

ARCS 2015 Conference Session Review

Shipping from and to China

Presenters:

Angie Morrow, Field Museum
Patrick LaQuaglia, Masterpiece International
Henry Tang, Huaxie

Review Submitted by: Jenny Wilson, Vancouver Art Gallery

Three presenters discussed shipping Chinese artworks from China to the US and back from the perspective of the US museum, US shipping agent and a Chinese shipping agent.

Angie Morrow discussed the logistics in organizing an exhibition from China and used the example of an exhibition that the Field Museum organized with artworks borrowed from the Palace Museum in Beijing. Key points included to allow a lot of time for planning and much communication along with realizing that things would be done very differently in China.

A site visit to the lender (Palace Museum) was critical for the loan process. While this can often be costly, it was worth it to for the lender and borrower teams to meet and so that expectations and timelines could be discussed. It was recommended to have an independent translator to help convey all the issues and not to just rely on the interpreters from China, both when working in China and at the hosting venue.

For this particular exhibition the loan packing and preparations were organized and orchestrated by the Field Museum team, thus they travelled to China to oversee the packing and the shipping. The crates and storage/ staging areas were assessed, packing materials determined during the site visit so that materials could be brought over. Photo documentation was critical for all condition reports and packing. The photos were the defining condition reports more so than written reports. The unexpected and unconventional were often the norm, such as crates stored outside, electricity outages, finding space to condition reports and packing etc.

The Field applied for government indemnification and it was granted even though not all the standards were the best practice. It took much time to explain all the nuances of packing and shipping from China where the facilities and materials are not the same as in North America. The limitations that were not within the control of the borrower were explained and they had to show that they took all precautions and did what they could through the means that were available.

Moving items in and out of the Palace Museum was a challenge as large trucks can't easily access the site and there are many stairs. However the security was very good at the Palace Museum as there were army officers all around.

One of the hardest challenges was the shipping and circumstances at airport. There is little control at airport for where the crates are located or palletized and yes the crates may be outside for hours for the palletization and while waiting for the permission to export. Many exports must wait 48 hours after palletization before shipping and none of the airline

warehouses are climate controlled. The permits and customs clearance is lengthy, but there is a large army presence for security so while the crates may not be in a climate controlled area, they are safe and secure.

The presentation concluded by emphasizing to work closely with the lenders, communication and flexibility is critical and also so to have some fun and plan time for socialization to build the relationships.

In his presentation Patrick LaQuaglia emphasized the need for good communication between the various agents involved and with the borrower and lender. It is very important to start working on logistics early and sorting out the timelines. Planning the shipping schedule takes time due to the time zone differences so it can take many days to get simple answers. In scheduling shipments, time has to be allotted for acquiring the export permits, which can take many weeks. As well there are a lot of holidays to work around in China both for getting documents and scheduling the shipments. Good agents are needed on both ends who can communicate well and set up all permits.

Budgets were also a key factor and one point to remember is that freight from China is often more expensive as there is limited space available on the inbound flights. This is due to many shippers having regular bookings and pre-dedicated space on regular flights. Thus special shipments such as museum loans are occasional and specialized so they need to compete to find space and flights.

The good news is that US customs is straight forward and there are few permits needed unless you have materials that are CITES controlled or need a USFW permit.

One last thing to remember is to apply for the Chinese couriers visas as all visitors from China need visas.

The first point Henry Tang emphasized in this presentation, was the need to understand Chinese culture and practices and be tolerant of the differences. The Chinese way of doing business and understanding of timelines can be different. In Chinese culture issues are not always presented in a straight forward manner and people often change their mind. It is important to connect to the right person to figure out the process to get things done and move forward. There is no equivalent position in China to the Registrar. Thus it is best to copy all your contacts in all communications. The Chinese in general prefer to establish relationships face to face. It was recommended to plan for onsite meetings or several – one at borrower and lender at a minimum to establish the relationships at the beginning of a project.

It was advocated to choose working with state museums over private lenders and artists and mentioned that it is easier to work with historic artwork or antiquities. Contemporary art can be difficult to export as it can be political and thus more challenging to get the permits.

It was also suggested that it was best to avoid CITES restricted pieces as the permits take a long time. Also control lists may be different in China and different permits required.

The exportation of artwork is very bureaucratic with many permits and forms needed. To export artwork from China an exhibition license is needed and it takes 90 days to be issued. If CITES

or other permits are needed, the loan agreement and exhibition license need to be in place first before applying for the permits and those permits can take an additional 90 days.

Exhibition permits and exhibition shipping are only done from Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. Artwork must ship in and out of same airport. Other cities do have flights and cargo capacity, but they only have local customs offices that cannot process exhibition permits and thus freight would go as general cargo.

For exporting artworks, the customs application must start 20 days prior to shipment. Customs officials inspect the crates before they are loaded in the trucks and there is a truck inspection when leaving the city. Once the shipment is at the airport the process is very bureaucratic for the customs clearance and palletization. This may take most of day to organize and involves lots of waiting. Another point to be aware of is that there are no climate controlled warehouses at the airport, but there is lots of security with a large army presence. Thus the crates may be waiting outside or even be palletized outside.

All crates must be x-rayed and if crates are too large for the x-ray machine then they must wait 48 hours in the airline warehouse. This is a government policy and no exceptions are made. Only after the full 48 hours are complete can the shipment depart the warehouse, so depending on flight time, this could be well into day 3.

It is best to use a carnet when exporting artwork as it is easier for the goods be imported upon their return. The carnet is valid for one year and China only permits cultural items to be out of the country for one year. Carnets can be expensive as a large deposit is paid to secure the goods, but it will be refunded when the goods are returned.

The return of artwork was discussed and is a similar process to the export. Most flights from North America arrive in the morning. The shipment must wait for the customs clearance which can take all day. De-palletization occurs often in the late afternoon and the trucks are loaded in evening and then wait to go in the city. There are truck restrictions within the cities so cannot they cannot go in city between 7-9am and 4-8 pm. Trucks have to go to exhibition customs and the truck is inspected before delivering to the museum. The next morning a Custom official comes to look at crates and may open crates. It is best to let them do work and not interfere. Wait until all this done before starting unpacking or condition reporting.

The conclusion was that much time and planning is needed for the shipping as a whole, but museums need to be aware of the process of import and export of artworks which can take several days to get the artworks in/out of the airports and to/ from the museums.

All the presenters provided very helpful information regarding the shipping of Chinese historical artworks. One recommendation for a future presentation would be on shipping contemporary Chinese art from Chinese artists and also lending artworks to Chinese museums and if any of the processes or permits are different.