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**Trading 'Money': Shell Money and Trading Networks of
the Langalanga, Malaita Province, Solomon Islands**

Pei-yi Guo

Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan

langa@gate.sinica.edu.tw

Abstract

This paper aims to reconstruct the regional trading networks related to the Langalanga production of 'shell money', a kind of local currency in many societies in Island Melanesia, and explore the social impacts of such trade.

Shell money is made of strings of shell beads and has been used for a long time in Island Melanesia as a bride wealth, payment for compensation, and medium for trade. Though there were several production centers in the past, today, the major production center in the Solomon Islands is now in the Langalanga Lagoon, Malaita Province. The Langalanga people subsist mainly through root crop cultivation, as well as through fishing and wage labor. Their major cash income, however, depends on manufacturing shell money. Although the state currency is used in most transactions, shell money is still used for ritual purposes and as ornaments among some Solomon Islanders.

The Langalanga used to trade their products of shell money with people in the Solomon Sea, including Malaita Island, Guadalcanal, Nggela, Ysabel, Makira, and (in the past) Bougainville. After describing how shell money is made and used, I will examine the possible orientation of the shell-money industry in Langalanga in oral history, including the legends of how shell money was introduced to the area, and how it was adopted and flourished. I will then illustrate the Langalanga trading networks, including their trading history, trading routes and the relationships between trading partners. In the end, I will discuss the importance in Langalanga society of trading shell money, in particular, how the practice relates to the Langalanga's worldview, inter-ethno relations, inter-marriage and incorporation of outsiders, and experiences of contacts with Europeans.