THE “PI & LU” POEM COLLECTION AND BOOK COLLECTION IN SUZhou IN THE LATE-TANG DYNASTY

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ABSTRACT

The Tang poetry correspondence between Mr. Pi Rixiu and Mr. Lu Guimeng in Suzhou in the Late-Tang dynasty is quite famous in literary history. The “Song Ling Ji (松倪古 Song Ling Poetry Collection)” is this Tang poetry collection, which was a correspondence and has been handed down since the Tang Dynasty. This poetry collection not only has the characteristics of a large quantity of poetry covering a wide range of topics and a completeness of stylistic approach with refreshed styles, but it also has a theoretical summary and the distinguishing features of “Learning from the Poetry”. It also can be considered that this correspondence between the two learned scholars of poetry, Mr. Pi Rixiu and Mr. Lu Guimeng, reveals their close relationship with the rich book collection in the Suzhou area at that time.

KEY WORDS

Poetry Correspondence between Mr. Pi and Mr. Lu
Mr. Pi Rixiu
Mr. Lu Guimeng
Scholar, Learned
Suzhou’s Book Collection

Book collecting is a cultural phenomenon, and it is like a distant source with a long stream. It is not only an outcome of cultural activities, but it is also the source of other cultural activities. The activity of corresponding through poetry among scholars depends especially on book collections. The following is a case study of a poetry correspondence between Mr. Pi Rixiu and Mr. Lu Guimeng in the Suzhou region in the 10–12th year of the Xian Tong Emperor Period of the Late-Tang Dynasty (869–71 A.D.). Therefore, we can understand that book collections had a very important significance to correspondence by poetry among scholars.
1. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MR. PI RIXIU AND MR. LU GUIMENG, THEIR POETRY CORRESPONDENCE, AND LEARNED SCHOLARS.

After the “An Shi Trouble time (755–757 A.D.)” in the Mid-Tang Dynasty, the practice of corresponding through poetry among scholars extended from the emperor palace to become popular in the offices of local government officials, especially in the South Yangtze River area. The occurrence of the poetry correspondence between Mr. Pi and Mr. Lu in Suzou was mentioned in Mr. Pi Rixiu’s book, “Song Ling Ji Xu”: “In the 10th year of Xian Tong Emperor (869 A.D.), the government officer Jian Qinghe went to Wu area (Suzhou region) on his official business with Mr. Pi Rixiu, who was a minister. They lived there for a month. Mr. Lu Guimeng, another name of Lu Wang, who was a successful candidate in the highest imperial examination, paid a visit to them and showed his brilliant talent in poetry writing. Scholars Wen Feiqing and Li Yishang were the general acknowledged great poets. Mr. Lu can be compared with them and also can’t tell who was the best… So, I made a poem to attract him, and it turned out that they were right.” Before that, poetry correspondence occurred between relatives and good friends, but the case between Mr. Pi and Mr. Lu was quite an exception here. Mr. Pi was from Xianyang, while Mr. Lu was from Suzhou. Although they had only a casual and temporary meeting, they inspired one another greatly, and their correspondence burst forth like a flooding river. The reasons for this might be quite complex. But from the contents of the poetry we can understand the learned scholars, and their endless and continuous poetry documents may be an important element. There are some characteristics of the contents as discussed below:

1.1 Quoting Many Legendary Figures and Anecdotes.

Mr. Pi and Mr. Lu seemed to have a great interest in books of historical anecdotes, more so than any other subjects in their poetry correspondence. This is reflected in the slow sipping and tune humming figures of Wangmu legend (Wife of the Supreme Deity of Taoism), Chang E (The Goddess of the moon [a lady in the legend who swallowed elixir stolen from her husband and flew to the moon]), Chao Fu and the forefather of the same dynasty. Their poetry correspondence involved the literary quotations of more than 200 historically eminent people. At first glance, the whole book of “Song Ling Ji” seems an atlas of eminent people.

1.2 Regarding Daily Issues and Unusual Things

In ancient China, scholars paid little attention to the insignificant outing, botanical garden work, planting flowers, pet breeding, etc. But Mr. Pi and Mr. Lu recited many poems with the flavour of pure interest and elegance and quoting the classics. There are some good examples, like “Cha Zong Za Yong”, and “Jiu Zhong Shi yong,” etc. Also, they were in favour of something unusual. For instance, the
poem, “Tai Hu Shi Xu”, described: “All of my experience called unusual. So I composed 20 poems to prove this matter and sent it to my friend”, but “When I came to this place, and no over half of it was recommended by chorogaphy.” Mr. Lu also had a similar case in his poem, “Si Ming Shan Shi”. Besides, they also showed great interest in some unusual poetry correspondence, such as “Qin Yan Jing,” “Ji Shi Zhan,” etc.

1.3 Regarding Buddhism, Taoism, and the Expression of Their Unusual Viewpoints

The philosophy of Buddhism and Taoism had a great impact on the book of “Song Ling Ji.” Mr. Pi Rixiu had developed a close relationship with Buddhism and Taoism since he had visited the Wu area. Mr. Lu Guimeng also quoted a lot of Buddhism and Taoism chants in his work. It was also in the poetry correspondence which had too many to be mentioned. Mr. Pi and Mr. Lu showed their great interest in “Yin Fu Jing”, which they wrote about and replied from time to time with special viewpoints that were praised by later generations.

1.4 Regarding Style Itself and the Innovation That Came Along

Corresponding through poetry was used as a kind of activity that had much to do with culture and rich connotation. Sometimes scholars did not stick to seeking a deep way to express their internal feelings, but would rather pay more attention to content of beauty and fascination with style itself. What brought forth new ideas to Mr. Pi and Mr. Lu’s poetry correspondence was not only the traditional styles they inherited, but also the further developments of the structure of “short length with non-stressed rhyme” since the great poets, Mr. Yuan Zhen (779–831 A.D.) and Mr. Bai Juyi (772–846 A.D.), created the structure of “long length with five words and non-stressed rhyme.” Besides, Mr. Pi and Mr. Lu also put their words both in classical and non-classical styles in order to pursue as many poetic styles as they could. Just as Mr. Pi Rixiu stated in his book, “Za Ti Shi Xu”; “Since the ancient styles to the classical style, and to the non-classical styles, we have covered all of these poetry styles.” Based on these different styles of poetry correspondence, Mr. Pi Rixiu came to his theoretical discoveries and the summarization, which can be found in his books, “Lu Luwang Du Xiangyang Die Jiu Zhuan”, “Lu Luwang Zuo Yi Wu Bai Yan Jian Yi”, “Za Ti Shi Xu”, and “Song Ling Ji Xu,” etc.

Mr. Du Fu (712–770 A.D., a great poet in the Tang Dynasty) in his “Feng Zeng Wei Zuo Cheng Zhang Er Shi Er Yun” said, “Having read more than 10 thousand books – well reads learned, Laying the pen and writing the masterpieces.” When scholars wanted to have a correspondence through poems, they would like to put forward new and extraordinary ones. So they have to read more to reserve more and more knowledge in their brains. When these scholars gathered together for competition in making poems and replying, it was during the time of prosperous learning styles. The practice and its theoretical discovery and the summarization
of Mr. Pi’s and Mr. Lu’s poetry correspondence were all based on their wide studies and their possession of a large amount of different antiquarian books and records. It was the admission process of the “Ke Ju (Feudal China’s imperial examination)” in the Mid and Late Tang dynasty, which preferred to accept those scholars in a lower social position, that stimulated civilian academic development. Meanwhile, traditional classical studies were being questioned a great deal and thus were in decline. As a result, the trend toward broad learning had become popular. They preferred to read and collect the “Za Shu (miscellanies topic of books)” and the “Pi Shu (the people seldom read books).” Therefore, this caused a tendency toward broad learning. If a scholar did not know something, he or she was filled with shame.

Being a “Jin Shi (a successful candidate in the highest imperial examination)” in the 8th year of the Xain Tong Emperor, there was no doubt that Mr. Pi Rixiu was a learned scholar. As soon as Mr. Pi visited the Wu area, Mr. Lu respectfully called him by “Mr. Lu Men” [sic] and “Fu Zi Pi” the first time they met each other. As a matter of fact, Mr. Lu Guimeng, himself was from a family background of great scholarly learning. In his poem, “Qiu Zhi Fu,” which said, “Throughout my whole life, there’s nothing more for me to be so fond of, except for classical studies.” Anyway, Mr. Pi and Mr. Lu had their own focuses in great learning. According to some surviving poems, Mr. Pi Rixiu, who was a successful candidate for the highest imperial examination, concentrated on the traditional classics and study of history, while Mr. Lu Guimeng paid more attention to broader learning as he spent a long time in different parts of the country. Both of them admired each other very much. On the one hand, they were eager to learn from each others’ strong points and offset their weaknesses. On the other hand, they also wanted to compete with each other as well. This competition was embodied in their poetry correspondence. To the scholars, the poetry correspondence was the best way to show their great learning after all.

2. THE PORTRY CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN MR PI AND MR. LU, AND THE BOOK COLLECTION IN THE SUZHOU AREA

The large scale and the broad contents of the poetry correspondence between Mr. Pi and Mr. Lu had rarely been seen before. Certainly, it had much to do with their wide range of knowledge. It also had to do with their close relationship with the abundant book collection in the Suzhou area. Originally, Mr. Pi had a small library in Lu Men Hill of Xiangyang county which had a large part of his collection in it. Since the 9th year of the Xiantong Emperor (869 A.D.), he went to Yangzhou from Chang An, and then to Suzhou to take refuge from the “Pang Xun Crisis (Pang Xun, leader of peasant uprising in Shandong, Anhui Jiangsu provinces in 868–869 A.D.)”. During the long distant journey of in the war of disturbance, Mr. Pi’s book collection was almost all lost. Anyone who was fond of reading suffered
seriously in those days without books. Therefore, the first thing he did in the Suzhou area was to pay a visit to a library. We can understand that it was a matter of luck which brought Mr. Pi and Mr. Lu together to borrow and read books, and to write and reply in poetry. The whole process of their poems’ creation was the story of their friendship and was the process of exchanging the reading experiences among the book collectors in the Suzhou area. The relationship between Mr. Pi and Mr. Lu in their poetry correspondence and the Suzhou book collection can be illustrated as the following:

2.1 Mr. Lu Guimeng’s Private Book Collection

Mr. Lu came from an old and well-known family. His ancestors used to be ministers of the Empress Wu Zetian (684–705 A.D.) and the Emperor Tang Xuanzong (712–756 A.D.). From the remark of “Qi Ju,” which said, “There’s a room for Books collection,” in a book of “Qiu Zhi Fu,” which said that: “I had a hobby of collecting books, which had different duplicates.” Thus, we can understand that he had a special room for his book collection. In the poem, “Wu Zhong Ku Yu Huai Lu Wang”, Mr. Pi said that Mr. Lu was in a bad situation, but admired Mr. Lu’s “Thousand of books collection.” There was no doubt that Mr. Lu’s abundant books brought a lot of comfort to Mr. Pi Rixiu. It became a good medium for the poetry correspondence between Mr. Pi Rixiu and Mr. Lu Guimeng.

Firstly, undoubtedly there were many volumes of poetry literature in Mr. Lu’s private library. The direct role of the poetry correspondence between Mr. Pi and Mr. Lu should be the literature, and the poetry correspondence between the scholars in Yue Zhou of the East Zhejiang Province and Wuxing of the North Zhejiang Province during the Tang Da Li Emperor Period (766–779 A.D.). For example, the collections of poetry anthologies of “Da Li Zhe Dong Lian Chang Ji”, “Wu Xing Ji”, “Yun Hai Jing Yuan”, “Shi Shi” etc., could be the evidence of this relationship. Mr. Lu Guimeng wrote a poetry anthology, “Wu Xing Shi Lu,” consisting of forty chapters, which belonged to the chorography [sic] and anecdotes. From this poetry anthology, we can understand that the author was quite familiar with the grand event of Mr. Yan Zheqing, a mayor of Huzhou, who gathered nearly a hundred famous poets to perpetuate the poetry correspondence succession during the Tang Da Li Emperor Period (766–779 A.D.). Besides, Mr. Lu had traveled around the east of the Zhejiang Province during his early years with his father Lu Binyu who was an officer in the local government there. Later on, Mr. Li Hu, minister of the east Zhejiang government also joined the activity of Mr. Pi’s and Mr. Lu’s poetry correspondence. It was indicated that Mr. Lu Guimeng had close contact with the scholars and poet club in east Zhejiang, which was led by Mr. Bao Fang, Me Yan Wei, and Mr. Xie Liangfu etc. During the Tang Guang De Emperor Period (763–764 A.D.) and the Tang Da Li Emperor Period (766–779 A.D.), most of the contents of Mr. Pi’s and Mr. Lu’s poetry correspondence were about the landscape of mountains and water, and admirable and distinguished persons. They
were inspired by previous scholars and by some intention to compete with them as well.

Secondly, there was no doubt that there were many reference books with material taken from various sources and arranged according to the subjects in Mr. Lu’s private library. During the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.), Wei Dynasty (220–265 A.D.), and the Epoch of Liu Chao (265–589 A.D.), the common people liked calling others by nicknames, which has been mentioned much in the literature such as “Shi Shuo Xin Yu.” Mr. Lu Guimeng intended to search for the nicknames of many historical figures, and compiled a book of “Xiao Ming Lu.” From the skillfulness when they talked about the historical figures, we can imagine that the book of “Xiao Ming Lu” probably was Mr. Lu’s preparation for their poetry correspondence. These reference books with anecdotes played and directed an important role in the poetry correspondence between Mr. Pi and Mr. Lu.

Thirdly, there were large numbers of agricultural books in Mr. Lu’s private library. Mr. Lu Guimeng was convinced that agriculture played a key role in the peoples’ livelihood. Once he wrote an essay of “Ye Lv Jing”, which introduced the names, structure, location, and function of different parts of agricultural tools, such as plough, rake, stoneroller, Li Ze (a kind of stone roller with rake), etc. He stated that: “It was all that needs in agriculture in east of Yangtze River.” There were nearly thirty kinds of fishing tools mentioned in the poetry correspondence between Mr. Pi and Mr. Lu. On the base of Mr. Lu’s poem, Mr. Pi worked out a poem collection of “Tian Yu Ju Shi”, which was rarely seen by others. Mr. Lu wrote a preface and said: “There [sic] are all coming out of the miscellaneous works and literature to be checked, and no fake at all.”

Fourthly, Mr. Lu Guimeng wrote a book of “Zi Lian” and said in its preface: “I had been sick for three years in some remote place, and the doctors here are not qualified at all.” He felt deeply grieved by the circumstance of witch doctors being widespread and the low-grade or inferior medical skill. The surviving paper collection listed forty nine places involved in the “sickness” and nineteen places related to “medicine.” There is a poem in the correspondence that said: “Visiting medicine sellers far away, visiting fishers when free; when coming back, looking up in them into the ancient literatures patiently.” Thus we can imagine that there should have been some medical books in his private library and also some medical books written by Mr. Lu Guimeng as well.

2.2 Mr. Xu Xiuju’s Private Library’s Collection

Mr. Pi’s and Mr. Lu’s readings and poetry correspondence were never restrained at all. They had a very close connection with other collectors in Suzhou. One of the most important persons was Mr. Xu Xiuju. In his book, “Er You Shi,” said: “There’s a military minister in En Wang Fu named Xu Xiuju, who had kept tens of thousand volume books, and enjoying them quite much. So, I tried to borrow thousand volumes from him and was satisfied within a year.” Obviously, Mr. Xu’s
good book collection made Mr. Pi Ri xiu widen the field of his vision. In the poem of “Xi Ti Xi Mei Shu Yin Nang.” Mr. Lu Guimeng said: “Xi Mei has read more than ten thousands of books; who will mention about Shen’s collection now?” Another poem praised Mr. Pi like this: “Mr. Pi’s professional zause [sic] like the lofty mountain. Today’s social position like the rosy clouds and everyone admired”

2.3 Other Private Library Collections in the Suzhou Area

Suzhou is a place always famous for its talents. Scholars who got involved in Mr. Pi’s and Mr. Lu’s poetry correspondence were the famous learned scholars, such as Yang Zhenwen (another name Zhao Ye). Mr. Lu Guimeng wrote a poem, “Song Yang Zhen Wen Xian Bei Wang Gui Yang Gui Qin,” and said, “If this talented gentleman write something here, all other scholars should be shamed of themselves” with the remarks below saying, “His father became executive of Guiyang because of his good achievement in his studying of Shi Jing.” Mr. Yan Xuan in his poem, “Song Yang Zhen Wen Xian Bei Qin Gui Yang,” said, “Yang and my uncle who was an officer got admission as Imperial Scholar in the same year”. From this information, we believed that Mr. Yan Zhenwen was from a rich family with abundant book collections.

Also, there is a person named Sun Fa with the nickname of “Sun Bai Pian”. Mr. Lu Guimeng wrote a poem, “He Sun Baipian Jiang You Tiantai Qing Shi Zeng Xing,” and praised him saying: “Only give him one day can he work out a hundred poems.” Actually, Mr. Sun Fa did not have a large book collection neither was he learned. So, we have no evidence to say that: “He can work out a hundred poems just in a day.” Besides, Mr. Yang Taiwen, Mr. Yang Dingwe, Mr. Gu Hong, Mr. Sima Du, Mr. Zheng Bi, Mr. Yan Xuan, Mr. Yan Yao and so on were all local scholars with the academic background of their families. Although there is no clear record of their book collections, once in the poetry correspondence of Mr. Pi and Mr. Lu it was noted that they provided books and also took part in this poetry correspondence, and also had a lot of help in this activity.

2.4 Book Collections in Buddhist and Taoist Temples

Chinese Buddhist and Taoist temples used to have rich book collections. After the Mid –Tang Dynasty, many scholars would also prefer to keep their books in the Buddhist and Taoist temple libraries for the purpose of handing them down from generation to generation. Mr. Pi and Mr. Lu had a very close relationship with the Buddhist and Taoist temples in Suzhou. There were quite a few persons mentioned in the book, “Song Ling Ji,” such as Ji Shang Ren, Da Shang Ren, Zhang Shang Ren, Lai Er Shang in the North Chan Temple; Gu Taoist Priest and his disciples, in the Kai Yuan Temple; Yuan Da in the Zhong Xuan Temple; Nan Feng monks in the Zhi Mountain temple, etc. Both Pi and Lu paid frequent visits to all those collections in temples, which allowed them to read and quote from these libraries’
collections of Buddhism and Taoism. Not only these temples provided them with all kinds of book collections, but also sometimes opened some places for their poetry correspondence. For example, several linked up poems of Mr. Pi and Mr. Lu in their correspondence were completed in the North Chan Temple, the Kai Yuan Taoist Temple, the Bao En Temple, and so on.

2.5 Local Government’s Library Book Collection

In the 10th year of the Tang XianTong Emperor (869 A.D.), Mr. Pi Rixiu was admitted into the Cui Pu official bureau as a minister of military. According to Mr. Lu’s poem, “Qiu Fu You Qi Yin Ji Xi Mei,” and the remarks of Mr. Pi’s poem of reply: “Then, Mr. Pi was in charge of the local examination for the imperial scholar.” Therefore, we can see that Mr. Pi was in charge of culture and education works, and also had the experience of taking charge of the Ode to the Autumn. In “Huai Yang Tai Wenyang Dingwen Er Xiucai,” there is a sentence that reads: “If I have spare time, I would like to go to the small houses to inscribe poems,” and with the remark of these small houses of libraries- Chong Lan and Xiao Shan. So, we believed that it was very convenient for them to visit the small libraries in the local government library’s collections.

3. THE COMPILATION OF THE BOOK, “SONG LING JI,” AND BOOK COLLECTION IN SUZHOU AREA

There are two key reasons that make this paper pertinent for this discussion topic. On the one hand, Mr. Pi’s and Mr. Lu’s poetry correspondence was a milestone in history, as it began a tradition which broke out in the imperial palace and among the government officers, and also showed up in civilian communities. For the learned scholars, like Mr. Pi and Mr. Lu, who were the main characters and met by chance like patches of drifting duckweed, the Suzhou book collection was the key factor for their activity. Therefore, we can take this private poetry correspondence between Mr. Pi and Mr. Lu as a poetry correspondence among the libraries. It also can be regarded as the first sign of a similar response after the Song dynasty. On the other hand, the book, “Song Ling Ji,” which was compiled by Mr. Lu Guimeng, is the only literature that has survived until now. It provides us with a good document for our practical study.

Mr. Hu Yinglin said in his book, “Shi Shuo,” “The scholars in Tang Dynasty were fond of sending their poetry writing and replying in forms of good collections. But only a few of them were published and thus it couldn’t be handed down. There were only 40-50% survived in according to the records of arts and literature in “Song Shi Ji.” When it came to “Tong Kao,” and said that there were only 3 of them existed, such as Han Shang Ti Jin and Song Ling. Today there is only “Song Ling Ji” left, while all others were disappeared.” At that time, Mr. Pi
and Mr. Lu were not just well-known poets, but also good at writing books and collecting books. As a result, when their poetry correspondence came to an end, Mr. Lu Guimeng as a landlord and book collector, sorted out and compiled the book, “Song Ling Ji,” (actually, there are more than six hundred poems of the their poetry correspondence within one year), and he asked Mr. Pi Rixiu to write a preface from memory. All these were reasonable and easily understood. A comprehensive survey of the book, “Song Ling Ji,” shows not only the format of this book was arranged with different categories, but also it had its own clear character with many remarks (or notes), which were different from other poems. These notes concerned many eccentric matters and unusual books alluded to in the poetry correspondence between Mr. Pi and Mr. Lu. Mr. Lu Guimeng provided these many notes for the convenience of its readers’ comprehension. These remarks or notes made clear the origin of the anecdotes, which related to many collected works and unusual books of different dynasties. For example, Mr. Pi Rixiu quoted “Jiang Wen Tong Ji” for his remarks in the poem, “Wu Zhong Shu Shi Ji Han Nan Pei Shang Shu,” quoted “Shen Yue Ji” for the remarks in the poem, “Hu Wang Yi Lun Mian Huai Gao Zhi Yin Zuo San Pian,” and quoted “Shi Fa Xian Zhuan” for the remarks in the poem, “Kai Yuan Si Bo Shi,” etc. Sometimes, there were several remarks in a poem, like in Mr. Pi’s poem, “Gong Zhai Si Yong,” and Mr. Lu’s “Feng He GongZhai Si Yong.”

All these remarks proved that Mr. Pi and Mr. Lu had read all the books they could find and their knowledge was all-embracing. In other words, the compilation of this book, “Song Ling Ji,” with its different categories of remarks, especially for those notes, would be impossible to complete by those learned scholars without the support of abundant book collections.

It is also worth mentioning that the contribution of the survival of the book, “Song Ling Ji,” should belong to its publication by Mr. Lu Guimeng, and also to the book collectors in Suzhou. Of course, it would be remiss to neglect the book collectors who participated and promoted the poetry correspondence. There is no doubt that the readers and book collectors in Suzhou should clap and cheer for this book, “Song Ling Ji,” and for Mr. Pi’s and Mr. Lu’s poetry correspondence. The Suzhou people may also claim this local document as an honor. The fact that this collection is well preserved also proves the completeness of the book collection that existed in Suzhou during the Late Tang Dynasty.

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