The founding of a British convict colony at Botany Bay is generally considered to be the point where Australian recorded history begins and its pre-history ends. It is certainly an important and incisive symbolic moment, and has been the locus of intense historical interest, and considerable debate. The 'master narrative' of founding, which has become a convenient and familiar shorthand interpretation of events, is that the British struck out into Botany Bay in order to rid themselves of the problem of over-crowded prisons, as far away from home as possible. I argue here for a different version of early Australian history, one in which China plays an important role. Trading connections between the Australia-Pacific region and China were important for the British deliberations over the establishment of Botany Bay, affecting both its timing and nature. In addition, the trade between Indigenous northern Australia and Makassar to supply China with trepang, known in China as hai-sen, made it seem both desirable and feasible to establish British hegemony over the entire continent.

A BIG DEBATE

The traditional story that the colony was founded to receive surplus British convicts sounds entirely feasible, supported by the fact that the prison populations were, indeed, a problem at the time and that a convict colony was founded in 1788. Britain's prison population was the subject of a number of commissions of inquiry after the American colonies refused to accept any further convicts following the American war of independence in 1776. The Hulks Act, passed in hurried response, was a temporary measure allowing for the detention on ships of those convicted for transportation but, given the capacity of such vessels was necessarily limited, it could not be a permanent solution.¹

This picture is, however, complicated by a host of discussions that were held in the lead-up to the sending of a first fleet of convicts in 1788, suggesting that a range of other motives was at play. Australian historians have been fairly divided on the question of whether Botany Bay was indeed the result of a criminal justice problem (Gonner, O'Brien, Roe, Clark, Atkinson),² or whether it was motivated by military/strategic considerations (Blainey, Frost),³ or inspired by the trading opportunities it offered (Dallas, Fry, Martin).⁴ These are the
'camps of opinion' identified by Ged Martin in a 1978 review of the debate, with a few more historians weighing in by raising objections to each.\textsuperscript{5}

I would argue that the distinction between strategic and trading considerations is of little value in understanding an essentially mercantilist apparatus, and that the prospect of trade with China has generally been vastly under-valued in this historiography. Dallas, however, did suggest a broad canvas of strategic interests, including the China trade, the South American trade, the fur trade, and whaling and sealing. 'It was the mercantilist age', he argued, and the First Fleet convicts were 'the servants of mercantilist interests'.\textsuperscript{6} Both H. T. Fry and Ged Martin also emphasised the China connection.

Even historians who are considered to be in the 'convict colony' camp of opinion have not, on the whole, been entirely content with that narrow view. E. C. K. Gonner concluded in 1888 that 'those who sent [the expedition in 1788] aimed at something more important than the mere foundation of a new criminal establishment'.\textsuperscript{7} Michael Roe considered the sweep of clues hinting at the importance of trading and strategic considerations, but felt compelled to conclude only what the available documentary record allows – and the documentary record is geared towards the planning and execution of the project.\textsuperscript{8} Alan Atkinson warns of taking the intentions – and records – of government as indicative of the motor of British history when 'the moving forces were those of private enterprise'. He cautions that in 'the City of London, the centre of Britain's world-wide trading interests, the party had no real authority at all' and that party ideas 'generally did not prevail at all in such vital places as the coffee houses and counting houses of the city, places intimately linked with Britain's overseas empire'.\textsuperscript{9}

The debate over the founding of Australia was most lively in the 1970s, but books are still being published and theses are still being written on the topic. The debate is far from over, despite an emerging weight of opinion that it derives its salience from a rather mono-cultural and Euro-centric view of Australian history and eclipses the prior and continued occupancy of Australia by indigenous people. The debate is also tainted by the charge that it continues the older historiographical tradition of casting Australian history as a branch of the British history of empire. My view is that an examination of the British arrival in Australia can avoid all these pitfalls and make a useful contribution to seeing Australian history as part of a global dynamic with important antecedents, shifting the trade relations of indigenous peoples with the outside world long before 1788 into the prominent place which they deserve.
CONVICT TRANSPORTATION

The British penal system was essentially mercantilist. Merchants to whom convicts were indentured met all expenses for their transportation, feeding, housing and medical care, and over 500 private holding goals in Britain housed them from conviction to transportation. Between the passing of the Transportation Act, 1718 and the American War of Independence in 1776, some 50,000 convicts were shipped to the American colonies. The number of offences punishable by death (and convertible into transportation sentences) increased from around 50 to almost 200 in the period from 1688 to 1801. A harsh penal system that subjected minor offences to extreme punishment went hand in glove with a useful and profitable deployment of the cheap labour pool so created.

Not surprisingly, when the Bunbury-led House of Commons committee on transportation in 1779 recommended that one or more colonies might be established 'in distant parts of the globe' as a remedy to the problem with the hulks, it added that this 'may prove advantageous to navigation and commerce'. The committee suggested Gambia (West Africa) or Botany Bay. The committee had the benefit of favourable advice from Sir Joseph Banks who had accompanied, and helped to finance, James Cook's first Pacific voyage in 1770. Banks' first impression of New Holland had been unfavourable. His journal recorded: 'A soil so barren, and at the same time entirely void of the help derived from cultivation, could not be supposed to yield much to the support of man.' But by 1779 he had changed his mind: 'It was not to be doubted, that a large tract of land such as New Holland, which was larger than the whole of Europe, would furnish matter of advantageous return.' This is among the earliest positive assessments made by European eyewitnesses of Australia, a truly remarkable change of heart.

There were many 'armchair strategists' who chose to ignore the discouraging first-hand evidence of travellers and speculated that a land as large as New Holland, and situated in temperate zones, simply must be valuable. They have now been vindicated, but opinion of the time was weighed against them. Although Banks' advice in 1779 is often cited as a crucial intervention, the Bunbury Committee did not lead to the establishment of a colony in New Holland. Inquiries were made about suitable locations in Africa, but it was concluded that the prevalence of malaria would render transportation to Africa tantamount to a delayed capital punishment.
COMPETING CLAIMS FOR AUSTRALIA

Several petitions for the colonisation of New Holland had been discouraged in Holland and Britain even before Britain entered this field of interest with William Dampier’s voyages in 1688 and 1699.14 For Britain, the voyages of Byron, Wallis, Carteret and Cook had shifted interest away from finding the Great South Land and towards the islands of the East Indies and the Pacific. Despite the 1605 Spanish passage through Torres Strait by the Torres/de Quiros expedition, it was generally thought that Australia and Papua New Guinea formed a single landmass, referred to as Java la Gande from 1530 to Drake’s circumnavigation of Java in 1579, later Zuytlandt, and from 1644 as Nieuw Holland.

Three successive European nations had lain inchoate claim to what is now Australia, but none had followed their claims with any active presence. In the 1500s, Spain already claimed all unknown territories south of the Spice Islands and, in 1605, de Quiros followed up by taking possession of Australia del Espiritu Santo as far as the south pole.15 Dirk Hartog claimed a part of the western coast for Holland in 1616 and, in 1770, James Cook took possession of the eastern part of New Holland for George III of England. At this time the map of the yet poorly charted Australian continent was dotted with names claiming Dutch sovereignty16 and New Holland had recently also been attracting interest from the French.17

Britain had asserted its maritime prowess over Holland in the early 1650s but the East Indies – the lucrative spice islands – remained firmly dominated by the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC), the Dutch East India Company, formed in 1602, two years after the British East India Company (BEIC). It was under these conditions that New Holland excited the British imagination.

FOMENTING PLANS

During the 1780s, British merchants continued to press for the privilege of establishing a trading station or settlement in the area, but each time the idea was rejected in favour of maintaining the BEIC’s trading monopoly which extended from the Cape of Good Hope to the Straits of Magellan (Cape Horn).

Lord North, as Home Secretary, rejected an application by James Matra for a trading station in the south-west Pacific in 1783. Matra suggested it could be peopled by American loyalists, and settlers from nearby islands and China.18 With Lord Sydney installed as new Home Secretary, Matra at once renewed his lobbying efforts in 1784, now incorporating Lord Sydney’s idea of a convict
colony. Admiral Sir George Young – who had previously mooted a trading settlement at Madagascar which was foiled in 1782 by the BEIC monopoly – then collaborated with Matra, Lord Sandwich, Banks and Lord Mulgrave to submit a proposal for a settlement at Botany Bay which he recommended for its equal ease of access to China, India and the coast of Africa. The plan reiterated that settlers might be brought from nearby islands and China, and it would be useful for settling loyalists and convicts. This proposal underwent two revisions, de-emphasising trade and underlining the convict idea, and emphasising the shipping routes which could supply the new settlement, securing for the BEIC alternative routes from India to China without relying on the Dutch East Indies. The proposal, in other words, was modified to accommodate a pressing problem of the Home Secretary, responsible for prisons as well as colonies, and strategic concerns recently raised by the BEIC in the case of hostilities with Holland.19 Again the proposal was vetoed, by Alexander Dalrymple of the East India Company. Clearly the major source of resistance came from the BEIC's China interests. Alan Atkinson observes that each revision of the proposal placed China at a greater distance. In the first proposal China was 'not more than about seven hundred leagues away', in the second 'not more than a thousand leagues' distant, and in the third 'about fifteen hundred leagues' distance.20

While the proposals for a privately funded settlement were being considered in 1785, a further Commission of inquiry into transportation was convened under Lord Beauchamp. It concluded that convict transportation needed to be resumed but did not recommend a location, presumably because Young's proposals were still under consideration. Young's third proposal was printed in April 1785; Beauchamp's first report was issued in May; and, in July, the BEIC vetoed Young's proposal. Two weeks later Beauchamp released a second report suggesting Das Voltas Bay on the south-west coast of Africa, outside the BEIC's jurisdiction.21

In August of the following year, after further inquiries had found Das Voltas Bay unsuitable, Lord Sydney issued instructions to the admiralty to prepare a fleet to transport convicts to Botany Bay. What motives settled the issue in great hurry remain, in the absence of historical records to disclose them, veiled. A great uproar in the British press immediately commenced to probe into the reasons why, of all the bountiful places known in the world, Botany Bay had been chosen, where only one explorer's party had spent nine days and had found it 'rather barren' and unpromising.22
THE CHINA TRADE IN THE EUROPEAN EYE

As far as Europeans were concerned, Canton was opened for trade in 1757, and quickly became well enmeshed in a trading network of European, Malay and Chinese traffic. From 1759, Alexander Dalrymple of the BEIC started to push for a concerted effort to graft onto this trade by establishing a port to compete with the Dutch at Batavia, within easy reach of perahu (Malay boats) and Chinese junks. Balambangan, between Palawan and North Borneo, was selected as a suitable site but both attempts at such a settlement (1772-74 and 1803-05) failed.23

Dallas observes that the BEIC's China trade had received a great boost after Cook's second voyage showed an alternative route to India, bypassing the hazardous Sunda Straits. Cook's third voyage, completed after his death by Lieutenant James King, resulted in 'news of immense wealth in furs, forests and fisheries'. King had sold £2,000 worth of furs in Canton.24 The Pacific Rim was just emerging as an attractive whaling and sealing area, with China as the main market for South Pacific seal skins.25 South Pacific sealing under licence from the BEIC was to begin in 1791, and was indeed so successful that the Chinese market for seal skin became glutted within a few years and other uses were developed such as hat-making and seal oil.26

John Ward roundly considers the China trade the 'inner citadel' of the BEIC's South Pacific trading interests, which prevented the establishment of a British settlement in the South Pacific until 1786.27 China was 'the most jealously guarded of the Company's monopoly markets' and 'the greatest obstacle in the way of development of British interests in the Pacific had been the monopoly of the Company'.28 It had quashed Sir George Young's plans for a settlement at Madagascar in 1782, as well as plans in 1785 to settle Norfolk Island, when Alexander Dalrymple predicted that such a colony 'would become the base of piratical excursions against the islands and the coast of China, where the East India Company enjoyed a rich trade'.29

Michael Roe, too, finds that the Company was 'ever fearful of the development of an extra-monopoly trade with China'.30 As a result, the British convict colony at Botany Bay was severely limited in its capacity to trade and transport. In order not to antagonise the BEIC, all goods and transports had to be conducted on BEIC vessels, and shipbuilding was prohibited. Intercourse with the East India Company settlements and China was expressly forbidden.31
THE CHINA TRADE AND THE CONVICT COLONY

The vessels transporting convicts to the government settlement were privately owned, either by the BEIC or under licence agreement with it, and the transport of convicts was only part of the purpose of their journeys. Even some of the First Fleet vessels, after depositing their cargo of convicts at Botany Bay in 1788, proceeded to Canton to purchase tea. Vessels used to transport convicts became attracted by the abundance of sperm whales off the New South Wales coast and whaling began in the south-west Pacific as a result, drawing British vessels from the Eastern Pacific as well as American and other foreign vessels.

Tea and silk were highly desirable products from China but the Chinese market for British goods was small. New South Wales was beset by a huge trading deficit at any rate in its trade with Britain, but Dorothy Shineberg has calculated that tea imports from China alone exceeded the value of all export earnings from wool, oil, hides, horns, seal skins, and timber. Tea was part of the weekly rations of government officers and was one of the largest import items between 1825 and 1830. Sandalwood and trepang, on the other hand, found a ready market in China. Consequently, the islands of the Pacific became the third leg in an emerging trading triangle. Trepang, a holothurian also known as beche-de-mer (from the Portuguese bicho di mar) and in China as hai-sen, became translated into English in the eighteenth century as 'swallo'.

While the colony was under severe restrictions so as not to violate the BEIC's trading monopoly, trade between the islands and the new colony was permitted and the colony was firmly orientated towards the sea. 'The maritime industries, based on the Australian coast and the islands, and the island industries such as sandalwood and trepang offered excellent prospects and were developed with considerable rapidity.' Sandalwood trading took off in 1804, starting with Fiji and Tonga (then referred to as the Friendly Islands).

These island products were not for domestic use but attractive for the China trade. Once landed in Sydney, the goods had to await BEIC transport. British and colonial traders were at a great disadvantage compared to 'neutral' (foreign, including American) vessels that were not affected by the BEIC monopoly. Governor King made two urgent approaches in 1806, pleading that the new colony ought to have access to the China trade, exporting seal skins, trepang, sandalwood and other colonial produce. The BEIC, however, resisted any move to release the colony from the confines of a single penal settlement. Consequently, King was forced to especially forbid intercourse with China. Joseph Banks then lent his influential support to the idea of commercial development of the colony, suggesting that colonial ships 'should be allowed to navigate freely to the northernmost extremity' of Australia, but he discouraged
the idea of trading to China and engaging in the trepang trade. Presumably, he was keenly aware of the BEIC's resistance, and sought to pursue ways of expanding the commerce of the colony without striking too directly at the BEIC.

No amount of protection and diplomacy could eventually save the BEIC's outdated monopoly in the face of thriving trade. Concessions which eroded the BEIC's monopoly rights were at first made for whaling and sealing (in 1798, 1802, 1803 and 1811) until, in 1813, the company – having had to borrow money from the government – 'lost practically the whole of its monopoly rights save in the China trade and in tea (the main product of the China trade)'. The China monopoly was finally abolished in 1833 and sandalwood trading took off in earnest.

THE CHINA-AUSTRALIA TRADE WITHOUT EUROPEANS

But well before the establishment of a British colony, the trepang trade formed an important historical link between Australia and China. It existed quite independently of the British and perhaps also independently of any European involvement, despite its central orchestration from the old Portuguese harbour of Makassar and the strong Dutch interest in the long-standing trading networks of a region which have been 'little understood' in Australia. Governor King's urgent requests were merely an attempt to graft onto an already lively trade 'at the northernmost extremity' of the continent, powered by Chinese demand for trepang.

A regular annual trade was conducted by the seafarers of Sulawesi (formerly Celebes) between Timor, Makassar, Kayu Jawa (the Kimberley coast of Western Australia) and Marege (the north coast of Arnhem Land). Vessels were crewed by Bugis from north Celebes and Makassans from the south, and often under command of a Chinese merchant. Practically all Australian trepang was exported to China.

It is not entirely certain when or why they turned their attentions to the northern coast of New Holland. British and Dutch sources make reference to the China-Makassar-Australia trading triangle only from the 1750s, and then with increasing frequency. This may indicate the beginning of a regular trade, or it may indicate the awakening of a colonial interest in it. Campbell Charles Macknight, who has produced the most extensive and authoritative study of the Australian trepang trade to date, dates this development to between 1650 and 1700. Others favour an even longer timeframe of culture contact between Yolgnu people of Arnhem Land and the archipelago, based on anthropological and archaeological evidence. Still, as far as a trading triangle with China is
concerned, no credible doubt has yet been cast on the accuracy of Macknight's estimate.

The earliest reliable evidence of a trading journey to north Australia is dated as 1751. A Chinese trader conducted the voyage. He set out from Timor 'to see if he could reach the large sand-plate beyond Roti, to search for turtle-horn'. (Roti is a small island off the southwestern tip of Timor.) Reporting the journey, the Dutch Resident of Timor did not credit the Chinese with a voyage of discovery or exploration, but stated that 'after five days sailing before the wind and two days and nights having drifted', he reached a southern coast where he met indigenous people. 'Though said Chinese took it for a large island, we do not doubt or it will have been the mainland coast of the Southland.'

This news, when it eventually reached Amsterdam, sparked great interest in the VOC. The directors requested more information, but by this time a new Timorese resident had been appointed who could furnish no further details. Batavia recapitulated that the journey to the land south-east of Timor was 'made now and then from Timor and Makassar, but produces so far as we know nothing but trepang, being dried jelly-fish, and wax'. To refer to trepang as dried jellyfish suggests little acquaintance with the details of the trade. A further VOC exploration was sent to the Southland in 1756, under Captain Gozal in command of Rijder and Buis, but could not contribute anything on the trepang trade. Yet only a few years later, Alexander Dalrymple (1759, see above) was aware of a regular Bugis trade to the 'Southland'.

Within less than fifty years, a considerable industry appeared which could no longer be overlooked by colonial observers. By the early 1800s, at least 30 varieties of trepang were traded at Makassar, most destined for sale in southern China. By 1820, trepang had become the largest export from the Dutch East Indies to China, next to pepper. How did this industry come about?

During the early seventeenth century, Celebes was fractured into several principalities, with Gowa and Tallo' in the southwest and Boni, Wajo' and Soppeng in the central and east. As the Dutch started to gain ascendancy in the East Indies, Makassar became an attractive alternative port for British, Danish, Malay, Indian, and Javanese vessels. The kingdom of Gowa on the southwest of Celebes rapidly expanded its political and military power at the expense of neighbouring kingdoms. The Dutch (assisted by the Rajah of Boni) finally defeated it in a decisive sea battle at Buton in 1667 and the port city was ransacked in 1669. The Dutch restricted the direct traffic from Canton and Amoy to Makassar to one journey per year.
Macknight thinks that the throttling of the Makassar trade by the Dutch after 1667 may have stimulated a greater concentration on voyages to north Australia which did not rely on trading imported commodities, but focused on productive activities, such as trepang fishing, which required a large workforce for on-the-spot processing. Makassan oral history also suggests that at the battle of Buton some perahu escaped to the Gulf of Carpentaria and their crews lived there for a considerable period. 

It was not until 1820 that the Dutch trading restrictions were lifted and the traffic between China and Makassar increased (or recovered). But Chinese resident merchants, or taukeh, like the one who voyaged from Timor in 1751, were present in the archipelago throughout this time. When Matthew Flinders called in 1803, the European population of Kupang had been reduced by recent hostilities with the British to three Dutchmen (the governor, a surgeon and a 'young gentleman'), a Swiss sergeant-major, two or three soldiers, and 'no merchants': 'What may be called the trade of Coepang is mostly carried on by the Chinese, some of whom are settled in the town, and have intermixed with the Malays.' They traded sandalwood, beeswax, honey and slaves, mostly to Batavia, and imported rice, arrack, sugar, tea, coffee, betelnut, 'and the manufactures of China, with some from India and Europe'.

The taukeh participated not only in the Dutch-controlled import and export trade; they were also well enmeshed in the distributive trade of the archipelago which bypassed European dominance. Chinese trading goods were described by Captain Thomas Forrest in 1775:

The Chinese provided iron tools, chopping knives, axes, blue and red cloth, China beads, plates and bowls, receiving in return Misoy bark, slaves, ambergris, trepang, tortoise-shell small pearls, black parrots and large red parrots, birds-of-paradise, and many kinds of dead birds, dried in a particular way.

The trading goods of the islands were 'tortoise-shell, mother-of-pearls, sea-shells, coral, seaweed (agar-agar), various kinds of dried shell-fish, birds' nests, mangrove bark and wood, roots for dyeing, honey, beeswax, eaglewood and dammar'. The Aru Islands were among the trading bases for this inter-island trade. By 1825, about 30 perahu traded from Makassar to Aru each year, and in 1841 the visiting fleet carried some 5,000 persons on 'four or five ships and brigs and a number of prow'. On their departure they left 'some dozen Chinese and about 300 Bugis and Makassars' on the island.

Despite the wide range of trading goods of interest to the taukeh, trepang became the major trading item. Macknight observes that Chinese imports of
trepang from Southeast Asia did not commence before the late seventeenth
century. He believes that the oldest reference to trepang in China (hai-su) was
the Shi-wu pen-t'sao in the sixteenth century. Earlier medical works by Li
Shih-chen (1552 and 1578) make no reference to it whereas, by the seventeenth
century, there are frequent references to trepang in Chinese literature, even in
poetry. It may be assumed, then, that in the late seventeenth century Chinese
demand for trepang was growing sufficiently to seek new sources of supply.

The trepang trade to China exerted a transformative influence on trade and
power in the archipelago. A large Makassan population settled at Sumbawa
island in order to trade to the Kimberley region 500 miles distant, while
observers of the maritime people of southern Celebes, Luang island east of
Timor, and Fordate in the Tanimbar Islands, commented in 1825 and 1839 that
trepanging was the major economic activity on these islands. This suggests a
shift from a subsistence economy to specialised commodity production. For
Makassans, too, trepanging became 'their central concern'.

Going by the only figures available, China imported on average over 900 tons of
trepang (1868-72) from foreign vessels, and over 500 tons (in 1871) in Chinese
vessels. 'If these statistics are even approximately right it means that around the
middle of the nineteenth century the north Australian coast was supplying a
significant part of the total China market', perhaps a quarter or more,
supplemented by imports from south-east Asia, and possibly Japan. Chinese
demand was clearly the driving force behind Australia's engulfment in the
trepang trade.

THE POLITICAL IMPACT OF THE TREPANG TRADE IN
AUSTRALIA

During his circumnavigation of the continent in 1802-03, Matthew Flinders was
surprised to find a fleet of Makassan trepangers in the islands of northeast
Arnhem Land. The diary of this voyage conveys a sense of foreboding as
wreckage and signs of foreign visits were first encountered in the Gulf of
Carpentaria. Pieces of pottery, scraps of blue calico from pantaloons, and 'such
hats as are worn by the Chinese' from palm leaves stitched with cotton,
suggested to Flinders that the visitors were Chinese. That the discovery of
foreign contact was considered to be significant is clear from the detailed
attention that it is afforded in an account of almost unrelieved monotony,
consisting of bearings and measurements and the naming of landmarks for
orientation. Flinders' surprise at meeting foreign visitors was matched by their
astonishment on hearing of a British settlement at Port Jackson. They were
coming every year and were familiar enough with the area to give Flinders some advice on dealing with the Yolgnu people inhabiting the north coast.

Flinders extracted as much information as possible from the commander of the fleet, and afterwards lost little time in heading straight for Kupang, a port scarcely able to provision the ship, but able to shed some further light on the traffic to New Holland. The return journey proceeded with great speed and little time for coastal survey on a rotting ship. Upon his return, Flinders proposed the name of 'Australia' for the whole continent to replace 'New Holland'. Perhaps the meeting of strangers had underlined the need to symbolically re-create the continent under British auspices.

Flinders' estimate of the commencement of the trade to north Australia remains the most conservative. He understood the trade to have commenced in about 1783, though Brown's journal of the same voyage implies that Flinders' informant, Poobassoo, commenced journeying to Australia at that time, not that the trade itself then commenced. Other early observers tended to lend greater antiquity to the trade. A 1911 estimate by customs collector Alfred Searcey ('about two centuries') puts the commencement at about 1700, whereas the French navigator Dumont d'Urville in 1837 thought that it 'doubtlessly preceded the Dutch'.

At the same time as Flinders, a French expedition with Nicholas Baudin in command of *Geographe* was plying the northern waters and found Makassans fishing for trepang on the Kimberley coast. They learned that 'the existence of the continent had been known for a long time' but that regular voyaging to it was of recent origin, stimulated by increasing Chinese demand for trepang. This is the backdrop against which both Governor King and Joseph Banks became keen on extending the Port Jackson trade into the north.

Continuing Flinders' work, Philip Parker King on *Mermaid* (1818-21) found further evidence of recent trepang fishing activities in the Kimberley, at Vansittart Bay near Long Island and on Jar island south of the bay. He found a woman at Melville Island beckoning in what appeared to be Portuguese language ('ven aça, ven aça' – come here) suggesting a long-standing contact with Timor. Soon after his report, and even before the western half of New Holland was claimed for the British (in 1829), a British drive to north Australia commenced in an attempt to graft onto this existing trade.

Singapore, established as a British free trade port in 1819, became a spectacularly successful trading post, attracting much trade from Makassar. It served as an inspiration for a similar endeavour in north Australia. In the hope that a northern port could attract Makassan trade and become the basis of 'trade
with the Celebes, Moluccas and other eastern islands and ultimately with China', three successive outposts were established on the far northern coast: Fort Dundas on Melville Island (1824-29), Fort Wellington at Raffles Bay on Cobourg Peninsula (1827-29) and 'Victoria' at Port Essington on Cobourg Peninsula (1838-49). They were all unsuccessful in attracting the Makassan fleets for trade, but the implication is that the Yolgnu-Makassan-Chinese trade expedited the British claim over the whole continent and made it a more urgent, and more promising, prospect.

It also had an impact on the Yolgnu people of northeast Arnhem Land. As a result of their long-standing contact with outsiders, Yolgnu people were better prepared than were Aborigines elsewhere to withstand the onslaught of British colonisation. They had been exposed to smallpox, yaws and venereal disease, to firearms, tobacco and alcohol. They had a foreign language that was able to overcome regional differences, and they had been coping with the presence of strangers with whom they entered into bartering relationships but with whom they also had occasional clashes. Yolgnu people had been overseas, some had lived in Makassar for years, and some Makassans had lived with them and married into local families. Yolgnu today will say about Makassans that 'we are one people'.

The traces of Makassan contact in Yolgnu material culture, ritual and lore are so profound that a number of anthropologists and archaeologists have favoured a much longer timeframe of contact than the documentary record supports. John Mulvaney has described the impact of this contact on Yolgnu society as 'all pervading'. The weight of archaeological evidence suggests considerable lifestyle changes as a result of this contact, with larger groups, drawn to the coasts and islands, placing a greater emphasis on the more permanent marine resources, and characterised by decreased mobility and seasonality. It is presumed that the introduction of dugout canoes and hunting technology suitable for marine mammals facilitated this lifestyle. That trading intensified is suggested by the presence of non-local stone artefacts in post-contact middens. The radiocarbon dating of artefacts from several sites suggests external contact up to 800BP. Pondering the divergence between the historical and archaeological evidence, Anne Clarke thinks that 'the long archaeological chronology of Macassan contact is as likely as the short, documentary chronology'.

How ancient the contact between the East Indies and north Australia might be remains uncertain. It is certain, however, that the Chinese demand for trepang involved the northern parts of Australia in an extensive trading network which emerged before the arrival of the British in 1788. This network boosted the
Dutch position in the East Indies and tempted the British into emulation. It also stimulated the British embrace of the whole continent.

CONCLUSION

The China trade was an important consideration in the deliberations over the establishment of Botany Bay and, once the colony was established at Port Jackson, it again came into prominent concern with the emergence of new trading networks grating against the jealously guarded monopoly over the China trade and the discovery of old ones. It must be concluded that the China trade impacted on early Australian history in a number of important ways. It delayed the establishment of a British colony in the south-west Pacific and caused a confinement of the settlement within the parameters of a penal colony out of consideration for the BEIC trading monopoly. It also enhanced the attraction of Pacific trading to secure produce for China, and eventually powered the commercial expansion of the colony. The lively trade with northern Australia out of Makassar and supplying China made it seem both desirable and feasible to establish British hegemony over the entire continent.

Taken together, this makes for a rather strong Chinese imprint on early Australian history, but it is necessary to consult quite specialised sources to reach this conclusion. It is not that Australian historians have been unaware of either the trade that linked north Australia to China before the coming of the British, or of the importance of the China trade in the 1780s. But, in Belich's words, as it did not extend British history, it was not remembered very hard.66 Those who are more interested in Australian than in British history may try a little harder, and seriously consider the trade relations of indigenous people as part and parcel of our national history.

Griffith University

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8 Roe, in Martin, Founding of Australia, p.60.


13 Gonner, in Martin, Founding of Australia, p.32.

14 Courteen petitioned King James I in 1624 to be allowed to set up a colony in Terra Australis but was given title to the island of Barbados instead. G. Collingridge, The Discovery of Australia, Golden Press, Sydney, 1989 (1895), pp.295-99 and 270-71.

15 Ibid., pp.156, 310.

16 The claims were over Eendraghtsland on the west coast, claimed by Dirk Hartog as captain of Eendraght in 1616; Leeuwinland at Cape Leeuwin (lioness), claimed by Leeuwin in 1542; Peter Nuyts Land, claimed by the crew of Gulde Zeepaert at the eastern end of the Great Australian Bight in 1627; de Witts Land at 21 degree south, claimed by Gerrit de Witt on Vianen in 1628; and van Diemen's Land, claimed by commodore Abel Tasman on Heemskerck and Zeehean in 1642. Collingridge, Discovery, pp.261, 271, 272, 273, 279, 280, 288.

17 In 1772, an expedition under St Alouarn on Gros Ventre examined part of the Kimberley coast on the way from Shark Bay to Timor, and in 1788 a French fleet arrived at Botany Bay a day after the British. C. Clement, 'Pre-settlement Intrusion into the East Kimberley', EKAIP Working Paper No.24, CRES, ANU, 1987, p.12.

18 HRNSW I part 2, pp.1-6, cited in Alan Atkinson 'Whigs and Tories and Botany Bay', in Martin, Founding of Australia, p.191.

19 Ibid., p.192ff.

20 Ibid., p.194. Atkinson observes that the Cape also gained in distance through the revisions, either to emphasize the isolation of the location as a suitable convict settlement, or to suggest less interference with the BEIC's monopoly. Young followed up with the idea of a private
23 Fry, in Martin, *Founding of Australia*, p.137ff.
24 Dallas, in Martin, *Founding of Australia*, p.42.
30 Roe, in Martin, *Founding of Australia*, p.60.
37 King to Hobart, 14/8/1804 and 20/12/1804, HRA I, v, pp.8-9, 202-203.
42 Macknight, *Voyage to Marege*, p.11.
47 Governor General of DEIC, Batavia, 1754, in Macknight, *Voyage to Marege*, p.95.

51 Macknight's informant gave conflicting information, suggesting that they lived there for 25 years, or returned after a few months. *Ibid.*, p.96.
54 Macknight, *Voyage to Marege*, p.14, based on Sopher's work on sea-nomads.
59 Flinders, *Voyage to Terra Australis*.
60 Macknight, *Voyage to Marege*, p.162.
63 Macknight, *Voyage to Marege*, p. 86-89; Michael Cooke, 'Makassar and Northeast Arnhem Land: missing links and living bridges', Batchelor College, N.T., July 1987; Peter Spillett 'A Race Apart'.
65 Clarke, 'The "Moormans Trowsers"', p.328.