

<b>Institution:</b> University of Oxford		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 28 History		
<b>Title of case study:</b> <i>Ming: 50 Years that Changed China</i> (Exhibition at the British Museum, September 2014-January 2015)		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2007-2016		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>  Craig Clunas	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>  Professor of the History of Art	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>  2007-2018
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2014-2017		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Clunas' research had direct impact on the themes chosen for the major exhibition <i>Ming: 50 Years that Changed China</i> held at the British Museum (2014-15), and for its sponsorship by a major international company. Emphasizing the multi-cultural nature of China in the early Ming period, and bringing together a body of cultural material never before assembled (much of it from 10 major museums across China and never previously exhibited outside the People's Republic of China), this research-led exhibition increased public understanding of how China's history inflects perceptions of its place in the contemporary world. The emphasis on cosmopolitanism and diversity in Chinese history which characterises Clunas' research in turn underpinned the exhibition's impact on cultural life and civil society, through increased awareness of the historical dimension of China's engagement with the world.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Clunas' research on the art and material culture of Ming period China (1368-1644) challenges older stereotypes of a period in Chinese history characterised by the rejection of foreign contacts and engagements in the aftermath of the expulsion of the ruling Mongol elite of the preceding Yuan dynasty. His work is characterised by a high degree of integration between the evidence of textual sources and the evidence of visual and material culture: a subject on which he is internationally recognised, including in China, where his many books on the subject have been published in Chinese translation and are the object of considerable popular and scholarly discussion (<a href="https://book.douban.com/tag/柯律格">https://book.douban.com/tag/柯律格</a>). Prior to his career in HE, Clunas was for many years a curator of Chinese art at the V&amp;A Museum, and it was his contacts in and familiarity with curatorship, as well as contacts with Chinese museums, which led him to approach the British Museum in 2009 and suggest an exhibition on the recently discovered finds of Ming princely archaeology which were central to his 2013 monograph <i>Screen of Kings</i>. <b>[R1]</b> Responding to his initiative, the Museum programmed a major exhibition, supported by BP, which opened in September 2014. Clunas was Co-Investigator, with Jessica Harrison-Hall (PI) (Department of Asia, British Museum), in a GBP421,809 36-month AHRC grant entitled <i>Ming: Courts and Contacts 1400-1450</i>, the research for which underpinned the 2014 exhibition, also co-curated by Clunas and Harrison-Hall. The exhibition required a high degree of international exchange and partnership, working with 21 international lenders of artefacts, including 10 Chinese institutions. Clunas and Harrison-Hall were jointly responsible for the selection of all items for display, the establishment of themes for the exhibition, and for its interpretation both in terms of display strategies and in terms of accompanying text and audio description. Research led by Clunas for the exhibition also involved a team of senior international scholars who wrote the book accompanying the exhibition, with extensive contributions and editing by Clunas. <b>[R2]</b> The exhibition was accompanied by a major academic conference which brought together leading scholars on early Ming China. A volume of essays derived from the event was co-edited, introduced, and contributed to by Clunas <b>[R3]</b> and was the winner of the 2017 International Convention of Asia Scholars Book Prize Specialist Publication Accolade.</p>		

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

- R1.** [Authored Book, available on request] Craig Clunas, *Screen of Kings: Royal Art and Power in Ming China*, Reaktion Books (London, 2013), 248pp. ISBN 9781780231037 [Chinese translation: *Fan ping: Mingdai Zhongguo de huangjia yishu yu quanli* 藩屏: 明代中国的皇家艺术与权力, translated by Huang Shaojuan, Henan daxue chubanshe (Zhengzhou, 2016)].
- R2.** [Edited Book, available on request] Craig Clunas and Jessica Harrison-Hall (eds.), *Ming: 50 Years that Changed China*, British Museum Press (London, 2014), 312pp. ISBN 9780714124841. Clunas authored Chapter 1 ('A Second Founding: Ming China 1400-1450', pp. 19-43) and Chapter 4 ('Wen: The Arts of Peace', pp. 157-203)].
- R3.** [Edited Book, available on request] Craig Clunas, Jessica Harrison-Hall, and Luk Yu-ping (eds.), *Ming China: Courts and Contacts 1400-1450*, British Museum Research Publications 205 (London, 2016), 301pp. ISBN 9780861592050. Clunas authored 'Introduction' (pp. 1-8) and 'Precious Stones and Ming Culture, 1400-1450' (pp. 236-44)].

**Grant:** AHRC Research Grant AH/J005479/1 for 'Ming: Courts and Contacts 1400-1450', awarded to Craig Clunas (Co-I) and Jessica Lucy Harrison-Hall (PI). Lead Research Organisation: The British Museum. September 2012-November 2015, GBP421,809.

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)**Impact of research on themes chosen for major British Museum exhibition, and for sponsorship by major international company**

The former Keeper of the Department of Asia, British Museum confirmed that the sustained body of research by Clunas on the Ming period of China's history was 'crucial to the decision by the British Museum to mount an exhibition focussing on this era', and his role as co-curator was 'fundamental in shaping its contents and interpretation from the selection of objects to their interpretation through display, labelling, catalogue, and audioguide'. **[E1]** Through the identification and selection of many exhibits never before shown outside China, as well as through their thematic grouping and juxtaposition, his research into the culture of the period was conveyed to a large and diverse audience (120,396 visitors), over 25% of visits being made by visitors who claimed to have 'little or no knowledge of the subjects covered by the exhibition prior to their visit'. **[E2]** Visitors overwhelmingly responded positively to the exhibition, with 55% rating their visit as excellent, and a further 39% as good. **[E3]** The aim of enriching understanding through a wider range of visual and material culture, which has been central to Clunas' research, was grasped by visitors, with comments such as 'When you think of China and the Ming dynasty, you think of pots and vases. There's all this other amazing stuff' and 'when there's something which has come from China [and perhaps] this is the first time it has been [on display] in the West – that's great when it[']s all put together. I think that was one good thing compared to the Vikings – you felt like you were seeing some really quite special stuff'. **[E3.1]** This approach and the novelty of the items that the research was able to interpret through Clunas' research contacts helped to attract a major international company (BP) to sponsor the exhibit.

**Increase in public understanding of China and of how its history inflects perceptions of its place in the contemporary world**

The exhibition had a measurable effect on understanding and awareness of China's past. The positive responses gathered in the British Museum's Summative Report of the exhibition show that overall motivations for visiting the exhibition were mainly intellectual enrichment (a thirst for knowledge, manifested as a desire for increased understanding and learning), reported by 48% of respondents. **[E3]** The most frequent statements on outcomes for visitors, demonstrating impact on public discourse and public understanding of history, were 'I improved my own knowledge and understanding' (42%), and 'I gained a deeper insight into the subject' (23%), which indicates that expectations were met, and sometimes even exceeded. The Summative Report concludes, 'Perceptions were also changed, with visitors often expressing surprise at

how advanced and outward-facing Ming China was'. [E3] Individual visitor feedback from focus groups included such statements – directly aligned with the main research themes – as 'This was actually a multi-religious, global society'; 'Whatever I'd heard about that dynasty and China in general was how closed a society it was. So the main thing I took away was actually how open minded they were – sending those ships out to take part in trade'; 'It struck me that there were a lot of parallels with the modern day in terms of going out to the rest of the world to trade'. [E3] Over half of visitors (57%) were encouraged by the exhibition to learn more about China by visiting the Museum's permanent Chinese galleries. [E3]

#### **Impact on cultural life and civil society**

This exhibition had a significantly higher proportion of BAME visitors (30%) than is standard for a British Museum temporary exhibition, two-thirds of which was made up of visitors of Chinese ethnic origin. This is much higher than the majority of past comparable exhibitions, ethnicity data revealing that visits from those of Chinese ethnic origin generally make up 3% or less of the exhibition visitor profile. [E3] The exhibition's impact on cultural practices was particularly notable among the Chinese community in London, with 2,080 visits via Community Partnerships, involving thirteen Chinese community associations such as the Camden, Tower Hamlets, East London, Hackney, Haringey, Hounslow, and Islington Chinese Associations, the Chinese Mental Health Association, and the Chinese National Healthy Living Centre. Feedback from these events, and from the associated Camden Chinese Community Centre Young Volunteers Scheme, included the statement 'I strongly believe the skills we gained from the scheme will help us greatly'. [E4] Chinese visitors remarked that 'Even in China there's not so much for us to see'. [E5] With 7,150 adult participants in the Education and Learning Programme, and elective schools visits by 1,996 school-age students (a high figure considering the absence of Chinese history from the National Curriculum), supported by a free resource pack for teachers on the British Museum website, the exhibition influenced choices and practices in learning and understanding at a range of levels. The extensive family programme, which drew in 5,116 people (adults and children), was described by participants as 'simply energising' and 'Best bit of the day'. [E4] The exhibition was chosen by the AHRC as an example of good practice in research impact, described as 'an excellent example of collaboration between two Research Organisations and an International Company', and was highlighted as an example of international exchange and partnership in research, [E6] noticed by high levels of Chinese government [E7] and by Chancellor George Osborne in his speech to the first UK-China Bilateral Investment Conference. [E8]

The reach of these impacts was considerably expanded by extensive press and media coverage, with the exhibition being referenced more than 500 times in English and other European-language media. [E9] The *Financial Times* (2/8/14) noted the contemporary relevance, citing 'telling parallels to today's world', while the *Daily Telegraph* (16/9/14) noted 'Some of the most fascinating moments in the exhibition suggest the extent to which Ming culture absorbed foreign influences...this is an exemplary exhibition of the kind that the British Museum does so well...Each part has been organised with great care and intelligence, elucidating complex material without dumbing down.' The *Times* (16/9/14) noted the innovative nature of the research behind the exhibition, stating 'This is a show to smash clichés as surely as some apocryphal Ming vase...It breaks the porcelain vase that until now had contained that picture, and lets loose a great genie of history.' Chinese media reports with a total reach of 99,748,100 readers/viewers [E10] stressed the innovative nature of the exhibition (e.g. *Nanfang Dushibao*, 16/9/14), the importance of its explication of Chinese culture to a western audience (Zhongguo yishupinwang, 10/1/15), and the way it challenged previous understanding of the Ming (*Guangming Daily*, 6/10/14). [E9] Finally, the innovative nature of the exhibition's content ('many of the artefacts had never previously been shown outside China') and themes ('the curators of the exhibition stressed the cosmopolitan mood of this period of Chinese history') was acknowledged when it was shortlisted for the *Apollo* magazine Exhibition of the Year award. [E11]

The British Museum embedded research from the Ming exhibition in its new China and South Asia Gallery, which opened in December 2017. Clunas' research specifically contributed to the identification and labelling of exhibits, which are available to the public on an ongoing basis.

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

- E1.** Letter from Melvin R. Seiden Curator of Chinese Art, National Museum of Asian Art, Washington, DC (former Keeper of the Department of Asia, British Museum), 27.03.2020.
- E2.** '*Ming: 50 Years that Changed China*: Top-line issues paper', produced by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre for the British Museum's Board of Trustees, January 2015, containing visitor data.
- E3.** 'An outward looking empire: a summative report of *Ming: 50 Years that Changed China* at the British Museum', produced by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre for the British Museum, February 2015, containing visitor data. **E3.1** BP support to Exhibition *Ming: 50 Years that Changed China*, online article 08.01.2014
- E4.** 'Education and learning programmes', report produced by the British Museum, February 2015, containing feedback from initiatives organised with Chinese community organisations, along with details of various initiatives involving adults, schools, and families.
- E5.** Screenshots of video of visitor reactions to the exhibition (quote from 0'15"), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ebWVBYwIZqw>. Accessed: 20 January 2021.
- E6.** Screenshots of case study on AHRC website, showcasing the exhibition as an example of research impact, <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/research/casestudies/50-years-of-ming/>. Accessed: 20 January 2021.
- E7.** Screenshots of video about the exhibition on AHRC website, noting attention paid to the exhibition within the Chinese government (from 5'00"), <https://ahrc.ukri.org/research/readwatchlisten/filmsandpodcasts/ming-50-years-that-changed-china/>. Accessed: 20 January 2021.
- E8.** Text of speech by Chancellor George Osborne to the first UK-China Bilateral Investment Conference, 12 September 2014, mentioning the exhibition, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chancellors-speech-to-the-first-uk-china-bilateral-investment-conference>. Accessed: 20 January 2021.
- E9.** Extracts from 'Press coverage: The BP Exhibition – *Ming: 50 Years that Changed China*', document produced by the British Museum, February 2015 (full document available on request), including details of the following media reports:
  - a. *The Financial Times* (2/8/14) – full text of article also included
  - b. *The Times* (16/9/14) – full text of article also included
  - c. *The Daily Telegraph* (16/9/14) – full text of article also included
  - d. *Nanfang Dushibao* (16/9/14)
  - e. *Guangming Daily* (6/10/14)
  - f. Zhongguo yishupinwang (10/1/15) – full text of online article also included (in Chinese/simplified)
- E10.** Email from Curator of Chinese Ceramics, British Museum, noting the number of readers/viewers reached by Chinese media reports on the exhibition (13/1/21)
- E11.** Screenshots of *Apollo* magazine shortlist for Exhibition of the Year, 22 November 2014, showing the exhibition shortlisted, <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/apollo-awards-2014-exhibition-year/>. Accessed: 20 January 2021.