

Historical Evolution of Gift Diplomacy from Ancient to Modern Times

Huatian Xia^{1,*}

¹Wuhan Britain China School, Wuhan City 43000, China
*1192649753@qq.com

Abstract: Giving gifts is indispensable in diplomatic etiquette. The exchange of gifts can enhance friendship between the two countries or convey deep-seated intentions. With the development of society, diplomatic gifts are no longer antiques but more symbolic goods. Diplomatic gifts are defined from sociology, and the historical evolution of gift diplomacy is explored from the tributary system, the transformation of participants, and gift ontology. Through analysis, it is found that ancient gift diplomacy focuses on reflecting national strength and has hierarchical differences. The gift is given in the name of Nagong by the conquered. With the development of society and the weakening of hierarchy, modern diplomacy pursues equality. The country maintains friendly relations between countries through gift exchange. Diplomatic gifts usually have symbolic meaning, artistic value, and emotional value, and gift selection is increasingly flexible. Animals also become the common diplomatic gifts, such as China's pandas, Japan's dogs, and Russia's cats.

Keywords: Gift diplomacy, Historical evolution, Tributary system, Panda diplomacy.

1. Introduction

A gift is a carrier for the giver to convey information, emotions, or willingness to the recipient. Appropriate national gifts can often promote good relations. Hence, countries are cautious in selecting national gifts in diplomatic activities with different purposes, considering the experience or personal preferences of the giver. Some ordinary gifts usually bear special meanings and have unexpected effects. Gift diplomacy is one of the branches of international relations. As a medium in international communication and diplomacy, gifts are not emphasized on their economic values, but their artistic, emotional expression, and symbolic significance [1]. Giving gifts is an important link to enhance relations between different countries in international diplomatic activities. The gift given between national leaders should be carefully considered, such as the handicrafts with national characteristics, the animals with unique local treasure, and the photographs with extraordinary historical significance. These gifts symbolize the current friendly relations between the two sides. As one of the components of diplomatic protocol, countries contribute presents with local characteristics to the other party, which respects others and promotes economic globalization, reflecting their deep communication and cooperation [2]. With the enhancement of comprehensive national strength and the improvement of international status, a series of large-scale diplomatic activities are held, including the BRICS Conference and the Belt and Road Conference, which promote cooperation in East Asia, Central Asia, and even the world [3]. At the conference, China gives gifts to the visiting countries. Most gifts are handicrafts based on traditional Chinese cultures, such as porcelain, silk, and cultural relics, which highlights the spirit of China's hospitality from ancient times to the present, and has become a historical witness of China's international exchanges in the new era.

In the feudal society, a complete tributary system is developed. It is the standard to establish the diplomatic relations between ancient China and surrounding forces,

neighboring countries, and even overseas countries. It relies on worship etiquette and tribute to show the prestige and state of the powerful government and the respect and compliance of the affiliated countries. Tribute gifts are the gifts presented by the donor country or the tribute countries. These tributes and gifts are local crops or handicrafts, such as bamboo cloth, curtain mats, earth paper, deer skin, and waist knives. The goods rewarded by the emperor of the Qing Dynasty are silk, mink skin, brocade, and the saddle horse. In addition, domestic books, stationery, paper, and other cultural goods with cultural characteristics are also included. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, the government makes relevant provisions on the categories and quantities of tributes and implements the principle of decreasing tributes and increasing gifts, highlighting the thrifty and honest great power style, and considering social transportation costs. In ancient western society, gifts and returning gifts are social obligations of politeness [4].

The gift is one of the critical events in China's diplomatic activities. Gift diplomacy can open up the new situation of China's public diplomacy. The role of gifts in public diplomacy should be given much attention. Exploring the meaning of gifts has tremendous significance in determining international relations. The gift diplomacy theory can clearly guide and enrich diplomatic activities and promote the implementation of gift diplomacy practically. But as a new perspective of modern diplomacy, the research on gift diplomacy is less. Therefore, gift diplomacy is taken as a systematic concept to analyze its historical evolution from ancient times to modern times, expand its vision, and enrich the extension of the diplomatic theory.

2. Definition of Gift Diplomacy

Gift diplomacy is the ritualized behavior of countries to regulate and maintain diplomatic relations between the two sides by giving gifts. The gifts are determined by the prudent purpose of the given country [5]. Diplomacy is a state's sovereignty activity through peaceful means and a meaningful way to establish a world political structure.

Implementing daily diplomatic practices helps develop, consolidate and regulate their international relations [6]. There are formal etiquette rules that the government, the state, and its representatives need to follow in modern diplomatic activities, including codes of conduct, ranking arrangements, and procedural arrangements. A mutual gift is symbolic and ritual diplomatic practices, and gift diplomacy is a branch of diplomatic etiquette. On formal or informal occasions, contributions can always reflect the policies and attitudes of

the diplomatic parties, showing the extremely sensitive relationship between countries. For example, the closure of the U. S. Consulate-General in Chengdu is a sign of intense relations between China and the United States. The national ceremony reflects the deep meaning behind the gift. The evolution of gift diplomacy from ancient to modern times is shown in Figure 1.

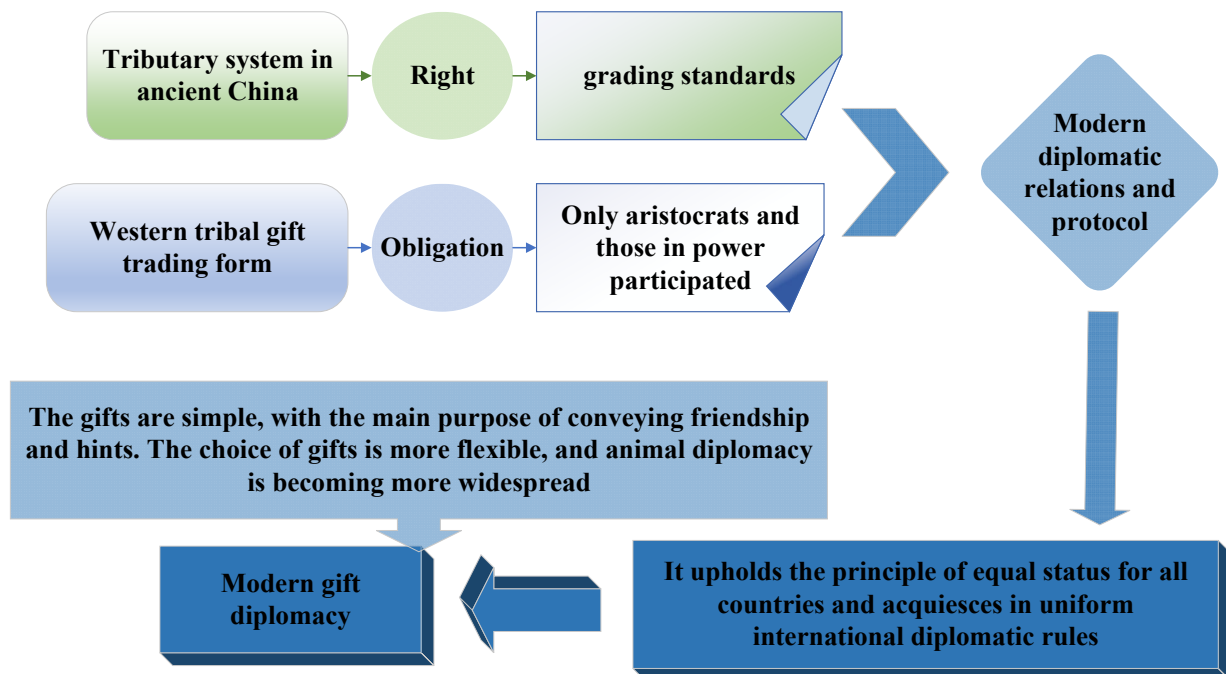


Figure 1. Evolution of gift diplomacy from ancient to modern times

In ancient Egypt, after the signing of the Egyptian Heti and Treaty, the royal family of Heti gives Egypt a silver plate with treaty content as a gift to express their friendship [7]. During the colonial period in North America, British and French colonists constantly gave medals to Indian tribal chiefs, which are the diplomatic gifts colonial powers gave to indigenous political groups. On the one hand, the act shows that the chiefs and the countries are loyal to them; on the other hand, it also tells that European countries recognize the wearer. The tradition lasts until the end of the American Civil War, and giving medals becomes a ritual between the American and Indian tribes. In western gift diplomacy, the main participants of both parties are masters or aristocrats, and ordinary people are not allowed to participate in diplomatic activities. The diplomatic activity is attended to and implemented by formal representatives, accompanied by diplomatic specifications of ceremonies.

The diplomatic gifts in modern times are not luxurious goods, but something that contains the meaning of peace. During the economic transition period, the diplomatic relations between China and the United States have gradually improved. President Nixon revisits China in 1972 and signs a joint communiqué with China. President Nixon gives Chairman Mao Zedong a large porcelain swan artwork in this visit. The shape of the swan is vivid and highly hierarchical. Premier Zhou Enlai specially arranges the first gift exchange ceremony in New China to welcome this gift [8]. At the ceremony, Nixon introduces the profound meaning of this swan art, symbolizing the hope of peace and friendship, hoping that it will bring better prospects for developing Sino-

US relations.

In recent years, animals have developed into unique diplomatic gifts, and they are special links to connect the friendship between the two countries. At the time of reform and opening up, the Nepalese government gives a male rhino as a gift to China, and the Chinese ambassador to Nepal returns a pair of white-lipped deer, white-naped cranes, and black-leaf monkeys on behalf of the Chinese government. Russia and Japan's "cat-and-dog diplomacy" is quite interesting. Akita County gives Putin an Akita Dog named "Dream" to thank Russia for its assistance to the northeast disaster area after the Japanese earthquake. He also gives back a Siberian cat from the mayor of Yokota County, Japan, and hopes to name the cat "Peace". China's panda diplomacy is also very famous. Premier Zhou Enlai learns that Mrs. Nixon loves pandas when he visits the zoo, so he decides to give a pair of giant American pandas to express the sincere friendship between China and the United States. When the giant pandas arrive in Washington, they are warmly welcomed by the American people. The Panda Pavilion in the National Zoo receives 100 million visitors when it is opened a month, and the "panda craze" appears. The Washington Post reports that giant pandas conquer Americans in a moment. Subsequently, Japan, France, Britain, Germany, Mexico, and Spain have also been awarded giant pandas. Pandas have been an essential symbol of diplomatic relations between China and other countries. The panda diplomatic events are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Panda diplomatic events

Time	Grant countries	Foreign representative	Location
Apr. 20 th , 1972	America	Mrs. Nixon	Washington National Zoo
Nov. 4 th , 1972	Japan	Chief Cabinet of Japanese Government	Shangye Zoo
Dec. 24 th , 1988	Japan	Mrs. Zhu Xia Prime Minister	Shangye Zoo
Dec. 12 th , 2005	Mexico	Mayor of Mexico	Chapultepec Zoo
May 17 th , 2015	Canada	Leader of Canadian House of Representatives	Toronto Zoo
Aug. 23 th , 2014	America	Mrs. Obama	Washington National Zoo
Nov. 23 th , 2016	Austria	Deputy Prime Minister of Austria	Vienna Spring Palace Zoo
July 5 th , 2017	Germany	German chancellor	Berlin Zoo
Dec. 4 th , 2017	France	First Lady of France	Bovaler Wildlife Park
Jan. 18 th , 2018	Finland	Minister of agriculture and forestry	Helsinki Wanta Airport
Apr. 7 th , 2019	Denmark	Minister of Culture of Denmark	Kesschupp International Airport
June 5 th , 2019	Russia	Russian president	Moscow Zoo

3. Gift Diplomacy Under the Ancient Tribute System

In the last century, the residents of the New Guinea Islands naturally abided by a “Kula” gift exchange system without regulations and articles in social activities. People build complex social relations by giving gifts, which makes them have personal credit in gift exchanges and a sense of honor. Gradually, the gift side shows off their wealth and status by giving gifts. In international diplomacy, gift exchange is the key to promoting the stability of the peaceful and equal order of the international community. The Marshall Plan launched by the United States is similar to the tribal chiefs’ public display of treasures to consolidate their status. They believe that gift exchange is non-mandatory reciprocity. State and non-State actors can release friction in international social interaction and meet the needs of society by gifts [9]. In the early Iranian Qazar Dynasty, the gifts between countries have an important impact on the legitimacy of the status of the Qazar regime, which makes the Iranian people acknowledge their dominant position. Similarity and Exclusiveness: the Art of Colonial India - Gifts and Diplomacy tells that cross-cultural gifts are unjustified and valuable [10].

Etiquette is rooted in social communication, and it is regarded as the basic principle of action. In ancient Chinese feudal etiquette society, the basis of personal judgment centered on etiquette has gradually matured. At the national level, gift-mediated communication is used for courtesy ceremonies. The court ceremony plays an essential role in the cultural and economic activities between the various political forces in ancient times. Ministers usually present local specialties as gifts to the emperor to express the close relationship with the emperor, and the emperor cares for the minister afterward. Royal politics would surely return them with more significant gifts if the other party brought offerings that showed a friendly attitude. Gifts carry the inner feelings of communicators. A gift affects the effect of communication and expression. If it is not appropriate, the gift may cause misunderstanding of the recipient.

The tribute system is a hierarchical relationship between the central and local governments. After the Qin Shihuang

unifies the whole country, the “differential order” of internal governance in ancient society is replaced by the “Huayi order” of state communication, and developed into a system of state relations of “Tianxia – tributary”. The tributary system begins in East Asia and gradually expands to Southeast Asia, West Asia, and South Asia. The Han Dynasty is the founder of the tributary system, and the Tang Dynasty is the synthesizer of the tributary system. At that time, more than 70 people establish tributary relations with overseas countries and ethnic tribes. In addition, the countries that established tributary relations with China in the Song Dynasty mainly expand Southeast Asia and South Asia. The Yuan Dynasty inherits the tributary system of the Song Dynasty, and the early Ming and early Qing dynasties are the peaks of the increasingly perfect tributary system. With the decline of national strength in the late Qing Dynasty, the tributary system gradually collapses. Among these tributary countries, some are vassal states in the ancient Ming and Qing dynasties, and some are peripheral countries hoping to trade with the Ming and Qing dynasties. Since the late Qing Dynasty, Western centralism’s “treaty system” replaces the tributary system.

Britain gives many gifts representing the achievements of Western industrial civilization to Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty to expand foreign trade with China. The value of gifts reaches 15160 pounds. However, the Qing government misunderstands them as the ordinary tribute behavior of the UK. Macartney refuses to worship at the highest courtesy on three knees and nine kowels according to the rules of the guest ceremony. Finally, the British mission fails to achieve substantial results [11]. The gifts that the British present are what they thought the most valuable. However, Qianlong views technological inventions as odd skills, which made him have no interest in the gifts and suspect their intention. This is because there is a model of Britain’s largest warship equipped with 110 heavy artillery military equipment in the gifts. The model is to show off the British navy’s military power, which is called the European Navy Power. In China, the configuration of military equipment represents military threats and war provocations. The two sides have significant differences in the symbolic significance conveyed by the gift. The fine weaponry shows

only threats rather than the friendliness declared by the mission. After the Opium War, China's diplomatic philosophy

has undergone important changes in modern society, as shown in Figure 2.

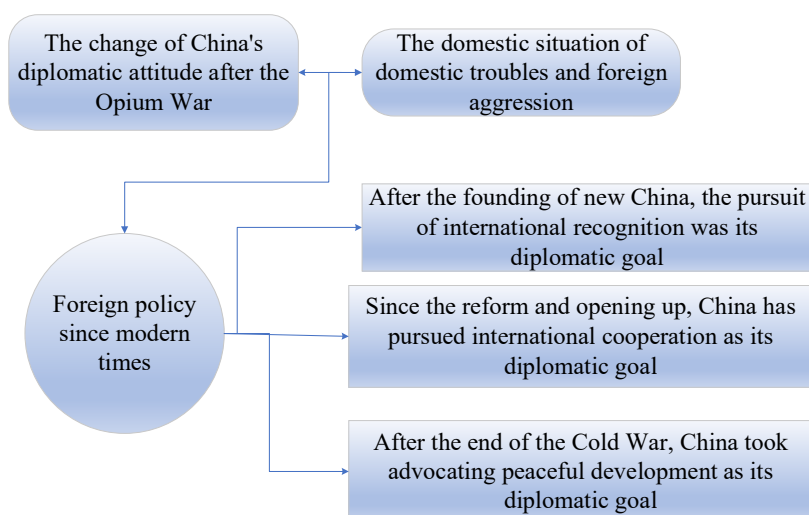


Figure 2. Changes of China's diplomatic ideas in modern times

In the early feudal society, gift diplomacy still reflected the characteristics of the state system. Gift-genders tried their best to send gifts that could represent the highest technological level of the country. Through these gifts, they demonstrated the robust and soft power of the country and the development of the domestic handicraft industry. In the ancient society with underdeveloped transportation, the embassy often had to transport for a long time to present carefully selected and prepared gifts to the rulers of the recipient country. Although the gift diplomacy was lengthy and costly, the gift-genders had to carry out weekly tribute behaviors to seek asylum and build stable diplomatic relations out of necessary diplomatic activities. The countries with comprehensive solid strength have their dominant position in the tributary system, while the weak countries maintain their subordinate position in the gift and consolidate national security. This hierarchy intuitively reflects the unequal exchange of presents under the tribute system.

Traditional gifts are mostly the country's crafts, and these gifts have high economic benefits. Most Qing Dynasty gifts are practical, including gold and silver treasures, spice silk, and satin. The gifts given to Luan Yiwei are rare animals belonging to the country's tribute. These overseas animals symbolize the ministers of all nations. The precious horses were domesticated by Luan Yiwei and can protect the dignity of the Qing Dynasty. Strategic materials such as waist knives and deer skin are stored in the armed forces. And some tribute items are used for sale or reward. The lacquer fans that Annan gives are sold at a discount by Chongwenmen. The Qing Dynasty rewards all 2500 Koryo cloths to the British officers and soldiers during the visit of the Magani Mission to Beijing. These practices fully demonstrate the economic utility of gifts.

Gift diplomacy attaches great importance to ceremonial links. In China's tributary system, gift diplomacy between countries needs to hold a contribution ceremony according to China's etiquette. Kneeling is an unchangeable tradition under the tributary system. In addition, there must be land for the ceremony, and the contribution period must follow custom practices rooted in the tributary system. It is undeniable that such a ritual arrangement clarifies the dignity and hierarchy of participants. Most countries cater to Chinese ceremonies to gain real benefits from China. The missionaries from the

Dutch East India Company and the Jesuits from Rome would kowtow, as the Portuguese and some Russians did.

4. Gift Diplomacy from The Perspective of The Modern Public

With the evolution of the international community, the practice of gift diplomacy has undergone an essential shift from hierarchical relations to equal relations [12]. This change is embodied in two aspects. One is that the gifts are significantly reduced compared with those under the tributary system. Gift diplomacy is not international aid but a specific action based on foreign policies. The purpose is to promote understanding and communication between countries through gift exchange and achieve international cooperation. The other is that the public begin to influence the government's diplomatic behavior. As the government's supervisor of the government, they keep an eye on international situations. Inappropriate diplomatic behavior cannot be accepted, depriving the government of legitimacy [13].

Modern gift diplomacy follows the concept of equality and openness. China's recipient country pursuing pandas as gifts can identify with China's goodwill [14]. The ceremony of gift diplomacy is simplified, the subjects involved in gift diplomacy are present in public places, and diplomatic activities are open to the outside world. Besides, public diplomacy has higher requirements for diplomatic behavior, and gift selection is more cautious. Inappropriate speech and behavior are infinitely amplified by the media, which will violate the original intention of this diplomacy. Givers' generosity and power desire are the core of gift politics. The extreme behavior in gift-giving will not be accepted.

Modern gift diplomacy pays more attention to its symbolic significance than traditional gift-giving. Gifts are changed from expensive to simple, more publicly attractive, and affinity items. China has collected the diplomatic gifts in the International Friendship Museum, which specializes in collecting, protecting, researching, and displaying exquisitely crafted diplomatic gifts awarded to party and state leaders [15]. In 2012, the museum is awarded the National Museum of China, and special exhibitions witnessing the history of friendly exchanges are displayed to normalize the representative gifts since the founding of New China,

including the woodcarving portrait of the elderly to Chairman Mao by Congo in 1973, the pomelo woodcarving elephants to Vice-Chairman Deng Xiaoping by Thailand in 1978 and the metal olive branch pendulum by the United States to President Hu Jintao in 2011. These gifts have witnessed the glorious diplomatic achievements of China, condensed the friendship between the Chinese people and the people of the world, and reflected the cultural characteristics of different countries.

During a visit to China by former Malaysian Prime Minister Najib, China presents him with a historic photograph of his father (Prime Minister Razakh) and Prime Minister Zhou Enlai signing the joint communiqué on China-Malaysia diplomatic relations in the Great Hall of the People. Also, in British Prime Minister Cameron's 2013 visit to Russia, Putin gave him the photo of watching the London Olympics judo together as a return. When Putin is invited to watch judo in London a few months ago, the picture shows that a Russian player successfully defeated his opponent. It is not appropriate for British media to evaluate this gift. Some gifts in diplomatic activities will be given symbolic meaning. For example, the redwood tree symbolizes Sino-US friendship, and the singing song "redwood tree" praises Sino-US friendship. During President Nixon's visit to China in the 1980s, several California fir seeds are presented to China as gifts. Subsequently, the introduction of fir trees has successfully grown in some cities in China. U. S. President Barack Obama gives the California red-shirt wooden chair again during the 2013 Manor Fair, meaning Sino-US cooperation. National gifts of different countries are often borne by national treasures that can represent the country, such as the "porcelain plate diplomacy" led by Chairman Mao Zedong. Under the instructions of Chairman Mao, Jiangxi assigned commissioners to Jingdezhen to invite domestic ceramic industry elites to co-fire 108 "Water Margin Story Porcelain Plates" according to the story of Water Margin. Mao Zedong gives them to Stalin as a national gift. The federal gift hopes that the Soviet Union should give some help in the war of resistance against America and aid Korea.

5. Conclusions

With the continuous improvement of China's international status, China is transforming from a participant to a constructor. China conveys its voice, shapes its good image globally, and creates a suitable global public environment in various forms. As a basic form of China's public diplomacy, gift diplomacy is worthy of further exploration in theory and practice. The concept of gift diplomacy and its historical evolution is discussed, and the changes in the ancient Chinese tributary system and modern diplomacy are analyzed. The results show that the hierarchical relations of diplomatic participants have changed significantly, and the rituals of gift diplomacy and the attitude of the state towards gifts have changed. Gift exchange deviates from the competitive nature, and the core of gift diplomacy has changed. Gift diplomacy has shifted from strict hierarchy to equal coexistence. Rituals of gift exchange are simplified, and the gift ontology has changed from nobility to public attraction.

The shortcomings are: (1) the cases of gift diplomacy selected are not extensive. It compares gift diplomacy cases with central hierarchical systems and lacks the analysis and

discussion of gifts in modern countries. (2) Since most of the information on diplomatic gifts is not open and transparent, the content does not explain the regularity of gift diplomacy. The subsequent research on gift diplomacy can further refine the gift exchange in a certain period, which will help to understand the changes in gift diplomacy and its roles.

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