The Melanesian anti-gift: Demand-sharing and its de-instutionalization in urban Melanesia

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Jan. 6, 2020 (Mon.), 14:20-16:20, Room 201, Department of Anthropology, NTU

image originated from http://anglicanhistory.org/oceania/story_melanesia1926/
【Abstract】

My talk will address certain aspects of town life in the capital of Vanuatu in Central Melanesia. In my most recent fieldworks in 2010 and 2014 I was investigating household economy and aspects of social organization in the squatter settlements that rapidly sprung up around the town of Port Vila.

I will present one particular feature of these settlements as a test case for revisiting the long debate about Melanesian reciprocity and gift (from Malinowski and Mauss, through institutions such as kula and moka, and up to Forge, Gregory and Strathern). Notably, in every household people set up a little store, from which kin and friends in the neighbourhood can buy their household supplies. Like the household itself, the store is typically fenced off and barred in – not directly from fear of theft, but as a defence against demand-sharing.

My point will be that – to put it simplistically - people in Melanesia now tend to value keeping over sharing and selling over giving.