Engaging Chinese Visitors; A Visitors Study at the Rubin Museum of Art

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Engaging Chinese Visitors

A Visitors Study at the Rubin Museum of Art

by

Chang Chia Liu

A Thesis submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

of

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a report of visitor studies conducted to help the Rubin Museum of Art (RMA) to better engage Chinese visitors and communities in New York City. The studies include surveys, focus group interviews, and behavior observations with individual interviews in the museum galleries. The results provide an insight into the Chinese museum-going culture and indicate that Chinese visitors may interpret the RMA as a religious center or temple instead of an art museum due to the museum’s emphasis on Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese visitors’ backgrounds in Chinese Buddhism. In addition, for visitors from Mainland China, the political tension between Tibet and China might affect their attitudes toward the museum. This thesis discusses the nature of these issues through Chinese visitors’ perspectives. It then proposes several strategies for the RMA docents and guides to enhance their tours and education programs for Chinese visitors. The thesis concludes that museum education should be aware of the cultural and political background that the RMA shares with other cultures in order to create a more meaningful museum experience for its visitors.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Rubin Museum of Art (RMA), opened to the public in autumn 2004, is the only art museum in New York City dedicated to art from the Himalayan region. Collected by the museum founders, Shelley and Donald Rubin, over 1,700 works of art represent the most significant periods and schools of Himalayan art since the 12th century.1 With six floors of galleries (2,500 square meters in total), the RMA serves local Himalayan communities as a cultural center and provides all NYC citizens and visitors a unique opportunity to explore the art and culture from the sacred mountains of the Himalayas. It is the museum’s mission to “establish, present, preserve, and document a permanent collection that reflects the vitality, complexity, and historical significance of Himalayan art and to create exhibitions and programs designed to explore connections with other world cultures.”2

Exhibitions and Programs in the RMA

Committed to this challenging mission, the RMA has organized more than sixty exhibitions in the past six years. The subject matters of the exhibitions have varied from exploring Himalayan culture and history to cross-culture iconography and cosmology comparisons.3 In 2010, the museum also held NYC’s first contemporary Tibetan Art exhibition, Tradition Transformed: Tibetan Artists Respond (June 11, 2010 - October 18, 2010), in which six Tibetan contemporary artists used multidimensional media, including paintings, photographs, metal sculptures, paper collages, and videos, to represent modern Tibetan religion (Buddhism), tradition, and social-political issues.4 Interestingly, the following exhibition, Grain of Emptiness: Buddhism-Inspired Contemporary Art
(November 5, 2010 - April 11, 2011), exhibited five international contemporary artists’ interpretations of the Buddhist notions of emptiness and impermanence in Buddhist ritual practices. Dialogues between the past and present, East and West, were addressed both within and between exhibitions, reflecting the museum’s mission of connecting the Himalayan regions with the world.

Reflecting to these intellectual exhibitions are hundreds of public and educational programs per year, including tours, lectures, conferences, concerts, films, workshops, and even a “sleepover” (a special program invites visitors to sleep overnight at the museum gallery), all attracting numerous participants from different areas. Some programs at the museum connect to a specific exhibition, such as the twenty-five-sessions program, *Talk about Nothing* (October 2010 to January 2011) to the exhibition, *Grain of Emptiness*. The program invited neuroscientists, philosophers, novelists, and artists to discuss reality, perception, and dreams through inspiration found in the exhibition. At each session, the presenters discussed specific concepts about “nothingness” in their respective professions, providing different perspectives for the audiences.

Other programs, such as films and concerts, though not a direct echo of a specific exhibition, still reflect relative concepts of the Himalayas. For instance, the ongoing program, *Lunch Matter*—the museum's Wednesday lunchtime screenings of short documentaries with an after discussion at the museum theater—displays interdisciplinary documentaries related to the Himalayas. One documentary about a female pariah in India, for example, led to the discussion of political and gender issues in India. The concerts and live music performances relate to the Himalayas by merging Himalayan traditional instruments and dances with modern musical styles. One of the most popular performing
programs is *Spiral Music* for which musicians who specialize in music from the Himalayas and South Asia perform at the base of the museum's spiral staircase every Wednesday evening.

Besides these public programs, the RMA also emphasizes on its education programs. Directed by Shelley Rubin and the director of the Education Department, Marcos Stafne, the RMA creates systematic and multidimensional education programs for all age groups. For individual visitors, the museum provides various tours, adult workshops, a RMA Teens program—a free after-school program which allows participants get a behind-the-scenes look at the museum, and diverse family programs for children of different ages, such as *Yak Packers*, a program designed for children 2 to 3 years old and *Word Play*, an art literacy program for children 4 to 6 years old.

The RMA education team also establishes a strong partnership with local schools and teachers. The museum not only provides free group tours for students of all levels, but also reaches out to schools to present *Pre-Visit* lectures, a program which sends museum educators to classrooms to introduce students the Himalayan culture before visiting the museum. The museum also provides educator development programs to help teachers and educators use museum resources, programs, and exhibitions in their classrooms. Only six years since the museum’s opening, the RMA education team provides hundreds of education programs, reaching thousands of participants both inside and outside of the museum.

**Engaging Chinese Visitors**

While the RMA’s remarkable efforts draw more than 100,000 visitors per year
since 2007, only a very limited amount of Asian visitors attended the museum and its programs. In the museum's first large-scale visitor study (collected during 2007-2008), out of 933 participants, only 8% of the visitors were Asian. Out of this group, Chinese participants consisted of 2.6% of the total participants; the highest among all Asian groups, and Indian participants consisted of 2%. The data also showed that almost no Chinese participants joined any program at the RMA. Chinese visitors rarely participated in family programs, lectures, talks, and all the other special events and programs, except school programs and gallery tours. This result showed that even as a museum representing Himalayan art and cultures with a strong emphasis on Tibetan Buddhism, the RMA does not engage Chinese who live closely within these cultures and religions.

This disengagement might be due to several reasons. First, considerable research has evidenced that museums in the U.S. are under-utilized by non-majority populations, including African American, Asian, and Latino populations. As, the museologist John H. Falk points out that a number of demographic variables have been found to "positively correlate with museum-going, including education, income, occupation, race/ethnicity, and age.” Including Chinese, Asian groups are usually underrepresented among the American museum-going public.

Second, it is possible that the RMA, as an art museum in the U.S. representing art and culture form the Himalayan region, might not display or interpret the objects in the way that Chinese visitors used to see or know in their real lives. Museums in the Western world have long faced the difficulty of representing “exotic” cultures and religions. As African art historian and curator Susan Vogel argued, museums in the Western world are “too far from the voices of the original owners and makers,” and “locked into the
perspectives of [their] own culture to presume to be faithful to the object in any exalted way.” After years of experience exhibiting African art she concluded:

Many Westerners feel too sharply their ignorance of the original contexts of African art and are too ready to let it blind them to the art’s visible qualities…The cultural context of much of the world’s art, particularly that large segment which is religious in inspiration, is remote from the contemporary museum-going public. If nothing else, the aura of faith and reverence with which it was regarded by its intended audience is missing for most of us. We can be insiders only in our own culture and our own time.¹⁰

What Vogel describes not only represents African art. Hispanic art, Japanese art, and Indian art, just to name a few, have all been discussed in terms of how to create the original contexts of the artworks in the museum environment.¹¹ Even though many curators and exhibition designers today have tried various ways to display and arrange the objects, labels, and interior designs in order to create an environment that tells objects’ stories, what has been much discussed is the fact that our perspectives can hardly ever mirror the original users’ or creators’. The objects in the museums, after all, no matter how they are arranged, are meant to be seen by the Westerns for their own interests, not by the people who use and live with the objects. The difficulty of representing cultural objects in museums is clearly summarized by art historian Svetlana Alpers:

Everything in a museum is put under the pressure of a way of seeing. A serial display, be it of painting or masks, stools or pitchforks, establishes certain parameters of visual interest, whether those parameters are known to have been intended by the objects’ producers or not… Museums turn cultural materials into art objects. The products of other cultures are made into something that we can look at. It is to ourselves, then, that we are representing things in museums… museums provide a place where our eyes are exercised and where we are invited to find both unexpected as
well as expected crafted objects to be of visual interest to us.\textsuperscript{12}

However, it was never the RMA’s intention to display objects in their original settings or initiate ritual practices in the museum. In the early planning of the museum, the RMA emphasized identifying itself clearly as an art museum instead of a Tibetan temple or monastery. As one of the RMA’s first curators Rob Linrothe pointed out:

[The RMA] needed to communicate that this is not a Buddhist museum or a Tibetan museum, it’s an art museum…If you have a whole museum devoted to Himalayan art, the devotees will certainly come, but we needed to create a setting that wouldn’t encourage misinterpretation…the museum has sought to provide an accurate interpretation of the iconography and themes, to emphasize how the long-standing visual conventions evolved, and to see how the artists worked with the imagery.\textsuperscript{13}

One example that illustrates how the RMA designs its displays and installations to identify itself as an art museum is the exhibition, \textit{The Gateway to Himalayan Art} (July 23, 2010 - January 1, 2012), on the second floor. At the entrance of the second floor gallery there is a large scale map of East Asia, highlighting different areas that the exhibition includes. On the right-hand side of the map, where the exhibition begins, the curator displays the most important figures in Tibetan Buddhism in sequence, including the Buddha, bodhisattvas, peaceful deities, wrathful deities, arhats (disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha), and mahasiddhas (tantric practitioners who attained enlightenment).\textsuperscript{14} On the other side of the floor, the exhibition includes the important concepts of Tibetan Buddhism, such as the wheel of life (representing the process of death and rebirth), the mandala (the geometric symbol of Buddhist cosmology), and the merit. Each of the figures and concepts is shown by a work of art, either a painting or a sculpture, with a large introductory wall text. The wall texts provide fundamental information about the
figures and concepts of Tibetan Buddhism. The area on the other end of the gallery, facing the stair entrance, displays the materials and techniques of creating these works of art. Materials such as clay, wood, and metal, as well as the techniques, such as lost-wax casting, are included and explained in detail. This clear classification and systematic arrangement of the exhibits make the entire exhibition a 3-D text book of Tibetan Buddhism instead of a Tibetan temple or monastery. In other words, the museum environment distances the objects from their original contexts.

The third possible reason of the disengagement between the RMA and Chinese is that Chinese visitors might misinterpret the RMA’s collection and exhibitions due to their overgeneralization and simplification of Tibetan culture when perceive Tibetan culture and religion from Chinese point of view. For example, while seeing Tibetan Buddhist objects in the RMA, Chinese visitors might use Chinese Buddhist concepts to explain those objects, especially when those concepts do not exist in Chinese Buddhism. Therefore, even if Chinese share a close cultural background with people around the Himalayan region, they might misinterpret the objects in the RMA. A comprehensive definition and distinction of both Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism would help to strengthen this hypothesis.

Therefore, this study is attempt to identify why the RMA, as a museum dedicates to the art and culture of the Himalayan region with its strong efforts of engaging visitors, does not seem to be appealing to Chinese visitors. The study will specifically focus on investigating the relationship between the RMA and Chinese visitors and understanding Chinese visitors’ experiences at the RMA in terms of how they interpret Tibetan Buddhism and culture.
CHAPTER II: TIBETAN BUDDHISM AND CHINESE BUDDHISM

In order to understand Chinese visitors’ experiences at the RMA, a better understanding of both Chinese Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism is essential. These two Buddhist schools not only differ in their philosophies and ritual practices, but also use very different iconography and symbolism in their art. This chapter will briefly introduce the history of Buddhism and the two schools and further discuss the differences in the works of art the two schools in terms of their functions in ritual practices and their religious meanings. These differences may help the RMA and further research to explain Chinese visitors’ perspectives while interacting with the RMA’s exhibitions.

Schools of Buddhism

In general, Chinese Buddhism is more open to the public than Tibetan Buddhism in terms of its practices and rituals. They belong to two main different schools of Buddhism, Mahayana (Great Vehicle) Buddhism and Vajrayana (Thunderbolt or Diamond Vehicle) Buddhism, also known as Tantric or Esoteric Buddhism, which developed from Mahayana Buddhism around the fifth century C.E. in northern India. The term, esoteric, is used to describe the Buddhist beliefs, practices, symbols, and icons that have multiple and hidden meanings and that require the guidance of a spiritual teacher to comprehend. The disciple has to receive the initiation—consists of receiving a special mantra (incantation or spell) and a personal deity—from his or her guru, a spiritual mentor, to start the preliminary training and ritual practices. Through sacred and intensive practices involving individual visionary experiences, physical trainings, such as yoga and ascetic, and the use substances such as wine and sexual images in its rituals, the
Tantric practitioners can pursue enlightenment in one lifetime instead of passing through millions times of death and rebirth as practitioners in other Buddhist schools.\textsuperscript{19} 

Tantric Buddhism became the mainstream of Tibetan Buddhism during the eighth century as it was imported by Padmasambhava, a great guru from India, also known as “the second Buddha” in Tibet, Nepal, and Bhutan.\textsuperscript{20} Because of Padmasambhava’s efforts, even though Buddhism was persecuted in the ninth century by an anti-Buddhism king, Lang Darma, the foundation of Tantric Buddhism had already rooted in Tibet.\textsuperscript{21} Tantric Buddhism then spread throughout South, Southeastern, Central, and East Asia. As the result, although the term “Tantric Buddhism” does not equal to “Tibetan Buddhism,” it certainly consists the most significant characteristic of Tibetan Buddhism.

On the other hand, Mahayana Buddhism developed in different forms in China. Strongly influenced by Taoism and Confucianism, Chinese Buddhism developed its unique school, Chán (called Zen in Japan and Son in Korea), by Bodhidharma around the fifth century.\textsuperscript{22} Chán believes that enlightenment comes when the mind is in “a spontaneous, nonverbal state generated by meditation.”\textsuperscript{23} The meditation should be maintained even in normal daily routines, such as field work or cleaning, and the enlightenment will then “suddenly appears” in a prepared mind. Chán practitioners therefore not only emphasize physical ritual practices, such as sit in meditations and chanting sutras, but also concentrate on developing a continuing awareness of meditation.

The other popular school of Chinese Buddhism is Pure Lands Buddhism, in which practitioners worships the celestial Buddhas, especially the Amitabha Buddha (called Amitofo in China and Amida in Japan) who presides the Pure Land of Bliss, more often known as the Western Paradise.\textsuperscript{24} By endlessly reciting Amitabha’s name, Pure Lands
Buddhist practitioners who are devoted to Amitabha can have rebirth in Amitaba’s Western Paradise and free themselves from the cycle of death and rebirth and all the sufferings. Therefore, the cult of the Pure Lands Buddhism is accessible to ordinary people since no initiations or spiritual mentors are required and even labors can practice while he or she is farming or doing housework.

Comparing with Tantric Buddhism, both Pure Land and Chán Buddhist philosophy share the belief that “all beings already possess the buddhahood, or full awareness.”25 Instead of practicing intensive rituals as Tantric practitioners in order to acquire the buddhahood, practitioners in Chinese Buddhism need only to find the way to re-realize their nature of buddhahood, or, in a sense, to be “awaken.” Therefore, since all beings already have possessed the nature to reach enlightenment, Chinese Buddhism in general is more open to the public than Tantric Buddhism in terms of its practices and rituals.26

Images in Tibetan Buddhist Art and Chinese Buddhist Art

The differences between Tantric Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism are faithfully reflected in their arts. As the majority of the Tantric Buddhist art works serve religious purposes shared only between teachers and students, the icons and symbols of the images are often unknown by non-Tantric-practitioners and might result in misinterpretations. One example of the misinterpreted images is the “yab-yum,” literally means “father—mother,” a pairs of male and female deities in a sexual union.

The meaning of the sexual union comes from the center philosophy of Tantric Buddhism. The male figure embodies compassion and methods (or skillful means of action), and the female figure embodies transcendent wisdom. The union of the
compassion and wisdom expresses the fundamental concepts of all opposites, including good and bad, right and wrong, and male and female. It is believed that as “serving to identify and sublimate conscious and unconscious instincts into a potent visual metaphor,” the yab-yum image can transcend self-consciousness and lead to the understanding of the ultimate nature of reality, the enlightenment. Moreover, the metaphor not exists just in images; some practitioners actually perform sexual intercourse to practice the union of compassion and wisdom. The practitioners would use the four elements, including wine, meat, fish, and parched grain “to arouse sexual desire and lead to the fifth actual or symbolic sexual union.” These five elements, so called five “m’s,” because these words begin with “m” in Sanskrit, are the fundamental practice materials in Tantric rituals. As a result, this combining of opposites, male and female, in sexual union is often portrayed in tantric Buddhist art.

However, for many Chinese who do not understand the religious meaning of sexual union, the image can be misinterpreted or even considered as inappropriate. One recent example came from the exhibition, *Tibet–Treasures from the Roof of the World* (September 30, 2010—January 9, 2011) at the National Science and Technology Museum in Taiwan. Because the exhibition included several paintings and sculptures depict sexual union, some visitors complained to the museum and asked that warning signs be put at the entrance and an age limit be established for the exhibition. These responses did not just come from visitors who were conservative but also from the general public. Furthermore, the yab-yum image has been used by religious scams both in China and Taiwan for sex abuses. The religious scams used practicing yab-yum as an excuse to ask female disciples to have sex with them. Therefore, without much understanding, some
Chinese might have a negative attitude toward the yab-yum and even Tibetan Buddhism at large.

Meanwhile, Tibetan Buddhism and culture is also often associated with supernatural mysteries in Chinese culture. For example, in comics, one of the mainstream pop-cultures in China and Taiwan, people (or creatures, if not human) from Tibet often have supernatural or spiritual powers. The popular 40 volumes comic, *3x3 Eyes*, for instance, tells the story about how a girl from Tibet, who has a mysterious power in her third eye on her forehead, fights the demon Shiva with her friends and partners to save the world. Other Tibetan stereotypical figures, such as snowmen, monsters, underground creatures, and mysterious demons and gods are also often depicted in various comics, animations, novels, and even movies. In general, it would be safe to assume that many Chinese, whether familiar with Tibet or Tibetan Buddhism or not, are familiar with these images and figures and their correlations.

Chinese viewers might also misinterpret Tibetan Buddhist artworks even if the artwork depicts figures or symbols they are familiar with, such as the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, because of the differences in ritual practices between Tantric Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism. Although making Buddhist images is considered as building religious merit and the art works themselves are often seen as objects of devotion, the art works created in Tibet usually are incorporated within the religious practices to a greater degree than in China. Taking the Tibetan traditional painting, thangka as an example, a painting of a peaceful deity is not only the representation of the deity or an object of devotion, but also a tool to help meditation. During Tantric meditation, practitioners unite themselves with the deity they are worshiping. They need to embody the deity, or
more precisely, the metaphor that the deity represents, and become the deity itself. A thangka painting is then a reference to clarify the visualizations of the deity during meditation. The practitioners use the painting to mimic the postures and hand gestures of the deity and chant the sutra devoted to that deity to attain the embodiment. This concrete embodiment in the form of images is necessary for this preliminary stage of practices. For Tantric Buddhists a thangka is a physical support in ritual practices.

On the other hand, the use of artworks within Chinese Buddhism is relatively simple and less connected to ritual practices. As Chinese Buddhist meditation is more focused on verbal practices, such as repeating the sutra or the name of Amitabha, Chinese Buddhist artworks are usually less emphasized in ritual practices. Art in Chinese Buddhism, besides as devotion and merit, rarely refers to anything beyond the representation of the subject itself. For example, a scroll painting of the Avalokitesvara is just an idealized image of the Avalokitesvara and is used to symbolize the existence of the Avalokitesvara. People who pray in front of the painting believe that they are praying directly to the Avalokitesvara. Unlike Tantric practitioners, Chinese Buddhist practitioners do not use the painting to internalize themselves as the Avalokitesvara or vice versa. In other words, Chinese Buddhist paintings are like open windows through which people reach in order to access the Buddha, Bodhisattva, or other spiritual deities. On the other hand, thangka paintings in Tantric Buddhism are like mirrors where practitioners see themselves in the deity through the embodiment. This concept also applies in other types of art forms, such as sculptures and textiles as well.
CHAPTER III: MUSEUM VISITOR STUDIES

In order to investigate if the Chinese visitors’ disengagement with the RMA is a result of the Chinese visitors’ misinterpretations of the Tibetan Buddhism and culture, as hypothesized in the previous chapter, the RMA needs to better understand Chinese visitors’ experiences in the museum through visitor studies. The studies should also help the museum to understand how Chinese visitors learn the art and culture of the Himalayan region through its displays and installations. Moreover, it will be helpful to gather some information of Chinese museum-going culture, even though Chinese are often underrepresented in the museum-going public. This chapter will first briefly review the history and theories of visitor studies, and their preference to the designs of the RMA’s Chinese visitor studies.

History of Visitor Studies

The museum visitor study has only been in existence for less than a century. The first published behavioral research on museum visitors was done by the psychologist William S. Robison and his student, Arthur W. Melton in 1928, sponsored by the American Association of Museums. Based on the assumption that visitors’ behaviors can reflect the quality of the learning, they observed visitors’ behaviors in the galleries and, in later studies, manipulated different museum environment settings to identify variables that affected visitors’ learning experiences. They continued a series of studies in the 1930’s at several museums, including the Buffalo Museum of Science, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Museum of Science and Industry in New York City, the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, and the Newark Museum. Several concepts they
developed are still used in current studies, such as the correlation between time and the object to identify the objects’ “attracting-power (to what extent visitors stopped to look at an object) and holding-power (how long visitors stay looking at an individual object or an entire gallery).” As such, using behavioral data to estimate a visitor’s learning outcome became the backbone of all museum visitor research. The museologist George E. Hein summarized the significance of visitors’ behaviors that:

No matter how much we wish to ascribe meaning to [visitors’] behavior, and no matter how much we may believe that the significant action takes place in the mind, we must still begin with what people actually do and say. Whether more quantitatively or qualitatively inclined, all researchers and evaluators are limited by what they can actually ‘see’ (or ‘hear’ or ‘feel’) about others, and the only attributes that are directly available to us are people’s behavior, or change in that behavior.

However, although Robison’s and Melton’s research was remarkable, visitor study did not flourish until the 1970’s and the 1980’s, led by several influential researchers including Chandler G. Screven, Harris H. Shettel, and George E. Hein. At that time, museums were gradually transformed from quiet halls to dynamic cultural and educational centers, and the evaluation of museum education quality became critical for museum professionals to gain grants and government supports. Hundreds of visitor studies were done by educators, psychologists, and sociologists, focusing on various aspects of museum education. Other free-learning environments, such as zoos and aquariums, also began to be included. As a result, many visitor studies closely corresponded with the educational and psychological learning theories developed at that time in order to provide solid evidence of museums’ educational functions.

In general, visitor studies can be categorized into two paradigms: qualitative study and quantitative study, or often referred to as naturalistic study and scientific study.
naturalistic study is relatively subjective and process-oriented; typical studies of this paradigm include interviews and unstructured observations. These studies focus on the meaning behind a behavior and on visitors’ oral reports that provide a description of their behaviors and thoughts. These behaviors and thoughts, which involve making personal meanings and connections with the exhibit, are usually hard to define, categorize, or generalize, but can provide an in-depth insight into the visitor’s experience. On the other hand, the scientific paradigm is more objective and outcome-oriented. These types of studies often use experiments, surveys, and systematic observations for which the focus is analyzing and classifying the behavior itself. Variables are mostly quantified, carefully defined, and used to generalize to broader populations.

Although both paradigms have their advantages and disadvantages, many researchers prefer one paradigm to another according to their definitions of museum education and learning experience. For example, the museologist John H. Falk strongly advocates the qualitative study and encourages museum researchers to use in-depth, long-term interviews to access visitors’ museum experiences. He argues that museum learning experience is a combination of personal, social, and physical contexts that not only affect visitors within the museum, but also, beyond the museum walls. The narrow and rapid quantitative methodology, on the contrary, is not reliable for capturing these broad, lifelong effects of museum experiences. However, since both paradigms have their advantages and disadvantages, to conduct a comprehensive research, multiple methods using both paradigms are often necessary. As Hein concluded:

All methods have limitations. The key to a deeper understanding of how and what visitors learn in museums is not to try to achieve a single, perfect method of study, but to recognize the limitations of all individual means
for doing so and make an effort to gain information and insight about what visitors learn using multiple methods.  

Therefore, in order to assemble comprehensive understanding of Chinese visitors’ behaviors and non-visitors’ attitudes toward the museum, the RMA’s Chinese visitor studies are designed to include both naturalistic and scientific paradigms. Depending on the purposes, this research designs three independent studies; each study uses a different methodology and focuses on different issues.

**RMA’s Chinese Visitor Studies**

As mentioned earlier, the goals of the studies are to better understand what Chinese visitors experience in the museum, and if its displays and installations help its visitors to learn the art and culture of the Himalayan region. Also, as the first visitor study designed for Chinese visitors, it would be helpful to obtain general information of Chinese museum-going culture for the museum. Each goal is not exclusive to one single study, but, on the contrary, all studies try to meet all of these goals.

For obtaining general information about the Chinese museum-going culture, a survey is the most direct, efficient way to obtain massive, reproducible data. This first survey the RMA conducted specifically for the Chinese can easily gather a preliminary understanding of Chinese museum-going culture and their attitude toward both the RMA and Himalayan art and culture. The clearly structured questions not only help the RMA to acquire specific information they need from Chinese participants, but also set the baseline for future studies. The consistence of the survey will help the museum to further compare its results gathered in different areas at different times by different researchers.
Although it is always difficult to develop good questions in a survey, in terms of avoiding bias questions or misinterpretations by the respondent, a survey is still the most useful and reliable way to collect some type of neutral information, such as demographic data and museum-going-habits.\(^{47}\)

For better understanding Chinese visitors’ experiences at the RMA, the RMA combines both naturalistic and scientific methodologies in two studies: 1) a focus group interview and 2) in-gallery observations with conversational interviews. Focus groups were first developed by market researchers to explore customers’ responses to their products.\(^{48}\) The plan was based on the idea that when participants are encouraged to discuss the product and also to say whatever is on their minds in a group, this loosely structured environment “allows one to identify the range of audience reactions, attitudes, issues, expectations, and perceptions with respect to the project topic.”\(^{49}\) Therefore, this type of study is often used to identify specific questions or to seek solutions for particular problems in the museum field. For the RMA, a focus group can help understand how Chinese visitors feel and respond to its exhibitions and programs.

The third methodology is the combination of behavioral observations and conversational interviews in the gallery. As mentioned before, visitors’ behaviors offer essential information of their learning experiences at museums; it is crucial for the museum to at least observe a few Chinese visitors in order to support this research. Also, observation is one of the main ways to study how visitors connect and make personal meaning with the collection, exhibitions, and programs.\(^{50}\) Detailed descriptions of individual paths or behavior help the researcher to access visitors’ emotions and feelings without verbal interpretations. Since there are usually not many Chinese visitors in the
RMA, the researcher is able to follow each participant throughout the whole gallery and record their behaviors, providing detailed information that time tracking or location tracking observations cannot collect.\textsuperscript{51}

Besides the observation, the study also includes a short, conversational interview with Chinese visitors. As formal and structured interviews are widely used in the museum field to determine the meaning visitors created from their visits, informal interviews, especially conversational interviews, are more often used to gather simple feedback about the installations, labels, or other technical issues and to immediately access visitors’ responses toward the exhibitions or programs.\textsuperscript{52} Also, since many museum visitors are “eager to please, and tend to give what they consider an ‘acceptable’ response or what they think the interviewer wants to hear” in formal interviews, the conversational interview, which is often conducted by docents or program staffs during the tour or program, can somehow avoid some of this “politeness.”\textsuperscript{53} For these, visitors have little time to think up “acceptable” answers; even a refusal to answer at the site or a pause can be a valuable response that tells the researcher something about their experiences. Moreover, as the questions of the conversational interview are mostly open-ended, the visitors’ answers may provide information of their museum experiences in any direction. Based on these advantages and considerations, the Chinese visitor studies in this research include a survey study, a focus group interview, and an in-gallery observation and conversational interview.
CHAPTER IV: THE CHINESE VISITOR STUDIES

This chapter consists of the methodology, procedure, result, and discussion of the studies, presented in the following sequence: the survey, the focus group interview, and individual interviews and observations. An overall discussion will be presented at the end of the chapter.

Survey Study

The aim of the survey study was to determine local Chinese people’s museum-going habits and their attitudes toward the RMA. According to the U.S. Census 2000, Chinatown, Manhattan, and Flushing, Queens, are the two areas that have the highest density of Chinese population in the New York City. More than 50% of the population is Chinese in both areas. Since the RMA is located in Chelsea in Manhattan and already has connections with nearby Chinese communities in Chinatown, the study was intended to be done in the Flushing area to help the museum to better understand Chinese communities in Flushing. The study was done in front of the Flushing Library. The 76,000-square foot Flushing Library is one of the busiest branch libraries in New York State and has the largest collection of Chinese books, attracting thousands of Chinese people to the library to read, study, take classes, and use the internet. Conducting the survey study at this location not only helps data collections, but also helps the study reach local Chinese people.

Method

Questionnaire    The Chinese visitor survey was adapted from a previous survey that the RMA conducted in 2007 and 2008. This survey included the same demographic
questions regarding age, education level, and marital status in order to accurately compare the findings with those of the previous survey. Several questions, however, were modified to include more recently popular social media, including Facebook and Youtube. The second section of this survey focused on investigating Chinese museum-going culture and the connections between the RMA and Chinese communities. Questions included multiple-choice and four-point rating scales in order to minimize time and obtain needed information. Like the 2007-08 survey, this study did not differentiate between Chinese, Taiwanese, or American born Chinese and Taiwanese.

Participants The survey included twenty five participants. Three participants withdrew before completion of the survey. Although the three participants’ data were not included in the results, it was interesting to discuss their responses and their reasons for withdrawing. The final participants were 12 females and 10 males. The participants’ age range was between 18 and 65 years old, with the mode (value that occurs most frequently) and median (the middle value in the data set) age range of 45 to 54 years old. All participants could read Chinese and speak either Mandarin or Cantonese.

Procedures The data was collected in front of the Flushing Library, Queens, on March 5th, 2011, from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm. The survey was randomly handed out to Chinese people who walked across the plaza in front of the Flushing Library. Participants were selected based on their ability to speak Chinese (either Mandarin or Cantonese) and by whether or not they lived in New York City. Participants either filled out the survey by themselves or asked the researcher to read and fill out the survey for them. The participants were encouraged to express their thought and attitudes even if they had no
previous museum experiences.

**Results**

The participants’ demographic data are presented in the Figure A-1, A-2, A-3, and A-4. Forty-five percent of the participants had never been to any museums. Out of the 12 participants who had visited museums in the past, five of them did not remember which museums they had visited. The most often visited museum in NYC is the Metropolitan Museum of Art, followed by the Museum of Modern Art and the Queens Museum. Nine percent of the participants had heard of the RMA before taking this survey, however, no participants had visited the RMA (see Table 1.1.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Heard of the RMA before</th>
<th>Visited the RMA before</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of the connections between the RMA and Chinese communities, forty-one percent of the participants indicated that nothing could make the RMA more appealing to the Chinese (see Table 1.2). Among the other fifty-nine percent of participants, art classes, contemporary Chinese art exhibitions, and programs in Chinese languages were the most appealing activities.
The data also indicated that the participants were most interested in music and film programs. Fifty-five percent of the participants were very interested or somewhat interested in both programs.\textsuperscript{62} The family programs were the programs that elicited the least interest; only eighteen percent of the participants were either very interested or somewhat interested in family programs. The experienced participants and non-experienced participants shared the same preferences.\textsuperscript{63}

Seventy-three percent of the participants were very familiar or somewhat familiar with Buddhism.\textsuperscript{64} More than a quarter of the participants were somewhat familiar with Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan history and culture. Hinduism was the most unfamiliar subject for the most participants. Experienced participants, on average, had more knowledge of all subjects than non-experienced participants.\textsuperscript{65}

**Discussion**

The data suggested that most Chinese have never visited or heard of the RMA. This result is consistent with the RMA’s visitor study in 2007-08, which indicated that only two percent of the museum visitors were Chinese. Therefore, even though the sample used in this study came from only one location, Flushing, Queens, and the sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Experienced Participants*</th>
<th>Experienced Participants**</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Non-Experienced Participants refer to participants who had no previous experience visiting museums.*

**Experienced Participants refer to participants who had previous experience visiting museums.*
size was relatively small compared to the number of total Chinese population in NYC, this result may still be reliable.

The data also revealed that nearly half of the participants had never been to any museum, regardless of their age, gender, and education level. Moreover, even out of the participants who had some museum experiences, forty-two percent of them did not remember which museums they had visited; some could only remember the city where the museum is located, such as Hong Kong or Washington, D.C. In general, museum-going culture is still not popular in the Chinese community even for the Chinese who live in New York City. One participant directly answered, “We Chinese don’t do museum stuffs,” when asked what might motivate him to visit the RMA.

What was more surprising was that no Chinese participants were interested in having the RMA participate in any Chinese community events. It is unclear as to whether the Chinese are not active in community events in general or if they are simply not used to having museums participate in community events. However, the data clearly revealed the weak connection between the RMA and Chinese communities. Interestingly, in a similar survey conducted for Tibetan communities in 2010, more than half of the Tibetan visitors were interested in having community events at the RMA. Further studies are necessary to understand this difference between Tibetan communities and Chinese communities.

Unlike the 2007-08 survey study which showed that talks, workshops, and film programs were the most popular programs for RMA’s general visitors, this study indicated that the Chinese are more interested in films and music programs. This preference might be the result of Chinese visitors’ limited experience of lectures or talks
in a museum environment. Also, it is possible that, for many Chinese visitors, a museum is a place of “seeing” something. Activities such as talks or workshops, therefore, do not fit in with Chinese visitors’ schema.

Experienced participants were more interested in museum programs and also more familiar with Himalayan related subjects. However, these results did not correspond with the participant’s education level, age or gender. In this study, the experienced participants did not, on average, have a higher education level than the non-experienced participants. As education level has been strongly correlated with museum-going habits in numerous visitor studies, these results suggested that the connection between education level and museum-going habits may be somehow loose among Chinese visitors. However, this non-correlation might be due to the small sample size used in this study.

The small sample size was the main limitation of this survey study. Larger samples from various locations would provide a more valid and representative understanding of the whole population. However, because of the limited recourses available and provided for this project, the survey was conducted on this small scale. Also, due to the fact that many Chinese have no previous museum experience, answering the survey might be a challenge for some participants and in turn, could cause a negative impression of the museum, the researcher, and themselves. For example, the three participants who withdrew from the study were frustrated and confused after not being able to answer many of the questions. They may have felt embarrassed for not having museum experiences and could interpret this unfamiliarity as a personal failure which might ultimately lead to negative attitudes toward the researcher and the museum. Future
research needs to take this situation into consideration in order to reach these non-
museum goers.

**Focus Group Interviews**

The aim of the focus group interview was to discover Chinese graduate students’
and young professionals’ attitudes toward the RMA and their museum-going habits. The
2007-2008 survey showed that more than twenty percent of the museum’s new visitors
were graduate students and young professionals between twenty-five to thirty four years
old. Although the result implied that this group of people had high potential of becoming
the museum’s audiences, the study did not discuss if young Chinese students and
professionals had the same potential. Therefore, in terms of reaching out and engaging
with new Chinese visitors, this study endeavored to focus on this type of Chinese
museum audience.

The study was originally designed for two groups—people from Mainland China
and from Taiwan. In the end, however, only the Taiwanese group interview was held due
to the difficulty of gathering enough participants from Mainland China. Nevertheless,
since people from Mainland China and Taiwan share a very similar culture, the
Taiwanese participants’ responses and suggestions still provide valuable information in
terms of helping the RMA to engage all Chinese communities and visitors.

**Method**

*Structure of the Interview* The focus group interviews were based on a questionnaire
adapted from RMA’s previous focus group study in 2007. The interview had two
sections. The aim of the first section was to initiate discussions of museum-going habits.
The participants had to share their museum experiences and their favorite types of art, exhibition, and leisure time activities. The aim of the second section was to identify potential connections between the RMA and Chinese visitors and communities. The participants were asked to share their opinions about the RMA and give suggestions for making the museum more engaging for Chinese visitors and communities. In order to engage each and every participant, several questions were designed to be answered individually through drawing.\textsuperscript{70}

\textit{Participants} The focus group interview included six Taiwanese participants—two males and four females. Their ages ranged from 18 to 34 years old. Two participants had lived in New York City for four years and the other four participants had lived in New York City between one and two years. Five participants were graduate students of New York University, Columbia University, and Manhattan School of Music, majoring in electrical engineering, film, and music. Two participants were Buddhists and one was Christian. None of the participants had visited the RMA before.\textsuperscript{71}

\textit{Procedures} The participants were interviewed in a comfortable and quiet conference room at the RMA on November 19th, 2010, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. The participants were notified in the beginning of the interview that the entire interview was video recorded and preserved by the RMA for further studies. A short questionnaire was given to the participants for collecting demographic information. The researcher followed the questionnaire to lead the discussion. The interview took about two hours with a fifteen minute break after the first hour.
Results

All the participants were active museum-goers; two participants went to museums almost once a month and the others visited museums at least four to five times per year. Two participants had joined museum programs, especially film screening programs because of their professions in the film industry. The participants were equally interested in art, science, and natural history museums. The admission price was a critical concern for all participants since most of them were still students and had little income. For them, less than twenty dollars with free audio guide and less than ten dollars without audio guide were the ideal admission fees for students.

When asked their reasons for visiting museums, three participants responded immediately that a new or special exhibition was often the main reason, especially when the subject matter of the exhibition matched their personal interests. For example, one participant mentioned that her last museum visit was to see the Yoshitomo Nara: Nobody’s Fool exhibition at the Asian Society. She visited it because she was particularly interested in the artist’s works. “The main character [of the artist’s works] is rebellious and she likes music, and she is always lonely…she is totally like me,” said the participant. A personal connection with the exhibition, the artist, or the artwork was probably the strongest motivation for the museum attendance of all of the participants.

Another important reason for going to museums was to become familiar with new artists and to be inspired by the works of art. One participant who studies film said that she was inspired by Joseph M. William Turner’s paintings when she first visited the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. “It was tremendous,” she said, “and it’s really inspiring.” She emphasized that the intimate experience of standing in front of these
works of art was completely different from seeing them in catalogs or on postcards. She explained that this kind of experience was one of the main reasons she likes to go to museums. The participant who was studying music also had a similar experience. She explained that, as a musical composer major, she was interested in Tibetan art because she felt that this kind of art, which connected with the local history, religion, and lives, could help her to better appreciate Tibetan music and inspire her own works.

All the participants were used to going to museums when traveling. For them, museums were tourist spots to hit. “It’s all about fame,” said one participant, “If it’s a very famous museum, I would definitely visit it [when I travel to that city].” They also were used to take their friends and families to museums when their friends and families visited New York City. One participant stated that, “[going to museums] is a great way to kill time when showing foreign friends around the city because I would not think that I am wasting my time since I can always learn something in a museum.”

Another important reason for visiting museums shared by all participants was the element of entertainment. After all, “visiting museums is just like going to a movies or shopping,” said one male participant. “People should have fun in the museums,” another participant agreed. In fact, two participants just visited the Cloisters one week before the interview because a professor recommended the museum and the park around the museum as a place for hiking and picnics. This demonstrated that personal recommendations also played a significant role in their decisions of visiting museums.

Only three of the participants had heard about the RMA, but none of them had visited the museum before the day of interview. Even if they had heard about the RMA, what they had heard was not related to the museum’s collections or exhibitions. One
participant, for instance, had heard about the museum café and the other participant knew that the RMA was “not far away from NYU” and was “local and tiny.”

The participants were asked to draw their concepts of Himalaya and Tibetan Buddhism. Four participants drew mountains and the plateau of Himalaya. Three participants included yaks in their drawings, although one participant actually drew a camel instead of a yak. For the drawing of Tibetan Buddhism, four participants drew a lama. Some common symbols and ritual objects of Tibetan Buddhism were also included in their drawings, such as prayer wheels, a varja (a Tibetan Buddhist ritual scepter), a sky burial, a lotus pastel, and a mandala (a ritual and spiritual symbol in Buddhism and Hinduism). In general, the participants had some knowledge of the Himalayas and Tibetan Buddhism.

Although all participants were somehow familiar with the Himalayas and Tibetan Buddhism, they agreed that the RMA was not very attractive for Chinese people. “We [Chinese] are very familiar with these kind of things…some people might think [the museum] is just about Buddhism, which is the religion we live within,” one participant pointed out. Also, the content of the exhibitions and collections might emphasize religions too much for some Chinese. One participant said that, “I am a little bit afraid of the mandala and sangsara [the concept of the cycle of death and rebirth]…I won’t dare to do something bad if I hang a mandala in my living room.”

The religious impact of the works of art was even more controversial when the museum displayed the object in its original context. Three participants, for example, had negative responses toward the museum’s special exhibition, *The Tibetan Shrine Room* (July 23, 2010 - January 1, 2012). Located at a corner of the second floor, *The Tibetan
Shrine Room arranged approximately 170 works of art, including sculptures, ritual objects and instruments, and thangka—Tibetan Buddhist silk paintings or embroideries, in the way that they would be displayed in a private Tibetan family house. Although the exhibition was the highlight of the museum for many visitors, its religious context might overshadow its aesthetic value for Chinese visitors. Two participants were scared when they entered the room and left right away. “It was too heavy and too powerful,” said one participant. Two participants also thought it was disrespectful to display a complete shrine room in the museum. “I felt it is disrespectful because it should be something solemn and scared, but it is now shown to the public like this.” “Maybe they should show it by projectors or by making smaller models,” one participant said. Another participant suggested that maybe the museum should “show the shrine room in a more solemn way, maybe in a separate space, so that people would not wander around in front of the shrine.”

The other three participants, however, liked the shrine room. “I felt comfortable and easy in the room because my roommate in college used to have four thangka paintings in our living room,” said one participant. Another participant said that the shrine room and the museum reminded her of her grandparents’ house because her grandma “had a lotus cushion and many sutras with Buddhist paintings.” Regardless of their negative or positive responses, all participants agreed that The Shrine Room was the most influential and significant display in the museum. All participants also stated that they would revisit the museum in the future.

In terms of connecting the RMA with Chinese communities, the participants provided two suggestions. First, the museum could create Chinese activities and
programs that attract young Chinese generations, such as film screenings and concerts. They noted that it could be even more engaging if these programs were bilingual and if they presented topics somehow connected to Chinese societies and cultures, instead of focusing exclusively on Tibetan Buddhism. Second, they suggested that the museum invite well-known Chinese artists, art critics, writers, actors, or organizations to host their programs, for example, the musician Yo-Yo-Ma. The goal of these programs would be to capture the public’s attention and initiate conversations about the RMA within Chinese communities.

Discussion

In sum, the Taiwanese participants did not show significant differences from general museum-goers in terms of their motivation for visiting museums. Like many museum-goers, their decision to visit a museum involved “matching personal and social interests and desires with the anticipated physical context and the associated activities of a museum.”

The data also pointed out that, with at least some background knowledge of Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism, all participants’ experiences of the RMA were strongly related to personal religious contexts, regardless of whether or not the experiences were positive or negative. In other words, their museum experiences were considerably influenced by their knowledge and attitudes toward Tibetan Buddhism. The experience of aesthetic appreciation or increasing knowledge of the culture and history of the Himalayan region, on the other hand, was rarely mentioned.

Interestingly, the participants in the focus group interview believed that
collaborating with local communities and organizations would be the most effective and efficient way to help the RMA to engage Chinese visitors. However, the participants in the previous study shared the opposite opinion. This difference between participants in the survey study and focus group might be a result of their museum-going habits. Since the focus group participants were more active museum-goers than participants in the survey study they may be also more active in other cultural activities, such as festivals and concerts which are often organized by communities and local organizations. Therefore, they may be more familiar with community based activities and be more connected with their communities. However, this assumption needs further research. An investigation into the correlation between museum-goers and participants of community events, for example, might be helpful.

**Individual Interviews and Observations**

This study was intended to collect Chinese visitors’ experiences in the museum. The study consisted of two components. The first was to observe Chinese visitors’ behaviors in order to understand how they interacted with the objects, labels, and installations throughout the gallery. The second component was a conversational interview with a questionnaire that assembled Chinese visitors’ thoughts, attitudes, and opinions of the museum. In addition, the study also counted the attendance of Chinese visitors during the observation hours in order to update Chinese visitors’ attendance rate.

**Method**

**Location** Instead of following Chinese visitors throughout the entire museum, the individual interviews and observations were done on the second floor of the RMA. The
exhibition, *Gateways to Himalayan Art*, on this floor provides a glimpse of the entire museum by “presenting the major concepts comprehensively and equipping visitors with the tools to understand, appreciate and contextualize many of the works of art throughout the museum's six floors of galleries.” It introduces the basic philosophy, history, symbolism, and iconography of Tibetan Buddhism paintings, sculptures, and textiles. The exhibition also demonstrates the traditional techniques and materials used to create the works of art and displays some works of art in their original contexts through *The Shrine Room*, a recreation of a traditional Tibetan shrine.

**Participants** There were eleven Chinese visitors who entered the second floor gallery during the observation hours. One visitor refused to participate in the study. The ten participants’ information is presented in Table 1.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Participant Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Geography</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>An elderly couple</td>
<td>Jan 17</td>
<td>F M</td>
<td>California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Two high school students</td>
<td>Jan 17</td>
<td>F M</td>
<td>Queens, NY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>An art researcher at the Nation Palace Museum</td>
<td>Jan 17</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Beijing, China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Two elderly women</td>
<td>Feb 18</td>
<td>F F</td>
<td>Manhattan, NY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A girl from Hong Kong with 3 Korean friends</td>
<td>Feb 18</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>A mother with a young child</td>
<td>Mar 18</td>
<td>F M</td>
<td>Manhattan, NY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Procedure** The observations and interviews were done on January 17, 2011, from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm, February 18, 2011, from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm, and March 11, 2011, from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm. In total, there were eight observation hours. During the
observation hours, the researcher met the Chinese visitors at the second floor stair entrance and discretely followed them throughout the gallery. In order to identify Chinese visitors, the researcher first approached visitors who had Asian physical characteristics and initiated brief conversations with them in order to obtain their ethnic background. The conversations were started by introducing the exhibition and the museum to the visitors. The researcher then asked if the visitors were familiar with Himalayan culture or Tibetan Buddhism and if they came from the Himalayan region, such as China, Tibet, Nepal, India, or Mongolia. The visitors who identified themselves as Chinese were then observed by the researcher. Before the participants left the second floor, the researcher approached them again and asked them to fill out a short questionnaire as well as to give comment about the works of art, the exhibition, and the museum. The questionnaire was answered by one person in each group.

Results

The number of museum visitors during the observation hours reached 339. There were 228 non-Chinese visitors and 11 Chinese visitors.\textsuperscript{77} Chinese visitors made up 4.8 % of the total visitors, slightly increased from 2.3 % found in the 2007-2008 survey.

In general, there were no significant differences among the participants’ behaviors. Five out of six groups started their routes in a clockwise direction and one group in counterclockwise. On average, the participants spent 35 minutes in the second floor gallery. The deviation of the time they spent, however, was large. The two elderly ladies in the group 4, for example, stayed only ten minutes in the gallery while, on the other hand, the art researcher from Beijing stayed nearly seventy minutes. Almost all participants read some wall texts and labels, stopped at certain feature objects, and talked
to their friends or families. None of the participants used an audio guide or joined museum tours.

Interestingly, one particular action was shared by half of the participants: prayer. The observation revealed that half of the participants, at certain point of their visits, prayed to some works of art. For instance, when the mother in group 6 passed the painting, *Thousand Hands Buddhisattva*, and the sculpture, *Wheel of Dharma and Deer*, she put her palms together in prayer and asked her young child to do the same. The prayer lasted for about four to six seconds at each art piece. The other objects that were prayed to by other participants included the sculpture, *Buddha Śākyamuni*, the thangka painting, *White Tara*, and *The Shrine Room*. This behavior was not observed among the other half of the participants or the other 228 non-Chinese visitors.

The participants’ responses to the questionnaire are presented in Appendix 3.3. On average, most visitors were satisfied with their museum experiences and stated interest in introducing the museum to their friends or families. Only half of the groups were very likely to visit the museum again, and only one participant, the art researcher from Beijing, thought the museum was very appealing to Chinese visitors.78

In terms of the participants’ comments about the objects, exhibitions, and the museum, both positive and negative responses were received. The couple in group 1 both enjoyed the exhibition and appreciated the museum’s dedication to preserving and exhibiting the art and culture from the Himalayan region. They suggested that since “the culture of Himalayan is [less] understood by the world…more introduction[s] [are] needed to promote it.” The art researcher from Beijing shared a similar opinion. A specialist in Tibetan art and archeology, the participant admired the quality of the objects
and the efforts that the museum had taken to create the exhibition. He was the only participant who considered the museum to be very appealing to Chinese visitors and was also the only participant who had been to the RMA before.

The high school students in group 2 had little thought about the museum and the exhibition. They came here for a homework assignment. As American born Chinese, they both explained that, for them, the subject matter of the museum was not quite connected to their own culture and was not very attractive. However, they did like the museum environment and its installation. “It is clean, beautiful, and new!” said one student.

The other young visitor, the girl from Hong Kong, also specially enjoyed the museum environment. In fact, she came to the museum because of her friends’ recommendation of the museum architecture and café. With her three Korean friends, she spent about twenty minutes at the second floor gallery and then went directly to the museum café without seeing exhibitions on other floors. It seemed that she had little interest in the exhibitions and the works of art. She also thought the contexts of the works of art were difficult to understand. “A tour in Chinese would be very helpful,” she suggested. Additionally, she also had a negative response toward The Shrine Room. She left the room right after she saw the exhibit, as did the participants in the focus group study. In terms of connecting to Chinese visitors and communities, she thought the museum was not appealing simply because “Asians rarely [go] to museums.”

The two elderly women in group 4 had interesting reactions to the museum. While the researcher was introducing the museum and the exhibition at the beginning of the conversation, they interrupted the researcher and asked who supported and founded the
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museum. After the researcher explained that the museum was founded by Mr. Donald Rubin and Ms. Shelley F. Rubin, they further asked if the museum was related to the Dalai Lama or if the Dalai Lama “owns” the museum. The conversation then went on for a while as the researcher clarified that the museum was not affiliated with any Tibetan Buddhist organizations or monasteries or to Tibet Government in Exile. The researcher emphasized that the museum had no intention of promoting Tibetan Buddhism or to taking any political stands. The two ladies then spent about ten minutes walking through the gallery without reading any wall texts or labels. This could be due to their language barrier or to their limited interest in the art. They then left for the café and gift shop without exploring exhibitions on other floors.

Discussion

Although the study only included ten participants, the data still provided several interesting and thought-provoking results. First, the observations indicated that only a very small portion of the museum visitors were Chinese. This result not only cohered with the museum’s 2007-2008 survey study, but it also showed that this situation had not improved in the last three years. As the museum has gradually emphasized engaging Chinese visitors and communities, a continuing measurement of Chinese visitors’ attendance will be necessary in the future.

Second, the data revealed that Chinese visitors had various responses toward the exhibition and the museum. One main reason was the religious culture that Chinese and Tibetan visitors share. For some Chinese, their abilities to contextualize the works of art influenced their ways of interacting with the objects and further, somehow transformed the museum into a religious site or temple. The visitors’ responses were also influenced
by their attitude toward the tension between Tibet and China. In fact, although the participants in group 4 were the only ones who explicitly expressed their concerns about the relationship between the RMA and the Tibetan Government in Exile, more than half of the other participants expressed a similar sentiment when asked by the researcher. They agreed that it is normal for Chinese visitors to see the museum as a promoter or supporter of both the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government in Exile.

Third, the results show that even the people surveyed who actually visited the museum were not very interested in it and were not likely to visit the museum again. These results were different than those obtained during the Taiwanese participant focus group study where participants all stated that they would like to visit the museum soon, especially when new exhibitions open. Moreover, the young participants in this study were actually less interested in the works of art and Tibetan Buddhism than older participants. Instead, they were more excited about the museum installation, design, and café. However, due to such a small sample size, the differences between participants may not be explained by their demographic characters. Therefore, it is unclear as to whether young Chinese visitors are, in general, less interested than adults are in the art from the Himalayas and in Tibetan Buddhism.

General Discussion

The three studies combined provided multidimensional perspectives for understanding Chinese visitors’ attitudes toward the RMA and their museum-going culture at large. Although each study was designed for different groups and purposes, some results were consistent across all studies. First, both the survey and observation studies showed that very few museum visitors were Chinese. Also, all three studies
showed that many Chinese, both museum-goers and non-museum goers, as well as people from Taiwan or Mainland China, thought the RMA was not appealing to the Chinese population. One main reason was their familiarity of Buddhism that could make the RMA less exciting for the Chinese, and the other main reason was explained as the lack of interest in museums within the Chinese community.

One particularly interesting question is if the people from Mainland China would experience the museum differently than others within the Chinese community because of the political tension between Tibet and China. The Taiwanese participants in the focus group did not share this tension. The results of observation and individual interviews, on the other hand, did imply the possibility of this political connection. However, since this conflict was expressed implicitly and subtly, further research will be needed to confirm this possible connection.

Reflecting on the hypothesis, the last two studies showed that the context of the works of art had significant influence on Chinese visitors’ (including people from both Taiwan and Mainland China) museum experiences because of Chinese visitors’ knowledge of Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism. It seems that their museum experiences were strongly related to the artworks’ religious contexts even though the objects were displayed behind glass and introduced by labels and texts. They prayed to the peaceful gods for fortune and protection and avoided some objects out of perhaps respect or even fear. Though these religious connections could be either positive or negative, they were almost unavoidable since many Chinese visitors were somehow familiar with Buddhism.

However, as noticed previously, Chinese Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism are different in philosophies, ritual practices, and images. Although the Tibetan and Chinese
viewers might share similar behaviors—as shown in their praying in front of a thangka painting—Tibetan Buddhists and Chinese Buddhists differ with regard to their philosophy and intentions. Since the studies also indicated that many Chinese visitors were not familiar with Tibetan Buddhism, those Chinese visitors’ behaviors then might actually show their misinterpretations of the objects. For example, when Chinese visitors, who have little understanding of Tibetan Buddhism, were praying in front of the thangka painting of the Thousand-Arms Bodhisattva, they might be performing the practice in the Chinese Buddhist way, rather than in the Tibetan Buddhist way, and when they were avoiding a sculpture of a sex union, they might be misunderstanding the meaning of the sex union and interpret the sculpture in the context of Tibetan Buddhism.

Therefore, the Chinese visitors’ responses in the RMA may be seen, to a certain degree, as representative of their understanding of Chinese Buddhism and their acceptance of the practices that mark Tibetan Buddhism and culture. Instead of experiencing the works of art from a aesthetic point of view or from Tibetan Buddhist point of view, some Chinese visitors may interact with the artworks through their own Chinese Buddhist perspective and may feel uncomfortable about certain objects and displays. The cultural and religious relationship between China and Tibet, in this case, may indeed influence some Chinese visitors’ experiences at the RMA, but in a direction that actually distances them from Tibetan Buddhism as well as from the art and culture of the Himalayan regions.

The main limitation of all three studies was the small sample sizes. As the observation and individual interview study showed that Chinese visitors actually had a huge variety of responses to the museum, a much larger scale study will be necessary to
provide a comprehensive understanding of Chinese visitors’ museum-going culture. However, since the purpose of this study is to identify and provide evidence of the potential problems that the RMA may face while engaging Chinese visitors and communities, the findings of these studies will be utilized for the remainder of the report.
CHAPTER V: IMPROVING CHINESE VISITORS' EXPERIENCES

This chapter will suggest practical strategies for the RMA to enhance Chinese visitors’ experiences. The suggestions will specifically focus on the RMA’s docents and guides since they are the main educators in the RMA. By using the well-developed docent and guide program, the RMA will be able to help its docents and guides to understand Chinese visitors’ experience in the museum and further adjust their tours for Chinese visitors. The RMA could also recruit new Chinese docents or docents who are familiar with the broad Chinese and Tibetan cultures. Also, the RMA should follow up with Chinese visitors and establish regular visitor studies which will help the RMA to serve all its visitors in the future.

RMA’s Docent and Guide Program

In the RMA, docents and guides are those who introduce and explain exhibits in the galleries and participate in talks, lectures, family programs and other museum education programs that inform visitors about the art and culture of the Himalayan region. The differences between the two are that docents are volunteers mostly involved in leading gallery tours and guides are museum employees participating in mostly in museum programs rather than tours.

The term ‘docent’ is originally derived from the Latin ‘docere,’ meaning “to teach.” It could also refer to an academic lecturer who is not regular faculty of a formal education system. The first museum docent program was conducted by Benjamin Ives Gilman at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston in 1907. As an advocate of museum education, he established a gallery instruction program, using volunteer “teacher-lectures” to educate
visitors and to elevate their aesthetic tastes. This program, free and open to the general public, was soon adapted by many other museums, especially art museums, in the U.S. and Europe. In the museum field today, a docent may be a person who leads tours, presents gallery talks, assists in visitor programs, and participates in many other aspects of museum education. The names given to those who translate, explain, and describe exhibitions and collections in museums have expanded and now include terms such as guides, docents, interpreters, and instructors, just to name a few.

Docents and guides are the main professional educators of the RMA. They are trained through a six-month preliminary program that consists of general knowledge of Himalayan history, culture, and religions, and are required to participate in training for new exhibitions and programs. For each exhibition, the museum education department provides in-depth readings such as articles and books, and invites the curators, scholars, or artists to give lectures during the weekly training sessions. Occasionally, the museum also provides training on serving special audiences, such as the visitors with impaired vision or Alzheimer’s disease. These intensive and continuing trainings provide the RMA docents and guides with the abilities and knowledge to help the visitors engage, learn, and enjoy the museum and the collections.

Over one thousand tours are led by the docents and guides each year. In 2009, for example, the total tour participants reached 17,805 visitors, taking 1,069 tours, including 132 program-related tours. This number did not include the visitors who were helped by the “roaming docents” in the galleries. The roaming docents are the docents who do not give tours but rather roam the galleries to talk to visitors and answer their questions. The intention is to provide intimate and informative conversations in an informal way in
order to enrich visitors’ experiences. More than nine hundred hours of service are provided by roaming docents per year.86

Depending on the exhibitions, visitors, and the docent or guide, the subject matter of tours can be varied. For example, the tours for RMA’s current exhibition, *Patterns of Life: The Art of Tibetan Carpets* (April 8, 2011—August 22, 2011) includes introducing Tibetan’s daily lives by showing how carpets are used for different purposes in different situations, focusing on how carpets are made in Tibet and Nepal in terms of their styles, weaving techniques, and the carpet market and production, or discussing the symbolism and iconography in the carpets if the docents and guides are interested in patterns and motifs. Tours given as part of the family program can be structured around the adventure of finding animals in the carpet patterns.87

The docents and guides are also free to create their own thematic, cross-exhibition tours. The popular daily complimentary tour, *Taste of RMA*, serving more than five thousand visitors per year, takes visitors “throughout the galleries for individualized, thematic journeys into Himalayan art” through docents’ or guides’ own interpretations of the collections.88 The docents or guides can select a number of objects they want to discuss, organize the route, and create the theme based on their own interests and professions. Some experienced docents and guides might even organize their tours based on visitors’ interests. It is a tour that reflects the RMA docents’ and guides’ enthusiasm, passion, and willingness to share their understanding of the museum collections with visitors.
Suggestions for the Docent and Guide Program

For the RMA, therefore, providing training for docents and guides to adjust their tour for Chinese visitors will be the most efficient and effective way to enhance Chinese visitors’ experience at the RMA. The training could first emphasize the distinction between Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism. A lesson on the two Buddhist schools will benefit the docents and guides while explaining the symbolism and philosophy from Chinese Buddhist perspectives. As an RMA docent who is Chinese, I received many positive responses from Chinese visitors by helping them to connect and differentiate the two Buddhist schools. It not only helped them to appreciate the artworks through Tibetan Buddhist points of view, but also increased their interests in learning about Tibetan Buddhism and culture. The training could also provide information addressing Chinese people’s attitudes toward Tibetan Buddhism and culture. Lectures by sociologists, anthropologists, or historians specializing in cultural relationships between Tibet and China might also be helpful.

The RMA docent and guide program could also recruit more Chinese employees and volunteers. These people could provide tours from a Chinese perspective and help other docents and guides to modify tours for Chinese visitors. Since volunteer docents are often the most dedicated adult audiences in a museum, such Chinese docents could also strengthen the museum’s role in the Chinese communities and attract other Chinese volunteers and visitors.89

Moreover, because Buddhism has spread throughout Asia and is rooted in different countries and cultures, visitors from other Buddhist countries and cultures might have experiences similar to those of Chinese visitors. They might interpret the works of art
through their own understandings of Buddhism instead of through the Tibetan Buddhist point of view. However, since visitors from other Asian countries are even more underrepresented than the Chinese within the museum-going audience, there might be very few visitors from other Buddhist countries in the gallery during observation hours. The study did not observe other visitors’ religious behaviors, such as praying or avoiding certain objects, as some Chinese visitors had. Further visitor studies are needed to clarify if other visitors’ experiences in the RMA would be influenced by their backgrounds in Buddhism.

The museum education department should also conduct regular visitor studies in the future in order to better understand general visitors’ experiences. As shown in this study, some Chinese visitors’ behaviors in the museum were surprising and difficult to notice (for example, the praying only took 4 to 6 seconds). Since this kind of behavior might reveal meaningful information about the visitors’ experiences, the museum should continually conduct various visitor studies. These studies will help the RMA to fulfill its mission of educating and engaging audiences from a diverse background, as the museologist Minda Borun argues the purpose of visitor studies:

The most fundamental value of visitor studies lies in their relevance to mission statements…Changing visitors by helping them to question, to learn and to be curious—this is the kind of thing demanded by mission statements. Visitor studies allow [museums] to maximize [their] impact on visitors, and also to know whether [they] are succeeding in what to set out to do.
CONCLUSION

This study reveals several options for the Rubin Museum of Art to better engage Chinese visitors and communities in New York City. One particular goal is to improve Chinese visitors’ experience in the RMA. As shown in the study, some Chinese visitors have strong religious connections with the museum collections and installations. These connections, which probably result from Chinese visitors’ cultural background in Chinese Buddhism, may affect their interpretations of the works of art and distance them from understanding the art and culture of the Himalayan region. To enhance Chinese visitors’ experience, the RMA’s well-developed docent and guide program will be the most efficient and influential recourse. By increasing the docents’ and guides’ understanding of Chinese Buddhism and culture and recruiting more Chinese employees and volunteers, the RMA will be able to provide tours and programs for Chinese visitors’ perspectives.

In sum, the studies indicate that the RMA should be aware of the cultural and political background it shares with Chinese visitors and provide tours and programs with this understanding in order to create a meaningful museum experience. Further studies are needed to identify if other visitors’ experiences in the RMA would be influenced by their cultural backgrounds, especially those who have strong backgrounds in Buddhism. For other culture museums intended to engage diverse audiences, this study might provide practical and instrumental information.
Notes:

6. Most RMA’s education programs are literally “public.” In order to distinguish education programs and public programs, the term “public program” in this thesis refers to all museum programs that are open to the public except education programs. “Education programs” on the other hand, refers to programs that are organized by the museum’s education department, including tours, family programs, teen programs, and school collaboration programs.
10. Ibid., 192-193.
11. See *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* for more articles.
13. Doran, 33-34, 
14. Arhats, literally means “worthy,” and usually refers to the disciples of the Shakyamuni Buddha. They were widely accepted in East Asia (for example, they are called loban in China), however their number grew from the original four to sixteen or eighteen and finally into as many as five hundred. Mahasiddhas, literally means a great who has attained his goal; They are almost unknown outside of Tibet. They are believed to be tantric practitioners who have attained enlightenment through bizarre yoga practices. Robert E Fisher, *Art of Tibet* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), 59-63.
15. The only display that focuses on in-situ installations is The Shrine Room near the end of the exhibition route. Different from other installations in the exhibition, The Shrine Room displays artworks in the setting as they would be arranged in a traditional Tibetan shrine room.
16. Buddhism was established by Siddhartha (renamed as Gauram as a monk), later known as the Shakyamuni Buddha, or the Buddha (which means “the enlightened one”), who lived from about 566 to 486 B.C.E. in northern India and present day Nepal. The early phase Buddhism, before the first century B.C.E., often aimed to attain personal salvation and was best described as Hinayana (Minor Vehicle), of which Theravada (Way of Elders) is the only surviving school today. Known as the Southern School, Theravada spread into Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia including India, Thailand, and Burma. The other main school, Mahayana, began to shape around the beginning of the Common Era. Different from Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism intends to complete enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. Known as the Northern School, Mahayana was adopted in Tibet, Bhutan, Mongolia, and throughout East Asia including China, Korea, and Japan. Serinity Young, *Buddhism* (New York, N.Y.: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2007), 9-37; Denise Patry Leidy, *The Art of Buddhism: An Introduction to Its History & Meaning* (Boston: Shambhala, 2008), 31-32.
In general there are two ways to reach enlightenment. One is the sutra way, which is based on the Buddha’s public teaching. The other way is called the tantric way, which is based on the Buddha’s private teaching. The sutra way refers to most of the Mahayana schools and the tantric way refers almost exclusively to Vajrayana Buddhism.

Leidy, 54.

Young, 37.

Ibid, 74-75.

Ibid., 75-76.

Ibid., 56-61. Bodhidharma (Damo in Chinese) is a legendary figure in Chinese Culture. Besides being the founder of Chán, he is the patron saint of the Shaolin Monastery and is credited for the invention of Shaolin Kung Fu, the original source of Chinese Kung Fu.

Young, 62.

Fisher, 37-38; Young, 63.

Buddhahood often refers to the spiritual quality of the awareness that leads to enlightenment.

Pratapaditya Pal, Amy Heller, Oskar von Hinuber, and Gautamavajra Vajracyara, Himalayas: An Aesthetic Adventure (Chicago, Ill: Art Institute of Chicago in association with University of California Press and Mapin Pub, 2003), 17; Young, 64.

In fact, comparing with Vajrayana Buddhism, most Mahayana schools are more open to the public. In general there are two ways to reach enlightenment. One is the sutra way, which is based on the Buddha’s public teaching. The other way is called the tantric way, which is based on the Buddha’s private teaching. The sutra way refers to most of the Mahayana schools and the tantric way refers almost exclusively to the Vajrayana Buddhism.

Fisher, 56-58.

Young, 37-38.


See the news on the television station website: http://news.ftv.com.tw/?sno=2010A24U02M1&type=Class. The new clip is also available on Youtube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_zXcs0_Q9s (accessed March 02, 2011)

Yuzo Takada, 3x3 Eyes (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1988).


Creating images of buddhas and bodhisattvas as the focus for ritual practices can be dated to the Prajñāparamitā-sūtra (Perfection of Wisdom Sutra) written in late-second-century C.E. The sutra states that such images were made “to help men revere the buddha and thereby acquire religious merit.” Leidy, 31.

David Paul Jackson and Janice A. Jackson, Tibetan Thangka Painting: Methods and Materials (Chicago, Ill: Serindia, 2007), 11.

Ibid., 9.


Hein, 48.

Hein, 101.


The discussion of what and how visitors learn in museums and in other free-learning environments is beyond this thesis’s capacity. Although it is difficult to clearly determine the results of visitors’ experiences in museums, profound research has supported that learning occurs in museums in a different way than it does for formal schooling or work. For more discussion of learning in museums, see Hein,


See John H. Falk’s *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience* for details of his theories.

Hein, 105.

For more details, techniques, and styles of observation, see Hein, 100-113.

Borun, Korn, and Adams, 9.

Hein, 124.

For detailed information about the Chinese population in New York City, see the U.S. Census Bureau website: [http://factfinder.census.gov/](http://factfinder.census.gov/)

See Appendix 1.1 for a map.


See Appendix 1.2 for the Chinese visitor survey.

See Appendix 1.3, A

See Appendix 1.3, B-1.

See Appendix 1.3, B-2.

See Appendix 1.3, C.

See Appendix 1.3, D-1.

See Appendix 1.3, D-2 and D-3 to compare the experienced and non-experienced participants’ preferences.

See Appendix 1.3, E-1.

See and compare Appendix 1.3, E-2 and E-3.

The Tibetan Community Survey was done in 2010. The data showed that 64.7% of Tibetan participants were interested in having community events at the RMA.

See Appendix 1.3, E-4 and F-4.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, several demographic features are positively correlated with museum-going culture. Education level is one of the most significant variables since it is related to factors such as income and occupation. For more information, see John H. Falk, *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience* (Walnut Creek, Calif: Left Coast Press, 2009), 28-30.

See Appendix 2.1 for the questionnaire and timeline.

Drawing is a common and useful technique in focus groups and interviews in which visitors can draw to “reveal their museum experience or analysis of their knowledge of exhibitions.” Also, in this activity all participants are required to make responses, which can help them to be stay engaged in the study. Hein, 122.

All participants, however, arrived at the RMA early and briefly walked around the second floor gallery before the interview.

*Yoshitomo Nara: Nobody’s Fool* was open from September 9, 2010 to January 2, 2011.

Their drawings and comments of the drawings are displayed in Appendix 2.2.

Visitors’ motivations have been widely studied in the museum field since the 1980s. Learning, spending leisure time with friends and family, and personal interests are the most common reasons for visiting museums found in numerous studies. John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, *The Museum Experience* (Washington, D.D.: Whaleback Book, 1992), 13.

See Appendix 3.1 for the questionnaire.


The total attendance observed in the study only included the visitors who walked into the second floor
gallery, and excluded the visitors who only went to other museum floors or to the museum café and gift shop. Therefore, the attendance counted by the museum at the entrance was larger than the number here. See Appendix 3.2 for detail results of the questionnaire.


Grinder and McCoy, 19.

Berry and Mayer, 28.

Grinder and McCoy, 3-7.

The training for visually impaired visitors was conducted by an accessibility consultant, Karen F. Kacen, on January 13, 20, and 27, in 2011. The training for visitors with Alzheimer’s disease will be provided in May 2011.


Ibid.

The themes of each exhibition are discussed in the exhibition training session for docents and guides. Docents and guides can provide idea for each other to create their tours. As the RMA docent, I joined the training session for this current exhibition.


Grinder and McCoy, 110-111.

According to the RMA’s 2007-08 study, visitors from other Asian countries each occupied less than 1% of the total museum audience.

Borun, Korn, and Adams, 4.
Bibliography


Jackson, David Paul, and Janice A. Jackson. *Tibetan Thangka Painting: Methods and


Appendices

Appendix 1.1 Census 2000: Percent of Persons Who Are Chinese in Flushing Area
Appendix 1.2 Surveys

Dear visitor,

This survey is designed to help the Rubin Museum of art to better understand our Chinese visitors' experiences. We sincerely appreciate your time and willingness to share your opinions with us. Your responses will be a most valuable and essential guideline for the Rubin Museum of Art as we plan future programs and exhibitions.

Thank you

您好，

本問卷調查旨在幫助魯賓博物館深入了解紐約地區華人對於博物館參觀的經驗。我們誠摯地感謝您將您的經驗與我們分享，您寶貴的意見將會成為我們博物館未來改善與進步的指標。

謝謝

1. Had you heard of the Rubin Museum of Art before being asked to take this survey? (Please check all that apply)
   請問在參與這次問卷調查之前您是否聽過魯賓博物館?
   · Yes · No (If “No”, please continue on page 4, Question 13.)
   · 是 · 否 (若”否”，請至第4頁第13題繼續作答)

2. Have you visited the Rubin Museum of Art before?
   請問您是否曾參觀過魯賓博物館?
   · Yes · No (If “No”, please continue on page 3, Question 10.)
   · 是 · 否 (若”否”，請至第3頁第10題繼續作答)

3. When was the last time you visited the museum?
   請問您上一次參觀魯賓博物館是何時?
   · Within the last year · 1 to 2 years ago · 3 or more years ago
   · 一年之內 · 一至二年之前 · 三年之前

4. Who accompanied you during the last visit? (Please check all that apply)
   請問您上次參觀魯賓博物館時是否有人陪同? (複選)
5. What did you do during your last visit? (Please check all that apply)

5. 請問您上次參觀魯賓博物館時您參與了哪些活動? (複選)

- Visited art galleries
- Joined a family program
- Joined a guided tour
- Attended a guided tour
- Attended a public program
- Attended a reception or private event
- K2 Lounge (free Friday night)
- Other _____________________

6. What parts of the museum did you enjoy the most? (Please check all that apply)

6. 請問您最滿意魯賓博物館的何項服務? (複選)

- Exhibitions
- Programs
- Tours
- Customer Service
- Cafe
- K2 Lounge
- Gift Shop
- Museum Environment
- Neighborhood Area
- Website
- Other _____________________

7. Were there any parts of the museum that you did not like? (Please check all that apply)

7. 請問您最不滿意魯賓博物館的何項服務? (複選)

- Exhibitions
- Programs
- Tours
- Customer Service
- Cafe
- K2 Lounge
- Gift Shop
- Museum Environment
- Neighborhood Area
- Website
- Other _____________________

Why? _________________________________________________
8. Where did you look for information to plan your visit?  
請問您從何處收集參觀魯賓博物館所需要的資訊？(複選)

- Museum website (www.rmanyc.org)  
- Newspaper or magazine listing  
- Asked a friend  
- Called the museum  
- Other websites or media  
- Other __________________

9. How would you describe your experience at the museum in general?  
請您簡單地描述您在魯賓博物館參觀的經驗

_____________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________

10. How did you hear about the Rubin Museum of Art?  (Please check all that apply)  
請問您之前從那裡聽過魯賓博物館？(複選)

- Personal recommendation from friends or family members  
- Poster  
- Mailings (postcard, newsletter, calendar)  
- Flyer or brochure  
- E-newsletter from the museum  
- Museum’s website  
- Newspaper or magazine ad  
- Facebook  
- Articles and reviews in newspaper or magazine  
- YouTube  
- Listing in newspaper or magazine  
- Blogs  
- TV commercial  
- Other website  
- Tourist guide  
- Walked/passed by  
- Other___________

- 親朋好友的推薦  
- 魯賓博物館的手冊或宣傳單  
- 魯賓博物館的電子郵件  
- 魯賓博物館網頁  
- 報章雜誌的廣告  
- Facebook  
- 報章雜誌關於魯賓博物館的評論與報導  
- YouTube
11. Why do you have not visited the Rubin Museum of Art?

Please choose why you have not visited the Rubin Museum of Art (please check all that apply):

- Not interested in visiting museums
- Do not have time
- Not interested in Himalayan Art
- The admission fee is too expensive
- Other ____________________

12. What might motivate you to visit the museum? (Please check all that apply)

Please choose what might motivate you to visit the Rubin Museum of Art (please check all that apply):

- Enjoy visiting a new museum
- Learn about the art of the Himalayan region
- Spend time with family or friend(s)
- See a particular exhibition
- Attend a public/family program
- Experience a peaceful environment
- Have food or a drink at the RMA cafe
- Enjoy K2 Lounge on Friday night
- Attend a special event
- Other ____________________

13. When was the last time you visited a museum in NYC?

Please choose when you last visited a museum in NYC:

- Within the last year
- 1 to 2 years ago
- 3 or more years ago
- Do not remember

Which museum? ____________________
Reason for visit ____________________________________________
With whom? __________________________________________

· 一年之內    · 一至二年之前   · 三年之前    · 不記得
那一個博物館? ____________________________________________
參觀該博物館的主要理由? __________________________________
可否有人陪同? ___________________________________________

14. What museums in NYC have you visited in the past 12 months? (Please check all that apply)
在過去的12個月當中您曾參觀過哪些博物館?(複選)

· 大都會博物館             Metropolitan Museum of Art
· 紐約現代美術館             Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)
· 古根漢美術館              Guggenheim Museum
· 日本協會博物館             Japan Society
· 亞洲協會博物館             Asia Society
· 惠特尼美術館              Whitney Museum of American Art
· 摩根圖書館及博物館         Morgan Library & Museum
· 美國華人博物館             Museum of Chinese in American (MOCA)
· 皇后區博物館              Queens Museum
· 其他 ________________________
· 不記得／無                Do not remember/none

15. What could make the Rubin Museum of Art more appealing to Chinese visitors?
(Please check all that apply)
以下何措施最能增加您對參觀博物館的興趣?(複選)

· Chinese Community Events        · Contemporary Chinese Art Exhibitions
· Free Chinese Language Tours     · Programs in Chinese Languages
· Chinese Brochures and Handouts  · Chinese Teen Programs
· Class on Chinese Art for Adults · Workshop for Chinese Families
· Other ____________________________

· 博物館參與華人社區的活動   · 展示當代華人藝術家的作品
· 免費中文導覽               · 中文活動(電影,戲劇,音樂等)
· 提供中文宣傳單以及手冊     · 華人青少年與兒童活動
· 藝術課程                   · 親子創作課程
· 其他 ____________________________

16. Please rate your interest in the following types of program.
請評量您對下列活動的興趣。

17. How would you rate your knowledge of

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</table>

Phone 電話: __________________________________________________________

Address 地址: __________________________________________________________

Thank you so much again for participating in this study. Your comments and opinions are much appreciated.

再次地非常感謝您參與我們的問卷調查
也感謝您寶貴的意見與指教。

Rubin Museum of Art

魯賓博物館

150 W. 17th St.
New York, NY 10011
www.rmanyc.org
Appendix 1.3 Figures of the Survey Study

A. Demographic Data

A-1. Gender

A-2. Marital Status

A-3. Age

A-4. Education Level

B. Museum Going Culture of Chinese Participants

B-1. When was the last time you visited a museum?
C. Connections between the RMA and Chinese Participants

What could make the RMA more appealing to Chinese visitors?

- Chinese Community Events
- Contemporary Chinese Art Exhibitions
- Free Chinese Language Tours
- Programs in Chinese Languages
- Chinese Brochures and Handouts
- Chinese Teen and Children Programs
- Art Classes
- Art-making Workshop for Family
D. Interest in Programs

D-1.

Please rate your interest in the following types of programs.

![Bar chart showing interest levels for different programs]

D-2.

Experienced Participants

![Bar chart showing interest levels for experienced participants]

E. Knowledge of Himalayan Related Subjects

E-1

How would you rate your knowledge of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Very Familiar</th>
<th>Somewhat Familiar</th>
<th>Slightly Familiar</th>
<th>Not Familiar</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Himalayan History</td>
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<td>Tibetan History and Culture</td>
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<td>Buddhism</td>
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<td>Tibetan Buddhism</td>
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<td>Hinduism</td>
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E-2

Experienced Participants

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<th>Subject</th>
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<td>Hinduism</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
E-3

Non-Experienced Participants

- Very Familiar
- Somewhat Familiar
- Slightly Familiar
- Not Familiar

E-4.

Knowledge of Himalayan Related Subjects

- Not Familiar
- Slightly Familiar
- Somewhat Familiar
- Very Familiar
Appendix 2.1 Focus Group Interview Timesheet and Questions

- **Introduction** (0 – 5 minutes)
  
  a. Pass handouts and all needed materials
  b. Inform participants the video recording

- **Personal Introductions and Museum Experience Sharing** (5 – 35 minutes)
  
  a. Ask participants to introduce themselves, including background information and their personal connection with art.

  **Questions:**
  
  - Please introduce yourself to the group, including where you are from, where you live now, and what you do.
  - Please tell us about your favorite type of art or artists.

  b. Ask participants to share their museum experiences.

  **Questions:**
  
  - How often do you go to museums?
  - What are your favorite museums and why?
  - Have you ever visited a museum for a specific program, such as a film or a musical event? How do you like it?
  - Why do you go to a museum in general? Can you list five most important factors that motivate you to visit a museum?
  - Do you go to other educational organizations or public events, such as zoo, library, concert, and festival?

- **Knowledge of the Rubin Museum of Art (RMA) and Himalaya** (35 – 60 minutes)
  
  a. Ask participants to share their knowledge about RMA and Himalaya.

  **Questions:**
  
  - Have you ever heard about RMA?
  - What do you know about the Himalayan region?
  - Do you familiar with Himalayan art and culture?

  b. Ask Participants to share their knowledge about Buddhism (or Tibetan Buddhism) and Hinduism.

  **Questions:**
  
  - What do you know about Buddhism and Hinduism?
  - What do you think about when you hear the words “Buddhism” and “Hinduism”?
c. Introduce RMA to the participants, including exhibitions, programs, website, brochures, and flyers.

Questions:
- What do you think about the RMA’s brochures (also website, flyers, and other public media)?
- What type of people do you think visit the RMA?

- **Break** (60-75 minutes)

- **The Connection between Chinese and the RMA** (75 – 100 minutes)

  a. Ask participants to identify any aspect of Himalayan art and RMA that might appeal to Chinese visitors.

  Questions:
  - Do you think the RMA is appealing to Chinese visitors? Why or why not?
  - The RMA would like to be a valuable resource to the Chinese communities. How could the museum connect better to the communities?

  b. Ask participants what kind of exhibitions, programs, and activities would be appeal to Chinese visitors.

  Questions:
  - What could the RMA do to attract Chinese museum-goers? Are there specific types of exhibitions or programs that you feel would be most appealing?
  - What could the RMA do to serve Chinese communities? School programs? Buddhist center?
  - Do you have any other comments?
Appendix 2.2 Participants’ Drawings (with comments) in Focus Group Interview

A. Drawing about Himalaya

“I thought about Mt. Everest when thinking about Himalayas. My drawing is looking the highest mountains from the lower mountains. The front is sky burial. I saw it on the Discovery channel.”
“My plateau has a very dangerous steep. It has snow on it which means it’s really high, and there is a cliff down there. Although the way is dangerous, but [the Tibetan and his yak] still have to pass it.”
“I drew a plateau with high mountains in the background. A Tibetan is dragging a yak behind him.”
“Everyone is laughing at me because I draw a camel, but I was trying to draw a yak.”
“There are many high mountains. One of the mountains has a cave, and there is an old lama in it, securing something about immorality.”
B. Drawing about Tibetan Buddhism

“Sorry, I wanted to draw Dalia Lama in the first place, but I guess this doesn’t look like him. And I also had a prayer wheel.”
“I am painting a Thangka. I had captured some symbols, such as the gestures. I also wanted to draw different postures, but don’t know how to do it. This [on the left] is the prayer wheel, and this [on the right] is sky burial.”
“Tibet also reminds me about the cycle of death and reborn, so I drew a symbol about it. But actually I do not know what are the details so I just drew cycles and cycles.”
“I drew a lama, and in case you can’t recognize, I added a note in the drawing.”
“I wanted to draw something like a varja, which can be opened in the middle and hide some scrolls.”
“I drew my concepts of Himalayas and Tibetan Buddhism on the same paper. I drew the Buddha on a lotus, but I don’t know how to draw his hair.”
Appendix 3.1 Individual Interview Questionnaire

Please rate your general level of satisfaction with the museum.

0 | | | | | | | | | | 10

Please rate how likely you are to visit the museum again.

0 | | | | | | | | | | 10

Please rate how likely you are to introduce the museum to your friends or families.

0 | | | | | | | | | | 10

Do you think the museum would be appealing to Chinese visitors?

No | | | | | | | | | | Yes

Do you have any other comments?

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

Thank you so much again for participating in this study. Your comments and opinions are much appreciated.

The Rubin Museum of Art
150 W. 17 St., NYC 10011 - 212.620.5000
Appendix 3.2 Figure of the Individual Interview Study

Please rate your general level of satisfaction with the museum.
Please rate how likely you are to visit the museum again.
Please rate how likely you are to introduce the museum to your friends or families.
Do you think the museum would be appealing to Chinese visitors?