Emeritus Professor W.E.H. Stanner, C.M.G., died in Canberra on 8 October 1981, fifty years after he graduated with first class honours from the infant Anthropology Department at the University of Sydney. He was still working in the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies which he had helped to found. He was still actively concerned with the analysis of Aboriginal systems of land tenure, and the moral issue of Aboriginal land rights. He made his first journey to the Daly River in 1932, to study local organization and the consequences of Asian and European contact. His records of this and later visits were being used by descendants of the men and women he knew, and the lawyers and anthropologists assisting them to prepare a land claim, when the news of his death reached the Daly River.

W.E.H. Stanner made notable contributions to anthropological theory, and his detailed analyses of Aboriginal religion and symbolism, economic life and social organisation are of world renown. His writing on customary law and its recognition in British courts, on nutrition, health, employment conditions, economic development, and the practical politics of administration helped to transform systems of colonial rule in Africa, Australia and the Pacific. He used his anthropological knowledge in the service of this own society in wartime and afterwards helped to build new institutions and develop new kinds of
research which aimed at appraising and improving Australian life. In the postwar period his abiding concern with the complexities of continuity and change in Aboriginal societies led him to develop new approaches which emphasised the necessity of studying the historical dimension in human affairs. In his writing for a wider audience Stanner sought to explain why 'the timeless categories of thought and life' persisted in Aboriginal society, and why Australians found it so difficult to see Aborigines in a way that was 'humane, respectful and compassionate'.

In a series of memorable essays, notably those on The Dreaming, on continuity and change, on the life of his friend Durmugam, and his 1968 Boyer Lectures, Stanner challenged others to explore Aboriginal history and ideology, to learn from the lives of individuals and the oral history of their communities, to think anew about Australia's past and the rights of Aborigines. He strongly supported the launching of Aboriginal History and generously offered two major papers to the new journal. The Editorial Board resolved to dedicate this special issue to the memory of W.E.H. Stanner, who wrote of Aborigines and the past with humanity, respect and compassion.

INTRODUCTION

James Urry

In 1979 Isabel McBryde suggested to the Editorial Board that occasionally the journal might produce issues devoted to a particular theme. Following her suggestion I proposed to the Board that a good subject for such an issue might be Aboriginal-Asian contact. This volume is the result.

Initially we hoped that not only Aboriginal views of Asians but also Asian views of Aborigines could be included. Letters were written to a number of people, both in Australia and abroad, who had studied aspects of Asian life in Australia, but little response was forthcoming. However, a number of people with knowledge of Aboriginal culture and history expressed interest in contributing papers and though not all could meet the deadline for the issue, the papers included in this volume give a good indication of the range of Asian-Aboriginal relations. Accounts of all the major Asian groups Aborigines have encountered are included: — 'Indonesian' peoples in northern Australia, Chinese and Japanese in northern Queensland, and 'Afghans' in central Australia. The papers, therefore, also deal with different areas of Australia though it is unfortunate that no detailed studies from Western Australia are included as this is an area which has rich history of Asian-Aboriginal contact.

None of the papers in this issue are intended as final statements on what is a complex and varied subject. Little, however, has been written on this theme before and it is hoped that the papers, and the points they raise, will encourage further research.