

The Person in the Painting: Commemorative Portraits of Korean Emissaries to Beijing from the 15th to 19th Centuries

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Abstract

Concerning paintings generated by Korean tribute missions to Beijing, most deal with landscape travel illustrations produced by artists or literati painters who were part of the group, including Gang Se-hwang's (1713-1791) "Saro Samgicheop" and "Yeongdae Giwancheop." They also include depictions of urban customs in the capital of Yanjing (Beijing), such as "Taepyeong seongsi do" by an anonymous painter. This study investigates another form of painting associated with missions to Beijing that has relatively unexplored: portraits of officials.

Portraiture of Korean emissaries to Beijing includes formal portraits in court attire, illustrations of amusements in informal attire, small portraits in baimiao outlines, and the depictions of literary gatherings. The persons responsible for their production include court painters, professional artists, and amateur painters. This study examines the production and contents of paintings of Korean emissaries to Beijing to understand the actual situation of Sino-Korean art exchange.

The study reveals that in "pictures of meritorious officials" serving as emissaries from Korea in the early fifteenth century to small portraits in baimiao outlines to commemorate friendship in the eighteenth century, portraiture of Korean emissaries to Beijing reveals a trajectory of change from officials to private individuals. The private nature of emissaries to Beijing and the increasingly common exchange with Chinese literati spurred the development of elegant gatherings among Chinese and Korean literati in the nineteenth century, helping to form a network of mutual cultural and scholarly exchange.

Keywords: Korea, emissaries to Beijing, portrait painting, cultural exchange, Hong Dae-yong

(Translated by Donald E. Brix)