# 6

# Renaissance

In October 2014, the *Cambridge Economic History of Australia* was finally published. Almost a generation on, the production function approach was abandoned, as were the old editors. Many of the contributors were the same, and they were determined to make this one work. The volume was a success, sparking conversation in international academic circles, and making its way into media and parliament discussions. It was, incidentally, also the first major project in Australian economic history that I ever worked on. I was a research assistant for Simon Ville, and was charged with sorting out the final touches, and coordinating between the authors, editors and publishers. It all seemed terribly exciting – I remember the day the advanced copy of the *Cambridge* arrived and sitting with Simon in his office, as he marvelled at the look and feel of the book. He was very proud of it, and so was I. It was a remarkable apprenticeship in Australian economic history.

The authors made a definitive statement on the progress and contribution of Australian economic history. I'm sure many hoped it was the start of a new golden era, similar to Noel Butlin publishing 'the words' and 'the numbers'.[1] Some may have seen it as the final death rattle of a field that had been on life support for a while. As it turns out, the *Cambridge* was part of a global and specifically Australian revival in interest in economic historical matters. Recent reflections in the US have argued that 'historians are examining the economy again' and that economic history 'should be

1 'The words' and 'the numbers' refer to Butlin's seminal works, respectively: Noel G Butlin, *Australian Domestic Product, Investment and Foreign Borrowing 1861–1938/9* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1962) and Noel G Butlin, *Investment in Australian Economic Development, 1861–1900* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1964), xiv, doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316530160.

at the heart of economics instruction'.[2] In Australia, there have been calls to support a 'new materialism', with capitalism re-emerging as a 'pervasive framework for understanding a world in momentous flux'.[3] This chapter contributes to these reflections by systematically examining the progress of the so-called revival in Australia, particularly connections between the field and its parent disciplines, fragmentation away from mainstream professional structures and the impact of a still very hostile higher education sector. The assessment is cautiously optimistic: while there are promising signs of the field's renaissance, it is faced with substantial uncertainties.

## The revival

Although the institutional space afforded to Australian economic historians declined in the 1990s and 2000s, outward-looking behaviour meant members had greater capacity to take advantage of favourable external conditions in the early 2010s. At the start of the new millennium, public and policy attention was drawn to globalisation, inequality and debt, and the influence of multinational corporations.[4] Within economics, 'new' forms of micro-economics utilised a range of qualitative, quantitative and historical evidence to understand inequality, wellbeing and happiness. Endogenous growth theory focused on the role of technology, human capital and innovation for long-run economic development.[5] Greater interest in institutions, particularly the effects of political, legal and social structures, aligned with historical and long-run data.[6] The Great

2 Kenneth Lipartito, 'Reassembling the Economic: New Departures in Historical Materialism', *American Historical Review* 121, no. 1 (2016): 101–39, 101, doi.org/10.1093/ahr/121.1.101; M Pettis, 'How Has the Crisis Changed the Teaching of Economics?', *The Economist*, 17 September 2010.

3 Hannah Forsyth and Sophie Loy-Wilson, 'Seeking a New Materialism in Australian History', *Australian Historical Studies* 48, no. 1 (2017): 169–88, doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2017.1298635; Ben Huf and Glenda Sluga, '"New" Histories of (Australian) Capitalism', *Australian Historical Studies* 50, no. 4 (2019): 405–17, doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2019.1663773.

4 Simon Ville and Claire EF Wright, 'Neither a Discipline nor a Colony: Renaissance and Re-Imagination in Economic History', *Australian Historical Studies* 48, no. 2 (2017): 152–68, doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2017.1279197; Sven Beckert et al., 'Interchange: The History of Capitalism', *Journal of American History* 101, no. 2 (2014): 503–36, doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jau357.

5 Paul M Romer, 'The Origins of Endogenous Growth', *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 8, no. 1 (1994): 3–22, doi.org/10.1257/jep.8.1.3; Iñaki Iriarte-Goñi, 'Spanish Economic History: Lights and Shadows in a Process of Convergence', in *Routledge Handbook of Global Economic History*, ed. Francesco Boldizzoni and Pat Hudson (London: Routledge, 2015), 160–74, doi.org/10.4324/9781315734736.

6 Work has been inspired by DC North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511808678. More recently, Acemoglu and Robinson's work on comparative economic history has been particularly influential. See Daron Acemoglu and James A Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (New York: Crown, 2012).

Divergence debate has been a site to bring together economists and economic historians, examining different rates of development between Europe and Asia, and a range of other polities, over the last 300 years.[7] Work has incorporated familiar economic determinants such as capital formation, natural resources and the role of the State, as well as institutions in the form of comparative legal systems and general propensities for entrepreneurship.[8] Historians, on the other hand, have been motivated to integrate the insights of the cultural turn with the material forces of money, production and distribution. The history of capitalism movement emerged in the US as a 'meeting place' for disparate fields to understand the contingency of capitalism across time and place.[9]

These intellectual trends were crystallised by the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2007–08, which triggered an increase in understanding the development and impact of economic systems. The recession was particularly important for the growth of the history of capitalism movement in the US, with students flocking to undergraduate and postgraduate instruction in the subject.[10] As Elizabeth Shermer has recalled:

> rarely did I find a student who mentioned the Great Depression, Social Security (or Medicare), or unions before 2008. Now, half the class wants to know about the 1930s and the New Deal.[11]

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7 Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: Europe, China and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), doi.org/10.1515/9781400823499; Ian Morris, *Why the West Rules – for Now: The Patterns of History and What They Reveal About the Future* (London: Profile books, 2010); Jeffrey G Williamson, *Trade and Poverty: When the Third World Fell Behind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9780262015158.001.0001; Prasannan Parthasarathi, *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not: Global Economic Divergence, 1600–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511993398; Jean-Laurent Rosenthal and Roy Bin Wong, *Before and Beyond Divergence* (New Haven: Harvard University Press, 2011); Gareth Austin and Kaoru Sugihara, eds, *Labour-Intensive Industrialization in Global History* (New York: Routledge, 2014), doi.org/10.4324/9780203067611; Christopher Lloyd, Jacob Metzer and Richard Sutch, *Settler Economies in World History* (Leiden: Brill, 2013). See Ville's review of this literature: Simon Ville, 'Divergence and Convergence: New and Shifting Paradigms in Comparative Economic History', *Australian Economic History Review* 55, no. 1 (2015): 80–94, doi.org/10.1111/aehr.12059.

8 Ville, 'Divergence and Convergence'.

9 Beckert et al., 'Interchange', 506.

10 Ville and Wright, 'Neither a Discipline nor a Colony'; Naomi Lamoreaux, 'The Future of Economic History Must Be Interdisciplinary', *Journal of Economic History* 75, no. 4 (2015): 1251–57; Beckert et al., 'Interchange', 530. See also Jennifer Schuessler, 'In History Departments, It's Up With Capitalism', *New York Times*, 6 April 2013.

11 Beckert et al., 'Interchange', 530.

Economists were, embarrassingly, surprised by the GFC, with US economist Tyler Cowan noting that it was the 'people schooled in economic history who came to terms with the crisis most readily'.[12] With the aim of contextualising contemporary challenges and guiding policy responses, the Great Depression received much greater attention, and economists became preoccupied by 'warning signs' of long-run instability. Harvard economists Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff's ironically titled *This Time is Different* identified common patterns of financial crises across the world over nearly a millennium.[13] It became a *New York Times* bestseller.

The economic history field globally responded to these trends, advocating for research more inclusive of both parent disciplines. Most of the chapters in the 2015 *Routledge Handbook of Global Economic History* advocated for cooperation between different disciplinary traditions as a safeguard against marginalisation.[14] In North America, economic historians such as Naomi Lamoreaux similarly argued for economic history to 'transcend the breakdown of the field's original interdisciplinary structure and its transformation into a sub-field of economics'.[15] Barry Eichengreen agreed, encouraging an integrated approach to contextualising contemporary economic challenges.[16] Even in the UK and Europe, where there has been less division of those who examine economic historical phenomena, scholars have called for broader interdisciplinary conversations. British scholar Stephen Broadberry argued that the field should 'embrace economic historians from diverse backgrounds and celebrate that diversity'.[17] Francesco Boldizzoni, from his vantage in Northern Italy, provided a more critical analysis, lamenting economic history's identity crisis at the hands of the North American 'cliometric threat', and calling for the field's renewed interdisciplinary engagement.[18]

12 Pettis, 'Teaching of Economics'.

13 Carmen M Reinhart and Kenneth S Rogoff, *This Time Is Different: Eight Centuries of Financial Folly* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), doi.org/10.1515/9781400831722.

14 Boldizzoni and Hudson, *Global Economic History*.

15 Lamoreaux, 'Future of Economic History'.

16 Barry Eichengreen, 'Economic History and Economic Policy', *Journal of Economic History* 72, no. 2 (2012): 289–307, doi.org/10.1017/S0022050712000034.

17 Geoffrey Jones, Marco HD van Leeuwen and Stephen Broadberry, 'The Future of Economic, Business and Social History', *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 60, no. 3 (2012): 225–53, doi.org/10.1080/03585522.2012.727766.

18 Francesco Boldizzoni, *The Poverty of Clio: Resurrecting Economic History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), doi.org/10.23943/princeton/9780691144009.001.0001.

These international conversations have influenced Australian academia. Economists have acknowledged the importance of understanding long-run determinants of economic development, particularly for the GFC, and historians have emphasised material matters for historical work.[19] Interest in the Great Depression, inequality, globalisation and multinationals contributed to a steady increase in the number of articles and authors publishing economic historical work in both *Economic Record* and *Australian Historical Studies*, from the 2000s and 2010s, respectively. In the *Record*, subjects like business cycles, international trade, the Great Divergence, inequality and wellbeing, as well as the connection between the Great Depression and the GFC, have comprised this 'new' interest in economic history.[20] In *Australian Historical Studies*, articles have examined consumption behaviour, business history, finance and the economic aspects of race, migration and labour, as well as special issues on big data, the 'new materialism' and Australian histories of capitalism.[21] Much of this new research *on* economic history has been written by those who would not consider themselves primarily 'economic historians'.

19 Steve Keen, 'Predicting the "Global Financial Crisis": Post-Keynesian Macroeconomics', *Economic Record* 89, no. 285 (2013): 228–54, doi.org/10.1111/1475-4932.12016; Peter Docherty, 'The Role of Economic History and the History of Economic Thought in Macroeconomics and Finance Courses after the Global Financial Crisis', *Australasian Journal of Economics Education* 11, no. 2 (2014): 1–24; Forsyth and Loy-Wilson, 'New Materialism'.

20 For example: Lee E Ohanian, 'Understanding Economic Crises: The Great Depression and the 2008 Recession', *Economic Record* 86, Suppl. S1 (2010): 2–6, doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4932.2010.00667.x; Noel Gaston and Gulasekaran Rajaguru, 'The Long-Run Determinants of Australian Income Inequality', *Economic Record* 85, no. 270 (2009): 260–75, doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4932.2009.00539.x; Anthony B Atkinson and Andrew Leigh, 'The Distribution of Top Incomes in Australia', *Economic Record* 83, no. 262 (2007): 247–61, doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4932.2007.00412.x; Anthony B Atkinson and Andrew Leigh, 'The Distribution of Top Incomes in Five Anglo-Saxon Countries over the Long Run', *Economic Record* 89, Suppl. S1 (2013): 31–47, doi.org/10.1111/1475-4932.12004; Paul Frijters and Robert Gregory, 'From Golden Age to Golden Age: Australia's "Great Leap Forward"?', *Economic Record* 82, no. 257 (2006): 207–24, doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4932.2006.00316.x.

21 Alister Bowen, 'The Merchants: Chinese Social Organisation in Colonial Australia', *Australian Historical Studies* 42, no. 1 (2011): 25–44, doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2010.542766; Julie McIntyre, 'Adam Smith and Faith in the Transformative Qualities of Wine in Colonial New South Wales', *Australian Historical Studies* 42, no. 2 (2011): 194–211, doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2011.560611; Sophie Loy-Wilson, 'Rural Geographies and Chinese Empires: Chinese Shopkeepers and Shop-Life in Australia', *Australian Historical Studies* 45, no. 3 (2014): 407–24, doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2014.948020; Jo Hawkins, 'Anzac for Sale: Consumer Culture, Regulation and the Shaping of a Legend, 1915–21', *Australian Historical Studies* 46, no. 1 (2015): 7–26, doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2014.994539; Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, 'The State, Convicts and Longitudinal Analysis', *Australian Historical Studies* 47, no. 3 (2016): 414–29, doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2016.1203963; Kris Inwood and J Andrew Ross, 'Big Data and the Military: First World War Personnel Records in Australia, Britain, Canada, New Zealand and British Africa', *Australian Historical Studies* 47, no. 3 (2016): 430–42, doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2016.1205639; Melissa Bellanta, 'Business Fashion: Masculinity, Class and Dress in 1870s Australia', *Australian Historical Studies* 48, no. 2 (2017): 189–212, doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2017.1300178.

Within Australian economic history, new interest from parent disciplines and the public sparked new major undertakings. Barrie Dyster and David Meredith published a new edition of *Australia in the Global Economy* in 2012.[22] The first edition, pitched at undergraduate students, was published 1990, and synthesised consensus opinion on Australian economic history in relation to key touchstones of the international economy – trade, capital flows and immigration.[23] The macroeconomics framework and the use of aggregated quantitative material was familiar to most undergraduate economics students. They argued that connection to the international economy contributed to Australia's economic growth primarily through demand for exports, and the supply of capital and labour, with public policy shaping the nature of this integration.[24] The new edition was prompted by interest from contemporary economists and policymakers in understanding the past. In 2010, while Dyster was at the University of New South Wales, his colleague, economist Tim Harcourt, mentioned that Wayne Swan (then the federal treasurer) was to deliver an address to leading businessmen, and that Swan had asked Harcourt for academic work from which to draw detail. In parliament, Swan said something to the effect that Dyster and Meredith were the experts in the way the economy has evolved, which prompted 'every chairman of the board and every CEO […] to get a copy of this book'.[25] Dyster and Meredith received some encouragement ('harassment') from Cambridge University Press to update the volume, with the authors maintaining the same framework but revising the quantitative material and focusing on economic reform, globalisation and the GFC.[26]

Ian McLean's *Why Australia Prospered* complements Dyster and Meredith, and was the most influential book in Australian economic history penned by a single author since the early 1990s. With echoes of Coghlan's 'progress', McLean focused on 'prosperity'– in this case income per capita. He examined the way Australia became rich by the middle of the nineteenth century and maintained this status for the next 150 years. The periodisation is familiar – it was organised into the first

22 Barrie Dyster and David Meredith, *Australia in the Global Economy: Continuity and Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

23 Dyster; Oxley/Meredith interviews. Unless otherwise specified, interviews cited are those conducted by the author: see Appendix for details.

24 Barrie Dyster and David Meredith, *Australia in the International Economy in the Twentieth Century* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

25 Dyster interview.

26 Dyster and Meredith, *Australia in the Global Economy*.

60 years of convict and settler experience; the 'Butlin era', including the gold rush and the long boom of the nineteenth century; the external shocks of two depressions and two world wars up to 1945; and then the (mostly) unfaltering boom of the remaining 70 years. McLean argued that Australia's prosperity owed to capitalising on natural resources ('luck') through a good policy setting and a decent capitalist environment.[27]

As with other major works at the time, *Why Australia Prospered* was an economists' economic history. The historical approach aimed to understand how the 'roots of prosperity are embedded in the past', contributing to growing interest in historical approaches from development economists.[28] Weaving analysis and narrative, endogenous growth theory was central to McLean's framework, through an interest in natural resource endowments, institutional quality, government policy and cultural attributes. McLean was aware of geographic, political, social, cultural and environmental elements, though in a similar way to the Great Divergence literature, these served as the structural background rather than aspects to be interrogated. McLean kept one eye on California, with the 'especially appropriate' origins of the book 'in an office affording a breathtaking view across San Francisco Bay and through the Golden Gate to the Pacific beyond'. Observing Australian experience from the outside, in relation to other settler colonies such as Canada, Argentina, New Zealand and the West Coast of the US, was crucial for McLean's perspective, as it 'heightens one's perceptions of what seems noteworthy or unusual'.[29] His method was also largely orthodox, with no interest in statistically testing relationships between variables, but incorporating counterfactual speculation as to why Australia did better or worse than elsewhere. McLean's work was like sinking into a warm bath for most mainstream Australian economic historians. Reviewers were very comfortable with his approach, with Withers particularly praising it as the 'best overview of Australian economic history that has been published to date'.[30]

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27 Ian W McLean, *Why Australia Prospered: The Shifting Sources of Economic Growth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), doi.org/10.23943/princeton/9780691154671.001.0001.

28 McLean, *Why Australian Prospered*, 1–3.

29 McLean, *Why Australia Prospered*, xiii. See Chapters 4 and 5 for a discussion of McLean's integration with US economic history.

30 Glenn Withers, 'Review: Mclean, *Why Australia Prospered*', *Economic Record* 90, no. 290 (2014): 400–1, doi.org/10.1111/1475-4932.12143; Tim Hatton, 'Review: Mclean, *Why Australian Prospered*', *Australian Economic History Review* 53, no. 2 (2013): 210–14, doi.org/10.1111/aehr.12011; Simon Ville, 'Review: Mclean, *Why Australian Prospered*', *American Historical Review* 118, no. 4 (2013): 1170–71, doi.org/10.1093/ahr/118.4.1170.

Simon Ville and Glenn Withers's edited *Cambridge Economic History of Australia* was similar in audience, speaking to economists and policymakers interested in Australia's long-run economic development.[31] Ironically, the book emerged from the history discipline. Ville and Lionel Frost both contributed chapters to the *Cambridge History of Australia*, published in 2013 and edited by historians Alison Bashford and Stuart Macintyre.[32] At some point, Macintyre pulled Ville aside and asked if it would be possible to get an economic history volume going. Macintyre contacted the Cambridge publishers, Ville enlisted Glenn Withers, and they were away. Unfortunately, despite the clear interest from historians in the subject at the time, members of this discipline were not represented. In addition to self-described members of the field, academic and professional economists made up the contributors. This was deliberate, with Ville recalling that:

> we also needed some economists that were interested in economic history because there just weren't enough economic historians who could write in this space.[33]

The *Cambridge* had a strong economic policy imperative. Withers spent time as a policymaker throughout the 1990s and 2000s, and he recruited members of the Canberra–Adelaide group of economic historians – such as Michael Keating, Rod Maddock and Jonathan Pincus – who had since moved on to policy work (see Chapters 3 and 4). Matthew Butlin also participated, fulfilling the family legacy by compiling the statistical appendix, and providing his perspective as a macro-economic policy official. Withers has argued that his motivation for editing the book came from his time as a policymaker:

> Particularly, I was convinced from all that practical work that we are at a key stage of Australian development […] I insisted, I think, upon […] *engaged* economic history. I wanted not just the scholarly economic history without reference to how [it] could be used to interpret current policy formation and evolution.[34]

31 Simon Ville and Glenn Withers, eds, *The Cambridge Economic History of Australia* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2015), doi.org/10.1017/CHO9781107445222.

32 Alison Bashford and Stuart Macintyre, eds, *The Cambridge History of Australia* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2013), doi.org/10.1017/CHO9781107445758.

33 Ville interview.

34 Withers interview.

**Figure 5: Participants at the second workshop for the *Cambridge Economic History of Australia*, Trinity College, University of Melbourne, February 2013**

Back row (l–r): Lionel Frost, Diane Hutchinson, William Coleman, Jonathan Pincus, Rod Maddock, Chris Lloyd, Simon Ville, Glenn Withers, Nicholas Biddle, Boyd Hunter.

Front row (l–r): Andy Seltzer, David Meredith, Deborah Oxley, Monica Keneley, Edwyna Harris, David Merrett, Tim Hatton, Michael Keating, David Greasley.

Source: Supplied by Simon Ville.

Contributors met on two major occasions. The new Australian National University (ANU) Centre for Economic History hosted a workshop in July 2012 to scope chapters. Ville's role in leading the 'unruly' group of people was acknowledged, with work starting out as 'almost a reunion' of those who had lost touch through the period of resistance.[35] The second workshop was held at Trinity College at the University of Melbourne in February 2013, in a building with no air conditioning, at the height of summer. Frost has likened the 'bloody hot' weather outside to the intense discussions inside, with critical but constructive feedback from authors.[36] My role came later, in the latter part of 2013 and throughout 2014, and I was similarly struck by their sense of joint endeavour.

35 Hatton; Keneley; Frost; Hutchinson interviews.
36 Frost interview.

The volume was mainstream in its interpretation and approach, summarising consensus opinion on various topics in Australian economic history. The importance of natural resources and migrant human capital, the uneasy partnership between governments and the economy, the dominance of big business and Australia's strong connection to flows of international trade and capital were valuable summaries, although not terribly radical interpretations. The most noticeable intellectual broadening was two chapters on Indigenous economic history that built on work throughout the 2000s to re-examine Butlin's estimates of the pre-invasion population, contributions of Indigenous enterprises and Indigenous socio-economic outcomes over time.[37] The approach was also orthodox, underpinned by a comprehensive statistical appendix that was used to inductively build a narrative of Australia's economic development. As with McLean's work, cliometrics was sometimes in the background, with the results of recent deductive work reported on, but not actively conducted in any of the chapters.[38] While the editors argued that 'varying disciplinary backgrounds are a source of creative tension among contributors', as with other major contributions at the time the spectrum of approaches extended from economic history to the economics

37 Boyd H Hunter, 'The Aboriginal Legacy', in Ville and Withers, *The Cambridge Economic History of Australia*, 73–96, doi.org/10.1017/CHO9781107445222.008; Jon C Altman and Nicholas Biddle, 'Refiguring Indigenous Economies: A 21st-Century Perspective', in Ville and Withers, *The Cambridge Economic History of Australia,* 530–54, doi.org/10.1017/CHO9781107445222.032. These built on the following literature: Ian Keen, ed., *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010), doi.org/10.22459/IPAE.12.2010; Natasha Fijn et al., eds, *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies II: Historical Engagements and Current Enterprises* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2012), doi.org/10.22459/IPAE.07.2012. See also Tony Smith, 'Indigenous Accumulation in the Kimberley During the Early Years of "Self-Determination", 1968–1975', *Australian Economic History Review* 42, no. 1 (2002): 1–33, doi.org/10.1111/1467-8446.t01-1-00020; Tony Smith, 'Welfare, Enterprise, and Aboriginal Community: The Case of the Western Australian Kimberley Region, 1968–96', *Australian Economic History Review* 46, no. 3 (2006): 242–67, doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8446.2006.00180.x; Jon C Altman, Nicholas Biddle and Boyd H Hunter, 'A Historical Perspective on Indigenous Socioeconomic Outcomes in Australia, 1971–2001', *Australian Economic History Review* 45, no. 3 (2005): 273–95, doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8446.2005.00139.x; Jon C Altman, Nicholas Biddle and Boyd H Hunter, 'Prospects for "Closing the Gap" in Socioeconomic Outcomes for Indigenous Australians?', *Australian Economic History Review* 49, no. 3 (2009): 225–51, doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8446.2009.00264.x; Boyd H Hunter and John Carmody, 'Estimating the Aboriginal Population in Early Colonial Australia: The Role of Chickenpox Reconsidered', *Australian Economic History Review* 55, no. 2 (2015): 112–38, doi.org/10.1111/aehr.12068.

38 Tim Hatton has argued that authors were given the task of reflecting on the relevant literature, and capturing the essence of quantitative–deductive results, but that chapters were not supposed to be technical. Hatton interview.

discipline, but not to history.[39] This body of 'new' work in Australian economic history was thus not really new at all, but reasserted the field's orthodox intellectual position, and its contribution to economics.

# Persistent challenges

## Fragmentation

Economic history, all of a sudden, became trendy again, with a rush of new work, public and policy interest in the subject, and renewed engagement from parent disciplines. However, in Australia, the field's intellectual and professional structures remained conservative, speaking primarily to economists through an orthodox frame. This has resulted in new research clusters bypassing mainstream professional structures and fragmenting of the field's efforts.

In Australia, the 'new histories of capitalism' has provided a focus for work on economic history topics from Australian historians. Adding an Australian voice to the intellectual movement of the same name that emerged in the US in the early 2000s, historians have examined the contingency of Australia's capitalist experience in an international and comparative frame. The seeds for this movement were found in the neglect of economic matters from cultural historians, as it left out capitalism as 'too totalising, too deterministic, too Euro-centric, and blind to gender, race and contingency'.[40] Australian scholars trained in cultural history methods acknowledged that disregard for economic forces left a gap in understanding, and were motivated to understand the historical path dependencies of a system that had come under increasing scrutiny.[41] They also positioned themselves against mainstream economic history, arguing that this 'traditional' approach saw capitalism as a background structure rather than interrogating its change over time.[42] Members have

39 Simon Ville and Glenn Withers, 'Introduction: Connecting Past, Present and Future', in Ville and Withers, *The Cambridge Economic History of Australia*, 1–10, 7, doi.org/10.1017/CHO9781107445222.002.

40 Huf and Sluga, '"New" Histories of (Australian) Capitalism', 408. See also Chapter 5.

41 Forsyth and Loy-Wilson, 'New Materialism'; Ben Huf et al., 'Capitalism in Australia: New Histories for a Reimagined Future', *Thesis Eleven* 160, no. 1 (2020): 95–120, doi.org/10.1177/0725513620949028.

42 Huf and Sluga, '"New" Histories of (Australian) Capitalism'; Forsyth and Loy-Wilson, 'New Materialism'; Huf et al., 'Capitalism in Australia'.

used their training in cultural history to provide new perspectives on traditional economic history topics. For example, Hannah Forsyth has provided a cultural scrutiny of balance sheets and accreditation standards to examine the moral and economic role of professionals in Broken Hill.[43] Yves Rees's work on interwar Australian economists – a very traditional topic in mainstream economic history – offered a new perspective by 'dissecting [the] constitutive discourses' that established economist's expert status and reputation.[44] Ben Huf has similarly examined the discourse of economic knowledge in colonial Australia to understand the way 'the economy' was established as a separate category to be understood and controlled through policy.[45] These contributions have been embedded within several collaborative projects on the 'new histories of Australian capitalism', with scholars primarily operating within the history discipline's professional structures, but collaborating with economic historians, political economists, labour and social historians, and geographers.[46]

Prompted, in part, by the integration of many labour historians with human resources and management groups, the Academic Association of Historians in Australian and New Zealand Business Schools (AAHANZBS) launched in 2009 as an initiative of the University of Sydney's Business and Labour History group. Much like mainstream economic and business historians, members of this group engaged in their own process of negotiation following the Dawkins reforms, expanding their collaborations, ideas and teaching to secure their position in business faculties.[47] Work on firm and industry structure, and the history of work, technology and education have used a range of qualitative and quantitative source data, and various social, business and institutional theories. For example, Greg Patmore and Nikola Balnave utilised a combination of aggregated quantitative data and detailed case studies to examine the complex global history of cooperative business, including in Australia. They assessed the various

43 Forsyth Hannah, 'Class, Professional Work, and the History of Capitalism in Broken Hill, C. 1880–1910', *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 15, no. 2 (2018): 21–47, doi.org/10.1215/15476715-4353680.

44 Huf and Sluga, '"New" Histories of (Australian) Capitalism', 412; Yves Rees, 'From Socialists to Technocrats: The Depoliticisation of Australian Economics', *Australian Historical Studies: New Histories of Capitalism* 50, no. 4 (2019): 463–82, doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2019.1628787.

45 Ben Huf, 'Making Things Economic: Theory and Government in New South Wales, 1788–1863' (PhD thesis, The Australian National University, 2018).

46 See Huf and Sluga, '"New" Histories of (Australian) Capitalism'; Huf et al., 'Capitalism in Australia'.

47 Frank Bongiorno, 'Australian Labour History: Contexts, Trends and Influences', *Labour History* 100, no. 1 (2011): 1–19, doi.org/10.5263/labourhistory.100.0001.

forms of cooperative firms against other modes of business organisation, particularly large-scale industrial firms and multinationals, arguing that cooperatives emerged due to the failure of the neoliberal market economy in marginalising substantial groups, particularly the working class.[48] The group has an annual conference and regular events, and is heavily involved in the journal *Labour History*. Despite intellectual alignment, the separation between the Business and Labour History group and the Economic History Society of Australia and New Zealand (EHSANZ) appears to be irreconcilable, with members of each telling me that it was the 'others' who refused to cooperate when the former group was established in the 2000s. Also regrettable is the separation between the Business and Labour History group and the historians of capitalism, with members aligned on the critique of capitalism as a theme, though adopting disparate methods.

The OzClio group provides a conduit to the economics discipline. The group is linked to the ANU Centre for Economic History, which came to life in 2012 as a revival of the University's postwar role in the field. The centre has a porous presence institutionally, providing a website, newsletter and events, with members maintaining their roles in their faculties and departments. As Tim Hatton has argued, it is an identifiable place where scholars in Australia and overseas can be assured of a cluster of relevant researchers.[49] The OzClio group has been supported by the appointment of new cliometricians to ANU and elsewhere, and members run an annual workshop to 'mobilise the new generation, if you like, of economic historians'.[50] Adhering to US 'clio rules', papers are distributed beforehand, with authors providing very short presentations before contributions by 'discussants'. The familiar intellectual features of cliometrics – mathematical modelling, quantitative testing and the use of neoclassical theory focusing on micro-foundations of economic growth – unite members' work, and their scope is global through research on Europe, Asia, Africa and the

48 Greg Patmore and Nikola Balnave, *A Global History of Co-operative Business* (London: Routledge, 2018), doi.org/10.4324/9781315638164. See also Nikola Balnave and Greg Patmore, 'The Labour Movement and Co-Operatives', *Labour History*, no. 112 (2017): 7–24; Nikola Balnave and Greg Patmore, 'The Outsider Consumer Co-Operative: Lessons from the Community Co-Operative Store (Nuriootpa), 1944–2010', *Business History* 57, no. 8 (2015): 1133–54, doi.org/10.1080/00076791.2015.1015998; Nikola Balnave and Greg Patmore, 'Rochdale Consumer Co-Operatives in Australia: Decline and Survival', *Business History* 54, no. 6 (2012): 986–1003, doi.org/10.1080/00076791.2012.706899.

49 Hatton interview.

50 Hatton interview.

US.[51] For example, Melbourne economic historian Laura Panza and US scholar Jeffrey Williamson quantitatively assessed Australia's economic growth through micro-economic labour market data, arguing that rapid economic growth from the 1820s to the 1870s was not associated with rising inequality.[52] Similarly, John Tang's work on Japanese and American industrialisation incorporated aspects of endogenous growth theory by examining the slow adoption but quick catch-up in use of new technologies in large Japanese firms.[53]

There is relatively strong top-level integration between OzClio and EHSANZ, with the ANU centre formally partnered with the society, and some collaboration and cross-attendance between groups. This reflects the existing intellectual character of Australian economic history, with cliometrics a mainstream feature of the field since the 1980s, and increasingly present in the *Australian Economic History Review* since the 2000s (see Chapter 5). However, similar to the other groups, OzClio was established for a particular purpose, one that does not necessarily align with the broader approach of the EHSANZ. As such, many members, particularly those who identify as economists, participate solely in OzClio.

The current fragmentation away from mainstream professional structures is understandable. Each of these newer groups began as an 'intellectual movement' – as something new and distinctive from the 'establishment'.[54] Butlin did so with Shann and Fitzpatrick; Snooks did the same with Butlin; Nicholas did so with the convict literature; and Merrett and Ville with

51 Some examples include John P Tang, 'The Engine and the Reaper: Industrialization and Mortality in Late Nineteenth Century Japan', *Journal of Health Economics* 56 (2017): 145–62, doi.org/10.1016/j.jhealeco.2017.09.004; John P Tang, 'A Tale of Two SICs: Japanese and American Industrialisation in Historical Perspective', *Australian Economic History Review* 56, no. 2 (2016): 174–97, doi.org/10.1111/aehr.12097; Laura Panza, Simon Ville and David Merrett, 'The Drivers of Firm Longevity: Age, Size, Profitability and Survivorship of Australian Corporations, 1901–1930', *Business History* (2017): 157–77, doi.org/10.1080/00076791.2017.1293041; Laura Panza and Jeffrey G Williamson, 'Australian Squatters, Convicts, and Capitalists: Dividing up a Fast-Growing Frontier Pie, 1821–71', *Economic History Review* 72, no. 2 (2019): 568–94, doi.org/10.1111/ehr.12739; Laura Panza, 'De-Industrialization and Re-Industrialization in the Middle East: Reflections on the Cotton Industry in Egypt and in the Izmir Region', *Economic History Review* 67, no. 1 (2014): 146–69, doi.org/10.1111/1468-0289.12019; Martine Mariotti, 'Estimating the Substitutability of African and White Workers in South African Manufacturing, 1950–1985', *Economic History of Developing Regions* 27, no. 2 (2012): 47–60, doi.org/10.1080/20780389.2012.745664; Jakob B Madsen, James B Ang and Rajabrata Banerjee, 'Four Centuries of British Economic Growth: The Roles of Technology and Population', *Journal of Economic Growth* 15, no. 4 (2010): 263–90, doi.org/10.1007/s10887-010-9057-7.

52 Panza and Williamson, 'Australian Squatters'.

53 Tang, 'A Tale of Two SICs'.

54 Scott Frickel and Neil Gross, 'A General Theory of Scientific/Intellectual Movements', *American Sociological Review* 70, no. 2 (2005): 204–32, doi.org/10.1177/000312240507000202.

traditional business history. It's the circle of life. Intellectual conservatism from mainstream economic historians, particularly integration with economics and business disciplines throughout the period of resistance, and adherence to the orthodox approach in recent collective efforts, has likely promoted an image of the society that is incongruous with various intellectual movements that have sought to 'shake up' the field's dominant thematic, ideological and methodological traditions. Demographically, the society is also relatively conservative, with leaders aligning with a profile that may appear exclusionary to members of the humanities, younger scholars, women and those from non-white ethnic backgrounds. The *Australian Economic History Review* has recently had its first female editor, Edwyna Harris, and although very welcome, it is the exception rather than the rule. Although I have never felt excluded in the EHSANZ, I can understand how the demographic structure could appear to those from the considerably more diverse OzClio and history of capitalism groups.

The relationship of the movement to the establishment also depends on relative institutional power. In some cases, intellectual movements are 'inducted' into the mainstream community by scholars convincing others of the new approach in order to secure appointments and funding.[55] This occurred with the postwar cliometrics movement in the US, and with antipodean cliometrics in the 1980s (see Chapter 4). The key question is, who are the newer groups trying to convince? The loss of identity for Australian economic history over the last few decades has meant that it no longer carries the institutional bargaining power that it once did. There are no longer departments with God Professors in charge of hiring and firing, and the field's leadership is unable to offer protections for newer scholars who manage to convince them of the validity of a new approach. Members of these intellectual movements then have to look for larger 'establishments' to which they can direct their efforts. Historians of capitalism have embedded themselves primarily within history: AAHANZBS within business disciplines and OzClio in economics groups. Ironically, these are the same parent disciplines through which mainstream economic historians are also seeking protection. The mainstream economic group is thus simultaneously perceived as the 'establishment' in terms of approach and profile, yet is competing with these other groups for institutional space.

55 Frickel and Gross, 'Scientific/Intellectual Movements'.

## The global, neoliberal university

Marginalisation of Australian economic history has generally been blamed on the closure of departments. This has been the most obvious symbol of change, and members of the field cite this as the main change in the field's fortunes. While previous chapters have demonstrated that separate departments are not necessary, and indeed can be counterproductive, for an interdisciplinary field, their establishment and subsequent closure were both the result of a higher education system that fundamentally misunderstands interdisciplinary research. As an extension of this, recent advocacy of interdisciplinary knowledge by Australian governments and universities has been met with the escalation of policies that reinforce disciplines.[56] Universities since the Dawkins reforms have been funded through a combination of student income and research funding. Domestic students attract fees paid by the federal government, with individuals repaying subsidised tuition costs in the form of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme, or HECS. International students pay full tuition costs upfront directly to the university. University income from students is thus tied to consumer demand, which is in turn determined by the requirements of external stakeholders (the labour market for professions), as well as the reputation of the university. Research income, on the other hand, is distributed through a centralised government agency, the Australian Research Council (ARC). Funding depends on external stakeholders ('national benefit'), as well as the reputation of scholars and the university environment. These various accountabilities largely reinforce disciplinary modes of learning and research.

### Professional enclosure

Tertiary education is designed to prepare students for their working life and, in the Scottish model that dominates Australian universities, student demand is determined by the types of jobs that people are likely to do.[57] The Dawkins reforms were geared towards increasing Australia's capacity in professional work, with business disciplines, as well as

56 Peter Woelert and Victoria Millar, 'The "Paradox of Interdisciplinarity" in Australian Research Governance', *Higher Education* 66, no. 6 (2013): 755–67, doi.org/10.1007/s10734-013-9634-8.

57 John C Smart, Kenneth A Feldman and Corinna A Ethington, *Academic Disciplines: Holland's Theory and the Study of College Students and Faculty* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2000); John Gascoigne, 'The Cultural Origins of Australian Universities', *Journal of Australian Studies* 20, no. 50–51 (1996): 18–27, doi.org/10.1080/14443059609387275; Hermann Röhrs, 'The Classical Idea of the University', in *Tradition and Reform of the University Under an International Perspective*, ed. Hermann Röhrs and Gerhard Hess (Verlag: Peter Lang, 1987), 13–27.

nursing, teaching, engineering and law, expanding substantially. Growth professions have responded to the expansion of their ranks by enclosing territory through new professional associations and accreditation.[58] This has incentivised universities to adhere to specific coursework guidelines in order to attract students and then admit them to each profession.[59] Professional enclosure is bad for most interdisciplinary fields, with standardised training and qualifications used to ensure members have comparable knowledge and skills. While standardisation works well with disciplinary instruction, it operates in contention with broad, flexible interdisciplinary knowledge. Professional instruction often occurs 'in house', with students disincentivised to take courses in other disciplines or fields (see Chapter 5).

While 'real-world' experience is ostensibly valued by relevant stakeholders, neither the professions, new professionals nor universities have incentives to incorporate interdisciplinary curricula. Working with enclosed professions is nothing new for Australian economic history. Expansion of 'new' business disciplines in the 1990s removed compulsory economic history subjects during the resistance. Similarly, the enclosure of economics postgraduate research constrained the potential for PhD supervision in historical subjects (see Chapter 5). Even though professionals in business and economics need a range of skills in the workforce, the situation has only deteriorated recently. Many have noted the increasingly narrow instruction within business and economics degrees – dictated partly by accreditation – and the pressure this has put on economic history teaching.[60] Keneley has argued that the 'curriculum has narrowed so much that there is no scope for anything outside'.[61] Tim Hatton has, similarly, noted restrictions on the economic history graduate program at ANU have been 'a great shame'.[62]

58 Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

59 Victoria Millar, 'Interdisciplinary Curriculum Reform in the Changing University', *Teaching in Higher Education* 21, no. 4 (2016): 471–83, doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2016.1155549; Woelert and Millar, 'Paradox of Interdisciplinarity'.

60 Oxley/Meredith; Withers interviews.

61 Keneley interview.

62 Hatton interview.

## Rankings

University rankings structure both student demand and research income. Through a general lack of trust in seemingly 'inefficient' and 'esoteric' academic work, the Dawkins reforms introduced formal measurement systems to evaluate performance (see Chapter 5). In 1993, the Australian Bureau of Statistics released the Australian Standard Research Classification, which designates various Field of Research (FoR) codes. Although FoR classifications have expanded over time, there are still no categories that adequately capture interdisciplinary research. The government then ranks relative research 'quality' through their 'objective' 'Excellence in Research for Australia' (ERA) assessment procedure.[63] Various performance indicators – research income, quantity of publications and citations – are applied across activities within the same 4- or 6-digit FoR codes, to determine the rank of that particular group or university regardless of the relative institutional or intellectual context. The procedure assumes that outputs and citations are proxies of peer-assessed quality.[64] Compared to research assessment overseas, there is little use of expert peer review in Australia for ERA, and no scope for those assessed to contextualise the material in the report. While ERA rankings have no explicit, direct control over universities, they modify university behaviour through reputation.[65] A university's place in ERA rankings can drive ARC and other funding, and can influence student decision-making. Universities are thus cognisant of the evaluation exercise, and seek to maximise their place in the hierarchy.[66]

To conform to ERA criteria, academics are appointed and promoted based on publishing in what are seen as the 'right' places.[67] If you are hired to an economics group, you are expected to have a suitable record of publications in that discipline. This presents challenges to those who occupy the interdisciplinary space, as they are often hired to a range of groups, each with their own set of rules regarding publication outlets.

63 ERA started life as the Federal Liberal Howard Government's 'Research Quality Framework', which was transformed into ERA under the Labor Rudd Government.

64 Peter Woelert and Lyn Yates, 'Too Little and Too Much Trust: Performance Measurement in Australian Higher Education', *Critical Studies in Education* 56, no. 2 (2015): 175–89, doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2014.943776.

65 Jen Tsen Kwok, *Impact of ERA Research Assessment on University Behaviour and their Staff* (Melbourne: NTEU National Policy and Research Unit, 2013).

66 Raewyn Connell, *The Good University: What Universities Actually Do and Why It's Time for Radical Change* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2019).

67 Woelert and Millar, 'Paradox of Interdisciplinarity'.

If you are lucky, parent disciplines simply disagree on what specific journals you should target; if you are unlucky they disagree on the fundamentals of what you should be writing. Economic history is unlucky: economics and business disciplines emphasise journal articles, while in history scholarly monographs are of prime importance. Each discipline has their own rankings of suitable outlets. For business and economics, the Australian Business Dean's Council (ABDC) list is taken seriously. For historians, global databases like SCImago are used to rank journal quality.[68] As with ERA assessment, most journal rankings are based on relative citation rates. ABDC, for example, is informed by 'globally recognised […] journal ranking lists, appropriate and select citation metrics and, if required, expert peer review'.[69] Citations take first place in this procedure, with qualitative assessment by experts the exception rather than the rule.

Citation analysis is a limited method for determining quality. Data collection is challenging, with citations determined by online repositories that are often unreliable with regards to government reports or books. Citations are limited in their ability to reveal article quality, offering no insight into perceptions of the piece – indeed an article may have a high rate of citation through disagreement.[70] Citations also reflect social realities and cronyism, with authors tending to disproportionately cite their friends and colleagues.[71] Bias is also found through the Matthew Effect, where prominent scholars are cited with relative frequency, simply because they are seen to be important.[72] Citations systemically reinforce

68 Connell, *The Good University*.

69 See the 2018 ABDC methodology review: abdc.edu.au/research/abdc-journal-list/2018-journal-quality-list-methodology-review/.

70 Loet Leydesdorff and Olga Amsterdamska, 'Dimensions of Citation Analysis', *Science, Technology, and Human Values* 15, no. 3 (1990): 305–35, doi.org/10.1177/016224399001500303; MH MacRoberts and Barbara R MacRoberts, 'Problems of Citation Analysis', *Scientometrics* 36, no. 3 (1996): 435–44, doi.org/10.1007/BF02129604; TJ Phelan, 'A Compendium of Issues for Citation Analysis', *Scientometrics* 45, no. 1 (1999): 117–36, doi.org/10.1007/BF02458472; Chris Alen Sula, 'Visualizing Social Connections in the Humanities: Beyond Bibliometrics', *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 38, no. 4 (2012): 31–35, doi.org/10.1002/bult.2012.1720380409.

71 SE Cozzens, 'Taking the Measure of Science: A Review of Citation Theories', *Newsletter of the International Society for the Sociology of Knowledge* 7, no. 1 (1981): 16–21; D Crane, *Invisible Colleges: Diffusion of Knowledge in Scientific Communities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); G Nigel Gilbert, 'Referencing as Persuasion', *Social Studies of Science* 7, no. 1 (1977): 113–22, doi.org/10.1177/030631277700700112; Neha Gondal, 'The Local and Global Structure of Knowledge Production in an Emergent Research field: An Exponential Random Graph Analysis', *Social Networks* 33, no. 1 (2011): 20–30, doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2010.09.001.

72 Robert K Merton, 'The Matthew Effect in Science', *Science* 159, no. 3810 (1968): 56–63, doi.org/10.1126/science.159.3810.56.

the power of disciplines, with disciplinary tribes characterised by common ideas, approaches and jargon, making it easier for scholars to assimilate and thus cite relevant material.[73] The enclosure of disciplines also reinforces social networks, with a greater role for cronyism and the Matthew Effect. Journal rankings, ERA and, ultimately, university hiring decisions are thus based on indicators that structurally disadvantage interdisciplinary knowledge.

Rankings are a major ongoing challenge for Australian economic historians. Scholars in business and economics schools (which is a lot of them) are evaluated based on the norms of those disciplines. The ABDC list is very influential, with department or faculty management demanding their staff send material to A*- or A-ranked journals. As with all interdisciplinary outlets, the ABDC ranks historical journals such as the *Australian Economic History Review* relatively poorly. This creates problems for the flow of new material, despite the importance of the journal for understanding Australia. Keneley, for example, has commented that her research in the *Review* and other economic and business history outlets do not 'count for anything – so I get no recognition in my workload for the research I do […] The ERA has a lot to answer for, it has basically killed scholarly inquiry; forced people into silos'.[74] Similarly, when I asked Frost what he would like to do today to improve the fortunes of Australian economic history, without hesitation he argued that he would 'get everyone to rip up the ABDC journal ranking lists'.[75]

With the marginalisation of interdisciplinary journals, in order to succeed scholars need to publish in disciplinary journals. They face barriers here as well. Journal editors function as gatekeepers for disciplinary tribes by controlling the flow and direction of legitimised work.[76] By virtue of it conforming to the group's norms, journals publish a higher proportion of disciplinary work, and lower proportions that challenge orthodoxy or integrate different perspectives. It takes quite a bit to convince disciplinary journal editors of the value of an interdisciplinary piece. Even then,

73 Rafols et al., 'How Journal Rankings Can Suppress Interdisciplinary Research: A Comparison between Innovation Studies and Business and Management', *Research Policy* 41, no. 7 (2012): 1262–82, doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2012.03.015.

74 Keneley interview.

75 Frost interview.

76 Collyer et al., *Knowledge and Global Power: Making New Sciences in the South* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019); Raewyn Connell, *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2007).

it may still be rejected if the editors believe it might be uninteresting to the members of the tribe, or if they struggle to find referees with suitable expertise.[77]

Compounding these disciplinary issues is intellectual imperialism. Book publishers are strongly ranked on imperial lines, with Oxbridge or Ivy League imprints at the top of the hierarchy. Journal rankings follow similar trends, with UK or US outlets ranked much higher than comparable journals in the antipodes. In the ABDC rankings, just as economic and business history research is structurally disadvantaged, so too are Australian journals.[78] The *Australian Economic History Review* is ranked lower than counterparts in the UK, US or Europe. Again, the assessment is based on faulty logic: rankings are drawn from citation rates, and citations are higher for metropole journals in part because the market for readers is so much larger. Citations also reflect unconscious bias, with imperial knowledge structures conditioning us to look to the metropole for legitimate scholarship.[79] Neither of these factors have much to do with quality. Just as they are resistant to interdisciplinary work, overseas journals are rarely inclined to publish Australian research, with editors of US or UK journals often rejecting Australian scholarship unless it is comparative, or strongly demonstrates something they deem as valuable to their region.

University ranking systems are thoroughly cooked. Comparing work produced in different knowledge domains enforces a flat system of assessment guided by seemingly objective quantitative measures of 'quality'. However, the fundamental assumption is flawed – citations are not objective: they reflect disciplinary, social and colonial structures of privilege. Governments and universities claim they want interdisciplinary research that is of national benefit, and yet the work that achieves this is structurally disadvantaged by the university system.

## The ARC

Australia has a relatively sparse funding landscape. Since the Dawkins reforms, the government has progressively increased the proportion of research funds allocated competitively through the ARC, with Australia

77 Ehud Shapiro, 'Correcting the Bias against Interdisciplinary Research', *eLife* 3, no. 1 (2014): 1–3, doi.org/10.7554/eLife.02576; Collyer et al., *Knowledge and Global Power*.
78 Collyer et al., *Knowledge and Global Power*; Connell, *Southern Theory*.
79 Connell, *The Good University*; Connell, *Southern Theory*.

also faced with comparatively lower levels of philanthropic or industry funding compared to other OECD nations.[80] As funding directly increases the research budget and influences ERA assessments, as well as the success of future funding applications, universities take the ARC very seriously when designing hiring, promotion or incentive procedures.

The ARC makes a concerted effort to encourage interdisciplinary knowledge. Funding was important for sustaining economic history projects during the period of resistance (see Chapter 5), and has enabled broader interdisciplinary engagement more recently, including work on environmental histories of water, convicts and anthropometric history, histories of multinationals and histories of capitalism. The application process appears to support projects that span the interdisciplinary space, and there is the opportunity to list multiple relevant FoR codes. Contrasting with ERA, applicants are able to contextualise their research outputs relative to the norms of the disciplines they work in. Innovation and national benefit are major criteria for assessment, and the practical, flexible and innovative insights of interdisciplinary knowledge are ostensibly taken seriously. This has been beneficial for interdisciplinary scholars, as universities have tried to increase their funding success through various internal seeding schemes. University research fellowships are common at the early career stage, and aim to support those who would be good candidates for future ARC funding. These fellowships are assessed in a similar way to the ARC, which provides space for interdisciplinary scholars to penetrate normally siloed hiring processes. Many universities also now distribute seed funding for interdisciplinary projects, under the expectation that ARC applications will follow.[81]

Nevertheless, some of the ARC's assessment criteria reinforces disciplines. Internationally, the success rate for interdisciplinary applications to similar research funding agencies is lower than for single-discipline applications.[82] In Australia, similar patterns have been reported, with lower success for applications that involve diverse knowledge.[83] Journal rankings, citation rates and ERA scores are still important for evaluating

80 The ARC was established in 1988. University medical research is funded separately through the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC).

81 For example, the University of Wollongong has a very active 'Global Challenges' program that funds projects with collaborators from three of the five faculties.

82 Shapiro, 'Interdisciplinary Research'.

83 Lindell Bromham, Russell Dinnage and Xia Hua, 'Interdisciplinary Research Has Consistently Lower Funding Success', *Nature* 534, no. 7609 (2016): 684–87, doi.org/10.1038/nature18315.

the candidate and the research environment. Interdisciplinary research is not captured directly in FoR codes, and so applicants essentially divide their project into its various disciplinary components. For example, in an economic history application, scholars decide whether to pitch the project to a humanities or social sciences audience. If it goes to the humanities panel, most of the assessors will be historians, and if goes to social sciences most of the assessors will be economists. The research will be up against those within that discipline, and although the panel will be cognisant of relative research context, naturally a panel of humanities assessors will view the approach very differently to their colleagues in social sciences. Rather than evaluated holistically, interdisciplinary applications are still valued based on disciplinary markers of success. Deborah Oxley has acknowledged the strategy necessary to make an interdisciplinary ARC application work, commenting that 'it's very hard to satisfy [assessors], if you are genuinely interdisciplinary', and that the same project, with the same national benefit, will perform very differently based on the panel.[84]

## Conclusions

Despite a revival of interest in economic history in recent years, the field faces substantial uncertainties. In very welcome developments, new research has increased the scope for collaboration, teaching and impactful research. However, conservatism from the 'establishment', particularly through the maintenance of an orthodox, economics perspective, has led some to bypass the field's professional structures in favour of their own intellectual movements. Fragmentation of scholars' efforts has been combined with significant challenges with regards to the higher education environment, particularly the escalation of neoliberal policies that have disincentivised interdisciplinary research. This assessment of the field's recent position highlights the distinctive progress of interdisciplinary fields within universities – particularly the need to redesign policies – and the challenges associated with maintaining the field's identity while also negotiating relationships with parent disciplines.

84 Oxley/Meredith interview.

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