2.2 Areas of inquiry: production, exchange and consumption

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 30 marks**

KEY WORDS reciprocity • gift • market • consumption • embedded • potlatch

Objective

Study the area of inquiry **production, exchange and consumption** 、 : gifts and reciprocity, markets and money, and what objects mean, through ethnographies.

You must be able to:

- explain the three types of reciprocity (Sahlins)
- explain Mauss' theory of the gift
- explain how markets are embedded in social relations
- explain consumption as a way of making identity
- apply these ideas to ethnographic examples

1 Key knowledge and worked examples

■ Reciprocity (Marshall Sahlins, 1972)

type	meaning	example
generalized	giving without counting; return is expected some day	sharing food in a family
balanced	a fair return within a known time	wedding gifts returned at the next wedding
negative	trying to get more than you give	haggling, theft

■ The gift

Marcel Mauss, *The Gift* (1925): gifts are never free; there are obligations **to give, to receive and to repay**. Refusing a gift can insult; failing to repay lowers status. The **potlatch** of Northwest Coast peoples, where chiefs gave away or destroyed wealth, shows gifts as a way to gain status.

Markets and consumption

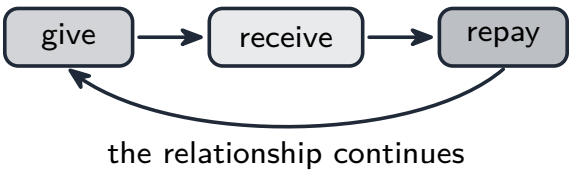
Karl Polanyi: markets are **embedded** in society: rules, trust and relationships shape them. **Consumption** is not only using up goods: people use objects to express identity and belonging. Daniel Miller studied how shopping expresses love and care within families (*A Theory of Shopping*, 1998).

Worked application. Red envelopes (*hongbao*) at Chinese New Year: money given in a gift form. Amounts often avoid the number 4, which sounds like "death", and often include 8, linked to wealth. The money is less important than the relationship it marks (generalized reciprocity between generations; balanced reciprocity between families).

2 Practice

2.1 Distinguish **generalized** from **balanced** reciprocity, with an example of each. [2]

2.2 Explain Mauss' **three obligations** of the gift, using red envelopes as the example. [3]



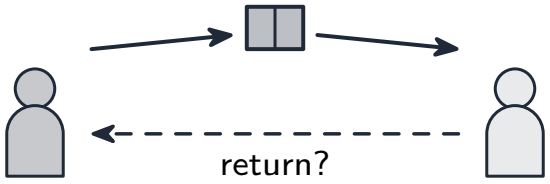
2.3 Explain what Polanyi meant by markets being **embedded**, with an example. [4]

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2.4 Explain how **consumption** can create **identity** and **belonging**, using **one** ethnographic example. [6]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 *(Paper 2 style.)* "There is no such thing as a free gift." Discuss with reference to **two** ethnographic examples. [15]



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Solutions

Marking: **M1** a correct method, **A1** the correct answer, **B1** an independent mark.

Each answer shows the steps, then the **result**.

2.1

generalized: giving without counting; return expected some day, e.g. parents feeding children; balanced: a fair return within a known time, e.g. returning wedding gifts of similar value

2.2

to give: adults are expected to give hongbao to children and junior relatives; to receive: refusing would insult the giver and the relationship; to repay: families return the gesture to the other family's children, so the relationship continues

2.3

markets are not separate from society; they depend on social relations, rules and values; trust and relationships shape prices and who trades with whom; example, e.g. the yapa and caseras in a highland market / guanxi in business / diamond traders who trade on trust; shows economic action is also social action

2.4

consumption as more than using up goods: a way of making meaning; objects mark identity, e.g. clothes, food, brands; an ethnographic example named, e.g. Miller on shopping as care in London families; how the example shows identity; how it shows belonging or exclusion; a concept link, e.g. materiality or symbolism

3.1

Mark with the markbands: [13-15] clearly focused on the question, key concepts used accurately, ethnographic material in detail (author, place, group), different perspectives and theories evaluated, well-developed critical analysis, different perspectives evaluated, a reasoned conclusion; [10-12] focused, mostly accurate knowledge, analysis with some evaluation; [7-9] some focus, relevant knowledge, mostly narrative or description with limited analysis; [4-6] little focus, limited knowledge, mostly narrative; [1-3] little understanding of the question. Points that may be included: explains the claim: Mauss' obligations to give, receive and repay; ethnography 1 in detail, e.g. Malinowski's Kula; ethnography 2 in detail, e.g. the potlatch, hongbao, or Weiner on Trobriand women's wealth; for: gifts create obligation and status; refusing or failing to repay damages relationships; against: generalized reciprocity within families comes close to free giving; donations to strangers, e.g. blood donation (Titmuss); Weiner: "keeping-while-giving": some objects are never given; comparison of the two examples; a reasoned conclusion