

Favor and Relationship: Study on "Kat Bba" in Yi Society

Yan Luo^{1,*}

¹The College of Literature and Journalism, Sichuan University, Chengdu, Sichuan 610041, China

*Corresponding author. Email: 514208419@qq.com

ABSTRACT

This paper makes an in-depth study concerning the unique forms of gift exchange in the Yi area of Liangshan by means of anthropological fieldwork. This paper analyzes the motivation, emotion and purpose of gift exchange in different situations. It is found that Kat bba in traditional Yi society has already changed in form and function during the development of modern society. The Kat bba of Yi People Society today is more of a means that builds human relationships. People use this "expressive gift" to build relationships, make connections, and form their own social networks.

Keywords: gift exchange, social relations of Yi, human favor

I. INTRODUCTION

The anthropological study of gift exchange enjoys a long history. Marcel Mauss proposed the theory of gift exchange, Malinowski adopted "reciprocity principle" to explain the practice of gift-giving. Sarins secularized the "spirit of gift", holding that the variable of gift exchange was "the distance of kinship". Levi-Strauss interprets gift exchange from the perspective of social exchange. Gift exchange provides a broad perspective for the study of the pattern and development of human social culture. Gift exchanges on different occasions in Yi society enjoy diverse meanings, and these gifts are given different names based on the intention of the giver, the nature of the gift and the identity of the two parties. "Kat bba" is a common gift that often appears in some festive and joyous occasions. Such "expressive gift" is an important way for Yi people to forge and deepen relationships. Based on the field investigation in Zhaojue County, Liangshan Prefecture, the author observed the application of "kat bba" in different occasions, the way people build their relationships through "kat bba", and how people play and change their roles in the practice of gift exchange.

II. "KAT BBA" IN THE YI SOCIETY

"Kat bba" is a form of gift exchange in Yi society. Such gift usually appears in some festive, joyful occasions, people take it to express their wishes and blessing, which is a complete "expressive gift". The understanding of "Kat bba" should take into account not only the literal definition, but also specific scenes.

Comparison with other forms of exchange contributes to a complete and comprehensive understanding of "Kat bba".

A. The meaning of "kat bba"

"Kat bba" is the Yi language of Liangshan, which Qubi Aguo interprets as gift money and reward in his *Investigation and Research on Bimo Kat Bba of Yi Society in Liangshan*. It is the reward that Bimo gets for his own labor, which is more like an explanation from the perspective of commodity exchange. However, in fact, "kat bba" refers more to gifts and money obtained through non-bartering, and "unconditional one-way gift". The euphemism for Bimo's payment is "kat bba". In the past, "the sacrifice of meat in certain parts of body was the most important and traditional part of kat bba for Bimo in the Yi's society, or 'Wojivha'. 'Wojivha' generally requires special cutting techniques and procedures, with strict contraindications in handling. In addition to 'Wojivha', gold and silver, horses, guns and land can also be used as kat bba, and the types are often closely related to the development and people's living standards of Yi society." ¹ Kat bba is a reward not only for Bimo, but also for the various gods involved in the ritual. At present, people in Yi society almost replace traditional forms of kat bba with money. This makes Bimo more like a "profession" and kat bba more like "salary". The euphemism for salary as "kat bba" actually reduces the secularism of "labor for reward" and preserves the ritual and sanctity of Bimo as a priest.

Yi Wen Jie Zi, published by Sichuan National Publishing House, translates "kat bba" into "prize", which seems to be similar to "unrequited gifts" in the

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¹ Qubi Aguo. *Investigation and Research on Bimo Kat Bba of Yi Society in Liangshan* [J]. *Religious Studies*. 2017(3):187-192.

sense, but the author takes that "prize" emphasizes rewards won by someone through competition or other behaviors. However, "kat bba" does not particularly emphasize such competition, in some cases even ignore the recipient's behavior, and only have to do with the identity of the recipient.

B. *The comparison of kat bba and hly pu*

"Hly pu" and "kat bba" are two common forms of exchange in Yi society, which enjoy both differences and similarities. The comparison between the duo is helpful to understand the essential meaning of "kat bba" more comprehensively.

Hly pu is "Yi language in Liangshan, among which 'hly' means exchange, while 'pu' price. The two together refer to 'exchange price', equivalent to 'whip-round' in Chinese".² It existed only within the family branch and clan before, and was mostly used in compensation disputes such as funeral and life payment, etc. Therefore, hly pu was more like a form of mutual assistance within the clan. In general, hly pu is a "holistic" help that represents a group's help to members of the group. In terms of number, a hly pu circle must cover three or more people. These people must have some overlap in their lives or work.

The circles falls mainly into two camps: one related by blood and the other by geography. The first one includes two membership: in-laws and lineage that covers close relatives and distant relatives. The most obvious feature of the blood-related circle is that the closer in blood relationship, the higher the value of hly pu. The geography-related circle is mainly composed of neighbors. If a family in a Yi village has a funeral, other families will uniformly give food or wine to the host family for entertainment. Nowadays, the forms of hly pu circle are more diversified, while that of hly pu are more monotonous. In the past, when the elder died, the younger generation would usually pull oxen or sheep to attend the funeral. The more people with oxen in funeral, the higher prestige or social status of the deceased, and the more prosperous life of the offspring. The people are proud, too, as they fulfill moral obligations, and show off their wealth in a disguised way.

In December 2012, the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee proposed the "eight rules". Since then, the Liangshan government has made efforts to rectify the extravagance and waste in funerals. It has stipulated that no cows be killed at official receptions, and the number of cows killed be strictly controlled. Since then, many people have turned a cow, worth about 10,000 Renminbi, into cash for funeral. Nowadays, the development of social economy has

greatly enhanced the scarcity of material resources. In the past, people adopted silver and food as hly pu to help members tide over difficulties. Now in most cases people use cash directly as hly pu, and such monetization is becoming more and more common.

It's more like a stress mechanism. Although hly pu of Yi nationality is similar to whip-round or gift of the Han nationality in terms of form, there exists great differences in function, scope, meaning and so on. In traditional Yi society, people usually do not offer "gift money" when their relatives and friends get married, and the firewood, rice, oil, salt, etc. offered are not "hly pu". "hly pu" is only used for funeral, life payment, dispute compensation, etc. Traditionally, only "member money" for the same clan was called "hly pu".³

In *Society & Culture*, Yan Yunxiang divides gifts into "instrumental gifts" and "expressive gifts" based on gift-givers' motives. The former refers to the gift given by the gift-giver to achieve a certain purpose. Generally speaking, both the gift-giver and recipient have the obligation to receive and return gifts as for "instrumental gift". The latter is a one-way gift to express pure blessing and gratitude. Such gift behavior is based on emotion, and there is no obligation to return. According to such standard, "hly pu" exchange in Yi society is mostly a cocktail of "expressive" and "instrumental". Kat bba, on the other hand, are typically "expressive gifts."

III. CATEGORY OF "KAT BBA"

Through field investigation, the author sorts and classifies the collected materials, and divides the "kat bba" in Yi society into three categories based on gift-giving occasions.

The first type of "kat bba" appears in religious rituals, which can be subdivided into two camps. The first is the food or property that the host gives Bimo during the ceremony. "The traditional kat bba is not only personal reward or compensation for Bimo, but also the food for the gods who assist in the ceremonies." "the sacrifice of meat in certain parts of body was the most important and traditional part of kat bba for Bimo in the Yi's society, or 'Wojivha' ... In addition to 'Wojivha', gold and silver, horses, guns and land can also be used as kat bba."⁴ The value of kat bba is not fixed and generally depends on the economic situation of the host family and the size of religious ceremony.

Jini and his wife, who live in Zhaojue County, are taken as example. Both of them are civil servants, and

² Wu Da. The Change of Hly Pu in the Yi Society [J]. *Ethno-National Studies*. 2004(01): 60-61.

³ Wu Da. The Change of Hly Pu in the Yi Society [J]. *Ethno-National Studies*. 2004(01): 62-63.

⁴ Qubi Aguo. Investigation and Research on Bimo kat bba of Yi Society in Liangshan [J]. *Religious Studies*. 2017(3):187-192.

their income is in the middle of the local scale. 2017 witnessed four religious services in the family, two xy ly bur⁵, one xy se bi⁶ and a large nimucuobi ceremony. Except for nimucuobi, the other three were small ceremonies and they paid Bimo 200 yuan as a reward. This is the "average price" in the county. The nimucuobi took five days and five nights, and the four Jini brothers paid 7,000 yuan to Bimo. "The ceremony requires more physical and mental energy and the pay should be higher than usual," Jini said. It seems to have become a convention to pay Bimo money as kat bba. On the one hand, the host family thought that Bimo should be paid for his work; on the other hand, they thought that the effect of ritual would be more significant after he was paid.

Another type is kat bba after nimucuobi ritual. Those who have received cuobi will go to the house of Esa (uncle or in-laws) to be guests. According to the custom, Esa's family will kill pigs and sheep to entertain him and give him corresponding kat bba.

The second type of "kat bba" appears at weddings. In the traditional Yi marriage custom, "cash gift" is the betrothal gifts or valuables given by the man's family to the woman's family, usually money. The cash gifts are divided into bride money and betrothal gifts. The former is mainly given to the bride's parents, while the latter is given to the bride's uncle, brother, best man, etc., which are called "uncle's money", "brother's money", "best man's money", etc.⁷ In addition to the gift money from the male to the female, the female will also give the other party "hair-dressing money" (money given by the bride's parents to the little girl⁸ sent by the man on the wedding day to comb the bride's hair), "parents-in-law money" (on the wedding day, the bride does not go directly to the husband's house, but first sits in a straw hut built by the husband temporarily. Those who build the straw hut are regarded as the temporary "parents-in-law" of the bride, who are generally happy in the family and filial), "silver-carrying money" (the man who comes to the bride's house with the endowment money) and "best man money" as kat bba.

The third type of "kat bba" is used to express the blessing given by the elder to the younger. It is mainly used on two occasions, one of which is the Yi New Year. It is a traditional custom for Yi families to kill pigs during the Yi New Year, and relatives will carry pork to each other to send New Year wishes. The children in each family carry pork, buckwheat noodles

⁵ Hilb: Yi Language in Liangshan, the Name of Religious Ceremony.

⁶ Xi Sebi: Yi language in Liangshan, the Name of Religious ceremony.

⁷ Luo Bian Wu Ge. The Marriage Custom Changes of Liangshan Yi [J]. Journal of Xichang College (Social Science Edition). 2015(04): 14-16.

⁸ The puberty rite for Yi girls.

and wine to pay New Year's call to the elders. The elders will give the children lucky money and return some grain or a piece of meat as a gift for the children to carry back. Such lucky money is called "Kushikaba".⁹

The second occasion when an older person gives a blessing to a younger person is when they meet a newborn child for the first time. In the traditional Yi society, women do not have the custom of confinement in childbirth. In general, mothers can take their children out of the house within ten days of their birth. If familiar people meet them on the street, they will give the children something, such as a wool thread from woolen blanket, or a thread drawn from the hem of a man's large trousers. Health care and life quality were poor in the past. Newborn children have a very weak immune system and are prone to illness when exposed to bacteria. Kat bba given to the newborn means good wishes. Generally speaking, after the child is born, the first visit should be grandparents, who will kill pigs and sheep to feast guests. Besides grandparents, the guests will also give the child some "kat bba" as a greeting gift. The development of social market economy in the Yi region has promoted the monetization of kat bba, and instead of giving things away, people give cash instead. At the same time, the application of the word "kat bba" also began to expand. In addition to the above three occasions, people's economic conditions are relatively well-off, the proportion of human consumption began to rise. When giving money to an old person or child on any other occasion as a token of affection, it is generally referred to as "kat bba".

Thus, people do not spend kat bba in exchange for something of equal value, but to express their emotional blessings, gratitude, love and so on to the recipient. Kat bba is generally used in happy, positive events or situations. People voluntarily give away their wealth to express their positive emotions without being bound by obligations or responsibilities.

IV. "GIVING" AND "RETURNING" OF "KAT BBA"

"Expressive behaviour is born with natural and pure characteristics, conveying an emotional and ethical appeal; while instrumental behavior is derived, stained with worldly snobbery and dust, mostly to achieve utilitarian purpose, and even related to some of the secrets of everyday life that are hard to see, such as nepotism, intercession, pride, reward, trade, entrusted, etc."¹⁰ In this sense, the "kat bba" in traditional Yi society is a typical expressive gift. Even expressive

⁹ Ku Shi: Yi Language in Liangshan, Chinese New Year.

¹⁰ Xue Qingchao. From Expressive Gift to Instrumental Gift: the Changes of the Local Social Human Communication Order [D]. Anhui University, 2017.

gifts, as Malinowski's "reciprocity principle" reveals, one "gives" for "return," and one must "return," or the other will stop "giving." All rights and obligations are organized into a perfectly balanced chain of reciprocity. Such expressive gift strictly follows "the obligation to give, receive, and return" and is "a non-profit, instrumental mixture of generosity, of voluntary and force."¹¹

Generally speaking, "kat bba" is bred in the acquaintance society. The giver and the receiver already know each other. However, the relationship between the two and their consideration of "kat bba" are also different in different situations. Here are a few examples of giving kat bba.

In the first case, the elder's gift to the younger. As mentioned above, when the Yi people celebrate the Year of the Yi or when their children are one month old, elders will usually give children "red envelopes" to show their love and care. It seems "natural" for the younger to receive kat bba from the elder, and the younger is not obligated to return. This is because the concept of seniority and inferiority exists in both Han and Yi societies. For the younger generation who have married and have children, they will usually bring some gifts home during the festival out of concern for their parents and out of filial piety. These gifts may not be valuable, but they will never go home empty-handed. Elders also often materialize their love as "kat bba" gifts to their juniors or their offspring. In this kind of gift, based on the existing kinship relationship between both parties, the elder's gift to the younger generation is typical "expressive gift", which is one-way and unconditional. Such gift narrows the distance between the two, and also consolidates the order of kinship, emphasizing their love for the young and youth's dependence and obedience on the elder.

The second is the reciprocal gift of peers or other relationships. In other peer relationships, such as among friends, colleagues, the gift of kat bba is an expression of affection and an important way to maintain relationships and expand social networks. In this case, "kat bba" is often a two-way gift giving. For example, this situation often occurs in the author's hometown: Xiao Wang and his one-year-old son met old friends on the street whom he had not seen for a long time, and the latter would give his children hundreds of yuan. The money was given to the child, but the friend initiated the gift out of his relationship with Xiao Wang. The next time Xiao Wang meets the child of his friend, he will do the same and fulfill the obligation of "returning the gift". Reciprocity is more important than expression in peer giving, where give-and-take is an important criterion for maintaining relationships.

There is also a special case: the hierarchical "kat bba" gift. Such hierarchical relationship usually refers to differences in social status, such as superiors and subordinates. The author learned a case in the field: According to local custom, families will kill pigs at the time of a new baby's first month to entertain relatives and friends and receive their blessings for the baby. Guests will also give the children a red envelope as "kat bba" as a token of their affection. A director in S County did not make a big deal of his baby's first month, but killed a pig at his home, with only a few close relatives present. His brother and Xiao Li work in the same unit and get along well with each other. S County is a small county, where everyone is connected in certain way, a typical society of acquaintances. Xiao Li learned the thing and found the younger brother, saying he wanted to go, see the child, and send blessings. The same day, the director's brother took Xiao Li to the home. Later, the director's brother left because of his job. The next day, the director told his brother that Xiao Li had taken 100,000 yuan, saying it was a "kat bba" for the child's full moon, in the hope that the director could help with the transfer of Xiao Li's son. The director did not reject Li at the time. He thought that there were guests in the house at that time, and it was not suitable for him to make a big deal out of it. Moreover, he did not want to affect his wife and children by shirking and harassing them, so he took the money and told Xiao Li that he would consider the matter. Afterwards, he said to his brother that the personnel transfer was much more complicated than that in previous years. There were many rigid conditions and standards, and he could not make all the decisions. So he took out 1,000 as Xiao Li's kat bba. He asked his brother to return the rest of the money to Xiao Li, and told Xiao Li that he would do his best.

For Xiao Li, gift-giving is both a pressure tool and a form of psychological insurance. If he asks for help empty-handed, even if he gets a positive answer from the director, with whom he is not yet so close, he will be worried. In this way, the gift becomes an intermediary to bring the two sides closer together. The director will owe a favor for receiving the gift, and such favor can guarantee the fulfillment of his request, which both puts pressure on the director and makes him feel relieved. However, the director did not embarrass Li by refusing him in field, but returned the parts of "kat bba" that were not expressive and maintained a network of acquaintances in society. As a result, the director does not have to do things for someone just because he has taken their money. What he did was morally and legally appropriate.

In relationships where there is a hierarchy of social status, the act of giving a "kaba" is often sensitive. It's like a game on both sides of the scale. When the social status of the recipient is higher, the "expressive" nature of kat bba tends to shift toward the "instrumental" side.

¹¹ Yang Meihui. *The Art of Social Relationships in China* [M]. Translated by Zhao Xudong and Sun Min. Nanjing: Jiangsu People's Publishing LTD. 2009: 7.

In interpersonal communication, the "give" and "return" of "kat bba" will generally change with the identity and status of both parties. For example, "kat bba" is usually "give-only" in hierarchical relationships. One of them is from a superior to a subordinate, such as an elder to a junior, while the other is the opposite, such as subordinates to the superior. In a peer relationship, though, the two parties involved not be giver and receiver, such as a peer giving a "kat bba" to the child of another peer. But as long as the two partners in the relationship are peers, the gift is often reciprocated.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the difference in status or identity between the two parties is exactly the important condition to ensure the occurrence and maintenance of "kat bba" gift giving. As for relationships of equal status, people rely on emotions to maintain the relationship, and such emotion is maintained by the gift exchange of "giving, receiving and returning".

V. CONCLUSION

The "kat bba" in Yi society facilitates interpersonal communication. According to such established rules of communication, people decide the value of the "kat bba", the timing of its giving and so on based on actual situation. Like other gifts, the value will be relatively high for those who are closer by blood and relationship, whereas the more distant the relationship is, the lower the value will be, presenting a "pattern of difference". Meanwhile, the expressive gift of "kat bba" endows the giver higher social morality. Expressive gifts are generally acceptable in terms of ethics. In addition, a person who often gives such gifts, on the one hand, expands the network of interpersonal relationship, on the other hand, proves his attention to the relationship, thus getting a positive social evaluation. People's role in such gift-giving is also determined by their status. Some of them implies an obligation to give, receive, and return. In society of acquaintances, it is through such reciprocity that people expand their social networks and relations.

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