

# Introduction

## Asian Orientations

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*Jan Gothard*

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Robin Gerster's recently-published anthology of Australian travel writing, *Hotel Asia*, pursues as one of its themes the 'historical reorientation of Australian patterns of travel and, by implication, outlook' through a study of literary accounts of Asian journeys.<sup>1</sup> Such a reorientation began surprisingly early. Even amongst nineteenth century accounts, Gerster argues

we can see the beginnings of a redrawing of the way Australians mapped the world. Here, in the nineteenth-century Austral/Asian travel book, are the first tentative steps towards a reorientation of national destinies as well as destinations.<sup>2</sup>

Other contemporary writers have adopted the same approach to the study of Australian relations with Asia. Bruce Bennett's article 'Re-viewing Asia' uses the compass metaphor, which appropriately names his collection of essays on 'place and direction in Australian literature', to remind us how Australian perceptions of our regional geography have changed.<sup>3</sup> From 'a recent past when Britain was "home" and South-East Asia was still perceived by Australians as "the far East"',<sup>4</sup> we now acknowledge the erstwhile Orient as our 'near North'. Chris Berry's *A Bit on the Side. East-West Topographies of Desire* similarly reorders an Australian world view through the language of geography and maps, in his critique of Dennis O'Rourke's film of his sojourn in Thailand, *The Good Woman of Bangkok*.<sup>5</sup>

As we have redrawn the maps so too we rewrite histories. Contemporary political and economic reorientations towards Asia have been a stimulus to recent Asian-focused studies and research within Australian and Western Australia. Literary and cultural studies have also been quick to explore questions

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1 Robin Gerster, *Hotel Asia. An Anthology of Australian Literary Travelling to the 'East'*, Penguin Books, 1995, p.6.

2 Gerster, p.31.

3 Bruce Bennett, *An Australian Compass. Essays on Place and Direction in Australian Literature*, South Fremantle, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1991.

4 Bennett, p.177.

5 Chris Berry, *A Bit on the Side. East-West Topographies of Desire*, Sydney, emPress, 1994.

of Australian perceptions of Asia.<sup>6</sup> Asian Studies is of course well established within West Australian universities, and both Murdoch University and the University of Western Australia, for example, now offer historically-oriented courses in Australian-Asian relations. Like the restructuring of geography, however, Australian Asian themes have long been on *some* historians' agenda even if, as Stuart Macintyre pointed out recently, this is sometimes overlooked or incorrectly acknowledged.<sup>7</sup> Australia's incorporation into Asia may well be the 'revelation of our age repeated over and over by political pundits like some kind of mantra'.<sup>8</sup> But though the mantra palls, it is unfair to accuse those with an interest in the area of jumping on a trendy bandwagon of presentist history.

Historical approaches have been diverse. Australia's anti-Asian immigration policies have long been a focus of significant attention, ranging from Myra Willard's pioneering 1923 text *History of the White Australia Policy* to Andrew Markus's recent *Australian Race Relations*. Sandra Tweedie's *Trading Partners. Australia and Asia 1790-1993* offers a useful overview of the literature on Australian Asian trade and economic relations from the 1930s.<sup>9</sup> R.M. Crawford's 1945 *Ourselves and the Pacific* provided a then-timely account (first written in 1940, rewritten and published in 1945) of Australia's position within and relationship to the Pacific nations, with Crawford stating

[o]f course it is clear that, given our position in the Pacific, intensive study of our environment, including the whole of Eastern Asia, is an important part of our task.<sup>10</sup>

Post Pacific war (itself a fruitful topic), strategic and defence issues such as decolonisation and the Cold War and their implications for Australia took priority, while Australia's more recent 'Asian wars'—Korea, Borneo, Malaya and especially Vietnam—all served as historical grist. And from further afield, American political scientist Werner Levi's *Australia's Outlook on Asia* addressed issues which are still on the agenda for those interested in national identity. As early as 1958 he posed the seemingly troubling question, 'how can Australia get along with Asia and at the same time preserve its distinct individuality?'<sup>11</sup>

Despite this it would be misleading to overstate the significance of the Asian outlook in earlier accounts of Australian history. As Levi wrote of his study:

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6 See, for example, *Australian Perceptions of Asia. Australian Cultural History*, no.9, 1990; also *Westerly. Crossing the Waters—Asia and Australia*, Summer 1993, no.4. *Westerly Looks to Asia. A Selection from Westerly 1956-1992*, Nedlands, Indian Ocean Centre for Peace Studies Monograph No.6, 1993, illustrates the duration of *Westerly's* literary interests in writings from and on Asia.

7 Stuart Macintyre, *A History for a Nation. Ernest Scott and the Making of Australian History*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1994, p.211.

8 Gerster, p.5.

9 Sandra Tweedie, *Trading Partners. Australia and Asia 1790-1993*, Sydney, University of New South Wales Press, 1994, pp.4-5.

10 R.M. Crawford, *Ourselves and the Pacific*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1945, p.264.

11 Werner Levi, *Australia's Outlook on Asia*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1958.

[s]ince this book deals exclusively with Australian-Asian relations these naturally have the spotlight and they are of necessity lifted from their general context much of the time. The impression might thus be created that these relations have always had an important place in the affairs of the Australian people. This is not so. It might, on the contrary, be maintained that their place was much too minor in proportion to their importance.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed when we turn away from 'Australian histories to refocus on Western Australia it is apparent that perceptions of an Asian theme within the West Australian historical canon have had only restricted currency until recently. Colebatch's 1929 celebration of a hundred years of West Australian history gave little or no credit to any race other than the European for the centenary's 'achievements' although he did note Moosan Nochachanar (who seems to be of Asian origin), as one of the names in the General Musterbook of 1829, and therefore one of the 'worthy pioneers' whose descendants peopled the state.<sup>13</sup> Australia was, after all, 'a white man's country'.<sup>14</sup> Battye's *Western Australia. A History* goes a little further. 'Chinese immigrants' appear in the index, with Western Australia's state-sanctioned policy of introducing 'coolie labour' under attack from the east at the 1881 Intercolonial Conference.<sup>15</sup> Trade relations with India, the introduction of Malay pearl divers to replace 'natives' in the North West, and the prospect of introducing Indian convicts for public works in the 1830s are all mentioned briefly, as are Indian settlers with 'native' servants at Albany, and Chinese workers brought in from Singapore.<sup>16</sup> Understating the 'Asian' role in Western Australian history becomes more apparent however when we examine Battye's *History of the North West of Australia*.<sup>17</sup> Reading the subtext of the biographical notes on 'principal towns and prominent citizens', it is possible to discern how very strongly Broome's pearling wealth was tied to the employment of indispensable 'Asiatic' labour. Its contemplated withdrawal as a consequence of the *Immigration Restriction Act* of 1901 'would have spelt ruin to many of those engaged in the industry',<sup>18</sup> acknowledged Battye. But he keeps his readers in total ignorance of any role played by Asian capital in the development of the industry, with Asian workers categorised solely as labourers and not particularly trustworthy ones at that. 'Apart from the actual diving, the employment of white men is increasing, as it is found that the returns are more satisfactory when all shell is opened in their presence'.<sup>19</sup> This was the nature of Battye's acknowl-

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12 Levi, Preface.

13 Hal Colebatch, *A Story of A Hundred Years. Western Australia 1829-1929*, Perth, Government Printer, 1929, p.40.

14 Colebatch, p.476.

15 J.S. Battye, *Western Australia. A History from its Discovery to the Inauguration of the Commonwealth* (1924), facsimile edition, Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1978, pp.318-319.

16 Battye, *Western Australia*, pp.298, 299, 127, 142, 186.

17 J.S. Battye, *The History of the North West of Australia* (1915), facsimile edition, Perth, Hesperian Press, 1985.

18 Battye, *The History of the North West*, p.49.

19 Battye, *The History of the North West*, p.114.

edgement of the role of the Asian worker in the pearling industry of the North West. Yet such was the extent of the Chinese and Japanese 'challenge to white control' of the pearling industry that legislation was introduced to restrict the role of Asian capital in the industry,<sup>20</sup> an issue dealt with by both Atkinson and Schaper in this volume. Battye clearly had no interest in presenting Asians in the pearling industry as other than menial and dishonest.

Written nearly forty years later, Crowley's *Australia's Western Third* shows greater awareness of things Asian, with topics such as Asian workers in the pearling industry, the impact of the Pacific war on the state and the return to Australia of former prisoners of the Japanese all mentioned.<sup>21</sup> Presumably the recent war and decolonisation in South East Asia were responsible for that shifting emphasis. Stannage's 1981 *New History of Western Australia*, written in a milieu of multiculturalism and heightened recognition of the non-European role in Australian history, goes further, with aspects of Asian interactions with Australians featured more prominently still.<sup>22</sup> Ian Crawford writes on early Makassan contacts with Aboriginal people, for example; and Ian vanden Driesen on Chinese and Afghan workers and nineteenth century anti-immigration legislation.<sup>23</sup> But apart from Anne Atkinson's and Jan Ryan's work,<sup>24</sup> it is only really in histories of the North West and the pearling industry, and in a growing number of unpublished postgraduate and honours theses, that Asians in colonial and twentieth century Western Australia assume anything much beyond a walk-on role.<sup>25</sup>

It's become almost obligatory to deconstruct the 'Asian' monolith when writing of approaches to 'Asia', so perhaps it is appropriate to remind ourselves of the obvious, that 'Australian' histories are not histories of a totality. 'Our' (meaning in this case West Australian) histories are not always encompassed within texts emanating from the east and presenting themselves as 'Australian', with *Studies* itself predicated on a belief that the distinctively Western Australian deserves its own showcase. And to unpeel another layer, regional histories cannot be assumed from a metropolitan or even a state-based discourse. Not all Western Australia's 'Asian-oriented' history is a product of the North West, however, which leads to the question of the historical relationship between Asia and the

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20 See J.P.S. Bach, 'The Pearlshelling Industry and the "White Australia" Policy', *Historical Studies*, vol.10, no.38, 1962, p.208 *et seq.*

21 F.K. Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*, London, Macmillan, 1960.

22 C.T. Stannage (ed.), *A New History of Western Australia*, Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1981

23 I.M. Crawford, 'Aboriginal cultures in Western Australia', and I.H. vanden Driesen, 'The evolution of the trade union movement in Western Australia', in Stannage, *A New History*.

24 Anne Atkinson, *Asian Immigrants to Western Australia, 1829-1901*, Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1988; Jan Ryan, *Ancestors: Chinese in Colonial Australia*, South Fremantle, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1995.

25 See both Christine Choo's and Michael Schaper's articles in this volume for discussion of some of these sources. See also Jenny Gregory, 'Inventory of Honours and Postgraduate Research into Western Australian History', in Charlie Fox (ed.), *Historical Refractions. Studies in Western Australian History*, vol.14, 1993.

colony/state as a whole. Certainly an accident of geology and arbitrary political boundaries have ensured that the state's economic links with mineral deficient Japan have been stronger these recent decades than those of the eastern states, with economic rationalism ensuring functional partnerships. In the past however, our location has also ensured that Western Australian relationships with Asia differed from those of the east. Alison Broinowski has argued that Australia's history has been perceived as somehow at odds with its geography. While the links between Asia and the North West have been closer than mainstream histories have indicated, it may also be that aspects of Western Australia's history (and indeed Australian history) have been more resonant with geography than Broinowski has suggested.<sup>26</sup>

Tying perceptions of nineteenth century Australian history to Anglo-celtic ancestry, for instance, has undoubtedly encouraged historians to overlook both those 'Asian' themes which have had an impact on Australian history, and the significance of European colonial powers elsewhere in the Asian region. Quiet voices have raised some of these issues. In this publication, Andrew Pope points out the significance of the British presence in India to the West Australian colonial economy. J.E. Hoffman has also argued that Australia's east coast settlement was conceived of initially as part of a Dutch-influenced Indian Ocean region, with this regional 'guarantee of propinquity' at least a consideration in the decision to settle. Despite, significantly, 'facing the Pacific', the eastern colony

was essentially an extension of the rim of the Indian Ocean power disposition that had long been resolved between indigenous and the intrusive interests whose morphoses were a Portuguese catalysis and then a Dutch immanence. It was sustained by a contiguous 'Eurasian' region in which the Netherlands-organized polity from the Cape of Good Hope to Timor was, for the decisive time, the underwriter to the extension, supplying food, livestock, and other vital material and communicable resources for the barely viable settlement.<sup>27</sup>

Certainly the significance to Australian colonists of the Dutch presence in the Indonesian archipelago is a theme which could be more fruitfully explored, and well beyond the parameters Hoffman suggested. Steve Mullins' work for example, on the Australian-owned Torres Strait pearl shelling fleets' large scale incursion into concessions granted by the Dutch East Indies administration around the Aru Islands, suggests the possibility of other as yet unexplored links between the European administrations of the two areas.<sup>28</sup> Were similar ventures organised out of Broome and Cossack? The Dutch East Indies administration was itself a presence in the pearling grounds of the North West. From the late nineteenth century, a substantial proportion of pearlers were recruited in the

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26 Alison Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1992.

27 J.E. Hoffman, 'A regional fabric for 1788: the guarantee of propinquity', *Australian Historical Association Bulletin*, no.22, March 1980, p.11.

28 Steve Mullins, 'Australian Pearl-shellers in the Arus, Netherlands East Indies, 1890s to 1943: overview of a research program', abstract, Australian Historical Association Conference, Townsville, July 1995

Indonesian archipelago. Many came directly through Dutch offices such as the one at Koepang, which dictated the level of wages to be paid to the indentured contract pearling labourers essential to the survival of the West Australian pearl shell industry.<sup>29</sup> Though Peter McGann suggests such agreements carried little weight in terms of protecting indentured workers, nonetheless the link between colonial powers is significant.<sup>30</sup> When Malay mutineers, pearlers from the North West, seized the schooner the *Gift* in 1872, they were apprehended by the Dutch authorities and subsequently tried and sentenced to death by the Dutch resident in Koepang.<sup>31</sup> Almost thirty years later another six pearlers—'Manilamen'—who had seized the brigantine *Ethel* and murdered five men on board (three Europeans, one Aboriginal and one Japanese), were arrested by Dutch authorities, extradited from Makassar to Perth and brought back to Western Australia by West Australian police. Five were tried and condemned to death; two were subsequently executed and the remainder had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment.<sup>32</sup> Official links between Western Australia and South East Asian colonisers clearly existed in the nineteenth century.<sup>33</sup> The question of how these official relations fared after federation might prove an interesting study.

Links between Western Australia and Asian people have also been structured by proximity to South East Asia. Discounting for the moment unverifiable tales of Chinese exploration, the first Asians to visit Australia were Makassan fishing people from the Indonesian archipelago. They used the same transit routes—the Indian Ocean and the Arafura Sea—as did the indentured and 'free' Chinese labourers, who came in the nineteenth century to work on Western Australian pastoral enterprises. As Atkinson and Ryan have both pointed out, Chinese who came to Western Australia did so through Singapore whereas those who went to the eastern colonies transshipped through the labour clearing houses of Hong Kong.<sup>34</sup> The indentured pearling workers from maritime South East Asia have already been mentioned.

This suggests that, in terms of Asian orientations, Western Australia does not necessarily share the Asia Pacific focus of the east coast. Yet even amongst historians who would eschew an east coast view of Australian history, the notion of the west 'facing' east to the Pacific still has currency. In *A Fine Country to Starve*

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29 Hugh Edwards, *Port of Pearls. A History of Broome*, Rigby 1983, p.47.

30 Peter J. McGann, "'Malays' as Indentured Labour: Western Australia 1867-1900', *Papers in Labour History*, no.5, April 1990, p.37.

31 McGann, p.50. See also Mary Albertus Bain, *Full Fathom Five*, Perth, Artlook Books, 1982, pp.34-5, for an account of this incident.

32 *West Australian*, 5 July 1900, p.5. See also Brian Purdue, *Legal Executions in Western Australia*, Victoria Park, Foundation Press, 1993, pp.42-3. McGann, pp.50-1, and Bain, pp.35-7, both suggest that all five were executed.

33 See, for example, Police Department Files, 'Series of papers concerning the classification of extradition cases', AN 5/1 ACC 430 2155/99, Public Records Office of Western Australia (hereafter PROWA), on extradition agreements between the West Australian and other governments.

34 Anne Atkinson, 'Chinese labour and capital in Western Australia, 1847-1947', Ph.D. thesis, Murdoch University, 1991; Ryan, *Ancestors*.

In, Geoffrey Bolton wrote of Perth in 1929 that :

[t]his was the edge of Australia; beyond, there was only Rottnest Island and four thousand miles of the Indian Ocean ... For [most Western Australians], the ocean meant the beaches in summertime and the 'Fremantle doctor', the afternoon sea-breeze which so often tempered the more than Mediterranean heat of the city in January and February. They were incurious about the world beyond and almost as incurious about their neighbours to landward.<sup>35</sup>

Anything west of Perth is 'beyond'; to the east lies the neighbourhood. Bolton continues, '[i]solation dominated Western Australia, isolation by sea and sand'.<sup>36</sup> If his interest is more isolation 'by sand' from the east, nonetheless he implicitly denied that Western Australia was part of any region to the west, or indeed that such a region could exist.

Writing of a period less than a decade later, Paul Hasluck espoused a differently ordered West Australian geography. In his autobiography, *Mucking About*, Hasluck hypothesised a distinctly Western Australian relationship with the Asia which seized his imagination in the late 1930s. As a result both of geography and commerce (school children from well-off Asian families studying in Perth, temperate fresh fruit and vegetables despatched weekly to Asian ports to tempt expatriate palates, evidence of lucrative business opportunities for enterprising West Australians in the exploitation of Asian raw materials), 'the southern face of Asia was not as unfamiliar to Western Australians as apparently it was in the prewar years to other Australians'.<sup>37</sup> Hasluck's Asia was one he was led to discover by a chance trip to the colonised worlds of the Dutch East Indies, Singapore and French Indochina, a European-ordered Asia which Western Australians could visit with relative ease courtesy of Blue Funnel Line steamers operating between Fremantle, Batavia and Singapore. What was different about the Haslucks' visit, he suggested, was not the *physical* trip, but the journey he and his wife first undertook into 'Asian history'.<sup>38</sup> This pre-embarkation pursuit of Asian history and civilisation caused Hasluck subsequently to reassess the links between Asia and Western Australia. The location of Perth, Hasluck's home town, and Western Australia's rather different relationship with parts of South and South East Asia, henceforth encouraged Hasluck to see:

the Indian Ocean and not the Pacific Ocean, as the central sea of the region and to think of the China Sea and the Arafura Sea as passages leading into the Indian Ocean.<sup>39</sup>

These of course were the passages used by almost all Asian visitors and

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35 G.C. Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve In*, Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1972, pp.1-2.

36 Bolton, p.2.

37 Paul Hasluck, *Mucking About. An Autobiography* (1977), Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1994, p.293.

38 Hasluck, p.293.

39 Hasluck, p.294.

immigrants who had come to colonial Western Australia. Surprisingly, however, given his 'awareness' of Asia and the region, Hasluck did not acknowledge or indeed appear to know that the seas to the north were, in 1938, still conduits for the arrival in the state of a significant number of Asian men, bound for that anomaly within a 'white Australia', the 'Japanese town' of Broome, and the other pearling centres of the North West. Hasluck's account of his Asian experiences is that of an Orientalist, with Asia perceived as a source of mystical religion and philosophy, of serenity, peace and dignity. Perhaps for that reason just two years after the Japanese invasion of China he did not allude to Japan's growing power within the region. It seems a surprising oversight given Hasluck's later career.

Hasluck's references to a 'number of pre-Federation Chinese immigrants, now all elderly', running laundries and market gardens and smoking opium in Perth's dingy back lanes,<sup>40</sup> also seem shaped by familiar Eurocentric assumptions that 'white Australia' was a description of Australian 'reality' instead of simply a prescription for a restrictive immigration policy.<sup>41</sup> Histories of the North West, including those of Choo and Schaper in this volume, show clearly that the influx of Asian workers to the pearling districts, although cut back by the *Immigration Restriction Act* of 1901, was by no means staunched before 1939. As Andrew Markus has pointed out, pearling (perhaps fortuitously) took place only in areas far removed from large white populations, such as around Broome and on Thursday Island.<sup>42</sup> Asian workers' contact with 'white' Australians was limited by the remoteness of these areas, part of the justification for the continued use of 'coloured' labour. A 'Japanese town' in the south west—say, Bunbury—would have been unthinkable, pearls or no pearls. Just as east and west were different, so too north and south, metropolis and province experienced 'Asia' differently.

Campbell Macknight has written:

If one ignores political boundaries and looks on the sea as a unifying rather than divisive agent, a strong case can be made for regarding the northern coast of Australia as the final extremity of Southeast Asia.<sup>43</sup>

Compare this with Arthur Upfield's telling metaphor of the northern coastline as 'Australia's backside pointing at the Asians'.<sup>44</sup> It is an image which assumes a broad understanding of Australian history as east coast history, with Sydney and the east the 'face' or front door of Australia, and the rest the rear entry. An Asian-oriented Australian history necessarily involves an Asian geographic reorientation: what Iletto and Sullivan refer to as the 'northwards tilt' of some recent Australian historiography.<sup>45</sup> Lyn Riddett's 1995 article on Darwin and Asia uses

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40 Hasluck, p.116.

41 Julie Easton's article in this journal explores one aspect of Asian immigration to 'white' Australia.

42 Andrew Markus, *Australian Race Relations 1788-1993*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1994, pp.123-4.

43 C.C. Macknight, *The Voyage to Marege. Macassan Trepangers in Northern Australia*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1976, p.128.

44 Arthur Upfield, *Bony and the White Savage*, Sydney, 1987, cited in Gerster, p.6.

the image of Darwin as 'gateway', picking up on the theme of Douglas Lockwood's 1968 work, *The Front Door: Darwin 1869-1969*.<sup>46</sup> In her work she also adopts the approach common to many regional historians, arguing a case for Darwin's 'difference'. In this case, 'difference' is constituted by factors such as tropical climate, small urban population, and distance from south eastern Australia's cities and influences.<sup>47</sup> Regions are often defined thus, in terms of distinctiveness, but, as Chilla Bulbeck has suggested, following McCarty, such regions are often abruptly and artificially divided by state or political boundaries, despite functional continuities.<sup>48</sup> What an Asian-focused study of the North West of Western Australia makes clear is that the North West is unlike the rest of the state. But it does share similarities with other northern 'regions' of the country. Riddett's work suggests that Darwin is one and North Queensland is certainly another. In his introduction to the collection *Race Relations in North Queensland*, Henry Reynolds remarked that White Australia had never extended beyond the Tropic of Capricorn; this is equally apparent in Western Australia.<sup>49</sup> It seems more appropriate, in constructing an Asian-oriented Australia, to think in terms of McCarty's functional regional history, namely a region defined by the relationship between two distinct sub-areas. It is not necessary to impose an artificial uniformity on sub-areas within such a functional region; differences would surely prove fruitful. Unlike the Filipinos in Broome, for example, Filipino pearling workers on Thursday Island were frequently accompanied by their families.<sup>50</sup> Why the difference between localities? For all the regional variations, however, between North Queensland, Darwin and northern Australia, and Western Australia's North West, and despite distinctively colonial/state based systems of political administration and social regulations, in terms of relations with Asia the common themes would surely be paramount.

This introduction is arguing for a reorientation of Western Australia's historical outlook on Asia in three ways. Firstly, it suggests that an Indian Ocean/South East Asian perspective on Western Australia's relations with Asia is more appropriate than the Pacific focus of the east. Secondly, it reminds readers of the historical significance of the proximity of the North West to parts of South East Asia. Finally, it suggests that the North West might well be usefully viewed as part of a larger region, linked functionally with other parts of Northern Australia, which has its own distinct relationship with parts of Asia.

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45 Reynaldo C. Ileto and Rodney Sulliivan, *Discovering Australasia. Essays on Philippine-Australian Interactions*, Townsville, James Cook University, 1993, 'Introduction', p.9.

46 Douglas Lockwood, *The Front Door: Darwin 1869-1969*, Adelaide 1968, cited in Lyn Riddett, 'The Gateway and the Gatekeepers: An Examination of Darwin's Relationship with Asia and Asians, 1942-1993', *Journal of Australian Studies*, no.46, September 1995, p.66.

47 Riddett, pp.59-60.

48 Chilla Bulbeck, 'Regionalism', in James Walter (ed.), *Australian Studies. A Survey*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1989, pp.74-5.

49 Henry Reynolds (ed.), *Race Relations in North Queensland*, Townsville, James Cook University, 1978, Introduction, cited in Ileto and Sullivan, p.2.

50 Ileto and Sullivan, p.3.

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The eight articles in this collection, as is usually the case with *Studies*, represent the work of Western Australian historians of a range of experiences. Nonya Peters and Christine Choo are postgraduate students and historians practising in the public arena, both of whom have already published articles in their areas of expertise. Julie Easton's article emerged from undergraduate work; it was the topic she once intended as a postgraduate dissertation but she has only now, in *Studies*, resumed work on the subject, having completed postgraduate research in a different area. Bruce Campbell's article stems from a political and social justice commitment to the topic of Indonesian fishing people in the North West, and he has also, with Bu Wilson, published a book on the subject.<sup>51</sup> Michael Schaper's interest in Broome and the North West was sparked by time spent teaching at Notre Dame's Broome campus. Charlie Fox is a well-published and established academic historian. Anne Atkinson has been prominent in multicultural affairs and as an academic historian of Asian immigration to Western Australia. Andrew Pope's article is the product of his Ph.D. thesis, and is one of several he has published on West Australian/Indian Ocean economic relations.

Contributions have been ordered thematically rather than chronologically. The first two, Julie Easton's study of Japanese war brides in Western Australia in the assimilationist 1950s and Nonya Peters' work on Vietnamese entrepreneurs in Perth, focus on aspects of the settlement experiences of Asian immigrants. As is appropriate for people writing the histories of recent immigrants, both have made use of oral history techniques. These two groups' experiences were otherwise relatively inaccessible to historians working in English and from written sources. The 'traditional' approach to oral history, which champions the ability of oral history to 'democratise' history, to uncover 'the histories of the inarticulate', in the favourite phrase, could be acknowledged here. Equally important however is the need to deconstruct those recollections. Japanese women who arrived in Japanophobic Australia just eight years after the end of the Pacific war (and only two after the signing of the peace treaty with Japan), interviewed forty years later, admitted to only limited recollections of anti-Japanese feelings, when directly interrogated on the topic. Other oblique questions elicit a different record. As Peters' article illustrates, Vietnamese/Chinese refugees and immigrants currently battling to establish themselves in the Western Australian market place have no such doubts about the racism they confront in today's multicultural Australia. Read superficially, the contrast between such records and recollections might suggest a triumphant assimilation process, but memory is clearly a refractory lens. On the other hand, as Hank Nelson has suggested of the Gamboa case, '[s]cratch an Australian of 1950, and you reveal not racial prejudice but compassion'.<sup>52</sup> Competing official discourses

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51 B.C. Campbell and Bu V.E. Wilson, *The Politics of Exclusion. Indonesian Fishing in the Australian Fishing Zone*, Perth, Indian Ocean Centre for Peace Studies Monograph No.5, 1993.

52 Hank Nelson, cited in Rodney Sullivan, "'It had to happen": the Gamboas and Australian-Philippine Interactions', in Iletto and Sullivan, p.112.

of assimilationist welcome on the one hand and disapproval on the other did not entirely construct individual responses to Asian immigrants in the period.

Julie Easton's article, as well as reminding us of the post-war currency of Orientalist images of treachery, cunning and animality associated with the Japanese, also reveals in passing how the West Australian media in the 1950s perpetuated images of Asian women as demure, diminutive, submissive and alluring. Such images, a focus of Edward Said's feminist revisionists such as Rana Kabbani, were associated with Japanese prostitutes from an earlier era of Australian history, and are still implicitly used to justify western male forays into the bars and brothels of Manila and Bangkok.<sup>53</sup> In the following article, an analysis of the fate of the Afghan Jumna Khan, who ran *amok* in colonial Fremantle, Charlie Fox also discusses late nineteenth century Orientalist discourses about 'treacherous Asiatics', with Jumna Khan's trial and subsequent execution explained in terms of interlocking western discourses on murder, insanity, 'Asiatics' and on *amok* itself.

The three articles by Anne Atkinson, Christine Choo and Michael Schaper all contribute specifically to the debate about West Australian 'difference', as constituted by this introduction in terms of relations with Asia and Asians. Like Fox's study of Jumna Khan, Anne Atkinson's detailed account of the restrictive colonial legislation designed to control the entry of Chinese to Western Australia and to limit the movement of Chinese labour and capital after arrival, focuses on particular Asians as the objects of powerful legislative and legal practices. Her work also reveals the role played by sectors of the Western Australian capital lobby: in restricting the activities of Chinese capital in colonial Western Australia but also in both permitting and limiting the continued entry of Chinese labour. She thus sheds a different light on the 1980s Burgmann versus Markus debate on the relative roles played by capital and labour in restricting the Chinese in the eastern colonies, emphasising that in Western Australia the specifically regional interests of capital need to be considered before attributing overarching capitalist motives to actions.

Schaper and Choo's accounts of Broome and the West Kimberley show the existence of dynamic Asian populations in the North West of 'white' Western Australia. These populations were dissected by ethnicity, gender (to a limited degree), and class and skills; they were also structured by power relationships operating both within those 'communities' (if the term can be appropriately used of groups so divided by their cultural and linguistic differences) and in relations with the dominant white population. Both articles offer unusual perspectives on Asian workers in twentieth century Western Australia. The idea of the 'sojourner' has been comfortably accepted by some historians who have tended to view histories of Asians in Australia in terms of nineteenth century immigration and twentieth century exclusion. In Australia the term has been particularly applied to the Chinese. However, as Anthony Chan has argued of Canada, the notion is an Orientalist one which denies evidence of settlement, of agency and of

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<sup>53</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin 1985; Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient. Devise and Rule*, London, Macmillan, 1986.

historical and present traces left by these so-called sojourners.<sup>54</sup> Christine Choo's article illustrates that even those Asian men who did not stay permanently left significant evidence of their time here and had a substantial impact on local societies. Choo also shows how Asian men and Aboriginal women were both subjected to racist state practices designed to control miscegenation and to limit social contact between these two 'out' groups. Schaper's article on the Broome race riots of 1920 uncovers a little-known event in Western Australian history. The much better documented Kalgoorlie riots of 1934 fit readily into a tradition of histories of labour conflict between 'white Australian' and 'ethnic' workers whereas at issue in Broome, as Schaper's work shows, was conflict within a multi-ethnic, non-white workforce. Schaper's work thus adds to the literature on ethnic segmentation of the labour force as a form of industrial control.

The final two articles in this collection reveal another aspect of West Australian 'difference', in this case one conceived in terms of off-shore relations with Asians and Asia. Bruce Campbell's article on 'the last colonial act', the Australian government's twentieth century appropriation of the waters of the North West and the concomitant dispossession of Asian fishing groups from the region, indicates that the historical relationship between the north coast of Western Australia and insular South East Asia is much longer standing than elsewhere in Australia (with the exception of the far northern coast) and quite different in nature and intensity. His article also puts forward the important concept of *mare nullius* and argues that the assumed right of the Australian government to exclude Indonesian fishing people from their traditional fishing grounds has striking parallels with the eighteenth century dispossession of Aboriginal people, on the basis of the doctrine of *terra nullius*. Andrew Pope's article illustrates how Western Australia's location on the Indian Ocean littoral ensured its incorporation into the nineteenth century regional trading world, and argues the importance of the connections established between British India and the colony. Harking back to Hoffman, it is apparent that the presence of imperial European powers elsewhere in the region were of great significance in shaping (in this case Western) Australia's economic and strategic outlook.

In total these eight articles comprise neither a systematic nor an exhaustive reorientation of Western Australian history. However they do suggest that within Western Australia's still-unwritten past it is possible to discern 'Asian' themes which, if not yet central to our historical understanding, will nonetheless shed a different light on continuing reinterpretations of the Australian past. Iletto and Sullivan suggested that in twenty-first century Australasia, 'Thursday Island might be more relevant to Australia's future than Sydney Cove'.<sup>55</sup> One could equally suggest that from the perspective of twenty-first century historians of Western Australia, Broome might well feature at least as significantly as Perth.

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54 Anthony B. Chan, "'Orientalism' and image making: the sojourner in Canadian history", *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, vol.9, Fall 1981.

55 Iletto and Sullivan, p.9.