

From Gift Flow to Social Memory: Cultural Mechanism in the Interpersonal Networks

Rao Rui

College of Ethnology and Sociology, Hubei Minzu University, Enshi, Hubei 445000, China

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Abstract: This article analyzes the flow of gifts from the perspective of memory; analyzes the gift exchange practices in ethnology and anthropology from another perspective, and explores the impact of gift exchange practices in interpersonal communication on group memory. This article combines the existing research theories on memory and borrows related concepts in the “memory” theory to interpret the practice of gift exchange, thus pointing out that gift exchange is not only a reciprocal purpose of social groups, but also a kind of awakening society. The medium of inter-group memory, in order to further understand the practice of gift exchange between people through cultural memory.

1. Introduction

Regarding the flow of gifts is a traditional research topic in anthropology, Western anthropology circles Moss, Malinowski, etc. have all put forward more important points, but Western anthropology circles mostly explain the upward trend of gifts from the perspective of reciprocity and exchange. flow. In China, anthropologists such as Yan Yunxiang, Yang Meihui and other anthropologists explored the flow of gifts in Chinese society from the perspectives of unique human relationships, face, and relationships in China. Anthropologist Yan Yunxiang is one of the earliest scholars in China who studied the anthropological significance of gifts. Yan Yunxiang’s “The Flow of Gifts” has important academic significance for the study of gifts and interpersonal relationships in Chinese society; Yan Yunxiang is referring to a large number of The ethnography of gift research based on the literature of the East and West gift research and combined with its own life practice. The reason why this ethnography has high academic value is that it recognizes the western research theories on gifts. The above makes up for the shortcomings of the western gift research, and it proposes that gifts not only flow upwards, but also tend to flow downwards. To sum up, interpersonal courtesy is an important window to understand Chinese traditional culture.

“The Flow of Gifts” by Yan Yunxiang describes the practice of gift exchange among the folks in Xiajia Village, but the difference is that this exchange practice is constantly changing with the changes of the times and it is full of various Chinese-specific interpersonal relationships. Yan Zhuzhong has produced different human relations networks based on the differences in gifts, and this kind of human relations network represents different human relations ethics and reciprocity principles; but unfortunately, Yan Zhuzhong did not mention the “social memory” carried by gifts. “. A further explanation of “social memory” will help us understand the impact of “social memory” on the practice of gift exchange, and whether the “social memory” behind the practice of gift exchange

has an important effect on strengthening or weakening interpersonal relationships. This is for us Understanding the human relationships, relationships, ranks, and prestige in Chinese society has a positive effect. The practice of gift exchange is an important medium in strengthening the “memory” between people. The theoretical framework of “social memory” is used to further analyze the practice of gift exchange, which will help to further understand the importance of memory in the practice of gift exchange in maintaining interpersonal relationships. It is important to understand the relationship between gift exchange practice and “cultural memory”.

2. Discussion on Memory Theory

Since Halbwach proposed “collective memory”, Connorton has followed up with “social memory”. Memory theory has injected new impetus into the development of anthropology, ethnology and other disciplines. Many scholars put forward their own opinions on the existing results of memory theory. In her discussion on how society remembers, Ma Hongyan pointed out that “different cultural groups have shaped different human behaviors, and different human behaviors carry the social memories of different groups”^[1], Luo Yang is discussing collective memory Agree with Habwach’s “family memory, religious social memory, and class social memory that integrate people together”^[2], Gao Yuan believes that “society has memory, which is written, dictated, acted, ritualized, and visualized. Objects are carriers. In order to establish a social memory, carriers can be invented and created. “^[3]In fact, both Halbwah’s “On Collective Memory” and Connorton’s “Societal Memory” both explored human beings from different aspects. Group memory, and to some extent, the two can be counted as complementary to each other. Halbwach’s discussion of collective memory begins with the family. He believes that “family memory is closely related to the attributes of the family. It is essentially social memory and is framed by social forces, but each family has its own unique memory. “^[4]But on the other hand, Connorton's “How Society Remembers” has also revealed that the memory of our human society can be continuously created based on rituals and physical practices in society.^[5]

The practice of gift exchange in traditional Chinese society can be interpreted using the framework of memory theory in anthropology and ethnology. In modern society, interpersonal courtesy exchanges have become more and more common, and various gift exchanges are also ongoing. The author believes that the flow of gifts in traditional Chinese society is not only a product of various fame, power, and social hierarchy, but also a carrier of complex interpersonal relationships. It is an important medium for communication between individuals and social networks, and the practice of exchange is first and foremost. Developed among the family, social class, relatives and friends, and then further through the practice of exchange to evoke the shared memory between the two parties so that the other party assumes a certain obligation or bears a certain kind of return responsibility.

3. Analysis and Discussion between Gift Giving and Memory Mechanism

The gift of interpersonal gifts has its practical significance. Gifts are in order to obtain actual benefits, and also to maintain their own interpersonal relationships and maintain the balance between interpersonal relationships. However, there is also a “culture” behind it. The mechanism of “memory”. Just as in the traditional Chinese society, after receiving the favor of others, someone will remind you: “You must understand” the meaning behind it is that you have to remember the favor of others, at a certain moment in the future To pay it back. At the same time, this kind of gifts is used to maintain the interpersonal relationship between oneself and others. The author believes that its main function is to evoke mutual emotional memories between people. When this emotional memory is formed in people's lives, it will create The Chinese traditional “acquaintance society”.

In the traditional Chinese “acquaintance society”, since the emotional memory between the two parties is very strong, the interpersonal communication is also very smooth, and later it has to be attributed to its traditional memory mechanism. Just as Benedict pointed out in the “Chrysanthemum and Sword” that the Japanese have “kindness” towards their elders, there are similar emotions in the traditional Chinese “acquaintance society”; as in the traditional Chinese In Chinese society, when a Chinese meets a friend or classmate who needs his help in his work, he has a responsibility for it at this time, and this responsibility is caused by this emotion. What the memory spawns, the same at a certain moment in the future, if he needs some kind of help from this friend or colleague in the future, the memory of “kindness” that exists will also be extracted. Therefore, he also bears an unshirkable responsibility for this. So in traditional China, it is an “acquaintance society”. So what role does gift giving play in China's acquaintance society? In the traditional Chinese society, the gift of gifts, such as Yan Yunxiang said, there are “instrumental” gift gifts and “ceremonial” gift gifts. In the gift of sexual gifts, there is almost no emotional memory between the gift giver and the gifted party, and the communication between the two parties only relies on the emotional memory of a third party (intermediary), so the gifted party often says : “I'm looking at the face of XX.” So at this time, the gift party and the intermediary party have formed different emotional memories. And as a result, different “emotional memories” have been shaped, and this “emotional memory” will need to be repaid at some point in the future. Therefore, behind the “instrumental” gift give, there is still the catalyst of memory. In “ritual” gifts, gifts mainly in order to maintain the emotional memory, if this kind of “ritual” gifts is broken at the same time breaking is between the both sides “emotional memory”, in Chinese traditional society, for example, if a person is a friend invited to the wedding, but he forget did not attend for some reason, After that, he is likely to destroy the emotional memory of the previous relationship with this friend and will probably not have any contact at all. So what does this cultural memory mean? The author thinks that this kind of emotional memory is an important factor to maintain the reciprocity principle mentioned by Yan Yunxiang, and it is also an important link to construct interpersonal communication. The traditional Chinese “acquaintance society” is constructed in this way.

Gift exchange practice, as the most important of traditional Chinese society a kind of human relations, simultaneously is also the most important medium of a kind of interpersonal relationship network, through the medium of cultural memory of embedding, it strengthened the relationship between the two sides, but also as the interpersonal intercourse is the most important emotional foundation. The cultural memories created by the practice of gift exchange will again form a network of human relationships with others.

To sum up, there is a profound “cultural memory” behind the practice of gift exchange. It promotes the exchanges of interpersonal relationships and plays a role in maintaining interpersonal relationships. At the same time, this “cultural memory” is a The existence of basic emotional memories between people promotes the exchanges of courtesy, but it is undeniable that once this kind of gift is destroyed by one party, it will immediately destroy this mutual “cultural memory”, and at the same time declare mutual relations. The end of interpersonal relationships. Therefore, as a kind of bond between the two parties' “cultural memory”, gift-giving in interpersonal communication plays a very important role. It can be said that the practice of gift exchange has an irreplaceable role with other forms of goods. In addition, the practice of gift exchange promotes the formation and deepening of “cultural memory” and at the same time strengthens the interpersonal network of both parties in the practice of gift exchange.

4. Conclusion

The practice of gift giving in traditional Chinese society expressed by Yan Yunxiang is to realize

the mutual benefits of both parties. But to realize this kind of reciprocity, the author believes that it must be based on a certain emotional memory. If it is not based on these memory mechanisms, then this kind of reciprocity will not be realized. Whether it is the ritual, non-ritual, instrumental and other gift gifts that Yan Yunxiang said, they all reveal the cultural memory behind the entire gift gift. This kind of cultural memory promotes the maintenance and advancement of the entire interpersonal relationship, and the constant exchange of gifts between the two parties, showing the continuous strengthening of power and prestige between the two parties.

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