

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Central Lancashire		
Unit of Assessment: 25 Area Studies		
Title of case study: <u><i>Cultural artefacts as cultural ambassadors: working with Taiwanese Indigenous groups and museums to share, preserve and enhance cultural identity</i></u>		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014-present		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Niki Alsford	Professor in Asia Pacific Studies, Head of Asia Pacific Institutes.	September 2016 - Present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016 – December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>This impact case study addresses the UN Sustainable Development Goals 4 Quality Education and 10 Reduced Inequalities. Alsford's innovative research uses engaged curatorial practices to collect and reinterpret indigenous Taiwanese cultural artefacts held in British collections. These artefacts have been presented to global audiences as part of a process that has increased political recognition for marginalized indigenous groups and influenced heritage policy and educational curricula. Alsford's research utilizes British collections to contribute to a Taiwan-centric development of identity within Taiwan and has prompted ongoing collaboration between organisations such as the British Museum (BM), the Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines (SMFA), and the National Museum of Taiwan History (NMTH) on three exhibitions since 2016.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Alsford's research examines the connections between Taiwan and the United Kingdom in the late 19th and early 20th centuries via objects and archives that relate to the indigenous communities on Taiwan. Alsford's research contextualizes and interprets these unique collections held in the UK by the BM and the University of London and has led to two books about these historic collections of indigenous Taiwanese objects [1, 2].</p> <p>The research for [1] involved analysing over 350 disparate Taiwanese artefacts preserved in the BM, objects which are very diverse, including items of clothing, baskets and ear ornaments. They were collected over 130 years by more than 15 individuals and organisations. By bringing together all these items and studying them as a single collection, they have gained a collective significance, contributing to the existing knowledge of indigenous lives and cultures in Taiwan [3, 4]. Working with Chia-yu Hu, Professor of Anthropology at National Taiwan University, Alsford brought these collections together and documented them, studying how and where they were collected and how the artefacts were originally used. They are significant both in the story they tell about the British in Taiwan and also as evidence of indigenous lives and cultures.</p> <p>Alsford's contribution to [2] involved the publication of the Presbyterian Church of England archives, the archives of Christian Aid, and the John Swire & Sons archive which are all held at the library of the School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS). This is the first time that these collections have been published together. As part of the project, Alsford assisted in updating SOAS's archival cataloguing to include entries that reference Taiwan's indigenous peoples. The updated catalogue and the publication of these works has enabled the study of these archives and collections to be accessed by international scholars, particularly from Taiwan.</p> <p>In 2018, Alsford founded the University of Central Lancashire's Centre for Austronesian Studies (COAST) to facilitate research exchange among Austronesian-language nations, including</p>		

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Taiwan, Southeast Asia, Oceania and Madagascar. COAST expands Alsford's research commitment to Taiwan in key areas. Firstly, in assisting unrecognised indigenous Taiwanese groups in gaining indigenous recognition from the government of Taiwan, specifically the Sirayan nation. Secondly, in informing the public on the historical importance of Taiwan's indigenous communities and in recognising the legacy of being part of the origin of the wider Austronesian migration. Alsford's research has informed the policies and practices of Taiwanese organizations such as the Council of Indigenous Peoples (CIP).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. N. J. P. Alsford & Hu, Chia-yu (2018), *Local Aesthetics with Foreign Perceptions: The Formosan Collection Housed at the British Museum* 他者視角下的地方美感』 – 大英博物館臺灣藏品圖錄出版與倫敦展示計畫草案 (National Taiwan University Press, Taiwan). ISBN 9789863502869
2. N. J. P. Alsford (2017), *Buried Treasures: Taiwan Indigenous Peoples' Archives Held at the School of Oriental & African Studies, the University of London*. (Council of Indigenous Peoples, Taipei). ISBN 9789860530919
3. N. J. P. Alsford (2017), *Transitions to Modernity in Taiwan: The spirit of 1895 and the cession of Formosa to Japan*. Routledge Research on Taiwan Series. (Routledge, London). ISBN 978-1-138-24207-4
4. N. J. P. Alsford & B. Fuehrer (2017), Carstairs Douglas (1830-1877) and his Chinese English Dictionary of the Vernacular or Spoken Language of Amoy (1873), *Journal of Translation Studies*, 1 (1). Pp. 137-182.

* All references presented above are peer-reviewed.
All outputs can be supplied by the HEI on request

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Influencing museums' curation and collaboration in the UK and Taiwan

In 2014, Alsford began a series of exhibitions entitled 'Local Aesthetics with Foreign Perceptions'. This was developed further in 2016 following his appointment at the University of Central Lancashire. This has involved the collaboration of the University of Central Lancashire, the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), the British Museum (BM), the Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines (SMFA), the Council of Indigenous People (CIP), National Museum of Taiwan History (NMTH), the Research Center for Digital Humanities at National Taiwan University, the Taiwan's Ministry of Culture/Education/Foreign Affairs, and Gawthorpe Hall in Burnley, UK.

The collaboration with museum and curatorial professionals in Taiwan and the UK has resulted in a positive enhancement to cultural heritage preservation. This collaboration has also significantly changed how the artefacts are interpreted [1, 2] [A1, A2]. Professor Hsiang Jieh, Center for Digital Humanities, National Taiwan University states: **"The willingness of Taiwan's indigenous peoples to engage with this collaboration is testament to the impact [Alsford's] work has had on these communities. Joint projects and shared workshops demonstrate a clear and enduring connectivity."** [A1] In addition to this, Joanne Ichimura, Special Collections Archivist, SOAS Library, UK states: **"the utilisation of data produced as a result of the project have added significantly and meaningfully to the catalogue entries for this subject area and have provided researchers with enhanced access points into this important historical material."** [A3]

Alsford's engagement with the marginalised indigenous peoples of Taiwan and his ability to foster a broad public understanding of the significance of cultural preservation strategies has helped shape public understanding and increased cultural enrichment and awareness. Eric Yu, Director of Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines, Taipei, Taiwan states that Alsford: **"has been instrumental in identifying and documenting indigenous collections [and these]**

collections have informed public discussion on how overseas archives foster not only global connections, but also [assist in] the conservation of indigenous heritage” [A2].

More recently, the exhibitions *The Beauty of Ceremonies 2017*, *The Beauty of Indigenous Power 2018* and *Woven Austronesia 2019*, were held at the University of Central Lancashire. The first at the Hanover Gallery and the second and third at the PR1 Gallery. Devised and curated by Alsford, these exhibitions were based on his original research [E1, E2 & F]. They involved the displaying, archiving, and recording of Taiwan indigenous and Pacific island peoples’ collections [C1– C5]. The public popularity among Pacific nation peoples and the enthusiastic response by both the BM and the NMTH to exhibit this collection is testament [A1, A2, B1] to the response and the reception given to Alsford’s research [A, B, C, D, E].

Alsford’s engaged curatorial practice has laid the necessary foundation work for the collaborative exhibition (to be held at the NMTH) that will display the Taiwan indigenous peoples’ archives that are held at the BM, being planned for the Autumn of 2023 [C1–C5, D1–D3]. As the NMTH states: **“One of the most important reasons to have the exhibition is to bring these traditions and original objects back to their source communities, so as to help revive indigenous cultures and reconstruct local identities.”** [B] The opportunity for the collection to return to Taiwan for the first time since the artefacts left, has been made possible by the underpinning work that was carried out by Alsford since 2016 [A1, B]. The National Museum of Taiwan History approached Alsford in 2018 to bring him in as the key historical consultant to the exhibition [B]. As a consequence of this consultancy Alsford has curated exhibitions in collaboration with project partners. This has generated new ways of thinking about Taiwan indigenous collections held in the UK by exploring the role of the collector/donor and the stories behind the initial gift exchange. One example of this can be seen in the 2019 *Woven Austronesia* exhibition, which has provided a wider understanding of local tradition and enhanced cultural preservation and the creative industries within Taiwan [A.1, A.2]. As such, the NMTH established a bilateral partnership with the University of Central Lancashire in 2019 to enable Alsford to share his expertise and develop the capacity for long-term planning and exchange. This also enabled the museum to fulfil a major museum requirement of promoting Taiwan indigenous research in the UK [A.2].

The work that Alsford has conducted has informed the chosen exhibited collection of indigenous objects for the 2023 exhibition. As a result of this, these objects have now been digitised at the Research Centre for Digital Humanities, National Taiwan University. This digitisation has provided a platform for objects to be displayed outside of the museums where they are held. Not only does this enable the objects to be more accessible to audiences but without the digitisation project there would be little knowledge of the object’s existence. This was made particularly clear by the Centre for Digital Humanities Director, Prof Jieh Hsiang, who states that Alsford’s research **“fostered global interconnections to objects and indigenous peoples by emphasising how the objects were obtained and the manner to which the cultures of origins have been interpreted”** [A1] “[A1]. What is more, the Director of the SMFA, Prof Eric Yu, wrote: **“As the museum serves as Taiwan indigenous cultures gateway to the world, Alsford makes an irreplaceable contribution to the achievement of our mission in Europe.”** [A2]

This process has been a two-way interaction and has been picked up by the media, sharing Alsford’s research with a wider audience [D1, D2, D3]. Alsford’s research is now the primary source for media agencies discussing the topic of Taiwan indigenous culture [D1, D2, D3]. This was particularly notable in an interview given on the indigenous collections held in the Presbyterian Church of England collections by the *Liberty Times* (*ziyou shibao*自由時報) [D3].

Influencing the Taiwan government and other agencies on heritage policy

Prof. Hsiang Jieh, Center for Digital Humanities, National Taiwan University states that Alsford’s research has: **“informed decisions made in Taiwan concerning government policy”** [A1] In September 2016, Dr David Liu from the David Landsborough Memorial Museum in Taiwan

began an extended visit to digitise the collection that Alsford uncovered. This was a significant investment in the long-term preservation of the material and will enable its wider accessibility to scholars and indigenous activists. Between 24-25 September 2020, Alsford was invited to be the keynote speaker in a conference on British Protestant Missionaries to Formosa to disseminate his knowledge of the collections to an informed audience of academics, government representatives, religious groups and NGO practitioners.

Alsford's role has been critical in establishing successful multilateral museum and library partnerships that have enabled the sharing of expertise and the capacity for long-term planning and exchange of artefacts. Alsford continues his consultant work with the different organisations for the planned 2023 exhibition of material from the BM and the project to digitise the full collections held in the UK. All national museum's in Taiwan are government agencies and Alsford's invitation to join the exhibition committee provides a pathway for informing policy makers on the importance of heritage preservation. The NMTH is a major tool for the Taiwan government to inform history and language education in Taiwan, particularly enhancing local school curricula. This has been achieved through revisions to the curriculum and reinforced via school visits to the museum. Alsford has worked closely with the museum as an external advisor to enable the **“material culture [to come] back to their source communities [since] many of the patterns and techniques used to manufacture these objects have been lost [...] One of the important reasons to have this exhibition is to bring these traditions and original objects back to their source communities, so as to help revive indigenous cultures and reconstruct local identities.”** [B]

Creating connections between Taiwan's indigenous peoples and the North West of England

Two exhibitions, The Beauty of Ceremony and The Beauty of Indigenous Power, at the University of Central Lancashire, in 2017 and 2018, have introduced Taiwanese indigenous groups to the North West of England for the first time. Four groups of primary school children from Preston visited the exhibition (50 students in 2017 and 18 students in 2018). It also brought in visitors from across the country and from Taiwan and South Korea. Members of the Taiwan Representative Office in London paid a visit to both exhibitions. One visitor to the exhibition stated that it **'changed the way I see indigenous people.'** [C5]. As part of the exhibition, photos and letters between British and Taiwanese local elementary and pre-schools were exchanged [C3]. One teacher from the University of Central Lancashire pre-school centre said that the exhibitions are a **“key part in [the school's] learning to see how art is shared all over the world”** [C3].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[A] Letters of Testimony

1. Letter from Prof. Hsiang Jieh, Center for Digital Humanities, National Taiwan University
2. Letter from Director Eric Yu, Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines, Taipei, Taiwan.
3. Letter from Joanne Ichimura, Special Collections Archivist, SOAS Library, UK.

[B] Exhibition Narrative Statement: National Museum of Taiwan History, Tainan, Taiwan

[C] Exhibition feedback from participants and visitors.

1. Feedback postcards from 2018 exhibition
2. Impact statement showing work between organisations and schools in the North West
3. Feedback from primary school
4. Impact statement on 2017 exhibition
5. Visitor book for 2017 exhibition

[D] Media.

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1. "Spreading the message" Taipei Times article on the Shung Ye Museum poster exhibition at an exhibit in London in 2015
2. "Project on Taiwan aborigines" Ohio State University reporting on the Shung Ye Museum poster exhibition at an exhibit in London in 2015
3. "Turning the pages on Taiwan's forgotten missionary past" Taipei Times article on Niki Alsford's research and resulting book on missionaries in Taiwan

[E] Exhibition posters.

1. Poster for the 2017 exhibition at UCLan: Singing of Formosan Aborigines
2. Poster for the 2018 exhibition at UCLan: The Beauty of Indigenous Power

[F] Competition winner Ms Hsu gives her talk at the opening night of the 2018 exhibition.