An outward looking Empire

A summative report of *Ming: 50 years that changed China* at the British Museum

February 2015

This is an online version of a report prepared for the British Museum by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre. Commercially sensitive data has been removed.
This report provides a **summative evaluation** of *Ming: 50 years that changed China*.

Morris Hargreaves McIntyre were specifically commissioned to ascertain **who** attended the exhibition, what their **motivations** were to attend, and whether their experience matched or **exceeded expectations**.

This evaluation is part of the British Museum’s **commitment** of putting visitors at the **heart** of the Museum experience, recognising the need to **attract** and **engage** visitors in order to facilitate outcomes.

*Ming: 50 years that changed China* ran in the Sainsbury’s Exhibition Gallery at the British Museum from 18 September 2014 – 5 January 2015, and aimed to explore the fifty years between 1400 and 1450 in which China’s Ming dynasty established Beijing as the country’s capital, and built the Forbidden City.

The exhibition aimed to convey the key message of Ming China as the largest state in the world during that period, ruled by a single family with unprecedented global contacts established through trade and diplomacy.

The exhibition had a total of 109,532 visitors.

**Methodology**

After dialogue with the British Museum, an exit survey was designed by MHM that matched the objectives listed in the initial brief.

The sample from the full exit survey was 174, plus key profile data from an additional 81 respondents sourced in the rolling research. The fieldwork ran from 30 August 2014 to 25 January 2015.

Two focus groups were also run at the Museum on the 9th December 2014.
# Exhibition summary

## Exhibition outcomes and audience profile KPI table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exhibition outcomes and audience profile KPI table</th>
<th>Ming: 50 years that changed China</th>
<th>Vikings: life and legend</th>
<th>Life and death in Pompeii and Herculaneum</th>
<th>Hajj: journey to the centre of Islam</th>
<th>Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe</th>
<th>Journey through the afterlife: ancient Egyptian book of the dead</th>
<th>Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance drawings</th>
<th>Hadrian: empire and conflict</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exhibition dates</td>
<td>18/09/14 - 05/01/15</td>
<td>06/03/14 - 22/06/14</td>
<td>28/03/13 - 29/09/13</td>
<td>26/01/12 - 15/04/12</td>
<td>23/06/11 - 09/10/11</td>
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<td>22/04/10 - 25/07/10</td>
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<td>86 mins</td>
<td>87 mins</td>
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<td>95%</td>
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<td>5%</td>
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<td>[255]</td>
<td>[412]</td>
<td>[206]</td>
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<td>[149]</td>
<td>[259]</td>
<td>[171]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specialist knowledge</td>
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<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>General knowledge</td>
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<td>65%</td>
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<td>15%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Key demographic profile information</td>
<td>London visits</td>
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<td>32%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>38%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elsewhere in UK visits</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>42%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overseas visits</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>29%</td>
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<td>58%</td>
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<td>66%</td>
<td>67%</td>
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<td>Aged under 55</td>
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<td>80%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 55 and over</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Base] [255] [412] [206] [301] [149] [259] [171] [146]
Visitor profile

A **significant leap** in the proportion of visitors of **Chinese** origin to *Ming: 50 years that changed China* suggests the exhibition had a **specific appeal**. The audience overall were not specialists, with the majority having **prior little knowledge** of the topics covered.

**A significant increase in visitors of Chinese ethnic origin**

There was a particularly high proportion of BAME visitors (30%) in attendance at *Ming: 50 years that changed China*, **two thirds** of which was made up of visitors of **Chinese ethnic origin**. This is much higher than the majority of past comparable exhibitions – previously visits from those of Chinese ethnic origin typically made up 3% or less of the exhibition visitor profile.

In line with these findings, 15% of visitors stated that Mandarin was their first language, and 3% Cantonese.

Of those visitors classing themselves to be of Chinese origin, **32%** were **first time visitors** to the Museum – significantly higher than non-Chinese visitors (9%).

Examining data from *Vikings: life and legend* and *Life and death in Pompeii and Herculaneum* shows that the ethnicity profile for special exhibitions at the Museum is usually made up of between 94-96% of visitors describing themselves of White origin. There have only been two previous similar variations from the norm; *Hajj: journey to the centre of Islam*, where just over half of the audience (51%) was from an ethnic minority group, most frequently an Asian background (9% Indian, 3% Cantonese, 2% Chinese) and 3% from a BAME background (8% Black or Black British, 2% Asian or Asian British, 1% Mixed).
13% Pakistani, 5% Bangladeshi, 7% Other Asian background); and Shah ‘Abbas: The Remaking of Iran, where 21% of visits were made by visitors of an ethnic minority background.

**A smaller domestic catchment area than recent exhibitions**

Three quarters (74%) of visits to Ming: 50 years that changed China were made by visitors from the UK, which is a similar proportion to numbers recorded at Vikings: life and legend (79%), the only other exhibition to be held in the Sainsbury’s Exhibition Gallery to date. It is also comparable to the number of visits made by UK visitors to other previous exhibitions in other locations in the Museum, such as Journey through the afterlife: Ancient Egyptian book of the dead (78%), and Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance drawings (69%).

Breaking this down further, 41% of the visits to Ming: 50 years that changed China were made by London-based visitors, which is a significantly higher proportion than seen at Vikings: life and legend (32%), and Life and death in Pompeii and Herculaneum (30%). This suggests a smaller domestic catchment area, in line with figures seen at previous, more ‘niche’ exhibitions – such as Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawing (38%), and Shah ‘Abbas: The Remaking of Iran (38%).

Visits from overseas visitors made up a quarter (26%) of the audience for Ming: 50 years that changed China - which is similar to that seen for Vikings: life and legend (21%), but significantly higher than Life and death in Pompeii and Herculaneum (14%).

15% of visits were made by visitors staying over night in London in order to see the exhibition. This is slightly lower, but still similar to the proportion of overnight stays recorded at Vikings: life and
legend (21%) - but significantly lower than Life and death in Pompeii and Herculaneum (26%) - which is in keeping with the smaller domestic catchment area suggested above.

Small number of younger visitors reflected in low family attendance

There was a fairly even spread over all age cohorts of visitors to Ming: 50 years that changed China, although with a significantly higher proportion of both 20 - 24 year olds (11%), and 25 - 34 year olds (16%) than in attendance at Vikings: life and legend (4% and 12%), and Life and death in Pompeii and Herculaneum (5% and 8%). Visitors aged 65+ made up 16% of the audience for Ming: 50 years that changed China, similar to levels generally seen at paid exhibitions at the Museum.

However, there was a significantly smaller proportion of under-16s in attendance at Ming: 50 years that changed China; 5% compared to 13% at Vikings: life and legend, and 11% for Life and death in Pompeii and Herculaneum. This could reflect the more specialist subject matter covered in the exhibition, which does not have as many direct links with the National Curriculum. This level of under-16s is similar to other paid exhibitions with a more niche subject matter, such as Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawing (3%) and Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe (4%).

The proportion of family visits reflects the relatively small percentage of under-16s in attendance - with 7% of visits to the exhibition made by family groups containing at least one child aged under 16 - which is significantly lower than other special exhibitions, such as Vikings: life and legend, where families made 13% of visits. However, as families were not a core target audience for Ming: 50 years that changed China, their relatively low attendance is perhaps unsurprising.
The family trail could be better publicised

Only 12% of family visitors were aware of the family trail prior to visiting - significantly lower than that at Vikings: life and legend (36%). Focus group attendees who would normally bring children with them to the Museum felt that the trail was not advertised strongly enough prior to their arrival, and that it wasn’t clear that it was available before entering the exhibition.

‘I didn’t see anything. It wasn’t obvious to me.’ Focus group attender

As previously stated, families were not a core target audience for the exhibition, however the data does suggest that the family-specific interpretation and free entry for under-16s could have been more widely promoted to encourage more families to attend exhibitions such as Ming: 50 years that changed China, that do not feature topics covered by the National Curriculum - such as Vikings and Romans.

An unfamiliar topic for many

28% of visits to Ming: 50 years that changed China were made by visitors who claimed to have little or no knowledge of the subjects covered by the exhibition prior to their visit. This is significantly higher than Vikings: life and legend (15%), and is more comparable to exhibitions such as Journey through the afterlife: Ancient Egyptian book of the dead (23%).

Corresponding with this trend, the proportion of visits made by visitors claiming to have a general knowledge of the subjects covered in the exhibition was 64%, which is also significantly lower than that seen at Vikings: life and legend (73%), and Life and death in Life and death in Pompeii and Herculaneum (79%), and most similar to Shakespeare: staging the world (65%).

The level of ‘little or no knowledge’ being so high is perhaps understandable - Chinese history is an unfamiliar topic for many. This was demonstrated in the focus groups, where many admitted no knowledge of Chinese history prior to visiting. Confusion over the exact timeline covered by the exhibition was also a common theme.

‘Chinese culture is completely new really. I studied history at school, and the thing about the projects that I undertake at the moment, they’re more European based, so Chinese is something completely different.’ Focus group attender
Relationship with the Museum

A smaller proportion of visitors arrived at the Museum with the intention of visiting Ming: 50 years that changed China than seen at previous exhibitions, however on site conversion was high, suggesting strong marketing within the Museum.

A high proportion of regulars in attendance

Visits by first time attenders to the British Museum made up a fifth (20%) of the exhibition audience for Ming: 50 years that changed China, maintaining a similar level seen at both Vikings: life and legend (17%) and Life and death in Pompeii and Herculaneum (17%).

Visits by regulars (visitors who have previously visited the Museum in the past 12 months) made up just over half of the visitor total (55%). This is a similar proportion to Vikings: life and legend (56%), and significantly higher than the proportion seen at Life and death in Pompeii and Herculaneum (40%), an exhibition which was particularly successful in attracting lapsed visitors.

Higher on site conversion than previous exhibitions

Almost three quarters (78%) of visitors stated that Ming: 50 years that changed China was the main reason they had visited the Museum that day. This
is significantly lower than *Vikings: life and legend* (86%), suggesting the audience for *Ming: 50 years that changed China* was more spontaneous, with a higher proportion than other recent major exhibitions making the decision to visit whilst on site.

The relatively high level of visitors making a spontaneous decision to visit on-site suggests that the internal marketing campaign supporting the exhibition was convincing and effective.

**A decrease in ‘new intenders’, but a continuing trend in ‘serial attenders’**

‘New intenders’ are defined as visitors who have not previously visited the Museum, but for whom the exhibition is the main or one of the reasons that they are visiting that day. The proportion of new intenders to *Ming: 50 years that changed China* was 29% - a significant decrease in comparison to the proportion seen at *Vikings: life and legend* (51%).

However, the exhibition does seem to have continued the trend of ‘serial attenders’. Over a third (37%) of repeat Museum visits at *Ming: 50 years that changed China* were made by visitors who had also been to *Vikings: life and legend*, which in turn saw 44% of visits made by visitors who had previously attended *Life and death in Pompeii and Herculaneum*. 

### Exhibitions previously attended by *Ming: 50 years that changed China* repeat visitors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exhibition</th>
<th>Attendance Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vikings: life and legend</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life and death in Pompeii and Herculaneum</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The First Emperor: China’s Terracotta army</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journey through the Afterlife: ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadrian: Empire and Conflict</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hajj: Journey to the heart of Islam</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shakespeare: Staging the world</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moctezuma: Aztec Ruler</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasures of Heaven: Saints, relics and devotion in Medieval Europe</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shah Abbas: The Remaking of Iran</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Motivations

When we talk about motivations we are referring to the **underlying drivers for audiences engaging with culture**: the factors that encourage people to attend a place like the British Museum based on their beliefs about the benefits they will get.

**Understanding these motivations** is crucial to **developing audiences**, informing how the benefits of attending are communicated through to how the experience is delivered on-site.

**Understanding motivations**

Having asked thousands of people why they engage with heritage, arts and culture and what they hope to get from their experiences, we have identified four universal drivers: social, intellectual, emotional and spiritual. The model below shows these drivers and the broad needs of the visitors that experience each driver.

These motives make people set off for a visit; as they enter they become expectations and as they leave they become outcomes. This is why they are so important. Being able to measure motives, expectations and outcomes can provide deep insight into the visitor experience.

Visitors can arrive at a site with any level of need, and if those needs are met they will have a satisfying visit. It is also possible for visitors to get unexpected benefits, or outcomes, from a visit. This can shape their future expectations of the organisation or site.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visitor who see venue as a...</th>
<th>Have this driver...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spa</td>
<td>Emotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archive</td>
<td>Intellectual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attraction</td>
<td>Social</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And they seek this from a visit

- Creative stimulation and quiet contemplation, a place to escape and recharge, food for the soul.
- See fascinating objects in an inspiring setting. Ambience, deep sensory & intellectual experience.
- Develop own interest and knowledge, journey of discovery, find out new things.
- Enjoyable place to spend time, good facilities and services, welcoming staff.
A thirst for knowledge drove the majority of visits

Visits to *Ming: 50 years that changed China* were most likely to be mainly driven by intellectual motivations, with 44% of visitors stating reasons falling in this category. This is relatively similar to comparable exhibitions, although is significantly lower than the proportion mainly driven by intellectual exhibitions at *Vikings: life and legend*, which was significantly higher (58%). The most frequently selected motivation statements were ‘to improve my own knowledge and understanding’ (31% were mainly seeking this from their experience), and ‘to gain deeper insight into the subject’ (20%).

An expectation of beautiful objects also drew people in

Emotionally-driven visits made up the next biggest cohort, with 41% of visitors citing emotional reasons behind their decision to visit the exhibition that day. This is significantly higher than for *Vikings: life and legend* (22%), and more similar to the result recorded for *Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe* (35%).
The most commonly chosen emotionally driven motivation statement was ‘to experience inspiring, fascinating or beautiful things’ - 14% of visitors stated this was the main reason for them visiting that day. As discovered in the formative focus groups for the exhibition, one of the most common associations with the Ming period is that of vases and beautifully crafted objects - something that created a definite expectation with the exhibition audience.

‘It was very distinctive with the vase [on the poster], very colourful. It caught my eye.’ Focus group participant

Trust in the British Museum’s programming

Evidence from the focus groups suggested that most regular attenders have faith in the British Museum’s exhibition programming, meaning that having little or no prior knowledge of the subject being presented is not a deterrent. Exhibitions give purpose to the visit.

‘I only come to the British Museum for an exhibition really - I mean it wouldn’t be top of my list of places to visit without a specific purpose.’ Focus group participant

‘I just find the exhibitions give a good kind of a potted picture of something and you can go off and explore further if you want to do so.’ Focus group participant
Visit modes

We know that visitors to cultural venues are far from homogenous. And an individual visitor never makes the same visit twice: their behaviour on-site varies each time they come, based on who they’re coming with and their reasons for visiting.

So, at any one time there is a massive range of different visits happening in cultural venues: visitors with diverse needs and wants, all responding in different ways to the facilities, services and programming.

Visit modes offer a prism through which to understand these diverse needs, by grouping visitors based on key factors that drive their behaviour on a given visit, including their motivations for attending, their familiarity with the Museum and who they’re visiting with.
Visit modes are not true market segments (for that, please see the Culture Segments chapter at the end of this report). It’s not possible to target Visit Modes in the wider market because people move freely between the different groups on different visits. Rather they are temporary groupings of visitors who share a particular set of needs during a given visit.

**Target visit modes reached**

The British Museum’s target visit modes for *Ming: 50 years that changed China* were Art Lovers and Self Developers. Over three quarters of visits to the exhibition (78%) were made by visitors in these two visit modes, which are typically the two most commonly seen at temporary exhibitions at the Museum generally.

**Self developers remain most common attenders**

Self developers made the highest number of visits to *Ming: 50 years that changed China* (40%), which also reflects the high number of intellectually motivated visits examined previously. As Self developers are not experts on the subjects covered by the British Museum, but keen to further their own knowledge, they are keen attenders of temporary exhibitions – similar proportions were seen at both *Vikings: life and legend* (38%) and *Life and death in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (35%).

**Content appealed to Art Lovers**

The content of the exhibition clearly appealed to the Art Lover visit mode – visitors who are looking to deeply engage with the objects in the collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visit modes defined</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visit mode</strong></td>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families</td>
<td>Mixed age groups, wanting a fun and educational trip for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art lovers</td>
<td>Visitors wanting a deeply moving experience through engagement with collections and objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts</td>
<td>Specialists wanting to deepen their knowledge further by engaging deeply with the collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self developers</td>
<td>Non-specialists wanting to informally improve their general knowledge about subjects covered in the Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeat social</td>
<td>Repeat visitors, meeting up with others at the Museum. Use the Museum as a sociable space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sightseers</td>
<td>First time visitors making a general visit. Mainly tourists who want to ‘do’ the Museum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and procure a deeply moving experience. At 38%, this is a similar proportion as recorded at *Life and death in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (32%), and at *Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawing* (43%) - the latter being anticipated given the artistic content of the exhibition.

As visit modes reflect the intentions of the visitor on the actual day, the large proportion of Art Lovers in attendance at *Ming: 50 years that changed China*, could well indicate that the marketing campaign successfully highlighted to the beautiful objects that were going to be on show.

**Families weren’t sold on the exhibition offer**

As touched on earlier, there was a significantly smaller proportion of Families (7%) in attendance at *Ming: 50 years that changed China* than previously seen at temporary exhibitions at the Museum. For example, *Vikings: life and legend* saw almost a fifth of visitors (17%) falling in the Families visit mode, and the same proportion at *Life and death in Pompeii and Herculaneum*. This is understandable - as previously stated families were not a target audience for *Ming: 50 years that changed China* - and Chinese history is not currently covered in the National Curriculum, unlike Vikings and Romans. *Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe* saw a similar proportion of Families (5%) - and is perhaps similarly comparable in the subject matter that may have been unfamiliar to children.

“I think carefully about what I take [my grandchildren] to because I don’t want to put them off.” Focus group attendee

“Well I thought it would be interesting, but my grandchildren are 12 and 9 and when they’re doing things at school, like the Vikings, [then it’s easy to get them to come] but I didn’t think there would be things that would necessarily interest them in this exhibition.” Focus group attendee

**Sightseers still the smallest group of attenders**

Although Sightseers are generally the smallest cohort at temporary exhibitions, this is the smallest proportion (1%) seen since *Hajj: journey to the centre of Islam* (1%).
Behaviour

The typical visit to Ming: 50 years that changed China fell well within the target of 90 minutes dwell time, and was similar to Vikings: life and legend.

Awareness of the accompanying programme was relatively high, but few attended anything prior to the their visit that day. The idea of late openings, rather than participatory late events was particularly popular with visitors.

Successfully met the target dwell time

Ming: 50 years that changed China saw an average dwell time of 86 minutes, which is similar to 87 minutes for Vikings: life and legend, the only other exhibition to be previously been held in the Sainsbury Exhibition Gallery. As the target dwell time for the exhibition was set at 90 minutes, this was a particularly successful result.

The data suggests there are commercial advantages to a longer dwell time. The longer visitors spent in the exhibition, the more likely they were to make a purchase in the shop - those that had made a purchase spent 102 minutes on average in the exhibition. Those who chose to walk straight through the shop without pausing to look spent the shortest amount of time in the exhibition - 75 minutes.

Two thirds (66%) of visitors felt they spent about as much time in the exhibition as they had expected.

High awareness of events

When asked about the accompanying events programme, all events were mentioned by at least 9% of visitors. The most commonly mentioned were late night openings of the exhibition (39%), lectures (35%), and gallery talks (30%).

This awareness translated into relatively high attendance for accompanying programme events prior to the exhibition visit, with 17% of those aware having attended a late night opening of the exhibition (or 7% of all exhibition visitors) 7% to a lecture (3% of all exhibition visitors), and 6% a gallery talk (2% of all exhibition visitors).

Late night access to the exhibition space is proving the most popular

Although awareness of the events programme was slightly lower than at Vikings: life and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exhibition</th>
<th>Average Dwell Time</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ming</td>
<td>86 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vikings</td>
<td>87 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pompeii</td>
<td>102 mins</td>
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</table>
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For example, 50% of visitors to Vikings: life and legend, were aware of the gallery talks, but only 6% attended - the same proportion of attenders at Ming: 50 years that changed China.

The late night openings of the exhibition, which were not run during Vikings: life and legend, were the most well attended part of the accompanying programme for Ming: 50 years that changed China. There is evidence in the focus groups to suggest that the opportunity to see the exhibition after hours is a more compelling offer than participating in special activities in late events.

‘I think one thing that would be really good is if there’s some sort of late opening thing - something quieter [than Museum Lates] would really appeal because I love the idea of coming and there’s just grown ups about. You have the place to yourself a bit more.’ Focus group attendee

‘When they have lates at museums, and there’s loads of stuff going on... In those times it’s not a bad time to go and see an exhibition because hopefully most folk are distracted by the other stuff.’ Focus group attendee

Visitors left feeling inspired to attend further events

There was still a high level of interest in attending or participating in events after having attended the exhibition, even though many had already attended an event prior to their visit. A quarter of visitors (25%) would be interested in attending a late night opening of the exhibition, 22% expressed interest in related lectures, and 17% in gallery talks. This suggests that the exhibition acted as an introduction to the topic, and left visitors inspired to learn more.

This much higher than seen at Vikings: life and legend, with only 8% expressing an interest in attending a lecture after their visit, and 9% in gallery talks.

‘I went to the Vikings at 7 or something like that, and it felt frightfully risqué!’ Focus group attendee
The Sainsbury Exhibition Gallery

Evaluating *Ming: 50 years that changed China* alongside the previous research undertaken at *Vikings: life and legend* allows us to build a clearer picture about the new space in the Sainsbury Exhibition Gallery. By comparing the two, we can understand what improvements have been made since the previous exhibition, what lessons are still to be learned, and how best to use the space in the future.

**The use of space in the exhibition was successful**

Visitors were asked how much certain aspects of layout and the practicalities of the exhibition space affected the enjoyment of their visit overall. Although many answered neutrally on this aspect of their exhibition experience, some positives are worth drawing attention to.

80% of visits were made by visitors who believed the layout and flow of the exhibition enhanced their visit in some way (44% strongly enhanced and 36% slightly enhanced). In a similar vein, 62% believed that the volume of visitors in the room had only served to enhance their visit. This is in stark contrast to satisfaction levels seen at *Vikings: life and legend*, where in fact a majority of 71% felt that the volume of visitors in the room had detracted from their enjoyment of the exhibition.

‘I visited on a Saturday afternoon at two in the afternoon, which is a dumb thing to do! But it didn’t feel as crowded as some exhibitions if that makes sense. I think there’s a lot of space there.’

Focus group participant

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**The effect of the volume of visitors in the room**

- Strongly enhanced: 31%
- Slightly enhanced: 31%
- Neither: 20%
- Slightly detracted: 13%
- Strongly detracted: 5%

**The effect of the layout/flow of the exhibition**

- Strongly enhanced: 44%
- Slightly enhanced: 36%
- Neither: 12%
- Slightly detracted: 7%
‘You’re not blocked off from anything. I think they used the space quite well like that. It’s a good area because you can change the space easily.’ Focus group participant

‘I mean obviously this place was bigger [compared to the Round Reading Room] and I enjoyed that... When I came here it was Saturday afternoon and fairly crowded, but I found out by hanging back a little bit I was able to still see everything.’ Focus group participant

Ambience enhanced the visit experience

The use of colours and lighting within the exhibition was noted by visitors as having a particularly positive effect on their enjoyment of *Ming: 50 years that changed China* overall - 44% stated it strongly enhanced the experience. Again, this is significantly higher than that seen at *Vikings: life and legend* (26%).

‘The lighting was better on the information - just on the side of the cases, because if I remember rightly at the Vikings one, some of it was so dark you couldn’t actually see it. So I think that was better this time round. You could actually see it on both sides, and I think just generally the way you could flow through [was better]. There weren’t any bottlenecks.’ Focus group participant

Visitors were impressed with the transformation of space

In the focus groups, visitors who had attended *Vikings: life and legend* prior to *Ming: 50 years that changed China* professed a common sense of amazement in the transformation of the Sainsbury Exhibition Gallery - many could not believe it was the same space, believing some of the problems faced at *Vikings: life and legend* had been overcome.

It is also worth noting, however, that average visits per day to *Ming: 50 years that changed China* were 2.5 times less than at *Vikings: life and legend* - which will have had a direct effect on the flow and crowding in the exhibition space.

‘I was amazed by the space itself, that it was so different to the Vikings. The way they’ve made that so different. It was incredible, it was a mind blowing experience.’ Focus group participant

‘I was just amazed that the two were actually in the same exhibition space.’ Focus group participant

Finding the gallery is still proving tricky for some

Although not asked on the exit survey, evidence in the focus groups suggest that it was still unclear for some visitors where exactly to find the exhibition.

‘I really struggled with [finding the exhibition]. I can’t remember what the sign said when I arrived, but it misled me to think that it wasn’t an entrance, and I went in the back way.’ Focus group participant

‘I found it quite difficult to track down the exhibition - it was obvious once you got there but it wasn’t obvious when you were a few yards out. It could have... been a lot better signposted.’ Focus group participant
Interpretation

The majority of visitors were satisfied with the level of information and interpretation provided in *Ming: 50 years that changed China* - a promising sign considering the high level of attenders with little or no prior knowledge of the subjects covered by the exhibition.

Visitors were content with the level of information provided

92% of visitors felt satisfied with the amount of information available, and 84% felt that it had enhanced their experience in some way. This is a similar amount to *Life and death in Pompeii and Herculaneum* - where 96% of visitors were satisfied with the amount of information provided, and significantly higher than *Vikings: life and legend*, where 85% were satisfied.

The introductory film was felt to be a good way in

91% of all visitors watched the first introductory film, and over half of all visitors (58%) watched both the films. 94% of those who watched one or both of the films in the exhibition felt it enhanced their experience in some way.

52% of visitors who watched one or both of the films were very satisfied with the film content in the exhibition, and a further 40% quite satisfied.

‘I liked the film introduction at the beginning. That was nice because it set you off looking didn’t it? You know it told you a bit about it before you started. I liked that.’ Focus group participant
Multimedia Guides

A large proportion of visitors chose not to use the multimedia guides for *Ming: 50 years that changed China* - however satisfaction levels from users were high. The expense was not the most common deterrent, meaning there is an opportunity for the Museum to better communicate the benefits of the guide prior to visitors entering the exhibition, and convert more people into ‘users’.

Use of the multimedia guide was relatively low, but satisfaction was high

For those who did opt to use a multimedia guide, satisfaction levels were high. 98% of visitors who used them felt they were value for money, as well as being easy to use - and 85% felt they enhanced their experience overall. Dwell time was longer when using a guide - 90 minutes on average with a guide compared to the 86-minute average overall.

Positive feedback from the focus groups

During the focus groups’ visit to the exhibition, the twelve participants were all given a multimedia guide and encouraged to use it, in order to collect qualitative data regarding user’s reactions. Before the visit, many expressed worry that the guides would be too complicated to use, and somewhat antisocial. However, when asked to feedback on their experiences, reactions were positive, even from a couple of self professed ‘technophobes’.

‘I found that the extra information was interesting and helpful. It wasn’t quite as bulky as I thought it would [be] and it didn’t quite pin me down in the way that I’ve always been prejudiced against them about.’ Focus group participant

‘[It depends] whether I’m coming with someone or I’m alone. If I [go with someone else] it looks a bit rude to have headphones on!’ Focus group participant

Multimedia guides added extra unexpected detail

Participants were in agreement that the guides added extra detail and insight on their visit - something they weren’t always expecting to get out of using them.

‘It was quite interesting because they do elaborate on things.’ Focus group participant

‘It was a chastening experience for me too, because that was my first time, and in actual fact I got a lot out of it! I love the lacquered table first time round but I didn’t know how it was made.’ Focus group participant
‘The two minute bites aren’t a huge commitment. I quite liked the fact that they would give you some information, but then you could have room in your head for your own thoughts.’ Focus group participant

Intuitive to use, even for unconfident users

The majority of focus group attendees felt that the guides were intuitive to use. A popular feature was being able to choose your own route through the exhibition, not necessarily having to follow the exhibits in any particular order - with the guide tracking for you which sections had been accessed already.

‘I mean they’re very easy to use - they’re intuitive.’ Focus group participant

‘[What] I noticed was that the thing you listened to instead of it being orange it changed to grey. So that was brilliant because it meant you didn’t have to go round the exhibition in a strict order.’ Focus group participant

The use of music and images, in addition to the traditional commentary, added another dimension.

‘Without taking the audio guide you [wouldn’t] get that nine minutes of music which you listen to whilst looking at the long scrolls. It was a really nice combination.’ Focus group participant

‘I really liked the one for the sword where it actually highlighted the parts of [it] and talked [you] through it.’ Focus group participant

Successful conversion of first time users

For the focus groups, the short free ‘test drive’ of the multimedia guides was enough to convert a large majority of previous non-users. This coupled with the high satisfaction levels of survey respondents, indicates that the only current issue with the multimedia guides is not pricing, but actually a knowledge gap in the benefits they deliver.

By managing to better communicate the benefits of the guide to current non-users, the Museum could see an increase in uptake.

‘I find them annoying to carry around, [so] in fact [this] was my first time using one ever in a museum! [I’m a] bit of a luddite in that respect, but I really enjoyed it actually.’ Focus group participant
‘I liked it because there were multiple people talking and sometimes you get a monotone voice, and it’s dreary.’ Focus group participant

‘I thought for me it was pitched about right because it was knowledge I didn’t have – but spoken in a fairly friendly way.’ Focus group participant

Suggestions for improvement

The only common suggestion for improvement to the multimedia guide by the focus groups was the possibility of being able to download the guide to their own devices in future. This would allow visitors to have further access to the content of the exhibition in their own homes, and in their own time.

‘Something which the National Gallery did... a couple of years back, you could download the thing free from iTunes. So you could just listen on your own phone with your own headphones and I think I found that a slightly nicer experience.’ Focus group participant

‘I would almost have liked to take it away and had it later.’ Focus group participant

So how do you encourage non-users to use them?

As visitor and focus group experiences from Ming: 50 years that changed China would suggest, for a majority it isn’t the price that is deterring them from choosing to use the multimedia guide. Instead, it is often a preconceived notion that it will simply not enhance their visit in anyway, and will instead detract or distract from the experience.

Perhaps a demonstration, or a free test drive of the multimedia guides, before entering the exhibition, would help to raise awareness of the benefits - encouraging more visitors to ‘give it a go’, and hopefully converting them to committed users in the future.

‘I use them all the time now. I’m totally hooked on them.’ Focus group participant
A positive overall response

Overall outcomes were mainly intellectual, and aligned with visitors’ motivations. There were high satisfaction levels from visitors to the exhibition, and some indicated that they now felt encouraged to visit the permanent Chinese collections. The key messages were successfully communicated, with trade being a particularly prominent theme in focus group responses.

Mainly intellectual outcomes, which aligned with visitors’ motivations

Visitors’ main outcomes often aligned with motivations – 48% stated a mainly intellectual outcome, and 45% a mainly emotional one. The most frequently selected main outcome statements were ‘I improved my own knowledge and understanding’ (42%), and ‘I gained a deeper insight into the subject’ (23%), which indicates that expectations were met, and sometimes even exceeded.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Percentage Point Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Used facilities at the museum</td>
<td>+13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited a major attraction in the region</td>
<td>-4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spent time with other people</td>
<td>+8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged children’s interest in history</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved own knowledge</td>
<td>+8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional / academic / personal interest in the subject</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intellectual</th>
<th>Percentage Point Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gained a deeper insight into the subject</td>
<td>+3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travelled back in time</td>
<td>+2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced awe and wonder</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was moved emotionally</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt a strong sense of personal connection</td>
<td>+1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escaped or recharged batteries</td>
<td>+2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stimulated own creativity</td>
<td>+2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time to reflect or contemplate</td>
<td>+5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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[Base 255]
A positive response to the exhibition overall

Overall satisfaction from visitors to *Ming: 50 years that changed China* was high, with all visitors responding positively. 55% rated their visit as excellent, and a further 39% as good.

Over half of visitors (57%) left feeling encouraged to visit the Museum’s permanent Chinese collections. The same amount (57%) felt they were now more likely to visit future special exhibitions at the Museum. This is a significantly higher proportion than recorded at *Vikings: life and legend* (40%), but slightly lower than *Life and death in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (65%).

‘I think it reinforces my opinion that the British Museum is really [a] world class cultural institution.’ Focus group participant

95% of visitors felt they were likely to recommend a visit to *Ming: 50 years that changed China* to a friend or relative – 58% of these stated that they definitely would. Again, this is a significantly higher proportion than seen at *Vikings: life and legend*, where 86% felt likely to recommend the exhibition to someone else.

Satisfaction with value for money

Around three quarters of visitors (72%) felt that the ticket price represented good value for money to some extent. This sentiment was echoed in the focus groups, who communicated that although the price was perhaps at the higher end of what they were happy paying, the quality of objects and exhibition had meant it had ultimately proved to be good value for money.
“I paid full price, I can’t remember what that was but it was normal London exhibition prices - I don’t mind paying here exhibition by exhibition.’ Focus group participant

“I think it must have been a very expensive exhibition to stage, with all those priceless artefacts, so 16 pounds in the context of what the set up costs must have been probably is very reasonable.’ Focus group participant

“If it’s the British Museum’s own, you [expect it to be on display] - but when there’s something which has come from China, [and perhaps] this is the first time it has been [on display] in the West - that’s great when it’s all put together. I think that was one good thing compared to the Vikings - you felt like you were seeing some really quite special stuff.’ Focus group participant

An outward looking empire - key messages communicated successfully

The exhibition seemed to successfully break down some visitors’ preconceived ideas that the Ming dynasty was ‘just pots’. The focus groups communicated surprise at learning of a ‘vibrant and cosmopolitan’ society that was in many ways more advanced than the Western world at the time.

“When you think of China and the Ming Dynasty, you think of pots and vases. There’s all this other amazing stuff.’ Focus group attendee

“I guess the general message was that the Ming Dynasty was really cosmopolitan, really vibrant.’ Focus group participant

‘Whatever I’d heard about that dynasty and China in general was how closed a society it was. So the main thing that I took away was actually how open minded they were - sending those ships out to take part in trade.’ Focus group participant

“This was actually a multi-religious, global society.’ Focus group participant

‘There were all these things happening that we tend to think of as perhaps very Western but they’re not. They happened in China long, long, long before they happened here.’ Focus group participant

Trade as a prominent theme

The extent to which the Ming dynasty had traded with the Western world during their reign seemed to strike a chord with the visitors.

“It struck me that there were a lot of parallels with the modern day in terms of going out to the
rest of the world to trade, that they weren’t very different, even though it was all those years ago.’
Focus group participant

‘Luxury goods from China such as porcelain, silk and spices were exchanged for gems from India, gold and exotic animals from Africa, glass and metal work from the Middle East and spices from South East Asia - all the most wonderful things the world has to offer were exchanged by way of trade amongst all these countries - that captured my imagination.’ Focus group participant

‘The swords were fantastic because they were Japanese - things like that had been given to China as gifts – it just showed that they were an outward looking Empire, taking in the best of all sorts.’ Focus group participant

Objects illustrating everyday life resonated strongly

The objects that stood out for many visitors were those that in some way detailed everyday life for the people living in that period, rather than the more beautiful ornate objects. For example, the encyclopaedia detailing a recipe for beans and bamboo shoots, and the illustrated scroll showing everyday ‘modern’ activities such as football and golf seemed to stick in people’s minds.

‘I really liked the encyclopaedia, because that’s probably the earliest encyclopaedia in the world, and I [could] read that the recipe for making the beans and the bamboo shoots. I love how human it was. Stuff like that really speaks to me.’ Focus group participant

‘I think those scrolls were totally amazing – there was one where they were showing Chinese life and they were playing a form of football in all the gear, which I thought was rather nice.’ Focus group participant

‘Hairpins for me were amazing, absolutely amazing - In terms of the accuracy and finesse.’ Focus group participant

Slight confusion over the period covered by the exhibition

The chosen time line for the exhibition was confusing for some focus group participants. Many interpreted the fifty years chosen as representing the entire Ming dynasty, and others would have appreciated more explicit information about its lasting influence on modern day China.

‘The period of the Ming Dynasty? What was it? 50 years? I was quite surprised about that. You know they achieved so much didn’t they? Why did it only last 50 years? What happened?’ Focus group participant
‘It sort of implied that it started and finished within 50 years.’ Focus group participant

‘I thought it would be broader and there would be more explanation about how the Ming Dynasty fitted in with the rest of Chinese history, and the impact it had.’ Focus group participant

‘A lot of your exhibitions end on [the present day], which I know you couldn’t do because it was about 50 years, but what happened to these dudes and what was their influence in China?’ Focus group participant

Missing the story of the ‘everyday people’

Generally, focus group participants were pleased with the amount of information provided in the exhibition. One common theme was a thirst for knowledge of how ‘everyday people’ (rather than Emperors) lived their lives - although there was some understanding that objects illustrating this were difficult to come by. Details of food came up as the most frequently-mentioned ‘missing’ element of the exhibition narrative.

‘I think just related to food, and the everyday life of the commoners - if you’re going to tell the story of the country, I think you need to address the vast majority of people who were peasants - they would never have even seen or heard of any of the things we’ve seen tonight.’ Focus group participant

‘I can see how the Emperors lived their lives from that painting - archery, polo, golf, football! I can say ‘Wow they know how to spend their time!’ But I want to see more about ordinary people, and how they lived their life.’ Focus group participant

‘I still think some kind of counterpoint of everyday life [would be an improvement] - it occurred to me immediately that the fact that it wasn’t recorded was even more interesting!’ Focus group participant

‘I was thinking of the servants, and I’m really surprised [that there is] nothing to show for what they used - crockery for example. I would have liked it a few recipes! When I came to the Pompeii exhibition I wrote down the recipe for stuffed dormouse!’ Focus group participant

‘I think you ought to do the next 250 years! Because I only got the 50! I want to know about the rest now!’ Focus group participant
Summary

The **second exhibition** to be held in the new Sainsbury Exhibition Gallery, *Ming: 50 years that changed China* provided a very different experience to the inaugural show *Vikings: life and legend*.

At a basic level, *Ming: 50 years that changed China* received 39% the number of visits that attended *Vikings: life and legend*. The average number of visits per day was 2.5 times smaller than the level recorded at *Vikings: life and legend*. In this respect, *Vikings: life and legend* can be considered a ‘blockbuster’ exhibition (as could *Life and death: Pompeii and Herculaneum* which went before it), whilst *Ming: 50 years that changed China* attracted a largely adult audience, with the level of family visits – which represented 7% of the audience – smaller than the majority of comparable exhibitions. Thirdly, based on visitors’ background knowledge, the exhibition’s subject area was less familiar than recent exhibitions, with visitors more than four times more likely to claim little or no knowledge (28%) than they were specialist knowledge (8%) of the topics covered.

**A specialist offer: greater representation from London-based, adult audiences and a low level of families**

The profile data supports this idea of a more specialist offering. Firstly, the catchment area of the exhibition was smaller than recent exhibitions, with the London audience being more prominent than those from the wider UK – whilst the reverse was true at *Vikings: life and legend* and *Life and death: Pompeii and Herculaneum* where visits from outside London outstripped those from within. Secondly, *Ming: 50 years that changed China* attracted a largely adult audience, with the level of family visits – which represented 7% of the audience – smaller than the majority of comparable exhibitions. Thirdly, based on visitors’ background knowledge, the exhibition’s subject area was less familiar than recent exhibitions, with visitors more than four times more likely to claim little or no knowledge (28%) than they were specialist knowledge (8%) of the topics covered.

**A diverse audience profile, with younger adults than typically expected at temporary exhibitions**

In terms of age profile, whilst the proportion of child visitors is lower than most previous exhibitions, the proportion of younger adults aged 20 - 34 is significantly higher than average: 27% is more than double the proportion of 20-34 year old that attended *Life and death: Pompeii and Herculaneum*, and 11-percentage-points higher than at *Vikings: life and legend*.

Another audience characteristic that sets *Ming: 50 years that changed China* apart is the diverse ethnic profile that was attracted. 30% of visits were made by those identifying as an ethnic minority group – the majority of whom were Chinese. This level of diversity is topped only by *Hajj: journey to the heart of Islam* amongst previous exhibits.

**A relatively spontaneous audience**

The internal marketing campaign was a success, capturing and convincing a relatively high level of spontaneous visitors (11%) who made the decision to attend the exhibition whilst already on a general visit. It was clear that the sense of
urgency in terms of obtaining timed tickets in advance – a feature of *Vikings: life and legend* and *Life and death: Pompeii and Herculaneum* – was not apparent with *Ming: 50 years that changed China*, affording the audience more ‘lead time’ and spontaneity in making their decision to visit.

**A dual offer of intellectual and aesthetic stimulation**

Intellectual motivations – such as improving knowledge or seeking to gain deeper insight – were particularly prominent in the audience, closely followed by those who were more emotionally-driven, seeking, for example, more of a ‘feast for the eyes’ experience through engaging with awe-inspiring or beautiful objects. Again this suggests that the marketing campaign and, more widely, the Museum’s temporary exhibition brand, are successful in engaging the more ‘traditional’ museums-going audience alongside those seeking more of an art-gallery experience.

**The transformation of the Sainsbury Exhibition Gallery**

One of the key findings from the *Vikings: life and legend* exhibition related to the negative impact the volume of visitors had on the overall visit experience, with complaints of overcrowding and inability to access artefacts relatively common. At *Ming: 50 years that changed China*, however, there was little, if any, mention of crowding as an issue; in fact over 6 in 10 respondents felt that the volume of visitors actually enhanced their experience.

Those visitors who had attended both exhibitions (representing one-third of the audience, pointing to the ‘serial’ attenders that are increasingly represented in the exhibitions audiences) were often amazed at the transformation of the space, which was much more positively received amongst the *Ming: 50 years that changed China* audience. Clearly the audience was in a much better position to fully appreciate all aspects of the exhibition design, from the lighting and colours used, through to the display of artefacts.

**Multimedia guides: the potential to do more**

Multimedia guides tend to be divisive; people are often either enthusiasts, or simply rule them out as they don’t like the idea of them. Uptake of the multimedia guides at *Ming: 50 years that changed China* was lower than recent exhibitions, but those who did use them resulted in similarly positive reactions.

A key finding of this evaluation, as revealed through the qualitative research, is that there is a significant latent audience for multimedia guides, who need a small form of incentive (such as a ‘try for free’ offer) to use the guides and who would quickly become ‘converts’. Any worries that people might have about using such devices (for example being antisocial or complicated to use) quickly dissipated amongst those visitors who were coerced into trying the guides during the focus groups, as visitors quickly experienced how intuitive the guides were to use and how much extra information they conveyed. Particular design features, such as using multiple commentators and providing ways to ‘map’ visitors’ journeys through the space were very well-received.
After-hours access and an appetite for more

The positive experience delivered by the exhibition led to a clear appetite for more, with particular interest shown in the wrap-around events programme such as lectures and gallery talks. The level of commitment post-visit was significant compared to levels recorded within the *Vikings: life and legend* audience. Even more pronounced was visitors’ appetite for after-hours access of the exhibitions space; recent moves to facilitate more of this are clearly appreciated, and visitors would welcome even more of this.

Overwhelmingly positive reviews

The exhibition often delivered what visitors were anticipating and more. High satisfaction was achieved and there was a clear sense of the unique opportunity the exhibition presented: a chance to see rare artefacts from diverse collections, united in a carefully curated show.

Perceptions were also changed, with visitors often expressing surprise at how advanced and outward-facing Ming China was. Whilst this was something of a revelation for many, one aspect of the narrative which visitors would have welcomed expansion on was the lives of everyday people – offering more of a counterpoint to the rich, luxury of the Ming Emperors. Drawing on more references to the everyday, and building more direct links to modern-day China would have made the content even more relevant to visitors.

Ultimately, although *Ming: 50 years that changed China* may have attracted less visitors than recent exhibitions, the positive visitor outcomes and responses will have made a substantive contribution to the Museum’s reputation for exhibitions, in particular for hosting such shows in the Sainsbury Exhibition Gallery.
Appendix: Culture Segments

Culture Segments is a sector-specific segmentation system for culture and heritage organisations that has been devised by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre in consultation with key sector organisations, including the British Museum.

Culture Segments is designed to be more subtle, granular and sophisticated than other non-sector specific segmentation systems. This is because it is based on people’s cultural values and motivations. These cultural values define the person and frame their attitudes, lifestyle choices and behaviour.

The priority target segments for Ming: 50 years that changed China were identified as Affirmation, Essence and Expression.
High proportion of Essence and Expression

23% of the audience for Ming: 50 years that changed China fell into the Essence segment - a figure similar to that seen at Vikings: life and legend (25%) and Life and death in Pompeii and Herculaneum (25%). Members of this segment are regular culture attenders and are consistently overrepresented in the temporary exhibitions market - as well as being the part of the core of the Museum’s general audience (16%) - it is therefore unsurprising that they made just under a quarter of the visitors to the exhibition.

A slightly higher proportion of Expression visitors (27%) were in attendance than at Vikings: life and legend (21%) and Life and death in Pompeii and Herculaneum (22%). Expression make up 26% of the Museum’s audience overall, which suggests that Ming: 50 years that changed China managed to appeal to this segment successfully and tap into the Museum’s core audience.
Lower appeal amongst Affirmation

There were significantly lower proportions of Affirmation (6%) in attendance at *Ming: 50 years that changed China* in comparison to *Vikings: life and legend* (11%). As they were specified as a target segment, this would suggest that something in the marketing didn’t quite resonate with this them as hoped. This segment is happier with ‘safe bets’, and as previously mentioned, a large proportion of visitors professed to have little or no knowledge of the subject matter - suggesting that perhaps potential Affirmation attenders viewed the subject matter as too ‘niche’ and chose to stay away.

In comparison, *Vikings: life and legend* saw a proportion of Affirmation attenders more in line with their overall audience profile - 11% compared to 12%. This is likely to be as Affirmation see *Vikings* as a less risky, easily accessible topic - and one that needs little prior background knowledge before choosing to make the trip out.

The content didn’t seem to capture Stimulation’s attention

There was a significantly lower proportion of Stimulation visitors to *Ming: 50 years that changed China* (8%) than at both *Vikings: life and legend* (17%) and *Life and death in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (18%). This could perhaps in part be attributed to the exhibition’s run coinciding with *Ancient lives, new discoveries*, an exhibition with a high amount of digital content - where the evaluation showed an overrepresentation of Stimulation compared to the audience as a whole.

An unusually high representation of Perspective

16% of visitors to *Ming: 50 years that changed China* were from the Perspective segment - a much higher proportion than normally seen in the Museum’s usual audience profile. Although this segment can be tricky to entice to museums, they do enjoy history and spending time in cultural institutions developing specific interests, if the offer suits them.

80% of Perspective visitors to the *Ming: 50 years that changed China* stated that the exhibition was the main reason that they visited that day, suggesting the publicity campaign was particularly successful in engaging a segment which often views marketing with some cynicism. 41% of Perspective visitors stated having read about the exhibition in a national newspaper prior to their visit - and overall word of mouth recommendations for the exhibition were high (16%) - meaning that for risk-averse Perspective (who on average, booked tickets 53 days after hearing about the exhibition for the first time) - reviews had a strongly positive knock on effect.
Research parameters

This study was carried out for the British Museum by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre.

Target group for the research  general visitors to the Ming: 50 years that changed China exhibition

Sample size  174 exit surveys, key profile data from 81 rolling research respondents, and 12 focus group participants

Date of fieldwork  30 August 2014 - 25 January 2015

Sampling method  visitors were approached at random at the exit of the exhibition

Data collection method  interviewer-led exit surveys

Reliability of findings  based on sample size and population, reliability of 5.16% at 50%

This report was prepared for the British Museum, February 2015.
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Morris Hargreaves McIntyre is an award-winning creative research consultancy. We use consumer insight to help organisations transform their relationships with audiences.

We are passionate about understanding cultural consumers, getting to the heart of issues that matter to you and making practical recommendations.

All projects are different, but the value we add is constant. We measure out success by the impact we have on the organisations we work with.

‘When you think of China and the Ming Dynasty, you think of pots and vases. There’s all this other amazing stuff.’
Focus group participant

‘I thought it was brilliant and it was absolutely beautifully displayed. I think it was phenomenal’
Focus group participant