

<b>Institution:</b> University of Bristol
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 30 History
<b>Title of case study:</b> How the benefits of groundbreaking research into a huge archive in China have extended beyond academia to policymakers and the public
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Research led by Professor Robert Bickers into the massive archive of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service (CMCS) has been of value to scholars working in several fields – including climate change – but it has also had a variety of wider impacts. Members of the general public with an interest in China, teachers looking for fresh resources, UK policymakers seeking to understand the legacy of the British record in China – all these have drawn on the Bristol research. In some cases they have, in turn, contributed to it. This is an example of high quality research, active dissemination and imaginative engagement coming together and having a positive effect on a range of interests from genealogy to international diplomacy. The work was also developed and interacted with a 2006-2014 Language Based Area Studies Scheme's British Inter-university China Centre [BICC], which focused on engagement and knowledge exchange.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The CMCS was a Chinese state agency, the running of which was outsourced to foreign nationals (1854-1950). For much of this period, it was the largest single source of Chinese state revenue. It mapped, lit and policed the Chinese coast, built arsenals and colleges, and acted at times in a quasi-diplomatic role. As the key body mediating the Sino-foreign encounter after 1854, it has long been accorded a central place in the literature on modern Sino-foreign relations and on Chinese state-building. In 2000, the 60,000 files of the CMCS's central archives held in China were reopened. This provided an opportunity to extend significantly the range and depth of CMCS studies. Just as importantly, an immense mass of data about a very wide range of issues in modern Chinese history became available. This included information on trade, warfare, revenue, costs of living, local history and environmental history.</p> <p>Bickers has been a Lecturer (1997), Senior Lecturer (2001) and Professor of History (2005-) at Bristol University while undertaking this research and explored the history of CMCS in his book, <i>Britain in China: Community, Culture and Colonialism</i> (1999). The research that is the subject of this case study grew out of that interest. A collaborative AHRC-funded project in 2003-7, led by Bickers, pioneered new research in this archive.[1] The project developed a range of new tools (catalogue, datasets) and resources (website), funded and mentored one PGR student at Bristol (Ladds) and two postdocs (Chung and Tsai at Bristol); and has directly generated a score of articles/book chapters to date (six by Bickers [3][4][5]) and four books (including Bickers, <i>The Scramble for China</i> [6] (2011)), and an exhibition catalogue [7] with at least four more contracted. Iterations of the work have subsequently secured additional research funding from AHRC (Bickers, 2008-9 AHRC research leave award, 'Treaty port China and its legacies, 1842-1999'[2]), British Academy (Bickers, 2007-12 Academy Research Projects scheme award for 'An Archive for China', renewed until 2016), JISC and others (see below); Bickers, Chang &amp; Fan (2013, Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation). In the period 2003-5, the AHRC award was a formal collaboration with Hans van de Ven (Cambridge), but all the activity outlined in this case study was directed by Bickers.</p> <p>The original project's main achievement was to demonstrate the richness of the archive for scholars working on modern Chinese history. The project pioneered the collation of new quantitative data from the archive, and worked with external scholars who were interested in locating more. It involved co-operation with people working on maritime history, literary studies, architecture history, history of medicine, history of science, economic history and history of the Chinese diaspora (Cuban migration, for example).</p> <p>Academic debates on modern China and its pre-1949 foreign relations have been turning back to a close study of its internationalised history. From the late 1970s onwards, there was a rush to a 'China-centred history' which turned its back on models of China's modern evolution predicated on its interaction with 'the West'. This proved unsustainable intellectually because, while rightly trying</p>

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to focus on Chinese agency, it often ignored processes of Chinese appropriation and adaptation of foreign models, goods and ideas. Foreigners were written out of Chinese history. At the same time as academics have begun to put 'the West' 'back in', a re-globalising China in the era of World Trade Organization accession has been re-appropriating its pre-1949 internationalised past. This project showed how the CMCS was clearly at the heart of this internationalised past.

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

- [1] 2003 AHRB Research Grant (£298,399), 'The history of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service', 2003-07. Bickers, PI. (H. van de Ven, Cambridge, CI 2003-5). Two studentships (one at Cambridge), PDRA, research expenses. Related 2006 'Dissemination award' (£10,500).
- [2] 2008 AHRC Research Leave Grant, 'Treaty Port China and its Legacies' (£34.7k). Graded A+; final report graded 'Outstanding'.
- [3] Article, and journal special section: Robert Bickers, 'The Chinese Maritime Customs at War, 1941-45', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36:2 (2008), pp. 295-311. DOI: [10.1080/03086530802180643](https://doi.org/10.1080/03086530802180643) Also in this issue: 'Revisiting the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854-1950', pp. 221-226. Introduction to a special section, edited by Bickers. DOI: [10.1080/03086530802180676](https://doi.org/10.1080/03086530802180676)
- [4] Chapter in book: Robert Bickers, 'Anglo-Japanese Relations in China: the case of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1899-1941' in Antony Best (ed.), *The International History of East Asia, 1900-1968: Ideology, Trade and the Quest for Order* (Routledge: 2010), pp. 35-56 Can be supplied upon request.
- [5] Chapter in book: "“Good work for China in every possible direction”: the Foreign Inspectorate of the Chinese Maritime Customs, 1854-1950", in Bryna Goodman and David Goodman (eds), *Twentieth Century Colonialism and China: Localities, the Everyday, and the World* (Routledge 2012), pp. 25-36. Can be supplied upon request.
- [6] Monograph: *The Scramble for China: Foreign devils in the Qing empire, 1832-1914* (Allen Lane, Penguin Press, 2011), pp. xv, 496. ISBN: 9780713997491 Listed in REF2.
- [7] Book: *Picturing China 1870-1950: Photographs from British Collections* (Bristol: Chinese Maritime Customs Project Occasional Papers, 2007), pp.i-ix, 52. Co-authored volume, with Catherine Ladds, Jamie Carstairs, Yee Wah Foo. Bickers co-ordinated this, and composed three short essays 'Picturing China' pp. 1-4, and 'Recording the Infrastructure of the treaty port world: The Photographs of G. Warren Swire', pp. 9-10, 'A Sentimental Policeman: William Armstrong', pp. 11-12. Can be supplied upon request.

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

There were four key strands to the activity and impact arising from this bedrock research.

**Strand 1, 2002-present.** This strand generated significant new, open-access, online resources for family history researchers. As well as digitizing and posting online data secured from the archive, the project located, digitized and disseminated related materials through its site, including 22,000 staff records from Customs files. The project also involved setting up an email facility through which to respond to genealogical and research queries. This facility has garnered some 400 family and other contacts and exchanges to date, and has also led to transfers of significant private materials to institutional repositories.[a]

**Strand 2, 2006-present.** The researchers interacted with a range of contacts to build up a significant online digital resource of 'Historic photographs of China' (HPC). These images, which were held by families or institutions, support teaching and learning, genealogical research, academic research and simple popular interest. There are 9,803 uploaded images; 8,572 are currently live; and over 30,000 images have been digitised in total to date. Users contacting the project state that they are using them for private family research; for scholarship across disciplines (including scientific research – eg photographs which evidence changing river-levels); because they wish to exhibit some of the pictures in museums (eg Changsha & Wuhan Municipal Museums) or on websites (eg a site illustrating the built heritage of the Russian Orthodox Church in China); for local heritage research (eg in Ningbo city [b]); and for commercial purposes in publications, including books, academic and popular journals, including the 26,000-circulation *International Institute of Asian Studies Newsletter* [c], and *Deutsch-Chinesische Zeitung* (a German newspaper about China).

This resource, accorded British Academy Research Project status in 2006 (renewed 2011), has

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been the exclusive subject (in this review period) of four different exhibitions at seven sites in three cities across the UK: Bath (Jan-Apr 2008: 1,700 visitors); Durham (Apr-Aug 2008: 7,096 visitors); Bristol (Jan-Feb 2009: 2,700 visitors), and 2 in China (2013: see **Strand 3**). There have also been exhibitions in Spain (Pamplona: Nov, 2009; Navarre: three sites, Feb-April 2011), and collaborations with the British Library on an exhibition at the National Library of China ('Western Eyes': Sept-Oct 2008), with Hong Kong Museum of History (two exhibitions – 'Modern Metropolis': Apr-Aug 2009; 'Centenary of China's 1911 Revolution': Mar-May 2011), and the Dr Sun Yat-sen Museum, Hong Kong, on 'Revolution Once More': Sept 2010-Mar 2011. The last of these was also shown in the Guangzhou Museum (Mar-Jun 2011) and the Jinan Museum (Oct 2011).

This strand has involved collaboration with the Institut d'Asie Orientale on developing the website, and with the Institute for Learning and Research Technology's Web Futures team on a JISC-funded project to create a new, cross-site search tool ('Visualising China'). The strand has also entailed dissemination through other media. For example, an article by Robert Bickers entitled 'China through a colonial lens' appeared in *History Today* magazine (October 2011); the online activity was featured by AHRC as a website case study as well as in its 2009 report 'Leading the World' [d], and in 2013 in its new online Image Gallery [e], and was also the subject of a *Weekly Telegraph* article (31 Aug-6 Sept 2011); and the project was the sole focus of a BBC Radio 4 documentary ('Old Photographs Fever', 11 July 2012, [f] also excerpted on 'Pick of the Week') which was complemented by a BBC News Magazine website article, 'The search for photos of China's historic past'. [g]

Between May 2012 and October 2013, the combined project websites HPC and 'Visualising China' received an average of 154 unique visits a day. The number of unique visitors was 63,385, with 102,762 total visitors. On average, 64.11% a month of these were new visitors. Between March 2010 and November 2011 HPC alone had already secured a further 39,813 unique visitors.

**Strand 3, 2006-present** The project engaged with a range of UK and foreign state contacts, including, for example, the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO), China's General Administration of Customs, the Danish Consulate-General in Shanghai (which was preparing a centennial review of Sino-Danish relations (2008)), the Norwegian Customs Museum, Trinity House, the Hong Kong Maritime Museum, the United States National Park Service, the US Defense Prisoner of War Missing Personnel Office (2010) the Eire Consulate General in Shanghai (about commemorating Sir Robert Hart (2012)), the Taiwan UK Representative Office (2013). More widely, the work has been used to attempt to bridge asymmetries in understanding of the impact and legacy of Britain's wider historic role in modern China. [h] This has been pursued through public talks in the UK, Hong Kong and China, including a talk to the FCO (December 2011); through involvement in a British Inter-University China Centre (BICC) seminar in June 2009 which enabled the FCO to consult with university academics on its 2010 China Policy document (*The UK and China: A Framework for Engagement*); and through popular journal articles (eg Robert Bickers, 'China's Age of Fragility', *History Today* (March 2011)) and other media. These have included Robert Bickers, 'Chinabound: Crossing borders in treaty port China', *History in Focus* 11 (Autumn 2006); BBC Radio 3, 'Nightwaves', February 2011 – a discussion about *The Scramble for China*; interviews on RTHK Hong Kong and Dublin City Radio; and a television series and film, 'The Bund' [外滩] (China Central Newsreel & Documentary Studio (中央新聞紀錄電影製片廠), 2010, for which Bickers was academic consultant and interviewee. In August, 2011 BICC organised a public event on 'China and Britain' with speakers from the FCO, as well as journalists and policy makers. In February 2013, a variety of stakeholders in current China-UK relations, and families with historic China links, were brought together in a public event to mark the restoration of the tombstone of Sir Robert Hart (1835-1911) and to mark his contribution to modern China, with a film about this initiative now in the late stage of development. [i] In Spring 2013 the FCO's Beijing embassy press team, and Chongqing Consulate General press team organised public exhibitions of HPC photographs in their respective cities. At Beijing (where the exhibit was opened by the Ambassador), audience reach was estimated by the Deputy Head of Communications at: visitors 22,000; social media campaigns reach: 1,635,402. The Ambassador stated that the resource provides: 'a unique visual record of the longstanding shared history between the UK and China. They are a reminder of the strength and depth of our relationship, one which is increasingly important to both countries as China continues its development'. The audience reach at Chongqing was: visitors 80,000; social media reach 200,000; articles in press with readership of 3 million+. The Chongqing Consulate General Head of Communications reported that the exhibition, and

opening reception and workshop “supports our public diplomacy objectives through demonstrating the strength and depth of UK-Chongqing bilateral relations, but also provides a platform for us to access to key contacts in humanities research and creative industry”, which also involved collaboration with the Dept of Business Innovation & Skill’s ‘Science and Innovation Network’, and the British Council in China. [j] In August 2013, building on these collaborations, Robert Bickers was appointed by BIS its China Science Focal Point for the Creative Economy.

**Strand 4, 2008-present** The project worked to facilitate access to the resource by other scholars, including historians from a range of sub-disciplines, but also scientists. There was interaction with a climate change scientist exploring historic tidal bore water levels in East China (2009), and the project also worked closely with the Met Office’s Hadley Centre’s ACRE (Atmospheric Circulation Reconstructions over the Earth) climate change research team to locate historic climate records generated by the Chinese Maritime Customs and provide a 10,000-word report on the history of its meteorological activity. This was published to the ACRE website and was funded by a 2008 AHRC Knowledge Catalyst Partnership award, and by ACRE. The AHRC chose this project as one of its Knowledge Transfer case studies [k]. Within the AHRC-funded 2012-14 second phase award of the British Inter-university China Centre, Bickers has co-ordinated new knowledge exchange placements which deploy this body of research and skills with Penguin Books China, John Swire & Sons Ltd and a new phase of collaboration with the Met Office.

The unifying element in all these strands was that by pioneering research into the archive in China, the team was able to bring its findings to a very wide range of users, engage with them and secure new materials and findings from them. It worked with the general public, libraries and archives, government agencies and the private sector, as well as with academics internationally from a wide range of disciplines. It aimed to provide detailed evidence about the extent and impact of the British record in China, and its contemporary salience and legacies. As a result, British diplomats are engaging with and deploying this research in China as part of their strategy for Sino-British relations.

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

- [a] Selection from extensive correspondence with users relating to strands 1-3.
- [b] *Ningbo wanbao* (Ningbo Evening News), 19 June 2012, p. A27, and correspondence with author, <http://daily.cnnb.com.cn/nbwb/page/50/2012-06-19/A27/11481340039211285.pdf>
- [c] ‘Picturing China’, Supplement to the *International Institute of Asian Studies Newsletter* No.46, (Winter 2008). Bickers was guest editor, and provided an essay, ‘Smiling through the 1920s: Two Private Collections of Chinese Photographs’, pp. 3-5. Available online at <https://www.bris.ac.uk/history/customs/photoarchive/iiasupplement.pdf>. Circulation: 26,000
- [d] AHRC, *Leading the World: the Economic Impact of UK arts and humanities research* (2009) (pp. 28, 31)
- [e] AHRC, Online Image Gallery, ‘Picturing China’ <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/News-and-Events/Image-Gallery/Pages/Picturing-China.aspx> (August 2013)
- [f] BBC Radio 4, ‘Old Photographs Fever: The search for photos of China’s pictured past’, 11 July 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01kkntb>.
- [g] BBC News Magazine, ‘The search for photos of China’s Past’, 11 July 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-18784990>
- [h] ‘FT praises new AHRC supported book on China’, AHRC press release, drawing on review by Lord Patten, of Bickers, *The Scramble for China*, in the *Financial Times*, 5 March 2011 <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/News-and-Events/News/Pages/FT-praises-new-AHRC-supported-book-on-China.aspx>
- [i] See Robert Bickers, ‘Remembering Sir Robert Hart’, <http://www.bicc.ac.uk/2013/03/01/remembering-sir-robert-hart/> (1 March 2013);
- [j] Public Diplomacy Reports: British Embassy, Beijing, March 2013; Chongqing Consulate General, July 2013. Impact can also be corroborated by Kate Alden.
- [k] AHRC, *Making a difference: Knowledge transfer in the Arts and Humanities* (2010) Set of case studies on cards. Impact can also be corroborated by Rob Allan.