

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Glasgow (UofG)		
Unit of Assessment: 32 Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory		
Title of case study: Transforming curatorial practice through the creation of an authoritative, accessible and transparent provenance resource for the Smithsonian's Asian art collection		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2003–2016		
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:
Nicholas Pearce	Richmond Chair of Fine Art	1998–present
Yupin Chung	Research Associate; Honorary Senior Research Fellow	2006–2009; 2010–2013
Konstanze Knittler	Scholar	2006–2009
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014–2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Accessible, verifiable provenance data is important for the commercial art world, museum professionals and provenance researchers, who need to trace an artefact from its time and place of origin through subsequent ownership. UofG provenance research focusing on Chinese art has underpinned key initiatives at the Smithsonian's Freer-Sackler Galleries, and led to the creation of a unique online provenance database, publicly available worldwide. Holding one of the world's most important Asian art collections, and the USA's only national collection, the Freer-Sackler's advances in provenance transparency are internationally influential. As a result, other provenance professionals and organisations are using the database as a 'go to' resource, and the model is already inspiring the creation of further such databases.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>A body of work emerging from three Asian art provenance projects underpins the impact.</p> <p>The first project (2004–2005) led by Nick Pearce, tested the feasibility of provenance research in the area of Chinese art. Using the Chinese collection in the Burrell Collection, amassed between 1911–1956, Pearce uncovered dealer archives and other unpublished and published sources to build an unbroken chain of previous collectors, in some cases back to China. The database of research was published on the Chinese Art Research into Provenance (CARP website) [3.1] – the first publicly available provenance resource for Chinese art. This output also includes a range of essays about dealers and collectors and was the first to establish a methodology in Chinese art provenance. This methodology is outlined and illustrated with a range of case studies from the website in [3.2].</p> <p>The second project, again led by Pearce, was <i>Chinese Art at the Lady Lever Art Gallery</i> (2006–2009), cataloguing over 1,000 ceramics, enamels, jades and reverse paintings on glass held at this gallery in Liverpool. The research used the LLAG archives to chart biographical information and trace individual works back through auction-house and dealers' records and produce a newly comprehensive picture of their provenance. [3.3].</p> <p>The expertise developed in this work informed research for the Freer-Sackler Galleries <i>Asian Art Provenance</i> Project, part of the Smithsonian Provenance Research Initiative (SPRI), undertaken 2014–2016 when Pearce was awarded a Provenance Research Fellowship. Pearce refined and applied the CARP methodology and its format for biographical data and provenance entries, and the data is presented in a fully searchable database connected to the Freer-Sackler collections</p>		

online. Additional information which further assists in recreating the chain of object ownership includes known connections to other dealers, collectors, and the art market. A bibliography and the location of archival records are also provided, along with images including dealer and collector marks. This online resource is linked to other Smithsonian archives, including the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art (AAA), and it contains information on collectors, dealers, auctions and exhibitions applicable to other institutions and individuals internationally, making this a powerful search engine for provenance research.

The research began with 51 [biographies](#) of individuals associated with the FS collections (90% of which were researched and written by Pearce), objects they owned, and information about major exhibitions of Asian art during the 20th century with an emphasis on the period 1933–1945. The database continues to be expanded through research collaborations and Pearce's subsequent appointment as a Smithsonian Research Associate. Additional provenance research data has also been created, including 2,559 object records; an additional 323 'People' records with related geographical and biographical data, and 188 event records. This unprecedented level of collection knowledge has been made possible by Pearce's approach of focusing on the interconnections of relationships, developed through these successive projects.

The approach and findings of this body of work, and their influence on the wider academic field are presented in output [3.4]. This 180,000-word book includes 40 internationally recognised authors representing a range of disciplines and cultural perspectives. The editors' *Introduction* covers the background, including the collaborative relationship in provenance research between the Smithsonian and UofG. Contributors include colleagues from the universities of Glasgow, Harvard, California at Berkeley, Paris-Sorbonne, Illinois and London and museum/research institute colleagues from the Smithsonian, Metropolitan Museum, Frick Collection, British Museum, Belvedere (Vienna), Carnegie Museum of Art, Getty Villa, National Gallery of Australia, Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte in Munich and the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.

3. References to the research

- 3.1 Chinese Art Research into Provenance (CARP) online database first published in 2005: <https://carp.arts.gla.ac.uk/>.
- 3.2 Nick Pearce, 'CARP-ON: Further Thoughts on Chinese Art Provenance Research', *Collectors, Collections and Collecting the Arts of China: Histories and Challenges*, (ed. Jason Steuber and Guolong Lai) (2014). University of Florida Press/Harn Museum of Art, pp.295–312. ISBN 9780813049144 [available on request from HEI]
- 3.3 Nick Pearce, Yupin Chung and Konstanze Knittler. *Essays in the Chinese Art at the Lady Lever Art Gallery Catalogue* <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ladylever/collections/chinese/> [not currently available online but will be supplied by the HEI]
- 3.4 Nick Pearce and Jane Milosch (eds), *Collecting and Provenance: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (2019). Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD. ISBN 9781538127568. [available on request from HEI]

Quality: The research was funded by the AHRB (CARP), the Leverhulme Trust (Chinese Art at the Lady Lever Art Gallery) and the David Berg foundation and Smithsonian Institution (Smithsonian). The findings and methodology have influenced the provenance research of others in the field and the body of work is expected to meet or exceed the 2* threshold.

4. Details of the impact

The Smithsonian is the world's largest museum and research complex, and it has an ongoing commitment to undertake provenance research across the full range of collections in its 19 museums, 21 libraries and 9 research institutes. The Freer and Sackler (FS) Galleries hold one of the world's most significant Asian art collections, and their research collaboration with Pearce, described above, led to the launch of a publicly available [web resource](#). The Smithsonian's then Director of Provenance Research [5.1] explained that: *'Professor Pearce's deep knowledge of the history of collecting and Chinese art has been invaluable to the recently-launched Asian Art Provenance Project at the Freer|Sackler Galleries. His CARP project informed the methodology of the F|S [since rebranded to Freer and Sackler] project, and is leading the way to advances in digital technology for provenance research'*.

Allowing professionals in the art world to trace artefact provenance

The resource assists provenance researchers, museums, legal and commercial entities, and members of the public to recognise patterns in the history of Asian art collecting, establish ownership transfer, and help determine the whereabouts of specific Asian art objects. Many of the users are non-academic professionals who need to carry out research into the provenance of artefacts. For example, a Senior Research Fellow at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London [5.2], who teaches students that include *'curators, collectors and members of the art trade'*, commented: *'In my teaching at SOAS [school of Oriental and African Studies] and at the V&A, and in my research for the exhibition A Century of the Oriental Ceramic Society, to be presented October–December 2021 at the Brunei Gallery, [Pearce's] painstaking and well presented research files have revolutionised my and the students' ability to review, compare and synthesise collections ...[it has] become a 'go-to' when undertaking provenance and collecting history research'*.

The Provenance Specialist at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, USA [5.3], stated *'this vital resource is one of the first references a provenance researcher consults when looking for data about a constituent'*, adding *'I know of no other resource that brings together this type of information on the Asian art market in a single location'*. The Specialist further noted that the *'centralization of information saves researchers time and contributes to a better understanding of how collectors and dealers are related within the broader art market of a particular period'*.

Another category of users of the resource has been from the multibillion-dollar [commercial sector](#) for Chinese art and antiques. Bonhams' Deputy Chairman described it as an *'excellent initiative'* adding that *'professionals and collectors acting at the top end of the market for Chinese Art are increasingly preoccupied with establishing a transparent and documented provenance trail ... I am very confident that all reputable dealers in Chinese art, auctioneers, collectors and academics with a relevant specialist interest will find a data base of this kind to be an essential source'*. [5.4]. Another international dealer in Chinese art [5.5] commented that: *'As an authoritative resource, freely available, [the site] is an invaluable source of knowledge for those of us in the business of art (as international dealers and auctioneers), as it helps transform our understanding of objects that have passed and continue to pass through the market-place in terms of their authenticity, their previous owners and cycles of taste and fashion. As such, it provides us with an invaluable tool in our business'*.

However, in addition to this direct use, the research-underpinned resource is serving as a model for further development of online provenance research resources. As the V&A's Senior Research Fellow [5.2] noted, *'the Smithsonian has created a considered, measured example of how to document and connect verifiable objects and related archival data'*. A Berlin museum-

based art historian commented that, by linking biographical information on collectors and dealers with objects and museum records, *'Nick Pearce and the team have created a ground-breaking layout that supports every provenance researcher in the field substantially in their daily work. I very much hope that the model will be expanded both nationally and internationally'* [5.6]. So far, there have been 15 expressions of interest from museums, and a great deal of network activity to advance this goal.

Establishing a network of provenance researchers and sharing the research methods

The Asian Art Provenance Project and Pearce's Chinese art provenance research is increasing international awareness of effective provenance methodologies, through collaboration and information exchange, in a field that has grown in significance over the last few decades and where transaction, title and their transparency are important for both the commercial and museum sectors. Pearce's research has reached the wider community of provenance researchers, curators and archivists in the US and Germany through the Provenance Research Exchange Program (PREP), a major forum funded by a Federal German grant. Pearce's involvement has included co-organising PREP's 2019 meetings in Dresden, Germany and in Washington, DC [5.7]. He co-organised a Symposium on East Asian Art Provenance Research at the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin including colleagues at the Technische Universität, marking the beginning of a network of professionals in the field. This was attended by over 100 mostly non-academic colleagues from Germany, the UK, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the USA. Further engagement with the Getty Institute planned for April 2020 to teach them how to use the principles of Pearce's research had to be cancelled due to Covid-19, and rescheduled for Autumn 2021.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Testimonial letter, Director of the Smithsonian Provenance Research Initiative [PDF], corroborating the importance of the CARP project and Pearce's expertise to the methodology used by the Freer Sackler's own provenance initiatives, and the impact of his work in establishing a major institutional partnership between the Smithsonian and UofG.
- 5.2 Testimonial letter, Senior Research Fellow, Victoria and Albert Museum, London [PDF], corroborating the impact of Pearce's provenance work at the Smithsonian on their teaching and research at the V&A as well as on an exhibition they designed, and the importance of this work as a model for museums to make provenance research available for the public.
- 5.3 Testimonial letter, Provenance Specialist, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art [PDF], commenting on the impact of the Freer Sackler provenance work, especially the biographies element, for their research into the provenance of their museum's holdings.
- 5.4 Testimonial letter, Deputy Chairman, Bonhams [PDF], also an expert in provenance, on the value of the Smithsonian provenance resource for the commercial market in Chinese art.
- 5.5 International dealer in Chinese art, Bond Street, London [PDF], corroborating the value and utility of the resource as an 'invaluable tool' for art dealers.
- 5.6 Testimonial letter, Provenance Researcher at the State Museums Berlin / Asian Art Market Specialist Technische Universität Berlin [PDF], commenting on the value of the Smithsonian resource for all researchers of provenance, in particular because of the unique combination of biographical information with specific objects and museum records.
- 5.7 Programme of Workshops 2019, including keynote lecture by Pearce [PDF], exemplifying Pearce's international influence [<https://www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de/newsroom/mediathek/dokumente/dokument-detail/article/2020/04/1/media-prep-deutsch-amerikanisches-austauschprogramm-zur-provenienzforschung-fuer-museen-2017-2019.html>]