Lost in the Whiteness

Aboriginal-Asian Encounters in Australia, 1901-2001
Lost in the Whitewash

Edited by
PENNY EDWARDS & SHEN YUANFANG

ANU
HUMANITIES RESEARCH CENTRE
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THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

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whose work is not represented here but all of whom contributed obliquely or directly to this project in its formative stages through their ideas, suggestions, general enthusiasm, or active participation.
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Note to readers

Every attempt has been made to incorporate inclusive language in this work. As part of this intention a decision was made to capitalise Black and White, unless otherwise requested by authors. Similarly, some words and phrases that are both considered significant to minority groups and are frequently capitalised in contemporary usage are also capitalised. These include Freedom Rides, and Stolen Generation.

In this work Macassan is spelt with a 'c' as it is a purely English term; Makassar however is a Sulawesi term and is therefore spelt with a 'k'.

Quotations from written sources follow the spelling and punctuation conventions of those sources.
You've got to ask the question, how a culture is formed? Right ... it's this business of mix. At the beginning of a mix it means that if you let go of what you do know you move into an area of complete confusion of what you don't know.

Bishop George Tung Yep

In their search for 'something more' to the telling of Australia's story, the contributors to this volume reflect much of the energy captured in Tracey Moffat's photo-essay of that name. The opening frame of Moffat's 1989 nine-part tableau throws together three stereotypical figures that loom large in Australian racial legislation, but which have rarely been allowed to inhabit the same social, political or cultural space.

One is a Chinese immigrant, his pigtail and conical hat signalling the nineteenth-century gold rush. Another is a peroxide blonde redolent of a 1960s Hitchcock movie, a caricature of a 'fallen woman' whose descent (from grace, and Whiteness) is mocked by the cherubic features of two blonde-haired schoolboys in the background. Third is an Aboriginal man, nursing a beer bottle in the shed's shadowy interior. Occupying the foreground, central to the composition, is an anti-stereotype: a young country girl of mixed race, looking out of the frame to an unknown elsewhere. Performed by Moffat herself, she's dressed in a scarlet and black cheongsam that speaks to the 1950s, whose jagged hem hints at frayed boundaries and sexual encounters. Moffat's very presence in this fictional tableau simultaneously unsettles colonial representations of
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Aboriginal female sexuality\(^3\) and destabilises both the colonial triangulation of race relations and contemporary formulations which divide Australia into White, Black, and immigrant populations.

Moffat's work is worlds apart from our cover illustration, Joseph Johnson's *A Game of Euchre*, which was first published in the Christmas 1876 issue of *Australasian Sketcher*. Here three men sit, frozen in time, place and race. There are no ambiguities. Depictions of skin colour, styles of hair, modes of dress, all reaffirm their separate identities. European dominance is inscribed in the central positioning of the White card-player. The effect is of a triptych, reflecting the structure of colonial race relations. Three races, neatly spaced, who meet, as in this card game, for strictly regulated socio-economic transactions.

By contrast, Moffat's work creates, in the words of one French critic, 'a slightly hallucinatory perception of plural times and plural universes existing in parallel' which presents not the image of what was, but the 'reflection of a present which is constantly dissolving and reconstituting itself even as we ask ourselves what is there before us'.\(^4\) This book is conceived in a similar spirit.

The initial inspiration for this volume came from a colloquium, *Lost in the Whitewash: Aboriginal-Chinese Encounters from Federation to Reconciliation*, convened by the editors at the Australian National University in December 2000. By bringing together a range of writers, artists, activists, politicians and scholars with a personal or professional interest in Aboriginal-Asian identities, we aimed at once to dislocate the Anglo-Celtic from the centrefold of Australian historiography, and to steer the telling of Australia's past and present towards a new cross-cultural history emphasising the horizontal ties, spiritual exchanges, spatial journeys, human transactions and cultural traffic which cut across and interlink Australia's many non-White peoples.

The initial focus of our Whitewash project was Aboriginal-Chinese relations. While Chinese were by no means the only non Anglo-Celtic migrants—Afghan, Japanese, Kanaka, Indians and many others were coerced or lured to Australia—we argued, two factors made the Chinese particularly important in any study of Australian race relations. First was their size. The Chinese presence in Australia grew from the first arrivals in 1848 to some 30,000 by 1900. In certain areas, notably the urban and mining centres of the
Northern Territory, Chinese populations grew rapidly to outnumber both White settlers and the remains of Aboriginal populations. Second was the strength of Chinese community organisation and ethnic identification.

But in singling out the Chinese on these grounds, we were arguably echoing some colonial preoccupations. Indeed, it was precisely the size of the Chinese population, combined with the very efficiency and energy with which Chinese immigrants were seen to be achieving their ambitions, which encouraged the vilification of Chinese by White settlers and government. Stoked by contemporary discourses on race and degeneration, and streamlined into a dominant and often hysterical ‘yellow peril’ discourse through print media, cartoons, and political debates, Sino-phobia, and the desire to keep Chinese out, became critical catalysts of the unification of the five separate colonies into a federated Australia in 1901.

To move away from such preoccupations, and to emphasise the diversity of Aboriginal–Asian connections, we have broadened the scope of this volume to include several discussions—historic, personal and visual—of Japanese encounters with Australia’s Indigenous peoples. Here we were also inspired by contributor Minoru Hokari’s elegant denunciation of ‘minorities history’, and his insistence that sites of convergence and not relative sizes of populations should be our main preoccupation in mapping Aboriginal–Asian histories.

In many of the stories in this book, what becomes peripheral is the White settler presence. Europeans are either absent from the stages on which these histories are enacted, or they appear as supporting actors—as spouses, fathers or grandfathers—but not as chief protagonists, and never the all-controlling puppet masters.

Colonialism’s impulse to catalogue and compartmentalise races spilled over into the organisation of knowledge about colonised lands and peoples. The development of many contemporary academic disciplines—the discrete fields of geography, history, and anthropology, for example—was fuelled by nineteenth-century Europe’s deepening interest in the nation as a political and cultural paradigm, and ripened in tandem with colonial expansion. Those same metropolitan universities and colonial research institutes which produced particular cultures and countries as colonial categories, often for the consumption of European audiences and
administrators, privileged Western, rational interpretations while devaluing Indigenous knowledge systems. The legacies of such knowledge projects echo today in the rigid structuring of academe and in the distinction often maintained between ‘academic’ and ‘non-academic’ writing.

We find such distinctions obsolete and counter-productive to any attempt to forge a new understanding of Australia’s past trajectories and future directions. Instead, we intend this volume as an open dialogue between the personal and the academic, the auto-biographical and archival, the professional and the political. Our aim here is not to present the history of Aboriginal–Asian encounters, but to forge a meeting ground for plural voices, collected here to shed light on what Jennifer Martiniello calls ‘the continuous cartography of [her] peoples, their histories’. These are the lives who, through the work and words of writers like Martiniello, have become the ‘unsilenced’. Their tracks have always been there: exist in more places than we can hope to see. They may have ‘stayed unmapped’ or unwritten, but they reverberate in the lives of their descendants and through those of countless others, and have become written into the Australian landscape in myriad ways.

In taking Federation as the start point for this collection, we do not contend that the year 1901 can be staved off from the previous centuries of histories in this continent, or that this date necessarily holds the same meanings and significance for different groups, any more than we see the arrival of the First Fleet as the point of anchorage for Australian history. We use this date as a signpost: one that points back, forwards and sideways in time. As Ian Anderson has observed, ‘colonial relationships did not simply evaporate when European imperial powers withdrew from direct colonial rule’, but continued to permeate Australian society long after Federation. It is precisely this persistence of colonial structures of power, knowledge and prejudice, as Ann Curthoys has warned, that jeopardises contemporary aspirations for multiculturalism.

Aboriginal–Asian histories

Although Aboriginal–Asian connections have long been neglected, they have not been completely ignored. Occasional, largely negative references to Chinese–Aboriginal interactions peppered colonial
discourse, offering fleeting glimpses of the chief preoccupations of those involved in designing and enforcing race legislation. Sensationalist tales of Aborigines devouring new Chinese migrants, or of Chinese goldworkers abducting Aboriginal girls allowed for a broader abduction of positive cross-cultural encounters from colonial records and much subsequent Australian historiography. Scientific accounts were similarly gloomy, couched in the language of cold rationalism. In his 1947 book Australia’s Coloured Minority: It’s place in the community, Auber Octavius Neville, who had served as Chief Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia from 1915 to 1940, devotes several pages to stressing the unsuitability of Aboriginal–Asian marriages. Neville illustrates his point with stereotypes of irresponsible Asian and Aboriginal parents, abandonees of spouses and children, incapable of living together in harmony, and much less of raising happy families.

As Curthoys has written, such marginalia were largely eclipsed in the colonial era by a bipolar, public discourse in which discussions of the ‘Chinese Question’ and the ‘Aboriginal Problem’ were conducted almost entirely without reference to one another. This segregation of ‘Chinese’ and ‘Aboriginal’ subjects in public discourse belied the connective web of legislation which systematised racial discrimination against Aboriginals, Chinese and other non-European immigrants. But these two overtly distinct racisms were conceptually unified by their unshakeable belief in European superiority, reflected in a common, colour-bound lexicon: ‘John Chinaman blackleg’ inhabited the same immoral, unChristian, and alien world of darkness as Aboriginal blacks. Attacks on the ignoble, indolent savage and on the greedy, land grabbing ‘Celestial’ were used to justify and popularise legislation at once dispossessing Indigenous peoples of their land and debarring Asian immigrants from landholding.

Australia’s Indigenous inhabitants may have found little to distinguish invading Europeans from the immigrants who arrived, from China, Japan and elsewhere, in their wake. Asian traders and sojourners were not new to Aborigines: as a number of leading historians and archaeologists have shown, Macassan traders had been visiting Australia from at least the seventeenth century. But colonisation radically altered the structures, size and settlement patterns of Asian migration.

Many immigrants who made their way to colonial Australia were motivated by the same incentives as White settlers: to accumulate wealth and land. These common aspirations did not result in common access to resources. Figures such as Ping Que, a nineteenth-century Chinese immigrant to the Northern Territory who accumulated substantial wealth from farming land, were the exception. Many Chinese travelled to Australia as indentured labourers, under coolie contract systems, or as bond servants. But even these subaltern subjects often ended up implicated in those projects of expansion, construction and extraction which displaced increasing numbers of Indigenous people. Indeed, many colonial schemes, in private and public spheres, were almost entirely dependent on the exploitation of Chinese labour. As Regina Ganter and Helen Sham-Ho both note in their chapters for this volume, Darwin could not have been built without Chinese labour. But to stress this
Asian contribution to Australia's development begs another question: would Indigenous people have been so effectively and extensively dispossessed without a Chinese presence in this crucial stage of colonial consolidation? Looking at it another way, we can also argue that some nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Chinese migrants who moved to Australia from other colonies—such as Malaya or the Dutch East Indies—were doubly colonised. Moving from one existence where they had experienced social dislocation and European occupation, they faced a second tier of race discrimination and colonial subjugation in Australia.

In some respects, Aborigines and Chinese were more culturally aligned than were Europeans with either group. Chinese society shared with many Aboriginal societies a strong sense of attachment to the land, a belief in ancestral spirits, an emphasis on extended kinship groups, a sense of identity and naming patterns strongly tied to one's age and familial ranking, an appreciation of the value of natural remedies and herbal medicines, an acceptance of plural female partners in marriage, and the common intervention of older kinship members in prescribing marital partners. Despite these general areas of limited similarity, the structures of belief systems and social norms naturally differed enormously between Chinese immigrants and Aborigines, as did values relating to work and the accumulation of wealth and property. Nor can one speak in any meaningful way about 'the Chinese' or 'the Aborigines' as unified ethnic groups. Just as Australia's Indigenous population incorporated many different language groups, so Chinese migrants to Australia belonged to several dialect groups including Cantonese, Teochiu, Hokkien and Hakka. For the architects of Australian race relations and its record-keepers, however, such distinctions were collapsed into 'the Aborigine' and 'the Chinese'.

**Studying Aboriginal–Asian encounters**

As Hokari demonstrates in his periodisation of Australian historiography, the Black-White binary retained critical mass well into the 1990s. In the 1970s, Hokari shows, a new wave of scholars, led by C. D. Rowley and William Stanner, focused on correcting decades of neglect and misapprehension of Aboriginal society. The following decade, a vogue for minority groups broadened the field to charting the largely hidden histories of such Chinese, Afghan, Japanese and
other communities, and of women, whose stories had also been elided in the male-dominated canons of high colonial history.

But even when these projects were conceived in an emancipatory fashion, as a form of rescuing minorities from their lack of history, to paraphrase Prasenjit Duara, their effect was to tie diverse ethnic groups into a unifying vision of the Australian nation with which, Hokari argues, members of such groups may have never identified. In their desire to emphasise the agency of minorities and to embellish the national story by magnifying its margins, or by inscribing minorities in the centre of a national narrative, Hokari argues, many scholars necessarily ‘reinforce[d] and reproduce[d] nationalistic history by reshaping it’.

The first concerted academic effort to map connections between Aboriginal and Asian histories and identities appears to have been in 1981, with the publication of a special issue of *Aboriginal History* entitled ‘Aboriginal–Asian Contact’. This collection of ten essays broadened Australia’s cultural cartography to include Afghans, Macassans, Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos and Malays and their intersections with both Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. Despite the depth and breadth of this volume, interest in, and writings on, Asian–Aboriginal encounters appears to have waned during the following decade. No parallel works appeared. Instead, the next fifteen or so years of scholarly production saw a reaffirmation of discrete Black, Chinese and White identities.

By contrast, from Dougie Young’s 1979 song *Treaty* to Jimmy Chi’s 1986 musical *Bran Nue Day*, Aboriginal cultural production during this period engaged with what Young called the ‘many different colours ... in the Aboriginal race’. Written in Kriol—a language which jostles Chinese, Malay and Aboriginal terms and set in Broome’s historic Sun Cinema, where Aborigines and Chinese once watched White film stars from the inferior seating reserved for non-Whites, *Bran Nue Day* brought Broome’s plural ancestries centre stage.

The past few years have seen fresh interest in Aboriginal–Asian encounters. As four of our contributors show, much of the impetus for this has come from people tracking the footprints linking them, and their children, to the journeys their parents or ancestors made from Asia to Australia and, in some cases, back again. In her chapter, ‘Kung Fu ... It Means Hard Work’, Hannah McGlade charts a slow and
often frustrating journey to piece together the itinerary of her maternal great-great-grandfather Ah Lee from Singapore to Western Australia in 1870s and into the life of her Nyungar great-great-grandmother. Archival records, news clippings, Chinese tombstone inscriptions, and family histories offered more clues than the silences she encountered in recent publications on Chinese in Australia.

As Gillian Cowl is shows in *Love against the Law: The Autobiographies of Tex and Nelly Camfoo* (Aboriginal Studies Press, 2000), bringing such stories to book is as much about the art of listening as it is about the craft of writing. Other recent publications which have furthered understanding of Aboriginal–Asian relations are *Asians in Australian History*, compiled by Regina Ganter in 1999, and *Mission Girls*, published by Christine Choo in 2000. Ganter’s volume challenges the ‘implied polarities of generalising terms like Asian, Chinese, Malay’ and emphasises the genealogies linking Indigenous Australia to Asia and the Pacific through two essays on Malay–Aboriginal relationships in Darwin and Broome. Similarly, Choo devotes one chapter of her book to missionary intervention in liaisons between Asian male labourers and Aboriginal woman, and highlights how these encounters became a focus on which missionaries and others played out their moral visions and religious prescriptions for the control of Aboriginal female sexuality.

Perhaps not surprisingly, it has been novelists, playwrights and artists who have, in recent years, best reflected the plurality and fluidity of contemporary Australian identities. Melissa Lucashenko, a Murri writer of Yugambeh/Bundjalung descent, peoples her books for young adults with characters to which they can relate: figures who are ‘not easily categorised racially and culturally’ But this reconfiguration of what Suvendrini Perera has termed Australia’s ‘cultural script’, examined here by Peta Stephenson in her chapter on contemporary Aboriginal–Asian arts, has eluded much of Australian mainstream media and political debate. In recent celebrations of nation and debates on reconciliation, the past two hundred years of Australian history and considerations of its future are too often depicted as a Black-White binary, with little reference to Asian peoples or influences.

This narrative was particularly apparent in lead editorials and opinion pieces celebrating the spirit of Federation in early 2001. In
one such piece, commentator Paul Kelly described Australia as ‘one of history’s most monocultural nations’ and Australia’s non-Aboriginal population as a ‘nation of Europeans’, ‘bonded by Christianity’, who were at once ‘shipwrecked at the bottom of Asia’ and ‘divided’ from that region by ‘culture and language’. Elsewhere, historian Geoffrey Blainey wrote of ‘the longstanding black’ camp with its ‘black nationalism’ and ‘the new white’ camp with its ‘white nationalism’. Excised from popular narratives of colonisation and elided in debates on reconciliation, Asian immigrants have become trapped in a conceptual conundrum. In the fantasy-land of Pauline Hanson, their presence is invoked en masse, as a sort of nouveau yellow peril, in discourses which conflate the conceptual Asian with a mass invasion of some hallowed White national space and conjured as gang-raiders of some imagined employment emporium. On the other hand, Asians are too often entirely squeezed out of the frame of contemporary negotiations on reconciliation.

As Curthoys notes, such readings of Australia, and the accompanying articulation of reconciliation in Australia as a Black-White binary with no conceptual room or political space for the immigrant, are a distinctly colonial legacy. In its contemporary manifestations, this binary is often mediated and maintained by Anglo-Celtic heirs to the colonial establishment in a way which replicates Johnson’s triptych on our cover.

Unlocking history-writing from these neat geometric formulas—whether we include the Anglo-Celtic gatekeeper, and speak of triangulations, or exclude it, and speak of binaries—requires the rejection of what Dipesh Chakrabarty terms the ‘conquest-paradigm’ of Australian history. This paradigm sees the contest for authorship of narratives of the past as a duet oscillating between conquered Aborigines and the conquering Anglo-Celtic, and takes the arrival of the First Fleet as the point of anchorage of Australia’s modern history. Drawing on the work of Gayatri Spivak, Chakrabarty argues for the merits of a colonisation paradigm, based not necessarily on ‘“shared histories” (as may be claimed between Settler and Native) but on the shared predicament of having been colonised (both politically and intellectually)’.

As we have seen, the predicament of colonialism is not one that can necessarily be equally or easily shared. In her reading of contemporary culture, Stephenson finds Asian characters portrayed by
Aboriginal writers as both the perpetrators of colonisation and its victims. In one work, for example, Japanese are described as invaders. Stressing their deviation from the common Anglo-Celtic ‘victimological or triumphalist’ narratives of nation, Stephenson reads such works as alternative histories whose positioning of Aboriginals and Asians in the same time, but at different places, offers space for reconciliation.

In their chapters for this volume, Jennifer Martiniello, John Ah Kit, Lucy Dann, and Hannah McGlade shed light on some of these shared experiences. Moving between past and present, China and Darwin, Japan and Broome, Singapore and Perth, and travelling through Irrawanyirri, Nyungar, Arrernte, and Yolngu space and time, these four writers signal the plural strands of personal history and individual identity which transcend state boundaries, tying Australia to Asia. Each uprooting, as Martiniello observed during our ‘Whitewash’ colloquium, brings a new planting elsewhere. One way in which scholars can meet the challenge of writing a ‘less minor history’ without creating a new ‘master narrative’, Hokari suggests, is by focusing on such points of convergence.

**Contact zones**

A leading trope in mainstream Australian historiography has been that of the ‘isolated continent’. In her chapter, Regina Ganter stresses the web of trading links between Darwin and the Torres Strait Islands with Indonesia and China and shows how, for the Yolngu of the Northern Territory, it was colonial legislation—in the form of a prohibition on Macassan visits from 1906 onwards—which inaugurated an era of isolation after centuries of trade with South Sulawesi.

A range of material evidence—from Netherlands East Indies coin excavated in the Kimberleys to seventeenth-century Qing dynasty shards in Arnhem land, and Macassan burial sites at Anuru Bay—testify to the longstanding presence of Macassans in Australia. Archaeologists David Bulbeck and Barbara Rowley have observed a striking contrast between material culture in the South Sulawesi and the repertoire that the Macassans brought with them, and emphasised the ‘major cultural reorientation’ that results from ‘the very act of moving into a contact situation’. In his study of Ramingining in Arnhem Land, Djon Mundine highlights the
multiple traces—in songs, words, ritual, and trees—evidencing the ‘productive inter-cultural relations ... forged over centuries’ between the Mildjingi and Ganalbingu, among other groups, and the Macassans. Such statements cohere with Hokari’s vision for a new contact history. Using the example of interactions between Indigenous peoples and Japanese pearl divers in Broome, Hokari suggests shifting our historical consciousness from the role played by Chinese, Japanese, and Aborigines in the making of Australia to the meeting places in which cross-cultural alliances were forged.

In her analysis of Aboriginal–Chinese sporting histories in Darwin, Julia Martínez considers one such site. Martínez charts the emergence of the sportsground in Darwin as one of many domains in which Chinese and Aboriginal identities intersected. ‘By playing football,’ she writes, ‘players of different ethnic backgrounds immersed themselves in a common identity and a common culture’ which was quite different from ‘the common culture imaged by White Australian assimilationists’. At the same time, Australian Rules football in Darwin took on the cultural influences of its Chinese, Aboriginal and European players each of whom fought for a sense of ownership of the game and strived to shape the game in their own way. Martínez’s findings echo with Ah Kit’s description of his father’s role in creating joint sporting events for Chinese and Aboriginals in 1950s Darwin, and with Ah Kit’s own memories of playing sport with Greeks, Italians, Chinese and non-Aboriginals in a Darwin where racism never ‘tapped you on the shoulder’.

In highlighting these intersections this volume also aims not only to encourage a geographic reorientation such as posed by Ganter, in her call for a new telling of Australian history from the top down, but also to invite a conceptual overhaul of the spaces within and between which Australia can be imagined in its present and its pasts, and so to further liberate imaginings of Australia from what Ghassan Hage has called the ‘White national space’. To Hage, this space, incorporating both racists and multiculturalists, is rooted in Anglo ‘fears of dispossession’ by ‘Australia’s new [Asian] unlanded gentry’. It is precisely that vision of a White national space which reverberates through the earlier mentioned columns of Australian media, in their frequently reiterated references to a ‘White’ or ‘Black’ Australia. Spatial metaphors are particularly apparent in allusions to overcrowding, swamping, floods of immi-
grants, waves of refugees. Proponents of the Anglo decline discourse, Hage asserts, feel threatened both by the ethnic balance within the dominant White paradigm of a White-dominated national space, and by the cosmopolitan elite, or ‘cosmopolite’: Australia’s new unlanded gentry, ‘megaurban’ figures without roots. This trope of rootlessness is all the more powerful in a ‘settler’ society, where the act of taking possession of land, dispossessing others, making one’s place in the land, through agricultural and pastoral work, engineering or industrial projects, was not only seen as a vital physical act, to maximise profits from the land, but also an important psychological act, emphasising the European impact on an alleged *tabula rasa*, and therefore leading to claims of colonial ownership and postcolonial legitimacy. Here perhaps more than anywhere else, Australian nationalism can be reduced to a binary comprising the ‘settler’ and the ‘itinerant’. But even this binary is unsettled by the figure of the Asian, whether the Chinese sojourner, the Japanese pearler, or the contemporary Asian cosmopolite.

Furthermore, in the era of globalisation, this cultural traffic is now moving, and looking, in different directions. As Stephenson shows, a growing number of Aboriginal artists, writers and musicians are exhibiting, working and performing in Asia, where they are engaging with artists from China, Indonesia, East Timor and elsewhere. In a reversal of the impact of Sulawesi and Macassan cultural activities within Australia, these outward journeys are forging new zones of cultural contact.

In an indication of the importance of place in Chinese culture, Martiniello relates how her paternal grandfather Edward (Ned) Chong named his daughter after his birthplace, Amoy (now Xiamen), in China. In Mayu Kanamori’s elegant photo-essay, the page of a yellowed registry of pearl divers, a wooden bungalow, and a Pokemon toy all become part of the past which became embedded in Lucy’s present as she journeys from Broome to find her father in Taiji. Reflecting on a reverse process—how Chinese lives became inscribed, or elided from, Australia’s sites of natural and official memory—Peter Read visits the bicentennial monument at Inverell. Finding the dominant White-Black binary sculpted into stone, stele and plaque, Read sees more meaningful memorials to the Chinese presence in such forms as a hand-dug tin mine on West Oak station north of Inverell. Designed to present an ethnographic record of
Inverell’s past, the Inverell monument simultaneously consigns that ethnographic life to the safety of the past, as reflected in the deployment of past tenses for its description of the Weraerae people, while all but erasing the substantial Chinese presence in this once thriving mining town.

**Sexual Frontiers**

Domestic spaces also offered key sites of convergence, and become important fields for the contestation and negotiation of Aboriginal-Asian identities. As Martiniello points out in her chapter, Chinese liaisons with Aboriginal woman were ‘an alliance of comfort, necessity, possibly even resistance, an alliance of survival between groups excluded by the dominant culture, politically, socially and culturally’. Such liaisons were anathema to twentieth-century assimilation policies which aimed to breed a White Australia. Bolstered by social Darwinism, schemes to absorb European–Indigenous offspring into the ‘White race’, and consign ‘pureblood’ Aborigines to isolation and eventual extinction had no room or place for what Neville called the ‘coloured population’. These ‘products’ of contact and intermarriage between Indigenous and Asian sojourners so troubled the architects of Australian race legislation that a series of measures were taken to restrict and prohibit contact between Asians and Aborigines—particularly Aboriginal women—in the workplace, the bedroom and even in marriage.

From 1897 on legislation was enacted to segregate Aborigines and Asians, and to place Aboriginal residents in a cultural, moral and racial quarantine on reserves. The isolation of Aboriginal women was seen as key to this exercise. One of the few spaces in which Aboriginal and Asians were allowed to come together was within White households, as domestic servants. Outside these White dominions, however, a series of laws forbidding Asians from marrying with Aborigines, or from employing Aborigines in their own homes or businesses, sought to keep Aborigines and Asians from inhabiting the same spaces. Much of the discourse surrounding such prohibitions was paternalistic, and centred on protecting Aborigines from unscrupulous Asian desires (sex, prostitution) and illicit substances (opium, alcohol).
Introduced after the fact, anti-miscegenation laws shattered families and ruptured existing unions. But, in her scrutiny of 1901 as a temporal frontier, Ann McGrath finds that these grand visions were not necessarily enforced on the ground, and that attempts to terminate relationships met with fierce resistance. By the turn of the century, McGrath shows, Queensland was only ‘barely White’, and many ‘colonisers’ were of non-Anglo-Celtic descent. Ironically, McGrath argues, it was the domestic unit—the microcosm of what the state hoped but failed to achieve—which provided the social framework within which Aboriginal women found protection from the draconian regimes of the Protectors. Cohabitation and inter-marriage with Chinese men, and their support of poverty-stricken Aborigines, created a system of what McGrath calls ‘community protection’. Resisting arrest, resisting categorisation, resisting state intervention—these were common threads of contempt for government which criss-crossed different ethnic groups in frontier communities, tying Chinese, Aborigines, and Anglo-Celtic in a shared resentment of state intrusion beyond the domestic frontier of the front stoop.

Despite great efforts to isolate them, as Ganter explains in her chapter, mixed populations emerged which challenged the ‘hegemony of Aboriginal protection policies’ and formed ‘close-knit communities’. Poly-ethnicity, and not-Whiteness, was the defining characteristic of both the smaller northern townships like Broome and Thursday Island, and such settlements as Malaytown in Cairns and police paddocks in Darwin. It was against such spaces that Anglo-Celtic Australia defined itself, to the extent that the ‘resulting siege mentality’ became the ‘defining moment of national consciousness’. While such psychoses stood at the core of the Anxious Nation, as defined in David Walker’s book of that title, people of Chinese–Aboriginal descent found themselves on the margins of both Aboriginal Australia and White Australia.

This positioning at the margins allowed the strategic exercise of ethnicity which could mean the partial escape from some of the harsher state policies directed at Aboriginals. Martiniello observes that most children of Chinese–Aboriginal descent in the far north of South Australia appear to have escaped state policies of child removal, and were left with their families. In other cases, however, it was precisely being positioned at the margins that made one
more vulnerable to such legislation. In several instances, schools became sites for racially-driven battles by White parents. Speaking out against mixed schooling in Darwin in 1912, where English, Chinese and Aboriginal children attended one school and shared the same classroom in Chinatown, one member of the House of Representatives declared that ‘I am quite prepared to have teaching given to the black and Chinese children, but I want them separated from whites’. Two years later, a separate school was set up for Aboriginals, and the Chinese children were placed in a separate class under a separate teacher. As Martiniello writes, it was ‘The degree of White blood in a child of mixed blood’ which was taken as the index of the child’s ‘redeemability’ and capacity to be ‘educated’, or trained in menial work for the benefit of the dominant culture. But colonialism and its aftermath was fraught with contradictions. In 1933, protests by the White community at Pine Creek resulted in the removal of part-coloured children from the local school, attended by White and Chinese children, to Alice Springs.

As McGrath demonstrates in her essay, a focal point of the legislation aimed at segregating Aborigines and Chinese, was the desire to control and monitor sexual relations between Aboriginal women and non-White men. Aboriginal–Chinese unions became problematic for colonial policy makers and early post-Federation policemen, McGrath ventures, not because they violated visions of racial purity, but because they created new competition for Aboriginal women, who were viewed as highly desirable. McGrath’s study is restricted to Queensland, but recent work by Christine Choo and Anna Haebich shows similar trends at work in Broome, Beagle Bay and in southern Western Australia, where White male administrators’ and missionaries’ desire to control and monitor the sexuality of Aboriginal women resulted in similarly complex legislation.

Although McGrath’s is the only essay in this volume which explicitly analyses the position of Aboriginal women and related gendered dimensions of control, the three highly individual contributions by Indigenous women writers each testify, in different voices and different stories, to the pivotal agency of Indigenous women in forming and sustaining relationships across racial boundaries, and in translating those relations into future generations through childbearing.
As Neville declared, if ‘assimilation is the desired end, the question of marriage is of paramount importance’. Neville berated the ‘carelessness’ of missionaries and clergy in ‘linking up people of ethnic unsuitability and against tribal laws’, citing in particular ‘the marriage of indentured Asiatics to native women’ as well as ‘Afghan and aboriginal unions’ which resulted in ‘desertion, destitution and prostitution’, Neville declared that ‘The Chinese who marries an aboriginal wife generally finds himself deserted by her in later years’. Several of our authors obliterate such stereotypes. John Ah Kit relates how his grandfather, Jimmy Ah Kit, fended off intrusive Native Welfare officers with a hoe, a rake and ‘a marriage certificate’. Others, particularly those whose unions were not sanctioned by such paperwork, retained family cohesion through strategies of evasion. For McGlade’s grandmother, the price of family unity was the denial of her Nyungar identity.

Identity: Politics?

As the above cameos show, identity choices were far more than matters of academic interest. Indeed, as several of our authors demonstrate, questions of which identity one assumed at a given moment in Australian history had enormous, and potentially tragic, ramifications for individual dignity, family unity, and basic citizenship rights which most Whites still take for granted. The colonial polarisation of race relations left little room for manoeuvre between Black and White identities. Against this background, political protest and the desire for justice contracted room for the expression of ethnic identifications.

‘Indigenous identities,’ Ganter tells us, ‘can be constructed in ways which confirm complex ancestries.’ It is true that at different points in recent history, identities have been strategically articulated to resist government intrusion into domestic lives. Up to the 1970s, as Stephenson shows, Aborigines of Asian descent secured citizenship rights and protected their children from unwanted state intervention in Queensland by claiming an exclusively Pacific Islander or Asian identity. By contrast, in recent years, pending Native Title claims have led people of mixed Indigenous–Asian descent to privilege their Aboriginal ancestry and renounce their Asian origins. In a point confirmed by Ah Kit’s proud embrace of his Aboriginal identity in his political life, Stephenson further suggests
that the invocation of an Indigenous corporeal identity might also serve as a powerful tool or tactical manoeuvre for the purposes of political mobilisation and agitation.

Recognition of the political climate and injustices that have forced or encouraged such choices is important. But many of the stories in this volume indicate that the denial or celebration of distinct identities is highly complex, and never purely reactive. Indeed, it would be both simplistic, and disrespectful to the extraordinary courage, resilience, and force of personality guiding many of the life-choices of Indigenous and Asian protagonists in these stories, and their offspring, to read their motivations and identifications in terms of simple economic gain or political expediency.

Martiniello recalls how her grandfather decided not to pass on Chinese language and cultural values to his children, preferring them to learn English, the ‘language of power’. Before leaving his baby Lucy and her Bardi-Jarwi mother in Broome for his hometown of Taiji, Lucy’s Japanese father asked a Bardi-Jarwi man to ‘look after’ and ‘mind’ his daughter. Dann’s Bardi-Jarwi stepfather gave Lucy a strong sense of ‘where we come from, who we are, our identity’, while at the same time concealing her Japanese origins. As a child, Lucy was made to feel different by both schoolyard taunts and innocent questions, while growing up at a time when ‘authorities told us what our identities were supposed to be’ further confused her sense of identity.

While scholars and politicians may quibble over the terminology and ideologies of multiculturalism, to Dann, ‘multicultural’ is a way of being, and is how she has felt since recently meeting for the first time with her Japanese father and family in Taiji. Indeed, an identification as multicultural eases the tension between Dann’s sense of individuality, on the one hand, and her identification as an Aboriginal, a Bardi, a Japanese or an Australian which necessarily involves an assertion of ‘sameness’ with other groups.

In contrast to Aborigines of northern Australia who are ready to recognise and identify with Asian ancestry, Peter Read reflects in his chapter, very few people of mixed Chinese–Indigenous descent living in southern Australia openly identify with their Chinese ancestry. Instead, Koori identity is privileged above all else. For John Ah Kit, the two identities are easily reconciled. Knowledge of his
plural roots, writes Ah Kit, has never detracted from ‘the absolute primacy of [his] Aboriginality’ or that of his family, past and present.

**Reconciliation?**

In the 1990s, following the rise of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party, and its platform against both Aboriginal land rights and Asian immigration, Chinese who had once regarded themselves as essentially, racially or socially ‘different’ to Aborigines began to see themselves more in relation to Aborigines and other people of colour in Australia. As Helen Sham-Ho writes, John Howard’s refusal to apologise was another external factor encouraging a strong sense of unity between Asian and Aboriginal approaches to reconciliation. For Sham-Ho, former Member of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, reconciliation is about ‘bringing together all Australians from diverse backgrounds’ and ‘building a bridge between the First Peoples and newcomers by creating understanding and respect between different communities’.

As recent truth and reconciliation commissions in South Africa and East Timor have demonstrated, reconciliation also involves reconciling different versions of the past in ways which cohere with a vision for the future in which all people can enjoy difference with dignity, and find dignity in difference.

Reconciliation is a conversation between the past and the future, mediated by the present. Curthoys has described it as an uneasy conversation. It is not quite clear when the conversation started, or how it will end. Like Hokari, we do not intend to make this conversation any easier. As Martiniello reminds us, words—our scholarly tools of recovery and excavation—can bury as well as bring to light: the act of naming what is lost, through the foreign register of an English tongue, can inscribe its loss in painful ways.

Our aim here is not to ‘fill in the blanks’ so as to present a finished, coherent view of history: to our mind, history must always be an unfinished conversation, in which we are constantly chasing voices in the wind. Rather, this volume envisions Australia past and present as a soundscape which holds many spaces for many voices, where hushed secrets, lone shouts, mixed whisperings and song resonate alongside political pronouncements, government decrees and police dispatches. These are no lost ghosts or forgotten stories.
As McGlade reminds us, men like her great grandfather Ah Lee live on through their Aboriginal descendents.

Notes

1 National Library of Australia, Oral History Transcript 3245: Diana Giese Interview with Bishop George Tung Yep, 19 April 1995.


9 Prasenjit Duara, Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).


11 Several of the interviews with Chinese Australians conducted by Diana Giese for the National Library of Australia in the 1990s, and an interview conducted by Ann McGrath in 1988 for the NLA’s 1938 Oral History Project, also contain important information on Chinese attitudes to Aboriginal–Asian relations in the last century.


16 Geoffrey Blainey, ‘A Big Land Searches for a Big Enough Identity’, in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 November 2001, p. 13. To these were added a third element: not Australia’s historic Asian population, but the environmental lobby and its ‘Green nationalism’.


21 Hage, *White Nation*.


As Strands of Plaited Music
My Chinese-Aboriginal-Anglo Heritage

JENNIFER MARTINIELLO

You ask me what I know about this story-telling business, but all I can tell you is about this kid on the cart asleep. His youngest sister is with him to keep him awake at this predawn hour, half his day already worked. He’s delivering bread from the bakery at the Chinese Gardens down by Hookey’s Waterhole. After school it’ll be the fruit and veg.

He slouches, drives, dozes under the brim of his hat, this one camel-hide workday, schoolday, from the Afghan camp further down the creek. His Sunday hat is felted, taut, from the white-fella store in town. A privilege earned by his father’s usefulness to others, others with power. Like his and his brothers’ and sisters’ some-days presence at the one-room schoolhouse on the outskirts of town. They like margins of colour, border countries, slotted between the white columns of a learning page. Squeezed by the loops of a language scrawled inkwise into blotches that spread across margins like a tidal erasure, invading comprehension, vision.

English is the language of power, his father says, we speak only that in this house. His father is a man of insight and intention motivated by experience ... of deep and abiding vision. His mind an inevitable journey beyond his escape from the stormy mid-chop of another century, another continent, to land somewhere at the top end of another and the long walk south. The skinny kid behind the reins is still sleeping, soon to wake. Language to him and his sister is not their father’s, nor even mostly their mother’s three Central Desert
languages. It is a sea of currents, each one with its own swell and syntax, direction, salt to bite the tongue, plankton to nourish. A self-sustaining ecology of thought, word and image stirred about now and then by the vividness of their father’s own pictographic tongue in moments of frustration and anger. The old man a bony stick close to skeletal, stirring up a sluggish waterhole.

Yet this kid on the cart, asleep and alive, the youngest son, is the one who will continue his father’s journey. From the top end of a red gibber ocean to walk south, to another place to cultivate where he will, in turn, replant his roots in new country, go on telling, being the story. Seed and grow an ecology, plants, trees, place that will grow him and go on growing him ...

And how do I know all this? Because I am one of them—I am his story, and his father’s story, and many others besides; as I am my own, and my children’s and my grandchildren’s. This is Dreaming. It is Tjukurrpa.

In the beginning before everything was made the earth was soft. Fluid. Formless. The Ancestors moved across the land, inscribing the tracks of their journeys in the hills and plains, the mountains, deserts, forests, lakes, the creeks and rivers that they created. When their work was done and they had given the cosmos form and life, they sent their spirits into the rocks, the trees, the waters, the earth herself, the sun and moon and Milky Way. These places are spirit, sacred life, source, being. They are creation and continuum, they are story without end, the earth their living library. Tjukurrpa.

The ground of the story-teller is defined by its ambiguity, its resistance to nails, fixation, incarceration by space-time isobars. By the imposition of alien topographic rescription. Erasure.

I am my father’s story and his father’s, and many others besides. The ears of a page are multiple as Ancestors. Malleable. Soft as earth waiting for the journeys that will shape and nourish, give form and spirit, language. Waiting for the story to speak, listening for Creation. Like the words of that other old Elder from my country who never knew my grandfather, not even of the same race, but whose eyes see with
his vision—whose language has never been ruled by margins and yet, in the eyes of the world, fills only those:

*We gotta own 'em, now, those white-fella marks on paper. We gotta take them marks and make 'em run together like the dots and circles, the tracks and rivers and beings that live together on that bark. We gotta show that's who we are, how we live. Them white-fella pages Tjukurrpa too, now, because it's us mob that's making the marks on 'em—markings of ourselves like we've always been, like we'll go on being, tracing our tracks on the paper ... That's how we gotta speak our place in that world where people paint the journeys by writing on pages.*

I am bark, engraved by the continuous cartography of my peoples, their histories—I am Dream. The unsilenced. The ink that runs from the tongues of languages to their inscriptions in print, paper, minds.'

Thus begins my story, a story of Chinese, Aboriginal and Anglo heritages interwoven as plaited strands of music. My paternal grandfather, Edward (Ned) Chong, was born around 1853 in a place called Amoy in China. He preserved this scrap of personal history for future generations by giving his daughter, my aunt, the name of May Amoy, who in turn handed it down to her daughter. I say scrap, because in the years my father and his brothers and sisters were growing up, my grandfather steadfastly refused to speak Chinese. My father recalls that only on the rare occasions when Chinese visitors came to the market gardens at Hookey's Waterhole did he ever hear his father speak his own language. Amoy no longer exists on Chinese maps. It was renamed Tzse Ming after the Revolution, and is now known as Xiamen.

As family oral history records, Ned Chong ran away from China at the age of twelve. He worked his way to Australia on a fishing trawler, got off somewhere at the Top End and walked south. My Auntie May recalls the story he told her when she was still a young girl. His mother had been a Chinese American woman, although how and when she and his father met and married is unknown. Possibly he himself had followed the work to America in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, later to return home with a bride. She left him and returned to America when my grandfather was
about ten, and when he began seeking his comfort in opium, the young Ned ran away.

We know he arrived in Darwin, probably lived and worked with a Chinese family for a time, either in a market garden or a store of some kind. He later showed his entrepreneurial skills with both. At some point thereafter his father also arrived in Darwin looking for him to persuade him to go home. He refused and his father went home to China. This story would indicate that his father had some means at his disposal to make such a journey. Informed speculation suggests it may have come from some type of family enterprise. We know that at the outbreak of World War II, Ned’s (possibly only surviving) relative, an uncle, died in Hong Kong and bequeathed to him a shop and business, which inheritance he refused. My father recalls him saying that his life and country were Australia and he wanted no more to do with China. However, it is likely that he may have had connections to Chinese people in Darwin through his uncle when he first arrived in Australia.

Much of my grandfather’s story remains tracks that have stayed unmapped. At some time in his twenties he is recorded as being in Adelaide, working for a Chinese market gardener there. A portrait of him was taken during those years that shows a young man, probably in his late twenties or early thirties, dark hair pulled back in a pigtail, Chinese cap, and Western waistcoat, shirt, tie and jacket. His trousers and boots are scuffed and marked by work. An eloquent portrait of the socio-economic status of a Chinese immigrant around the 1880s—between cultures, societies, classes. The expression is self-composed, determined, with the eyes of a man with an unrelinquished vision.

Two further things stand out in this portrait. It was probably taken outdoors by a travelling photographer rather than in a studio, as the European landscape backdrop folds at the base, revealing bare earth beneath. The draped armchair on which his right elbow leans is scuffed and tattered at the base. Both indicate that the portrait was taken somewhere outside of what would have been the city of Adelaide at the time in a working class setting. And secondly, there is a watch chain draped across his chest, the fob in his pocket. Ownership of a watch and watch chain in those times was a dominant culture (Anglocentric) symbol of affluence. The type, design, length, were indicators of one’s status. His was Mexican sil-
ver, more affordable than gold, but not the least expensive. As I have inherited it, it is well worn, dented in places, inscribed with the simplest of linear motifs along the longest links, but still solid, an item purchased for its durability but with an eye for quality. Often it is the small things that give us the deepest insights into the character.

In 1878 the Overland Telegraph began construction, from Adelaide, north in stages, to Alice Springs. It was followed in the next two decades by the railroad. Many Chinese worked on both, and there are stories that attest to my grandfather’s experiences on both. Many Chinese formed liaisons with Aboriginal women, an alliance of comfort, necessity, possibly even resistance, an alliance of survival between groups excluded by the dominant culture, politically, socially and culturally. At some time in the journeying north my grandfather met his countryman, and business partner, Cherry Ah Chee, who was my grandmother’s first husband. Cherry had arrived from China with his brother, date unknown. Cherry’s brother settled in Broome in Western Australia where many of his descendants still live.

Historical records of Oodnadatta show that the Chinese Gardens, as the market gardens were called, were already established at Hookey’s Waterhole by 1898. Ned Chong and Cherry Ah Chee worked the market gardens in partnership until Cherry’s death by suicide in 1911. My grandmother, Minnie, was left a widow with five small children and another on the way. On the first day of April, 1913, she and Ned Chong were married in Oodnadatta. My father Richard (Dick) Chong was born in January, 1914, and his sister, May Amoy, in May, 1921. My grandfather would have been in his sixties when his children were born, yet he raised all eight children, educated them, and inculcated each with his vision, his strength, his tenacity to achieve something better than the socio-political mandates of the time said they could.

My grandmother was Minnie Bell, an Arrernte woman born at Charlotte Waters on the Finke River in 1878. Her story is still a journey I continue to trace. How she came to be with Cherry Ah Chee, how she came to make the long walk from Charlotte Waters to Oodnadatta, her people, her family. Her first language was Alyerntarrpe. She also spoke Pertame, and at least two other Arrernte languages. She passed these on to her children, as well as her traditional knowledge of family, skin and kinship, bush tucker and cultural skills. All
this, despite my grandfather's dictate that only English, the lan-
guage of power, would be spoken in the home. An old Auntie, my 
father's eldest brother's half sister, in her mid-eighties who now 
lives in Kalgoorlie, tells me that all the children grew up speaking 
three of their mother's languages. Also that my grandmother had a 
sister who used to visit the Chinese Gardens from time to time. She 
remembers her sitting in the kitchen telling stories. She tells me 
also that my father and my Auntie Minnie have their mother's calm 
and gentle nature.

It is probable that my grandmother's name, Minnie, was an 
Anglicised version of her Aboriginal name. There are several possi-
bilities as to what it may have been. But the power of the dominant 
culture was such that even our people's names were not left to 
them, any more than their countries, their languages, or their chil-
dren. My grandmother's father was an Irishman who worked, as far 
as I can ascertain, on the Telegraph. His surname was Bell, I have no 
first name to go with it. My father remembers his visits. A big, tall 
Irishman with a flaming red beard who picked him up and sat him 
on his knee and told him stories. Whatever his relationship with my 
grandmother's mother, a full-blood Arrernte woman whose name I 
have not yet uncovered, it must have been one of sufficient affec-
tion, duration and personal meaning for him to have kept contact 
with his daughter and grandchildren over the years and distances. 
But then, as history tells us, the Irish were also on the bottom of the 
socio-cultural ladder, often spurned, or regarded with suspicion, by 
the dominant English society of the time.

That my grandmother was respected and liked in Oodnadatta, as 
indeed my grandfather became, is a curious phenomenon attested 
to by the recollections of those growing up in Oodnadatta during 
those years. In Horrie Simpson's Oodnadatta,² known as the 'Oodna-
datta Book', she is referred to as a 'gentle coloured woman', a 
description old and well used over time, and an expression denoting 
respect for those times when referring to (the rare) Aboriginal 
women accepted into White society. In becoming so, she defied the 
social mores and boundaries of race, place (class and position) and 
politics. The photographs and stories of both my grandparents in 
the Oodnadatta Book paint a portrait of well-respected members of 
an otherwise White community. My grandfather's entrepreneurial 
flare had much to do with it. After the railhead was established at
Oodnadatta he expanded the market gardens to include a piggery, later a bakery, and then a butcher’s shop. He made himself and his family, who worked in all of these, indispensable to the survival of the community, Black, White and Afghan alike.

This is perhaps part of the reason my father, aunts and uncles were left to grow up with their lives and heritages at least fundamentally intact. I have only speculations as to why my father and his siblings were never taken. There was a children’s home, a halfway place, at Oodnadatta. Children of mixed blood were taken from surrounding stations and communities to the home in Oodnadatta and kept there for varying periods of time before being shipped off to the Colebrook Home, south at Quorn (which later moved to Adelaide), or north to homes in Darwin or Croker Island. Many never made it back. Those who did came back as adults, often with children of their own, to find parents and grandparents already gone. But apart from my grandfather’s role and attendant status, there is another, more sinister reason why they may have been left alone.

The historical records of White Australia are grim. They show a prolonged history of policies and practices that dehumanised Aboriginal people and demonised the Chinese. Policies for removal of children were based on a fundamental premise arising from the theory of Social Darwinism. Full-blood Aboriginals were deemed savage, heathen and uneducable. The degree of White blood in a child of mixed blood was the measure of ‘redeemability’, of the capacity of the child to be ‘educated’, or trained in menial work for the benefit of the dominant culture. But Chinese blood was definitely undesirable, being regarded as ‘tainted’. I have not found anyone researching this, but I know that some children with Chinese ancestry were also taken in some states. To what degree their Chinese ancestry might have been physically apparent, or even known by the authorities, I do not know. However, of the children of Chinese–Aboriginal descent from that region of the far north of South Australia, it seems that at least most of them were left with their families. Innuendoes of this have underscored my search for family history over the years. The poem below illustrates this:
Lost in the Whitewash

Lunch in Alice

I sit under the Red Label umbrella of an urban mask to hear sky, water, tree, place the stories of my country from old voices rusting to the red of blood and earth; I hear half a memory sliced between the rough-grain of which one’s daughter never came back, that one’s son laid out on concrete in a barred coffin, three this year like slabs of fresh young meat spoiled by the hotplate; hear the half of another, how yellow paints other meat like quiet poison and preserves it from white heat.

At Roxby Downs and Lucas Heights, Jabiluka and the ANU they paint black symbols on a yellow ground to denote danger from fall-out; I hear two old grandmothers whose voices clack and creak and whirr on softly, old technology drawing up artesian water millennia-old to quench my thirst.

The courtyard dims, grows heavy under dark cloud; it’s Lightning Brother weather but we don’t go in. The waitress brings out sandwiches—shredded lettuce, sliced tomato, pressed meats between brown multigrain on white plates.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that my father and his siblings were allowed to take their place in the one-room schoolhouse and gain an education reserved in those days for White children because of my grandfather’s standing and contribution to the community.

My paternal grandparents are buried at Oodnadatta. Until recently their graves remained unmarked, Aboriginal way, until the
Aboriginal Progress Association raised money to begin restoring the old cemetery as part of an historical project. My father says that when his father reached ninety he stopped counting. By his reckoning, when Ned Chong died in 1949, he was about 108 years old, although his gravestone records his age as ninety-six. If my father is right, my grandfather’s year of birth would have been before 1850. My grandmother, Minnie Chong, died in 1954, aged seventy-five. The heritage both left to their children perhaps in many ways defies transcription. The vision, talents, tenacity, endurance of body, mind and spirit, patience and forbearance. But their heritages, as those of the dominant culture, live on, overtly and covertly.

My father, Dick (Richard) Chong, changed his surname to Longmore in the 1930s when he went to Adelaide because he couldn’t get work with a dark skin and a Chinese surname. With an Anglo name he found work as a storeman and packer for John Martin’s department store. As a teenager his father had sent him south to board at Adelaide Boys High School to complete his education. He never talked much about that brief time. He played tennis for the school, and cricket, and won trophies for the school for both. But he left at the end of the first year and went home again. He said he was homesick. At home he ran the businesses, doing the bookwork and accounting before leaving again for Adelaide in his early twenties. In the late 1930’s he played Sheffield Shield cricket for South Australia. In 1942, already in the army, he married Betty Joan Wallbridge, eldest daughter of Harry and Daisy Wallbridge, English migrants to Australia in 1910, of English, Scottish, and French heritages.

My paternal grandparents approved of their son’s choice of a bride, and my mother went to stay with them at Oodnadatta during their engagement, travelling up on the old Ghan with my father when he was on leave. The bonds forged then between my mother and my father’s brothers and sisters have remained close and caring through the years, despite the distances. My grandfathers shared much in common. Both avid gardeners whose labour had fed their own families and their respective communities in hard times, they swapped seeds and plants, and (organic) growing and fertilising secrets. Both were highly respected and played leading roles in the wellbeing of their communities, and had left a parent country with little more than a vision and the skills in their hands to achieve them.
My maternal grandmother, Daisy Wallbridge, was also a woman of vision. She read Plato, the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* by lamplight under the canvas of the migrants’ camp tent they lived in when they first arrived off the boat from England. Later my grandfather, Harry Wallbridge, son of a painter and interior decorator, established himself as a builder and built many of the old homes in Adelaide as the city expanded towards the hills and along the coast. My grandmother would tell me how frightened she was of the Aboriginal people who came down from the hills to peer in through the windows of their house when it was first built, the only house in the middle of miles of open paddocks in what is now classed as an inner-Adelaide suburb. She never told me what she thought when my mother first brought my father home for them to meet. I know she resisted the match until my grandfather thumped the table and told her to let the girl get married!

For his part, my mother's father grew up learning, living and passing on community as he learned it from his father. *Look after your family, your extended family, and then your community.* He taught his children never to judge a person by the colour of their skin, the creed they believed in, or the clothes they wore. Hospitality was forged on the motto that there was always enough for everybody, no matter how much or how little you had, of food in the pantry or faces at the door. My father couldn't have found a finer meeting of life-world creeds than the common ground forged between the one he'd grown up with and that of his father-in-law's family. Under today's political populist blanket, it is worthwhile remembering that roots like these keep putting up shoots and seeds that will keep on growing 'til they get to the sunlight. Contrived silences have only ever been that, and are meant to be shattered.

In defiance of her Victorian upbringing, my grandmother Daisy pushed out the boundaries of 'her social place', became the first woman of her era and social (working) class in her area to pursue photography as a 'hobby', setting up a developing room in the bathroom, and stage-managed her daughters to musical achievements and careers that went well beyond the acceptable drawing room etiquette for young ladies of the time. My mother was a Licentiate of the London College of Music by fifteen, had her own children's
radio show at sixteen (in 1936), with shelves of medals and cups for performances as a pianist and a mezzo soprano. My father shared none of these pursuits, but willingly stayed home with me and my grandfather while my mother and grandmother went to the theatre, opera and various performances, until I was old enough to go too.

My aunts also went when they came down to Adelaide from up north, and in many ways my grandmother Daisy took them under her wing as daughters, and shepherded them as she thought young ladies ought to be. The cultural exchanges that were often initiated under the guise of ‘women’s business’ are hard to estimate, but should never be underestimated. In retrospect, she became (unknowingly) an agent in my grandfather Ned’s vision for his children—a vision that stretched from the muddy banks of a waterhole in the middle of a red gibber desert to a place of safety, respectability and substance in the society of power. A vision, nonetheless, that was her own, too, having come from the bottom of the class structure in England, being in service as a downstairs maid.

True to her vision, and my grandfather Ned’s, my grandmother Daisy knew that language was the key to power. She never ceased her self-education. She read philosophy, poetry, and her favourites, dictionaries and encyclopaedias. Just as Grandpa Ned forbade the speaking of any language other than English in the home, and sent my father to school in Adelaide to complete his education, my grandmother began my education in the language of power at an early age by reading the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* to me in lieu of bedtime stories. Granddad Harry and Grandma Minnie I believe also shared something fundamental across the distances of culture, gender and race. Both lived their lives, and taught others, according to a profound belief in the existence of a core set of principles that ordered all life, and made all things possible. Their adherence to those principles, as each perceived them to be irrespective of their source, is the ground from which visions are grown and given wings. Their visions are still in flight.

The boy on the cart sits, dozes, drives his regular morning and afternoon routes between places, stations of the crossings between worlds that are held to their placements consciously and unconsciously, ritualistically. He doesn’t yet
know what waking means. Nor his sister, who leaves the guiding to the horse that knows these routes as well as the winds and the cross-currents know theirs. Her eyes are adrift with the high eagles on the currents, with the clouds and the unbidden stories of their shapes, seeing dreams. They relax into the slow, mesmeric rhythms of the cart wheels, their bodies pulse against air and sky, like prayers pushed heavenward by the eternal rotations of transported Buddhist dharma wheels. Half a century those wheels will turn and turn and turn, plying the stony red tracts of place and lives for blessings. But the boy will wake before then, his time of indenture one fifth of that. His share of the blessings counted in the magic that the marks of a language can manifest, despite their desert flatness.

His blessings are the catapult that launches me, his and others’. My flight is language-borne. Pictographic only in the clash of cadences, the intaglio of phrase, the impact of Dream against walls of theoretical construction, against immunities boosted by regular intraveinals of synthetic power. But then, these are but the tools of the story-teller. And as I am story and page, so am I also keeper and teller. You ask me about this story-telling business, but all I can tell you is how the motes before my eyes float up to the light like fire-flies to the night sky in shafts, columns of sparks from the fire-dancers in the circles of the wind. How the world is circle, wind, place, page and page and turn and turn about the hub of scripted vertebrae—the unending choreography of an ancestral score. How I am music and step.

My granddaughter learns Irish dancing. Born to it, a natural! Her teachers say. They the transcriptions of a choreography, she a radiant sprite, skipping, twirling, her feet trilling the air like a bird high on joy. Her great-great-grandmother’s totem was a bird. I forget its Alyerntarre name, but I have the air of it in my head. I never use its Anglo name, the register of it flattens its tune on the tongue. Naming it inscribes its loss. In my ancestral country, Grandmother’s Law is the passage of knowledge from grandparent to grandchild. It is many things, many stories—sand, dance, voice, gesture, stone and basket, ochre, feather, bird and plant, animal and tree, and water. A bequest of tongues. It is the continuity of identity, an inheritance of the spirit. In Tjukurrpa she is named by her great-great-grandmother’s skin.
With how many languages can a child’s feet speak, her spirit vibrant in the air of her selves? She is my story, and her mother’s and my grandmother’s stories, and many more besides—music born for the air of the high currents—still fledgling. She dances the wheel of our lives, the reverberating revolutions of our languages that are never silent. She is their resilience, their invocations, their answer...  

Notes


Lost in the Whitewash
The Golden Thread of Kinship
Mixed Marriages Between Asians and Aboriginal Women During Australia's Federation Era

ANN McGRATH

According to the first prime minister of Australia, Edmund Barton, the present and future nation of Australia was united by the 'crimson thread of kinship'. Coined by Henry Parkes, the phrase was also used by Alfred Deakin and numerous contemporary politicians and authors. The words were even emblazoned on the huge triumphal arch of the Commonwealth erected for the Federation ceremonies of 1901. First deployed to blanket the flames of competition between Victoria and New South Wales, this slippery allegory came to convey a common bond between people of all the Australian colonies, based upon a shared origin or descent from a distant British community. The thread paired the race metaphor 'blood' with kin, family and colour. Historical ties and 'blood' bonds were evoked to define a community imagined on the basis of an extended family model. This was to be governed by White male patriarchs and bound together with a united purpose.

Increasingly 'the crimson thread' thus came to stand for racial and cultural homogeneity. Slavery and the Civil War had nearly destroyed the 'Great Republic' of America and left a legacy of a people thought 'never to be assimilated' in their own nation. In Australia, race riots and bitterness had occurred against the Chinese on the goldfields. To Henry Parkes, cultural similitude was 'a question of policy of the first magnitude' that would effectively 'cement society together by the same principles of faith and jurisprudence, the same influence of language and religion, and the same national habits of life'. It was as if citizenship could only be
exercised by cultural groups considered to hold existing seats in the house of modernity. In his 1901 speech on White Australia, Alfred Deakin thus envisaged familial and cultural models for the new state:

A united race means not only that its members can intermarry [my italics] and associate without degradation on either side, but implies one inspired by the same ideas, and an aspiration towards the same ideals, of a people possessing the same general cast of character, tone of thought—the same constitutional training and traditions—a people qualified to live under this constitution, the broadest and most liberal perhaps the world has yet seen reduced to writing: a people qualified to use without abusing it, and to develop themselves under it to the full height and extent of their capacity.²

This rhetoric of nation, however, conflicted with the everyday realities of peoples' lives in Australian communities.

This chapter reflects upon the moments of state intrusion into mixed Aboriginal and Asian families in Queensland from the time when anti-miscegenation laws first began to be enforced in 1901. Via the archival record of state surveillance, we enter the lands of the rainforest and Cape dwellers, the Kuku-Yalanji, the Yidinjdi, the Djirbalngan, the Wargamaygan, the Kaantju and many other linguistic groups.³ The situation in Western Australia or the Northern Territory is not explored here, as strict enforcement of marital restrictions in these states occurred during later decades.⁴ In the newly ordained state of Queensland, administrators were trying to stop new cultural worlds being created on the frontier. Such coloniser worlds had been facilitated by the invasion of an Aboriginal-populated Australia and the later importation of cheap Pacific and Asian indentured labour from different regions of mainland China and Southeast Asia. Employers of all types, but especially those running sugar and tobacco plantations, had imported tens of thousands of workers from the 1860s onward. Employers still argued that coloured labour was essential to maintain international competitiveness in the marketplace.⁵ Contemporary scientists doubted White men's ability to survive in the tropics and White women's capacity to thrive and reproduce. Others feared that the tropics might create a 'degenerate' Anglo race with dark skins. On different
grounds, White Australian labour interests and the union movement feared competition in both cheap Asian labour and as mutual employers of (even cheaper) Aboriginal labour.

In the north, Australia's crimson thread of kinship had already taken on a multi-coloured surface. In northern Queensland, where mines, tropical plantations and maritime industries were based upon imported coloured labour, significantly larger non-White populations resided than in the southern cities. 'Coloured aliens' were a significant portion of the population and there were few non-Aboriginal women. By the turn of the century, Queensland's reliance upon coloured (mostly male) labour precipitated strong debate, especially amongst planters and allies, about whether this colony would be disadvantaged by joining the federal movement. Compromises were reached, but now that the colonies had agreed to unite, the rainbow had to be reined in and neutralised.

Aboriginal communities, dispossessed of their land, were looking towards new options for survival, including opportunities to establish reciprocal relations with the newcomers and their food supplies. Later, they were attempting to avoid lives under government scrutiny on reserves. The extremely high masculinity ratio of the British, European, Pacific, Chinese and Southeast Asian populations created a strong demand for local Aboriginal woman. A national drive towards Whiteness, however, required surveillance not only of external relations and immigration policies, but also of the most intimate family relations. In evolving frontier communities grappling with cross-cultural family, kinship and social structures, such policing met with conflicting community reactions.

Race panic
Immediately after Australian Federation, race anxiety prevailed. While a plummeting birth rate had rocked much of the western world, in this lightly populated new nation, it posed a symbolic, if not an actual, threat to British Australian sovereignty. Fears of 'Asian hordes' and anxiety over defending its vast coastline were amplified by a colonising ideology premised upon filling the vast 'empty' spaces of a land occupied on the basis of terra nullius or unoccupied wasteland. Race panic led to the call for the first Royal Commission to be formed after Federation—an enquiry into the Decline of the Birthrate. Demographers across the British Empire and in the
United States were busy studying population statistics in order to assess racial sturdiness. In keeping with an international movement, Australia complemented the immigration restrictions of its White Australia policy with an internal eugenicist drive. Although policies were based on a domestic paternalistic model where the state stepped in as father, Australian administrators had inadequately considered what might constitute 'Aboriginal protection.' In frontier communities, further tensions derived from mutual dependence and competition between ethnic communities. Second and third generation mixed families presented particular problems to colonial administrators as they defied neat definition by either 'blood' or racial category.

When marital regulations were enforced, the rights of the husband, and the 'sanctity' of male rights in marriage were invoked. A sense of fairplay for any husband who dutifully performed his anticipated labour role as breadwinner flavoured contemporary debates. A culturally western notion of marriage and 'civilised' or 'modern' habits were considered prerequisites to entering such a contract. As Queensland's Aboriginal Protector Archibald Meston pontificated:

> Much depends on the degree of civilisation to which the woman has attained to [sic] as also is the character of the man. If she is above the ordinary type of 'Gin' and if both he and she would recognize the responsibilities it might be well to insist on legal marriage.

While removal of the 'primitive' was required to ensure that the new urban centres were truly 'civilised', the new protectionist rhetoric deployed a language of paternal care. The same kind of logic precluded Aboriginal people from citizenship in the newly federated Commonwealth.

In 1897, the Queensland government introduced the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act*. Prior to introduction of the act, policies vis-à-vis Aboriginals had been implemented by the militaristic Queensland Native Police force—run by Whites but manned by Aborigines. This was now replaced by a system that included a Protector of Aborigines for the North and South of Queensland, each of whom were given wide powers, under the Act, over the movement, residence and activities of Aboriginal people. The missionary and humanitarian lobby had argued that
the government must do something to protect Aborigines from exploitation, disease and substance abuse. The Chinese population of North Queensland was accused of having a particularly bad impact on the Aboriginal population, and blamed for the spread of such ills as opium addiction and disease. The opium clauses in the 1897 Act signalled state intentions to segregate Aboriginal people from Chinese men, their 'vices' and the threat of racial admixture.

Queensland's first Aboriginal 'protection' legislation represented a radical policy departure. In order to curb the high Aboriginal disease and death rates, the Act aimed to segregate Aboriginal men and women from 'Asiatics' and their now illicit drugs and to stop 'immoral' (sexual) association with White men. The Act contained powers to remove and relocate Aboriginal people onto specified reserves away from their traditional lands. Protective policies thus replaced the earlier militaristic policies designed to guard settlers from Aborigines. Now it was local White policemen living in frontier communities who were required to act as the frontline of the new policies.

Under the Act, the state had wide powers over the private lives of White and Asian men who mixed with Aboriginal people. Chinese were prohibited from gaining permits to employ Aborigines. Whether humane in their dealings with Aboriginal people or not, Chinese colonists were tarred by the opium/degradation brush and the new legislation caused them to be under greater surveillance for any association whatever with Aboriginal people. Eugenics considerations regarding cohabitation between Whites, Chinese and Aborigines were even more prominent in the next Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act of 1901. A key impact (if not a major intention) of the 1897 and 1901 legislation was that White men gained an advantage over Chinese men in both the employment of cheap Aboriginal labour, and access to Aboriginal women partners.

In the United States of America, the main thrust of anti-miscegenation law in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was directed towards prohibiting intermarriage or extra-marital relations between 'Negroes' and 'Caucasians'. However, in the western states of America, Asian–White intermarriage was also prohibited. Those states most affected by gold rushes and subsequent waves of Chinese migration included California, Oregon, Nevada, Idaho, Utah, Arizona, Wyoming, Montana, Nebraska and Missouri. While Oregon, Nevada and Idaho introduced their first
prohibitions in the 1860s, most legislation was first introduced in the 1900s or 1910s. Around the same time, racial categorisations were becoming more ‘scientific’. In 1901, California introduced restrictive measures for the first time and in Arizona, too, its statutes were reworded from the looser category ‘Whites’ to ‘Persons of Caucasian blood or their descendants’.

In eleven states of America, ‘Mongolian’ or ‘Chinese’ races were prohibited from marrying the ‘Caucasian’ or ‘White’ races. While some states restricted Native American–White intermarriage, marriage between Chinese and Native Americans was not prohibited.

As in the United States, most Chinese immigrants to Australia were male. With the exception of California, which had been a target destination for large numbers of Chinese prostitutes prior to the imposition of immigration restrictions in 1870, few Chinese females migrated to nineteenth-century America or Australia. Chinese men in both countries were therefore likely to enter sexual relationships with local women and, in the case of long-term or permanent migrants, to marry outside their own community. In north Queensland, the majority of Chinese migrants hailed from Guangdong province.

With the introduction of the White Australia policy in 1901, the Chinese were not forced to repatriate and their spouses or families were permitted to immigrate for the window period until 1903. After this, however, Chinese wives could not immigrate, although after energetic lobbying—usually with strong support from the White community—individuals were occasionally permitted to enter Australia.

**Prohibition and protest**

Marriage laws in the Australian states did not include prohibitions against a Chinese man marrying a White woman. Although couples could be targeted by police on other grounds, marriages took place regardless. Vagrancy and suspicion of carrying opium were common reasons for detention. One Chinese man with a European wife, Wong Quay Lun, was being sought for travelling ‘from Sydney to Townsville with quantity of opium in company of a European woman’. Wong Quay Lun was described as ‘stout to corpulent; wears hard black hat, single gold curb chain’. His wife was forty years old, five foot seven inches tall, ‘medium to stout’ and dressed in ‘black
silk dress black feather hat'. Although twelve years younger and a
good deal slimmer than Wong, another Chinese man with a Euro-
pean partner, Harry Gew, was detained in his place. When asked
why they arrested such a dissimilar man, police stated that it was
hard to 'tell the age of a Chinaman'.

Only the states with large frontier and tropical belts—Queens-
land, Western Australia and the Northern Territory—prohibited
Asians from employing Aborigines and White men and Asians from
cohabiting with Aboriginal women. In 1901, there were 2017 Chinese
men residing in the Cairns district of Queensland and sixty-one
women. In the Cairns region, Chinese made up eighteen per cent
of the population and forty-eight per cent of that in the hinterland.
Chinese farmers and gardeners grew fruit, corn and rice on small
holdings, usually on leased land. During the 1890s, the Chinese
banana production export industry had burgeoned to such an
extent as to represent a major part of the economy. The Barron River
was graced by up to twenty sampans ferrying Chinese produce to
the port of Cairns. A bustling Chinatown featured two temples. In
1897 the *Cairns Post* stated 'We recognise it is in our interests that
the Chinese should remain'.

While Chinese, and not Whites, were associated with the opium
trade and its devastating effects on Aboriginal health, government
discourses on the problem of 'interbreeding' were directed at White
men. In 1900, Meston pronounced:

> I hold in utter abhorrence these marriages between Chinese
and Aborigines, or whites and Aborigines ... They are unfair
to the woman and degrading to the man, though in nearly
all cases the man is of very low type ... An alliance with a
white man who cannot get a woman of his own race is a
degradation to any decent aboriginal woman.

Meston, who took credit for drafting Queensland's first Aboriginal
Protection legislation, was more concerned about the 'breeding
effects' of the White men than the Chinese. 'The question of mating
must be faced at some time or other ... the problem of half-castes,
quadroons and octoroons' was one that the Australian colonies should
solve, he declared. To avoid 'the breeding of half-castes', Meston rec-
ommended 'the absolute isolation' of Aboriginal women from contact
with Whites, which would otherwise produce 'attendant quadroons
and octoroons among whom the law of atavism will assert itself in after years with unpleasant results'\textsuperscript{23} Such preoccupations with the prospect of darker children being born to ‘White-skinned’ families reflected anxieties at the crumbling of ‘race’ boundaries.

Northern Queensland Protector Walter E. Roth suspected that inter-racial couples would try to marry merely ‘to defeat provisions of the Aboriginals Protection Act’.\textsuperscript{24} In 1899 Roth had expressed his frustration that ‘Marriages are at present taking place with Europeans and coloured aliens’\textsuperscript{.25} Roth wanted to prevent the marriage ceremony becoming ‘the Harbour of Refuge for those men who (under the Aboriginals Protection Act 1897) were deemed unfit to employ or to harbour natives.’ Chinese, he reasoned, might merely use marriage as a means of gaining cheap or free labour. When the government solicitor advised Roth that he lacked the authority under Australian law to prevent such marriages, he requested that ministers of religion and ‘marrying justices’ refuse to marry such couples. While some missionaries were happy to obey, others were concerned about those already married.

By late 1901, Roth secured a veto over the marriage of any non-Aboriginal man who wanted to marry an Aboriginal woman. An applicant had to apply to the local police officer who would then refer the request to Protector Meston in the southern district or Protector Roth in the northern. From 1901, these two White men ruled upon the suitability of every potential husband of an Aboriginal woman. Despite Roth and Meston’s special decrees against marriages between Aboriginal women and Chinese and ‘Kanakas’ (Pacific Islanders), marriage records demonstrate that ‘coloured’ men had equal, if not higher, chances of gaining permission to marry Aboriginal women. During January 1901, the month of ‘White Australia’s’ Federation, five marriages of ‘coloured’ men and Aboriginal and ‘half-caste Aboriginal’ women were celebrated in Queensland. Of the forty marriages involving Aboriginal women officially approved in the year of 1901, only three or seven per cent were to White men. Divided into ‘birthplace’ and colony they were described as Queenslander (White), New South Wales (White), English and British (born at sea).\textsuperscript{26} The remaining thirty-seven males awarded permission to marry ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘half-caste Aboriginal’ women in the Queensland of 1901 were Chinese, South
Sea Islander, Javanese and Malay birth, Filipino, West Indian, Indian, Cingalese (Ceylon) and Pacific Islanders.

Aboriginal women who married Pacific Islanders experienced special problems as these men faced repatriation under the Immigration Restriction Act. While over 1600 were permitted to stay, another 500 escaped into the bush. Their Aboriginal partners either had to return with them to the Pacific Islands or go into hiding. Eking out a meagre living, some wives of Pacific Islanders were near starvation. The protectors often inspected their sleeping arrangements—on the grounds of suspicion of paedophile offences, group marriage or prostitution rackets. By comparison, the wives of Chinese could lead more respectable, socially accepted lives. When a Chinese fisherman's Aboriginal wife rescued an Aboriginal mother who had just given birth, she revealed that the Pacific Islanders' wives had had to make bows and arrows in an attempt to catch birds for food. The wife of the Chinese man was praised by police as intelligent and highly regarded in the local community.

Surveillance of all mixed partnerships continued into the 1920s and 1930s. Marriage registers for 1926 list seventeen legal marriages of Aboriginal and ‘half-caste’ women. This included eleven marriages to Aboriginal men, two to Asians, and three to White men. Of twenty-two permits issued in 1927, only three were for Europeans, four to Malaysians and Pacific Islanders.

Although much of the official correspondence regarding familial relations is heartless, officials did not always endorse the removal of Aboriginal partners. In 1901, official permission was granted the Chinese market gardener and cook, Ah Man, to marry an Aboriginal woman Lucy. The grounds given were to legitimise a child already born to and being raised by the couple. When Goon Goo was prosecuted for harbouring ‘gin’ Kitty, and for supplying opium and alcohol in 1901, he was fined three pounds. Three days later, probably on police advice, he applied to be married. Despite their six- to seven-year relationship, police then forcibly removed Kitty from her own tribal lands and placed her on the remote Yarrabah mission. Goon Goo’s Herberton solicitor argued that Kitty was well regarded and admired in the Dry River district as a good cook and laundress. He also defended her domestic arrangements: ‘if all the blacks were as well treated as Kitty there would be no necessity for interference by the authorities’. For various reasons, Goon Goo’s marriage to
Kitty thus had the support of a Protector, an employer, a solicitor and his wife. Kitty’s White female employer supported the marriage as a means of keeping her working on her property. Additionally, Goo gathered references from three ‘reliable people’—a businessman, a bank manager, and a police sergeant. Prompted by bad publicity regarding his new powers, Roth reacted angrily to Kitty’s treatment and the officer’s lack of consultation. Roth thus concluded that providing permission would ‘rectify as far as possible the wrong already committed’. Although Roth acknowledged Sergeant O’Donnell’s report about Goon Goo ‘supplying opium and drink to aboriginals,’ he concluded: ‘Beyond being a chinaman, I can find nothing against Goon Goo’s character’.

Roth was probably also embarrassed by the case because the Registrar General had advised him he had no legal authority to prevent such a marriage taking place if a celebrant was willing to marry them. In reaction to the case, Roth seemed to prevaricate about the very powers he was exercising, and he certainly backtracked on his 1899 statement, in which he saw marriage as merely a means of obtaining cheap labour and an evasion of the law. He stated that it was ‘a very serious matter thus to take away an aboriginal’s liberty’ and that he only removed ‘young girls where every hour may add to the risk’. This case was not only illegal ‘morally speaking, it was forcible’. As well as arousing the ire of powerful community members, this case caused much embarrassment by showing that, in a frontier society so fraught with rupture and lack of family relationships, police or senior administrators were breaking up successful unions. The ‘respectable’ White community sided with Goon Goo, supporting both the man and his long-standing, harmonious relationship. Such strong links between Chinese men and influential members of small communities complicated the overblown and misleading image of a general populace wholeheartedly enthusing about ‘White Australia’.

White frontiersmen who were small-time employers of Aboriginal labour and who themselves engaged in sexual relations with Aboriginal women were the most outspoken protestors against the newly introduced Aboriginal protection policies. ‘Protection’ of Aborigines meant interference with what they saw as their own rights, and, as we have seen, the state’s wide powers over Aborigines enabled it to interfere in long-standing family relationships.
Although generally in competition with non-Whites for Aboriginal women, White men tended to be far more resentful of centralised administrators of Aboriginal protection than they were of local Asians. In a particular case where Meston sent Minnie, the Aboriginal wife of a Pacific Islander, away to an island reserve, they railed against Meston’s interference in a long-lasting legally endorsed marriage. This assault on the rights of a legal husband provoked not only public local outrage but also a stern rebuke from Meston’s superiors. It was hardly a straightforward case, as an Aboriginal man, Linnay, said he was Minnie’s tribal husband. In the local papers, however, popular sympathy ignored the tribal husband:

How would you—we mean you—react if you were torn asunder from your wife, or your father by the cruel hand of this ruthless monster masquerading under the guise of the ‘Protector’ of Whites.

The Under Secretary over-ruled Meston’s decision, ordering that his legal wife be returned. It may seem curious that White men of all ranks sided with a Pacific Islander who was a husband and father rather than with a tribal man whose marriage might not have been legally recognised but pre-existed the other marriage. This was a society where a man was hard pressed to find a wife. Beyond respect for the laws of Christian marriage, however, the case might also suggest that one of the deepest levels of competition experienced by White men was actually with Aboriginal men—especially tribal husbands—over wives.

Anti-miscegenation laws were designed to curb an entrenched social phenomenon, but there was confusion about the legitimate targets of such policing and its actual purpose. Second and third generation Chinese–Aboriginal families added further complexities. In 1909, a man called Tony Bing requested permission to marry a ‘half-caste Chinese girl’. The woman had to assure police she had ‘no Aboriginal boy’ or husband. His relative, the ‘half-caste’ stockman Jimmy Bing, born of an Aboriginal mother and a Chinese father, had been living with his Aboriginal partner for some years. By the 1900s, small frontier communities did not consist of entirely discrete ethnic or cultural groups as the Act implied; they were inter-dependent and already intertwined—sometimes cross-generationally—through family ties.
Husbands subvert the system

Chinese men collaborated to evade restrictions against their association with Aboriginal women. On a day to day basis, they won the respect and tolerance of local police officers. They enlisted good lawyers and sometimes conducted well-orchestrated challenges to police authority.

Police newcomers sometimes caused trouble for Chinese men in longstanding relationships. For example, in 1898, Constable Buckley accused a man called Ah Chin of locking up his Aboriginal partner Topsey while he played Fan Tan all night. Topsey denied this: '[T]hat fellow Constable never ask me, that fellow tell em lie, me like Ah Chin, no leave him, me long time sit down long him.' 38 The couple had been living together for six years and Topsey worked for Mrs Flynn, wife of the local state schoolteacher. Sergeant Bradley explained:

She is a good-looking gin and much attached to the Chinaman Ah Chin. There is a rumour that some white men have offered her money for immoral purposes. In fact it has been suggested to the Sergeant that Constable Buckley's zeal might be at the suggestion of some other party, so as to get the gin away from Ah Chin.

Bradley was angry about Constable Buckley's behaviour: 'What right had the constable to absent himself from town duty, to spy about Ah Chin's house?'. 39

Many local White men, including senior police, were sympathetic to and defended ongoing 'decent' relationships even when they were outside the law. Even Roth evinced such broad sympathies when, in 1898, he telegraphed: 'such cases were never intended to be interfered with if the Local Police are satisfied if the wellbeing of gins in like cases they should not interfere'. In 1906, Ah Kow, a storekeeper and resident of the region for thirty years, was charged with harbouring an Aboriginal woman and bribing a police officer. Constable Creedy and tracker Tiger went to Ah Kow's store and residence in remote Byerstown. Tiger allegedly saw two female Aborigines—one with a 'piccaninny'—chopping yams in the kitchen. When they saw the police, they ran away. Ah Kow reportedly said 'that is my gin and you are not going to take her away as I got a letter through my solicitor from big boss telling me I could have the
aboriginal gin Nelly. Although Ah Kow had a business license, he actually had no permit to employ Aborigines as all Chinese were prohibited from doing so under section five, sub-section two, of the *Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium* Act of 1901.

To cover his offence, McCreedy alleged that Ah Kow had offered to bribe him with gold valued at 1 pound 4 shillings. Ah Kow stated that Nelly was 'his gin, he liked her' and that he had spent a lot of money on her. It was further reported:

> Aboriginal Nelly sometime carries water, sometimes washes shirts, after finishing these jobs goes to camp when she is hungry looks for job and looks for horses ... Constable Creedy caught her at the river, struck her with a whip and [she] came crying to him.

Ah Kow accused Creedy of demanding the gold as a payoff. Creedy's story came unstuck because he had taken the gold and had it valued, indicating that he had visited the camp with the aim of getting paid off. Following an admission by Creedy that he had got the dates and various facts wrong in his report, and a statement by a senior policeman that Creedy had handled the case badly, he was transferred from the district. The case against Ah Kow for harbouring an Aboriginal woman and bribing a police officer was dismissed.\(^4^0\)

In another case, Constable Casey's allegations against the goldminer Ah Chew tarnished the policeman's reputation and he, too, was transferred. Casey alleged that an Aboriginal woman named Dolly was cohabiting with Ah Chew at a mine between Maytown and Cannibal Creek in north Queensland. Using unnecessary force, Casey handcuffed Lee Chew for harbouring an Aboriginal woman. According to Dolly, she was only there for 'ki ki' or food. Just before the case was heard, Dolly and another local Aboriginal man, Jackey, both fled, perhaps fearing removal to a reserve. According to tracker Sandy: 'Dolly say I go down longa camp get a blanket and she never show up, she go away altogether, and never come back'. Other Aborigines testified that Lee Chew had never given them alcohol. Lee Chew refused to make any statement, and instead charged Constable Casey with assault. Police reliance upon Aboriginal tracker Sandy's contradictory answers further discredited the case. Sandy became confused in court, stating a prejudice perhaps taught to him to justify such arrests: 'I no like chinamen because they give him opium keep him gin; plenty die before long time ago'.\(^4^1\)
A number of Chinese men gave tight evidence in support of Lee Chew. According to Casey, Chinese witnesses for Lee Chew’s defence had a ‘good tale made up’ and were ‘no doubt tutored by some expert’: ‘The defendant swore falsely relying on their numbers. It was a conspiracy to defeat the ends of Justice’. The consistent witness statements by Chinese men, however, did not reflect well upon police. Charley Ah Long stated that Constable Casey was drunk. ‘Ah Chew take him small bottle china medicine grog. Casey say “no like that one”; Ah Chew take bottle brandy and Constable has one. Charley Ah Long said he witnessed Ah Chew giving a pouch containing gold and silver to the Constable. Although not wearing watches, the Chinese witnesses were also consistent on the time of night when events occurred. The court interpreter’s skills left the magistrate doubting the accuracy of the questions being put. Lee Chew’s solicitor, Mr Patching, implied Casey was corrupt. Constable Casey consequently had to explain why he took a bottle of rum from Lee Chew’s premises and why he took payment in gold. Casey said it was for evidence, whilst Lee Chew said it was payment to prevent him being summoned ‘for having gin [his Aboriginal partner] ... on premises’.

While some police sought to gain from the unpopular laws against cohabitation with Aboriginal women, others were ambivalent for other reasons. When Chong Choy of Byerstown was charged with harbouring an aboriginal named Maria, she claimed she was only there to exchange fish for potatoes and the case was dismissed. Sub-Inspector Bowen remarked that he could not get convictions from the local court. ‘[T]wo Justices who have been a long time in the locality ... apparently consider the chinamen benefactors to the aboriginals for years past’. The Bench ‘considered that were it not for the Chinese support the aboriginals would be often wanting provisions on the Palmer’.

While we have not explored the negotiations that went on between Aboriginal kin groups and clans, it is probable that wives were approved for Chinese men on the proviso that the latter fulfilled reciprocal obligations towards the wife’s Aboriginal kin, supplying particular relatives with necessities. A husband’s task was to protect and look out for his wife, to protect her against police who might remove her from the district or allocate her as an incentive to an Aboriginal police tracker.
If the husband failed in their duties towards Aboriginal kin, he was in more danger than the White police could pose. Tommy Toy of Maytown feared for his life when his wife Maggie disappeared. His troubles started when he requested permission to marry her in February 1902 and encountered Constable O’Regan. This Constable advised him that he had to send Maggie away to avoid prosecution. O’Regan demanded that Maggie work for him for a few weeks. When both Maggie and Toy were reluctant to enter this arrangement, O’Regan promised her a dress and permission for them to marry. Feeling he must comply, Toy later discovered that O’Regan had chained Maggie up by her legs and tied her to a post. Her relatives accused Toy of having ‘given her’ to police and warned him of payback or serious retribution. Understandably, Maggie left town.

Conclusion

In the Queensland of the Federation era, Chinese suffered a disadvantage compared with Whites. Although both groups could be charged with cohabitation, Chinese were not supposed to be granted permits to employ Aboriginal labour. Compared with Aborigines, however, they had plenty of clout in the eyes of the law. While the support of police officers and local magistrates usually made this unnecessary, at times they skilfully used their networks to avoid fines and jail sentences. When new officers arrived in town to enforce the law and attempt to gather evidence against them or take advantage of them, it was the policeman who often came off the worse. The Chinese accused police of corruption and some were consequently reprimanded or transferred. Intervention in marriage arrangements also backfired on the most senior administrators of Aboriginal affairs.

When Chinese men requested permission to marry, it appears that these applicants were treated humanely and given the same opportunities as other coloured men to marry, especially if there was proof of a long-standing relationship or children. The apparently higher rate of approvals for non-Anglo men may have stemmed from the higher proportions of Asian and Pacific men actually living with Aboriginal women in longer-term unions. It is also possible that protectors were keener to prevent hybrid Whites being born than other admixtures—or even to prevent the ‘degradation’ of the White race. Restrictions upon the employment of Aborigines by Asian men denied Asian men the most popular pretext used by
White men for having Aboriginal women on their premises, so permission to marry was essential to avoiding other charges. Greater police surveillance and the fear of deportation meant that Asian men had greater reason to fear disobeying the cohabitation laws.

White men had a much harder time, as police or more senior bureaucrats classed them as disreputable, usually on the basis of their being itinerants, drunks or violent. Although there may have been many more, I came across only one instance where Roth denied permission to a Chinese applicant. When Chinese had prior convictions or accusations regarding opium possession, even this did not seem to constitute bad character. Possibly their lower ranking on the social scale meant they were already considered ‘debased’. In the absence of Chinese women, it might have been considered understandable for a Chinese man to wish to marry an Aboriginal woman. Although offensive epithets such as ‘Chinaman’ were widely used, with occasional related slurs on character, most correspondence which I examined from the period around 1901 contained no derogatory comments about Chinese applicants and it seems permission was often granted for them to marry Aboriginal women. Possibly it was assumed that the Chinese worked hard, had valued skills, were good providers for their wives and families and that, as ‘dutiful husbands’, they could take over the role of ‘protectors’ of Aboriginal women from the state. In effect, as acknowledged by senior officials, Chinese men’s cohabitation with, intermarriage with, and general support of poverty-stricken Aborigines was creating a system of community-based protection which Queensland’s segregation-oriented Protection Acts could not hope to achieve.

While there are strong indications that some Chinese men were certainly cruel and violent towards Aboriginal women, there is no evidence that they were any more so than White men. By contrast, Chinese men had a reputation for carrying out their duties to their Aboriginal wives and families, whether they were legally married or not. Some had reputations for being better employers than White men. Fewer were drunks, and many worked very hard, but so did many White men who cared for their Aboriginal wives and families in the few cases where the state and community permitted them to do so. White police and administrators respected the ‘good husband’ and ‘good father’, viewing these categories as something that transcended colour bound-
aries and the Aboriginal Protection laws. Despite restrictive policies resulting from the combined influence of humanitarians and White workers to curb Chinese-Aboriginal relations, it would appear that White frontiersmen and policemen's regard for certain Chinese men as human beings, as 'intelligent', as 'good colonisers', was never in question.

At Australian Federation in 1901, the actual as opposed to metaphorical 'births of a nation' did not fit the stereotype of the 'little newborn Australians' or White/Anglo-Celt babies that appeared in Federation cartoons. Scrutiny of the North Queensland archival sources reveals a vital frontier society that was creating familial links and alliances through cohabitation and locale rather than via distant ties with Britain. It was a place of conjugal liaisons and marital unions between Aboriginal people, Asians and Whites. This was becoming a community in itself—one contingent upon sexual, de facto and marital partnerships which were often cemented by parenting ties and familial responsibilities. While removals policies of both adults and children dislocated many family ties, in these early years of a 'White Australia', they did not—and indeed, could not—remove the many tracks and traces of interracial relationships. The 1900s already saw a third generation of Chinese-Aboriginal babies being born alongside new generations of White/Anglo-Celt and Chinese-Anglo babies. Intermarriage indelibly obscured the discrete 'colour' categories of coloniser and colonised.

A 'golden thread' of Chinese and other Asian familial ties thus extended the kin networks of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities throughout Australia. By the 1900s, an array of crimson threads was already binding together networks of kin of many different complexions, cultural and familial values. 'The crimson thread of kinship' envisaged by the founding fathers was already entwined beyond their imaginings. Australia's increasingly diluted British genealogy was going to be more inclusive, more culturally and legally complex than Parkes, Barton or Deakin ever imagined. Furthermore, the silken threads of familial connections wove together the stories of Australian regions and the nation as a whole into a vast Chinese global diaspora and into a rich Indigenous world.
Notes

For generous research advice and assistance with guidelines, I wish to express my appreciation to Margaret Reid and Kathy Frankland of the Community and Personal Histories Centre of the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, Queensland. I also thank Penny Edwards for her suggestions and encouragement.


3 The general terms ‘Aborigines’ or ‘Aboriginal people’ are used in this chapter as it is not possible to identify from archival documents the linguistic group of people concerned; significant movement and relocation had already occurred from traditional lands. By the same token, the term ‘Chinese’ is used irrespective of province of origin and ‘Pacific Islander’ irrespective of the island as such details are rarely mentioned in archival documents on intermarriage. Specific locations described the origin of ‘Whites’.


6 R. Evans, K. Saunders, K. Cronin, *Race Relations in Colonial Queensland* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978; 1988), Part Two. While the majority of workers on the sugar plantations by the turn of the century were from Melanesian islands, smaller numbers had been imported from China, Ceylon, Japan, Java and Malaysia. Many continued to work in these industries, while others set up market gardens, banana and tropical fruit plantations.


10 Australian government demographer T.A. Coghlan collected international death and birth rates in order to assess which groups were declining and which multiplying. Those not reproducing at a particular rate were classed as 'dying' or doomed races. Aborigines of full-descent fitted this category, but the British race was also thought to be in trouble. The hybrid or mixed-race population, especially those who mated with whites, were thought to reproduce rapidly. Regarding other nations, private communications with Dipesh Chakrabarty and Penny Edwards.

12 The origin of what became a derogatory term for Aboriginal women is uncertain. By the late nineteenth century, it had entered official discourse as the standard European term of reference for Aboriginal women.


14 For more discussion of the Act, see R. Kidd, The Way We Civilise (University of Queensland: St Lucia, 1997).


16 By 1860, 583 of 681 Chinese women residing there were prostitutes. Many were sold to brothel owners. Albert Hurtado, Intimate Frontiers: Sex, Gender and Culture in Early California (University of New Mexico Press: Albuquerque, 1999), p91. G. Bolton, A Thousand Miles Away (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1972); Cathie May, Topsawyers: the Chinese in Cairns 1870–1920 (Townsville: History Department, James Cook University, 1984); for Western Australia, see Jan Ryan, Ancestors: Chinese in Colonial Australia (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1995)

17 Queensland State Archives (QSA), Hom J36.

18 Markus, Australian Race Relations, p. 86.

19 Markus, Australian Race Relations, p. 73.

20 Markus, Australian Race Relations, p. 73.

21 Evans et al., Race Relations in Colonial Queensland, p. 108.

22 A. Meston to Under Secretary, Home Secretary, 7 July 1900, QSA A/58764.

23 Cited Evans, p. 108.

24 Circ Memo, 4 April 1901; Roth to Under Secretary Home Department, 21 Jan 1901 in QSA A58764.

25 A/589/2; Annual report, Roth, Report of the Northern Protector of Aboriginals for 1899; Yet elsewhere states it is inhumane to separate people legally married. Once the ceremony conducted, the status of the union changed. Underlines importance of marriage as colonising agent, as racialising agent.

26 Marriage of Half Caste and Aboriginal Women - 1901 in QSA, A/58764.
27 In the Mossman district, the nine Aboriginal women known to live with Pacific Islanders or Chinese generally held official marriage certificates issued before 1897.

28 Report of Northern Protector 1900, QSA Col/142; 4884/01 (old numbering system); various cases see QSA A58764.

29 Aborigines Department Report (ADP) 31 October 1926 and 1927, Queensland Parliamentary Papers (QPP).

30 ADP, 5 January 1901, QPP. See also W.E. Parry-Okeden, Commissioner of Police to Under Secretary, Home Secretary’s Dept, 4 Sept 1901, QSA A58764 for rivalry between police and Aborigines Dept. Queensland State Archives files, upon which this research is based, used ‘Christian’ names, or European first names, not Indigenous names. Files used in this research were open access and therefore already in the public domain. Many of the cases discussed were also the subject of reportage and debate in contemporary newspapers.

31 ADP, 2 Sept 1901, QPP.

32 The patient courtship of Jack Akbar, an Afghan, and Lallie of Linden, Western Australia, led to a life of police and family harassment. The story is told with simple power in Daryl Tonkin and Carolyn Landon, Jackson's Track: Memoir of a Dreamtime Place (Viking/Penguin: Ringwood, 1999). Aborigines of mixed descent ran into trouble with restrictions on intermarriage. See Tex and Nelly Camfoo and Gillian Cowlishaw, Love against the Law: The Autobiographies of Tex and Nelly Camfoo (Aboriginal Studies Press: Canberra, 2000).

33 W.E. Roth to Under Secretary, 2 Sept 1901, 18 Sept 1901, QSA A58764.

34 W.E. Roth to Under Secretary, 2 Sept 1901, 18 Sept 1901, QSA A58764.

35 W.E. Roth to Under Secretary, 18 Sept 1901, QSA A58764.

36 Public Meetings, Maytown and Pt Douglas, 1902 in QSA A5/8850.

37 The Patriot, circa June 1902.

38 QSA, Pol/J16.


40 J. Bradley to Inspector Graham, 10 Dec 1898, QSA POL/J16.

42 See Report on Constable Creedy v Ah Kow; 20 Oct. 1906; Lee Chew state-
ment, 22 Feb. 1912; various correspondence, QSA A45206.

43 ‘Gin’ here does not denote drink but appears in its earlier noted usage as a
derogatory term for Aboriginal woman/women. Its usage by Lee Chew
indicates that the term circulated among Asian communities as well as
white communities, although Lee’s choice of terms here may have been
influenced by what would have undoubtedly been a white magistrate
and court, and/or by his White legal representation. See Report on
1912; various correspondence, QSA A45206.


45 Tommy Toy statement, 11 Aug. 1902; Walter Roth to Sub-Inspector
Garraway, 14 August 1902. A tracker is involved here and aspersions about
witness’ character.

46 ‘Births of a Nation’ is the title of a travelling exhibition organised by the
Powerhouse Museum for Centenary of Federation, 2001, which travelled
around regional centres of Australia throughout 2002.
My name is Lucy Dann. I was born in Broome in 1960. I have a Bardi bush name which is, Widdagoo.

In following my mother's descent, I would say I am a Goolarrgoon Bard, or Aboriginal from Dampier Peninsula, but my ningarm remains in Boolgin. Ningarm means mother's birthplace.

My mother's name was Onja, which was her traditional Bardi name. My mother's White man name was Biddy. My father's name was Joseph, and he was from the same clan group as my mother, which is Bardi-Jawi Aboriginal people. I later found out that my father was in fact a stepfather, but I did not know at the time.

When I was in my early teens I was teased a lot. People started calling me names like round face and moon face. Although I didn't think it was too nasty, it still upset me, and I wondered why people said things like, 'You look like Japanese'. Even White taxi drivers said to me, 'Where do you come from little girl. Do you come from Hawaii or somewhere?'. I didn't know a thing. I didn't think I looked different. I thought I was Aboriginal.

I used to look into the mirror and wonder why I looked different from other Aboriginal kids, and why I did not look like my father. Then one day one of my aunts came out and told me that the man I knew as my father was not my real father. My father Joseph was a good man. He treated me like his own daughter, and I knew no other man in my mother's life. I knew my stepfather as my father, and although this incident did not make me think any differently of my stepfather, I was left with a feeling of restlessness deep inside.
Lost in the Whitewash

When I was in year seven, a girl in class told me that I was Japanese. At that time my mother was a younger woman, and I did not dare question anything she said. But one day, I remember, I lost my temper. I started kicking, and then she finally told me that the man I knew as my father was not my real father. This made me even angrier because it appeared as if it had been a one night stand. I was conceived, and the man was gone. Been and gone.

Many years later, before my husband Alec and I got married, we used to look after my stepfather for one and a half years and we saw the need for him to go into a nursing home in Derby. A couple of years later, a week before he passed away, on his death bed, he admitted to me that I had a Japanese man as a father, and that this Japanese man had asked him to look after me and mind me. I felt relieved that he had told me, although I felt sad for him that he could not tell me all these years. I also felt angry. However I respected my stepfather for being a good man. He had successfully fooled me that he was my biological father.

My husband Alec had a Japanese uncle—Subuu Kanagae, who was married to one of his aunts, named Vera (Dann) Kanagae. As a matter of fact, three of Alec’s aunts came out and told me that they knew my Japanese father. Through my husband’s relations, I was able to find out bits and pieces about the other side of my roots. They told me his name was Tamotsu Tsutsui and he was from a town called Taiji, which is a sister town to Broome.

By this time, I thought, I was now woman enough to question my mother, and then she opened up and she started telling me everything. She told me about meeting my real father, who was a Japanese pearler who used to visit her on his motor bike. She said to me, ‘No, I may not have lived with your father. He may have gone back, but he did look after you. He did come, and he would get you as a baby, take you back to the Japanese quarters, nurse you, and proudly show you to his Japanese friends’. When my mother told me this, the anger I had felt subsided. I started to become curious about this man and about the Japanese side of me.

Four years ago, my husband told me that Aunty Vera said that there was a Japanese photographer in town wanting to talk to people with Japanese and Aboriginal heritage. Her name was Mayu Kanamori. Mayu and I met together one hot lunch time in Broome in October 1999. She said she was documenting the faces of
DANN: Yearning of the Hearts

Japanese-Aboriginal people, and she asked me about my father. After Mayu went back to Sydney, I started wondering about my Japanese roots again, and I really wanted to research more into the other half of myself. Perhaps I should go out researching and look for this man. I may never be the same again.

A year later Mayu came back to Broome on our invitation in October 2000, and we went on a camping trip. Being my true self in my own country, relaxed with Mayu, this time I poured out my heart to her. I was not really a happy person, not fully knowing who I was. I did not feel that I was a whole person unless I could find out who this man was, and whether he wanted to know me. Mayu said she was going back to Japan soon so she would try to find my father.

Mayu soon found out my father's address and phone number. Mayu telephoned his house, but was told by his wife that he was bed ridden and could not come to the phone. I had written a letter to him, which Mayu translated, but there was no reply. So we decided to take the plunge and go to Japan to see if he would say, 'Yes, I want to know you', or 'No, I don't want to know you. Get out of my life'.

Instead of going directly to my father's home in Taiji, Mayu had set up meetings with some mediators. In Japanese culture, the best way to handle these situations is to go through mediators. If we had gone directly to his house, we may have been told to leave by his wife. The mediator at Taiji was Mr Nakagawa, a local politician who knew my father. I gave Mr Nakagawa some photographs of me to take to my father's home, but was told by his wife that they did not wish to meet with me.

We had come all the way to Taiji, and I wanted to see this journey to its end. I insisted that there may be other ways, and that I had heard that my father had sons. Mr Nakagawa knew of my brothers as well, and he suggested that we try to telephone them. After waiting for some time, we finally got through to my eldest brother, who knew nothing about me, and was surprised, but agreed to meet with me straight away.

When I saw my eldest brother Tsukasa, I was so surprised. When I looked at his face, I thought 'this is my reflection, but a male version'. I was taken aback and stunned. I didn't know what to say. I'd never known there was this person, halfway across the world. We had the same eyes, same features, same mannerisms, even though
he was a male, I just felt that we were connected straight away. That evening Tsukasa invited us to his home. My younger brother also had a shock. Mayu was busy translating. We ate a fabulous Japanese meal cooked by my sister-in-law Tsurue, and they all treated me as a family, holding, hugging, eating, drinking, and joking. Everything happened so quickly that I did not realise fully at the time that something very beautiful had happened to my life.

The following day my sister-in-law Tsurue took me to see my father. There was an old man lying on his bed. Tsurue asked my father if he knew who I was. She joked and said, 'Hey old man, what have you been doing in Broome?'. My father reached out and held my hand. He turned it around and said that we had the same hands. I began to cry. I showed him photographs of my husband Alec and our six children. I showed him my mother's photo, and he said, 'Onja'. There was a tear in his eye.

The next day my brother Tsukasa took me to see my father again, and he gave me a ring from his hand, which to this day I treasure. He didn’t say, 'No, I don’t want to know you. Go away'. Instead he gave me a ring taken from his own finger.

In terms of my identity, I feel whole now with both sides of my roots in place. I have lived in times of overt racism. There were policies of the past which dictated that we were to live on missions or reserves. My mother and stepfather instilled into my mind, from a very early age, where we come from, who we are, our identity. So I never lost that side of who we were, even though the policies of the past were ones of assimilation and protection. The government policies from the early 1900s to late 1970s were still racially orientated times for Indigenous peoples which caused many conflicting issues associated with one's identity as a person.

Identity is a strange word. With its roots in the Latin concept of *idem*, it is a mark of sameness with others (identical) and individuality (identify). To identify myself firstly as an Aboriginal, a Bardi, a Japanese, or an Australian is to try to find sameness with other people, yet I am an individual within. To grow up in an era where authorities told us what our identities were supposed to be, added further confusion to my question of who I really am. Perhaps my identity, like so many, others is multicultural.

As a child I did not know what multicultural meant. Now I know. I went looking for my father, and I ended up finding an entire
family where parts of me belong. I believe my search for my Japanese roots have only just begun. When I was in Japan, there were new things I needed to learn about the culture, history and the way things are done in Japan. My family took me to our ancestor's grave and showed me how to look after the family grave. My brother took me to a Shinto shrine, and we prayed together. I felt the bonding between myself and my Japanese family was strong and immediate, especially with my eldest brother Tsukasa. We did not speak the same language, and knew very little of each other's culture, but the body language said it all. Our differences didn't really matter. I was accepted as a family member. I was accepted as a human being.

I have been lucky to find my friend Mayu and the mediators in Japan. My mother and my relations and my husband's families and relations were supportive of my journey, and my Japanese family were exceptionally open minded, warm-hearted people. Not everyone who has tried to look for the other side of their roots has been successful, and I do not think what I did would work for everyone, but I knew that I had to do it. As a result of my trip to Japan, Mayu and I have made a sound and slide show The Heart of the Journey, which documented my journey to find my father. This show has been seen by many people, and so many people have come to me and said they have been inspired and encouraged by what I did. So perhaps it was destiny, maybe even a mission. I write this piece in the hope that I may encourage other people with mixed heritage: if you have a feeling deep inside to find out about yourself, then go for it.
Lost in the Whitewash

...
LUCY'S JOURNEY

A PHOTO-ESSAY BY MAYU KANAMORI

Register of Diver's Permits courtesy of Broome Historical Museum.
(c) Mayu Kanamori 2000.
Above: Japanese Camp site in Broome, Western Australia. (c) Mayu Kanamori 2000.
Above left to right: Vincent Angus (Lucy's cousin), Keiffer Dann (Lucy's son), Mayu Kanamori, Lucy Dann and Aled Dann (Lucy's son) on camping trip at Dampier Peninsula 1999. Photo: Alec Dann 1999.

Lucy Dann and her Japanese brother (oldest) Tsukasa Tsutsui in his home in Taiji, Wakayama Prefecture, Japan. (c) Mayu Kanamori 2000.

Lucy Dann and her Japanese father Tamotsu Tsutsui in his home in Taiji, Wakayama Prefecture, Japan. Photo: (c) Mayu Kanamori 2000.
Mixed Relations
Towards Reconfiguring Australian History

REGINA GANTER

For over a decade I have conducted a wide-ranging investigation of the various forms of contact between Asians and Aborigines in the far north of Australia: from the Kimberley across to Torres Strait; from pre-British Macassan contact to more recent efforts of mixed descendants to reconnect with severed patrilineal connections—by embracing Islam, by organising family reunions, or by travelling to Indonesia, China, the Philippines or the Pacific. Here I offer a sketch of the implications of this work in the wider framework of Australian history.

Northern histories read so differently from the standard version of national historical consciousness that they are more suggestive of ‘exploitation colonies’ than ‘settler colonies’. In the far northern townships of colonial Australia the population balance was weighted heavily against White Australia. Despite great official efforts to keep Asian and Aboriginal populations apart, and manage them separately, what emerged were mixed populations, able to challenge the hegemony of Aboriginal protection bureaucracies, and forming close-knit communities. The history of the poly-ethnic north appears to reside at the margins of Indigenous Australia, at the margins of histories of Asians in Australia, and at the remote margins of White Australia.

But what are the intellectual frameworks within which these peripheral histories appear marginal? Might they not challenge core assertions of Australian history and identity? Could they be the seeds of a reassessment of fundamental historical dynamics in Australia?
Thinking about history and its poly-ethnic spaces

We are able to know the world by matching it against knowledge models—models of societies, of historical processes and trends, models of causality, models of power. Max Weber referred to them as ‘ideal types’ in the field of sociology, Thomas Kuhn favoured ‘paradigms’ to refer to the field of science, and historical models might be referred to as ‘master narratives’. Models help us decipher and interpret complexities. They are powerful instruments of knowledge. If they seem unsatisfactory it is not sufficient to critique them—in that case they must be replaced with models that help us think differently.

Models necessarily have a close relationship with empirical evidence, but empirical evidence can also fall into the gaps between models. Evidence that does not fit into models is rendered insignificant, marginal, and easily forgotten. In Kuhn’s 1962 account of The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, such evidence, when it is found worthy of interrogation, becomes a research puzzle. A critical quantum of research puzzles can cause a scientific crisis—when marginal evidence becomes counter-evidence. A scientific crisis stimulates the emergence of new theories, and eventually a scientific revolution may occur that sweeps away the old ways of knowing.

Clearly our historical models of Australia are in crisis, and have been for some time vacillating from revisionism to counter-revisionism under the onslaught of the feminist critique, the Indigenous wake-up call, and the challenge from migrants. Looking at Aboriginal-Chinese relationships is hitting into several sore spots. In their executive summary proposing the Lost in the Whitewash colloquium, Edwards and Shen pointed out some of these sores: the Black-White binary around which reconciliation is structured, the Anglo-Celtic centrefold of national history, the continuing salience of colonial ideas.

Looking beyond the crisis, to the emergence of new ideas, what might be the features of a new Australian history, yearned by Edwards and Shen, where Aborigines, Chinese, and other non Anglo-Celts are not relegated to footnotes and marginalia? In Kuhn’s formula, the defining feature of such a new model would be one where the evidence that appeared marginal becomes a driving engine of explanation, becomes central, crucial, important and indicative. Let me review some of the evidence on Asian–Aboriginal interaction that
is suitable for just such a project—evidence that tends to fall between the gaps. Such evidence forms the substance of my forthcoming ‘Mixed Relations’ book and will be referred to only cursorily here, as ‘research puzzles’ in the Kuhnian sense, in order to declare that we are able to look beyond the crisis, towards a new theory. The following pens eight theses of a ‘mixed relations model’ of Australian history. In this model Asian–Indigenous contacts are a core element of Australian history, so that the Chinese in Australian history may occupy perceptual positions beyond that of victims of colonialism.

**Puzzle 1: Beginnings**

If we take settlement as an indication of actual presence, as the idea of a bicentennial evidently does, then nowhere in northern Australia does Anglo-Celtic history yet amount to a 200-year span. European encroachment was gradual and unsteady, and sometimes in retreat, and reached the northern mainland with roughly a 100-year time lag. More importantly, it did not take place on a historical tabula rasa. Apart from the Indigenous presence, there were also a number of colonial claims over the continent, the map of which was literally dotted with Dutch names: Eendraghtsland, Leeuwinland, Peter Nuyts Land, de Witts Land, van Diemens Land, and of course, all of it, Nieuw Holland.

Histories of northern Australia abound with references to the regular visitors from Makassar and other parts of Sulawesi without according them any but incidental status: an ancient trade which once existed, then ceased, and left a few inconsequential imprints on a marginal part of the remote north.

The Macassan trepang trade features in the earliest British accounts of the northern coast. During his circumnavigation of the continent Matthew Flinders in 1803 encountered the spearhead of a sixty-ship strong fleet at the north-eastern tip Arnhem Land, subsequently named Malay Roads. He estimated that this fleet carried about one thousand Macassans. It must have seemed a veritable, and utterly confounding, invasion. Flinders learned from the encounter about the commercial value of the sea slug in the China trade, and of a history of contact which he understood to have commenced twenty years earlier. This would date it at around 1783, a date that is now considered far too conservative an estimate and possibly arising from a misunderstanding.
The concept of a history of Australia that commences in 1788 might have easily been dented by this discovery, but that concept had not yet formed. The continent was still conceptually divided between New Holland and New South Wales, the latter being nestled into the coastal region of Sydney Cove with a new outrigger in Newcastle.

The challenge to a British claim presented by the Macassan trade to Arnhem Land, and linked to the Dutch in the East Indies, could not have been lost on a strategist like Flinders. His circumnavigation became utterly preoccupied with the regions of Macassan contact and an excursion to the Dutch port of Kupang in West Timor. He boldly proposed the label 'Australia' as a reference to the whole continent—a label that eventually erased the Holland connection from Australian history.

Is it possible that this Macassan trade to Arnhem Land expedited the British claim over the whole continent and rendered it a more urgent project? There was a rush to establish far northern outposts even before the western half of the continent was formally claimed (in 1829). Shortly after Phillip Parker King—continuing Flinders' work on the Mermaid (1818–21)—reported on strong trading activities between Makassar and the north coast, two outposts were set up in order to graft onto the flourishing trepang trade: Fort Dundas at Melville Island in 1824, and Fort Wellington at Raffles Bay on Cobourg Peninsula in 1827 (later recommenced as 'Victoria' at Port Essington on Cobourg Peninsula, 1838–49).

It was well understood that the influences of this long-standing trade on Yolngu culture were profound, and that it was part of a much larger colonial trading network involving the highly coveted market of China. Might it not be a significant factor of Australian history that Indigenous people of the far north were linked into a trade with China well before the British colonists who were restrained by the monopoly of the East India Company?

It is now generally accepted that the trade lasted for about 200 years—equalling the two centuries of British presence in Australia, and certainly pre-dating them. It would be difficult to relegate this ancient trade to the realm of prehistory, since Campbell Macknight has shown that it is perfectly accessible to historical methods of inquiry.

Perhaps this bicentennial history does not amount to settlement, made no claim to territory, and is therefore inconsequential? 'Settler', like the German 'Siedler', bears an etymological relation-
ship with ‘seed’, connoting someone who plants. Indeed, in many colonial histories the colonists are referred to as ‘planters’, and the French ‘colon’ is translatable with this agricultural, rather than political, meaning. The Macassans planted a range of crops including tamarind. They dug wells and erected dwellings and gave names to many places, some of which have become adopted by Yolngu. Moreover, the Yolngu understanding is that they planted abrus seed with precisely the same symbolic significance as the European planting of flags, and that they bestowed the title of daeng on some of the sea-people of Arnhem Land, which became part of local names.3

This understanding finds further support in an extraordinary map at the Sultan’s Palace in Makassar, Sulawesi, which shows the boundaries of the ‘Gowanese kingdom and areas that accepted Gowanese sovereignty until 1660’. The map shows Sulawesi at the centre of the kingdom and clearly includes the top end of Australia, including the site of Darwin, from Wagait in the west to Cape Grey (above Blue Mud Bay) in the east.4 Macknight also demonstrated that Macassans sometimes stayed behind when the trepang fleet departed, and some of the family links between Yolngu and Sulawesi are now well documented. On balance, it does take a certain commitment to Anglo-Celtic history and its peculiar type of settlement to think of Australian settlement as starting at Sydney Cove.

The first thesis for a ‘mixed relations’ model of Australian history is the claim that Australian settlement history starts in the north. This thesis carries the rider that ‘history’ should be accessible to historical methods of inquiry, and that the standard account by Aborigines of their own past, that they have ‘always been here’, seems a more credible shorthand than their reconstruction as migrants or settlers. What we have then, are in broad brushstrokes, two bicentennial episodes of settlement.

A second thesis immediately emerges that the two bicentennial episodes of settlement in Australia are related. I have suggested that the British embrace of the northern parts of the continent owes much to the trading opportunities and challenges presented by the Macassans, and it is well known that this embrace resulted in the demise of the Macassan settlement era. Unable to dominate the Yolngu–Macassan trepang trade, the colonial government of South Australia prohibited the Macassan visits so that they ceased in 1906.
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Puzzle 2: The isolated continent

Another plank of the master narrative is pulled into the vortex by the acknowledgement of a Macassan contact era: the idea of the isolated continent. This concept has tenaciously survived empirical counter-evidence. The Torres Strait has long been recognised to have been as much bridge as barrier, as a region of intensive trade linking the Australian continent with the New Guinean mainland. The northern coastal regions of Australia do not fit the model of a long period of isolation prior to British colonisation.

Tony Swain has already taken this argument further, observing that long-standing contact and cultural exchange can be traced as ontological shifts in Indigenous thought from geo-centric to socio-centric cosmologies. He sees place-based cosmologies, where place itself has consciousness, subverted by ‘cosmologies of disrupted space’. In the Torres Strait this is expressed through certain culture heroes, in Arnhem Land through the concept of the Earth Mother. He also sees the subsection system, now widely spread, as part of this cosmological shift which reflects disrupted space. Swain observes similar shifts under the onslaught of colonisation, including the appearance of monotheistic ideas. This argument both posits culture contact prior to the British arrival as being consequential, and by inserting a healthy dose of telos into ideas of Aboriginal cosmology, insists on change as a condition of culture.

Torres Strait Islanders were eventually confined to their islands by Queensland Aboriginal policy that also prevented mainland Aboriginals from travelling abroad. The Macassans were evicted from the northern coasts. What we might say, on balance, is that but for some fleeting incursions of Anglo-Celts, a period of isolation from the outside world now began for the Yolngu. The social isolation of the continent may have more to do with the actions of British colonisers, and a particular view of what one is isolated from. It is certain, however, that the northern parts of Australia had various connections to the outside world prior to British colonisation.

Puzzle 3: The European dominance

The idea of a ‘White Australia’ became a galvanising factor in the emergence of a federated Australian nation precisely because in the
1890s the historical outcome to which all of us have become accustomed was by no means clear.

Because of the scarcity of labour in the north, Chinese and other Asians continued to be recruited to assist northern colonisation when anti-Chinese sentiments had already been well formulated in the south and legislative measures been taken in response. The three engines of northern colonisation—pastoralism, pearling and transport—all crucially depended on Asian labour: Chinese shepherds in North Queensland; Chinese railway workers in the Northern Territory; Afghani camel teams for long-distance haulage; Japanese, Filipinos, and Malays in pearling.

The result was that the northern population balance continued to be weighted against White Australia well after Federation. Until 1911 there were more Chinese than Europeans in the Northern Territory; and in 1910 only seven per cent of those engaged in Broome pearling, and 1.3 per cent of those engaged in Thursday Island pearling were Europeans. Thursday Island was the administrative centre of the Torres Strait and subject to residential restrictions for Indigenous people. Still, in 1910 Europeans made up only forty-seven per cent of the total resident population.7 In the Northern Territory as a whole, the European population was consistently dwarfed against the Asian and Aboriginal populations until World War II. Streetscapes in the northern colonial townships were more suggestive of Asia than Europe and ‘outnumbered’ is part of the standard lexicon of northern histories, because White Europeans were everywhere a minority.

The Chinese population of the Northern Territory peaked in 1888 at over 6,000, the Japanese participation in the Thursday Island pearling industry peaked in 1898 (at 790), dipped in 1901 (to 551) and then continued to swell until 1913 (to 655). In the wake of these population movements, the anti-Chinese mood of the gold-rush period had by the 1890s become an anti-Asian sentiment that became galvanised as a pro-White policy.

The threat to White hegemony in the north was clearly perceived, particularly by southern visitors. A 1901 address to the Queensland Parliament observed that Thursday Island was ‘a regular little Chinese, Cingalese, or Japanese principality’ and that ‘the presence of coloured aliens on Thursday Island was a distinct menace to the white population, not only of the island but of Australia

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generally'. The entrepreneurial competition of numerically strong non-White communities caused the shake-up of several industries through a range of public inquiries and legislative measures concerning pearling, trepanging, camel haulage, and hawking, and the competition from cheap imported labour caused the reorganisation of the sugar industry.

The idea of White dominance in northern Australia was even more fundamentally challenged by the phenomenon of fast growing mixed populations. This development subverted the trend predicted by evolutionary theory of the eventual demise of the indigenous population. Moreover, the idea of White dominance was necessarily premised on the ability to distinguish between populations. If mixed populations rendered it difficult to define identifiable populations, then more troubling still was the convergence of two 'problem populations' such as Asian-Aboriginal families presented. While it was possible to regulate the immigration of Asians, and to administer Aborigines under special legislation, the mixed Asian-Aboriginal populations of the north tended to rent asunder the distinctions on which such management relied. During World War II these populations were regarded as a 'fifth column' and Indigenous people with suspected or real affinities with Japanese were treated with circumspection. From the point of view of a history committed to a White centrefold, Asian-Aboriginal families may appear as a quirky footnote at the periphery. In a 'mixed relations' model, on the other hand, as a fourth thesis, the phenomenon of Asian-Aboriginal families must be properly located at the core of the 'anxious nation'.

**Puzzle 4: The invisible Chinese and Aboriginal policy**

The numerical dominance of Chinese in the non-Aboriginal population of the Northern Territory until 1911 would suggest that its histories ought to be strongly preoccupied with experiences of the Chinese. However, the Chinese tend to appear as either incidental or problem populations, while studies that focus on the Chinese in the Territory make no claim to be histories of the Territory.

I have argued elsewhere that the medical/moral policing rationale, which Ros Kidd sees as the core of Aboriginal protection policies, is as useful to describe Anglo-Celtic attitudes towards Chinese as towards Aborigines.
Medical concerns associated with Chinese in Australia, like opium addiction, leprosy or smallpox, were generally couched in language suggestive of moral judgements (filth, laziness, lasciviousness). It is not as useful to seek to tease out one from the other as to understand them as a tightly constructed complex of grievances.

Aboriginal–Chinese interactions were constructed squarely within this medical/moral set of grievances. Several pieces of fundamental legislation bear the clear imprint of anxiety over contact between Indigenous and Asian peoples in the far north. Among them are the 1897 Protection Act in Queensland (prohibiting the sale of opium) and its 1901 amendment (barring Chinese from employing Aborigines), and the 1905 Protection Act in Western Australia (prohibiting contact between Aboriginal females and pearling lugger).

Though the history of colonisation of Indigenous Australia has been written in the firm grid of Black-and-White interactions, the Chinese have played a significant part in Aboriginal protection policies. When Walter Roth as protector of Aborigines in Queensland placed the issue of mixed marriages on the political agenda, he argued that it should be checked 'especially in the case of Asiatics and Kanakas'. The debates and correspondence surrounding the 1901 amendment act clearly demonstrate that it was not aimed at mixed marriages in general, but at marriages between Asians and Aborigines. The amendment made it possible to disallow mixed marriages, and the policy was to disallow Asian–Aboriginal marriages.

It was this amendment act which imprinted the Aboriginal protection bureaucracy in Queensland as a moral arbiter. The bureaucracy came under a barrage of requests for permission to marry and the policing of family formation became a major field of Aboriginal protection. Young women and mixed-descent children became the focus population of the Home Department.

For more than thirty years the Department was hamstrung by its definition of 'Aboriginal' and 'half-caste' in the face of a quickly growing mixed population. Legally it needed to be able to define a mother as 'Aboriginal' in order to rein in her children as 'half-castes' under the Act. However, the mixed Asian–Aboriginal populations of north Australian townships quickly outgrew this definition, creating a grey area of Aboriginal policy where neither the administrators nor the members of these coloured communities could be sure about their standing under the Act.
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The Department resorted to illegal removals of young women from these communities, and to marvellous feats of logical reasoning by which siblings of identical parentage could be classed as ‘Aborigines’, or as ‘half-castes’, or as ‘neither Aboriginal nor half-caste’, depending where they had been born and how old they were. This was the case in the Ahwang family of Thursday Island, where, with the ingenuity of an exasperated bureaucracy, it was declared retrospectively in 1921 that the mother ‘had been an Aborigine’ from 1897 until 1905.14

Asian–Aboriginal families formed the core of the poly-ethnic spaces that characterised north Australia. These ‘coloured communities’ were close-knit communities, whose members were linked by family, friendship, residence or experience, and woven into indigenous and Asian community fabrics. ‘Coloured’ was a label which undercut all legislative distinctions such as between Asian and non-Asian, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, alien and non-alien. Much as the state sought to distinguish between populations, coloured communities resisted these distinctions.

In 1934 the Department asserted its authority with a further amendment to the Protection Act targeting the northern coloured communities. It now reined in Pacific Islander descendants, and persons of Indigenous offspring to the fourth generation. This meant a disenfranchisement of many who had enjoyed full citizenship rights. All over Queensland associations were formed demanding citizenship, and a range of strikes, including at Stradbroke Island and in Torres Strait, underlined the resistance movement. In an attempt to fragment this movement, the Acts were repealed in 1939 and replaced with separate legislation for the mainland and for Torres Strait, the latter gaining some measure of self-government.

Asian entrepreneurial competition, the growth of mixed populations, and their contestation of White hegemony played a crucial role in key policy shifts in Aboriginal management. This suggests a fifth thesis, that to understand Aboriginal policy in north Australia requires a triangulated reading of relationships between Whites, Asians, and Aborigines.

Identity outcomes

There are ample indications that White hegemony was constantly under siege in northern Australia. In the larger towns coloured
communities occupied definable poly-ethnic spaces like Malaytown in Cairns, or Police Paddock in Darwin. The fabric of such townships was woven with finely graded rules about which school one attended, which streets one occupied, where one shopped, with whom one socialised, and even where one sat in the local cinema. Their disappearance facilitates forgetting, but I have met and interviewed countless people in the north for whom this poly-ethnic past was part of their experience, and became part of their identity. Many accounts of Darwin, Broome and Thursday Island suggest that, as thesis six, not Whiteness, but poly-ethnicity was the defining characteristic of the northern townships.

Since World War II a range of factors combined to erode the poly-ethnic spaces of the north. During the evacuation of civilians the northern towns came under allied command and Chinatowns and Japanese townships were targeted for demolition. Japanese were at first interned and then repatriated, and a conscious effort was made to prevent the reappearance of ethnic and poly-ethnic townships in the central business districts. Indigenous Australians, on the other hand, were gradually released from the paternalistic grip of the department, and eventually their access to rights became linked to Indigenous identity. Under these conditions it became difficult to remain 'coloured'.

Despite such pressures to become either Aboriginal or simply non-Aboriginal, assertions of hybrid identities emanate from the north with its poly-ethnic past. The family of Antonio Cubillo and Lily McKeddie was typical of the mixed community at Police Paddocks in Darwin. One of their descendants wrote a play about their relationship, called *Keep Him My Heart*. The subtitle of the play, *A Larrakia-Filipino Love Story*, speaks volumes about remembering and celebrating a hybrid lineage. Most descendants of this family today define themselves as staunchly Aboriginal. Yet Tex Camfoo at Barunga referred to one of the daughters of this marriage as 'a Filipino lass' who managed nearby Beswick station with her White husband. This perhaps underlines the range of identities which were able to emerge from a poly-ethnic past.

To demonstrate how uncertain the boundaries of Aboriginal identity have always been, I referred earlier to the Ahwang family from Thursday Island. Among its descendants, there are women voyaging into the Pacific to reassemble family links, and others
performing Malayan songs and Malayan dances, or embracing Islam, while still holding on firmly to their Indigenous identity. One descendant suggested that Islam needed to be recognised as an important faith in Torres Strait next to Christianity.  

Arnhem Land Aborigines have been active in reconnecting severed links into Makassar and celebrate their shared histories through locally produced school textbooks, exhibits in cultural centres such as at Maningrida, and popular music. Their affirmations of shared histories certainly do not amount to a challenge of their indigeneity.

It is in the field of creative and artistic production that these manifestations of hybridity have found their strongest expression. The musicals of Jimmy Chi, Bran Nue Dae and Corrugation Road, both deal with hybridity and use a good deal of 'Broome creole' to convey this flavour, and Broome rumour has it that he has been working on another piece about a 'Broome Chinese man who fosters and fathers many children of different cultural backgrounds, and through whom most of Broome discover they are related'.

Sarah Yu, discussing the Broome history of Aboriginal and Asian partnerships, refers to the moral condemnation and intensive policing to which such relationships were subjected, but also powerfully conjures the image of a shared history, shared cuisine, shared houses, and a shared 'Broome creole' which make up Broome culture. These kinds of observations strongly resonate with the conclusions reached in Caribbean cultural studies. Beverley Ormerod's analysis suggests that the colonial past has endowed the Caribbean not only with a complex hierarchy of named skin colours that used to be strategically deployed in the service of governance, but also, in a sense, with the seeds of the demise of this colonial frame of mind, in the form of a unifying Creole language which asserts diversity of origin and unity of experience. The emphasis on 'negritude' which played an important part in weakening the hold of colonial culture, is being displaced by a sense of 'creoleness' which appears to have far greater local relevance.

There are many affirmations of hybrid identities in textual representations emanating from the northern regions. Such texts, dealing with the repressed histories of Aboriginal–Asian contact in the north, might be read as an affirmation of complex ancestries and a refusal to construct Indigeneity as a closure. We gain from
them a sense, and posit as thesis seven, that *Indigenous identities can be constructed in ways which affirm creoleness*. Affirming complex ancestries which emerge from a repressed past of inter-racial contact that was subject to moral strictures, is a way of coming to terms with historical change. It requires the relinquishment of the idea of racial purity which underscores the continued assertion of Anglo-Celtic dominance.

**Conclusion**

If we start to write Australian history from north to south, instead of the other way round, and chronologically forward instead of teleologically backward, we must straightaway give up the ideas of Anglo-Celts at the centre of the Australian universe. Documented Australian history starts well before their arrival, and Indigenous people of the north were not as isolated before their coming as after—when Macassan trade was curtailed and Torres Strait Islanders confined on their islands. The two roughly bicentennial episodes of Australian settlement history are not incidental, but causally linked in a British effort to fend off the earliest reliably documented Asian connection to the Australian continent.

Anglo-Celtic Australia defined itself defensively against the empirical circumstances of the north, where Asian, Indigenous and mixed populations preponderated, and not Whiteness, but poly-ethnicity was the dominant experience. This siege mentality has become a core feature of national consciousness.

This also has implications for how Indigenous histories might be viewed. Histories of the management of Indigenous peoples must be understood in the context of the Asian presence that impacted on key pieces of legislation aimed at Asian-Aboriginal contact. Mixed families defied legislation to contain both Asian and Aboriginal populations: they reside at the core of an anxious nation. Such families long predate the British presence in Australia and have become an integral part of Indigenous identity in the north, demonstrating that Indigenous identity can embrace creoleness.

Once we look at the whole continent instead of its southern half, the moment of Anglo-Celtic dominance appears brief. Not achieved until World War II in the Northern Territory, by the 1970s a new wave of Asian immigration in the south and a broad-based mass move-
ment for Indigenous rights demonstrated to policy makers that a monocultural nation was not, after all, tenable.

If we take seriously the Australian Bureau of Statistics finding that fifty-eight per cent of Australians have parents from different birthplaces then the fastest growing population in Australia must be a mixed population. This must mean—as an eighth thesis in the ‘mixed relations’ model of Australian history—that histories that are to be relevant for the future ought to pin themselves on the crossroads of culture contact, on the threads that link populations rather than retrace, affirm and reinvent boundaries between them.

Notes

1 This work was first conducted during a post-doctoral fellowship in the History Program of the Research School for Social Sciences at the ANU and a visiting fellowship at the North Australia Research Unit. It was bridged with a Griffith University Research Grant, and brought to conclusion in 2000 as an ARC-funded study. The assistance of these institutions is gratefully acknowledged. Some of the publications emanating from this work are referred to below.


5 The map was photographed by Batchelor College students and published in their account of the journey: Michael Cooke, *Makassar and Northeast Arnhem Land—Missing Links and Living Bridges* (Batchelor College, July 1987). Macknight kindly presented me with a copy of the rare manuscript in which it first appeared, *A History of the Kingdom of Gowa* by Abdurrazak Daeng Patunru, Sedjaraht Go (Jajasan Kebudajaan Sulawesi Selatan dan Tenggara di Makassar, 1967), republished a few years later with the updated Indonesian spelling.

6 David Walker (ed.), *Bridge and Barrier—The Natural and Cultural History of Torres Strait* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1972).


9 Mr Lesina, member for Clermont, Legislative Assembly, 8 October 1901, *Queensland Parliamentary Papers*, LXXXVII (1901), p. 1150.


12 Roth to Under Secretary, Home Department, 21 January 1901, QSA A/58764.

13 This has been argued in detail in Regina Ganter 'Living an Immoral Life— 'Coloured' Women and the paternalistic State' in *Hecate*, 24, 1 (1998), pp. 13–40.

14 Ganter, 'Immoral life'.

15 Muriel bin Dol, personal communication, August 2000.


18 Henry Chan, personal communication, UNSW December 2000.
Lost in the Whitewash
Anti-Minorities History
Perspectives on Aboriginal-Asian Relations

MINORU HOKARI

Not 'fragmentary' in the sense of fragments that refer to an implicit whole but fragments that challenge not only the idea of wholeness but the very idea of the 'fragment' itself (for if there were not to be any wholes, what would the 'fragments' be 'fragments' of?)—Dipesh Chakrabarty

In this process, 'Australia' might cease to be seen as a convenient 'universalist salient point from which to 'read' Asia. Instead, people and places in Australia would become part of the problem to be understood and 'read' — in an interconnected series of points upon the earth, not only reflecting but becoming objects of reflection—Tessa Morris-Suzuki

Limits of minorities history

Let us ask ourselves, once again: why do we study the Aboriginal-Asian encounter? The simple answer has already been given in this volume: because such a history has been largely neglected in Australian historiography. Exploring how discourses of 'Indigenous' and 'Chinese' have historically been separated, Ann Curthoys describes this omission as 'an uneasy conversation'. Facilitating the conversation between the Indigenous and Asians in Australian political debate is indeed an urgent and important part of our Whitewash project. However, this article does not necessarily aim to make the conversation 'easier'. Instead, my purpose here is to look into Aboriginal-Asian relations from a different angle by 'unfocussing' on Australian history. By recasting our purpose in studying
Aboriginal–Asian relations, I am seeking a way of emancipating Aboriginal (and Asian) history from Australian historiography. I will first briefly look at Aboriginal historiography and show how such an Indigenous/minorities history has served to reshape Australian (national) history in the last thirty years of the twentieth century. Secondly, I will examine some studies about Aboriginal–Japanese relations to allow us to meditate on the conditions of multicultural/multinational experiences in Australia. Finally, I will sketch some methodological possibilities for writing Aboriginal–Asian relations as ‘anti-minorities history’.

The emergence of ‘minorities history’ has urged historians to re-think the writing (or not writing) of national history. As Dipesh Chakrabarty says, ‘The expression “minorities histories” has come to refer to all those pasts on whose behalf democratically minded historians have fought the exclusions and omissions of mainstream narratives of the nation’. In short, ‘minorities history’ created the field of writing ‘anti-national history’. However, this obviously important contribution to history writing ended up revealing its weakness as well as its strength. Minorities history is, by definition, always ‘marginal’. The more historians emphasise ‘how marginal they are’, the more we place minorities history in a ‘minor’ part of our historiography. In Chakrabarty’s words, ‘such “minor” pasts are those experiences of the past that always have to be assigned to an “inferior” or “marginal” position as they are translated into the academic historian’s language’. Confronting this problem of the ‘marginalisation of minorities’, historians began to write minorities history in a ‘less minor’ way by integrating it into the ‘new national history’. Therefore, the fundamental epistemological problem with writing minorities history seems to me to be that historians have to choose between either marginalising minorities history, or integrating it as part of an ‘alternative master narrative’.

However, first, we need to bear in mind, as Benedict Anderson clearly points out, that the very notions of ‘minority’ and ‘majority’, or ‘ethnicity’, are the products of colonial modernity. ‘[T]he politics of ethnicity,’ Anderson writes, ‘have their roots in modern times, not ancient history, and their shape has been largely determined by colonial policy’. Therefore, when writing minorities history, we should be aware of the risk of reinforcing the artificial binary of ‘majority’ and ‘minority’. Furthermore, we cannot overlook the
importance of Ghassan Hage's work on 'fantasies' of white supremacy in multicultural Australia. Hage argues that both racists and multiculturalists take the ‘White nation’ for granted and try to control Aboriginal and migrating populations as their political objects through White authority/supremacy.8

I would argue that the risks identified by Anderson and Hage have been apparent in Aboriginal history in Australian historiography.

**Creating a nation? Aboriginal historiography**

Since William Stanner challenged the ‘Great Australian Silence’ in his famous public lecture,9 the overriding purpose of studying Aboriginal history has been, more or less, consistent: finding and creating a place for Aboriginal history within Australian national—if not nationalistic—history. This project started by challenging previous Australian historical studies which had largely neglected the colonial oppression, exclusion and exploitation of Indigenous Australians. C.D. Rowley’s trilogy,10 Peter Biskup’s 1973 book *Not Slaves Not Citizens*,11 and Raymond Evans’ 1975 work *Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination*12 are probably the best examples of important works from the earlier stage of Aboriginal historiography, which narrated Aboriginal history as an anti-national history of Australia. However, since the 1980s, the historians’ project shifted from describing Aboriginal people as passive objects of colonisation, to seeing them as active agents of Australian history. Henry Reynolds’ groundbreaking 1981 work, *The Other Side of the Frontier*13 and other related works emphasised the violent conflict between the Indigenous people and the settlers.14 Corresponding to this shift, historians also began to explore the ways in which Aboriginal people flexibly adapted to the colonial regime, and their positive contribution to shaping Australia. In other words, historians began to shift Aboriginal history from ‘minorities history’ to a ‘less minor history’ of Australia. During this second major stage of Aboriginal historiography, Aboriginal history came to be written as a part of the ‘new national history’.

Many historians have persuasively argued for the Australian pastoral frontier as a site for this new national history. For example, Dawn May who studied Aboriginal labour in the Queensland pastoral industry claims that the success of Australia’s major export activities (the cattle industry) 'owes much to the contribution of
Aboriginal labour’. Ann McGrath’s controversial 1987 book Born in the Cattle emphasises Aboriginal stockworkers’ positive memories of their life in pastoral frontiers and stakes out a place for them in ‘our national legends’:

The Aboriginal stockman in cowboy hat, bright silk shirt, jeans and elastic-sided riding boots is a familiar sight in much of rural Australia. Yet so far he has been excluded from our national legends because of racism and his position in the story of colonialism. [...] Aborigines wanted their story to be told.

Such scholarship shifted the purpose of studying minorities history from writing ‘anti-national history’ to creating an ‘alternative national history’. Through this process, minorities became at the very least ‘less minor’ and, at most, a part of ‘our national legends’. In other words, Aboriginal history became ‘less dangerous’. Chakrabarty describes this shift as follows: ‘The transformation of once-oppositional, minority histories into “good histories” illustrates how the mechanism of incorporation works in the discipline of history.’ One of the most paradigmatic statements for the writing of ‘good history’ or ‘less minor history’ in the context of Australian national history can be found in the introduction of the 1994 book, Creating a Nation:

This book explores the myriad ways in which both women and men, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, have contributed to the economic, political and cultural life of the separate colonies and then the nation.

Before carrying our discussion further, let me make it clear: I have no intention of dismissing the importance of the Aboriginal or the Asian contribution to Australian nation-making. However, it is worthwhile examining whether Asian and Aboriginal people in Australia were as nationalistic or patriotic as dominant White Australian elites. Does the notion of ‘we all contributed to the making of the nation’ really correspond to minorities’ consciousness, or is it a response to a contemporary Australian public consciousness which demands such a new national memory? On the epistemological level, this question leads us back to our starting point of conceptualising ‘minorities’ whose histories were ‘neglected’. As long as we begin our historical inquiry from the notion of ‘minorities history’, our choice is limited to either the intellectual
marginalisation of minorities through their relegation to a stream of anti-national history, or the integration of minorities into an alternative master narrative. Minorities are necessarily ‘minor’ when we problematise and challenge the political ‘majority’ and its hegemonic history-making. Therefore, we cannot doubt the importance of uncovering the history of exclusion and exploitation of ‘minorities’. However, our next step is debatable: when historians want to write a ‘less minor history’ in order to emphasise the minorities’ agency, we end up writing a ‘good history’ which reinforces and reproduces nationalistic history by reshaping it. Is there any way of writing a ‘less minor history’ without creating a new master narrative? Can the position of minorities in history be anything other than either ‘minor’, or a part of ‘major’?

In considering these questions, I want to emphasise that the value of our project of studying Aboriginal-Asian relations lies not only in its capacity for expanding our historical knowledge but in its potential for overhauling our ways of thinking history and of constructing knowledge. The exploration of Aboriginal-Asian relations becomes, therefore, not an end-product but a point of departure which opens up new and interesting perspectives on the possibilities of writing an ‘alternative minorities history’.

In the next section, I will mainly look at the historiography of Japanese-Aboriginal relations as an example of the Aboriginal-Asian encounter. If we approach history from within the ‘minorities’ framework introduced by colonialism, then the Aboriginal-Japanese encounter constitutes a ‘more minor’ event than Aboriginal-Chinese relations in Australia by dint of demography. Since the population of Japanese migrants was much smaller than that of the Chinese, Aboriginal-Japanese history is probably less important in terms of contributing to Australian nation-making. Indeed, Aboriginal-Japanese relations could be one of the most ‘marginalised pasts’ in Australia. The question is how to shrug off this minorities framework and ‘unmarginalise’ Aboriginal-Japanese relations without integrating them into either Japanese or Australian national history.

**Aboriginal-Japanese relations**

At first glance, the history of the Aboriginal-Japanese encounter is no exception to the earlier described historiographic shift from
'anti-national history' to 'recreating national history'. Twenty years ago, the first published collection of studies on the Aboriginal–Asian encounter in Australia appeared in a special issue of *Aboriginal History*. In this volume, Athol Chase discussed Aboriginal–Japanese working relations in the pearl industry in Cape York. He described the close and friendly relationship between Aboriginal and Japanese labourers under the oppressive colonial regime. More recent work by historians has emphasised not only how badly both Asians and Aboriginals were exploited by colonialists, but their role as vital economic agents who were indispensable labourers in northern Australia. Regina Ganter's detailed and eye-opening study of the rise and fall of the Australian pearl-shell industry clearly asserts this point. *The Pearl-Shellers of Torres Strait* of 1994 opens by saying, 'At the faded margin of Australian historical consciousness are the shadows of a once vibrant industry which provided the pulse of bustling little townships on the northern extremities of the continent'. Here, she suggests that 'Australian historical consciousness' should not forget this 'marginalised history' of Australia. However, soon after this, Ganter tells us that a constant characteristic of 'pearl-shell fishery in Australian waters' has been 'that it was conducted by foreign nationals'. At the level of the pearl-shellers' domination, the Australian colonial industry constantly competed with and resisted Japanese migration by protecting its lugger-ownership. At the level of labour power, most of the divers and other workers were mainly either non-White migrants, many of whom were temporary visitors, or Indigenous peoples. Therefore, the history of the pearl-shell industry in Australia necessarily crosses the boundary of Australian nationhood. In other words, the history of the pearl industry in northern Australia is not just a part of Australian national history. It is the history of a place where 'All kind of nation been...', to use the phrasing of one Aboriginal person from Lockhart River.

Studying Australian colonial oppression and the exploitation of labourers from 'all kind of nation' may lead us to a minorities' marginalised history of Australia. On the other hand, emphasis on how people from 'all kind of nation' contributed to the Australian economy may create a new Australian national history. However, through the very notion of 'all kind of nation', both Chase's and Ganter's works indicate and imply something more than 'Australia' is happening here.
Keeping this problem in mind, let us now examine some of the Japanese literature. In Japan, the history of the Australian pearl shell (as well as trepang) industry has been discussed largely in the context of Japanese migration history. In other words, the purpose of these studies has been chiefly to augment Japanese national history through praise of the internationally acclaimed Japanese divers' excellence, their contribution to the industry, and their possession of particular national characteristics, such as their endurance in the face of Australian racism. For example, Kyuhara Shuuji writes:

[In Australia] Japanese fishery people went through numerous difficulties, fought them out, and with their bravery and efforts, risking their lives, they improved diving technology and found new fishing grounds. With original and exquisite Japanese skills, without peer among peoples of other nations, they have developed the pearl industry.5

Japanese historians often emphasise Japanese migrant workers' contribution to the 'industry'. However, it is difficult to discover in their works 'how Japanese contributed to the Australian economy'. Furthermore, Japanese historians normally do not pay much attention to Japanese encounters with Aboriginal people. Aboriginal–Japanese relations are often not discussed or, at best, are 'marginalised' in the context of Japanese migration history. Ogawa Taira's 1976 *Arafura-kai no Shinju* [Pearls in Arafura Sea]6 describes the Aboriginal–Japanese encounter in one section of one chapter. However, his account is surprisingly biased and is full of racism towards Aboriginal people, as indicated by the section title: 'Primit­ive Race, Bushman'.7 His discussion here is based on oral histories from Japanese ex-pearl divers. The stories introduced by Ogawa include reports that Japanese divers were attacked and eaten by 'bushmen'. 'It is heard that three Japanese were eaten in Showa 7 (in 1932). In inland Australia, even though Japanese buried the bodies, they were dug up again (by the Aborigines) the next morning.'8 With regard to Aboriginal women, Japanese ex-divers told Ogawa that they had 'the rut'. He also describes 'settled bushmen' who worked for the pearl or trepang industry. According to Ogawa, 'set­tled Aborigines' were employed because they did not demand money and were satisfied with clothes and tobacco. In addition, their ability to hunt fish, birds and kangaroo was very useful. He says 'their sense of smell and sight demonstrate extraordinary superhuman-
like talent, which is almost akin to animals'. He closes this section by describing in a positive manner missionary efforts to settle down and 'modernise' Aboriginal people. Ogawa's work also contrasts strongly to the ways in which Chase and Ganter describe peaceful and friendly Japanese–Aboriginal relations under the oppressive colonial regime. For example, Japanese ex-divers told Ganter about the Japanese–Aboriginal relations as follows:

We treated them like one of the family. Everyone had their own work to do, we didn't have to communicate very much. [...] There was no corporal punishment, only verbal abuse, if something went really wrong. The people on the boat were like one family.

Ganter summarises these findings with the statement that 'Aborigines and Japanese refer to each other as “honest”, a term that expresses mutual respect'. In contrast, while also admitting friendly aspects of the relationship between Aboriginals and Japanese, Ogawa narrates the encounter through negative characteristics of 'lack' (of understanding, of shared etiquette) and 'excess' (of violence). Due to the lack of understanding as well as different manners and customs, exchanges of blows were so common on the boat, Ogawa alleges, that disputes sometimes ended with serious injury, or even murder. In addition, Ogawa gives an example of a White manager who treated his Japanese workers like members of his family. Referring to Ogawa's work, David C.S. Sissons applies words like 'mutual respect' and 'honesty' to Japanese–White relations.

In sum, for historians writing Japanese migration history, the Aboriginal–Japanese encounter is something less than 'Japanese history'. The Japanese contribution to the pearl industry and their experience in colonial Australia are narrated as separate from their encounter with Aboriginal people. It is worth investigating why the works of Ganter and Ogawa, both based on the oral histories of Japanese ex-divers, produce such different images of Aboriginal–Japanese relations. Ogawa's discussion of Aboriginal societies was enmeshed in the racist discourse of the 1970s which Ganter is free of in the 1990s. Furthermore, Japanese interviewees may have reacted differently according to who the interviewer was, a male Japanese or a female Australian. Different questions and approaches by the interviewers may also have resulted in the collection of different types of stories. However, what I would like to suggest is
that our focus should not be on which one of these two versions of the past is a 'right story', or indeed 'the right story' any more than it should be on attempting to integrate these different standpoints into one story. Instead, we may need to stay with and pay attention to this difference. In other words, by comparing and 'connecting' two oppositional descriptions of the Aboriginal–Japanese encounter—as 'more than Australian history' (Ganter) and 'less than Japanese history' (Ogawa)—we may be able to create a historical arena in which we can think through those histories which can never become a part of 'national legends'.

Before further developing this conceptualisation, I would like to consider briefly the work of a Japanese journalist. In 1980, Nakano Fujio published an English article, 'Japanese Pearl Divers of Broome'. Later, based on his English article, Nakano published a Japanese book in 1986, *Mari- to Masatora* [Mary and Masatora]. This is probably the only Japanese literature focussing on the history of Aboriginal–Japanese relations. Of particular interest here is the divergence between these two works. While Nakano's English article claims that the multi-racial culture in Broome 'must be a facet of Australian society, and a part of Australian history', his Japanese work shows little intention of integrating Broome culture into an Australian national narrative. Instead, the first chapter of Nakano's Japanese book is titled, 'Town [Broome] that was made by Japanese'.

Nakano's work is based mainly on the oral history of a Japanese ex-pearl diver (Masataro Okumura, popularly known as 'Masatora') and his Aboriginal wife (Mary Okumura) in Broome. Both Japanese and English writings by Nakano position themselves in the conjunction in between Australian, Japanese and Aboriginal histories. The story of Masatora's background corresponds to Japanese migration history, while Mary's story tells the history of Aboriginal lives on a missionary reserve. Masatora's memory of his working experiences is closer to Ganter's argument rather than that of Ogawa's. He tells how many different ethnicities worked together, more or less harmoniously. At the same time, Masatora has been consciously against racism, which he has faced not only from white Australians but also from some Japanese who looked down on him for marrying an Aboriginal woman. At the beginning and near the end of his Japanese book, Nakano describes how, on the death of his best friend, Masatora murmurs, 'it's us who made this town (Broome),
We made it ... Kaino did a good job, too.' It was not Ketou-san [Whites] who made a company big,' Masatora reflects. 'It was not Ketou-san either who made this town big. All are our job.' However, by describing Mary's responses of nodding to him and holding his hand, as well as many Aboriginal people attending Kaino's funeral, Nakano indicates Masatora's 'we' and 'our' do not actually refer exclusively to 'Japanese' but instead embrace the earlier quoted formulation of 'all kind of nation[s].' Reading Nakano's Mari-to Masatora, it also became clear that Masatora's 'we made this town' does not mean their contribution to either 'Australia' or 'Japan', but something more local—Broome. Because Mary and Masatora's stories do not directly correspond to 'Australia', but more to Japanese, Aboriginal and other nationalities, this 'locality' does not necessarily represent a part of 'Australia'. Rather, Broome becomes a place of conjunction or a site of convergence between different places, cultures, and nations. Therefore, it is self-evident in Nakano's own writing that the multinationality of Broome is both 'more than' just a facet of Australian national history and 'less than' a part of Japanese migration history.

Stories of Aboriginal-Japanese encounters are marginal and local in both Japanese and Australian national histories. This is because their relations inevitably indicate something 'more than Australia' or 'less than Japan'. You cannot fully integrate Aboriginal-Japanese relations into any national history. However, because of the very nature of the notion 'more than Australia, less than Japan', its marginality and locality indicate the point of 'conjunction'; the conjunction in between Indigeneity and other nationalities within which the framework of 'Australia' or any other 'nations' lose hold. This should not only apply to Aboriginal-Japanese relations, but also Aboriginal-Afghan, Aboriginal-Indonesian, Aboriginal-Chinese, and so forth. I believe this 'conjunction' is one of the gateways for writing an 'anti-minorities history'. Anti-minorities history should, I believe, be a project of paying attention to these multicultural/multinational chains of conjunctions of different people and places.

**Sketching anti-minorities history**

Tessa Morris-Suzuki's proposal of 'anti-area studies' opens up further avenues of exploration for anti-minorities history. Morris-Suzuki argues that under the pressure of recent nationalism,
ethnocentrism and globalisation in Australia and elsewhere, we need to re-examine the notion of 'area studies'. She claims that area studies, along with other traditional disciplines, too often take the certain nature of social space for granted. In this search to create 'a single framework for the interdisciplinary study of social wholes,' she argues, entities such as 'Latin America' or 'Southeast Asia' have been unquestionably 'real' and 'integrated'. As an alternative template, Morris-Suzuki suggests a paradigm of 'anti-area studies' which will seek 'to reverse the process of spatial integration'. In such a project, it is crucial to analyse different social processes and interactions by using different sorts of social and geographical maps.

Morris-Suzuki sketches four possible examples of anti-area studies. The first comprises comparative studies of different nations' indigenous histories by focussing on their encounter with the modern nation-state. The second involves the study of a particular set of ideas varied around the world—such as the late 1960s student movement. The third would comprise research on global organisations such as the World Bank or United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). A fourth framework would involve looking at the local event 'in terms of the practical, everyday ways in which people experience and deal with the unsettling effects of global economic change in a number of very different sites throughout the world'.

Of these four proposals, the first—comparative studies of different indigenous communities—represents a possible way of practicing 'anti-minorities history' through the comparison and connection between different indigenous (or any other minorities) histories.

Morris-Suzuki's proposed overhaul of area-studies paradigms provides a useful starting point. But I would like to propose my model of anti-minorities history, as mapped out here in my examination of Aboriginal-Asian relations, as a means of pushing her fourth example of anti-area studies even further. By focussing on the 'connections' of different migrant and indigenous groups in a certain locality, anti-minorities history crosses the national and area boundaries without being entrapped by essentialistic notions of the 'nation', 'Asia', or 'ethnicity'. Through studying northern Australian towns such as Broome, Darwin or Thursday Island, one may find a web of connections between people from around the world—people from China, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, the Philippines.
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and Aboriginal Australia. Once again, our focus is not on 'origins' but on 'conjunctions'—on those connections which end up with 'more' or 'less' than a history of a certain 'area' or 'nation'. In other words, by 'unfocussing' national histories, the role of anti-minorities history will be to uncover non-elite ways of connecting local and global. In a similar vein to Ranajit Guha's contrast between the subaltern and elite mobilisation in colonial India, anti-minorities history pays attention to the 'horizontal network' of the different people across the globe rather than study the 'vertical integration' of globalisation by the hegemonic nation-states. Because this project is by nature multi-local and multicultural, it requires the collaboration of scholars studying different people and places in order to make such 'global yet local connections' visible. Moreover, as Morris-Suzuki warns, this project is not for integrating histories into one 'social whole' or single discipline. Instead, anti-minorities history should explore the boundary-crossing problems by using diverse disciplinary approaches as well as a wide range of knowledge from different areas.

But my model of an 'anti-minorities history' is not only congruent with Morris-Suzuki's prescription for 'anti-area studies'. It is equally pertinent to the project of 'deprovincialising national histories' discussed by Donna Merwick and Dipesh Chakrabarty in a recent colloquium at the Australian National University. During these discussions, Merwick suggested that we should focus on the migration of people, and their identities, which easily cross national boundaries. To Chakrabarty, our challenge was not so much to see across boundaries but to think without centres. In the context of anti-minorities history, I understand their suggestions to mean imagining history as a series of 'fragments' and 'connections' that cannot be integrated into national narratives. As Chakrabarty puts it, we should stay with 'what is fragmentary and episodic precisely because that which is fragmentary and episodic does not, cannot, dream of the whole called the state and therefore must be suggestive of knowledge forms that are not tied to the will that produce the state'. Studying the stories and localities of conjunctions among different people and places, anti-minorities history tries to pay attention to the web of connections without centre. Needless to say, such a web should not be understood as an essential whole to be known or exercised. Rather, this web is an unreachable open
horizon that facilitates the expansion and dispersion of the local conjunctions. By focussing on locality, and unfocussing the nation, anti-minorities history allows us to study conjunction, and to pay attention to the web of connections. Through this process, Aboriginal–Asian relations as anti-minorities history can be a course to ‘deprovincialising Australian history’. As Ganter stressed at the Lost in the Whitewash colloquium and in her essay for this volume, the new histories must ‘pin themselves on the crossroads ... on the threads that link populations rather than retrace, affirm and reinvent boundaries between them’. I believe that the direction Ganter is indicating is highly relevant to this project. By unfocussing national histories and boundaries, the project of anti-minorities history will articulate the connections among diverse ‘minorities’ without any ‘major’ or ‘central’ point of reference, in which the very notion of ‘minorities’ may not be necessary any more.

For my own part in this project, I am interested in exploring histories of Aboriginal–Japanese relations based on oral historical research by setting up a dialogue between academic and Indigenous modes of historical practice. I quote from Deborah B. Rose explaining the Aboriginal epistemology:

And knowledge, in all Aboriginal systems of information, is specific to the place and to the people. To put it another way: one of the most important aspects of Aboriginal knowledge systems is that they do not universalise. Moreover, the fact that knowledge is localised and specific is one of the keys to its value.

We are apt to overlook important things that lie nearby. The way Aboriginal people operate their knowledge is, in fact, the ideal model for practicing anti-minorities history.

Notes
1 I would like to thank Tessa Morris-Suzuki, Donna Merwick, and Ann Curthoys for discussions that have helped me to explore the idea of ‘anti-minorities history’. Mayumi Shinozaki of the National Library of Australia helped me to effectively survey Japanese literature. I am also grateful to Philippa Webb, Jinki Trevillian, and John Docker who kindly read the manuscript and made grammatical corrections and other numerous valuable suggestions.


6 Chakrabarty, Provincializing Europe, pp. 100–01. Although my argument here seeks to problematise such ‘major/minor’ dichotomy in the framework of ‘national history’, Chakrabarty’s article moves to develop the conception of ‘subaltern pasts’ (pp. 101–06), which is not directly related to my discussion in this article.


13 Henry Reynolds, The Other Side of the Frontier: An Interpretation of the Aboriginal Response to the Invasion and Settlement of Australia (Townsville: History Department James Cook University, 1981).

14 See, for example, Fergus Robinson and Barry York, The Black Resistance: An Introduction to the History of the Aborigines’ Struggle Against British Colo-
nialism (Camberwell: Widescope, 1977); Noel Loos, Invasion and Resistance: Aboriginal-European Relations on the North Queensland Frontier 1861–1897 (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1982).


22 Ganter, The Pearl-Shellers, Chap. 4.

23 Ganter, The Pearl-Shellers, Chap. 1.

24 Chase, ‘All Kind of Nation’, p. 11.


27 Ogawa, Arafura-kai, pp. 190–96.

28 Ogawa, Arafura-kai, p. 193.

29 Ogawa, Arafura-kai, p. 193.

30 Quote from Ganter, The Pearl-Shellers, p. 55.


32 Ogawa, Arafura-kai, pp. 196–203.
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33 Ogawa, *Arafura-kai*, p. 95. To be fair, Ogawa also describes the incident that a Japanese man hit the white manager. (pp. 202–03)


37 Nakano, 'Japanese Pearl Divers', p. 120.


49 Or, you may want to correspond such an anti-minorities history to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s conception of ‘Rhizome’. See, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1987).

50 Morris-Suzuki, 'Anti-Area Studies', p. 22.

51 The colloquium Deprovincialising National Histories was held by the Humanities Research Centre, ANU, May 2000.
52 Chakrabarty, 'Radical Histories and Question of Enlightenment Rationalism', p. 757.

53 Or, you may want to see it as a 'spatial application' of Foucault's notion of 'genealogy' as elaborated in Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' in Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 139-64.

54 Regina Ganter 'Mixed Relations: Towards Reconfiguring Australian History' in this volume; see page 82 of this volume.

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Introduction

In writing this essay, I have sought to amalgamate two apparently separate histories, those of the Chinese and Aboriginal communities in pre-war Darwin. This essay examines Darwin’s sporting history by looking at the dynamics of ethnic separation and solidarity in the formation of football teams in the 1920s and 1930s. The sporting field was one of many sites where Chinese and Aboriginal people came together in Darwin. Yet in previous histories, the emphasis has been on Chinese and Aboriginal sport as two separate activities. It is only by focussing on the connections between the two, however, that we begin to see the important political and social significance of sport as a forum for popular protest and as an expression of community.

Separate disciplines—Chinese and Aboriginal history

While some scholars are now choosing to examine the connections between Chinese and Aboriginal communities, it is nevertheless most common for historians to specialise either in the field of Aboriginal or Chinese history. In my own work, I have similarly been led to write separate histories in order to adapt to the themes of specialist conferences and academic journals. While such specialisation is largely a matter of expediency, it has produced an unsettling outcome. In selecting evidence to suit distinct subjects, historians have tended to locate the life stories of Chinese and Aboriginal protagonists against a backdrop of ‘White’ Australia. This has resulted in the
promulgation of separate rather than shared histories. Ann Curthoys has drawn attention to this division and its effect on contemporary political debate, where the legacy of Australia's historical 'race' relations is too often assumed to be ethnic separatism rather than inter-ethnic solidarity. It is important, therefore, that we emphasise instances of historical inter-ethnic co-operation, and that we recognise that the apparent division is largely a creation of selective remembering. As was demonstrated during the Lost in the Whitewash colloquium, it is possible to recast the evidence so as to highlight the connections between Chinese and Aboriginal Australians.

**Sport and ethnic identity**

The study of sport and ethnicity is a relatively recent but important addition to the study of ethnicity. Well known in this field is Colin Tatz who writes on Aboriginal sport. Tatz writes:

> ... the black Australian sports experience has shown how sport reflects social, political and legal history. Sport is perhaps the mirror of all things. It sheds light on political, social, legal and economic systems and processes. It is one major embodiment of popular culture ... Finally, sport is a reliable litmus test of the nature and level of racism in this society.'

There is, as yet, no corresponding work on Chinese sporting history in Australia. Rob Hess' study of the Chinese and Australian Rules Football in Victoria from 1892–1908 indicates that sport played an important role in building amicable relations between Chinese and White Australians. Diana Giese, writing in *Beyond Chinatown*, has discussed Chinese sporting history in Darwin.

Giese portrays the history of Chinese sport in Darwin as the history of Chinese achievement in the face of White Australian oppression. Her stories relate to the struggle to retain a sense of Chinese identity. She is critical of J. A. Cross' 1956 thesis, commenting that in Cross' assimilationist view, the formation of the Chinese Recreation Club in the 1920s 'is not attributed to their banning from White sporting clubs' but is seen as 'breaking down Chinese exclusivism and encouraging social and sporting contact with the rest of the population'. While Giese champions the notion of Chinese separatism as resistance to White hegemony, Cross favoured the assimilationist view.
Given my intention to examine the connections between Chinese and Aboriginal players I am inclined to reconsider part of Cross’ analysis regarding ‘contact with the rest of the population’. The Chinese Recreation Club was the creation of the Chinese Nationalist Party (*Kuomintang*), and as such its members were advocates for Chinese rights. But their sense of Chinese nationalism was not exclusive. A *Kuomintang* member, Charlie Houng On, wrote in 1932: ‘Many of us are Australian by birth, others are Australian by adoption; and though we are proud of our Chinese Nationality ... we are also proud of the land of our adoption’.4 For these Australia-born Chinese, their experience of Australia was of multi-ethnic Darwin, of growing up in mixed schools with both European and Aboriginal children. Understanding this background, it is not surprising to discover that the Chinese Recreation Club played a vital role in forging alliances between those White, Chinese and Aboriginal players who believed in a shared, ‘multicultural’ community space.

If the Chinese community supported mixed football, it was partly in acknowledgement of the fact that Darwin football was originally a mixed game, dominated by Aboriginal players of mixed descent. In the 1910s, Reuben Cooper, a so-called ‘half-caste’ Aboriginal had introduced the sport to Darwin after learning football at Prince Alfred College in Adelaide. He remained captain of the Vesteys football team until 1920.3 During the 1920s, the Aboriginal players in Darwin established themselves as a force to be reckoned with. I have described the players as ‘Aboriginal’ but by the 1920s the term usually used to describe the football players in the *Northern Standard* was ‘coloured’, a term which referred to their mixed heritage. The Ah Mats, for example, were of Malay–Torres Strait Islander descent, the Cubillos of Filipino–Scottish–Aboriginal descent and the Snape and Lew Fatt brothers of Aboriginal–Chinese descent. Thus, while the common bond of Aboriginality has led historians to identify these players as Aboriginal, the ethnic backgrounds of the players also confirmed the existence of a visibly poly-ethnic community and testified to the already established personal ties between Asian and Aboriginal communities. In an interview with Diana Giese, Joe Sarib, who was born in Darwin in 1930 of Javanese-Chinese descent, recalled that his desire to play football was prompted by watching ‘these marvellous, well you could call them Aboriginals or part-Aboriginals, whatever you like,
coloured people playing at the Darwin oval and it used to amaze me how they were able to kick and mark ...'. Men such as Steve Abala, Ali Ah Matt, Benny Baban and Don Bonson who played for the Buffaloes team were founding members of what Diana Giese has called the 'football dynasties of Darwin'.

In his history of Aboriginal sport, Colin Tatz emphasises the Aboriginality of famous players and argues that too often, in the past, Aboriginality has been denied. In pursuing this theme, he all but ignores the Chinese, Filipino and Malay heritage of many players. He writes that a 'fair number of Aboriginal achievers were persuaded to claim exotic ancestry, such as Caribbean, Filipino, Maori or, best of all, son of a Cherokee or Arapaho Indian chief'. He implies that such claims were part of the orchestrated publicity of the players and avoids any discussion of whether these 'exotic' ancestries may have been a valid means of identification. By focussing on Aboriginality, Tatz avoids the issue of mixed heritage and neglects cross-cultural influences.

If we compare Tatz's work on Aboriginal players with Giese's work on Chinese sport, this cross-cultural perspective emerges. For example, an Aboriginal basketball player discussed by Tatz is Bennie Lew Fatt, born in Darwin in 1938, who played in the Australian basketball championships during the 1960s. Tatz does not refer to Lew Fatt as having Chinese heritage. He refers only to basketball being played by Top End Aboriginal communities. Giese, writing in Astra- nauts, Lost Souls and Dragons takes her evidence on Darwin basketball from Charles See-Kee, who recalls that he was responsible for starting basketball during the Second World War, working under the auspices of the Chinese Recreation Club. He was president of the Northern Territory Basketball Association for twenty-one years. The personal story of Bennie Lew Fatt might just as easily be written in either the Aboriginal or Chinese version of Darwin's sporting history. Such individual stories demonstrate that the two histories are inextricably intertwined. Giese clearly appreciates this point, setting aside space to discuss the 'Boundary-Crossers', those that moved between the Aboriginal and Chinese worlds. Even this term, however, implies that individuals crossed over a distinct boundary, separating two ethnic groups. In sport, at least, the connection was far broader and the boundaries less distinct.
Certainly there is evidence of a Chinese separatism in sport, insofar as the original Chinese soccer teams were uniformly Chinese. The _Kuomintang_ had set out, as part of its 1921 agenda, a program to encourage physical fitness amongst Chinese. The promotion of youth sporting associations was common in nationalist programs of this era as it encouraged a sense of citizenship and promoted group identity. Giese's _Beyond Chinatown_ contains a photograph of the Chinese Recreation Club soccer team in 1923, which shows the team to be exclusively Chinese. The Club was intended as an affirmation of Chinese identity and was popular with second generation Chinese.

**Reacting to White exclusionism**

From the outset, Chinese players encountered hostility from members of Darwin's White elite or 'silvertails'. In 1922 Councillor Finniss complained to the Town Council that the Chinese were playing on the tennis court on Sundays and that they should be banned as this went against the Christian tradition of observing the sabbath. The Finniss family was actively involved in the Anglican Church and no doubt felt that it was their duty to report such activity. In this instance the other councillors dismissed the complaint but this did not prevent the Finniss family from continuing their crusade.

In 1925, Miss Finniss helped to organise a petition demanding that the Darwin State School be reorganised so as to separate the White children from the Chinese and Aboriginal children. At the time the government reported that there were 44 White, 66 Chinese and 11 'quadroon' and 'half-caste' students at the school. The petition was refused and a letter from the Administrator of the Northern Territory, Frederick Charles Urquhart, questioned 'whether separation as urged by the petitioners might not tend to the accentuation of racial differences with unfortunate effects on the general peace'. He argued that this 'ingrained prejudice' should not be regarded as a governing factor.  

While the petitioners were unable to institute segregation in the school, they were able to achieve segregation in sport, this being a matter for local government. In 1926 the Town Council voted to ban all 'coloured' and Chinese players from participating in Australian Rules Football. They disbanded the Northern Territory Football League and replaced the mixed teams with White-only teams to
form the North Australian Football League (NAFL). This shift to blatant apartheid coincided with the retirement of Urquhart and his replacement with an acting administrator, E. Copley Playford.

Some players accepted the change. Six White men who had previously played in the mixed Vesteyes team now played for the all-White League. Protesters pointed out that it was shameful that Reuben Cooper, who had ‘taught more local lads (of both colours) than any other player at present in the game’ was now banned from playing. H. Edwards, a delegate of the Vesteyes team wrote:

   It is difficult to understand what objections anyone can have to playing with the coloured lads, except, perhaps their superiority of play ... This movement to disenfranchise the locals from participation in football comes mainly from birds of passage who are here to-day and gone tomorrow ...’  

For those unwilling to accept the advent of White-only football an alternative solution was found. Australian Rules Football was abandoned and the players turned to soccer. The Darwin Soccer Association was formed in 1927 with four teams, two Chinese from the Chinese Recreation Club, one White and one ‘half-caste’ team. Tommy (Gee) Ming Ket, a member of the Kuomintang executive, was appointed secretary of the new Soccer Association. Ming Ket had to fight for the survival of the new soccer club. When he wrote to the Town Council asking for permission to use the oval on Saturday afternoons, he was told that the NAFL was in charge of the oval and that he would have to apply to that body for permission. Ming Ket protested that Councillor Watts should refrain from voting on the matter as he was biased ‘insofar as he was a delegate who voted for the exclusion of all coloured and Australian-born Chinese players’. He pointed out that the Darwin Soccer Association had fifty players and that as ratepayers they could not be barred from using the oval. Both Councillors Marchant and Watts were highly indignant in their response commenting that Ming Ket’s letter was dictatorial and that his request was impossible. Councillor Watts said, regarding Ming Ket, that he ‘did not give a snap of his finger for him’.  

A letter of protest to the editor of the Northern Standard from ‘Fairplay’ supported Ming Ket and suggested that the Council should give the soccer players a ‘fair go’. He criticised the ‘silvertails’
in the new League and reminded them that ‘union is strength’. This
was a significant statement as it publicly presented, for perhaps the
first time, the notion of Chinese, Aboriginal and White players
joined in union. At the time the Darwin North Australian Workers’
Union (NAWU) admitted only White and ‘half-caste’ workers into its
ranks. Their membership rules allowed a large number of part-Abo­
riginal members and a small handful of part-Chinese members, but
left the majority of Australia-born Chinese firmly excluded. It is thus
all the more significant that a unionist should accept and support
the leadership of Ming Ket in the matter of soccer. The formation of
the new Soccer Association opened the way for Chinese players to
compete against Aboriginal players, whereas previously only a small
number of Chinese had been involved in Australian Rules Football.
In February 1927 the first soccer game was played between the
Waratahs, a ‘half-caste’ team and the Chinese Recreation Club.5

The public protest against the racial prejudice of the White elite
escalated in 1928. In this year, a communist named Mahoney began
to lobby on behalf of the Chinese and Aboriginal residents of
Darwin. His primary goal was to have all workers admitted to
NAWU, but he also recognised the symbolic and social importance
of sport. A town meeting was called at which Mahoney declared
that the:

debarring of the coloured boys in the local football arena
was a violation of the fundamental principles of sport. Sport
is international. In the great games and sporting competi­
tions of the world all nations compete, irrespective of colour
or creed ...

The next speaker at the meeting was Harold Nelson, the Mem­
ber for the Northern Territory and a founding member of the
Darwin branch of the Australian Workers’ Union. He spoke against
the ‘colour line’, arguing that they did not want to base their society
on ‘colour and caste’ as was done in Singapore. He explicitly reject­
ed the British colonial model of a divided multiracial society. Bob
Murray, another unionist and keen footballer echoed his senti­
ments. It was Murray who suggested that it would be preferable to
avoid dividing the players into teams according to ethnicity as had
been done in the soccer teams. Instead he asked that they form
mixed teams, with ‘coloured’ players on every team.6
Australian Rules—Aboriginal–Chinese style

The protest against segregation was successful and by the 1930s there were two ‘mixed’ teams playing Australian Rules. Included in the 1933 Wanderers team were two Chinese players H. and A. Jan. One of the Jan brothers appeared in the 1923 photograph of the Chinese Soccer team—an indication perhaps that the incident had encouraged more Chinese to join teams with Aboriginal players. A similar pattern of mixed teams was seen amongst the junior players. The junior Town team was captained by H. Chin, son of a prominent Darwin Chinese and included several Chinese boys including the Moo brothers, who were of Hakka origin and several Aboriginal children. In 1933, author Ernestine Hill published this description of her impressions of Darwin football:

There is the football match on Saturday afternoon, with barrrackers in 25 languages and the ‘yacha-hoi’ of the tribes, with swarthy half-castes in bright blazers the big majority of the teams, leaping eight feet into the air to catch the shining rain-wet ball, and running with the swift grace of a deerhound—in Darwin it is more an Oriental ballet than a football match.

For Hill, this typically Australian pastime had been transformed into a unique display of cultural blending in which Aboriginal and Chinese influences were clearly apparent.

Chinese involvement in Australian Rules football was not simply as players but as financial supporters. When Ernie Lee died in 1932, he was described at his funeral as ‘a good sport and for a number of years was a staunch supporter of the Wanderers Football Club’. His pall bearers were F. Chavez, F. Spain, C. Spain, E. Conanan, A. Cubillo, E. Tapper, and J. Cubillo. These men represented a cross-section of ethnicities. Tapper was recently arrived from England, while Chavez was of Filipino descent. The Cubillo brothers were well known in Darwin as being descendants of the local Larrakia clan and a Filipino pearler. By taking part in Ernie Lee’s funeral, these men demonstrated the extent to which social groupings crossed over ethnic boundaries. Ernie Lee was well placed to have Aboriginal contacts as he had been one of the few Chinese to obtain membership of the NAWU. As the son of the Chinese merchant Lee Hang Gong and Sarah Bowman, his mixed descent meant that he was able to work
as a waterside worker. Charlie Snape, of Chinese–Aboriginal descent also worked on the wharf. Many of the footballers were encouraged to take up wharf work and like the football field, this became an important multi-ethnic meeting place. It would appear that the inter-ethnic bonds formed in the fight for mixed sport, helped to establish and strengthen bonds, in the workplace and beyond.

Conclusion

In this brief examination of Darwin's sporting life, it becomes clear that it is inappropriate to speak of separate Aboriginal and Chinese sporting histories. The complexity of ethnic identity and inter-ethnic connections is such that it becomes impossible to emphasise any single ethnic group without misunderstanding the very character of Darwin sport. The sportsground in Darwin became one of the many sites where Chinese and Aboriginal histories intersected. By playing football, players of different ethnic backgrounds immersed themselves in a common identity and a common culture. It was not the common culture imaged by White Australian assimilationists. Australian Rules football in Darwin had taken on the cultural influences of its multi-ethnic players. The Chinese, Aboriginal and European players fought for the right to play together, with each ethnic group taking an active role in the shaping of the game—each with a sense of ownership of the game.

The political analysis of these ethnic interactions has been re-interpreted over the past decades. What was important for writers in the early multicultural period, was to stress the singular and strong ethnic identity of players as Chinese or Aboriginal and to reject suggestions of assimilation. It is possible, however, to view this story as an example of inter-ethnic solidarity more in line with the type of co-operative or inclusive multiculturalism promoted today. This interpretation is only made possible by going beyond the confines of specialised Chinese or Aboriginal studies. The impact of the protest over sport in the 1920s on the Darwin community demonstrates that the connections between the Chinese and Aboriginal communities were far from being marginal or insignificant. The social history of Darwin cannot properly be understood unless we consider the way in which Chinese–Aboriginal co-operation played a central role in promoting a sense of 'multiculturalism' both on the sporting field and in the town itself.
Notes


4 Letter to Minister for the Interior, 5 July 1932, A1/15 32/2186, National Archives of Australia (NAA) ACT.


7 Giese, Interview with Joe Sarib, p. 25.


10 Other Chinese basketball players in the 1950s were Ray Yee and Joe Sarib. See Robyn On ‘The Chung Wah Society Past and Present’ in *Sweet and Sour: Experiences of Chinese Families in the Northern Territory* (Darwin: Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, 1996), p. 41.


12 Urquhart to Secretary, Home and Territories Dept., 8 September 1925, A1/15 38/10188, NAA ACT.

13 *Northern Standard*, 31 December 1926.


18 Northern Standard, 19 May 1933.
19 'Death of Mr E. Lee', in Northern Standard, 28 October 1932.
20 Northern Standard, 1 November 1932.
21 Barbara James, 'Hang Gong, Lee also Lee Hang Gong (c. 1836–1907) in David Carment and Barbara James (eds), Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography, Volume Two (Darwin: NTU Press, 1992), pp. 80–82.
Not long after I won a seat in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, I was given the opportunity to visit Hong Kong as part of a Commonwealth parliamentary conference. Although I'd knocked around Aboriginal politics for a long time, I was a very green mainstream parliamentarian and so had much to learn.

I was also visiting a place that was close to an historic end to a chapter in the history of colonialism, with the return of Hong Kong from the United Kingdom to the Chinese nation state. My experience with Chinese parliamentarians in Hong Kong enabled me to put one more piece of the jigsaw of my life into place. It also enabled me to fit my life a bit better into the whole experience of colonialism in the Northern Territory, and the way it has shaped the experience of Aboriginal people elsewhere.

I've always been proud of my Chinese heritage, so I was quite happy to tell my Hong Kong hosts about my grandfather Jimmy Ah Kit who sailed with six other Cantonese in a sampan to Palmerston, as Darwin was then known. According to the woman that was to become his wife, Nanna Jane Ah Kit, Jimmy and his compatriots walked all the way from Palmerston to Camooweal and Mount Isa looking for work and a new life in a new country.

The marriage certificate records Grandpa as fifty-eight years of age and my grandmother, Jane or Jean Ah Sam, as eighteen when they married. I believe Grandpa Ah Kit died back in the 1930s. Nanna was a Waanyi-Garrawa woman who stayed on around the Camooweal area and grew her family up there near her Lawn Hill
Lost in the Whitewash

birthplace. There was my father, Jack; Johnson Ah Kit, Henry Ah Kit, George Ah Kit, then Alfred Ah Kit. And on the girl’s side there was Jeanie Ah Kit, Doreen Ah Kit, Margaret Ah Kit and Edna Ah Kit. So, my father had four brothers and four sisters.

The response of my Chinese hosts was extraordinary, and completely unexpected. They informed me that, because my grandfather had come from Hong Kong and the province around Canton, I had residency rights and could return to the land of my ancestors if I wanted. In other words, I had a form of land rights.

By that stage I’d spent about fifteen years fighting against big odds to defend land rights in the Northern Territory and elsewhere in Australia. And here were my Chinese cousins suggesting it wasn’t too much trouble to organise, after all! Of course it wasn’t—and isn’t—that easy. But it made me think about how my Chinese grandfather confronted the racism of the time very much with his feet in the camp of the Aboriginal people he lived with.

Nanna Ah Kit told me how Native Welfare used to come around every couple of months trying to take her kids away, but she wouldn’t have a bar of it. Grandpa Jimmy Ah Kit—who would have been well into his sixties by this stage—took it one step further. He threatened the Native Welfare with a hoe and rake and told them to get lost, brandishing his marriage certificate with the words ‘These are legally my children. I am legally wed to their mother’.

How he got the marriage certificate I don’t know, because the cohabitation laws of the time would have meant he had to get permission to marry. Either way, I’ll always remember with pride the stories of him facing down the forces of government—and winning. It makes me wonder—if he’s up there looking down at me—what he thinks of his grandson now that he is in government! But there’s more to it than that.

The absolute primacy of my Aboriginality—and that of my family past and present—is undoubted. But the effects of past racist government policies and social structures have echoed down through my family’s history in both its Indigenous and its Chinese heritage.

My birth mother was Daisy Hull, an Irrawanyirri woman from what is now Witjira National Park in South Australia. She had extensive cultural knowledge, and spoke seven central Australian languages. She met my father down Alice Springs way, where I was
born in 1950. As a young bloke, my father had worked as a road labourer first for the Mount Isa Shire Council, and later for the Northern Territory Administration, patching roads between the Three Ways Roadhouse and the border. By the time he met Mum Daisy, he was working in Alice Springs as a labourer and then a taxi driver. At this time he also got involved in sport.

My second mum who grew me up was a lovely woman—Stella Weetra—and had the job of raising us Ah Kit kids along with four of her own. She was also known as Stella Tennant, reflecting the fact that she had been stolen by Native Welfare officers from Tennant Creek as an eight- or nine-year-old. That was typical of the time—with Native Welfare handing out surnames according to where they pinched you from. Stella was sent to Croker Island along with her countrymen. There was Bobby Renner, obviously from around Renner Springs, as well as a Dicky Tennant, and the Hill family who were taken away from Wave Hill.

The saddest part for all of us now is that Stella, a Warrumungu lady, didn’t pass on her knowledge of that heritage to us kids. This was a time, at Croker Island and beyond, where the government and missions actively suppressed Aboriginal culture—and actively discouraged the passing on of culture to the following generations. It was a punishment for being Aboriginal—but it was an inter-generational punishment, also. We all missed out. We were all punished for having an Aboriginal heritage.

Mum Daisy sent me and two of my sisters up to Darwin when I was three or four years old to live with Stella and my Dad at the Parap Camp. By this stage Dad was working on the wharves, which he did till the day he died. It was for that reason, at the sixtieth anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin I attended the commemoration down at the wharves, and not with all the others up on the hill. It was those Labor and Communist Party Darwin wharfies who lost their workmates along with the armed forces who died that day—and who over the years have kept those memories alive.

Life as a kid at the Parap Camp was hardly a bed of roses, but we had a good life growing up in the old ex-army tin sheds. It was mostly with Aboriginal kids, but we also knocked around with Chinese, Greek and Italian kids, as well as kids with Filipino, Malay and Torres Strait Island heritage. It was a knockabout life where we made our own entertainment, some of which I can only laugh about
in a shame-faced way now. I remember for example us kids seeing a Scottish pipe band in town, then going back and grabbing some neighbourhood cats, tucking them under our arms and marching around the camp squeezing them and biting their tails to produce sounds that we thought were pretty close to bagpipes. I doubt if anyone from Scotland would have agreed, nor did our parents, because I remember we got a good hiding for that.

Sometimes, the Chinese heritage would crop up in my life simply because we faced similar discrimination, and so shared similar hardships, to the Chinese.

Not long ago, I heard on the radio an interview with Albert Chan, a very elderly Chinese gentleman who lived in Darwin for years and years, who worked on the wharf when my father did. He was speaking of the days of old Chinatown and it reminded me of the times when Albert used to take us goose shooting. We’d jump on the back of a truck—eight-, nine-, ten-year-olds—and head off out to Howard Springs which would be, in those days, a couple of hours’ drive. And we’d spend the day out there hunting magpie geese, something I enjoy doing to this day.

My father was well known in the Chinese community, and well respected. Not just for the name, Ah Kit, but for the Chinese blood that he had—the Chinese culture he had in him. We shopped at the Sun Cheong Leong for clothes, or Sue Wah Chin across the road. It made a lot more sense for us to shop with the Chinese, with whom we shared so many disadvantages in the old days, than with the Anglo-owned stores.

I remember there used to be an old Chinese cemetery down from the Camp towards Dinah Beach. Whenever there was a Chinese funeral we’d hide in the bushes until the ceremony was over, and then we’d sneak down and pinch all the offerings of food from the tombstones. That was our biggest feast of the year.

No-one ever caught us—though it’s an episode I now feel ashamed about.

Growing up we got introduced to salty plums and if you want to tell if a person has been around the Territory for a long time, you’d see how they take to them. You show me a kid eating salty plums, and you know straight away—it’s a Top Ender trait. As a kid we had—and still do today—rice with every main meal not to mention more than the occasional salty plum! And we cooked in a lot of
similar ways to the Chinese. For example, there’s a dish that we cook which I put down specifically to the relationship that the Chinese people had with Aboriginal people. It’s known as cabbage stew and it’s a well-known dish that we cook at least once a week. Meat, bacon, with a bit of Chinese cabbage thrown in, are cooked into a nice stew. And you have it with rice. So, when you look back and think ‘Hang on, where’s this Chinese cabbage come from—how the hell did it get mixed up with this stew type of thing?’ It’s that damn Chinese heritage again!

As the president of the Darwin Amateur Basketball Association, my father had a lot to do with the Darwin Chinese Recreation Club. Darwin’s Chinese were in the same boat—pushed to one side like the Aboriginal people—so they started up their own competition. Like Aboriginal people, the Chinese weren’t welcome in any sport.

The Chinese, from the mid-1950s onwards through the Darwin Chinese Recreation Club excelled in basketball and Aussie Rules and the Chinese and Aboriginals used to play together.

A lot of the Chinese community—especially the younger generation—need to understand that their grandparents and parents fought for them to be treated and accepted as equals in Darwin in the old days. In the same way, Aboriginal kids need to learn about and understand the struggles their old people had in establishing civil and political rights.

My political education started developing when I began working. But increasingly, it was influenced by Aboriginal political developments in Darwin and elsewhere in Australia.

All my early jobs were pretty much unskilled: carting parcels for customers at Woolworths, selling newspapers on the streets and working at the abattoir. Right through this period, I am now aware, I was storing experiences and ideas in the back of my mind. Not for any real reason, but because I felt uncomfortable with particular situations.

As time went on I got jobs on cattle stations mustering bullocks on horseback and driving trucks—meeting people. It was pretty much a young man’s existence: the good times of girls, grog and sport. But I was coming into contact with more politically interesting things when one starts to think through things. I was coming to realise that politics—mainstream, Aboriginal, sporting, you name it—affected all of our lives.
I was too young to really pay much attention to the New South Wales Freedom Rides led by Kwementyaye Perkins back in the 1960s, but it was Perkins who first sparked an active interest in Aboriginal politics. It was 1971 and I was twenty-one, and I attended my first NAIDOC march in Alice Springs. It was there I met Perkins for the first time.

A few non-Indigenous friends who played rugby for the team I coached gigged me a bit. But that was like water off a duck’s back. I found myself marching in the street yelling out radical things. Back in those days, Aboriginal people who came out and showed their true colours and started to support the cause, or the struggle, were always labelled as stirrers—Black hustlers. They just basically wanted to put you down. But I just felt, ‘No, I’m not going to be put down, you can say what you like but I need to march. I want to march and I need to find out more about politics.’

I sat and listened to Kwementyaye Perkins on a couple of occasions when he visited Alice where I was living, working and playing sport. I was fascinated by the way he spoke, the knowledge he had, the people he had met, the places he had travelled and to know that he was doing it for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

That then triggered a yearning in me to look at going back to study, because I knew that if I wanted to be somebody, I couldn’t do it without having a formal degree or diploma. A piece of paper that I could say to non-Indigenous people in the bureaucracy: ‘I’m not being appointed to a position earmarked specifically for Aboriginals because of my colour and my Aboriginality. I’m going to be given a job as the best person that can do the job with qualifications.’

But this desire to go and study was also about solving the jigsaw puzzle in my life. Who was I? Where did I come from? What was my tribe? What languages did they speak? What sites were there? What ceremonies were there? It was about all this cultural and traditional wealth of knowledge that I’d missed out on because my mother was a part of the Stolen Generation. The government had indoctrinated her, my father and many others, that if you wanted your kids to survive, the only way was to learn to be like the White man.

And so that was the challenge before me at the age of twenty-seven when I went to university and studied for two years. It was during this period that I was able to sort myself out, where I was heading and what I wanted to achieve. This included coming to
grips with my Aboriginality and being comfortable with it. Then I was able to take on the world in ways of providing what input I could in terms of helping our people and our struggles.

Adelaide was an educational experience in more ways than one—particularly in my appreciation and understanding of racism and its impact on Aboriginal people, as well as other minority groups.

Maybe it was a function of being very young, but growing up in Darwin you just didn’t worry about racial prejudice. You never saw it. It never passed you every day. It never tapped you on the shoulder. If it was there, you were oblivious to it.

Adelaide was a big shock in both big and small ways. For the first time, I became acutely aware of prejudice.

For example, I used to get on the bus where I was staying at my friend’s place, at St Marys, which is part of the southern suburbs of Adelaide and it was bus number 28 that I used to catch to come in to study. I wasn’t comfortable in my studies because I was still getting settled in Adelaide, and I used to sit up the back of the bus in the corner because I didn’t believe I had a choice. That’s where I figured blackfellas had to sit. But after a couple of months, as my training started to take hold, I began to experiment. I’d sit up the front of the bus—as you come onto the bus, the first seat on your left.

People wouldn’t sit near me. On some occasions—many occasions—people would not sit near me, simply because I was a black boy. It was sad for me.

I came back a changed person—but a determined one. Determined to make a contribution—and to be sitting at the front of the bus.

For a couple of years I worked as the District Officer with the then Department of Social Security in Katherine. The area I covered was bigger than Victoria and it was from this time I was able to meet countrymen and women from a wide variety of places and circumstances—from outstations in central and eastern Arnhem Land, to the cattle stations of the Barkly and Victoria River region, to the fringe camps of townships scattered up the track.

It was the beginning of a period when I encountered some of the finest men and women you could hope to meet. It was the time that I got to travel and sit around countless campfires, yarning with the old people, and watching the faces of kids in the firelight. It strongly reminded me of my own childhood, and of how the lives of
Aboriginal people are inextricably linked with each other through family and community.

The vivid memories I have of those times around the campfire continue to inspire me in what I do today.

The department was my first real experience of how government and bureaucracies work, and stood me in good stead over the decade of the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s as I became involved in Aboriginal-controlled organisations. My first work in this area was as the boss of Kalano, Katherine's Aboriginal town organisation. This was followed by seven years as the director of the Northern Land Council, and finally by three years as the executive officer of the Jawoyn Association.

They were momentous years, for myself and the organisations for which I worked. They were the years of battles with the government over the preferred national land rights model being pushed by Canberra; the 1988 marches in Sydney over the Bicentenary; the fight for Guratba, or Coronation Hill; and the first successful native title victory over the Mount Todd mine.

It was also a time of making many friends across Australia, both in Indigenous and non-Indigenous circles and—no doubt—a few enemies. Many of these friendships—and hostilities—developed in the field of parliamentary politics. In countless lobbying and campaigning trips to Canberra, I'd got a taste for it, so by the 1990s I had decided that I would channel my efforts into working for Indigenous people in a different arena.

I remember that my first attempt at running for parliament was a total failure. I was preselected for an impossible seat for Labor. Probably the best advice I got was not to worry about my campaign photographs showing that I had a missing tooth. 'It'll save the CLP [Country Liberal Party] graffiti-ing them', I was told. My second outing, for the seat of Arnhem, which I have held since 1995, came under the unfortunate circumstances of the death of the sitting member—another Aboriginal man and a great friend.

But my political opponents did their level best to attack me. They claimed, incorrectly, that I came from Queensland. They refined their expertise at Aboriginal bashing when they campaigned to 'vote against the yellafella'. They also threw a heap of money against me. They lost, and here I am, a proud member of the Territory's first Labor Government and the Northern Territory's first Aboriginal minister.
It’s still a puzzle to me how a little ratbag from the Parap Camp could get to where I have. I’m not sure who should be more surprised—me, or the kids I grew up with in Darwin. Maybe it’s something in the water in the Northern Territory, but the response from my contemporaries has been remarkably positive. We have, what I believe is a sort of unwritten golden rule amongst old Darwinites of my age. We went to school together and have known each other for many years and we’ve respected each other over the years. Darwin was easy to grow up in. There was no need for mistrust or disrespect for tribal people living over in Bagot and in the long grass. There were the Greeks, Italians, Chinese and non-Aboriginal blokes that I went to school and played sport with who treat me with the utmost respect, as I do them. Many probably still think I’m a ratbag—but there’s a level of respect as well.

In early 2002, I gave a major address to the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly which focussed primarily on the crisis facing virtually all Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, from town to the bush. My comments were not designed as a contribution to the culture of complaint—far from it. They were designed to underscore the current emphasis of the Martin Labor Government, which is to rebuild resilience in Aboriginal communities, organisations and individuals. This must be our future direction, upon which all of us will be judged, both in the Territory, and across the nation.

One of the finest things I’ve seen in my lifetime experience of the struggle, is coming out of the 1970s and into the 1980s. That was the decade when Aboriginal kids started to wear our colours with pride—in anklets, necklaces, watches, and t-shirts. Twenty years on, it’s still very much a matter of pride, with no second thoughts about 'my Aboriginality'. Rather, it’s a case of ‘That’s our colours and I’m wearing them’.

Now there’s a new generation of bright young Indigenous leaders moving into the political sphere to shape our future. In time, we’ll be remembered as the old people. But the colours will stay the same.

*This paper was first presented at the 'Understanding and Implementing Good Governance for Indigenous Communities and Regions' conference, Canberra, 3–5 April 2002.*
Lost in the Whitewash

[Article text]

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Reviewing, (and often enough, bestowing criticism on) historical exhibitions has become the meat and drink of public history journals and students in the past fifteen years. As a historian who has spent more energy advising on the production of exhibitions than reviewing them, I offer the following remarks about the Inverell District Bicentennial Memorial, in respect and appreciation of what has been achieved. I do not underestimate the heart-searching and difficult negotiations which, I have no doubt, attended the planning of this memorial.

Inverell is a medium-sized and fairly prosperous town in northern New South Wales. Its bicentennial memorial was unveiled by the NSW Governor in 1988 'to commemorate those people who, irrespective of ethnic origin, colour, class or creed, con-
tributed to the genesis and development of the Inverell district. The memorial stands in a public park near the town centre. It consists of three open-air galleries, each holding ten relief (that is, two dimensional) sculptures in white cement, which illustrate and describe the history of the town and region. Most of the sculptures are about a metre tall and half a metre wide.

The first plaque of the memorial invites readers to liken it to a living tree.


One complete gallery is devoted to Aboriginal (mostly pre-invasion) history. Typical captions on the reliefs are:

MURRI PEOPLE KNEW HOW TO CONSERVE THEIR RESOURCES AND HOW TO OBTAIN MAXIMUM BENEFIT FROM THEM. BOTH MEN AND WOMEN WERE EXTREMELY SKILLED IN THE MANUFACTURE OF ARTEFACTS

and:

THERE IS MUCH EVIDENCE OF OCCUPATION OF THE OTTLEY VALLEY BY THE WERAERAI PEOPLE. SANDSTONE OUTCROPS PROVIDED SHELTER. ROCKS NEAR THE CREEK PROVIDED
PLACES FOR SHARPENING IMPLEMENTS (GRINDING GROVES) AND FOR MILLING SEEDS

The only caption which uses the present tense is:

ANAIWAN PEOPLES OF TINGHA KNOW MANY TRADITIONAL STORIES WHICH ARE THOUSANDS OF YEARS OLD. USING THE ARTIST'S OWN STYLISED FORM OF ABORIGINAL DRAWING, THIS PANEL DEPICTS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STORY TELLER.

Although in focus anthropological rather than historical, distant rather than recent, the gallery is impressive. Collectively the plaques and illustrations suggest either an authorship or an overseeing, by the Annaiwan and the Weraerae peoples. White Australians do not enter their story at any point. I can imagine the debates and negotiations as to whether the captions should be written in the first or third person.

The use of multiple illustrations within a single frame in the third gallery, and a new signage style indicate the separate authorships of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous sections. A typical caption, identifying a collage of activities rather than a single scene, reads:

EARLY WOOL-GROWING. A SHEPHERD PROTECTS THE SHEEP FROM DINGOES, SOMETIMES SLEEPING IN A 'SENTRY BOX'. EARLY TYPES OF FENCING. SHEEP WASHING REDUCED WEIGHT OF WOOL BEFORE TRANSPORT.

In this gallery Aborigines are mentioned twice:

THE FIRST WHITE VISITORS
A CONVICT ESCAPES FROM A ROAD BUILDING CHAIN GANG
REMOVES HIS FETTERS
GOES BUSH AND IS BEFRIENDED BY ABORIGINES

After which, they disappear altogether, except for the unfortunately worded:

PROBLEMS DURING THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. ABORIGINES LIVING IN SQUALOR ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN. PRICKLY PEAR AND RABBIT
Aboriginal Drawing, panel.

Photo: Peter Read
Where are the Chinese?

At the time I inspected the memorial in 1999, I was carrying out an assessment on what was called ‘European Material Heritage Items’ along the route of a proposed power line from Armidale to Texas. The ethnocentric limitations placed upon the consultancy had already become apparent to me several weeks earlier as I searched the web for items of material heritage registered under the Australian Heritage Commission Act and the NSW Heritage Act. Some of the notable register items were connected with the nineteenth century Chinese community. I brought the anomaly to the attention of my employer. My brief was changed to assessing the ‘Non-Indigenous Material Heritage’ items along the planned route.

Yet about the Chinese on the memorial there is almost nothing. I could understand the historical unawareness of the electricity engineers, but what of the planners of the memorial? The Chinese were crucial to the history of the region both as miners and storekeepers. The town of Inverell itself lists the Hong Yuen and Co. store among its score of historic buildings. The most important item in Tingha is the Wing Hing Long and Co. Store, whose structure, fabric, and archival and movable heritage collections provide a unique documentation of the continuous and significant contribution of Chinese Australians and of general stores to the history of retailing in regional New South Wales ... They also provide significant insight into the
rise and decline of the tin mining community in which the
store is located.'

The Wing Hing Long store, the 'Inventory' item continues, was
owned variously by other Chinese including Ng Chee, a butcher from
the mining town of Emmaville, Jock Sing from Glen Innes and Ah
Bow, a miner from Tingha. The list suggests diversity of region as well
as of occupation. The 'Historical Notes' to the assessment add that

The history of ownership is a reminder of the long and con­
tinuous association of Chinese Australians with the town of
Tingha, and with establishing and managing general stores
in regional New South Wales during the late nineteenth and
first half of the twentieth century.²

Nine hundred Chinese miners in fact occupied the region, a fact
borne upon me a few days later when I inspected two excellently
preserved Chinese hand-dug tin mines on West Oak station north
of Inverell. One hundred metres from the mines lie the remains of a
hut occupied by the miners, another stone structure (probably a pig
oven) and a small hand-built irrigation dam, quite unlike the typical
White Australian structure. In my report I rated the importance of
the entire site as 'high local', and worthy of consideration for inclu­
sion as an area of 'local significance' registered with an Interim
Heritage Protection Order.³

Given the significance of Chinese miners, storekeepers, irriga­
tors and vegetable growers in the region, one might assume that
several important aspects of their contribution would be depicted
on the memorial. But they are not. The Chinese occupy a minor part
of a single relief drawing, bearing the caption:

TIN DISCOVERED 1871 BY SHEPHERD, JOSEPH WILLS.
DIAMONDS MINED FROM 1880S. TECHNIQUES SHOWN —
ALLUVIAL-PANNING, CRADLE, TUNNEL INTO HILL,
WINDLASS ABOVE SHAFT, HORSE DRIVEN WINCH, CHINESE
MINERS, SLUICE BOX.
The entire Chinese contribution to the history of the region has been reduced, perhaps by grammatical inattention, to no more than a mining technique. Yet the initial invocation to the memorial acknowledges:

THOSE PEOPLE WHO, IRRESPECTIVE OF ETHNIC ORIGIN, COLOUR, CLASS OR CREED, CONTRIBUTED TO THE GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE INVERELL REGION.

We can admire the impulse which allowed Koori people a whole third of the memorial and the evident right to create their own history. We can admire the attention to individual Koori language groups and the differentiation of place, vegetation and artefact. These are substantial and lasting achievements. But what has become of the Chinese? For that matter, what has happened to the extensive Chinese–Aboriginal kin structures?

It is easier to answer the second question than the first. It is my impression that Chinese Australians have generally not put pressure on people of mixed Chinese descent to identify as Chinese. It has been very much a matter of individual choice. Chinese Australians have not been, to my knowledge, particularly interested in those who did not wish to acknowledge their Chinese ancestry. ‘Harvest of Endurance’, the challenging and important fifty-metre pictorial scroll depicting Chinese-Australian history, and produced in the same year as the Inverell memorial, does not refer to Chinese mixed families of any kind. Nor do non-Chinese Australians enter this narrative significantly. The implication is that Chinese Australians may be proud of their achievements which they have carried out in Australia and to some extent beside Anglo-Celtic Australians but not with Anglo-Celtic Australians. Indeed, the self-perception of Chinese Australians appears from that work to be one of parallel belonging, parallel achievement.

Judging from the several shops operated by Chinese Australians in Inverell and in the region, it is clear that the Chinese population has not vanished. If, though, I am right in the perception that Chinese Australians identify their achievement as parallel to that of other Australians, it may be that they did not see acknowledgement of their contribution as important, in a White conceived and dominated memorial. It may be that there were too few Chinese Australians in the region to take part in the discussions. It may be
that those who remained were not particularly historically minded. It may be that they were not consulted at all. It may be that the town authorities had a much more ethnically homogenised view of the history of the Inverell region than the Chinese, and certainly the Aborigines.

Why not, then, an acknowledgement of Chinese and Aboriginal extended families? The number of Indigenous people of the region who can identify, or choose to identify, a Chinese ancestor is unknown, but my experience working as a Link-Up field officer some years ago, leads me to think that it is substantial. Few, though—unlike the Aborigines of northern Australia—do so identify. That is, very few people of mixed Chinese—Indigenous descent living in southern Australia openly identify with their Chinese ancestry.

There are good historical reasons for this. The NSW Aborigines Protection Act of 1909 defined Aborigines (s.3) as including those 'having an admixture of Aboriginal blood' who received government rations, or had applied for them, or who lived on a reserve'. Those who were identified as Aboriginal, and who associated with other Aborigines, legally were Aboriginal in the eyes of officials who insisted on classifying them as either one or the other. One was either an Aboriginal, (and could be so defined by one’s actions alone) or one wasn’t. For the purposes of being allowed on to a reserve, or legally able to be ejected from one, or be refused entry to a hotel, or to vote, or to enlist in the armed forces—one was either an Aboriginal or one was not.

New South Wales Aboriginal people until very recently generally took the same view of themselves. The famous newspaper Abo Call, produced by Victorian and NSW Kooris in the 1930s, implicitly made the assumption that a person of any degree of Aboriginal descent was entitled to describe themselves as Aborigines. The obverse to southern Aboriginal identity for most of this century has been, 'I’m a Koori and whatever else I am doesn’t matter'.

The pattern is changing. I have noticed an interesting, and very recent, tendency on the part of younger southern Indigenous people to identify themselves as both Aboriginal and, say, Scottish, Irish, Italian or Croatian. Probably the impulse for this novel phenomenon derives from the self-identity of many of their friends, whose families for a generation or more may have described themselves as Malay Australian, Turkish Australians or Greek Australians. Clearly this potentially subversive reidentification may carry significant
legal implications: a woman who identifies herself as Aboriginal and Chinese may possibly carry less weight in a land-claim hearing than someone who positions herself as Aboriginal alone—even though she is still the same person!

As we have seen, the Aborigines not only were consulted in the planning of the memorial, but devised their own historical narration. No doubt they asked for this participation, or demanded it. Equally, in 1988 Anglo-Celtic Australian historians were anxious that Indigenous history be afforded its proper place in the celebrations. The index for ‘Aborigines’ in the 1988 volume of *Australians: A Bicentennial History* takes up forty lines, by far the longest entry. That same impulse drove the planning committees of the Inverell Memorial. Perhaps like the Chinese, the Indigenous historians saw their achievements as independent of the Whites. This is the same kind of belonging-in-parallel that I noticed while chairing the Indigenous committee of the segment of ‘Indigenous Belonging’ in the national touring exhibition ‘Belonging’.

Like all memorials, the site marks the confluence of progressive community historical analysis of 1988. It will in time be superseded, but not, I hope, replaced, by another. It is the journey not the arrival that matters.

Notes
1 NSW State Government website, State Heritage Inventory Listing Number 01307.
2 Historical Notes, NSW State Government website, State Heritage Inventory Listing Number 01307.
3 Peter Read and Michelle Morton (Field Assistant), Report on the Non-Indigenous Material Heritage Items, of the Armidale to Texas Electricity Transmission Line, 1999.
4 A fifty-metre scroll painted in tradition *gonghi* style painted by Mo Xiangyi tracing Chinese Australians engaged in agriculture, mining, construction, commerce, and in social, political and religious activities.
5 That panel of historians (Indigenous except for myself) chose to depict their own sense of history and belonging within Australia not as necessarily participating closely with other Australians. The greatest sense of common unity they expressed was with other Australian Aboriginal people in Australia.
Lost in the Whitewash
Kung Fu ... it Means Hard Work

HANNAH McGlade

Searching, finding, lost, recovering, missing ... These are some of the words I could use to describe what’s been an intensely personal journey for me—that of researching my Chinese ancestry.

To be Aboriginal of Chinese descent may seem almost a contradiction in terms. While most of White Australia can happily or sometimes grudgingly concede that Aboriginal people are the ‘real’ or ‘true’ Australians, this is not so for the Chinese. I can remember playing a game of pool at a hotel in my teens, doubling with a friend’s Chinese boyfriend. My pool partner was verbally attacked by our opponent, of Anglo origin, who demanded to know when he was going to ‘go back to his own country’. Incensed, I asked him when he was going to ‘go back to his own country’, and he looked at me as if I was a mad woman. I did go on to explain to him that the original people of this country were Aboriginal people, but he still had a lot of difficulty with my argument.

I had always been aware of my Chinese ancestry. My grandmother, Ethel Woyung McGlade—who was my source of love and affection as a child—was an Aboriginal-Chinese woman. She spoke little of her father, although it was clear that she did claim him as such. Her mother had passed away during childbirth and she was raised by another Nyungar family. It appears that my grandmother’s father—Ah Lee—was brought to Australia in 1877 as an indentured labourer or ‘coolie’ by the Hassell family, who were well known pastoralists of the Jerramungup/Albany region.

The Hassell family, who had seafaring connections, and substantial pastoral ambitions, imported many coolies from Singapore to
work for them. My grandmother and her Nyungar family were also ‘indentured’ to the family—although they were forced to work for government rations—flour, sugar, tea and tobacco.

Obviously my Chinese ancestry dates back very far—four generations to be precise. And so why should I have been keen, on a personal level, to understand it and locate it in my life? I have read that according to the Chinese tradition one should worship one’s ancestors back six generations, so perhaps my interest is all good and proper. I had always openly acknowledged Chinese ancestry, although I had no understanding of it and did not actually connect it to my own self. And yet I had often not felt wholly comfortable with only the Nyungar identity—it was as if there was something else there. I accept myself now as a Nyungar, and a mixed blood, also of Chinese and Irish descent.

I can remember as a young person the disagreements my mother and grandfather had about identity. My mother, who was influenced by the growing political activism of the 1970s, and her opportunities in the education sphere, disapproved of my grandfather for claiming his non-Aboriginal ancestry. I have only understood my grandfather more recently. His father was Irish, and he also had a Chinese grandfather. He had not been cut off from his multiracial ancestry. It was a fact of life for him.

According to his Native Welfare file he was classified by the Native Welfare Department as a ‘White man, although his status is in between, that of White, Aboriginal and Chinese’. My grandfather was classified as White, but he was not always treated as such. Although he was, and remains well respected by the White farmers he worked all his life for, the file also documented his attempts to seek citizenship rights or exemption from the laws, due to him being ‘stopped by Police from entering hotels or obtaining accommodation in same’. Grandfather was forced to live in a racial no man’s land—he was refused citizenship or exemption from the Act because the Department considered him to be a ‘quadroon’ and not a ‘native in law’.

My family are one of the few Nyungar families who were not torn apart by the governments’ segregation and assimilation polices—complete with apartheid like reserves and missions. My grandmother and her Irish descent husband, Jim McGlade lived an isolated and solitary life in the bush, working for the Hassell family
and keeping as much to themselves as they possibly could. Their union was illegal and my grandfather would have been arrested if they were found out. My family all know about the time the police-man was sent by the Native Welfare Department to investigate them. I guess it was a turning point in our family's history. The police constable apparently looked at granny, with her long black plaited hair, and declared that she was not a native, but 'a Chinese woman'. And so her family remained intact.

Of course the legal prohibition on inter-marriage did not stop the unscrupulous White men from their sexual abuse of Aboriginal women. It just caused tremendous damage and hardship to those in loving relationships. My grandmother's family remained intact, but at great cost, and I understood that well even as a child. My grandmother's Nyungar identity was to be denied, forgotten and buried. That was no easy task and she wore the scars for it.

What was it that provoked my own interest in Chinese ancestry? I cannot say for certain. I had once been befriended by a Eurasian boy, my only friend at a predominantly White school—and I can remember him telling me (with bias, I'm sure) that I was the prettiest girl in the school. I can remember fighting with an Aboriginal friend (who was also of Chinese descent) because she had denigrated Chinese people as 'chinks'. And being infuriated when school kids, on the bus home, rushed to lean out of windows and spit at the Chinese people in a car driving past. This was in the 1980s when anti-Asian immigration views had in turn, sparked some serious racial hatred and even violence directed at Chinese. Crying in front of the television at the broadcast of the Tiananmen Square massacre. With hindsight, I can see that there was some Chinese in me too—I just didn't know it.

Perhaps a turning point came with the opening of a local Chinese tai chi and kung fu school. Kung fu was something I'd always wanted to learn and I took to it with zeal. I liked the old pictures on the wall, the Chinese writing, the swords and dragons. There was a shrine in the hall and I was told to bow and show respect to the kung fu spirit ancestors—if you do so, and are lucky, they might just teach you kung fu. I was taken back upon hearing this story as it had only been a few nights previously that I'd had the most vivid dream in which it seemed that I had actually met a kung fu ancestor spirits. In my dream I was very small, a tiny person. I was wearing kung
fu shoes but they were huge on my feet and I could not move at all. There was a Chinese spirit man watching me—he was big and awesome. I looked to him and he acknowledged me. And I could move, maybe even throw a few kicks. It felt good.

It was not too long after this that I started to think about being also of Chinese descent. I read a book called *Ancestors*, a comprehensive and interesting book about the early Chinese of Western Australia. However, it made no mention at all of Aboriginal and Chinese relations. I wrote to the author, raising this point, but did not hear back from her. Another significant and informative piece of research also similarly failed to document the Aboriginal–Chinese histories and further claimed that ‘very few descendents of the early Chinese remain’. I was puzzled by this. Was I really only one of a few? I know now that I am not, that there are many Aboriginal descendents of the early Chinese.

On commencing my own research, I found that there was particularly little that had been documented about the history of the coolies of the south of the state—those who were indentured to the Hassell’s and brought to the Jerramungup/Albany region. I discovered that at the turn of the last century there had once existed a vibrant community of Chinese men in Albany—men who formed their own societies, established joss houses and gambling houses, and who won most of the prizes for their vegetable entries in the local fair. And yet there was little public record left of them. The Chinese of the south were not exempted from the immigration restrictions—unlike those in the north—and their exclusion had been more immediate and effective.

Their rich history was hidden from the public view. There was certainly nothing of it that caught my attention in the local museum. I learned what I could from old newspaper clippings, fortunately indexed by the local historical society. Most of the publicity consisted of a record of appearances before the police courts—a clear indication of the coolies’ marginalised status in colonial Australia.

I can’t say that my requests for information about the early Chinese of Albany were met with any enthusiasm—although I found one old manuscript written by an elderly local woman who was described to me as ‘eccentric’. She was clearly saddened by the hard life the Chinese coolies lived in Albany—their isolation, the discrimination, the demise of their community and their eventual...
deaths. I asked her if she knew of any of their descendants in Albany now and she said no, not really; they didn’t marry, they couldn’t have a White woman unless she was well, a prostitute, and then there were the native women of course.

I never thought that I would be able to find out much about Ah Lee—who he was as a person. But I did, somewhat, through those newspaper clippings. Many of these stories concerned one Ah Lee in Albany from 1891. This was consistent with the limited information that I had concerning my ancestor who, I knew from a bibliographic study of the early Chinese, had been living in nearby Ongerup in 1890 when he reported the theft of sandalwood from his camp to the police. Like many other of the Hassell’s former indentured coolies, he then appears to have moved to Albany. The Albany newspapers recorded an Ah Lee in Albany engaged in the sandalwood business, later in the vegetable market business and winning prizes at the local fairs for vegetable entries. Entering the local twenty-mile bike race but making a mess of it by colliding into a baker’s cart. Ah Lee seemed to have a temper and was arrested by the police on a number of occasions concerning sometimes petty, sometimes serious squabbles—usually of a competitive nature—with fellow Chinese of Albany. He had a distinct character—and it made sense to me that I was his descendant.

One thing that particularly stood out was Ah Lee’s interest in the law, and that is not something you might expect from a coolie. Quite a few of the news stories concerned his criminal and civil cases before the Albany courts. I noted with interest that in all cases Ah Lee was represented by the local law firm. He was successful as either plaintiff or defendant in at least three criminal cases and one civil matter. There was one case he did not win and you could say the odds were stacked against him. With a number of other Chinese coolies he made a complaint of assault against a Hassell overseer—the case was heard before a bench of the local establishment, including a member of the Hassell family.

Ah Lee’s legal advents made for very interesting reading and I think that he would be happy to have a lawyer (myself) in the family.

In some respects, though, Ah Lee still remains a mystery to me. I thought that I had gained real ground following my research in Albany. I found out that there was a George Lee buried in the Chinese section of the local cemetery in the late 1920s. The head-
stone also read though, that this was the grave of Mr Ma Hua Hing—I understood this to mean George Lee’s full Chinese name. The headstone further recorded his place of origin as Jai’sun District and noted that ‘He passed away on the 40th year since the birth of the Republic of China’.

Although I was extremely careful to keep a record of the headstone details, they were inexplicably missing upon my return to Perth. I felt this to be a sign, as if I was being told something. I later found out that George Lee and Hing Lee were two different people, presumably buried in the same plot and in different decades.

And there is a final twist to this story. I then investigated the local cemeteries in Perth to locate any possible gravesites for Ah Lee. There was only one that could have been that of my ancestor. It was located in a cemetery barely five minutes from my home. After a long walk through this cemetery, past the various religious affiliations, and past the many racially segregated sections, I found the Chinese plots—almost at the end. There was another sign for ‘aboriginal’, but there had been no burials there. I found the unmarked gravesite of an Ah Lee, last address and last occupation unknown. I will never, I’m sure, know if that was my ancestor in that unmarked plot only a few hundred metres—and seemingly parallel to my home. And on the other side—the kung fu school where this seemed to have started. I visited that gravesite just one more time to show respect in what I thought would be the proper way, with incense and an offering.

As for the kung fu—I never did all too well with that and have yet to gain a belt. I had a serious confrontation with an apparently well-connected young Master. But that’s probably not too surprising. I am, after all, Ah Lee’s great-great-granddaughter!

Since completing my research, I have travelled to Singapore and very much enjoyed that experience. I was impressed with the multicultural relations and the government’s attitude to racial harmony. Perhaps this is a naïve opinion, but one influenced by the commonplace denigration of Aboriginal people in the Australian political sphere. I felt physically comfortable with myself amongst the Chinese, Malay and Indian populations. Of course I was a mixed blood, but sometimes in Australia this can feel just too obvious.

There were some interesting occurrences, such as when I stumbled randomly upon the first Singaporean temple, erected to thank
the sea gods for the safe journey from China. It was situated in a shopping centre, the promotional leaflet explaining that this location was once the centre of the coolie trade. And I found out about Guan Di—the Warrior God. I had previously sighted him in a country town restaurant and was told by the non-Chinese waitress that he was ‘Happy Buddha’. I did not believe her and was most curious to know his name, in Singapore I found out that he was the God worshipped by the coolies.

I did not have a great deal of success in furthering my academic knowledge of the Chinese coolie life. I asked a bookstore attendant if the store had any books on this topic; they did not. She hesitatingly responded that it was not a popular topic. And little wonder too; the trade was one in human life, marked by deception, brutality and death. It was largely an invention of the British as part of their colonisation of China. The African slave trade was now legally prohibited, and it was the coolies from China who took their place in the fields and plantations of newly forming British colonies. There were some Chinese, including the powerful secret societies, also involved in the trade.

I do not know if Ah Lee ever returned to Singapore or China—I strongly doubt if his remains were properly buried in his village, near to his own ancestors as was the proper custom. Historian Henry Chan has described those coolies such as Ah Lee as ‘discriminated “lost souls” [who] died lonely deaths as exiled huaqiao’.

This is undoubtedly true, but still there is more to these men—and that is us, their Aboriginal descendents. We are a part of them too, and their ancestry has continued.

Notes

1 Genealogically she is my great-grandmother, but she was always ‘granny’ to me, and to honour this memory and place in my life she remains ‘my grandmother’ in this essay.

2 Jan Ryan, Ancestors: Chinese in Colonial Australia (Fremantle, Western Australia: Fremantle Arts Centre Press).

4. The birthday of the Republic of China referred to in Mr Ma Hua Hing's headstone was in 1911, thus dating his death to 1951.
The history of the survival of the people of East Timor is not so different from those same tragedies that have been experienced by Indigenous Australians. Shared experience of loss—Massacre, rape, murder, family break-ups, land dispossession, prohibition of cultural practice, lack of housing, lack of education opportunities, lack of health facilities all serve to draw some common ground on which we can collaborate. Just as there is tragedy, so too can there be found a strength of spirit shared by people who have survived such experiences ... This work shows the shadow of the past injustice and the new strength of indigenous determination that overlays such tragedy.

Australian Indigenous Gumbainggir artist Donna Brown and East Timor-born Bernardo Duarte collaborated on a recent visual art works project to produce their painting Two Tribes. These artists worked together as part of the ‘Lost & Found: A Shared Search for Belonging’ exhibitions that were shown in both the Koorie Heritage Trust and the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, 2001. ‘Lost & Found’ symbolised the potential for new relationships between Aboriginal and other culturally diverse Australians and highlighted the intersecting ways in which Indigenous and non-White migrant communities are seeking a sense of belonging in this country. Given the forcible removal of many Indigenous people in Australia from their ‘country’, language and culture, they might share with migrant and refugee communities an understanding of the sense of dislocation from ancestral lands, and the practicing of cultural expressions in new places.
In an attempt to produce alternative mappings and temporalities of Australian history, Marcia Langton has argued that the ‘now toxic relationship between many Australians of British background and indigenous people must cease to be the only litmus test for cultural relations’.

She has urged Aboriginal film-makers and artists to try to understand the histories of resistance they might share with people who have survived similar experiences: ‘[l]et’s forget about this psychotic debate we keep having with White Australia and let’s start talking to Asians and people from Eastern Europe and Africa ... we could bring our experiences as human beings together’. Many Indigenous writers, visual artists and poets are indeed ‘talking to Asians’ and other non-White migrant collectivities in Australia. This essay explores the cross- or inter-cultural alliances that are emerging between Aboriginal and Asian-Australians in contemporary literary and cultural production.

I show that a range of Indigenous artists has collaborated with people from the various regions of ‘Asia’ in recent theatre productions, musicals and operas, novels, poetry and the visual arts in both Asia and Australia.

An uneasy conversation

We have all inherited the consequences of [Aboriginal] oppression, because we are enjoying the fruits of 200 years of dispossession of the Aboriginal people, the labour and sweat of underpaid Aboriginal pastoral workers, and the virtually unpaid labour of the ‘stolen generation’ ... For the Queensland Chinese community—as Australians who understand the acts and attitudes of the past from the point of view of a downtrodden minority, or as newcomers free of cultural ties to Aboriginal oppression—it is a unique opportunity to assist in making restitution.

Especially since Pauline Hanson’s bracketing of Aborigines and Asian immigrants together ‘in one racialised package’, more recent Asian arrivals have come to see the connections between themselves and Aborigines and other non-White peoples in Australia. One year after Hanson’s maiden speech, at the 1997 Chinese Writers’ Association conference on ‘The Culture of the Chinese Diaspora’, an Aboriginal dance troupe performed the welcoming ceremony. Julie Chang, a Taiwanese-born writer, and one of the conveners of the conference, said that if it had not been for Hanson,
the conference organisers did not think they would have had the confidence to invite the Aboriginal dancers to open the proceedings. Hanson's objectification of Aboriginal and Asian communities, and her attempts to undermine their claims to 'Australianness' have assisted Chang and other Asian Australians to comprehend that they share with Aboriginal people the search for a sense of belonging to Australia. As John Docker and Gerhard Fischer suggest, the 'attraction of outsiders to fellow outsiders, the stranger (the indigenous made a stranger in her or his own land) to the stranger from elsewhere' can result in the creation of common interests and affiliations.

The Queensland Chinese Community Voice, a group representing more than 30,000 Chinese Australians lodged a formal objection to the registration of Hanson's One Nation Party, claiming that: '[a]s Asian Australians we reaffirm our solidarity with Aborigines in opposing this type of abuse.' Spokesperson Dr Anthony Lee noted that Hanson's rhetoric 'lends itself to scapegoating against Asians, [and] Aboriginal people.' Lee reaffirmed the Chinese Community Voice's solidarity with Indigenous people, claiming that: '[a]t the rally last November [1996] in Ipswich, we marched with Aborigines and supported Aboriginal rights. We support the continuation of native title.'

Some Asian Australian community groups have also clearly aligned themselves with Aboriginal people in their support of a national apology for the Stolen Generation. The following show of public support from members of the Vietnamese Australian community in Melbourne was made in response to the Federal Government's refusal to offer a formal apology to those affected by the practice of removing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their parents:

We [Vietnamese Australians] are here now, living in the cities and towns that were their [Indigenous Australians'] hunting grounds, their camping places, their sacred sites. We are the beneficiaries of their dispossession, and we acknowledge their loss. We understand about the loss of home, family and cultural values, and we too would like to express our deep sorrow to all indigenous Australians and offer our support for genuine reconciliation.

But the common experiences of racism that many Asian and Aboriginal Australians share do not automatically guarantee under-
standing or political solidarity between the two groups. One difficulty in helping migrant communities understand their complicity in the ongoing colonisation of Indigenous Australians is that knowledge and understanding of Indigenes is invariably mediated by mainstream representations, making them vulnerable to ‘the distortions, fabrications and stereotypes that circulate in the national media’.

In Sang Ye’s interviews with various Chinese migrants in *The Year the Dragon Came*, for example, one interviewee claimed that: ‘[n]early all the Aborigines are unemployed or refuse to take jobs that are available; they’re outside the pubs or on the grass getting drunk on beer’. These comments clearly show that Asian Australian people can reproduce dominant White Australian characterisations of contemporary Aboriginality.

Many refugees and migrants from the various regions of Asia have suffered great hardships in making the transition from their home countries to Australia. Ann Curthoys has argued that Anglo-Australians fail to recognise our culpability in the process and enduring legacies of colonisation because of a tendency to engage in narratives of victimisation, positioning ourselves as ‘victims and innocents, glorious battlers’. Without meaning to diminish or underestimate the various difficulties and traumas that migrant and refugee communities have suffered, they too utilise their own renditions of these historical victim narratives: ‘telling a story of persecution or economic difficulty in their country of origin, experiences of racism and rejection after arrival, and the gradual building of a new life and making a contribution to Australian society at large’. Chek Ling describes his edited collection of reminiscences of Chinese Australians in Queensland, for example, as ‘a short history of how the Chinese came to be here, the ways that racism was fomented against them ... and how the Chinese survived and in doing so contributed to the economic development of Queensland’. One of his contributors called her personal narrative ‘I just bore it quietly’, while another named his ‘surviving, haphazardly’.

For Asian Australian people who lack proficiency in the English language, obtaining information on Indigenous issues can prove incredibly difficult. Newly arrived migrants generally find it hard to access information on Indigenous Australians, and English language classes run by Migrant Resource Centres tend not to contain Indigenous issues in their curriculum. But steps are being
taken to address this issue. The Ecumenical Migration Centre (EMC) in western Melbourne provides workshops with migrant peoples on Indigenous issues as a way of forging partnerships or solidarity with ‘indigenous Australians dealing with the continuing consequences of past injustices and policies’. The special edition of the journal Migration Action, ‘Reconciliation and Multicultural Australia’ was another part of the EMC’s contribution to the work of ‘actively building community relations between immigrant Australians and Aboriginal Australians’.

In October 2000, the Ethnic Affairs Commission (EAC) of New South Wales held its ‘Building the Reconciliation Bridge’ seminar as a strategy towards the greater inclusion of non-Indigenous ethnic communities in reconciliation. The seminar recognised that ethnic communities can be a powerful lobbying force in the reconciliation process in Australia and that a lack of English skills was an important factor in the exclusion of NESB people from the debate. From the seminar, the EAC developed a policy basis and various strategies to encourage migrant communities to participate in the reconciliation process. President of the Chinese Australian Forum, Jon-Claire Lee presented a paper at the seminar, showing how some of these initiatives could be put into practice. As the principal of a Chinese language school, he and his staff have selected particular course material so that their students can gain a ‘better understanding of Australian history, [A]boriginal culture, [A]boriginal concerns’.

New cultural scripts

The ambiguous and complex Aboriginal–Asian relationships of the colonial and post-colonial eras are depicted in much recent literary and cultural production. In his poem Asian Invasion, for example, Noonagah Aboriginal writer Graeme Dixon portrays the Japanese as commercial or economic colonists who ‘attack/using the power of the dollar’. In his comparison of the British colonisation of this country with the ‘invasion/initiated/by the [Japanese] financial scholar’, Dixon reminds us that ‘oppression is oppression/No matter the shape of the eye’. Rather than ‘the fellow oppressed and dispossessed’, the Japanese are clearly described in Dixon’s account as ‘another set of invaders’. In Murri poet Lionel Fogarty’s Mad Souls, people of Asian extraction are positioned alongside Anglo-
Australians as unwelcome migrants in an unambiguous rebuke 'to any vision of many-coloured hands linking across Australia': I am a moody Murri/don't like Aussies/don't like Asians./You'd love to meet me/I'll tell you/go live where you come from'.

A cautionary tale of an Asian invasion is imagined by Aboriginal writer Eric Willmot in his novel *Below the Line*. Beginning in the 1970s when 'Vietnamese refugees began to descend on its northern shores', and followed by two successive 'waves of refugees [that] were engineered by Indonesia', Australia was invaded in 'an insidious and unrecognisable way'. The top half of the country became 'The Republic of South Irian', while the bottom half remained Australian territory. The various relationships between the poly-ethnic characters in this novel are very complex—the President of the South Irian Republic, for example, is an Aboriginal man, with some northern Aboriginal groups, as well as non-Aboriginal people joining the new republic, while other 'Aboriginals along the Roper and Daly Rivers were slaughtered trying to defend our native land'.

*Ruby-Eyed Coucal*, a novel by Bruce Pascoe, a member of the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative, is also characterised by shifting and ambiguous alliances between its poly-ethnic characters. Jim Fox, a so-called 'half-caste' Aborigine joined the Free Papua Organisation in Irian Jaya to fight the Indonesian occupation. The Indonesian characters feature as violent and ruthless invaders, but they are also portrayed as the friends and allies of those Aboriginal people 'who had worked for Makassans boiling down bêche-de-mer at Yirrkala'. The 'connection between the Indonesians and Australian Aborigines was the trade they'd shared for centuries before white people learnt to sale boats' and, based on this trade, the Northern Land Council hoped to show the Supreme Court that nations such as China and Indonesia had already recognised the sovereignty of Aboriginal Australia, thereby proving that the British violated the sovereign rights of the original custodians.

In Rachel Perkins' film adaptation of the play *Radiance*, we see another example where Asian characters are portrayed both positively, and in less favourable ways. In this production too, ' "Japanese" capitalists are constructed as responsible for pain'. This film narrates the story of three Aboriginal women who return home to bury their recently deceased mother. Nona is determined to bury their mother's ashes on her ancestral land, a nearby island
that has been bought by Japanese investors and is now a tourist resort. Although viewers are reminded of the island’s Indigenous history, its White colonial history is largely overlooked, implying that it has ‘only actually been colonised by “external” Asian forces’. In another scene, Nona wears a cotton kimono or yukata while she mimes the words to Puccini’s Madame Butterfly from a recording made by her famous opera singer sister. She tells the other characters of her affair with a Japanese lover, but speaks of him in disparaging terms, claiming that she is able to confirm the rumour that Japanese men ‘have small dicks’.

Further uncertain and contradictory alliances between Aboriginal and Asian peoples feature in other recent writing. In her novel Plains of Promise, for instance, Waanji Aboriginal writer Alexis Wright portrays a close and long term relationship between the Aboriginal protagonist May Sugar and her Chinese husband Pilot Ah King. Wright acknowledges that these cross-cultural unions were very common in the colonial era, where the ‘Gulf was filled with Aboriginal Chinese families, a kaleidoscope of colours between black and brown’. Commenting on the parallels in the exclusion of Aboriginal and Chinese peoples from White society, Pilot complains to his wife that White people ‘[d]on’t let no dirt or dirty people like you and me inside [their big houses]’. Even though this Aboriginal–Chinese couple share a close relationship of mutual dependence, Pilot remains very sceptical of some of the practices of Aboriginal people, including those of the local ‘medicine man’: ‘May Sugar used to go to him, but I’d never let no witch doctor do those sorts of things to me’.

Through the introduction of Aboriginal–Chinese character Paul Ah Sung in her novel Hard Yards, Yugambeh/Bundjalung writer Melissa Lucashenko also makes these connections explicit. In this account too, Aboriginal–Asian relationships are based at times on a mutual sense of exclusion from Anglo-Australia, while at other points they are seemingly contradictory and conflicting. The shared objectification of Aboriginal and Asian peoples is portrayed when Pauline Hanson appears on a television in the local pub, with the ‘yobbos’ who support her claiming: ‘be voting for her, before the fucken boongs and slopes take the place over’. This theme of common marginalisation is a trope that reappears further in the novel, with one protagonist claiming that Chinese people ‘copped it, same
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as Murries'.

But the obvious disparity in the socio-economic levels of these communities is portrayed in one of the character's descriptions of Chinese people as 'loaded' and 'dripp[ing] gold'.

In his novel Benang: From the Heart, Nyungar writer Kim Scott also portrays varying relationships between the Chinese and Aboriginal characters. An Aboriginal fugitive Barney Cuddles is being pursued by the police for stealing from a White storekeeper. A 'Chinaman' who had been camping with two Aboriginal women companions was subsequently robbed by Cuddles, who threatened 'Ah Ling, I shoot you', before deliberately missing. If not for their strong desire to apprehend Cuddles, the police would not have been concerned that the Chinese man had some of his possessions stolen. The constables agreed that 'the silly bastard had probably welcomed Cuddles in to help with the women. Serves him right'.

Demonstrative of the White settler racism that many Chinese sojourners encountered, the police arrested the 'Chinaman' for being idle and without visible means of support.

The Australian Fiancé, a novel set in the post-Second World War era by Singaporean Australian author Simone Lazaroo, contains a number of poly- or multi-ethnic Broome characters. The central protagonist is a Eurasian woman from Singapore who forms a bond with an Aboriginal-Asian woman who describes her origins as: '[m]y mother's Nyul Nyul tribe; some of my father's people Indonesian, Japanese'. These characters have both shared the experience of living under a British colonial government, and while the Eurasian woman denotes living under such a repressive regime '[s]wallowing the boss', her Aboriginal-Asian friend 'laughs hugely, her laugh that understands', replying '[e]ating shit, we call it'.

These women have many experiences in common, but their friendship is fractured along lines of power because the Aboriginal-Asian woman is also the maid in the house of the Anglo-Australian fiancé.

Some recent theatre productions that have illustrated the many joys and hardships cross-cultural couples have faced include Keep Him My Heart: A Larrakia-Filipino Love Story, by Darwin-based writer Gary Lee, an Indigenous Larrakia man with Japanese, Chinese and Filipino heritage. In its portrayal of the sexual attraction between an Aboriginal woman and a newly arrived Vietnamese man, the play Conversations with Charlie by Binh Duy Ta further explores the lan-
guage of desire between these two disenfranchised groups. Conversations with Charlie is a production that explores themes of human love across racial and cultural divides, but it is also about homelands and displacement. Created by an Aboriginal woman who has endured the horror of having her land and culture torn away and a Vietnamese immigrant whose homeland was subject to war, Hung Le and Ningali Lawford’s satirical comedy Black and Tran also revolves around themes of the motherland, homelessness and diaspora.

One of the first theatrical performances to make an explicit link between Indigenous and Asian identities was created by Broome-based Aboriginal-Asian writer and musician Jimmy Chi. For Chi, his mixed-race heritage is a source of pride, and he resists identifying solely with his Aboriginal ancestry, ‘because I also know I’m Chinese and I’m Japanese and I’m Scottish’. Demonstrative of Chi’s ease with his multi-ethnicity, his 1990 musical Bran Nue Dae was written in kriol—a language that jostles Chinese loanwords with Malay and Aboriginal terms. Act One begins in Broome’s historic Sun Pictures, where Aboriginal and Asian patrons ‘watched white filmstars from the inferior seating reserved for non-whites’. The second act starts in Broome’s Chinatown, and when Willie the main protagonist is on his way back there, one of the things he most looks forward to is his mother’s home-cooked ‘fish soup and rice’.

In Chi’s 1996 musical production Corrugation Road, the audience is led on a journey between Broome and remote Beagle Bay, further exploring the lives and ‘chaotically blended bloodlines’ of Kimberley people, as the line ‘we are all one mongrel breed’ attests.

Impressed by Chi’s musicals, Aboriginal writer and performer Trevor Jamieson co-wrote with Scott Rankin the theatre production The Career Highlights of the Mamu, portraying intersections or connections between different countries, cultures and histories. Shown at the 2002 Adelaide Festival in March, Mamu (meaning devil) paralleled the experiences of Aboriginal people displaced from their Maralinga homeland because of atomic testing with Japanese survivors of the atomic bomb blast in Hiroshima. The connections between Hiroshima and Maralinga are made explicit by imagery portraying Jamieson together with one of the Hiroshima survivors, and by a young Japanese woman Asako Izawa’s telling of the horrific human damage her people suffered.
Culture crossings

Lucy Dann, whose essay features in this volume, is not alone among Aboriginal people who have gone to various parts of Asia to meet or reconnect with family members. An early example is Aboriginal-Chinese woman Gloria Lee, who travelled to Zhongshan with her father and siblings after the death of her Arrernte mother, and was well accepted by her extended family, staying long enough to learn Chinese before her family's return to Australia in the 1920s. Others include Ollie Smith who grew up in an orphanage in Broome and spent her whole life believing her Indonesian father had abandoned her and her Aboriginal mother, until she read the welfare files kept on them. In actuality, despite protests and letters of support from his employer and the Pearler's Association, Ollie's father was arrested, fined and deported for cohabiting with Ollie's mother. Ollie eventually met her father in Kupang in 1995 and on her second trip visited his village on Sabu where the 'big cross cultural influences between the Koepangers and Broome people' were immediately apparent.

A number of Indigenous writers has also visited the various regions of Asia. In 1999 Lucaschenko, for example, went to Indonesia on a literature residency. Oodgeroo Noonucal (Kath Walker) and Mudrooroo (Colin Johnson) gained inspiration for their poetry from their visits to China and other Asian countries. Noonucal's collection of poems *Kath Walker in China*, was a result of the poetry she wrote during a trip there. After her visit to Reed Flute Cave in Guilin, Noonucal wrote a poem depicting Aboriginal creation stories in a Chinese setting:

*I didn't expect to meet you in Guilin*
*My Rainbow Serpent,*
*My Earth Mother,*
*But you were there*
*In Reed Flute Cave.*

A number of the poems in Mudrooroo's *Dalwurra: The Black Bittern*, such as 'Samye Ling' was inspired by his time in Singapore, while others are a reflection of his travels in Thailand. One of the poems in this collection comments on the practice of 'blackbirding', where Melanesian or Kanaka indentured labourers were brought to work on the sugarcane plantations in North Queensland in the late
nineteenth century: ‘Blackbirds summing up the white Pacific crimes/...I know deir lies’.67

A growing number of Aboriginal artists is showing their work in China, and other regions in Asia. Since 1995 at least twelve exhibitions featuring the work either solely of Indigenous artists or in conjunction with non-Indigenous visual artists have been shown in a vastly diverse number of Asian countries and cities. In the exhibition ‘Between Remote Regions’, a large collaboration with artists from Australia and Malaysia focusing on art made in the regional towns of both countries, eleven of the fourteen Australian artists
were of Aboriginal descent. Asialink worked in tandem with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to sponsor the ‘Seasons of the Kunwinjku: Aboriginal Art from West Arnhem Land’ exhibition in which eight Indigenous artists exhibited their work. ‘Voices of the Earth’, an exhibition of traditional and contemporary Aboriginal art showed the work of fifteen Indigenous artists, and toured through Seoul in 1996. ‘Unhomely’, an exhibition of eleven Australian artists including Tracey Moffatt toured to Seoul and Kyongju in 1998, and in 2001 ‘Tracey Moffatt’, a solo retrospective exhibition of her artwork toured through Korea and Taiwan. This exhibition included her photographic series *Something More* (1989) where Moffatt is pictured wearing a cheongsam, posing with a young Chinese man with a queue. In 1996 Chinese Australian artist Zhou Xiaoping and Walmajarri artist Jimmy Pike held a joint art exhibition in Zhou’s home town, Hefei, and in 1999 ‘Through the Eyes of Two Cultures’, another collaborative exhibition (including their paintings of each other) was held at the National Gallery of China, further demonstrating the spiritual dynamism of an encounter ‘between two ancient, sophisticated visual traditions’.

Recently non-Indigenous, non-Asian peoples have been collaborating with Aboriginal and Asian communities in documenting these cross-cultural connections. Playwright Julie Janson, for example, went on a literature residency to Indonesia in 2001 where she worked on her new play *Arafura*, tracing the stories that have developed along the trade winds from Makassar in Sulawesi to Northern Australia. Janson’s project is a collaborative piece that not only draws on her research of Indonesian tales of the Macassan traders, but on her work with the National Aboriginal and Islander Dance Academy and Indigenous artists from the Torres Strait Islands. *Trepang*, one of the first Indigenous operas, produced by Andrish Saint-Clare in 1997, was the result of much research into the oral and ceremonial histories of both Aboriginal and Macassan people. In consultation with Aboriginal elders and cultural practitioners in Ujung Pandang, the opera depicted a cross-cultural marriage, with some of the performers being the actual descendants of the original participants.

**Conclusion**

An extensive range of Aboriginal–Asian cross-cultural production exists. In literature, poetry, theatre, the visual arts and in much con-
temporary theoretical and intellectual debate, the parallel, but in no way identical histories that Aboriginal and Asian communities share, are being explored. These recent collaborative projects draw on a rich and complex history of relationships that were sometimes exploitative and violent, and on others that were based on mutual respect, interdependence and love. Indigenous and Asian diasporic communities might not share the same histories, but the recent dialogue between these peoples is indicative of the many overlapping points of intersection in their experiences. While the emerging conversation between these communities might still be characterised as 'uneasy', it is nonetheless one that seems willing to engage with both its colonial as well as its potentially emancipatory features. The interrogation of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples has located Asian communities simultaneously as agents of colonisation, and of decolonisation. Such a dialogue undermines and destabilises the usual Black–White, migrant–settler dichotomies that habitually characterise debates on Australian history and culture.

Further research into South-East Asian influences on the construction of contemporary Aboriginality is being undertaken in places like Broome, Darwin and North Queensland. Guy Ramsay, Christine Choo and Regina Ganter, for example, have conducted interviews with people of Aboriginal–Asian descent in their recent work. Mary Ann Bin-Sallik, whose mother is from the Djaru people of east Kimberley, and whose father was an indentured Malay pearl diver has recently received an Australian Research Council grant to explore how Aboriginal people of mixed descent self-identify. Given the high incidence of Asian men marrying local Aboriginal women in places like Darwin and Broome, Bin-Sallik is interested in tracing the way contemporary Aboriginality 'comprises a blend of Aboriginal, Asian influences from the Malay, Indonesian, Filipino, Chinese and Japanese cultures, and of course European influences.' The growing number of requests received by the Golden Dragon Museum in Bendigo from Indigenous people trying to trace their Chinese roots has inspired the museum's deputy director Joan Jack to schedule an exhibition on this theme.

Individuals of mixed race descent are living proof of the partnerships between Asian and Aboriginal people that were forged despite the many restrictions designed to impede them. Lasting
cultural influences on languages, foods, and ceremonial practices are further evidence that alliances between Aboriginal and various Asian communities prevailed despite many hardships and obstacles. The Aboriginal–Asian cross-cultural production explored in this paper testifies to an honest and sincere attempt to embrace these relationships in their entirety, that is, to recognise that Asian immigration ‘furthered both the colonising and decolonising processes on the Australian continent’. It is this willingness to embrace the colonial as well as the potentially decolonising aspects of these relationships that has enabled a degree of reconciliation between these communities, and is what most clearly differentiates or demarcates them from Anglo-Celtic renderings of nation. Anglo-Australians typically rehearse victimological or triumphalist narratives of nation that leave us unable to ‘own’ or acknowledge our treatment of the country’s Indigenous custodians, or our subsequent dealings with non-European peoples. Aboriginal–Asian cross-cultural production provides an invaluable example of another way to narrate the story of this nation.

Notes


2 While the diasporic or ‘migrant condition’ is structured by histories of displacement, travel and resettlement, Indigenous people frequently ‘stress continuity of habitation … and often a ‘natural’ connection to the land’—even though of course, in reality, their own historical experiences have included displacement, travel and resettlement. James Clifford, quoted in Tony Bennett and David Carter, ‘Programs of Cultural Diversity’, in Culture in Australia: Policies, Publics and Programs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 254. Recent research is exploring the notion that Indigenous people’s life experiences might parallel those usually associated with migrancy or the diaspora. Noelene Brasche from the University of Sydney, for instance, is currently completing her PhD dissertation called ‘Leaving country: reading Indigenous life narratives as discourses of diaspora’.


This paper focuses on the cross-cultural production between Aboriginal and South-East Asian communities, but Aboriginal dialogues are clearly taking place with other non-European racial collectivities. Through its portrayal of the main character 'Jila', the daughter of an Aboriginal mother and Afghan father, the recent film Serenades explores the complex interaction of Islamic, Aboriginal and Christian cultures in 19th-century Central Australia. For discussion of the historical links between Aboriginal and Afghan communities, see Luise A. Hercus, 'Afghan Stories from the Northeast of South Australia', and Ben Murray and Peter Austin, 'Afghans and Aborigines: Diyari Texts', both in Aboriginal History, 5.1 (1981), pp. 39–70 and 71–79.


Julie Chang, quoted in Alex Miller, unpublished paper presented at the Globalising Australia Conference 20–21 June 1997, La Trobe University. Corroborated by author's personal communication with Chang.

John Docker and Gerhard Fischer, 'Adventures of Identity', in Docker and Fischer (eds) Race, Colour and Identity, p. 15.


Lee, quoted in Matthews, 'Chinese Community'.


Perera and Pugliese, 'Detoxifying Australia?', p. 17.


19 Curthoys, 'An Uneasy Conversation', p. 34.


24 Greco, 'Editorial', p. 2. The EMC also issued a statement of commitment and apology to Indigenous Australians: 'EMC's statement of commitment to the First Peoples of Australia is based in a recognition that the lives of present generations of Indigenous Australians continue to suffer the devastating effects of European settlement, including the dispossession of land, culture and language, and the separation from family and community. We recognise this is a key cause of the intolerable levels of disadvantage still faced today by Indigenous Australians. EMC's workers, volunteers, and Committee of Management deeply regret and unreservedly apologise for the damage caused by the forcible separation of Aboriginal children from their families. We commit ourselves to the reconciliation process, and through community education we aim to promote understanding and respect amongst ourselves and those new communities with whom we work towards a just and inclusive Australia'.

25 Jon-Claire Lee, 'How Non-Indigenous Ethnic Communities Can Play an Active Role in Aboriginal Reconciliation?' (internet resource, 9 April, 2002), <http://www.caf.org.au/spring2000/prpto11100.html>; During his role as Artistic Director for the Festival of Nations in Sydney from 1993-1997, Lee also sought to put Aboriginal and Chinese communities in touch with each other. One year a Chinese musician who had constructed some replicas of 5000-year-old Chinese flutes rehearsed and performed with an Aboriginal musician who played the didgeridoo, Lee, 'How Non-Indigenous Ethnic Communities...'.

27 Graeme Dixon, 'Asian Invasion', in Holocaust Island (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1990), p. 36.
28 Dixon, 'Asian Invasion', p. 36.
29 Dixon, 'Asian Invasion', p. 37.
31 Perera, 'Futures Imperfect', p. 4.
32 Lionel Fogarty, quoted in Perera, 'Futures Imperfect', p. 3.
33 Eric Willmot, Below the Line (Milsons Point, NSW: Hutchinson Australia, 1991).
34 Willmot, Below the Line, p. 40.
35 Willmot, Below the Line, p. 31.
36 Willmot, Below the Line, p. 30.
38 Pascoe, Ruby-Eyed Coucal, p. 104.
42 Spark, 'Gender and 'Radiance', p. 46.
44 Wright, Plains of Promise, p. 89.
45 Wright, Plains of Promise, p. 92.
47 Lucashenko, Hard Yards, p. 135.
50 Lucashenko, Hard Yards, p. 122.
52 Scott, Benang, p. 235.

54 Lazaroo, *Australian Fiancé*, p. 92.


69 'Asialink Touring Program'.

70 'Asialink Touring Program'.

71 'Asialink Touring Program'.

72 Giese, Astronauts, p. 73.

73 'Asialink Literature Residences 1997-2001'.

74 Dave McRae, 'Trepang', in Amida 5.4 (1999), pp. 18–19.


76 Mary Ann Bin-Sallik (ed.), Aboriginal Women by Degrees (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1999), p. 179.

77 Personal communication with the author, 24 April, 2002.

78 Curthoys, 'Immigration and Colonisation', p. 172.
Lost in the Whitewash
Concluding Comments

HELEN SHAM-HO

The purpose of the ‘Lost in the Whitewash’ project is to discuss Aboriginal and Chinese encounters over the past one hundred years, and to place these shared histories within the making of Australia. Today we have gone a long way towards filling these gaps in our nation’s history. In anthropological writings, the great silence imposed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their position in Australian history is often referred to as ‘the cult of disremembering’. The same can be said for the contribution made by Chinese Australians to the development of this country, and of course, of the history of Aboriginal–Chinese relations. After today, I am pleased to say that this ‘cult of disremembering’ seems to be crumbling.

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation was established by a unanimous vote of the Federal Government in 1991 for a life span of ten years to promote and guide a formal process of reconciliation. During this time, the Council worked hard to fulfil its objectives in consultation with the Australian people. Our central goal has been to find ways of developing better understanding and respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians by January 1, 2001.

I believe that I was appointed to the Council because of my Chinese heritage. Of the twenty-five members, one was required to be ethnic. As the first Parliamentarian of Chinese descent in Australia, I imagine I seemed an appropriate choice.

I must admit that for some time I felt I was simply the Council’s ‘token ethnic’. Like many people, at the time of my appointment I
did not know much about our First Australians. What I did know I had learned from my university anthropology studies and from media reports, which in those days were more likely to be negative than positive. However, after being appointed and reappointed to the Council by three successive prime ministers—Bob Hawke, Paul Keating and John Howard—I have become somewhat of an expert on Indigenous rights and issues. It has also become one of my chief policy concerns as a New South Wales member of parliament.

As an Asian woman, I feel that I have brought a unique perspective to the Council's work. In the early 1990s, there was a general lack of awareness in the community about Aboriginal people and reconciliation. Few knew what reconciliation meant, and it was not regarded as an important issue for Australians. Sadly, many people still seem to think of reconciliation in terms of a White-Black binary.

But from the ethnic perspective, reconciliation is about much more than simply uniting 'Black' and 'White' Australia. It is about nation building. It is about bringing together all Australians from diverse backgrounds, regardless of race, culture or creed and regardless of when they came and where they came from. Reconciliation is about building a bridge between the first peoples and newcomers by creating understanding and respect between different communities. To me, a reconciled nation is a harmonious, just and equitable multicultural society. It is my hope that in 2001 and beyond the reconciliation process will continue.

Being on the Council has been an extremely satisfying and rewarding experience, and an honour that surpassed my election as the first member of parliament of Asian descent in Australia. Not only have I gained a far greater insight and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but I have also established lasting relationships with past and present Council members and all the relevant people. My life has been enriched by these friendships. In November 2000, the Council met for the last time in Canberra and handed over to the National Museum of Australia the items we had collected over the previous ten years. This was a moving time for all of us.

There is no doubt that relations between Indigenous and other Australians have come a long way over the past decade. Reconciliation is now firmly entrenched on the social and political agenda. Ten years ago, governments did not even acknowledge indigenous
rights and interests, let alone actively pursue and address them. Today, however, the reconciliation message informs numerous legislative instruments, policies and government strategies.

More importantly, reconciliation has become part of the Australian consciousness. It has taken on a life of its own in communities, workplaces, schools, peak bodies and voluntary organisations. Reconciliation has become a people’s movement.

We only have to look at the tremendous success of Corroboree 2000 in May of the same year to see just how far we have come as a nation in making reconciliation a reality. In my home State of NSW, between 200,000 and 250,000 took part in the 4.1-kilometre People’s Walk for Reconciliation across the Harbour Bridge and into Darling Harbour. The enormous turnout vindicated what we on the Council had been working to achieve for the past nine years. We had reached the point where we could say that most people want better race relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Of course, the journey of reconciliation has had its ups and downs. There have been a number of external factors and pressures that have helped to push the reconciliation process along. These include the High Court’s Mabo and Wik decisions, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission’s Bringing Them Home report, the prime minister’s consistent refusal to apologise on behalf of the nation and, most recently, the Stolen Generation test case. Needless to say, timing has been crucial as far as the Council’s achievements are concerned. Had it been set up twenty years ago, I doubt whether the Council would have been as successful in improving relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

We have come a long way, but there is still far to go. Much remains to be done if we are to achieve a truly reconciled nation. Over the past three and a half years, the Chinese and Aboriginal communities have been particularly cohesive and mutually supportive. This is, of course, due to the emergence of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party, which specifically shunned Asian Australians and Aboriginal people. The Chinese and Aboriginal people have truly pulled together.

In my mind, Aboriginal and Chinese Australians have never been unreconciled. They share a history of peaceful coexistence that until today has been ignored by historians. Chinese and Aboriginal inter-
marriages or relationships go back to the colonial period. The reason lies in the gender imbalance among the early Chinese migrants. In 1861, there were only ten Chinese women in the whole of Australia, two in New South Wales and eight in Victoria. Given the shortage of Chinese women, inter-marriage and relationships between Chinese 'coolies' and the Aboriginal inhabitants of the land—as well as with White settlers—were not unheard of.

But this statistical imbalance cannot explain everything. Such relationships and interminglings did not cease when Chinese women began migrating to Australia in larger numbers. My personal experience shows that Aboriginal-Chinese marriages and relationships are not uncommon. The first wedding that I attended in Australia thirty-nine years ago was between a Chinese and an Aboriginal. Ironically, I acted as their lawyer when they divorced some years later. Some of my close personal friends are of Aboriginal-Chinese background. The funny thing is that some Chinese in Australia see Aboriginals as 'Western' people (sai-yan in Cantonese).

But for the discovery of gold in 1851, Chinese immigration is unlikely to have become more than a marginal issue in Australia. The Chinese presence grew from the first arrivals in 1848 to some 50,000 by 1900. This placed the Chinese alongside the Aboriginal population as the largest non-White community in Australia at the turn of the century.

Darwin in particular was closely associated with the first Chinese immigrants to Australia. In 1874, two hundred Chinese 'coolies' were brought to Australia from Singapore and China to establish Darwin. By 1888, there were 6,000 Chinese in Darwin, compared with just 1,000 Europeans. Without these early Chinese immigrants, Darwin may never have existed. Because European workers could not withstand the extreme climate and the conditions as they then were, previous attempts to establish Port Darwin had failed. Chinese and Aboriginal labourers worked together, many of them in the mines, under harsh and oppressive conditions.

The first encounter between Chinese and Aboriginal people may perhaps go back even further. Some reports indicate that the great Chinese navigator, Admiral Cheng Ho, landed near Darwin in the fifteenth century. Are such reports reliable? The facts may be disputed, but what is important is that the idea of his visit entered
into oral histories and Chinese consciousness in ways that give meaning to the notion of pre-European contacts between Aborigines and Chinese. In one indication of this consciousness, when a soapstone statue was discovered beneath the roots of a Banyan tree near Darwin in 1879, some saw it as a relic of that voyage.

Notes
1 This is a revised version of closing remarks made by Helen Sham-Ho at the Lost in the Whitewash colloquium, 1 December 2000.
The first encounter between Chinese and Aboriginal people may perhaps go back even further. Some reports indicate that the great Chinese navigator Admiral Zheng He landed near Darwin in the fifteenth century. Are such reports reliable? The facts may be disputed. But what is important is the idea of his adventurous
Lost in the Whitewash

Aboriginal-Asian Encounters in Australia, 1901-2001

This important new book on the under-explored area of Aboriginal-Asian identities, ancestries and histories brings new voices and visions to contemporary debates on reconciliation, immigration and race relations. It unravels the intricate web of human encounters, spiritual exchanges and cultural traffic between Indigenous peoples and Asians in 19th- and 20th-century Australia. These essays collectively argue for a new interpretation of modern Australian history and identity.

A significant contribution to scholarship on Aboriginal-Asian encounters and their legacy in Australia on the form and content of Australian culture. From personal reflections to essays with a theoretical or historiographical perspective, each contribution offers fresh and accessible insights on an important and often forgotten aspect of Australian history. —Christine Choo, historian and author of Mission Girls: Aboriginal Women on Catholic Missions in the Kimberley, Western Australia 1900–1950.

Lost in the Whitewash provides windows on analysis privileged by experience. This collection proves the academy can be scholarly while ensuring that such good thinking and writing need not remain 'lost'. —Sandra Phillips, Managing Editor, Aboriginal Studies Press

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