

LANDSCAPE, HISTORY AND MIGRATION AMONG THE LANGALANGA, SOLOMON ISLANDS

Pei-yi Guo

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Department of Anthropology, University of Pittsburgh

This dissertation aims to understand how the Langalanga people of the Solomon Islands conceptualize and appropriate their landscape. Recent studies have shown that landscape is socio-culturally constructed and experienced in multiple ways in diverse localities all over the world. There are two major genres of models in contestation in landscape studies: the inscriptive model and the processual model. The former, initiated by cultural geographers, sees landscape as a pictorial way of representing or symbolizing surroundings and as the materialization of memory. However, since the mid-1990s, some anthropologists argue that landscape should be seen as cultural process instead. This approach stresses that the relationship between people and landscape is more intertwined and dynamic in some societies than the inscriptive model may suggest. In the inscriptive model, landscape can be alienated from the people, while in the processual model, landscape is embodied in the people. On a theoretical level, this dissertation argues that for the Langalanga, both models have explanatory power, and looks at the dialectical relationships between the inscriptive and processual conceptualizations. Although landscape is better seen generally as cultural process in Langalanga, it is inscriptive in some circumstances, especially in the Langalanga's interactions with the gazes of outsiders.

Ethnographically, this dissertation examines the phenomena that a unique feature of the landscape—'artificial islands'—are regarded by the Langalanga as a cultural marker, even though the majority have abandoned their residence there. The approach to artificial islands as a cultural symbol is both poetic and political: on the one hand, landscape is a key component of how people perceive, memorize and represent history and configure the sense of selves; on the other hand, the colonial and post-colonial (tourist) gazes have highlighted artificial islands as a locus of interests. It is through this culturally patterned mode of organization of memories of the past and its entanglement with a wider range of powers and relations in a historical context that the artificial islands become the dominant symbol in the process of differentiation and representation of self and other, and that landscape is transformed from cultural process to inscription.