



## Global Education – Learning Emphases

- Interdependence and globalisation
- Identity and cultural diversity
- Sustainable futures

# AUSTRALIA'S EARLY ASIAN HISTORY

**Ross Mackay, Goulburn High School**

**Editors Note– The Northern Territory Department of Education produced a resource kit “The Makassans”. Although developed some years ago it is excellent for this unit.**

## Outcomes

A student:

HT4-2 describes major periods of historical time and sequences events, people and societies from the past

HT4-3 describes and assesses the motives and actions of past individuals and groups in the context of past societies

HT4-4 describes and explains the causes and effects of events and developments of past societies over time

HT4-6 uses evidence from sources to support historical narratives and explanations

HT4-7 identifies and describes different contexts, perspectives and interpretations of the past



Early European Ship, rock art (1765–1813). Google Art Project. Source: Wikimedia Commons

# AUSTRALIA'S EARLY ASIAN HISTORY

## Activity 1: Makassan fishermen and Northern Australian Aboriginals

In the passage below, there are fifteen spelling mistakes. You need to highlight the incorrectly spelt words and write them correctly in the space provided underneath. Some of the words are spelt correctly but are incorrect for the context they are in.

It is fairly commonly known that Dutch explorers were the first Europeans to contact the Australian mainland. Indeed Austrailia was marked on a number of werld maps from the 17th century as New Holland. Many places in Northern Australia have Dutch names such as Arnhem Land and Groote Eylandt (big irland). What is not as well known is that Aboriginal Australians in Northern Australia had ongoing contact with Indonesian fisheman from the Makassar four nearly half a century before Captain Cook landed in Australia. Fishermen from around 1720 (sum archaeologists say considerably earlier) came seasonaly to Australia to fish for trepang (sea slugs) witch were considered a delicasy in China. The fishermen sailed from Makassar on the island of Sulawesi in the Indonesian archipelago (a large group of islands) to the northern coast of Arnhem Land and around into the Gulf of Carpentaria. Once the trepang had bean colected and prosessed in Australia, they were transported to Makassar and then on to Manilla and China. As such, Australian Aboriginals were involved for a long time in one of the first global traiding networks to exist. The trade in trepang came to an end in 1906 when the newly-formed Commonwealth government raised the cost of fishing licenses so high that it made the trip unprofiteble. As a result around 200 years of continous contact with our near neighbours came to an end.

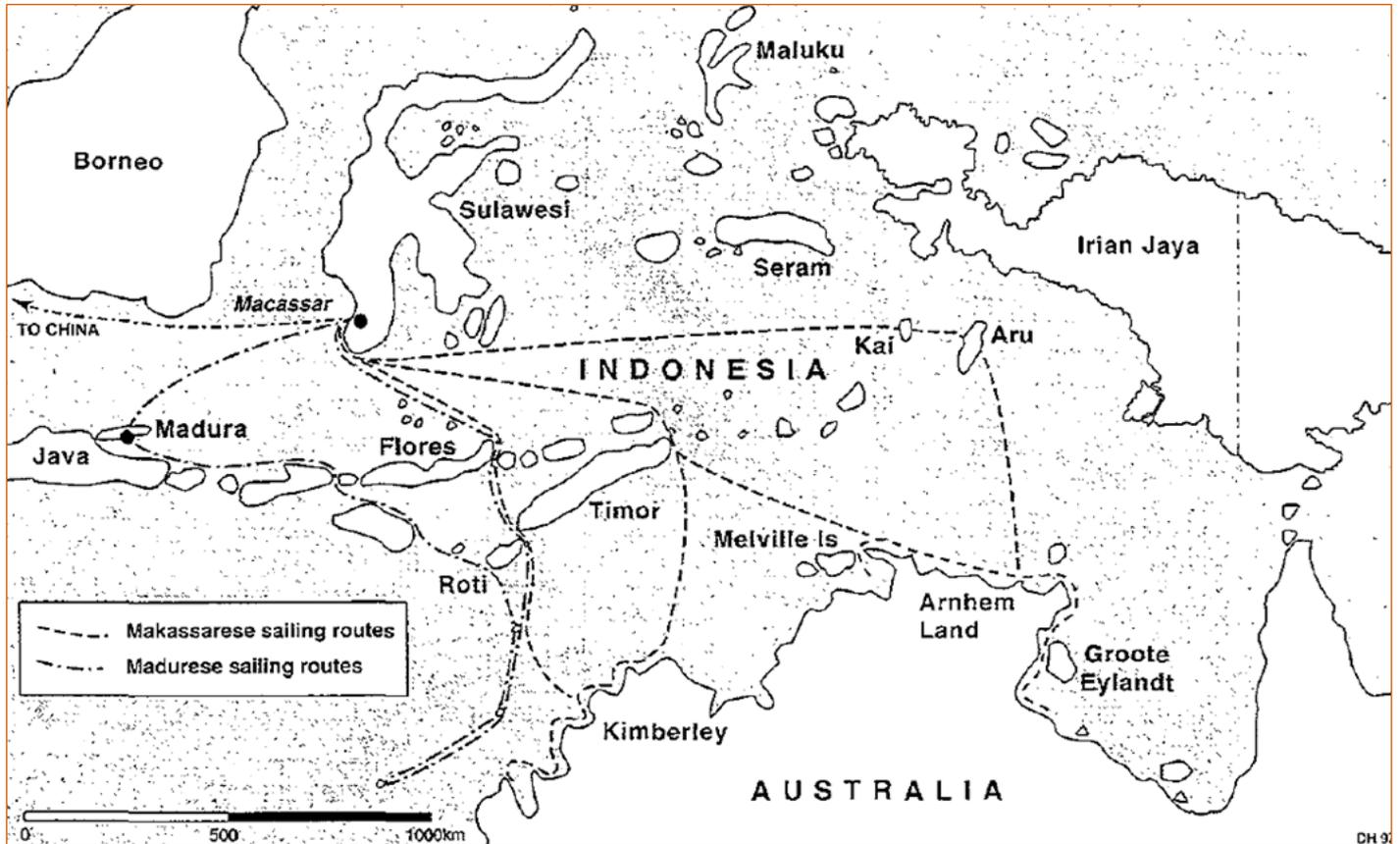


Trepang or Sea cucumber Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Holothuroidea\\_\(Sea\\_cucumber\\_feeding\).jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Holothuroidea_(Sea_cucumber_feeding).jpg)

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# AUSTRALIA'S EARLY ASIAN HISTORY



Makassan sailing routes. From Morwood and Hobbs 1997. Reproduced with the permission of Oceania.

## Activity 1 – Comprehension

1. Explain what is meant by the term 'New Holland'.
2. Write four facts about the fisherman who first had contact with Aboriginal Australians in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.
3. What is an archaeologist? What does he/she do?
4. The trepang were considered a **delicacy** in China. What does this mean?
5. Explain why this important trading relationship ceased in 1906.



A prau bringing Makassan fishermen to Australia  
Source: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Macassan\\_prau.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Macassan_prau.jpg)



# AUSTRALIA'S EARLY ASIAN HISTORY

## Activity 2: What did the Makassan fishermen do?

**In the passage below, unjumble the words in bold and write them correctly in the space provided.**

The Makassan fishermen travelled to Australia each December at the start of the monsoon season. They stayed for up to six \_\_\_\_\_ (nothsm) at a time, slowly working their way along the coast from the Coburg Peninsular, across the waters off the \_\_\_\_\_ (thron) coast of Arnhem Land, into the Gulf of Carpentaria and Groote Eylandt and all the way down to the Edward Pellew Group of islands. Archaeological evidence suggests that they fished as far \_\_\_\_\_ (sewt) as Broome in Western Australia. They travelled in large fleets of boats called Praus. According to Matthew Flinders (of Bass and Flinders fame) these \_\_\_\_\_ (leftes) brought up to 1000 crew. This was at a time when the total European population of \_\_\_\_\_ (atrsauial) was just 7000. The fishermen set up processing sites in a number of locations along the \_\_\_\_\_ (staoc) where the trepang would be dried before being transported first to Makassar and then onto \_\_\_\_\_ (hniac). There is evidence that suggests some of the fishermen stayed for the whole year. Tamarind trees were \_\_\_\_\_ (ltaedpn) by the fishermen at these sites. This is symbolically similar to the raising of a flag on new territory by a western culture.



Source 1 – The Trepang Source: © [British Library Board](#)

# AUSTRALIA'S EARLY ASIAN HISTORY

## Activity 3: Contact between Makassans and Aboriginal people

**A sentence is one idea or concept. In the paragraph below there are six sentences. You need to identify the sentences and mark them with a capital letter at the start and full stop at the end. You also need to mark all proper nouns with a capital. A proper noun is a person's name, a specific place or thing.**

contact between the makassan fishermen and aboriginals of the area was far more **harmonious** and **equitable** than the experience of those aboriginals living around sydney cove the makassans **negotiated** with the local people for the **right** to fish for the trepang and paid for the **privilege** in the form goods and money some aboriginals interviewed in the twentieth century **recall** trade items including tobacco, rice, knives and gin being exchanged as **compensation** for the right to fish this was despite of the fact that like the british in sydney cove, the makassans were technologically **superior** to the aboriginals having guns and other more advanced weaponry the makassans often employed aboriginal people to work for them as labourers at the processing sites they traded with local aboriginals and built temporary structures around the processing sites but left no permanent structures

**Use a dictionary to find contextually relevant definitions of the words in bold above.**

Harmonious: \_\_\_\_\_

equitable: \_\_\_\_\_

negotiate: \_\_\_\_\_

Right: \_\_\_\_\_

Privilege: \_\_\_\_\_

recall: \_\_\_\_\_

compensation: \_\_\_\_\_

Superior: \_\_\_\_\_

# AUSTRALIA'S EARLY ASIAN HISTORY

## Activity 4: Outcomes of contact between Aboriginal people and Makassans

Use the words from the word bank to complete the passage below.

**Word bank:** canoes, women, trepang, lived, glass, water, family, shown, dreaming, words

There is extensive evidence to indicate that the long term nature of the contact between the two groups had a substantial impact on the Aboriginal culture of the area.

The Aboriginal people were \_\_\_\_\_ how to build more robust dugout canoes. These allowed them greater opportunity to fish and travel by \_\_\_\_\_ than did their traditional bark canoes. These canoes changed the lifestyle of these coastal groups to become more maritime-orientated. The \_\_\_\_\_ allowed them to fish for dugong and sharks.

Many of the words of the different aboriginal groups in the area are copied from or are Makassan words. Some estimates indicate as many as 200-300 \_\_\_\_\_ of the Yolngu people are Makassan. Some early European reports refer to Yolngu people speaking in "Malay" (a term used to describe languages from Indonesia).

There was some intermarriage between Aboriginal \_\_\_\_\_ and Makassan fishermen. Not surprisingly therefore, many Aborigines from parts of Northern Australia (such as Mattjuwi Burruwanga) can trace their \_\_\_\_\_ heritage to Makassar. Aborigines from a number of places along the coast travelled to Makassar with the fleets when they returned. One Aboriginal elder told some historians that he had \_\_\_\_\_ in Makassar for several years and there were a number (about 17) of Aboriginal population living there.

Other evidence of the presence of the Makassan fishermen includes broken pottery, \_\_\_\_\_, coins fishhooks, bits of metal and clay pipes.

Today many Aboriginal ceremonies reflect this extended contact through ceremonies, songs and Dreaming stories. \_\_\_\_\_ stories mention the arrival of the Makassan fleets with the monsoon winds. The band Yothu Yindi, sang a song called "Macassan Crew" that talks about the contact with the \_\_\_\_\_ fishermen.

# AUSTRALIA'S EARLY ASIAN HISTORY

## Activity 4 – Questions

1. On a blank outline map, mark all the locations mentioned in Australia where the Makassans fished and set up temporary settlements.
2. The fishermen sailed from Makassar to Australia by going on the eastern side of East Timor. Using the scale on the map, work out approximately how far this trip was.
3. With reference to Source 1, what activities can you identify occurring in the picture of the Makassans at Port Essington?
4. List some of the types of evidence archaeologists have found in their investigation of the Makassan fishermen.
5. What do you think the expression *maritime-orientated* means?
6. In Source 2 (see below), what is Mattjuwi Burruwanga's view of the Makassan fishermen? Make specific reference to the source to support your point of view.
7. What does he suggest was the experience of Aboriginal people with Captain Cook?
8. Watch the *ABC News* video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gz3IfOkiSQk>
9. Write a short summary about how the Macassans influenced the Aborigines in Arnhem Land in the following ways:
  - a. tools
  - b. artworks
  - c. intercultural relationships.

### SOURCE 2:

*Mattjuwi Burruwanga, an Elcho Island elder who is related to one of the last Makassan fishermen to travel to Australia, was asked if the Makassans came with guns and were violent towards the Aborigines:*

*"No. These here Makassar people, very good start. Real good friend. All the Makasar bringit here friend, brother and sister, uncle, nephew, not they bringing trouble, not anything, because they looking for dharippa job [trepang], he working on the dharippa, ma. This is the story from the beginning. True story. Different from there Captain Cook. Makasan people come here, they are friends. One group.*

*(Interview by Regina Ganter with Mattjuwi Burruwanga at Galinwin'ku, 1995.)*

# AUSTRALIA'S EARLY ASIAN HISTORY

## Activity 5: Timeline of Makassan Contact

Cut out the dates and events, and stick them in your workbook in the correct chronological (date) order. The first date is correct.

**Early 1600s** – possible contact between Makassans and aboriginals based on cultural, language and Dreaming story evidence.

**1906** – End of Makassan trepanging industry in Australia

**1803** – Matthew Flinders encounters a large Makassan fishing fleet while on his circumnavigation of Australia

**1883** – South Australian Government imposes a trepanging license on the fishermen.

**1876** – Report of 17 Aborigines from Port Essington living in Makassar.

**1720** – Earliest confirmed occasion of Makassan fishermen contacting Aborigines

**1818 –1824** – Reports of Makassans living on Melville Island.

**1664** – Rock art of Makassan shipping vessel found under beeswax in Northern Australia. Beeswax was dated at 1664.

**1730** – Skeletal remains of a Makassan fisherman found at Anuru Bay (found in 1966) were carbon dated at 1730.

**1788** – First Fleet arrives in Sydney Cove

### Questions

1. Based on the earliest confirmed date, how long were Makassans in contact with Aborigines before the First Fleet arrived at Sydney Cove?
2. Based on the earliest confirmed date, how long did Makassan fishermen visit Australia for?
3. Research task (approx.. 300 words):
  - a. What was the impact of the establishment of a British colony on the Eora people of NSW?
  - b. How did this compare with interaction between the Makassans and the Aboriginal people of Northern Australia?

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## Images

Sea cucumber - <http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/invertebrates/sea-cucumber/>

Aboriginal painting of a prau, Museum Victoria – 23438 Enquiry number for permission to use image

Image of Processing site Port Essington - <http://www.manikay.com/didjeridu/macass.shtml>

Shipping routes trepang by the Makassan fishermen. From Morwood and Hobbs 1997. Reproduced with the permission of Oceania.

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Port Essington circa 1845, an illustration from *Journal of an Overland Expedition in Australia* by Ludwig Leichhardt Source: Wikimedia Commons