

TOWARDS A SYMBOLIC ANALYSIS ON THE ACCEPTANCE OF CASH ECONOMY IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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Introduction

The traditional social systems in many Papua New Guinean societies can be characterized by big-men or self-achieved political leaders and ceremonial exchange systems. Big-men build their honor and position through exchanges and distribution of traditional valuables. The cash economy is typified by the production of cash crops such as coffee and cacao since World War II especially in the Eastern Highlands and Gazelle Peninsula. People also started small trade stores and the operation of public motor vehicles, which are known as *bisnis* in Neo Melanesian.

In order to help understand the transformation from the traditional to modern economies, EPSTEIN (1968) proposed three stages in Tolai economic growth; the agricultural investment period, the investment trial period, and the tertiary investment period. In this paper we will review studies on the acceptance of cash economy in Papua New Guinea, and propose a symbolic analysis on the acceptance of cash economy in big-men/ceremonial exchange systems.

Dual Economy Model and Sociological Model

Former models on the acceptance of cash economy in Papua New Guinea may be divided into sociological models and dual economy models. Dual economy models find the dynamics of the development of cash economy in the relationship between the traditional sector and the modern sector, especially in the incentives from the modern sector (FISK 1962, 1964). On the other hand, sociological studies have claimed that big-men's prestige-orientation and ceremonial exchange systems are preadapted to the modern capitalist economy (FINNEY 1973, 1987; SALISBURY 1962, 1970). They find the dynamics of the development of cash economy in big-men as cultural broker, who mediate the traditional ceremonial exchange and the modern capitalist economy.

These studies assume that the modern sector replaces the traditional sector. However, GREGORY (1982), political economist, has disclaimed the validity of such assumption. This is because we can find simultaneous development of both the traditional and the modern economies in Papua New Guinea such as the use of cash in ceremonial exchange.

Commodity Fetishism and Analogical Reasoning

In his studies on Latin American peasantry, TAUSSING (1977, 1980) has proposed that there is a difference in symbolic representation of social relationships between use-value oriented societies and exchange-value oriented societies. We represent as if capital and products were animate, i.e. "money bears money". Such representation is what MARX (1963–1968) calls commodity fetishism, in which social relations are represented as the relationship between things. For example, profits are represented not in terms of labor relation but in terms of the property of thing itself.

On the other hand, in use-value oriented societies, the relationship between things is represented in terms of social relations. For example, wife-givers donate female valuables to wife-takers, because they are wife-givers to the recipient. Furthermore, social relations do not appear as dominated by the relationship between things, but as direct, reciprocal, and personal. According to TAUSSING (1977, 1980), the symbolic representation of sociality in use-value oriented societies is based on analogical reasoning.

In analogical reasoning, the unfamiliar is understood in terms of the familiar. Therefore, analogical reasoning is inherently holistic, identifying phenomenon in terms of its relationship with the whole of which it is a part. In analogical reasoning, symbols and their meanings do not appear isolated. On the contrary, the meanings of symbols depend on the established relationships between the symbols.

Money within Binary Oppositions

If we accept TAUSSING's (1977, 1980) distinction between use-value oriented societies and exchange-value oriented societies, the acceptance of cash economy has not necessarily transformed the traditional symbolic representation of social relationships in Papua New Guinean societies.

The social stratification in Mt. Hagen is based on the fact that men control lands as a means of exchange-valuable production and utilize domestic labor and its product (STRATHERN 1979, 1982). Women's work is recognized and appreciated. However, it is men that have rights and the will to conduct ceremonial exchanges and business in public. In other words the relationships between men and women is categorized in terms of the contrast between transactors and producers, while the relationship between transactors and producers are categorized in terms of the contrast between men and women. Shell valuables and cash are exchange valuables that were introduced in the society with such paradigm.

Shell valuables were accepted without problems. Shell valuables have been manipulated by men and considered to be special to male prestige. Since shell valuables are imported from outside of Mt. Hagen, they are an exemplar for prestige valuables. However, money earned from coffee posed a problem, because coffee has to be produced.

In Mt. Hagen, husbands insist that money earned from coffee production should be used in ceremonial exchanges and business, while wives insist that the money should be used for consumer goods. Such competing claims for money may be understood in terms of the traditional binary opposition, e.i. the male are to the female as transactors are to producers. According to STRATHERN (1979), men try to deny female access to money, using money in ceremonial exchanges and business. On the other hand, women claim money is to be used for imported

clothes and foods, emphasizing their accepted role as consumer. In short, the binary opposition concerning gender hierarchy is utilized in understanding money, and the attributes of money are represented in terms of the social relationship between men and women.

When Mt. Hagen society accepted the cash economy, the traditional ceremonial exchange system also incorporated money as exchange valuables. In order to understand such processes, it is necessary to conduct symbolic, as well as sociological and economic analyses.

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