

**Topline Summary of Findings**

*Monkey King: A Journey to China  
Summative Evaluation*

April 26, 2004

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## I. Introduction

*Monkey King: A Journey to China* is an interactive exhibit created by the Children's Museum of Manhattan (CMOM). Funded by an initiative of the Freeman Foundation, it is intended to introduce American children to China and Chinese culture. This research report is intended to assist in remediation regarding the exhibit prior to its travel to 10 other exhibition spaces affiliated with the Association of Children's Museum.

## II. Objectives

The research aimed to examine three core and interrelated objective areas.

- **Comprehension**
  - What do visitors understand of the content after viewing the exhibit?
- **Engagement**
  - What is visitors' connection with core elements of the exhibit?
- **Attitude**
  - What are visitors' motivations for attending the exhibit?
  - How does visiting affect visitors' perception of or interest in Chinese culture?

## III. Methodology

In order to meet these objectives, *BliP research* created a program of quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Methodology	Scope	Sample
Participant Observations	Ongoing during research days	Parents Children age 5-12
Intercept Surveys	66 completed	46 Children 5-12 20 Parents
Mini Focus Groups	7 completed	2 Children 5-8 2 Children 9-12 3 Parents/guardians
Follow-up In Depth Interviews	5 completed	2 parent/child 5-8 2 parent/child 9-12

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## IV. Findings

### *Comprehension*

- Children and parents were highly aware that the exhibit was rooted in China and Chinese culture.
- Many children felt that they had learned something new about China/Chinese culture from viewing the exhibit.
- Children were generally unclear regarding the narrative basis for the exhibit.
- Parents were much more aware of the exhibit's basis in a written/oral narrative.
- Children had very high recall for Monkey as a featured character in the exhibit.
  - Recall for other characters was quite low.
  - Recall for all characters was relatively non-specific.
- Children had a very difficult time recognizing or enunciating the themes of the narrative and the exhibit, and/or the goals of the characters contained therein.
  - They tended to view the exhibit as being about a battle between good (Monkey King) and evil.

### *Engagement*

- Children derived and retained content knowledge almost solely from the exhibit elements that most engaged them. These included:
  - "Monkey Eats the Peaches"
  - "Battle of Wits"
  - "Cloud Soaring"
- These (most engaging) portions of the exhibit were also the most directly interactive.
  - Interactive elements were the most effective delivery devices for narrative content.
- Parents read about half of the text in the exhibit aloud to their child. Very few children read any of the text themselves.
- The wall text was thought to:
  - Lack visual contrast
  - Be difficult to locate
  - Be written at a level of difficulty beyond the target audience

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- Children were much more likely to attend to text delivered to them through an interactive element (i.e. printed on a video screen during a game, played in a recorded message) than that printed on the wall.
  - The equities and liabilities of each individual exhibit element will be addressed in detail in the multi-media presentation.
  - Because of their limited understanding of the Monkey King narrative, and the exhibit's roots in this narrative, visitors had a difficult time detecting a linear "order" to the exhibit.
    - This difficulty was enhanced by the fact that the exhibit could be entered from the "beginning" and the "end".

### *Attitude*

- Both children and parents were generally quite satisfied by the exhibit, with the great majority of visitors in both categories giving it a favorable (good or great) ranking following viewing.
  - Interactivity and exposure to Chinese culture were the two key motivators influencing parents' choice to bring their children to the exhibit.
  - Nearly all parents agreed that the interactive features in the exhibit helped their child to understand the ideas and concepts clarified.
  - Yet parents and children also had criticisms of the interactive features:
    - In some elements, components were missing or not functioning.
    - The elements felt geared toward younger children (under 8 years old).
    - The interactive features distracted children from understanding the larger sense of the exhibit (narrative, themes, characters, etc.)
  - Parents and children were appreciative of the opportunity to explore elements of Chinese culture.
  - Many children voiced their desire to further explore some of these elements such as: language, rituals, food
  - In follow up interviews, children exhibited a high recall for the very features of the exhibit they were most drawn to during their visit.
  - All follow-up interviewees reported having thought about or recalled the exhibit since their visit.
  - Many of these children/parents had recommended the exhibit to friends.
  - Many of them had also sought out further information about China or Chinese culture, particularly in the form of books.
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### *Recommendations*

- Strengthen the sense of narrative in the exhibit.
  - Clarify narrative flow.
- Make the text more “readable.”
- Ensure that all interactive components are functional.
- Deliver the most important/core content interactively.
  - Be aware that making a section/element “interactive” strongly privileges the information it delivers.