Reciprocity Beyond Borders: The Case of Couchsurfing Network in Hanoi, Vietnam.

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Abstract
The concept of reciprocity in the host-guest relationship has been recognised for centuries, both in the western and oriental cultures. Scholars in the West have posited that the receiving, hosting and entertaining of guests imply certain reciprocal expectations, albeit the act of hospitality occurs in social, private or commercial domains. Within each hospitality setting, the interaction between hosts and guests is manifested distinctively.

This study specifically looks at how the reciprocal host-guest interaction is exhibited in the private domain of hospitality by examining the case of Couchsurfing.com, a web-based hospitality network that allows its members to offer and receive hospitality in the home setting. The purpose of this study is to investigate how hospitality and reciprocity are viewed in a non-monetary, cross-cultural exchange context.

Despite the popularity of the Couchsurfing network and other similar hospitality communities, little has been researched on the dynamics of members involved in this type of travelling and how the meaning of hospitality and reciprocity is demonstrated through the interaction between the hosts and the guests in the non-monetary contexts. Furthermore, while the concept of reciprocity in relation to hospitality has been studied widely in the West, little has been known about how hosts and guests in non-western cultures, including Asian.

Taking Hanoi (Vietnam) as a qualitative case study, this thesis addresses this knowledge gap by exploring how the notion of non-monetary exchange is observed and practised by the Vietnamese hosts towards their guests in private setting. The findings from this research suggest that the concepts of hospitality and reciprocity, while universal, have some features unique to Vietnamese culture and Vietnamese couchsurfing community, especially in terms of moral values, and differences from one generation to another when it comes to hosting strangers.