

**China in Contemporary American Museum Culture: Reality or Exotic Orientalist
Fantasy?**

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A thesis submitted to The University of the Arts in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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The members of the committee appointed to examine the thesis of Shuangzi Hu find it satisfactory and recommend it to be accepted.

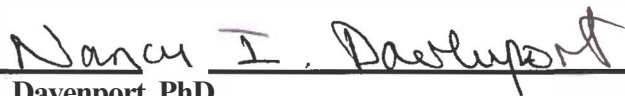
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Abstract

In my undergraduate major in Sociology at Wheaton College (MA), I started to consider the ways that museum exhibits today are presented to diverse contemporary societies rather than simply following the traditional function of museum exhibits as display centers for masterworks representing particular artistic styles, subject matter, historical periods or locations. One of my past projects was, for instance, the global and cultural impact of cut flowers: i.e., the symbolic meaning of flowers in different societies.

My undergraduate thesis, *Museum: A Modern Social Institution in Transition* considered how western European and American museums today are transitioning from private object display institutions into social and educational institutions which inevitably, if perhaps unknowingly, represent in different ways the national values of their environment to their now global visitor pool. After I received my BA and with the encouragement of my advisor from my undergraduate institution, Professor Hyun Sook Kim, I decided to develop my undergraduate thesis into a Masters Thesis, and started research on the impression projected by European and American museums in their exhibitions of Chinese art. In the case of Chinese art, native-made, admired, and used objects being the symbolic representations of most cultures, the prolific and widely dispersed number of available Chinese art objects put on display in exhibitions drawn from western museum collections are, surely, the major criteria readily available to western museum visitors when they seek to enhance their interpretation of, and knowledge about, Chinese culture.

The sociological theories of Edward Said (1935-2003), Palestinian American Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, published in his text entitled *Orientalism* (Pantheon Books, 1978), were among the first to critique the views of the West about the Near East, colonized in the 19th century by western nations. My personal interest in the idea of Said's Orientalist theories encouraged me to develop my own research, using his ideas but using them to consider the concepts of Orientalism as they relate to western interpretations of China as revealed in museum exhibitions featuring Chinese art and material culture. One of the many goals of this research has been to consider the evolution of social change in the Chinese objects exhibited by western museums, their historical and symbolic meaning as presented by the curators of these exhibitions and the interpretation of the objects on display by exhibition visitors.

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NOMENCLATURE

The definition of the *Orient* has been repeatedly changed throughout both Eastern and Western history in various academic disciplines, including history and social sciences. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I will be using the terms *Orient*, *Symbolic Interactionism*, *Commodity Fetishism* interchangeably as theoretical support for my thesis.

The *Orient* is a term invented by the West, a generalized concept of the Eastern world, generally referring to the Middle East, South Asia and the Far East. In this thesis, the term *Orient* will be used frequently, because one of the initial goals of this thesis is to explore the changing understanding of the East by the West. More specifically, the term *Orient* will be an indicator of the Far Eastern world, especially China, as one of the goals of the thesis is to further understand the evolution of Chinese art as it has been experienced in the Western world throughout the history, by means of two recent two Chinese-Culture related exhibitions in the United States.

The term *Symbolic Interactionism* developed by American sociologist Herbert Blumer explores the shaping process of social behaviorism, which supports the interpretation of meaning making of the new Orientalism that will later be explained at the conclusion of the thesis.

And another important term *Commodity Fetishism* by Karl Marx will be used in a different way to explore social relationships in the art world instead of the economics. It is crucial to understand how the role of “art” has been transferred into “product” in the increasingly global cultural market, and why we should be aware of this change.

Introduction

Through the Looking Glass: Moon in the water, and Flower in the Mirror.

– Cao Xueqin

In February 2016, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston held a public panel which it called “a public apology” because of its seemingly mistaken decision in July of 2015 to set up a program entitled “Kimono Wednesdays,” an event which had caused a public protest by visitors accusing the museum of “imperial racism.” This program especially distressed the Asian-American audiences in the museum. Some might be curious to know why a simple interactive activity—the trying on of kimonos—would cause serious cultural controversy, or why, if this were such an obviously racist activity, the Museum of Fine Arts would not have had some earlier awareness of the “racism” behind its choice of this particular activity. The simple answer to this can be explained as “ignorance”; that there is a general lack of information about, and sensitivity to, Asian culture in the West, and that this particular approach: anyone and everyone trying on Japanese kimonos following the inspiration of the 19th century French Impressionist painter Claude Monet’s portrait of his wife in a kimono in a painting he entitled “La Japonaise,” might affect the sensibilities of Asians. Using Cao Xueqin’s metaphor quoted above, this painting clearly reveals Asia as only in a distant mirror, i.e., through a 19th century French artist’s eyes, and thus it can be easily recognized that this particular “reflected image” of the east, in which one and all tried on kimonos like Halloween costumes in a Boston museum, is an excellent example of the differing kinds of problems that have arisen in contemporary museums there and elsewhere in the West as a result of insensitive decisions made when their seemingly well-intentioned exhibits of Asian art have been conceived and presented. In this thesis, two recent exhibitions at major museums, one at the Metropolitan Museum

in New York and a second at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts will be analyzed extensively, on the basis of particular theoretical points of view, in order to illustrate the conflicts that arise today in the West because of its imprecise and insensitive understanding of the cultures and sensibilities of the East.

I. “Through the Looking Glass” in New York, 2015

The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York curated an exhibition “China: Through the Looking Glass” which ran from May 7 to September 7, 2015. The exhibition explores the impact of Chinese aesthetics on Western fashion and how China has long fueled the fashionable imagination in the west.¹ The name of the exhibit “Through the Looking Glass (Jing Hua Shui Yue)” drawn from the poem quoted above, can be traced to a longer phrase found in the novel *Hong lou meng*, most popularly known in English by the title *Dream of the Red Chamber* (or *The Story of the Stone*) by the famous author, Cao Xueqin (1715/24-1763/4), which first appeared in print in China in 1791 during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

As a descendent of a Chinese family which had once had close ties with China’s Manchu rulers and subsequently enjoyed great prosperity during the Qing Dynasty but had then experienced a severe decline after its loss of imperial favor, Bao Yu, the main character in *Dream of the Red Chamber*, realistically expresses the author’s feeling of dissatisfaction with Qing society through his narration of the descending prosperity of two important families in Beijing, one “Zhen (real)” and one ‘jia (fake),” as contrasting

1. Exhibition Review, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, last modified March 28, 2016, from <http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2015/china-through-the-looking-glass>.

concepts of “ideal and real.” He used the term “through the looking glass”² to reveal the untold dark facts behind the extravagant life of the two families in an imaginary society in the novel. The poem, “Hope Betrayed,” which echoes this contrast, and is found in Chapter five in the novel, reads as follows, “in vain were all their sighs and tears / Or flowers reflected in a glass.” This text was used by the Metropolitan Museum of Art on its website as the explanation of the name of this exhibition. The destinies of the main characters in the novel were designed to have sad endings, revealing the “fake” happiness behind their luxurious life in the novel.

Two centuries later in his novel *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and its sequel *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), English author Lewis Carroll used a similar concept to depict a girl named Alice’s adventures in her dream of a non-existing world where she met imaginary creatures. Comparing Carroll’s Alice to Bao Yu in *Dream of the Red Chamber*, American poet and literary critic John T. Irwin stated that the similarity between the two novels is the parting gesture of Bao Yu when he takes a mirror, on which is revealed the illusory world of reflection, with him into the real world with the consequent reversal of outer and inner. Essentially, Bao Yu’s infinite dream in the mirror and Alice’s discovery that she is a figure in a dream are similar in form and meaning.³ Both Lewis Carroll and Cao Xueqin created an untouchable and infinite world

2. Moon in the Water. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, last modified March 28, 2016, <http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2015/china-through-the-looking-glass/exhibition-galleries/217>.

3. John T. Irwin, *The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story* (New York: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 90.

or dream for their readers in order for them to consider whether reality is actually real or simply an illusion.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibition was a collaboration between the Costume Institute and the Department of Asian Art, and also included contributions from other Chinese culture experts and the famous Chinese movie director Wong Kai-wai. It used multi-media elements to present a history of Chinese fashion in the Western world, particularly in Europe (France and Italy), the home base of the majority of the designers of the exhibition's objects. The key to the exhibition was buried in its title, "Through the Looking Glass," which indicated, in this case, the, perhaps, until revealed here, mirrored real or imagined influences of Chinese culture on the contemporary western fashion world. The Metropolitan Museum of Art described the exhibition as a dialogue between Eastern and Western fashion, one that had existed, if not always visibly, ever since the silk trade flourished between Asia and Europe in the Roman Empire.⁴ The majority of the exhibited objects were from the Metropolitan Museum of Art's own collections, and the main sources of information sources of viewer pleasure and education were described as follows:

The exhibition features more than 140 examples of haute couture and avant-garde ready-to-wear alongside Chinese art. Filmic representations of China are incorporated throughout to reveal how our visions of China are framed by narratives that draw upon popular culture, and also to recognize the importance of cinema as a medium through which to understand the richness of Chinese history.⁵

4. Andrew Bolton et al., *China Through the Looking Glass: Fashion, Film, Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015), 13.

5. Moon in the Water. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, last modified March 28, 2016, <http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2015/china-through-the-looking-glass/exhibition-galleries/217>.

The exhibition was a visual presentation of Chinese traditional culture in contemporary fashion, and as an exhibition curated by Andrew Bolton from the American Art Department, the intercultural approach to Chinese fashion was intended to display a multi-perspective of the oriental world for various group of audiences from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

There have been, however, both positive and negative reviews of the exhibition from domestic and foreign media and scholars, and the key problem as I see it is whether the exhibition was presenting or fetishizing authentic Chinese culture, and if the latter, representing the phenomenon of western cultural hegemony. One of the key concepts that could be used to critique this exhibition at the Metropolitan would be that of “Orientalism,” as coined by the Palestinian-American literary theoretician and sociologist, Edward Said.

II. About “Orientalism”

In his book *Orientalism* (Pantheon Books, 1978), literary theoretician Edward Said represented his observations about the West’s interpretation of the Middle East. The Middle Eastern world in his book includes North Africa, the Middle Eastern countries, and Saudi Arabia. The definition he gives of “Orientalism” is as a way of seeing that imagines, emphasizes, exaggerates and distorts differences between Arab peoples and cultures and those of Europe and the US. An American citizen as an adult, one who had grown up as a Palestinian in Jerusalem, Said developed his academic interests as a literary theoretician looking at colonized Middle Eastern cultures. In *Orientalism*, his first publication as a professor at Columbia University, he presented his theory about Europe’s

interpretation of the Middle East, which included Islamic, North Africa, the entire Middle East, and Saudi Arabia. The definition he gave of “Orientalism” is as a way of seeing that imagines, emphasizes, exaggerates and distorts differences between Arab peoples and cultures and those of Europe and US. In his own writings, Said did not expand his conception of “Orientalism” into Asia. But while observations concerning “Orientalism” were restricted to his own Near Eastern homeland, the same conceptual perceptions of the Near and Far East (names after all invented by Europeans in relation to their own location) could clearly be observed at the time he was publishing on the subject.

An “Orientalist” view of China in the West can, in fact, be seen as early as the eighteenth century, during the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1711-1799, reign: 1735-1796). Trade between China and Great Britain started in the Qing Dynasty in the 1820s. In 1792, George McCartney, 1st Earl Macartney of Scots-Irish descent was the very first European official representative to visit China⁶ in order to negotiate trade terms with Emperor Qianlong. However, the emperor did not think any terms were necessary, because he believed China to be the center of the universe, and therefore free of any need for external financial relationships. After Qianlong’s death, China entered a period of decline that made it weaker, and the succeeding emperors were not as competent just at the time that the West growing more powerful. Hence, the British army forced the Qing to permit Europeans to enter the Chinese market after the Qing lost in the first Opium War (1839-42), which marked the beginning of social structure changes in China: from feudal to half feudal and half colonial society, until 1911 when the Qing Dynasty was overthrown. The Republic of China was formally established in 1912, with Sun Zhongshan (1866-1925),

6. Macartney and the Emperor. Asia for Educators, last modified March 28, 2016, http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/china_1750_macartney.htm.

more familiarly known in the West as Sun Yatsen as its first president, and it was then that China entered a new era.

I am interested in the changing conception as it has been perceived in the West from colonial times (1840s) to the present, sociologically and museologically. I will be using the exhibition “China: Through the Looking Glass” as one of two examples to examine the development of Western “Orientalist” ideas about China: how its perception of the east has changed through time by Western scholars, and by Europeans living in the Western world. Similar to the “China: Through the Looking Glass” exhibition, the “New Blue and White” exhibition held in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, which I will also discuss, uses one of the main Chinese decorative ideas about the colors “blue and white” in the technique of porcelain making to present the globalization of the specific Chinese cultural traditions of ceramic and porcelain making.

III. Introduction to Chapters 1-3

Chapter 1 “China in the Mirror: From “Commercialized Orientalism” examines the construction of “Orientalism” through a macro or an institutional perspective: “the modernization of the contemporary museum” and “the global culture market.” Having traditionally been careful storehouses of precious objects, some museums have recently modified their goals to become more like public institutions serving their visitors. While museums do still retain some aspects of the traditional “cabinet of curiosity” model, the “culture market” has influenced their exhibition choices and their curatorial staff, so that some, especially encyclopedic museums like the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, have chosen to present new kinds of exhibitions that present new and startling

relationships between ideas and objects materials that have not been seen together before. For the case of the exhibition “China: Through the Looking Glass,” it is useful to make a correlation between the museum’s history, market needs and the curator’s exhibition planning purposes, in order to explain the presence of the concept of “Orientalism” in the exhibit “China: Through the Looking Glass” exhibition.

Chapter 2 “China in the Mirror: Commodity Fetishism” is a continuation of chapter 1: a micro and in-depth study of the objects in the exhibition, which covers objects of Chinese fashion since the 1840s under the circumstances of the social and political changes that occurred in that period. These dramatic changes in China from the 1840s to the present have been identified in the exhibition by generalized names: feudal society (before 1840), half feudal and half colonial society (from 1840 to 1911-1949), and finally the communist society (after 1949). From the exhibition “China: Through the Looking Glass,” the Metropolitan Museum of Art presented to its audience a rapid transition of Chinese contemporary styles from past to present by using different media, including movie, stage designs, and music. The primary design of the exhibition is the “contrast” between the present and the past: almost every case in the exhibition contains two objects from two different time periods, which share a similar design.

This chapter uses the theory of symbolic interactionism as defined by the American sociologist Herbert Blumer (1900-1987) to examine visual “Orientalism” in the modern day, in museums and in the work of contemporary designers. Blumer’s theory of symbolic interactionism is a iconographic study using both external and internal approaches: how socially prominent individuals influence each other and how structures in society change and also interact; and how differentiated types of people respond to the

social changes that may affect their personal lives and art creation. But a question that can be raised with respect to the Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibit was whether the particular fashion pieces on display in the exhibit did, in fact, truly inherit, embody and utilize, or if they misunderstood Chinese culture in the designer's own time, which visitors have been since told they did, on the basis of the particular designer's cultural background and his / her social interaction with other individuals who might have had influence on his / her design. And related to "Orientalism", a question to be asked is whether American museum visitors can ever really know whether a specific object on display from another culture represents it faithfully or is merely a distant echo of its particular character?

Chapter 3: A Global Exhibition: A Case Study of "New Blue and White" an exhibition in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (February 20, 2013 – July 14, 2013), examined how some contemporary encyclopedic museums have presented the idea of cultural globalization through real objects, and questions whether the idea of "Orientalism" has been applied to a particular kind of traditional Asian design, blue and white porcelain with respect to both its traditional iconography and symbolic meaning. The "New Blue and White" exhibition revealed the development of "Blue and White Culture" in the context of globalization out of Asia and into the present global world. Various national or cultural identities were presented in the different themes of the exhibition. The exhibit successfully attracted and/or targeted multi-cultural audiences, a fact which will be examined below in more detail. At the conclusion of this chapter, some comparisons and contrasts will be made between "New Blue and White" and "China: Through the Looking Glass."

Literature Review: The Oriental World: From the Past to the Present

The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilization and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the other.

– Edward Said⁷

This thesis is a study of the presentation of the modern Oriental culture in museums in North America through two major case studies: “China: Through the Looking Glass,” an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the “New Blue and White,” an exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The three main theories to be used to examine these exhibits will be Karl Marx’s commodity fetishism, Edward Said’s “Orientalism”, and Herbert Bulmer’s symbolic interactionism. The key argument will be: what is the modern concept of the East as it is reflected in the West in museum exhibitions, as illustrated by the two described above concerning the arts in China through the ages merged with related arts in the West.

I. The East: Rise and Fall

The term “East” has always been a changing concept throughout history geographically and culturally, with distinctions eventually being made in Europe between a Middle East and a Far East, for example. Furthermore the term “West” also changes depending on one’s vantage point. In what is now called the Far East, in particular China, interactions with regions to its west have been traditionally believed to have begun in the

7. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, Vintage Books Edition, 1979), 1.

Han dynasty (206/202 BCE-220 CE) and especially the first half of that dynasty known as the Western Han (206/202 BCE-9 CE) when trading networks greatly expanded to form what is now popularly called in China and elsewhere “The Silk Road,” a term of German (*seidenstrasse*) rather than Chinese origin coined by the German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833-1905). The Chinese terminology for the Western World at that time was “Xiyu,” which meant any region not ruled by the Western Han Dynasty within Asia and the eastern borders of Europe. This included about 36 small nations, the Roman Empire, and Mongolia and assorted regions, the latter under the control of a non-Chinese nomadic ethnic group known as the “Xiongnu.” Although it is now known that trade existed between China and regions to its west even before the Western Han dynasty, still there is no doubt that cultural interaction and trade greatly expanded during this period. A very important factor in this were various missions undertaken westward to assorted kingdoms and regions by diplomat-official Zhang Qian (ca.200 BCE?-ca.114/113 BCE) beginning in 139 BCE at the behest of Western Han Emperor Wu (156 BCE-87 BCE; reign:141 BCE-87 BCE).



Figure 1: Map of the geographical extension of the Western Han Dynasty in 200 B.C.



Figure 2: Map of the geographical extension of the Eastern Han Empire with its extension of the Western Protectorates in 100 AD.

At that time, the furthest border of “The Silk Road” was Central Asia. However, during the subsequent Eastern Han dynasty (25 CE-220 CE) which followed the brief Xin dynasty (9 CE-23 CE) which had toppled the Western Han, “The Silk Road” was extended by the general/diplomat ambassador Ban Chao (32-102 CE) from 91 to 100 CE from Central Asia to Western Asia, and he reported that he dispatched an envoy to what would have been the easternmost part of the Roman Empire, which was then called “Daqin”. Although most experts doubt this envoy actually reached the Roman Empire, there was knowledge of it in China, and in subsequent centuries better evidence of some interaction with it. Recent scholarship has revealed that the “The Silk Road “continued to exist following the collapse of the Han dynasty in 220 CE, but with somewhat diminished trade due to conflicts and cultural instability. Along with what has been sometimes called the “The Silk Road of the Sea”, i.e., maritime routes which expanded during the Tang dynasty (619-907), a period often described as the” Golden Age of Cosmopolitanism,” east/west trade revived due to China’s welcoming attitude toward foreign cultures. In fact, these maritime routes seem to have been more important than land trade during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (907 – 960), and the Song

Dynasty (960 – 1279), possibly because of the many land-based conflicts at that time coupled with the rise of maritime merchants, many of whom were Arab. With the rise of Mongol power and its ultimate conquest of most of Asia in the 13th century, a period during which the Yuan dynasty (1271/2-1368) was established, the land-based “Silk Road” revived and there was an even greater geographical expansion of East/West trade. The famous Italian “Silk Road” traveler Marco Polo (1254-1324) made his way to the Far East, and wrote extensively about the trade connections between China and the European world in his time, his documented travels becoming a great resource for Westerners in his lifetime and long after.

With the overthrow of the Yuan dynasty in 1368 by the Chinese led by the founder of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), Zhu Yuanzhang, the Hongwu Emperor (1328-1398, r.1368-1398) access to the overland “Silk Road” once again, became limited as the vast region was no longer under the rule of one group (the Mongols). Attention in China eventually turned to maritime trade, which had, in fact never ceased during the Yuan dynasty. The third Ming Emperor, Zhu Di, the Yongle Emperor (1360-1424, r.1402-1424) apparently had an interest in expanding knowledge about, and trading with, ever more distant maritime destinations, It was during his reign that the famous eunuch Admiral Zheng He (1371-1433.35), was first assigned to explore further west by ship in order to expand the trading network between the Ming Dynasty and other countries. Zheng He traveled all the way from China to Southeast Asia and then on to India, and major trading sites on India's southwest coast. On his fourth voyage, he traveled to the Persian Gulf, and on his three last voyages, he went even further, all the way to the east coast of

Africa.⁸ As a devout Muslim, Zheng He is also thought to have visited Mecca, most likely on his seventh and last voyage. The size of Zheng He's ships---disputed but certainly many times larger than those common in Europe at that time---is often cited as symbolic of China's power during the first half of the Ming dynasty. Even as later Ming emperors ceased supporting expeditions like that of Zheng He and the dynasty suffered some reversals in conflicts with non-Chinese ethnicities, China during the Ming certainly remained one of the most developed countries in the world, multiple great commercial resources to trade which included ceramics, silk, and industrially functional cast metals in iron and other materials. At its height, China under the Ming dominated East Asia and it could be seen as the starting point and a zenith of "Oriental Power."

While China was under the rule of the Ming dynasty, European countries were beginning to expand their interests ever further, first the Portuguese and Spanish in the 15th and early 16th centuries, and then other Western powers began to "engage the globe," for example the English in the sixteenth century during the reign of Elizabeth I (1533 – 1603, reign: 1558-1603), a period when it might be claimed that the origins of British imperialism could be discerned and also the first signs of a diminution, although certainly not the demise, of Eastern commercial and political power. A key factor in the rise of Western powers outside of their national boundaries was the commercial enterprises that grew up in this period. Founded in 1600, the East India Company was an organization that existed within and between many different worlds.⁹ This company established a

8. The Ming Voyages. Asia for Educators, last modified April 1, 2016, http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/china_1000ce_mingvoyages.htm.

9. Jon E. Wilson, "The International History Review," Taylor & Francis, Ltd 26, No. 3 (2004): 619.

regular series of established trade network connections between Europe and Asia, all of which made travel between Britain, India, and China easier. The Company also enlarged points of connection and competition between British and Dutch finance and trade,¹⁰ which came just at the same time as appeared a series of incompetent Ming rulers and some popular discontent that eventually led to the dynasty's overthrow and the establishment of the Qing dynasty in 1644. The Qing emperors were Manchu, a non-Chinese ethnicity, and the early years of this dynasty were marked by attempts to re-establish the Ming, or at least a Chinese, dynasty, so it was a very disordered time. Eventually, however, a series of great Qing emperors brought China to another zenith of power culminating in the reign of Qianlong (1711-1799, reign: 1735-1796).

International trade during the early Qing Dynasty had been declining due to the concentration on internal political issues, although trade with nearby regions had begun to rebound in the early 18th century and some European goods like clocks, for example, were valued in China. In the mid 19th century, the power of the East India Company and the armed forces in Britain forced the Qing to permit the Europeans to enter the Chinese market after the Qing lost in the first Opium War (1839-42) and this period marked the beginning of a changing social structure in China: from feudal to half feudal and half colonial society until 1911 when the Qing Dynasty was overthrown. The Republic of China was formally established in 1912, with Sun Zhongshan (1866-1925), more familiarly known in the West as Sun Yatsen, as its first president. It was at this time that China entered a new and modern era.

10. Jon E. Wilson, *The International History Review*, Taylor & Francis, Ltd 26, No. 3 (2004): 619.

With the rise of European colonialism and imperialism, which had begun in the sixteenth century and expanded in succeeding centuries, many areas of Asia, especially South and Southeast Asia, but also including parts of Central and East Asia, had become Western colonies by the nineteenth century. Exceptions to this were Korea, but more importantly Japan, which would soon take on certain colonial-imperialist ideas of its own.

Japan had been an exception with respect to colonization at that time because the Emperor Meiji (1852 – 1912) had recognized the need to reinforce the national power of Japan through learning Western systems. Thus, he made a series of political and cultural policy changes in order to turn Japan into a more modernized capitalistic nation, leaving behind its traditional feudal one. Starting in the nineteenth century, Japan became an East Asian colonial power like America, England, Spain and Russia, and also participated in the Opium Wars, thus making some historians consider Japan to be a western country, due to its social and political structure.¹¹ Otherwise, East Asia from the nineteenth century on was completely colonized by the West, financially, culturally, and politically with respect to matters of political power and culture.

Nowadays when people think of the ‘East’ they may well have in mind what is called East Asia---China, Japan and Korea, essentially. However, the concept of the “East,” according to Edward Said, was different. According to Said, the Orient as an area required Western attention, even reconstruction.¹² Said’s approach to “Orientalism” was

11. Donald Keene, *Emperor of Japan: Meiji and His World, 1852-1912* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 20.

12. David Scott, “Kipling, the Orient, and Orientals: "Orientalism" Reoriented?,” *Journal of World History* 22, No. 2 (2011): 300.

to show Western cultures how they, with or without knowing it, reduced Eastern cultures politically and culturally to less advanced levels than their own.

The “Orientalist” oil painting below, entitled *The Snake Charmer*, is an example of an imaginary “Orientalist” world by the French artist Jean-Léon Gérôme, that was inspired/invented by the people and architecture Gérôme saw on his many voyages, beginning in the late 1850s, to Egypt, the Holy Land, and Asia Minor.¹³ One way to understand Orientalist painting according to the Art Historian Norman Bryson (1949-) is: first we must look at the base, to the questions of who owns the means of production and distribution of wealth, to what constitutes the dominant class, to the ideology this class uses to justify its power; and then to the art, and to painting, as aspects of that legitimation and that monopoly.¹⁴ The Gérôme painting was created during the time of one of France’s campaigns in Egypt and Syria, and it informs its French audience about its powerful hold over the Middle East. The main “Orientalist” subjects in the painting are: the snake, musical and characters from the Middle East. The only Westerner and cultural invader in the painting is the white boy who is holding the snake, a sacred symbol in the Orient, in order to express his power and superiority over the other people.

13. The Spectacular Art of Jean-Léon Gérôme. The Getty Center, last modified April 1, 2016, <http://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/gerome/>.

14. Julijana Nicha, “Orientalist Art as Means of Cultural Imperialism over the Middle East,” American College of Thessaloniki (2013), 14.



Figure 3: The Eastern world depicted in *The Snake Charmer* (1880), by Jean-Léon Gérôme, illustrates the fictional beauty and mystery of the exotic Orient through “Orientalism”

According to the Australian philosopher Arran E. Gare (1948-), the Orient is the "Other" by means of which the West established its own identity, usually to affirm the values it exalted and occasionally to lament the values it suppressed,¹⁵ which means the region of the East defined the West, according to its own history, experience, and culture. “Other” then could also indicate all people who were culturally colonized by the West in the Orient, and whose culture and language were transformed thereby. According to Gare, the Orient was the ideal location for Europe’s imaginary colony plan: the European-created Orient expressed and represented the perfect colony culturally and ideologically, having appropriate supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.¹⁶ “Orientalism” has become, in fact, an individualized and subjective cultural interdisciplinary study of the East that has varied

15. Arran E. Gare, “Understanding Oriental Cultures,” *Philosophy East and West* 45, No. 3 (1995), 310.

16. Ibid., 311.

according to different scholars' and artists' socioeconomic backgrounds, and the particular historical period in which they have lived.

The definition of power according to Said came in different forms. It was not just military, political or economic, but, drawing on the French historian philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984), the power to produce knowledge, images, versions of other people which become accepted as the reality.¹⁷ Said's concentration on "Orientalism" was to study the relationship between the internal power, which would be the local culture, and the external powers including each country's economic and military capacity: how the two inter-influenced each other to shape each individual's experience of the Oriental world.

Edward Said's definition of the Orient was limited to the Middle Eastern world, and an important question to ask is whether this same idea about the idea of the culture superiority of the West applies to the Far Eastern world?

II. About Commodity Fetishism

Another key concept for this thesis is that of Karl Marx (1818 – 1883)'s "commodity fetishism" that analyzes the socioeconomic relationship between labor, commodity and customer throughout the process of production. Born in Germany, and one of three foundational classic sociologists (the other two being Max Weber and Emile Durkheim) in the early nineteenth century, Marx studied law, philosophy and history at college. Later under the influence of the Georg W.F. Hegel (1770–1831), the dominant German intellectual figure and one of the most influential thinkers of the nineteenth

17. David Herman, "Edward Said (1935 – 2003)," *Salmagundi*, No. 143 (2004), 80.

century, Marx constructed the basis of his theoretical system of historical materialism, by inverting Hegel's philosophy of social change.¹⁸ By studying the capitalized social structure of Germany, Marx codified a series of social relationships between labor, employer and customer in order to differentiate the nature of capitalist and communist society based on the division of labor and the social hierarchy system.

Marx developed his theory of capitalism out of the fundamental social structure of early nineteenth century German society. His key theory focuses around the fact that individuals are born into societies where the forces and relations of production that make up "material life"- classes and property relations-are already established for all individuals independent of their particular will. From this existing already economic base, he wrote, was born a "superstructure" or "the human "social, political, and intellectual life processes in general."¹⁹ The industrialized market in the nineteenth century was a social classification or class system, which was according the Marx, the "superstructure" that divided society into various groups based on their economic capacity and determined their material and social lives. Commodities, based on production levels, created, in Marx's belief a crucial socioeconomic bond among individuals.

Another two cultural theory concepts that were derived from Marxism are "post-modernism" and "post-structuralism." One important feature of post-modernism is the effacement of some key boundaries or separations, most notably the erosion of the older

18. Scott A. Appelrouth and Laura Desfor Edles, *Classic and Contemporary Sociological Theory* (Los Angeles: Pine Forge Press, 2012), 21.

19. Ibid., 28.

distinction between high culture and so called mass or popular culture.²⁰ Mass culture in earlier society lay in sharp contrast to high culture, which represented the highest aesthetic standard in the fine arts industry. The contrast between “high” and “low” culture, in fact, had a great influence on the formation of the social hierarchy system. As one of the theoretical formulations of “post-modernism,” “post-structuralism” means that the individual is shaped by sociological, psychological and linguistic structures over which he/she has no control, but which can be uncovered by using “post-structural methods of investigation,”²¹ which reveal that all individuals are under the rule of common social norms created by the society, and are distinguished into different groups or classes naturally defined as “high” and “low” culture.

According to Marx, in his work, *Das Capital*, the definition of commodity is: “an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort of another”.²² An object that can be defined as a commodity must have some specific functions to be utilized by its owners in order to fulfill specific demands. Depending on the function of the object, and the requirement of the supplier for his or her consumers, the function of manufactured objects must to be maximized for profit making. The profit maximization process must include efficiency of production, evaluation of the cost of the labor force used in production, and the particular trends of the market at any identifiable

20. Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983-1998* (New York: Verso, 1998), 34.

21. Post Structuralism. Roger Jones, last modified May 3, 2016, <http://www.philosopher.org.uk/poststr.htm>.

22. Scott A. Appelrouth and Laura Desfor Edles, *Classic and Contemporary Sociological Theory* (Los Angeles: Pine Forge Press, 2012), 59.

time. The purpose of any commodity only exists when it has commercial value for individuals who chose to buy it, and the value of this commodity is mainly determined by its physical properties. It is they that determine its use value. Marx defines “use value” as “the utility of a thing.”²³ Factors to determine the “utility of a thing” include the cost of labor force and the demand from the mainstream market, largely upper-middle and upper class costumers.

The creation of the means of production goes through a series of steps: the initial market demand, the actual cost of labor and the final product. The meaning of production created through the labor force may increase or decrease the market value of the commodity, and create a new cultural meaning for other groups including labor, merchants and customers. Marx wrote:

“A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men’s labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labor; because the relation of the producers sum total of their own labor is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the product of their labor.”²⁴

There is the process by which the products of labor become commodities and reflect people’s social relationships in the form of commodity exchange during the trade. For example, in the case of the cut flower industry, labor is working for wages to sustain life. Most of the laborers are females from poor and rural areas like Kenya, who do not

23. Scott A. Appelrouth and Laura Desfor Edles, *Classic and Contemporary Sociological Theory* (Los Angeles: Pine Forge Press, 2012), 59.

24. Ibid., 59.

have good educations or stable lives.²⁵ But in many other developing and developed countries, cut flowers are fetishized by the local cultures and customs, the demand for which determines their high prices. Both flower sellers and customers benefit from certain initial production customs such as: the low cost of labor, however, they are unaware of this unfair exploitation. Marx's theory of commodity fetishism studies the economic market, but also applies to the cultural world.

III. About "Orientalism"

Edward Said's "Orientalism" was influenced by the work of Karl Marx. In fact, Said closely engaged with specifically Western Marxism. He seriously considered a diffuse assemblage of radical Marxist thinkers from the colonial and postcolonial worlds.²⁶ Said inherited some concepts including imperialism, cultural colonialism and materialism to develop the idea of "Orientalism"; and made a published study of colonialism in his later book, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). In it, Said also expanded Marx's cultural theory from a micro to a macro perspective: from "colonial" to "post-colonial intellectuals, from "nationalism" to "liberation."²⁷ By updating and modernizing Marx's theory, Said demonstrated that "Orientalism" was a response to the movement of

25. Catherine Dolan, Maggie Opondo and Sally Smith, "Gender, Rights & Participation in the Kenya Cut Flower Industry," *Natural Resource Institute Working Paper*, No. 2768, 6.

26. Stephen Howe, "Edward Said and Marxism Anxieties of Influence," *Cultural Critique*, No. 67 (2007), 59.

27. *Ibid.*, 72.

Western cultural domination in the Third World, which, he wrote, included the Middle East and even the Far East.

There are three different aspects of “Orientalism”, and this could also be considered as a concept with three interrelated parts. The first dimension refers to all the scientific and academic disciplines whose purpose is to study Oriental cultures and customs.²⁸ Any type of scholar, be he / she sociologist, anthropologist, or historian who is interested in studying the East can be considered an “Orientalist”, although he/she may study different aspects of the orient. Depending on their academic background, scholars from various disciplines like sociology, history and anthropology may have different approaches to the study of the Orient.

The second concept inherent in the word, “Orientalism” refines it in a more general sense as a “style of thought,” the “ideological suppositions, images, and fantasies about a region of the world called the Orient.”²⁹ The East is an “Orientalized” blueprint for most Westerners; and the term “Orient” thus an individualized and personalized term shaped by people’s academic and cultural background, experience and personal imagination. The French Campaign in Egypt and Syria (1798–1801) by Napoleon offered some Westerners scholars and artists, including Eugène Delacroix and Jean-Léon Gérôme, the opportunity to visit the Eastern World (defined by the French) under the protection of the army. Exhibited in the Salon in Paris, the official exhibition of art sponsored by the French government for centuries, “Orientalist” paintings presented in the nineteenth century to those engaged in the aesthetic upper class an exotic view of the

28. Scott A. Appelrouth and Laura Desfor Edles, *Classic and Contemporary Sociological Theory* (Los Angeles: Pine Forge, 2012), 796.

29. Ibid., 796

Orient that most French people would never actually experience. However, the visual depiction of the Orient in these paintings usually revealed a sense of Western cultural superiority because these paintings were made on commission for the wealthy, which gave a false impression of the Orient as being an under-developed, uncivilized and degenerate world.

The third dimension of “Orientalism” is as a source of power for “dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”³⁰ The concept of the West changed frequently in the early twentieth century with all the historical events taking place: from 1914 to the death of Stalin, Germany and Russia were the central issues for the West. Between the Korean and Vietnamese wars, Asia dominated debate, at least in America. From 1967, especially after the late 1970s, there was a historic shift from the Soviet Union and Asia to Islam and the Middle East.³¹ As an American citizen who grew up in Jerusalem, Said developed his academic interest as a Palestinian literary theoretician. He had grown up in Palestine, and thereafter studied about the colonized Middle Eastern cultures, which became, because of his scholarship, the primary critical topic of “Orientalism”. Based on the geopolitical map of the West, Said experienced a long transformation from being an Easterner to becoming a Western university professor right up until the year of his death in the 1970s. Thus, his personal boundary between East and West was an invisible one rather than the geopolitical one of the European imagination.

30. Scott A. Appelrouth and Laura Desfor Edles, *Classic and Contemporary Sociological Theory* (Los Angeles: Pine Forge, 2012), 797.

31. David Herman, “Edward Said (1935 – 2003),” *Salmagundi*, No. 143 (2004), 78.

Said also created a stereotype for both the West and the East: he defined westerners as the “White West,” and Easterners as “non-White, non-Western populations.” The Orient that became, therefore, East was, he wrote, actually an individualized and personalized term shaped by people’s academic and cultural background, experience and personal imagination. However, most people gained their very first Oriental experience from Oriental art, and observing in it the preset generalized stereotype that the Orient was uncivilized, which increased their sense of superiority and their assurance of their legitimate right to assert domination over the Orient. “Orientalists” of the Western world still believe they speak the “truth” about the Orient and Orientals and that increases western imperialists’ ambitions. Said demonstrated the beliefs of the “Orientalists” as: the Oriental to them was no sudden discovery, no mere historical accident, but an area to the east of Europe whose principal worth was uniformly defined in terms of Europe – European science, scholarship, understanding, and administration – which has been given the credit for having made the Orient what it has become.³² “Orientalists” from the Western world considered themselves as the authority on Oriental culture, and believed that the advanced Western system would influence and finally recreate a modern Western model in the East.

IV. Symbolic Interactionism

A further concept concerning the relationship between East and West can be defined as symbolic interactionism, which was originally created by George Herbert

32. Scott A. Appelrouth and Laura Desfor Edles, *Classic and Contemporary Sociological Theory* (Los Angeles: Pine Forge, 2012), 797.

Mead (1863-1931) in 1937, but was developed in the 1980s by Herbert Blumer into a micro, instead of a macro perspective. With a background in philosophy and social psychology, Mead created the original model named as “behaviorism,” which can be defined as individuals shaping their actions on the basis of the imagined responses they attribute to others. Self-control as to what we say and do is thus in actuality a form of social control as we check our behaviors against the responses that we anticipate will be elicited from others.³³ Mead’s focus of “behaviorism” was mainly on how the self-consciousness of an individual influences his or her action or decision-making process thereby shaping a unique individual on the level of his or her level of self-control. The original highly individualized thinking process created by Mead has been further developed into “Symbolic Interactionism” that explores the inter-influence among human beings.

Symbolic interactionism explains how human beings conduct themselves in different contexts by comprehending other’s behaviors and communicating through symbols during the process of socialization. Blumer stated that the central place and importance of symbolic interaction in human group life and conduct should be apparent; that a human society or group consists of people in association. Such association existed, necessarily, he wrote, of people accessing one another and thus engaging in social interaction.³⁴

33. Scott A. Appelrouth and Laura Desfor Edles, *Classic and Contemporary Sociological Theory* (Los Angeles: Pine Forge, 2012), 292.

34. Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (Los Angeles: 1986), 10.

To reinforce the importance of social interaction, Blumer insisted that the “ability of self- control” and “self-consciousness” shaped by the broad social environment created the “meaning of social interaction:” its interpretation entailing constructing the meaning of objects or of another’s actions. It is on the basis of one’s interpretation or definition that one then responds, he wrote, to his/her physical and social surroundings”³⁵ Similar to Karl Marx’s concept “meaning of production,” objects or commodities are given different meanings through people’s social activities, which represent a process of interpretation.

The first proposition of symbolic interactionism is: “the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows.”³⁶ Relating this to Said’s third stage of “Orientalism” (dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient):³⁷ with all the pre-knowledge from the Orientalist paintings and historic documents, and the cultural superiority given by the capitalized society, the meaning or the image of the Oriental World becomes a potential imaginary colony of the Western mind.

The second proposition of symbolic interactionism is that “human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.”³⁸ Relating this concept to the first stage of “Orientalism” which refers to all the scientific and academic

35. Scott A. Appelrouth and Laura Desfor Edles, *Classic and Contemporary Sociological Theory* (Los Angeles: Pine Forge, 2012), 476.

36. Ibid., 476.

37. Ibid., 796.

38. Ibid., 476.

disciplines whose purpose is to study Oriental cultures and customs³⁹: the cultural approach of “Orientalists” or the Westerners’ to the East is based on a pre-set understanding: that the East is an undiscovered and primitive land.

The third proposition of symbolic interactionism is that “these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters.”⁴⁰ When one experiences his own cultures in a foreign country, there will be some differences. For example, customs from other countries might be practiced in localized ways. The invasion or occupation of other cultures during globalization reinforces the homogeneity of the world, which shows the concept of the “McDonaldization of Society,” a term of the sociologist George Ritzer (1940-), which is “the process by which the principles of the fast food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world.”⁴¹ Globalization thus reduces the cultural distinctions between the Eastern and Western world significantly.

39. Scott A. Appelrouth and Laura Desfor Edles, *Classic and Contemporary Sociological Theory* (Los Angeles: Pine Forge, 2012), 796

40. Ibid., 796

41. Ibid., 794.

Chapter 1: China in the Mirror: Commercialized Orientalism

A Case Study of the “China: Through the Looking Glass” Exhibition at the Metropolitan
Museum of Art, New York

*It is a smart, illuminating look behind the curtain at one of New York’s Greatest
Institutions and the fascinating mechanics that make it tick.*⁴²

— Adam Rathe, Dujour

Chapter 1 “China in the Mirror: Commercialized Orientalism” examines the construction of Orientalism through a macro or an institutional perspective: “the modernization of the contemporary museum” and “the global culture market.” Having traditionally been careful storehouses of precious objects, some museums have recently modified their goals to become more like public institutions serving their visitors. While museums do still retain some aspects of the traditional “cabinet of curiosity” model, the “culture market” has influenced their exhibition choices and their curatorial staff, so that some, especially encyclopedic museums like The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, have chosen to present new kinds of exhibitions that present new and startling relationships between ideas and objects that have not been seen together before. For the case of the exhibition “China: Through the Looking Glass,” it is useful to make a correlation between the museum’s history, market needs and the curator’s exhibition planning purposes, in order to explain the presence of the concept of Orientalism in the exhibit “China: Through the Looking Glass” exhibition.

42. The First Monday in May. The First Monday in May (Official Movie Site), last modified April 15, 2016, <http://www.firstmondayinmay.com/>.

I. The Exhibition

The “China: Through the Looking Glass” exhibition was curated by Andrew Bolton, the current Head Curator of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute in New York City. The key inspiration of the exhibition was the term “Through the Looking Glass” that indicated the influence of Chinese cultural elements on the contemporary fashion world, especially on modern European and American designers. The Metropolitan Museum of Art described the exhibition as a dialogue between East and West, in recognition of the fact that since the Asian silk trade, which has existed and flourished in the west since the Roman Empire, when trade flourished between Asia and the Roman Empire, China has been a source of fashion inspiration for the West.⁴³

The exhibition was a visual presentation of Chinese traditional culture as revealed in contemporary western fashion. This intercultural approach to Chinese fashion was intended to provide a multi-perspective view of the “Oriental World” aimed at audiences from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

43. Andrew Bolton et al., *China Through the Looking Glass: Fashion, Film, Art*, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015), 13.

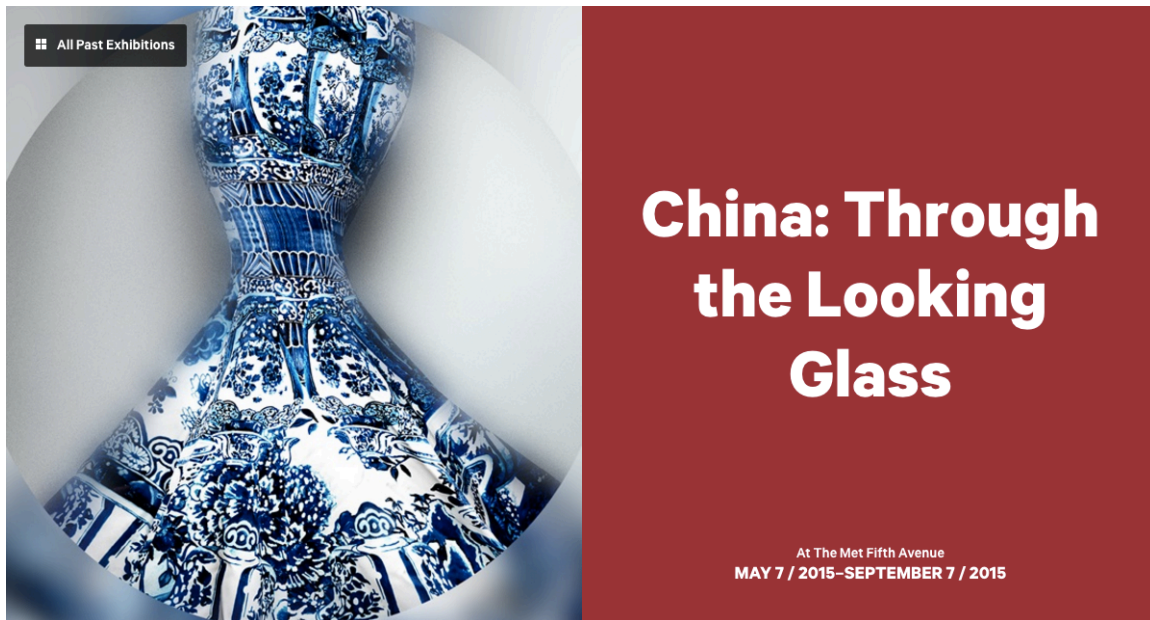


Figure 4: Official Poster of the exhibition “China: Through the Looking Glass”

For most audiences, their instant reaction to the “China” in the exhibition title “China: Through the Looking Glass” was its double meaning: the country China, and the culture of China. And the term “Through the Looking Glass” contained multiple meanings to audiences, that is, before they read the catalogue text, which indicates that “Glass” might indicate either an objective presentation of Chinese culture through a clear glass or an imagined mirrored view of China seen from outside. And indeed, both are part of what Mr. Bolton explained: “The show is not about China, per se. He [Mr. Bolton] said that it is instead about the “collective fantasy of China” and how it is represented in western culture – primarily through fashion and cinema.⁴⁴ However, the title did not match some audiences’ expectation for this exhibition. For the majority of the Asian audience, this exhibition was a completely Western fashion show using some, but in fact,

44. Met's China: Through the Looking Glass show presents a fantasy of the far east. Amanda Holpuch, last modified April 15, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2015/may/04/met-china-fashion-art-exhibit-gala>

very few Chinese visual symbols, reminding them of an “elaphure”, which is an old Chinese myth illustrating the idea of “nothing alike,” because this specific deerlike creature has features of different animals: a horselike head, a donkeylike tail, a camellike neck and deerlike horns. In other words, the Orientalist characteristics of this exhibit were its two diverse and conflicting goals, neither of which served the reality of China at all: “the modernization of contemporary museum” and “the global culture market.”

II. The Modernization in Contemporary Museums in North America

The general concept of modernization is “a traditional or pre-technological society as it is transformed into a society characterized by machine technology, rational and secular attitudes, and highly differentiated social structures.”⁴⁵ James O’Connell’s definition of modernization emphasizes the change in the social structure led by external factors such as technology, cultural difference and the development of the economy.

Another scholar, Andreas Huyssen, professor of German and comparative literature at Columbia University, who O’Connell used in his article “Introduction: Modernism after Postmodernity”, stated that modernization means the transition of traditional European culture to the rest of the world, and particularly to America. This concept of modernization is strongly linked to the process of globalization, which can be defined as cultural transmission from the European countries to the “non-Western” world,⁴⁶ especially with respect to high culture such as architecture and the fine arts, and

45. Cyril E Black, *Comparative Modernization: A Reader* (London: The Free Press, 1976), 60.

46. Andreas Huyssen, “Introduction: Modernism after Postmodernity,” *New German Critique* 99, No.5 (2006), 3.

also including the development of new methods in museology. Huyssen wrote that the process of modernization is actually a conscious effort in the West to colonize all “non-western” countries.

In the case of museums, Huyssen thinks that one important factor that influenced the development of the contemporary museum originated in the National Gallery of Art in Berlin, where the first exhibitions of “modern” were curated. The term “modern art” not only indicated the “modernity” of the art exhibited in the Berlin museum, but also the overall style or decoration of the museum itself. Designers in the US were inspired to build the Museum of Modern Art in New York to make it look more like a modern institution visually from the perspective of its architectural design in order to complement the art it displayed. The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York is, however, an exception to more traditional museums such as The Metropolitan Museum of Art. As an universal art museum, there it seemed to be accepted that this “new world” museum should repeat this “European practice,” which Huyssen defined to be to carry the “new arts” into the “non-western world.”⁴⁷ Interestingly, the United States was not considered primarily as a “Western country” in museology history, but rather a secondary country that took on the traditions of European museum culture. This American embrace of European traditions is evident in the visual arts, according to Huyssen, in a whole series of recent major shows on the international museum circuit, including the MoMA celebration of its modernist holdings in Berlin and the extensive Dada show in Paris, Washington and New York. The director of the National Gallery of Berlin, Harry

47. Andreas Huyssen, “Introduction: Modernism after Postmodernity,” *New German Critique* 99, No.5 (2006), 10.

Alexander McBride advanced the idea that the modernization of the museum has turned it from the storehouse of tradition into a mass media function, a *heteropotian heteropolitan* space characteristic of a democratic society.⁴⁸ The word *heteropolitan* means a large common place that is able to bring together people from various cultures, races, and social classes to have equal access to a space and its contents. The concept of *heteropolitan* has become the common practice of most museums in the US because of its reinforcement of democratic ideals of equality, and this is especially significant for The Metropolitan Museum of Art who gets over six million visitors annually.

The exhibition “China: Through the Looking Glass,” could be considered one such *heteropolitan* exhibit, designed to fulfill a public duty to its widely international audiences: because besides displaying world art consistently, it also needs to exhibit work that has a rotating cultural focus every few months to draw new audiences who may be interested in diverse and nontraditional subjects, and wish to share their non-traditional backgrounds or experiences. New York has a large Asian population, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art receives a large percentage of international visitors. The “China: Through the Looking Glass” actually attracted a record of 815,992 visitors domestically and internationally,⁴⁹ which was one of the highest visitation numbers for exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

48. Andreas Huyssen, “Introduction: Modernism after Postmodernity,” *New German Critique* 99, No.5 (2006), 5.

49. Chinese exhibition at New York’s Metropolitan Museum attracts record 815,992 visitors. Agence France Presse, last modified April 15, 2016, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/1856642/chinese-exhibition-new-yorks-metropolitan-museum-attracts-record>.

The modernization of the museum in the US has been largely influenced by European high culture, as the European museum model was completely adopted by most American museums. Huyssen points out that the consequence of this adaptation of the European museum model has been that “the wave of French and German critical theory ended post- modernizing the organization of knowledge in significant parts of the American humanities and social sciences, and architecture.”⁵⁰ Thus American museums in the twenty-first century are still echoing the traditional European model in form.

Arif Dirlik agreed with Huyssen that the modernization of museum development in the early nineteenth century in the US could be defined as a “Euro-American” model. It is clear that the concept of the museum was originally developed in Europe in the fifteenth century although the museums then were only “small cabinets of curiosity,” and the property of European families, who had full control of their collections. According to Edward Alexander:

The French collector was the force that made the art museum possible. Usually a prince, nobleman, high clergyman, rich merchant, or banker, he purchased or commissioned paintings, sculptures, and other beautiful and useful objects. As his collection grew, connoisseurship became his passion, and he added or discarded pieces, ever seeking highest quality (Alexander, 2008, p. 50).⁵¹

Thus, most types of museums in the world, including the ones in the United States, all share the “culture memory of collection” of the original European museums, still a basic characteristic of US modern museums in contemporary society.

50. Andreas Huyssen, “Introduction: Modernism after Postmodernity,” *New German Critique* 99, No.5 (2006), 2.

51. Edward P. Alexander and Mary Alexander, *Museum In Motion: An Introduction to the History and Function of Museums*. (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2008), 50.

The other meaning of a modern cultural institution like a museum is “the resurgence of history,” which is visible in our day in the resurgence of nationalism, but also in the resurgence of claims to history that erode the nation-state both from within and without, ranges that spread from localized claims of various kinds to global and civilizational claims.⁵² Dirlik has written that the modernization of global history is indeed a “an identification with Euro-American models of modernity, which provided an earlier modernization discourse with its teleological power.”⁵³ Thus most museums, as typical cultural institutions, are, in his mind, all truly a reflection of European collectors’ history or style even though they may be localized by the local culture and social environment.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art is one of the inheritors of the “Euro-American” model, since the museum’s earliest roots date back to 1866 in Paris, France, when a group of Americans agreed to create a “national institution and gallery of art” to bring art and art education to the American people.⁵⁴ Although the Department of Asian Art at the Metropolitan Museum is now one of the largest in terms of galleries and personnel, and space devoted to other non- Euro-American based art has expanded, the primary collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art is still European, and even the master plan of the museum is European art and style based:

52. Arif Dirlik, “Modernity as History: Post-Revolutionary China, Globalization and the Question of Modernity.” *Taylor&Francis* 27, No.1 (2002), 17.

53. *Ibid.*, 17.

54. History of the Museum. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, last modified April 14, 2016, <http://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met>.

Unfortunately, the nature of the ground plan, the "master plan," even in its most current incarnation, still seems to conform to a nineteenth-century paradigm: the arts of the great ancient civilizations flank the entrance and Great Hall, and the grand staircase that bisects the central axis of the building leads to European painting. The arts of Asia are tucked away above Egypt; the Rockefeller Wing, focusing on the Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas, hides behind the cafeteria.⁵⁵

The European cultural root of The Metropolitan Museum of Art has determined Western culture to be the mainstream focus of the museum, and shapes its non-western exhibitions as "Orientalist," not Asian in actuality, and this idea has continued to influence exhibition planning and public marketing.

III. The Museum in the Contemporary Cultural Market

The globalization part of museum development is that museums in non-Western countries have adopted the basic structure of the Western museum, although some changes have to be made, based on local culture or other needs such as those of the cultural market. After World War II and into the 1960s, *avant-garde* art began to be popular among New Yorkers, and so curators and art merchants began to spread this newly popular form of art worldwide. The *avant-garde* in all its forms became the newly popular way to exhibit in museums, but since most American museums do not get funding from the government but from wealthy and often traditionally cultured individuals, many have not been able to modernize in the US. However, as the Guggenheim Museum in New York City is the earliest European contemporary art museum in the US, it has become a brand for all contemporary global museums.

55 . Reinventing the architecture of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. JDWelch Design, last modified April 15, 2016, <http://www.jdwelch.net/writing/metarch.html>.

The Guggenheim Museum is also considered one of the very first non-capitalist style museums in the world, according to Saloni Mathur.⁵⁶ The Guggenheim Museum in New York was, in fact, the first museum to expand its collections to non-western areas in Asia, Africa and South America. The significance of the expansion of the Guggenheim is that the museum is what Mathur calls “Global Guggenheim”⁵⁷ as it was the pioneer in the art museum world in the twentieth century to become culturally global. But the expansion of the Guggenheim did not mean that it rejected American contributors, because, to this day, it provides a completely professional context for local cultures to be exhibited to the public as well. Because the Guggenheim Museum is not a non-profit organization like the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, however, which gets direct funding from the government, the Guggenheim has less freedom to choose the objects to be exhibited because of the “private demand” of the museum’s donors and visitors.⁵⁸ The safest way for the Guggenheim to maintain its profit has been to provide a professional contemporary art context for its visitors in order to preserve the authority of Guggenheim in the avant-garde art market in the US. Most art works exhibited in the Guggenheim are from famous avant-garde artists in the late nineteenth century, such as Pablo Picasso and Marcel Duchamp who were the most well known artists in the contemporary art revolution in the 1970s in New York. Also avant-garde art has become a symbol of New York City, so the Guggenheim Museum is also exhibiting the art identity of New York

56. Saloni Mathur, “Museum and Globalization,” *Anthological Quarterly* 78, No. 3 (2005), 700.

57. *Ibid.*, 698

58. Bruno S Frey and Stephan Meier, *A Companion to Museum Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), 401.

City to its residences and visitors. The strategy of the Guggenheim Museum includes what is called “bequest value,” which is that people derive satisfaction from the fact that their descendants and other members of the community will in the future be able to enjoy a museum if they choose to.⁵⁹ Avant-garde culture is already bred into the lives of New Yorkers, so the Guggenheim museum is serving as a public showcase for the high fashion values of New Yorkers, and thus brings visitors to the city to experience its high fashion tastes as well as its longtime preference for the avant-garde.

One important public function of the museum is providing a vehicle for corporate image promotion through corporate sponsorships, which can be explained through the example of the hidebound contemporary Guggenheim Museum’s relationship with the fashion brand Armani. The collaboration between Armani and the Guggenheim Museum shows how economic power influences the development of museums, as the direction of fashion is most certainly determined by market needs. The Guggenheim Museum has collaborated with several fashion companies to create exhibitions in recent years. From 2000 to 2001, The Guggenheim Museum opened two exhibitions with the Giorgio Armani Company, presenting clothing made by the Italian designer. Their purpose was not to advertise Giorgio Armani fashion and encourage visitors to purchase the company’s stock, but the result of the museum’s contemporary goal to reveal the contemporary art world in all its forms.⁶⁰ The Armani exhibition in the Guggenheim Museum was a win-win for both parties, the fashion company and the museum. The

59. Bruno S Frey S and Stephan Meier, *A Companion to Museum Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), 403.

60. Saloni Mathur, “Museum and Globalization,” *Anthological Quarterly* 78, No. 3 (2005), 699.

Guggenheim achieved even more authority than it had already by being the top museum displaying the most up to date fashion in the art market and the newest Armani collection. Armani also fulfilled its desire for expansion in the United States through a non-economic path that showed transnational fashion from Europe in one of the best-known contemporary museums in the United States. Thus, it seems, the cooperation between fashion brands and museums has helped fulfill present day demands for transnational trade.

Compared to the success of the Guggenheim Museum in displaying fashion, The Metropolitan Museum of Art also has experienced a few similar cases, which have all been represented in the annual fashion exhibitions in early spring curated by the Costume Institute. Past fashion exhibitions have included: Jacqueline Kennedy: The White House Years (2001), Superheroes: Fashion and Fantasy (2008), and PUNK: Chaos to Couture (2013). Recent monographic exhibitions have included Chanel (2005), Poiret: King of Fashion (2007), and Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty (2011).⁶¹ The data show that that fashion exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art always draws the largest number of visitors, partly due to the branding effect the exhibits represent. Almost every fashion exhibition at the museum has involved top international designers: Chanel and Alexander McQueen, for instance, both name stars in the fashion world and brands revered in the culture market.

Bruno S. Frey, a Swiss economist analyzes the market of museums with respect to the typical economic model: demand and profit. Frey thinks that for most museums, their

61. The Costume Institute. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, last modified April 15 2016, <http://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/curatorial-departments/the-costume-institute>.

cost is fixed and inelastic because museums in general operate with considerable high fixed costs: buildings, collections, staff, insurance, technical outfitting, and so on, none of which can be varied in the short run.⁶² The basic relationship between the museum and its visitors is like that of the supplier and the demander. The general principle in economics is that the price of the product will rise if its demand rises. However, Frey points out that it is not applicable in the case of the museum, and the museum is more likely to lose in the transaction between the museum and the visitors due to the high cost of putting on very expensive exhibits, which counteracts best choice options in economics.⁶³ However in the museum, art works and historic artifacts require not only storage and conservation costs but also opportunity costs, which is the additional cost the museum has to expend to purchase art works for special exhibitions in order to attract larger audiences. In doing so, the museum also has to calculate how much it has invested in preparation for the exhibition and whether the profits (ticket sales) from the audience will equalize the costs and still create a cash bonus for its annual budget.

Another concept related to this case is the earned income, which consists of admission fees, membership fees, revenue from museum shops, and rental of facilities. Facility rental can be a significant of revue, bringing in more funds than the net revenue from food service.⁶⁴ Earned income must, in fact, be an important part of The Metropolitan Museum of Art's revenue, and that of other museums in the United States

62. Bruno S Frey S and Meier, Stephan. *A Companion to Museum Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), 399.

63. Ibid., 400.

64. Neil G. Kotler, Philip Kotler and Wendy I. Kotler, *Museum Marketing and Strategy* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2008, 196).

as well, except the Smithsonian and other government controlled museums that are funded by the nation. The Metropolitan Museum of Art often rents its gallery space to public events, but concerns, such as multi/inter cultural respect, have been raised by the public. The Met Gala in 2015 was held in the Chinese Galleries and the Costume Center, where all the objects were exhibited. Thus, one question from the public was: was there any respect given to the objects, if all the celebrities could have their “Oriental dream night” within five inches of the invaluable Chinese antiques? Some scholars and collectors claim that the choice of the Gala location created an inappropriate approach to Chinese culture that went beyond and behind the exhibition itself, directed by various Chinese social media platforms.

From the visual design of the exhibition “China: Through the Looking Glass,” the preparation costs were certainly not small; thus, other than just the income from ticket sales, The Metropolitan Museum of Art had to rely on external support such as sponsorship and collaboration with *Vogue Magazine* for marketing and public benefit. The time frame of the exhibition was from May 7 to September 7, 2015. The Met Gala, formally called the Costume Institute Gala, which is an annual fundraising gala for the museum, was used as a pre-opening advertisement to the public for the exhibit, and the museum was able to utilize the “celebrity effect” to draw potential audiences’ curiosity to come into the museum to see the exhibition in person, which also needed to be calculated in advance as an opportunity cost. The Metropolitan Museum of Art staff might have considered that using “China” as the subject might not have been popular enough to attract the number of visitors they expected. To reduce the opportunity cost of the exhibition, the collaboration between the Anna Wintour, the editor-in chief of *American*

Vogue, one of the most influential fashion leaders in the US, was crucial to the gala. In addition to her, inviting as many celebrities as possible to the Gala was also done to increase publicity for the museum and as a way of increasing publicity for the exhibition. In the preview of the Met Gala movie: the First Monday in May, Wintour mentioned: “Rihanna, we cannot lose her, right?” (Rihanna is a famous Barbadian singer and songwriter) We just realized how expensive it all would be.⁶⁵ Certain US and international celebrities or fashion icons were “musts” at this Met Gala in reference to this exhibit.

Rihanna’s dress at the Met Gala in 2015 also created a popular public cultural discussion on different social media. There was an inappropriate cultural tie through the dress of Rihanna: the dress and Rihanna were considered by some to be an awkward or even unmatchable cultural combination between the East and West. Dr. Homa King, one of the contributors of the exhibition, and a professor of the History of Art at Bryn Mawr College commented on Rihanna’s dress:

I felt bad Rihanna was made fun of. She wore a Guo Pei -- a female, Chinese designer. It’s a dress that is in a conversation with that beautiful gold gown that’s in the Buddha gallery. It wasn’t just kitsch. It was the imperial yellow color with that Qing dynasty imperial yellow. And Rihanna’s a queenly figure. It was like performance on royalty, faded dynasties, the legacy of royal pageantry in an era when we don’t have that many royal families.⁶⁶

65. Fabiola Beracasa Beckman, Sylvana Ward Durrett, and Dawn Ostroff, “The First Monday in May Trailer,” The Metropolitan Museum of Art, April 25, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MRFCVG85X_s.

66. China Through The Looking Glass: Academic Who Inspired Exhibit Talks About Rihanna’s Gown, 'Orientalism,' And Not Going To The Met Gala. Barbara Herman, last modified April 15, 2016, <http://www.ibtimes.com/china-through-looking-glass-academic-who-inspired-exhibit-talks-about-rihannas-gown-1914705>.



Figure 5: The model Rihanna in costume at the annual Gala Ball organized by The Costume Institute of The Metropolitan Museum of Art

As a typical Western queen figure or even the fashion icon of the United States, the collaboration between Rihanna and Guo Pei was a win-win trade. Through the imperial symbolic meaning behind the dress, Rihanna was able to achieve a level of self-satisfaction, which was to be the “queen” of the gala, or even the most iconic fashion trend in the United States of 2015; and Guo Pei used the celebratory publicity of Rihanna as one measure of the successful level of the dress design. After the Met Gala, Guo Pei immediately became one of the top Chinese fashion designers with her rapidly improved reputation as the designer who had made Rihanna’s Met Gala costume.

However, relating to the idea generated out of Orientalism, there were some negative voices that pointed out that the commercialized purpose of the Met Gala did conflict with the purpose of the exhibit as one representing the particular nature of Chinese fashion, reducing respect for the content of the exhibit by its emphasis on Western designers. According to one of the contributors of the exhibition, Dr. Homay King, who expressed her thought on the Met Gala: “It's their biggest fundraiser. They

have a limited capacity, and the minimum donation is \$25,000. I was not invited. I don't mind. Not that many people got to go, including some other curators. I would have jumped at the chance, but I'm slightly relieved to have not been in the media circuit.⁶⁷ Most people would consider "China" a national culture, and it may not be appropriate to over consume a culture like this by valuing how much people were able to donate to the Met; instead, the focus point should have been on who would have been the best candidates to present the beautiful designs of Chinese fashion made with Chinese fabric, so as not to mislead the public.

Thus, with the intervention of cultural market need expressed in the fundraising goals of the Met Gala, the presentation of the Oriental culture of "China" was fetishized locally based on the museum's needs, the choice of the Museum administration, which might be seen as "commercialized orientalism."

Under the influence of the Euro-American model, most museums in the US should continue to follow what they have inherited from the newer European museums, which get some of their costs paid for by the government or by particular patrons. But because of the necessity of their being one of the economic profit seekers in the cultural market, some museums or cultural institutions have had to adopt certain commercial practices, which may go against their original cultural standards.

67. China Through The Looking Glass: Academic Who Inspired Exhibit Talks About Rihanna's Gown, 'Orientalism,' And Not Going To The Met Gala. Barbara Herman, last modified April 15, 2016, <http://www.ibtimes.com/china-through-looking-glass-academic-who-inspired-exhibit-talks-about-rihannas-gown-1914705>.

Chapter 2: China in the Mirror: Commodity Fetishism

A Case Study of the “China: Through the Looking Glass” Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

*In order for China to satisfy Western desires for the exotic, a sense of the mysterious needed to be pre- served. In this self-defeating and self-perpetuating quest for the unexplored, Chinese Imperial Palaces- places generally inaccessible to Westerners- seemed to be the last bastions of the unknown until forcibly opened up by military intervention.*⁶⁸

— Sarah Cheang

Chapter 3 “China in the Mirror: Commodity Fetishism” is a continuation of chapter 2: an in-depth study of objects with fetishized cultural meaning in the exhibition “China: Through the Looking Glass.” Chinese fashion since the 1840s changed considerably under the circumstances of the social and political changes that occurred in that period. These rolling changes in China from the 1840s to the present have been identified by generalized names: feudal society (before 1840), half feudal and half colonial society (from 1840 to 1911-1979), and finally communist society (after 1979). From the exhibition “China: Through the Looking Glass,” the Met presented to its audience a rapid transition of Chinese fashion from past to present by using different media, including movie, stage designs, and music. The primary design of the exhibition

68. Sarah Cheang, “Selling China: Class, Gender and Orientalism at the Department Store,” *Journal of Design History* 20, no.1, 3.

was the “contrast” between the present and the past: almost every case in the exhibition contains two objects from two different time periods, which shared a similar design.

This chapter uses American sociologist Herbert Blumer’s theory of symbolic interactionism to examine visual *Orientalism* in the modern day, in museums and in the work of contemporary designers. Blumer’s theory of symbolic interactionism is an iconographic study using both external and internal approaches: how socially prominent individuals influence each other and how structures in society change and also interact; and how differentiated types of people respond to the social changes that may affect their personal lives and art creation. But a question can be raised as to whether the particular fashion pieces on display in the exhibit did, in fact, illustrate, utilize or misunderstand Chinese culture in the particular designer’s own time on the basis of this designer’s cultural background and his / her social interaction with other individuals who might have had influence on his / her design. And with respect to the context described above of Orientalism, can American museum visitors really know whether a specific object on display presents cultural hegemony or represents an appreciation of its particular national character?

I. The Symbolic Interactionism and Commodity Fetishism

Symbolic interactionism, as described above, explores a micro social relationship among individuals. Individuals’ self control acts as an important enforcer of their behavior and decision making as well as their own imagined interpretation of others. Mead’s focus in “behaviorism” was mainly on how the self-consciousness of an individual influences his or her actions or decision making process, thereby shaping a

unique individual with respect to his or her level of self-control. This highly individualized thinking process was further developed into “Symbolic Interactionism” that explores the inter-influence between human beings.

Symbolic interactionism explains how human beings conduct themselves in different contexts by comprehending other’s behaviors and then communicating through symbols during the process of socialization. The process of meaning production can be explained through Karl Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism, which is that commodities, based on their differing production levels, create a crucial socioeconomic bond between individuals.

The creation of the means of production goes through a series of steps: the initial market demand, the actual cost of labor, and the final product. The purpose of the product produced by the labor force may increase or decrease the market value of the product, and thereby create new cultural meanings for other groups, which could include those who made the product, those who sell it, and those who buy it. There is the process by which the products of labor become commodities and reflects people’s social relationships in the form of commodity exchange during the trade. The “China: Through the Looking Glass” was surely a successful commodity produced by the Costume Institute of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, with its vast number of objects of different kinds embroidered by its visual and sound presentations that included the chosen objects on display enhanced by films and music.

II. Iconic Interactions at the “China: Through the Looking Glass” Exhibition

The commodity production of the exhibition “China: Through the Looking Glass” involved the producer (the Costume Institute and the Asian Art Department), the labor force or the cost of the labor (the cultural value of objects on view), and the final product (the exhibition itself). The means of the production of this exhibition included the revered reputation of The Metropolitan Museum of Art in the global cultural market, and, as a bonus, the potential expansion of its partnership with new and seldom before contacted cultural or economic institutions in the future.

The first proposition of symbolic interactionism is that: “human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.”⁶⁹ In the exhibition “China: Through the Looking Glass,” this type of interaction included the relationship between the exhibition planners and the general audience, which could be explained in this instance through the title-making process. According to Dr. Homay King, the final title “China: Through the Looking Glass” was a replacement for the original working title of “Chinese Whispers,” which likewise captured the idea that the exhibition was not going to be primarily about authentic Chinese art, but rather about how Chinese motifs had been re-used, reworked and transformed by western designers and filmmakers (and some Chinese ones too).⁷⁰ The term “Whispers” sounds like the exhibition was going to present the public with a secretive and, as yet, undiscovered perspective of Chinese

69. Scott A. Appelrouth and Laura Desfor Edles, *Classic and Contemporary Sociological Theory* (Los Angeles: Pine Forge, 2012), 476.

70. Dr. Homay King, email interview, March 10, 2016.

fashion, which would have been less specific than the chosen final sub-title “Through the Looking Glass.”

However, sometimes it is to no one’s disadvantage to represent a particular subject in a generalized rather than in a specific way, and this seems to have been true in this case. The primary audience group that the exhibition targeted would have been the diversified population of New York City, and the secondary audience group would have been international tourists. After French and Spanish, Chinese is presently the most sought-after language at US secondary schools, according to Maxwell Hearn, head of the Met’s Asian art department. There is, today, also a huge influx of Chinese tourists, who want to see how China is represented in a western museum.⁷¹ Most Asians, especially Chinese would understand the term “Through the Looking Glass,” to mean objects keeping their original properties but being represented in a different way, and they would consider the word “China” in the title as referring to their national culture.

This exhibition represented, however, a half Chinese and a half western culture. The image below is one of the iconic images of the exhibition: a replica of a Ming garden court constructed by Chinese gardeners from Suzhou at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in the early 1980’s. However, the balance between “fact” and “fantasy” of China was not achieved in this choice: visitors may have been able to recognize that it was an imaginary Chinese world through the selected style of architecture even before they paid attention to the inspired fashion in the middle of the garden, which might have created for them a

⁷¹ . China: Through the Looking Glass show breaks Metropolitan museum record. Agence France-Presse, last modified May 1, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2015/aug/19/china-through-the-looking-glass-show-breaks-metropolitan-museum-record>.

cultural contradiction because of the unmatched style of the traditional architecture and the modernized and westernized Chinese fashion. But the original purpose of the Ming Garden was to present a mirror scene to interpret the core idea of the exhibition visually: “through the looking glass.” Furthermore, no contrast was identified between “authentic” and “uniquely original” Chinese fashion in the exhibit. In fact, the lack of contrast was displayed at the very entrance to the exhibition, which may have lead some visitors to believe that the show was entirely about Chinese fashion designed by Westerners.



Figure 6: The Astor Chinese Garden Court at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Another important component of the “China: Through the Looking Glass” exhibition was a collection of costumes displayed in galleries belonging to the Costume Institute below the Main Floor of the Museum. These galleries turned out to be the last destination for most visitors because of the design and signage of the exhibition. This collection downstairs included several historical costumes borrowed from the Palace Museum in Beijing, which had actually been worn by Chinese people, including

Emperors. However, the reverse chronological design of the exhibition: from modern to traditional Chinese fashion seems to have confused many visitors, and led visitors to misunderstand what true Chinese culture was, as represented through its clothing fashions. Some people might have even missed this part of the exhibition because they may have thought the “creative” part of the exhibition in the upper galleries of the Museum was a perfect ending for the exhibition. Indeed, the signage directing visitors to the historical Chinese fashion downstairs was not, apparently, that obvious for many people.



Figure 7: Robe of the last Emperor of China, Pu Yi worn at his coronation in 1908

The image above was how the imperial robe of the last emperor of China, Emperor Puyi, was presented to the public in the exhibit: through the movie, *The Last Emperor*, directed by Bernardo Bertolucci seen on the two screens. The ceremonial scenery presented the authentic court life of imperial culture. In the relationship of the commodity culture of Marx, the historical part of Chinese fashion downstairs was more

like an extra commodity that was not in particular demand for the market (the exhibition needs), but was used as the best material to emphasize the (cultural) creativity of the European designers who contributed to the major part of the exhibition on the upper floor. The primary function of this traditional Chinese fashion section was to use this reality, which was, actually, authentic Chinese fashion in order to provide a more compelling visual interpretation of the idealized Oriental dream made by Westerners. As Dr. Homay King stated in my interview with him:

These objects are not simply negative or malicious stereotypes of China, even when they get some things "wrong." Rather, they are idealizing representations, and there is always some amount of distortion in a creative endeavor that involves fantasizing about another life or another world. And often, the people who are inspired by these fantasies are not bigoted or prejudiced; they are the opposite, people who have themselves been bullied or discriminated against (like Yves Saint Laurent), people who are dreaming of escape.⁷²

Also according to Nancy Chilton, Chief Communications Officer for The Costume Institute at The Metropolitan Museum of Art:

The exhibition was a historic examination of the impact of Chinese art and culture on Western fashion designers. In this exhibition we do not shy away from these images because they are historical fact and their own reality. Instead we will look for areas of commonality and appreciate the beauty that abounds.⁷³

This answer might be considered legitimized by Ms. Chilton in consideration of the positive publicity of the incoming documentary of the Met Gala in 2015: *the First Monday in May*. Part of the statement was true: that the exhibition was an historic examination of the impact of Chinese art and culture on Western fashion designers.⁷⁴

72. Dr. Homay King, email interview, March 10, 2016.

73. Nancy Chilton, email interview, March 10, 2016.

74. Ibid.,

However, since its content was only about 20 percent authentic Chinese culture, and this 20 percent primarily reflected ancient imperial Chinese culture, the danger of misleading the audience into thinking that all of Chinese fashion history was a process of historical imperialization would seem to have been more than likely.

A similar case to this was the exhibit of Monet's painting *La Japonaise* (Camille Monet in Japanese Costume, 1876), which is not an Orientalist painting, but could have been considered so by some. One of the recent news reports about this painting was called "The Confused Thinking Behind the Kimono Protests at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts" in 2015, which was about whether the kimono presents an idea of culture hegemony otherwise known as "racist imperialism."⁷⁵



Figure 8: *La Japonaise* (Camille Monet in Japanese Costume) 1876 Boston Museum of Fine Arts

75. The Confused Thinking Behind the Kimono Protests at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Seph Rodney, last modified April 15, 2016, <http://hyperallergic.com/223047/the-confused-thinking-behind-the-kimono-protests-at-the-boston-museum-of-fine-arts/>

This protest shows that the second proposition of symbolic interactionism is that “the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows.”⁷⁶ The original reason for encouraging people to put on a kimono and be the character in the painting was to give visitors a ‘tactile experience’ with the kimonos made in Japan, thereby getting them to understand and experience the painting in a new way.⁷⁷ Protesters uses Said’s concept of “Orientalism” as a valid argument to prove that the action of imitating Camille Monet represented an actual cultural offense to Asians or Asian Americans.

Different from the “China; Through the Looking Glass” case, the protest against the kimono try-on activity at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts had a different purpose. The artist Monet had not meant to present an example of Asian culture, but the meaning of the painting was, to an extended degree, fetishized by the Boston Museum for public education as if it were part of a Japanese culture class. This meaning was repurposed, however, and the encouragement to try on the kimono caused some audiences to consider it to be a consciously racist decision of the part of the museum.

The similarity between the “China: Through the Looking Glass” exhibition and Monet’s painting, *La Japonaise* is that the interpretation of this painting as “Orientalist” was actually created by the visitors to the museum, not by the museum curators. Creation of meaning comes primarily from individuals and their communication with others,

76. Scott A. Appelrouth and Laura Desfor Edles, *Classic and Contemporary Sociological Theory* (Los Angeles: Pine Forge, 2012), 476.

77. The Confused Thinking Behind the Kimono Protests at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Seph Rodney, last modified April 15, 2016, <http://hyperallergic.com/223047/the-confused-thinking-behind-the-kimono-protests-at-the-boston-museum-of-fine-arts/>

which can be explained by considering the particular mindset of individuals, which then extends into the minds of others by means of what is known as collective-consciousness. The process of meaning expanding from micro interpretation to macro interpretation is explained as inter-symbolic interactionism between individuals. “Orientalism” was originally derived from a highly individualized self- consciousness. But then what had started as a micro interpretation has grown to frame the collective consciousness of certain ways of seeing. Thus, there are no facts inherent in “Orientalist” thinking, just points of view which individuals have embraced on their own, following personal interactions with other individuals.

Chapter 3: A Global Exhibition: Micro “Orientalism”

A Case Study of the “New Blue and White” Exhibition in the Museum of Fine Arts,
Boston

*“New Blue and White” at the Museum of Fine Arts is not your grandmother’s china cabinet. The contemporary art exhibit riffing on blue and white ceramics flouts the familiar forms and patterns of Ming vases, Dutch delftware, Blue Willow China from Britain, and more. It also honors them.*⁷⁸

— Cate McQuaid

This chapter is a case study of the “New Blue and White” Exhibition in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, examining how some contemporary encyclopedic museums present the idea of cultural globalization through real objects, and questioning whether the idea of “Orientalism” was applied to this particular interpretation of traditional Asian design with respect to both iconography and symbolic meaning. The “New Blue and White” exhibition at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts was designed to reveal the development of the use of blue and white, traditional colors in Chinese porcelain from centuries past, in clay and other media in the present global world. Various national or cultural identities were presented through the themes of the exhibition. It successfully attracted and/or targeted audiences from multi-cultural backgrounds. Key concepts addressed throughout the “New Blue and White” exhibition included cultural globalization and localization, nationalism and orientalism. At the conclusion of this chapter, some comparisons and contrasts can usefully be made, it is

78. What’s Blue and White and Always In Style?. Cate McQuaid, last modified April 15, 2016, <http://www.globallighting.com/whats-blue-and-white-and-alwaysinstyle/>.

hoped, between the two exhibits, “New Blue and White” in Boston, and “China: Through the Looking Glass” in New York.

I. About the “New Blue and White” Exhibition

The “New Blue and White” Exhibition was a contemporary porcelain art exhibition held from February 20, 2013 to July 14, 2013 curated by Emily Zilber, the curator of Contemporary Decorative Art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. According to the informational material provided by the museum on the website associated with this exhibition (there was no catalogue): “ ‘New Blue and White’ explored the ways in which contemporary makers, working in ceramics as well as other media ranging from fiber to furniture to glass, have explored this rich body of material culture.”⁷⁹ This multi-faceted presentation of what might be termed “Blue and White” culture brought in a great variety of visitors to the Museum of Fine Arts during the exhibition period, especially a large number of Asians.

“New Blue and White” presented museum-goers with a modernized Asian tradition, a revolutionary transformation of old--prettily painted--plates and vases into new--abstractly ornamented--items of no particular use, elicited by a process of cultural globalization. The image below was the poster of the exhibition: the object in the poster is a glazed stoneware sculpture designed in 2008 by the Japanese artist Harumi Nakashima (1950-) quite likely inspired by the Polka Dot patterned artworks created by Yayoi Kusama (1929-), an ever more world-famous and globally-influential contemporary Japanese artist, herself much influenced by her residence in the United

79. Discover contemporary interpretations of blue-and-white ceramics. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, last modified April 15, 2016, <http://www.mfa.org/exhibitions/new-blue-and-white>.

States from the 1950's to the 1970's. In this particular artwork, Nakashima presented a consistent visual collision through its irregular shape and fading dots in blue and white. As one of the iconic images of the exhibition, this creation delivered an immediate message to the audience that the “New Blue and White” exhibition had presented entirely new dynamic forms and designs in contrast to the traditional idea of “Blue and White.”



Figure 9: the poster of the “New Blue and White” exhibition

II. “Blue and White” (*Qinghua Ci*)

The term “blue and white” in English is commonly applied to white porcelain with under-glaze blue decoration. The almost, but not quite equivalent in Chinese is “*qinghua ci*”. In China this term is applied to both under-glaze blue decorated stoneware and porcelain as the word “ci” (“high-fired ceramics” is used for both of these kinds of high-fired ceramics in contrast to the West where a distinction is made between pure-white bodied stoneware and porcelain). The origins of “blue and white” ware in China

can be traced back to the Tang (618-907) dynasty.⁸⁰ Examples of under-glaze blue decorated stoneware have been recovered from kiln sites and tombs dated to this period as well as from a shipwreck discovered in Indonesia. Blue glaze also appears on low-fired ware (earthenware) of this period, and it has not yet been resolved if the cobalt, which provided the blue color was domestic or imported from Central Asia or the Middle East. Under-glazed blue-decorated porcelain (a pure-white variety of stoneware) appeared in China some centuries later, possibly in the Song (960-1279) dynasty according to some scholars, and definitely in the Yuan (1271/2-1368) dynasty as shown by datable excavated and dated heirloom works. All evidence points to Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province as the place where the technique of under-glaze painting of cobalt blue on white porcelain was perfected and most likely invented—beginning on a large scale during the Yuan dynasty, if not earlier. (Prior to the development of blue and white, Jingdezhen was already a major ceramics center in China, producing many types of porcelain that were exported abroad during the Song dynasty.)⁸¹ For the most part, during the next two imperial dynasties (Ming and Qing) the kilns of Jingdezhen produced huge quantities of porcelain, including much of especially high quality created exclusively for the imperial household, i.e., for the use of the emperor, his relatives, etc. Jingdezhen blue

80. Laurie E. Barnes et al., *Chinese Ceramics: From the Paleolithic period through the Qing Dynasty*, ed. Virginia L. Bower and He Li (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 245.

81 . Ibid., 333.

and white porcelain produced during the Xuande period (1426-1436) of the Ming dynasty is traditionally considered to be the finest of its kind.⁸²

Chinese ceramics of various types had been exported via land and sea in some quantity already in the Tang dynasty, but this trade, especially the maritime trade of ceramics, expanded considerably during the Song dynasty.⁸³ Blue and white porcelain became a main commodity of the world trade market during the Yuan dynasty and came to be very popular in in the Middle East and South Asia. With the inauguration in the Song period of the "ceramic route" to Western Asia, a maritime equivalent of the ancient overland caravan road, porcelain had already become a preferred bulk export of high value.⁸⁴ This expanded in the Yuan, and on into the Ming and Qing dynasties, with blue and white porcelain coming to dominate among Chinese ceramic products.

82. Wu Juan, Pau L. Leung and Jiazhi Li, "A Study of the Composition of Chinese Blue and White Porcelain," *Studies in Conservation* 52, No. 3 (2007), 188.

83. Laurie E. Barnes et al., *Chinese Ceramics: From the Paleolithic period through the Qing Dynasty*, ed. Virginia L. Bower and He Li (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 535.

84. Robert Finlay, "The Pilgrim Art: The Culture of Porcelain in World History," *Journal of World History* 9, No. 2 (1998), 152.



Figure 10: Jar with Dragon, Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Xuande mark and period (1426–35)

The invention of ceramics greatly enhanced daily life in late Paleolithic and Neolithic China, for water-absorbent, earthenware (or pottery) could be used for storage as well as for more hygienic dining. Its value has been demonstrated by the inclusion of ceramics in burials at that time. Even after the advent of the Bronze Age in the Xia (ca. 2070 BCE-1600 BCE) dynasty, ceramics continued to be widely used. It was in the succeeding Shang dynasty (ca. 1600 BCE-1046 BCE) that the earliest glazed stoneware was made in China. Technological advances continued to be made in all aspects of ceramics in the ensuing dynasties and by the Eastern Han dynasty (25 CE-220 CE);⁸⁵ there was an ever greater preference for glazed stoneware among the elite. A light, yet strong ceramic ware appeared at this time, one that was preferable for artistic and

85. Larie E. Barnes et al., *Chinese Ceramics: From the Paleolithic period through the Qing Dynasty*, ed. Virginia L. Bower and He Li (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 152.

decorative purposes⁸⁶, and it has been in high demand ever since---this is usually referred to in English as celadon ware or celadon stoneware (*qing ci*). The origins of this ware can be traced back to Shang dynasty glazed stoneware. In considering the history of the development of Chinese ceramics it is worth noting that sometimes decorated wares superseded plain wares---the bulk of early Neolithic ceramics were plain, with the later ones being slip-painted. But at other times, especially in the later periods, plain and decorated wares were also produced and highly valued at the same time; this being the case with porcelain in the Ming and Qing dynasties.

The two images below are an earthenware (pottery) container from the Neolithic period, probably from the Longshan Culture (ca. 5000 BCE – 3000 BCE) of Eastern China, and another earthenware container of a type known as *Tang Sancai* (Tang three color ware) from the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907). The difference between the two is obvious: although both are earthenware, the earlier one has surface ornamentation, which is clay-based whereas the later one has ornamentation, which is glaze-based. This is just one example of the range of décor utilized in Chinese ceramics through the centuries, culminating in the highly-prized wares of the later dynasties, especially what came to be called in the West “Blue and White.”

86. Larie E. Barnes et al., *Chinese Ceramics: From the Paleolithic period through the Qing Dynasty*, ed. Virginia L. Bower and He Li (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 10.



Figure 11: Neolithic Cup, Probably Longshan Figure 1: A Tang Sancai Porcelain container from Tang Dynasty

II. “Blue and White” in Cultural Globalization

The theme of the “New Blue and White” exhibition was the presentation of the modernized development of porcelain culture in the global world from objects made by multi-media. According to the press release of the exhibition, the exhibition was divided into four parts: cultural camouflage, memory and narrative, abstract interpretations and political meaning.⁸⁷ But personally, I would have divided the exhibition into three sections: Blue and White in the contemporary home, the new Blue and White fashion and a history of Blue and White, which would have been about how the usage of porcelain changed throughout history in various nation states, especially in Asian countries like China, Korea and Japan. The exhibition was encyclopedic, because it not only contained

87. New Blue and White at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Showcases inventive works in Blue and White by 40 international artists and designers. Karen Frascona, last modified April 15, 2016, <http://www.mfa.org/exhibitions/new-blue-and-white>.

the basic historical sequences of porcelain, but it also evaluated the new hybrid porcelain culture in modern society.

The definition of cultural globalization according to Japanese cultural historian Nobuko Kawashima is the growing international diffusion, exchange, and intermingling of cultural goods and media products—its most visible manifestation being the globalization of everyday life.⁸⁸ Cultural interaction is occurring at an ever-faster rate by means of modern technologies such as social media and the Internet. One significant example of the result of cultural globalization is that the modes of making art have changed from being local to being global, thus reforming and reshaping new cultures in different locations

To be more specific, George Ritzer, an American sociologist whose specialty is in globalization and postmodern social theory, has divided the definition of “cultural globalization” into three categories: cultural differentialism, cultural hybridization and cultural convergence. The three concepts cover both positive and negative consequences of cultural globalization, and explain all the processes involved in cultural globalization. Ritzer has defined cultural differentialism as the origin of cultural globalization because it originally supported the barriers that prevented interaction between cultures that would have resulted in their mergers but did not, thus keeping them stubbornly apart from one another.⁸⁹ But because of these very differences and man’s natural curiosity, people began to be curious about the cultures beyond their own geographic borders, and this

88. Saloni Mathur, “Museum and Globalization,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 78, No.3 (2005), 720.

89. George Ritzer, *Globalization: The Essentials* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2011), 154.

curiosity has produced “cultural hybridization.” Ritzer has defined this as the mixing of cultures and the integration of the global and the local, leading to unique combinations.⁹⁰ Ritzer has stated that cultural hybridization is the process of mixing various forms of racial and cultural diversity during the process of globalization, and that through “cultural hybridization,” people can, and have, adopted unfamiliar cultures from other parts of the world into their own.

In addition to Ritzer, Sarah Merrouche, a professor in Algeria, has pointed out that the process of “cultural hybridization” has changed local culture to global culture, because cultural border crossing does not necessarily mean stepping into a different culture anymore, but creating new cultural border lands where shared beliefs and values can be developed.⁹¹ Thus cultural flow in cultural globalization also involves cultural mixing, which creates a new culture or community that is not limited to a single geographical location but is a merger of cultures from different nation states.

The “New Blue and White” exhibition reveals the cultural globalization of the porcelain culture, which flowed from east to the west through time: its history rivals that of tea, in fact. More than 1000 years ago, cobalt travelled from the Middle East to Asia, where it was used to make pigment applied to white clay. That China had native sources of cobalt, which seem to have occasionally been used, does not detract from the apparent primarily foreign origin of this key ingredient for ceramic decoration. Eventually, Europeans visiting the East brought Chinese ceramics home, and Westerners began to

90. George Ritzer, *Globalization: The Essentials* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2011), 154.

91. Sarah Merrouche, “Cultural globalization or cultural imperialism,” *Review Sciences and Humanities*, No. 25 (2006), 134.

replicate the process and make it their own. From there, it was disseminated to the different parts of the world that had been colonized by various Western powers.⁹² As Cate McQuaid points out, porcelain culture was globalized in the past from the East to the West, a fact, which was also present in the design of the exhibition. Half of the exhibition space on the left showed the traditional styles of porcelain to give the audiences a general background about of the origin of the porcelain culture. The emphasis on the part of tea ceremony culture revealed, not surprisingly, distinctions between the vessels used by the Chinese and those by the Japanese in their differently conceived ceremonies, thereby allowing western visitors to the exhibit to easily distinguish differences between the two ceramic cultures.

Ceramics and tea culture have always, and inevitably, been linked together, and many tea accessories from all cultures have been made either of earthenware, stoneware or porcelain. Ceramic teapots and cups are usually used in the tea ceremony in Asian countries, such as China and Japan. The tea culture of China is different from that of Japan, although the two share similarities. The three elements in the tea ceremony are, in fact the same in China and Japan: the way (spirit), the learning (culture of the way of tea) and the reality (practice through making tea). In China, during the tea ceremony, people learn about tea. In China, another name for the tea ceremony is “Artistic tea,” which means the tea ceremony shall also include the process of planting, picking, making and selecting of tea as an artistic practice, one no different from reading a pure fresh verse, or

92. What’s Blue and White and Always In Style?. Cate McQuaid, last modified April 15, 2016, <http://www.globallighting.com/whats-blue-and-white-and-alwaysinstyle/>.

appreciating a piece of beautiful music. To the Chinese, tea is a spirit in the world.⁹³

China is the country where tea was originally discovered and the definition of “good” tea is largely determined by the quality of the water, because the better the water, the better the treasured quality of the smell of tea. In *Chajing* (variously translated as the *Book of Tea*, *Classic of Tea*, *Tea Classic*) the earliest known book devoted to tea in China, the author, Lu Yu (733-804) mentioned that the water used to brew tea should be different from ordinary drinking water: water from mountains the best, from river water inferior, from well water low grade. Tea water, it is said, should be drawn from clear flowing water in sparsely populated areas.⁹⁴ Thus, it is crucial to have the best water in the tea brewing process. The tea container is also a crucial element in tea ceremony. In a complete tea set, most of the objects are made of wood and ceramics because they are considered to be the two traditional materials for the tea ceremony that have existed since the Tang dynasty.⁹⁵ Good tea and a teapot with great artistic value have been said to have encouraged a high level communication between literati when discussing art and literature as far back as the Tang Dynasty.⁹⁶ Today, the tradition of the tea ceremony has remained, as it was in that ancient time, a permanent social ritual for Chinese people.

93. Wang Ling, *Chinese Tea Culture* (Beijing, China: Foreign Language Press, 2002), 29.

94. Ibid., 29.

95. Ibid., 37.

96. Chunfang Pan, *Yixing Pottery: The world of Chinese Tea Culture* (San Francisco: Long River Press, 2004), 15.



Figure 2: Visitors of the Museum of Fine Arts enjoy the section of the creative porcelain container / dining ware.

The way the “New Blue and White” exhibition presented a modern Asian tea ceremony culture was in an open space with a special display of objects. The image above is a section from the exhibition of containers, vases, cups and plates. The initial innovative, visual presentation of an Asian ceramic household culture created a different experience for Asian and non-Asian audiences. Non-Asian audiences might have been able to feel that they were at an exotic contemporary Asian home. At the same time, the tea ceremony sets and household wares from this section may have reminded many Asian audiences of their ancestor’s culture, immigrant experience, and cultural transition in the US through making a connection of the present to the past.

In the section of “the recreation of the New Blue and White”, some objects showed cross-cultural themes by using porcelain to demonstrate a foreign culture, which was explained in the section on cultural hybridization. The artist in this case was probably not trying to express the culture he did not know; instead, the artwork may have marked his immigrant identity. The curator selected a group of works by immigrant artists, Asians who were currently living either in the United States or Europe, in order to

show the consequence of the trajectory of an authentic porcelain culture in a foreign country. For example, Steven Young Lee, a Korean-American artist, who lives in the United States, hand painted six vases, using the same painting techniques employed since the Ming dynasty (1368-1644).⁹⁷ But the shape of the vases was not in the traditional Chinese style because Lee wanted to break from conventional ideas concerning the aesthetic of functionality, and explore how blue and white might be reinterpreted as its aesthetic language changed across cultures and periods just⁹⁸ like as his immigrant experience in the United States had.



Figure 3: A ceramic vases by Steven Young Lee: Vase with Landscape and Butterflies.

97. Discover contemporary interpretations of blue-and-white ceramics. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, last modified April 15, 2016, <http://www.mfa.org/exhibitions/new-blue-and-white>.

98. Ibid.

III. The “New Blue and White” in National Identification

The exhibition also had a section dedicated to porcelain’s role in ancient China, which emphasized the authority of China in porcelain’s history, as porcelain is, still today a national cultural symbol of China.

In ancient China, ceramic technology continued to develop, especially in the post-Han dynasty era. This generally occurred under the patronage of the educated and ruling classes, and especially the emperor and members of the imperial family or imperial household. The aesthetic value of stoneware, and eventually porcelain, became more important to these individuals than its practical use. Evidence for this can be found in texts dating to the Tang dynasty, soon after porcelain began in China it was stated that the imperial family commanded the porcelain craftsmen to make objects for purely decorative purposes.⁹⁹ The period of the Tang Dynasty represented, in ceramics, the beginning of the practice of under-glaze painting on stoneware and porcelain, although the technique was still, at that time, not yet perfected or widely practiced. The stoneware and porcelain of this period “shows a profound understanding and appreciation, perhaps only half conscious, of the qualities brought by the accidents of the fire---of broken color, of the beauty imperfectly fused”¹⁰⁰ which already emphasizes the natural beauty of porcelain and a lack of artificial effort, although at that time, the technology was still not well developed, and it was still difficult for people to apply their rich creative ideas to porcelain making.

99. William B Honey, *The Ceramic Art of China and Other Countries of the Far East* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2010), 11.

100. Ibid., 19.

During the Song dynasty an ever-widening range of stoneware and porcelain were produced in kilns throughout China. Relatively plain celadon-glazed stoneware in forms imitating bronze vessels and jades associated with Bronze Age dynasties became a favorite of some Chinese emperors as well as the educated elite. The skill of the potter was directed more and more toward the development of a material that should have the hardness and immense durability, the musical resonance, dim translucency, and even the color, of jade,¹⁰¹ jade being the most valued of materials. In this case, jade was the favored ceramic color and shape that reflected the ancient Chinese social hierarchy system that had valued bronze and jade as symbols of imperial power since the Shang dynasty.¹⁰² The Song rulers chose not only to use bronze and jade vessels to separate themselves from mundane people's objects of use, but also to use ceramics in the shape of these ancient bronzes and jades. This sort of ceramic preference never disappeared, although it was not as strongly exhibited in later times as other trends in ceramics appeared, for example the blue and white ware with dragon designs of a type reserved only for the emperor, which became standard in the Ming and Qing dynasties. In Chinese feudal society, the role of porcelain art as a vehicle for displaying the status of the imperial family reflected the strict social hierarchy in ancient Chinese history. In learning about the history of ceramic, jade, and bronze material culture in China, visitors to the Boston Museum exhibit came to better understand the social and cultural significance of the Chinese porcelain culture.

101. William B Honey, *The Ceramic Art of China and Other Countries of the Far East* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2010), 11.

102. *Ibid.*, 7.

IV. “Orientalism” in the “New Blue and White” Exhibition

In quite a different key, Edward Said’s approach to the Orient uses “Oriental” culture, as a reference in order to help people in the Western world better understand themselves and their own culture. In the case of the “New Blue and White” exhibition, a group of diversified audiences were attracted to see the exhibition due to its unique and exotic subject. The actual number of attendees exceeded the expected audience, and there were, as well, a large number of visitors from Japan and China.¹⁰³ According to Ms. Zilber, the design of the exhibition was focused on creation and recreation, not about presenting a particular kind of Asian Art. Instead, it was about using Blue and White as ancient Asian color choices in order to illustrate how contemporary artists today remain interested in them much as they had been valued in former times in the Orient, choices which the west can now identify with, and about which they had previously had no background.¹⁰⁴ Instead of presenting the idea of cultural colonialism, the exhibition was intended to present a modernized global culture of blue and white through creating a cultural and ethnic connection for some audiences, or to be inspirational for Westerners who were interested in learning about Asian culture. Thus, different from Said’s idea, “Orientalism” in this exhibition resulted in cross-cultural appreciation rather than a modernist takeover.

The primary intention of the exhibition was to be “conversational,”¹⁰⁵ a concept drawn from the third proposition of symbolic interactionism coined by American

103. Emily Zilber, phone interview, March 10, 2016.

104. Ibid.

105. Ibid.

sociologist Herbert Blumer that “these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters.”¹⁰⁶

When one views one’s own culture represented by a foreign culture, one will be able to observe differences from one’s accepted norms in the foreign interpretation. For example, actual behaviors natural to one’s native environment which are represented seemingly accurately “abroad” may nonetheless be represented quite differently from the way they were in their original native form.

Blue and White culture was symbolized in this exhibition as a social media “hashtag” that was being “self-localized” by different types of audiences from various backgrounds, giving every different audience the freedom to build its own concept of “Blue and White.” According to Ms. Zilber, the curator of the exhibition, the meaning of the term “New” in the exhibition title “New Blue and White” referred to objects made since 2003, i.e., largely contemporary pieces made with twentieth century materials. Thus, the exhibition was partially targeting the American millennial generation, those born between the early 1980s and the early 2000s, and what their approach might be to Blue and White culture recreated from China largely by contemporary artists.

The image below shows the entrance of the exhibition; the arrangement of the two vases, and the desk on the left delivered a message, which was that the audience was entering a “globalized world” of Blue and White. By entering the exhibition, audiences were able to feel free to shape their idea of “New Blue and White,” just by sitting next to the table, and enjoying a cup of tea from their own American contemporary vessel with

106. Scott A. Appelrouth and Laura Desfor Edles, *Classic and Contemporary Sociological Theory* (Los Angeles: 2012), 476.

their own fellow visitors. And they would also have been able to formulate their idea of the exhibition “New Blue and White” based on their understanding, imagination, self-made connection to and experience with the Blue and White.



Figure 4: The entrance of the “New Blue and White” Exhibition

V. “The New Blue and White” and “China: Through the Looking Glass”

In contrast to the micro exhibition “China: Through the Looking Glass” at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the “New Blue and White” exhibition presented a relatively micro perspective of Chinese culture that caused little cultural controversy or discourse, and which might have, but did not, arouse any Nationalist loyalties for particular traditions. The standard definition of nationalism according to Sharon Macdonald is:

National identities and national publics were also defined through difference from other nations and ethnic groups- the new world picture was one of discrete, spatially-mapped, bounded difference, something which could prove difficult for those who, according to this picture, were “out of place” (such as migrants) or

who found their values and cultural attributes depicted as less advanced or morally worthy than those of the “home team”.¹⁰⁷

A typical example of nationalism is the National Place Museum in Taipei, as exemplified by the construction of a grand building in 1965 to house its collections—art objects originating in the original Palace Museum in Beijing founded in 1925, and based on the former Qing imperial collection initially taken in 1933 from Beijing to protect them from invading Japanese, and eventually transported to many locations in China during the war, and finally ending up in Taiwan in 1949 following the defeat of the Nationalist forces of Chiang Kaishek. To an extent, the construction of the building in 1965 and the use of a slightly different name (in Chinese and English) from that used by the Palace Museum, that continued to exist in Beijing, was an acknowledgement of two different museum entities as well as the unlikelihood of a quick (at least) return to China of the government which regarded itself as the guardian of these national heritage objects which it had carefully catalogued and stored in the 1950’s and early 1960’s in Taiwan. The establishment of the National Place Museum in Taipei evoked the concept of the national cultural identity of Taiwan as historically part of China: how the government (the Chinese Nationalist Party) in power in Taiwan has reconstructed a history and culture of China different from the one which exists in China itself today. The main emphasis on Chinese culture and history at the National Palace Museum is on what one might term the “authentic and old” and, in fact, one particular version of what is “authentic and old.” In my experience, how the image of China portrayed by the National Place Museum relates

107. Sharon Macdonald, "Museums, National, Postnational and Transcultural Identities," *Museum and Society* 1, no. 16 (2003), 3.

to China in the past and today is a continuing topic of discussion among both experts and various groups of Chinese themselves.

Similar to the case of the National Place Museum, the “China: Through the Looking Glass” involved some cultural controversy or discourse, although the curator Andrew Bolton stated that the China reflected in the examples of haute couture and avant-garde ready-to-wear fashions in this catalogue and related exhibition were a fictional, fabulous invention, offering an alternate reality with a dream-like illogic.¹⁰⁸ However, some scholars and Asian audiences have questioned whether the exhibition was, in fact, intended to be an exact manifestation of Chinese culture. Because the exhibition used the term “China” in its title, it immediately delivered a message to the public that this exhibition was about China. Having this initial impression in mind, the exhibition audience, particularly the Asians, may have entered with the idea that they would be seeing an exhibition celebrating Chinese high fashion. But the facts confounded this expectation, because the majority of the objects exhibited were made by European designers, and some of them implied a European colonial bias.

108. Andrew Bolton et al., *China Through the Looking Glass: Fashion, Film and Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015), 18.



Figure 5: a creative sketch for the fragrance “Opium” by Yves Saint Laurent in 1977

For example, a creative sketch for the fragrance “Opium” was designed by Yves Saint Laurent in 1977. The word “Opium,” on the drawing of a bottle of perfume brings to mind the beginning of the half feudal and half colonial society of China of the 19th century, which could have caused some discomfort or negative feelings for some audiences.

Different from the case of the National Place Museum, the “New Blue and White” exhibition included less content about traditional history, and its aim was not intended to present the “authentic blue and white” culture of China. Instead, it recognized “New Blue and White” as one creation that had begun in ancient China but had since been acknowledged and represented not only in Asia but also in the Middle East and in Latin America. Her exhibit was global, explained Ms. Zilber.¹⁰⁹ While originating in China in the distant past, Blue and White had expanded globally, and had become a “trending

109. Emily Zilber, phone interview, March 10, 2016.

atheistic pattern” through the continuous trade between China and the wide world in the 14th century, if not earlier.

The term “New” in the title “New Blue and White” was intended as a point of respect for a long-held cultural heritage and as recognition of contemporary artistic creativity and admiration for particular modern artists’ historical research and inventive recreation of the past. The colors of Blue and White in the exhibition were basic visual communicators that created a cultural resonance between the diversified groups visiting The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. This exhibition “New Blue and White” connected the past to the present through the innovative, but also classic and iconic “Blue and White” objects from the Museum of Fine Art Boston’s collection and successfully drew in a number of audience groups, both Asian, Asian American, and American, both those who were interested in traditional, and those interested in contemporary, art.

Conclusion: The New “Orientalism”

*When we concentrate on a material object, whatever its situation, the very act of attention may lead to our involuntarily sinking into the history of that object.*¹¹⁰

—Vladimir Nabokov

The Orient---whether the Middle or Far East (from Westerners’ point of view) has long been a land of fantasy for Westerners (Europeans and later Euro-Americans). Spurred on by their fascination with these far-away lands, as well as by a hope of obtaining their rare and valuable products (porcelain, silk, tea) Westerners wanted to reach the Far East. To review in summary what was discussed earlier in the thesis, “The Silk Road” is the name by which the early overland trade network between East (China) and West (Central and Western Asia, sometimes extending into Europe) has been known---the beginnings of which date back to at least the Western Han dynasty (206 BCE-9 CE). Over time trade between East and West came to encompass both land and maritime routes. China was predominantly, although not exclusively, an exporter rather than importer of goods, most of which reached the West through various middlemen, among them Arab traders. However, some Europeans merchants, such as Marco Polo did reach the Far East. Eventually the Portuguese and Spanish and later the Dutch and English sent ships directly to the East Asia for trade, and over time aspects of Western imperialism can be detected in their inter-actions with the Chinese and the establishment of colonies such as the Portuguese-ruled Macao and British-ruled Hong Kong. With the growing

110. Vladimir Nabokov, *Transparent Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003): 2.

power of the Europeans, especially the British in the nineteenth century, China came more and more under Western influence, even in areas not directly ruled by non-Chinese. Starting with the Opium Wars I (1840) and II (1842), in which China suffered humiliating defeats, China forfeited areas to non-Chinese even within its own borders, such as the American and French “Concessions” in certain areas within Shanghai where Chinese were not allowed, except under special circumstances. Later, too, the Japanese came to colonize parts of China, eventually in the 20th century invading and occupying large sections of China. This foreign domination, however, came to an end with the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. All of this essential historical background has made it possible to explore the changing concept of “Orientalism,” expanding on the theories of Edward Said, Herbert Blumer and Karl Marx.

This thesis has focused on two museum exhibitions in order to explore changing concepts of “Orientalism,” a term first elaborated on by Edward Said in the 1970s: “China: Through the Looking Glass” at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and “New Blue and White” at The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, using, as well, Blumer’s and Marx’ theories of Symbolic Interactionism and Commodity Fetishism as they relate to micro and macro social interactions with respect to the audiences at these exhibitions.

The “China: Through the Looking Glass” exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art presents fetishized Chinese fashion from over 140 objects of the Costume Institute’s collection along with some objects from the Palace Museum in Beijing. The primary design of the exhibition was a “contrast” between the past and present, to be more specific, exhibiting one object from ancient China, and one object from one of the well-known Western contemporary fashion designers including Chanel, Alexander

McQueen and Yves Saint Laurent. The two main conceptual approaches to explain the macro “Orientalism” of this exhibit in this thesis have been cultural globalization and commodity fetishism. It is, of course, true, that in the contemporary globalized world, museums have to adjust themselves to this new mode in the global economy. But museums still have to consider how to achieve economic security and stability---this can be gifts from donors or income from visitors as well as funding from the government or some mixture of both---while maintaining their public role as serving and educating their visitors. The economic model provided by Bruno S. Frey¹¹¹ clearly states the relationship between the importance of the museum’s financial income and its public service. The basic relationship between the museum and its visitors is like that of supplier and demander. In the museum, art works and historic artifacts require storage and conservation costs. Museums also must have extensive funds available for the purchase of special objects for their collections, if they come on the market. With respect to temporary exhibitions, museums must calculate how much they will have to invest for the preparation work of the exhibition beyond what they can expect from ticket sales, and determine whether they will be able to achieve a balance between the cost and the profit of an exhibition. Therefore all kinds of audiences should be considered in this new global world before any exhibition is planned.

In the case of the “China: Through the Looking Glass” exhibition, contemporary “Orientalism” may have seemed to have become more economic or market driven but it transpired that there had been not enough consideration in the planning of the exhibit

111. Bruno S Frey S and Stephan Meier, *A Companion to Museum Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), 401.

from the point of view of a global cultural perspective, which the Curator seemed to have wished to represent. Curating an annual fashion exhibition has become a tradition of The Costume Institute, and one of the most important income resources for The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Met Gala, formally called the Costume Institute Gala, which is an annual fundraising gala for The Metropolitan Museum of Art, was used in this case, as a pre-opening advertisement to the public for the exhibit, and the museum was able to utilize the “celebrity effect” to draw potential audiences’ curiosity to come into the museum to see the exhibition in person.

One significant example was the Rihanna case. As one of the top singers and fashion icons in the United States, Rihanna became a “diamond ring” at the Met Gala in 2015. The main organizer of this event, Anna Wintour, emphasized the importance of having all the major celebrities including Taylor Swift, Sarah Jessica Parker in the trailer of the documentary movie *the First Monday of May*,¹¹² and she insisted that they must have Rihanna, because of her fame. However, there seems to have been an incorrect and reverse emphasis here. Should this fantasy of China fashion have been created by American celebrities? The cultural discourse caused by the exhibit was whether the refocus of the “fantasy of celebrities” presented a fetishized version of Chinese fashion. And why did The Metropolitan Museum of Art make this choice? The picture below shows how Sarah Jessica Parker, a guest at the 2015 Gala and the model who wore the fantastic costume, was made fun of by some people on social networks. However, if we think further, Parker was presenting Chinese fashion through her costume, but her

112. Fabiola Beracasa Beckman, Sylvana Ward Durrett, and Dawn Ostroff, “The First Monday in May Trailer,” The Metropolitan Museum of Art, April 25, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MRFCVG85X_s.

inappropriate dressing may have misdirected visitors' understanding of Chinese fashion, or even ruined any positive image about "Chinese Fantasy" in the public mind.



Funny Or Die @funnyordie · 11h

Sarah Jessica Parker wore the fire emoji to the #MetGala. 🔥🔥🔥



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Figure 6: Sarah Jessica Parker in costume and wearing exotic fire emoji headdress at Costume Institute Ball

In contrast, the “New Blue and White” exhibition at The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston revealed the globalization of porcelain culture through a variety of choices of objects made by artists from all over the world including Thailand, America, Canada, Iran and England, all carefully selected by curator, Emily Zilber. The exhibition showed how porcelain culture had been localized in various geographic locations outside China, and how porcelain had become a modern form of art in the United States and Canada that had borrowed from, and then transformed, the traditional art form of blue and white

porcelain in China. The large number of international visitors to that exhibition revealed that the “New Blue and White” drew special attention from the Asian population who seemed to have made cultural connections to their own cultural or immigrant experience in the exhibition. The example of “New Blue and White” reveals a micro perspective on “New Orientalism,” illustrating a symbolic cultural interaction behind the objects from the exhibition, their traditional history and their connections in the contemporary world.

In conclusion, “New Orientalism” in a museum setting is a micro to macro process of the individual mind’s processing and decision-making that involves multi-parties: the cultural presenter (museums and celebrities) and the cultural judger (audiences), linking East and West in a global setting. There is no inherent “Orientalist” thinking, just different points of view which individuals have embraced on their own, following personal interactions with other individuals under the influence of the current global cultural and economic market, for similar to the American sociologist C. Wright Mills’s concept of the sociological imagination, the history that now affects every individual is global history.¹¹³

To further develop this topic, possibly into a dissertation, an interesting idea would be to conduct a quantitative and qualitative study of the audiences of the two exhibitions, and compare them with others of either a similar or different nature. The combination of both empirical and theoretical approach would improve the accuracy and authenticity of this cultural study of Orientalism.

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Figure 15: Entrance to Exhibit ‘New Blue and White. 2013.

Figure 16: Laurent, Yves St. Sketch for fragrance Opium. 1977. Metropolitan Museum of Art. Catalogue for exhibit “China: Through the Looking Glass,” 2015

Figure 17: Sarah Jessica Parker in costume and wearing exotic fire emoji headdress at Costume Institute Ball, Metropolitan Museum of Art. May 5, 2015.
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Source: https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=http-3A_wwd.com_fashion-2Dnews_fashion-2Dscoops_moma-2Dpreviews-2Dchina-2Dthrough-2Dthe-2Dlooking-2Dglass-2Dexhibit-2D8190527_&d=CwIFaQ&c=WAopAOoYhwkYfEix65l8HkxJg6TNRdSFVjz7ONc5bdk&r=S6DlueilmoJNpnZho8qyAA&m=ASXZbKj-c9o-QtYvKlmsQfx48GPzNiQnJ_99QZbplCM&s=Tjmox3L1V4czNnNOIA2BX8PpLafCzjvckjFa-y1B1V0&e=

The title came from Andrew Bolton, the show's curator. It was a replacement for the original working title "Chinese Whispers," which likewise captured the idea that the exhibition was not going to be primarily about authentic Chinese art, but rather about how Chinese motifs have been re-used, reworked and transformed by western designers and filmmakers (and some Chinese ones too). It was important to capture that sentiment in the title, right away, so people would not be confused and go in thinking they were going to see a show of traditional examples of Chinese dress.

As a side note, *Through the Looking Glass* also by chance happened to be my favorite book when I was a child.

3. Did you have a "big idea" for your contribution to this exhibition?

Not really. My goal was simply to try to distill the ideas from my book "Lost in Translation: Orientalism, Cinema, and the Enigmatic Signifier" into a much shorter exhibition catalog text, and apply them afresh to the works of art, film, and fashion that were in the show that I hadn't already written about. I felt like I already had the big idea several years prior, and that was what *Lost in Translation* was about.

4. Is there a or are there some specific objects which in your view embody the main idea / mission of the exhibition?

I think it's crucial that examples of costume and film by contemporary Chinese designers and directors were included in the show, but for me they don't distill the main idea behind the exhibition (even though the Guo Pei gold gown and Wong Kar-Wai's *In the Mood for Love* are two of my favorite objects in it). When I first saw the show, the Anna May Wong gallery was my favorite, in part because I felt a strong sense of having contributed creatively to it since I had written about her, those films and dresses, and had written some of the text that was on the walls. But now, some time later, I think that the gallery that most crystallizes the exhibition's concept was gallery 210 with Yves Saint Laurent's 1977 Chinese-inspired collection and the Opium fragrance bottle designs and the *Chinoiserie*. My initial reaction to it was one shared by some of YSL's critics, a sense of indignation that perhaps making a spectacle of the Opium Wars and drug addiction was crossing a line too far. In retrospect, and having done a bit more reading-up since then, that initial reaction now strikes me as somewhat puritanical and moralistic. Since then I have been learning more about Yves Saint Laurent, watching documentaries and reading about him, and the more I think about it, the more brilliant I find his work. It's pure fantasy, including the darker, more violent and salacious aspects of fantasy. He immersed

The concerns were manifold: historical coverage and accuracy, thematic correlation, thinking about costume design and mise-en-scène, etc.

Each gallery has a different theme and approach. In the Anna May Wong gallery, for example, you are looking at some dresses that she actually wore, and some that are very similar to things that she wore and/or are from roughly the same era. And then you see her there in the film clips wearing those dresses, so it's quite literal.

In the Saint Laurent & Opium/Chinoiserie gallery, the connections are more thematic. *Broken Blossoms* is a 1919 film directed by D. W. Griffith that features an early filmic representation of an "opium den" in a fictional London. *Once Upon a Time in America* also features a Chinatown Opium den (and, incidentally, a wonderful soundtrack by Ennio Morricone, who just won his first Oscar for best soundtrack for *The Hateful Eight*). And then there's *Flowers of Shanghai* by the Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-Hsien, set in an 1880s Shanghai brothel. This film, despite being made by a Chinese director, is equally seductive and exoticizing in its cinematography and mise-en-scène. All of these films are set in virtual worlds, part history and part fantasy, that are similar to those evoked by Yves Saint Laurent's designs.

In the Tisch gallery downstairs, the entire film installation is composed of clips from Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor*. That film simply had to be the showcase for a room in which Emperor Pu Yi's actual coronation robes were on display. It was the first time those robes had ever left the National Palace Museum in China and been loaned to a museum in a foreign country. I can't even imagine the delicate conversations that must have involved. And it's a beautiful film, with a script based in memoirs, which in my catalog essay I say is part of a long-standing mutual fascination between Italy and China that dates back to Marco Polo.

So, in each gallery, the connection between the films and costumes is different: sometimes highly motivated, sometimes more conceptual. But the selection is always very careful and was the result of many people thinking about what to include and not.

8. Were your expectations met, or where you surprised by the audience's reactions? Did you ever imagine the exhibition would be so popular, especially among Chinese visitors?

My expectations were surpassed in every respect. First, the concept: a show that is not about China per se, but rather about things *inspired* by China, including all the myths and fantasies that have accrued around Chinese art and culture. I was worried that people would not understand this idea and would either be confused, or object to it as a premise tout court. But from what I have read and heard, it seems to have come across fairly clearly.

Second, the execution, which I had no part in, but it was in some ways the most elaborate museum show I've ever seen. It was a Costume Institute show that spilled over into the East Asian galleries, thereby creating conversations among the objects in disparate collections spanning some of the most ancient things in the museum to some of the most

contemporary. To my knowledge those conversations have never happened before, and they felt very organic, not at all forced. For me those juxtapositions were illuminating and provocative on all sides: I saw things in the bronzes and Buddha sculptures that I had not noticed before because they were next to the contemporary garments, and vice versa. The objects said things about one another even without the explanatory prose.

Third, the staging and art direction, which for me, made it a magical and immersive experience, but also an intelligent one. On the one hand, I will never be able to go into the Astor Court again without remembering how it was transformed into a theater of light and lotus blossoms and inky reflections. On the other hand, even at its most absorptive, the staging did not stray from the headier themes of reflection and mirroring, projection and distortion, with its glass boxes and lacquer-like surfaces, thereby making you think and reflect on what you were seeing.

I was not particularly surprised by the audience reactions... The published reviews were more or less what I expected; no one said anything that caught me completely off guard. I was happy that many of the reviewers seemed to understand the concept behind the show in a deep way, not just be mesmerized by the staging and pageantry. As far as the show's popularity, I didn't really know what to expect. I am deeply gratified that it was so popular among Chinese audiences, since part of my goal with the work and writing that I did was to try to explain that, in my view (as a Chinese American and the daughter of a Chinese immigrant who was born in Shanghai), these objects are not simply negative or malicious stereotypes of China, even when they get some things "wrong." Rather, they are idealizing representations, and there is always some amount of distortion in a creative endeavor that involves fantasizing about another life or another world. And often, the people who are inspired by these fantasies are not bigoted or prejudiced; they are the opposite, people who have themselves been bullied or discriminated against (like Yves Saint Laurent), people who are dreaming of escape.

- Interview with Ms. Jessica Glasscock (Research Associate of the Costume Institute), Ms. Nancy Chilton (Chief Communications Officer for The Costume Institute) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

- Original Interview Questions

1. What is your definition of Orientalism? And did this concept have any impact on the exhibition planning process?
2. What is your understanding of the term / “through the looking glass”?
3. Did you have a “big idea” when you are developing the exhibition?
4. Is there a or are there some specific objects which in your view embody the main idea / mission of the exhibition?
5. What was the inspiration for this exhibition? / Could you expand a little more on your contribution to the exhibition?

For question from 1-5, see chapter 1 of the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s exhibition catalogue, Andrew Bolton, *Through the Looking Glass: Fashion, Film and Art*, 2015.

6. Were your expectations met, or where you surprised by the audience’s reactions? Did you ever imagine the exhibition would be so popular, especially among Chinese visitors?

Ms. Nancy Chilton: It was our hope that the exhibition would appeal to a broad, diverse audience, and our expectations were exceeded. As our head of Asian Art Department pointed out, Chinese visitors are often excited to see their culture celebrated so prominently among other cultures in overseas Museums, as in China the Museums contain only Chinese objects.

7. To those who voiced negative opinions, how would you answer? Looking back, is there anything you would do differently?

Ms. Nancy Chilton: The exhibition was a historic examination of the impact of Chinese art and culture on Western fashion designers. As exhibition artistic director and filmmaker Wong Kar Wai said in his press preview remarks “the fashion designers and tastemakers of that period took these distorted images [from movies] as inspiration and went on to create a Western aesthetic with a new layer of meaning that was uniquely its own. In this exhibition we do not shy away from these images because they are historical fact and their own reality. Instead we will look for areas of commonality and appreciate the beauty that abounds.

- Interview with Ms. Emily Zilber, curator of the “New Blue and White” Exhibition, and the Ronald C. and Anita L. Wornick Curator of Contemporary Decorative Arts at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

1. What is your definition of Orientalism? And did this concept have any impact on the exhibition planning process?

In thinking of Orientalism, I would say it is the fetishism and “exotification” of the culture of East Asia that is a part of the story of blue and white. It was our hope that the exhibition would contain European and specially Dutch practicism / practicality? enhanced by their version of this intimate of exotic culture, which is part of their history. By looking at not just the story but acknowledging that is one element of blue and white in a narrative, we will recognize a phenomenon not just from Asia but also a manifestation seen in the Middle East and Latin America. “Blue and white” is a global style. I was hoping not to overlook that part of the narrative. One aspect of art making that is really comprehensive is the idea that addresses its global reach. “Blue and White” has appealed to people throughout the history, almost without a beginning or the ending point of a conversation.

For this exhibition, the goal is different. It is about creating / recreating, not about present the view of Asia any way; instead, it was about taking blue and white as an example to illustrate how contemporary artists are interested in the subject that have resulted from the history and orientalism, not manifest in all of them. It included many other artists of the world, for example, Thailand who are thinking in the context of their own history instead of a western show. From the global selection of artists, their own culture of other cultures gives the audience a variety of perspectives in the difference of context. People may think about it is about Chinese art and culture but will also think that objects from the exhibition remind of them the home they grew up.

2. What is your understanding of the term “new”?

It means objects made in the 10 or 12 years / since 2003 which are mostly contemporary pieces with 21 century material.

3. Did you have a “big idea” when you are developing the exhibition?

It is important to have conversation in the museum. The blue and white objects come from various collection within the museum, and the museum has a wonderful collection of blue and white. From the contemporary collection, the museum is able to build the connection with the past. There was a big sheet of hundreds of artists: to look at what they are doing, organize their work to create a narrative from it.

4. Is there a or are there specific objects which in your view embody the main idea/ mission of the exhibition?

Iran, or Middle East tradition, global nature of this type making, critical making, grappling with her own culture connection

Mexico artists, huge seal, based on the tone of trade between Asian and American and indigo tradition in Mexico, the artwork speak the importance of trade.

We consider the important role played by the British East India Company in the growth of global trade and artistic interchange of commodities. No one object is really critical to the exhibition. The exhibition is to emphasize the global phenomenon (Globalization). Contemporary Japanese and Chinese artists who are thinking about their own history argue or assert it is their ownership of their own culture; and not just pay attention to how Europeans think about the historic iconography language of blue and white. The two contrasting colors evoke people of their own history.

5. What was the inspiration of the exhibition?

I have always been interested in “multi-art” exhibition, and from ideas I see artists exploring. I saw so many artists across the world who had an ethnic connection to “Blue and White.” It shows a trend in museum work to bring different questions together to have a bigger conversation across media, art craft and design to draw commonality.

6. Were your expectation met, or where you surprised by audience’s reactions?

It was even better than we thought, the actual number of attendance exceeds the expected audience. It is a moment of type of material that everyone has reactions to, and created personal connection to the collection. There is a big visitorship from Japan and China. In addition to that, in the context of the institution is in Boston, decorative arts resonate with many people.