-Trịnh government and Nguyễn dynasty used the information provided by envoys. These points are an important issue

that will lead to elucidation of the historical significance of the dispatch of envoys in Vietnamese history. In order to behave as a “domain of manifest civility”, it must have been important for pre-modern Vietnam to gather information about China, and the role of the envoys dispatched to China must have been important in this regard. Therefore, I would like to address this topic in the future.

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