

## **Cultural Legacies of a Globalised Past**

### **Author**

Ganter, Regina

### **Published**

2010

### **Book Title**

Enter at Own Risk? Australia's Population Questions for the 21st Century

### **Rights statement**

© 2010 Black Swan Press. The attached file is reproduced here in accordance with the copyright policy of the publisher. Use link for access to the publisher's website.

### **Downloaded from**

<http://hdl.handle.net/10072/36617>

### **Link to published version**

<http://humanities.curtin.edu.au/research/black-swan-press/>

### **Griffith Research Online**

<https://research-repository.griffith.edu.au>

## CHAPTER 8

### *Cultural Legacies of a Globalised Past*

REGINA GANTER

Australia's connection with the Asia-Pacific long predates the conspicuous focus that has been placed on our region since the Labor prime-ministership of Paul Keating (1991-1996). The intercourse between the cultures of Asia and the Pacific and the indigenous and white inhabitants of Australia was prolific despite a determined effort to control these links through the *White Australia Policy*. The flow of peoples and ideas from the region is under-valued in our national historical narrative. We only need to look at our heritage lists and registers to see how little recognition of the considerable evidence of our multicultural heritage is reflected there.

Australian history is suffused with interconnections to the Asia-Pacific region. In the age of sea transport places that are now considered remote – Cooktown, Kupang, or Broome – were well networked and serviced, and the island archipelago between Australia and China harboured several flourishing trade networks facilitating migration, trade, and the flow of ideas. White Australia as the central plank in the policy of a federated Australian nation itself was a response to just this proximity and connectedness, but the idea of a white Australian history is subverted by the manifold ways in which it was undermined in practice. Strong connections between Australia and the Asia-Pacific region revolved around trepanning<sup>1</sup>, pearling, gold mining, and missionising.

## **From sandalwood to pearl shell: the Pacific trading paradigm**

The Australian pearling industry, which became a pillar of economic activity on the northern shores, emerged from the Pacific sandalwood trade. The other legacy of that trade was the practice of blackbirding labour from the Pacific.

European traders keen on the lucrative China trade in tea, silk and porcelain pursued luxury commodities from the Asia-Pacific region to redress the trade imbalance resulting from a lack of Chinese demand for the European trade goods. One of these luxuries for which there was a ready market in China was sandalwood used for incense. Dorothy Shineberg has observed a series of shifts in this labour-intensive resource-raiding industry.<sup>2</sup> It was at first based on bartering relationships with Polynesian chiefs who could commandeer local workforces and were keen on European trade goods, particularly metals and weapons. However, this left the traders exposed to unstable supply depending on seasonal calendars and competing traditional obligations, and they began setting up trading stations in Melanesia to which they imported labour, creating a dependent workforce over which they had much more control. In the climate of labour shortages resulting from the Australian gold rushes, such Pacific trading companies extended their labour trade to the tropical east coast in the early 1860s.

The quick depletion of sandalwood resources required a constant lookout for new fields of activity, both in terms of geographical spread and the range of resources sought, including tortoise shell, pearl shell, trepang, and other products. The traders moved west towards New Guinea and Australia and were setting up shore stations to gather trepang. The first trepang station in the Torres Strait was established in 1862 at Warrior Island. From this station emanated the first commercial harvest of pearl shell in Torres Strait in 1871, which quickly erupted into a new industry. By 1877 sixteen owners ran 109 vessels in Torres Strait, working from island stations and importing workers from the South Pacific as swimming divers. The companies entering into pearling were well-known Pacific traders, like James Merriman, John Bell, Johann Cesar Godeffroy, James Paddon, Robert Towns, and Henry Burns (later Burns Philp). They brought with them their share-trading captains and boats, their connections in the Pacific, their marketing channels, and their financial resources to act as financiers, buyers and exporters of the produce.<sup>3</sup>

An administrative centre was established at first at Somerset (1863), and later at Thursday Island (1877), to supervise this new economic activity, and to raise revenue from it, and by 1879 the industry was so significant that Queensland shifted its boundary northwards for the second time (1872 and 1879) to include the whole of Torres Strait under its ambit.

The first pump diving boat was introduced in 1871, shortly after the discovery of commercial pearl shell, and by 1877 more than half the fleet had the latest deep diving equipment instead of relying on swimming divers. This changed the dynamics of the industry. The work on a lugger now became focused on the single diver on whose productivity the success of each boat depended. Instead of importing large numbers of crew from the south Pacific for swimming diving, recruiters increasingly targeted Malays, Filipinos and Japanese, and ethnic hierarchies began to characterise the industry.

By the 1890s Japanese predominated in the diving industry, not only as divers but also increasingly with an entrepreneurial involvement which led to a long drawn-out struggle to reclaim white dominance. Every Australian pearling port had a substantial Japanese population, consisting of permanent residents, mostly merchants and their families, and a transient population of contract workers. Well-established recruitment channels facilitated the flow and repatriation of workers, and targeted impoverished villages in the provinces of Ehime and Wakayama, so that in these villages, “Thursday Island seemed closer than Tokyo”<sup>4</sup>. Such villages still pride themselves as having been the first in Japan to have water-flush toilets, and to indulge in white bread and tea with milk. Their ‘Arafura divers’ opened horizons of economic opportunity and cultural influences for these villagers.

Like sandalwooding, pearling (or rather, pearl shelling, since the main produce was the shell) was a resource-raiding activity without an attempt to husband the resource, so that the stocks became quickly depleted and required the constant extension of the fields of operation. By the turn of the century most of the Australian-based fishery operated outside of territorial limits. This weakened the ability of the Australian governments to regulate the industry because pearling companies could just as easily operate from Dutch colonies, or under any other flag for that matter. This gave the master pearlmen considerable leverage and they achieved the exclusion of the pearling industry from the white Australia policy, safeguarding their continued access to cheap and docile labour, the main

reason why the northern Australian population remained much more Asian-dominated than the remainder of the continent until World War II.

By the 1930s the strong reliance on Japanese divers began to backfire. In a period of ebullient industrialisation, the Japanese government began to lend scientific support to its pearling fleets, and well-equipped fleets started to operate in areas which the Australians considered their own.

The strong participation of Japanese fleets in offshore pearl fishing became a sensitive issue during the 1951 peace treaty negotiations, which involved an agreement on international fishing rights. The Australian government advanced the continental shelf doctrine to claim rights to the off-shore pearl beds. The United States had successfully argued the continental shelf doctrine after the war to stake out exclusive rights over its oil reserves, but the doctrine had not been tested with regard to sedentary fisheries. The Japanese negotiators stalled and the Australian negotiators were reluctant to bring this matter before the International Court of Justice fearing that Japan may be able to successfully claim traditional rights to the pearl fishery on the strength of the long standing Japanese participation in the pearl fishery. Eventually a bilateral agreement was negotiated which side-stepped the continental shelf argument, as Japan agreed to observe the same regulations as those binding Australian pearl shellers under the *Pearl-Shell Fishery Act*, without accepting Australian claims to the area.

### **The Christian Pacific rim strategy**

In the Torres Strait the year 1871 marks not only the discovery of pearl shell for commercial use, but also the arrival of Christian missionaries, again from the Pacific. Just like the European traders, the mission societies scrambled for fields of influence. Insofar as newly acquired colonies supported mission endeavour at all, the French favoured Catholic mission work whereas Dutch and British territories were inclined towards Protestants. The interdenominational Protestant London Missionary Society (LMS) had come under pressure in French New Caledonia and sought to extend its reach into the virgin territory of New Guinea. In 1871 it settled a group of Pacific Island missionary teachers and their wives on Murray Island (Mer) and Dauan Island which were seen as outside the reach of any colonial power. The LMS missionaries James Chambers and William Lawes went on to New Guinea and left the evangelists to themselves.

The effect of the Pacific Island evangelists on these islands without any external government was swift. They established a 'theocratic rule' where even trivial offences, such as quarrelling or making jokes about the missionaries were punished with severe floggings.<sup>5</sup> Even islanders as far away as Mabuiag (about 200km by sea) complained of their raids on women. They were able to withhold or supply local labour to pearl shell and trepang station and formed strategic business alliances with pearl shellers, becoming partners in their ventures. Queensland extended its boundaries in 1879 and swiftly relocated the Pacific Island evangelists to Darnley Island (Erub) keeping an eye on their activities. The lasting legacies of the LMS stepping-stone strategy in the Torres Strait was the amplification of the entanglement of local with Pacific Island genealogies already underway through the island stations, and the ready acceptance of the gospel in the Torres Strait.

Having extended its boundaries to the north twice already, Queensland annexed the southern part of the non-Dutch area of the island of Papua in April 1883, attempting to forestall German interest. But by this time Queensland's international reputation arising from the blackbirding trade and its treatment of indigenous people was such that the McIlwraith government received nothing but a strong rebuke from the British government. (After the German annexation in 1884 Britain declared the remaining area a protectorate as British New Guinea, which became an Australian-administered area after 1902.)

Fifteen years after the LMS had used the Torres Strait as a stepping stone into New Guinea, the German Lutherans followed suit, responding to the German acquisition of the northern part of New Guinea as Kaiser Wilhelmsland in 1884. The German advance into New Guinea was at first the responsibility of the *Neuguinea-Kompagnie*. Like most other colonial trading companies preceding direct rule, this company resented and resisted interference from missionaries. The Lutheran missionary Johann Flierl, as the missionary spearhead into the German territory, was refused permission to board the company's ships, and was therefore delayed on his northward journey for a couple of months in Cooktown, still a fairly new place servicing the Palmer River goldrush.<sup>6</sup> This was actually the closest trading post to a future mission in New Guinea (soon to be overtaken by Thursday Island, which was opened to settlement in 1885). Flierl expected that Cooktown could become a recuperation station for staff from a future mission in tropical New Guinea, and proceeded to make arrangements to form a Lutheran mission at an unsupervised reserve that had been set aside for Aborigines at Cape Bedford in 1881, without even inspecting

the site. In January 1886 he led a party to the site, assisted by local government and police officers. This became Elim mission (later part of Hope Vale).

Internal and external dynamics then converged to result in a string of three Lutheran missions on the east coast, followed by a string of three Moravian-Presbyterian missions on the west coast of the Cape. This Christian colonisation of the north was facilitated by a Queensland government concerned about the German presence to the near north, the extension of white settlement into the north, and the supervision of the pearling and trepang industry that operated at the margins of the influence of the state.

For the Queensland government, the mission was a welcome receptacle for coastal Aboriginal labour then under much pressure from recruiters in the pearl shell and *bêche-de-mer* industry, while in Cooktown Aborigines had been excluded from town after dark in 1885, after an initial policy of ‘bringing them in’ to perform odd jobs.

The mission idea had been recommended to the Queensland government by the influential Moravian missionary Friedrich Hagenauer from the Aboriginal Protection Board of Victoria, who had conducted a tour of the north in 1885. His idea was to establish missions on which indigenous people could be trained as useful labour, so that they could replace the imported Pacific Islanders whose importation had brought so much international criticism. Negotiations with the Moravians led to the setting up of Bloomfield (later Wujal-Wujal) in 1886 but the Moravians retreated from the idea because Premier Griffith was lukewarm with support. The Lutherans therefore took over that station in 1887. Also in 1886, a separate, and short-lived Lutheran mission was established at Mari Yamba near Proserpine, which was essentially the result of splintering among the German Lutheran synods. The Moravians finally commenced their work on Cape York Peninsula in association with Presbyterians at Mapoon in 1891, adding Weipa in 1898 and Aurukun in 1904, with a short-lived attempt at Mornington Island (1914-18).

Government support for missions was always qualified, since the aims of state and church only converged on the ‘civilising’ project, leaving much room for disagreement. The Queensland government always insisted on English as the mission language, whereas Lutherans emphasized the need to acquire local languages. Lutheran missionaries therefore resisted the breaking up of language groups and the removals of individual children and adults. Half of all mission

work in the Australian colonies was conducted by Germans until 1850, and half of the Queensland missions were staffed by German speakers until World War I. The result is that much valuable work was conducted on indigenous languages, recording vocabularies, grammars, oral traditions, and translating bible texts.

The German missionaries on Cape York preferred to offer employment on the missions rather than allow mission residents to sign on with outside employers. Because the soil on the gazetted reserves was unproductive for most crops, they embarked on sandalwooding, collecting trepang, pearl shell and trochus shell, turtle and dugong fishing, in order to keep mission residents away from contact with civilisation, or “syphilisation”, as Rev. G. H. Schwarz at Mapoon expressed it.

Coconut plantations became a staple mission activity in Papua New Guinea and tropical Australia. The Queensland government handed out free seedlings to new missions, and transnational companies interested in palm oil and copra, like Lever Brothers and Cadbury, supported such initiatives. In 1904 an LMS missionary, Fred Walker, initiated a community development scheme for Papua and Torres Strait based on coconut plantations to generate cash income with which community boats could be acquired on a time payment scheme. He intended this scheme as a direct competition with trading companies like Burns Philp who paid the lowest possible prices for copra and generated dependence on their company trading posts. The LMS distanced itself from the idea and Walker had to quit the mission society to form the Papuan Industries Limited (PIL).

Torres Strait Islanders embraced the scheme with enthusiasm. Island after island acquired community luggers with which they also engaged in sedentary and pelagic fishing activities, competing with the commercial pearl shellers in the Torres Strait. They also used the boats for inter-island visits, and supported each others’ cultural activities, such as church building, with liberal gifts of coconuts. The scheme harboured the potential for genuine community development, creating economic independence and the potential for self-determination. For that reason the Queensland protection bureaucracy, which was extending its administrative reach into Aboriginal lives, resisted it. Torres Strait Islanders were brought under the Aboriginal Protection Act in 1904, and gradually government schoolteachers and superintendents on the islands took control of the lugger scheme. By 1936 the Papuan Industries Limited had been



transformed into an Island Industries Board administered by the Director of Native Affairs, and Torres Strait Islanders went on strike, refusing to work on the luggers because they had lost all control. According to Nonie Sharp, this was the decisive moment when the island communities, belonging to different language groups in the Torres Strait, converged into a regional identity.<sup>7</sup> This regional identity has given them the political clout to be considered as a separate indigenous group in Australia next to Aboriginal peoples, so that all policies, institutions and instruments dealing with indigenous people now refer to ‘Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders’. It is only under the pressure of competing native title claims that this regional identity might be threatened in the twenty-first century.

The cultural legacies that emerged from colonial activities in the Australian and Asia-Pacific region are submerged but palpable. Pacific trading with a view to the Chinese market heralded the pearling industry which became the economic pillar of far north Australia. The trade also transmogrified into the mass importation of indentured workers from the Pacific under conditions that aroused universal condemnation from humanists. The labour trade so tarnished the reputation of the Queensland government that it was held incapable of administering yet more indigenous populations in neighbouring Papua, with the result that the northward extension of Queensland’s boundaries was halted. Both of these activities – pearling and Pacific indenture – imprinted the northern population so that whites were never more than a fragile minority, as southern observers nervously observed.

Colonial trading also paved the way for mission activities, although the trading companies controlling new territories were often reluctant to admit missionaries. The scramble for Papua New Guinea brought both the LMS and the Lutherans to North Queensland, where both denominations developed successful mission fields. For Cape York the cultural legacy is the preservation of indigenous languages facilitated by German missionaries, and for Torres Strait it consists of a strong commitment to Christian faith, admixture with Pacific Island ancestors and the emergence of a regional identity.

### **Prior entanglements**

At the top end of Australia the entanglements with the Asia-Pacific are much older than the British settlement. The upshot is that Muslims were entrenched in northern Australia long before any British interest there.

The Australian north coast formed the far distant fringe of a trading zone between China, India, and what became the Dutch East Indies. Chroniclers of the kingdom of Gowa in Sulawesi claim to have incorporated ‘Marege’ (the top end of Australia) as early as 1640<sup>8</sup>, but solid historical evidence of contact with the top end only commenced in 1751, when a Chinese merchant undertook a voyage from Timor and landed in what was thought to be north Australia. Alexander Dalrymple of the British East India Company gave some description of a trade to north Australia in 1763. In 1769 he published ‘A Plan for Extending the Commerce of this Kingdom and of the East-India Company’, again referring to lucrative trading excursions from Sulawesi to north Australia, just a year before James Cook was expressly instructed to chart the remaining *terra incognita* of the Australian coastline.

The trade, centred on the port of Makassar, revolved around trepang that was marketed to southern China. By the time Matthew Flinders observed this trade first hand in 1803 it was well established. Following various trade routes between Makassar and ‘Marege’, Macassan fishing fleets rode the annual monsoon winds for four-month voyages.

Visiting the same camps each year, they established close relationships with coastal Yolngu people. There are reliable reports of Yolngu travelling with them back to Makassar, where they formed families, and of families formed by Macassans<sup>9</sup> with Yolngu. As a result of this long-standing and close connection, Yolngu languages are infused with Macassan words, including personal and place names, and Yolngu identity is infused with the Macassan contact history, revealed in a vast range of cultural productions from paintings to songs and dances, to story-telling, even basket-weaving patterns. The earliest Europeans on the north coast observed with amazement that local Aborigines addressed them in Malay, which had become the trade language used to communicate with strangers. In 1906, the year that the Pacific Islanders were expelled from Queensland, the South Australian government also forbade the Macassan visits to its northern territory.

The tangible traces of this contact consist of wells dug by Macassans and the characteristic tamarind trees marking their former camps, but much more profound is the intangible heritage expressed in linguistic and cultural traces among Yolngu, and the sense often expressed that Yolngu and Macassans are ‘one people’ united by deep roots of spiritual kinship. Just as in Torres Strait, indigenous identity among Yolngu is extremely strong, and incorporates creole

ancestries, in contrast to the black-white binary thinking that is essentially premised on the untenable and ahistorical idea of racial purity.

Another trail of legacy arising from this Macassan contact history is the interest which it aroused among British in the north of Australia. In the lengthy debate about the reasons for founding a British colony at Botany Bay, a number of authors have pointed out the attraction of trade with China as a major strategic consideration, but no reference has been made to the observations by Alexander Dalrymple published the year before Captain James Cook charted the East coast. Matthew Flinders received some of Dalrymple's notes from Joseph Banks, who helped to finance the circumnavigation in order to advance the commercial interests of the British East India Company. The precise contents of these notes have remained undiscovered, but it is tempting to speculate that they revealed a promising trade. During his ten-months circumnavigation of the continent, Flinders spent five-and-a-half months in the Macassan trading zone, from the Sir Edward Pellew islands in the Gulf of Carpentaria, where he found some of their traces, to Kupang, where he obtained confirmation of the information obtained from the Macassans at Cape Wilberforce (near Yirrkala). From Kupang Flinders hurried back to Sydney performing only the most perfunctory charting according to the letter of his brief. He was at that time harbouring plans to go into private trading with his friend George Bass, but Bass perished at sea and Flinders himself was detained by the French for six years and died soon after his release. Had he been thinking of the trepang trade as new commercial opportunity? French explorer Nicolas Baudin, too, had encountered a fleet of Macassans on the west coast.

After the Napoleonic wars, Phillip Parker King completed the task left unfinished by Flinders from 1818 to 1822, and he, too encountered a fleet of Macassans on the Kimberley coast. Soon after his report was received, the British established an outpost at Melville Island in 1824, exactly where they thought the main Macassan trading station was. This was even before the western half of the New Holland continent was claimed by the British. Being unsuccessful in establishing a trading relationship with the Macassans, the outpost was shifted to Raffles Bay on the Cobourg Peninsula in 1827, and abandoned in 1829. It was followed up with another attempt from 1838 to 1849 at Port Essington, also on Cobourg Peninsula. Clearly the Macassan activity attracted the British interest to the north coast.

## **The New Gold Mountain and the polyethnic north**

Whereas pearling was the main driver of immigration from the Asia-Pacific in the north, gold forms another strong link in the entanglements with the region. Soon after California became known in southern China as the ‘Gold Mountain’, Victoria became the New Gold Mountain (*xin jin shan*), and 10,000 Chinese arrived in Melbourne in 1854 alone.<sup>10</sup> This was the year of the Eureka Stockade, followed in 1855 by an immigration restriction act that imposed a poll tax and limitation on the immigration of Chinese. In 1856 more than 10 per cent of gold prospectors in Victoria were Chinese, rising to 20 per cent by 1860, the year in which gold-diggers in New South Wales rampaged against the presence of Chinese on the diggings at Lambing Flat near Young. Finally that colony, too, responded (as South Australia had already done) with immigration restrictions and an 1861 Goldfields Act Amendment Act targeted against the Chinese. These dynamics were repeated in Queensland in the 1860s, the Northern Territory in the 1870s and Western Australia in the 1890s.

By this time anti-Chinese sentiment had become transformed into a generalised anti-Asian, or rather, pro-white stance. Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds (2008) observe how closely the settler societies monitored each other. Charles Pearson warned Australians in 1892 that “the time will come” when the most populous nation on earth, then making up one-third of the world’s population, would elbow the white settler society aside. As a dire warning he cited the example of Singapore, where the Chinese population had increased from a few thousand to 86,000 within just over a decade. In March 1896 a premiers’ conference in Sydney extended the restrictions on Chinese to “all coloured races”. Half a year later, in the face of increased arrivals from India, the government in Natal (a province of South Africa) resolved “we must follow the example of New South Wales”. The requirement to write an application in a European language in the Natal 1897 Immigration Act was adapted in the Australian Immigration Act of 1901 in a manoeuvre to circumvent the protections implied in the idea of a ‘British subject’ which was a cornerstone of Indian protests in southern Africa.<sup>11</sup>

The Japanese victory over Russia in 1905 shook the confidence of white settler societies and firmed their resolve to pursue racial homogeneity. A mass rally in San Francisco in December 1906 achieved the exclusion of Japanese children from schools (Chinese children were already excluded), and in Canada the Asiatic Exclusion League rioted in Vancouver in October 1907 against Chinese

and Japanese. In 1910 Boer-British hostilities were reconciled with the Union of South Africa over the realisation that whites had to unite to save the Transvaal “from the fate that had overtaken places like Mauritius and Jamaica”.<sup>12</sup>

By the 1890s the Australian north was suffused with non-white residents and immigrants, and whites constituted but a thin layer of the population. In 1888 more than three-quarters of the settler population in the Northern Territory were Chinese. By 1910 the Asian population of the Territory had fallen back to about two thirds of settlers, but settlers constituted less than 20 per cent of the population compared to Aborigines. The central business districts of the coastal trading centres had a definite south-east Asian flair, and growing up in Broome, Darwin, Thursday Island, Katherine, Derby, or Wyndham meant growing up in a polyethnic society, not in a predominantly white one. Nowadays only the external territories of Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islands have a population reminiscent of the whole northern coast at the turn of the last century.

The northern settler communities were much more tolerant of Asians in their midst than the goldfield populations, with a strong sense that their economic prosperity actually depended on Asian businesses and workers. The Buffaloes Australian Rules football team, formed in 1916, was dominated by Aboriginal and Asian-Aboriginal players, and the North Australian Workers Union (established in 1927) had a decidedly mixed membership.<sup>13</sup> Southern observers commented with concern about the mixed northern population, with the towns looking like “proper little Japanese principalities”. Pearl-shellery and sugar growers came under federal pressure to seek alternative sources of labour. In 1906 South Sea Islanders were expatriated and the Macassan visits were stopped, but the pearlery was able to continue recruiting until World War II, which spelled the end of the poly-ethnic north as Japanese were interned and later repatriated, and Chinese townships demolished in a strategy to prevent the re-formation of Asian settlements.

### **Visible legacies**

The most visible legacies of historical entanglements with the Asia-Pacific are the mixed lineages of indigenous people in Torres Strait and northern Australia, and some of their cultural practices, such as a predilection for chilli and rice. There are some temples, mosques and joss-houses dotted around Australia that stem from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but none have made it from the old Register of the

National Estate to the new Commonwealth and National Heritage Lists, with the exception of two sites in external territories, the West Island mosque on Cocos (Keeling) Island, and the Malay Kampong on Christmas Island. Many cemeteries, and most of the older cemeteries in northern Australia, have Muslim, Chinese, and Japanese sections. On the state heritage registers we might find Chinese temples in Innisfail, Darwin, Melbourne, or Bendigo; Afghan cemeteries, mosques, or sites of riot such as at Buckland River; but, on the national heritage list, the only indication of our migrant history is the Bonegilla migrant camp in New South Wales.

As for Australia's world heritage, represented through 18 inscriptions, there is nothing to reflect a multicultural Australia, or a nation of immigrants. From 1981 to 2003 Australia listed 15 sites, all of them natural heritage sites, that were subsequently re-inscribed as also having cultural significance for indigenous people. None of Australia's inscriptions on the world heritage list show fusion, migration, or religious or ethnic tolerance. How different that is to the nations from which the migrants I have just referred to had come!

In southern China whole villages were drained of young men who took advantage of opportunities in California, Australia, New Zealand, Chile, Singapore, Japan and elsewhere. Colonial pressures and weak government produced social turmoil and the relative wealth of émigré villages that received transfers from overseas, and the absence of their young men, rendered such villages more vulnerable to attacks from bandit gangs. In one of them, Australian Researcher Michael Williams found a safe marked 'Anthony Hordern, Sydney'<sup>14</sup> A quirky architectural feature of such villages are fortified towers (*diaolou*) financed from overseas transfers. These served as watchtowers, shelters and for the safekeeping of valuables and stores, usually for several families. Often surrounded by a moat, they have the appearance of miniature castles. In 2007 China listed a *diaolou* site as world heritage. It is described as a site of fusion architecture that emerged from traditional migrant links to Australasia, the United States and South Asia.

This site represents an emerging trend in thinking about national heritage. In the same year Japan listed a silver mine area at Honshu Island, also describing it as a site representing of cultural exchange arising from extensive trade with Korea, China, East Asia and Europe. The inscription places much emphasis on trans-national connectedness.

Similar meanings arise from the baroque churches in the Philippines, world heritage listed in 1993 as representing a fusion baroque style emerging from Spanish, Filipino and Chinese collaborations. A number of sites listed in the 1990s represent the layering of meanings and religious co-existence, such as is evident in several Chinese sites where Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian elements converge. The Prambanan and Borobodur temples in Indonesia, listed in 1991, signal respect for Buddhist and Hindu temples in a predominantly Muslim society, and post-Taliban Afghanistan listed the Bamyán Buddha site in 2003 after the statues were destroyed in March 2001, as a signal for a new deal in Afghanistan.

World heritage listing and national heritage listing is a way for a nation to display what it values about itself. What is significant about a nation's history and identity often arises from its connections to other parts of the world. The most unique cultural phenomena are generally those that are most connected to elsewhere (the Eiffel tower, the Statue of Liberty). Australia's sites of cultural significance on the world heritage list (Sydney Opera House listed in 2007, the Melbourne Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens, listed in 2004, and the 11 convict sites listed in July 2010) all sit comfortably with the view that the Australian past was '98 per cent British'. But this image clearly only fits a very short period in Australian history, and all these sites actually do have transnational undertones. They refer to an international exhibition and international trade, and an international competition and a Danish architect, and the convict trade which was a global phenomenon in human capital. It is the way in which we think about and describe these sites that makes the difference.

As a nation of immigrants we have no shortage of sites that lend themselves to displaying a nation of immigrants. The Queensland Heritage Register includes the Cooktown cemetery, Croydon Chinese Temple, the Hou Wang Temple in Atherton and Atherton Chinatown, but not the Innisfail Chinese temple that was on the Register of the National Estate. But one needs to look hard to find such sites referring to immigrants, as the keyword search option bravely lists Aboriginal, Chinese, Russian, Japanese, South-Sea Islander, Afghan, Scandinavian, German (and many other) kinds of heritage, but returns no strikes under these keywords. The New South Wales Heritage Register is more accommodating, with strikes under 'migrants' and 'ethnic influence'. The Western Australian Heritage Register should contain many references to a polyethnic past, given the prominence of the pearling industry and the exposure of that states' northern coastland to Asia. The Register contains the Chung Wah

Hall in Perth (which doesn't turn up under the keyword Chinese), the Sikh Cemetery in Canning (which doesn't turn up under a search for Indian or Afghan), and the Broome cemetery (which turns up under most of these searches, but not under 'pearling'). The South Australian and Tasmanian registers can only be searched through the Australian Heritage Database (which includes all states, as well as sites that are not registered on any statutory list). Only the Victorian and Northern Territory heritage registers are fully keyword searchable and return 53 and 11 strikes respectively under 'Chinese'. The Northern Territory Heritage Register most completely whitewashes its history. It contains the Sue Wah Chin building, and Chinatowns at Brocks Creek and Pine Creek, but in the absence of a search option one needs to be creative find other references to Chinese (for example, under Kohinoor Adit), while the entries on the Palmerston cemetery in Darwin, the Daly River, and the Pine Creek Bakery (associated with the Ah Toy family) make no reference to Chinese whatsoever. This is the same Northern Territory where three-quarters of the settler population were Chinese in the 1880s. The entry on Victoria Settlement is entirely silent on the Macassans who were the reason it was formed. Here we have the ultimate irony of a heritage without a history, which renders it meaningless, and certainly bland.

During a 2008 excursion to the Chendge Mountain Resort (world heritage listed in 1994) our Chinese guides were leaving us in no doubt that the Hebei area with its outer temples was a site of trans-cultural harmony between Chinese, Mongolians, and Tibetans, due to tangled histories of migration and political patronage, and an association with the Panchen Lama since 1780. It is perhaps not surprising that modern China is keen to impress visitors with its multicultural histories. But Australia's image overseas does not encourage nonchalance about our own poly-ethnic histories. We have many interesting sites of cultural interaction. We would do well to make much more of them.

---

### Chapter notes

- <sup>1</sup> Trepang, or *bêche-de-mer* is a sea slug (*holothurian*) used in Chinese haute cuisine. There was a ready market in southern China for this luxury commodity.
- <sup>2</sup> Dorothy Shineberg, *They Came for Sandalwood: A Study of the Sandalwood Trade in the South-West Pacific 1830-1865* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1967).



- 
- <sup>3</sup> Regina Ganter, *The Pearl-Shellers of Torres Strait: Resource Use, Development and Decline, 1860s-1960s* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994).
- <sup>4</sup> Regina Ganter, "The Wakayama Triangle: Japanese Heritage of North Australia," *Journal of Australian Studies* 6 (1999): 55–63.
- <sup>5</sup> Nonie Sharp, *Torres Strait Islands 1879-1979 – Theme for an Overview*, La Trobe Working Papers in Sociology (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1980). Also in C. Pennefather, "Report of an Inspection of Torres Strait on HMS *Pearl*," in *Queensland Votes and Proceedings*, vol. 2, 1880.
- <sup>6</sup> See entries on Hope Vale and Johann Flierl at the German Missionaries in Queensland web-directory: "Cape Bedford Mission (Hope Vale) (1886-1942)," prepared by Regina Ganter, German Missionaries in Queensland, 2009, <http://missionaries.griffith.edu.au/qld-mission/cape-bedford-mission-hope-vale-1886-1942> (accessed September 2009), and "Flierl, Johann (1858-1947)," prepared by Regina Ganter, German Missionaries in Queensland, 2009, <http://missionaries.griffith.edu.au/biography/flierl-johann-1858-1947> (accessed September 2009).
- <sup>7</sup> Nonie Sharp, "Culture Clash in the Torres Strait Islands: The Maritime Strike of 1936," *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland* 11, no. 3 (1981-82): 107–26.
- <sup>8</sup> Abdul Razak Daeng Patunru, *Sedjarah Goa* (Jajasan Kebudayaan Di Makassar, 1967).
- <sup>9</sup> Macassan is a short-hand description incorporating all the ethnic groups that formed part of the trepang trading fleets, including Timorese, Sama Bajo or sea gypsies, and people from various parts of Sulawesi.
- <sup>10</sup> Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the Question of Racial Equality* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2008), 15.
- <sup>11</sup> Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 72, 125, 146.
- <sup>12</sup> Jan Smuts, in *ibid.*, 217.
- <sup>13</sup> Julia Martinez, "Ethnic Policy and Practice in Darwin," in *Mixed Relations: Asian/Aboriginal Contact in North Australia*, by Regina Ganter (Crawley, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 2006): 136–39.
- <sup>14</sup> Michael Williams, "Brief Sojourn in Your Native Land: Sydney Links with South China," in "Asians in Australian History," edited by Regina Ganter, special issue, *Queensland Review* 6, no. 2 (1999): 11–23.

## Bibliography

- “Cape Bedford Mission (Hope Vale) (1886-1942).” Prepared by Regina Ganter. German Missionaries in Queensland, 2009.  
<http://missionaries.griffith.edu.au/qld-mission/cape-bedford-mission-hope-vale-1886-1942> (accessed September 2009).
- “Flierl, Johann (1858-1947).” Prepared by Regina Ganter. German Missionaries in Queensland, 2009.  
<http://missionaries.griffith.edu.au/biography/flierl-johann-1858-1947> (accessed September 2009).
- Ganter, Regina, ed. *Asians in Australian History*. Griffith University, 1999.
- . *Mixed Relations: Asian-Aboriginal Contact in North Australia*, Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 2006.
- . *The Pearl-Shellers of Torres Strait: Resource Use, Development and Decline, 1860s-1960s*. Melbourne University Press, 1994.
- . “The Wakayama Triangle: Japanese Heritage of North Australia.” *Journal of Australian Studies* 6 (1999): 55–63.
- Lake, Marilyn, and Henry Reynolds. *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the Question of Racial Equality*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2008.
- Martinez, Julia. “Ethnic Policy and Practice in Darwin.” In *Mixed Relations: Asian/Aboriginal Contact in North Australia*, by Regina Ganter, 122–39. Crawley, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 2006.
- Patunru, Abdul Razak Daeng. *Sedjarah Goa*. Jajasan Kebudayaan Di Makassar, 1967.
- Pennefather, C. “Report of an Inspection of Torres Strait on HMS *Pearl*.” In *Queensland Votes and Proceedings*. Vol. 2, 1880.
- Sharp, Nonie. “Culture Clash in the Torres Strait Islands: The Maritime Strike of 1936.” *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland* 11, no. 3 (1981-82): 107–26.
- . *Torres Strait Islands 1879-1979 – Theme for an Overview*. La Trobe Working Papers in Sociology. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1980.
- Shineberg, Dorothy. *They Came for Sandalwood: A Study of the Sandalwood Trade in the South-West Pacific 1830-1865*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1967.
- Williams, Michael. “Brief Sojourn in Your Native Land: Sydney Links with South China.” In “Asians in Australian History,” edited by Regina Ganter. Special issue, *Queensland Review* 6, no. 2 (1999): 11–23.