

# History of Money. Where did money come from?

## Introduction only

Richard Trudgen and Djiniyini Gondarra discuss where money comes from. This 10 part series works through the history of money from a Yolngu perspective.

This series of podcasts covers some very interesting areas and is a good background to why Yolngu live with so much confusion about money and wealth creation today. These are also the main reasons why Yolngu are still not participating in the mainstream economic system as they should be.

Even though the podcast introduction promises this series would end with discussing the use of money today and the Reserve Banks role in the money cycle, unfortunately the presenters never got that far! There was too much other interesting information revealed, much for the first time. Surprisingly we discover that Yolngu had a number of different forms of money.

For further information please see the separate podcast called “**Reserve Bank of Australia. Where does money come from?**”. However it’s suggested you don’t listen to it until you’ve worked through this series of 10 separate stories on the history of money.

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# History of Money. Where did money come from?

## Story No. 1

Richard Trudgen and Djiniyini Gondarra talk the history money around the world.

In the past even Balanda had no money. Everyone around the world bartered or traded with each other without money in the middle. People traded what they had or what they were good at making. At that time Balanda did not move around and so they knew each other and they knew who you could trust. Contracts were sometimes made and everyone knew who paid their debts quickly or who didn’t.

This is a history that Yolngu know from their own experience but are surprised that it’s also part of Balanda history. Many Balanda tell Aboriginal people they “have to forget their own culture” even though Yolngu culture is founded on production and trade and being in credit with fellow traders.

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## History of Money. Where did money come from? Story No. 2

Richard Trudgen and Djiniyini Gondarra talk the history of money around the world.

In this podcast we discuss how Balanda started to explore the world, building bigger boats so they could travel further to trade in other lands in pursuit of wealth. Balanda carried metal such as axes and saucepans to countries like India where they traded for cotton and tea. No money in those days, just trading different items with each other.

Sometimes alliances needed to be formed and gifts given to keep peace and friendship between trading countries/groups. This was part of good trade practices and the creation of wealthy nations, particularly England.

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## History of Money. Where did money come from? Story No. 3

Richard Trudgen and Djiniyini Gondarra talk about how Balanda used valuable goods in the trade with places like India. After some time trade started to change, so they needed to find new items that were valuable and able to be used in other countries.

Items being used for trade included gold and silver, and they started to use them as a 'middle man' for trading as small amounts had great value.

Other people such as the Romans used gold and silver, but also used salt as 'middle man' for trading. While they did have some money, Roman soldiers were paid in salt at one time. (That's where the word 'salary' comes from.)

One of the first things that were used for money around the world was cowrie shells. The Romans, people in Africa, and even in the early history of some states in America, used cowrie shells as a money. Yolngu used cowrie shells in trade with the Macassans.

Various valuable items that could be considered a form of money were used as a 'middle man' in trade all around the world.

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## History of Money. Where did money come from? Story No. 4

Richard Trudgen and Djiniyini Gondarra talk about the trade in cowrie shells across the world.

Yolngu made cowrie shells into necklaces and arm & ankle bracelets and traded them with the Macassans as well as between different Yolngu clans. Djiniyini was surprised that cowrie shells were part of the world-wide history of trade and were used as money in other countries.

The cowrie shells were called 'maniy-maniy', which is pronounced money-money. It is not known where the name maniy-maniy came from. Possibly from the Macassans or from the Dutch who were in Macassar.

Mani-maniy is still used by Yolngu today. A lot of women who still make shell necklaces are surprised the value is now so low when they try to sell them to arts and craft shops.

The trade with the Macassans in pearls harvested from oysters and clam shells was also large. Djiniyini discusses how the trade in pearls from Yolngu through the Macassans went overland to England. He also explains how Yolngu produced pearls as part of traditional farming, including the production of cultured pearls. Pearls, as well as cowrie shells, were used as traditional money because they were so valuable.

It is mentioned that natural pearls are still very valuable today.

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## History of Money. Where did money come from? Story No. 5

Richard Trudgen and Djiniyini Gondarra talk about the search by Balanda and others around the world for valuable items that could be used as a form of money when trading.

Across the world different things were used, such as cowrie shells, pearls, gold, silver and tin. Plaited tobacco was also used as money world-wide. Tobacco was used as money in the USA where in some states it was even recognised by the government as legal tender. In Australia missionaries also traded using plaited tobacco as money. They used tobacco to pay Yolngu workers and to purchase things from Yolngu.

Traditional trading items like mǎrrŋu bolka possum fur were seen as very valuable by Yolngu. Also turtle shells, stone pestles for grinding nuts from cycad palms to make traditional bread, and flint spearheads were considered important and used as trade

items under Madayin law. Red ochre and beeswax were also very valuable as they were used for fixing spearheads and mending things.

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## History of Money. Where did money come from? Story No. 6

Richard Trudgen and Djiniyini Gondarra talk about Yolngu trade with the Macassans.

The main items Macassans came to trade for were trepang and pearls, while turtle shell was a minor trade. Flint spearheads, red cedar and cowrie and mani-mani necklaces were also traded. China wanted trepang and had their own trade with Maccassar. Pearls were wanted by wealthy people across the world as jewellery. It could have been that pearls from north Australia were traded overland to Europe, and even used by the Kings and Queens of England. In return the Macassans brought metal to trade with the Yolngu, including axes, knives and fish hooks. They also brought tobacco.

The trading sites, villages, were called Dhaarriny or Gambumaluku. These were the trading place where a number of dhomala flags were flown. When you saw the flags it was a place for trade. All trade was done through djugu-mirr contract giving.

Generally traders came as good friends. There was only one big clash remembered in the history which was the first occasion the Macassans came to Galiwin'ku. At the first meeting they had no trading partners or agreements with any tribes and so should have sent a diplomatic representative. This was Yolngu law – if Yolngu moved into the lands/estates of other Yolngu the way to let other tribes know of your arrival was by lighting a fire. However by the second and third visits friendship was established.

The Macassans created trading relations with only Yirritja people and tribes. The Dhuwa people were the labours and the djungaya managers for their Yirritja mother's people. The Yirritja people were the ones who had the contracts with the Macassans and all the Dhaarriny, trading sites, were on Yirritja lands. In the past Yolngu always paid their workers within traditional ceremonies, however that no longer happens.

The word 'Mathakal' has a meaning as a trading place, similar to an industrial area where many things are made. It usually involves many gong nyanyuk – someone who makes things and has lots of ideas, like an inventor. The Macassans were the first ones to bring small coins called rupia.

The language Yolngu learnt from the Macassans was their trading language not their everyday language. Djiniyini explores many of the words that became part of Yolngu Matha, including money, long bush knife, canoe, matches, guns, wire, and other trading vocabulary. Macassans and Yolngu became good friends, with inter-marrying

and strong family ties developing. Yolngu still have relatives living in Macassar today.

This is the Yolngu – Macassan history that most Balanda know nothing about. It's often believed the two groups were constantly fighting and that there was little trade. Occasionally trouble would occur if there was cheating while trading or if laws or agreements had been broken. However generally the relationship was good.

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## History of Money. Where did money come from? Story No. 7

Richard Trudgen and Djiniyini Gondarra talk more about the trade with Macassans.

In all the areas across Arnhem Land there were Macassan trading sites, from Cape Arnhem through to Milingimbi and onto Maningrida. At these places different clans had a contract agreement with the Macassans. When the Macassans came and met the clans in those areas for the first time the Macassan gave the landowners *wetj*. (Something that is given as 'mundhurr' (*a gift*) and not as an article of commerce or trade. But you cannot refuse to take it – similar to a PR gift.) They gave Yolngu axes, rice, tobacco, food, cloth and other things.

At first the Yolngu were not sure why the Macassans were coming. Then they discovered that they were looking for trepang and pearls. They were also interested to a lesser degree in turtle shells. They made agreements with many different clans along the coast of Arnhem Land. All these were Yirritja clans. They did go to some Dhuwa estates but their agreements were with Yirritja people.

Many times the people in the Miwatja area use the name mangatharra (a name Yolngu use for Macassans) for Yirritja because of the legally bound contract agreements that existed between the Yirritja people and the Macassan people.

Richard and Djiniyini explore the trade language that was used between the Yolngu and the Macassans. Economic words such as debt, contract, liability, and *balanydja* (a payment for goods or service rendered under contract. The payment received at the completion of a contract.) A lot of these economic words are now Yolngu trade words used in Ḍarra' parliaments.

It is discussed that Balanda have never learnt Yolngu trade language, based on the belief Yolngu were not business people. However Yolngu had no trouble trading and negotiating with the Macassans. They did not bring reams of paperwork like Balanda. They would sit down and talk and smoke pipes together. There would be discussions about what they wanted to harvest from Yolngu estates, or from the inter-tidal zone or further out. Discussions and agreements about how many trepang could be harvested and what the payment would be.

Rather than creating a djugu contract every time trepang were harvested, a Buku wangany agreement was made once. This meant a single big payment to Yolngu of food, rice, axes, and tobacco. Then the harvesting area would be marked out. If the Macassans wanted to harvest and trade into another area then they would have to pay more balandja payment to expand the contract. This was all carved into a letter stick, including all the items for payment. So a legal document as in the letterstick was used to seal the contract.

Some Yolngu clans became very wealthy and would trade in one special product like knives or axes or cloth, and these tribes would then trade with other Yolngu across regions of Arnhem Land. There are also Balanda stories of metal objects that Yolngu traded with the Macassans found being traded right across Australia.

Sadly though most Balanda did not understand that Yolngu were business people.

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## History of Money. Where did money come from? Story No. 8

Richard Trudgen and Djiniyini Gondarra discuss the Macassan-Yolngu trading relationship, when money first appeared and what happened when the trade stopped.

This podcast begins by exploring some of the economic trade words and ideas that were used between Yolngu and Macassans. This includes balanydja and muwat assets. After Yolngu received the goods of payment from the Macassans they kept the goods as muwat assets, ready to trade with other Yolngu gumurr'manydji traders. Goods of payment might include cloth, calico, shorts, māni-mani (cowrie) and lots of other things.

The Macassans also wanted timber for their housing and boat building, like cypress timber, cottonwood and ditti red cedar – a yellow and red timber for furniture building. Cottonwood was easy to bend for use in boat building.

The Macassans also began trading rupia money. Djiniyini explains that although Macassans could see the value in the coins, Yolngu didn't necessarily see it. Elders kept it as an asset to use later on with the Macassans but did not use it in trade with other Yolngu. Yolngu were more interested in practical things that could be used, like axes or samurai swords galiwang.

So this is the main underlying principal and meaning for money – it has to be something that is valuable.

Two other things which were seen as valuable were tobacco and alcohol. They were traded and consumed in a legal way, usually at the trading centres where the Macassans were. Under the law both Yolngu and Macassans only smoked at three

different times of the day. There was no sickness in the old days from smoking because of this legal practice.

The end of the Macassan-Yolngu trade relationship is still a very sad subject for Yolngu today. Djiniyini explains it hit Yolngu deep in the soul when these trading djugu contracts were stopped and some Yolngu still don't know the story of why this occurred. They were very upset because Macassans were a good gumurr'manydji trading friend, where each partner received a fair and equal share. Some Yolngu had become very wealthy from the trade. Three clans is particular, and they then shared their goods with the other tribes. They were the richest clans nations in east Arnhem Land.

So Yolngu were left completely confused, waiting for the Macassans to come. Year after year Yolngu waited, wondering if they did something wrong or what had happened. Some Elders would sing songs about the Macassans coming in their boats. But they never came again and clans that depended on the trade relationship became maarmirru bankrupt. The people sat in hopelessness and poverty.

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## History of Money. Where did money come from.

### Story No. 9

Richard Trudgen and Djiniyini Gondarra explore the bigger story of how and why the Macassan trade was stopped.

The trade between the Macassans and Yolngu in Arnhem Land was stopped by the South Australian parliament, which passed an act of law in 1907. At the time the Northern Territory was under the jurisdiction of South Australia (That's why it was called the 'northern territory' of South Australia.)

So the trade was stopped by the government, however without letting Yolngu know. The Balanda government had no idea that Yolngu had trading activities and legal business agreements with the Macassans. The Balanda belief was that Yolngu were just "hunter and gatherers".

The South Australian government wanted to start a business in the north of Australia. They were looking for some sort of enterprise for the region. It was thought that the Macassans mainly came for the trepang, so the government wanted that business.

This was similar to when the town of Sydney first started and it had no real business to help it prosper. It was a small community and England was a long way away. So they had to try and create a business. One of these was trading fur seals with China. Southern Australia had many seals and they have good quality fur like possums. This trade with China was one of the things that made Sydney wealthy and successful.

So in north Australia, they were looking for a business to make them rich like the other states in Australia. It was observed that trepang was very valuable and highly sought after by China. So the South Australian government stopped the Macassan trade on Yolngu estates by sending lots of British owned boats for harvesting and by going to Macassar and advising if they came again they would be meet with gunboats. All so Balanda could have their own trade dealings in trepang directly with China.

For many years both the South Australian and the federal government also received tax revenue from the Macassan trade, including on tobacco and rice products.

However they did not realise it was Yolngu who owned these estates and production sites, and it was them who gave the Macassans permission to harvest the trepang. The Balanda thought the Macassans just came on their own account and they did not understand there were business agreements between Macassans and Yolngu. But there were long-standing legal contracts where the Macassans made balanydja payments and Yolngu did a lot of the work harvesting the trepang, as well as processing them (cutting, cleaning, cooking and drying. Lots of hard work!) It was sometimes said by Balanda that Yolngu were frightened of the Macassans and stayed away from them, but the truth is the Yolngu-Macassan relationship was a friendly and productive trade partnership.

It seems Balanda doesn't know any of that history, even the politicians, though there are some books now starting to talk about it. It's also part of the problem when Yolngu ask the government for trepang licences. Lots of Yolngu want to get into this business but the government doesn't seem to listen. (That's another part of the story for later discussion – there's only one license for trepang that covers the whole of the Northern Territory.) It's also good for Yolngu to learn some of this history so they can see how they lost these big industries and are now dependent on Balanda money.

While it's true that many Yolngu are now dependent on the government, the government does not see that Yolngu were businessmen, farmers and traders. Instead, because Balanda don't know this history they think they now have to teach Yolngu the meaning of work and business. Some Balanda are just now starting to realise what happened but Yolngu Elders died in shame due to bankruptcy and loss of business. (Such as Djiniyini's mother's people who had a big business in pearl production. Yet that is now Balanda business worth millions.) However, it's possible for young Yolngu to get back into this.

For many Yolngu this is a new story and they are hearing it for the first time. The Elders who died knew the Macassans and worked with them. They waited for them, but in the end, they had no balanydja, goods of trade, so they died märrmiriw in spiritual and physical poverty and shame.

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# History of Money. Where did money come from?

## Story No. 10

Richard Trudgen and Djiniyini Gondarra discuss what happened after the Macassan trade with Yolngu was stopped in 1907.

Djiniyini talks about how Yolngu were märrmiriw, living in spiritual and physical poverty and shame, as they had lost their businesses. They had little food and were spending all their time looking for products and different girri general goods items. Some clans had goods but many of them had nothing to trade.

Many Yolngu went searching for trade tracks where there were goods. Dhumbalbal dhukarr mala the old trade tracks were followed along the coast and overland but there were no goods coming along here. Yolngu began to go where-ever Balanda were, like to Roper River and to cattle stations to the south of Arnhem Land. A lot of Yolngu from the miwatj went all the way down to Pine Creek and Katherine. Some walked overland to Darwin.

The Warramiri were one of the rich clans in the Macassan times along with the Gumatj and Dhalwanju. Some of those Elders ended up in Darwin, Katherine, Pine Creek and all the way to the Roper Valley looking for the products that had come from the Macassans and a replacement for the trade they had lost.

Then the Welfare Department, via the Missionaries, started to bring Yolngu back to stay on their own yirralka estates. However that's not what happened. Instead Yolngu were all brought into one single yirralka, which caused problems that are still happening today.

It was government policy and law to gather all the Yolngu into one place for the purposes of teaching – specifically teaching the people how to trade, work and produce things. (Ironic, considering it was the Balanda who stopped the production and trade because they didn't know it existed.)

Some missionaries suggested not taking Yolngu from their home yirralka estates, and going to work with them where they lived. But the Welfare Department had a special act of law for Aboriginal affairs (Native Welfare Act) that meant it didn't matter that Yolngu were all different tribes on separate yirralka estates – they had to come into one location.

This was disastrous. Yolngu went to foreign places where there were now many leaders from different tribes trying to assert themselves. In addition the very confused landowners of the area where the mission was sat oppressed in their own country.

The Welfare Department saw that Yolngu were in trouble, with lots of social problems and drinking and they put them in the hands of the church but things did not improve. Yolngu were often blamed for their circumstances, yet it was Balanda who created much of the mess with poor planning, and who put Yolngu in conflict with each other and they are still living in that situation today.

Balanda did not understand that Yolngu clans owned separate estates, each with its own mulwaṭ assets that belonged to the people and those who had separate alliances with that estate. They didn't see Yolngu had different production sites on these estates like gārul garden growing areas, marrandil fish production areas, baṭpa turtle production areas, and how many lands had mewiyal bird hatcheries and egg collection sites. They didn't understand clans had separate legal constitutions and acts of law, with different alliances, and different legal systems with separate legal symbols and objects. .

Balanda even thought that Yolngu had no ownership of their estates. Using terms like "hunter and gatherer" and "nomad" suggesting Yolngu wandered around like dogs or other animals looking for things to eat like grass, fruit or fish. And many still have the same view today, with schools teaching these kinds of ideas.

Balanda thought Yolngu were just one tribe/group of people; no yirritja or dhuwa groups, no different tribes or nations. So it was OK to put all Yolngu into one place. Never mind whose place it was, as if Yolngu had no practised human culture. Consequently they stopped the business and the contract giving/receiving on these separate estates where the resources were. And this is where the confusion/mystification happens around money, business and welfare.

This information is good for Yolngu across the three trade regions of northeast Arnhem Land (Miwatj, Marthakal, Gattjirrk, Gumurr-Rawarrang) to hear. This is a true story of how the the breaking of primary trade contracts between Yolngu and Macassans has had a great effect on Yolngu. It's a situation that's come about by a foreign Act of Law that's forced Yolngu into conflict.

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#### NOTE:

This series of ten stories did not end where we thought it would. The information that came out during the recording discussions was just too interesting to remain solely with the story of the history of money. However, the central theme of money needing to be something that's valuable is important for the context in which Yolngu today find themselves. Not many Yolngu see that money has value. This has nothing to do with the fact that Yolngu never had any form of money in the past because this series of podcast destroys that mainstream myth. Yolngu confusion comes from suffering an economic meltdown after the South Australia government ended the Macassan trade. These podcasts puts things in context for Yolngu. Many have said it has answered so many questions for them, questions that when unanswered left them feeling a lesser human because the conversations they have with Balanda seem to end up always leaving them defined as 'primitive' or 'native'. Now with the truth about what happened it makes much more sense. We will be recording many more conversations around this theme to help Yolngu rediscover their role as real business people, who were trading internationally for at least 300 years before Balanda arrived.