

The background image shows a busy museum gallery. Large, ornate classical paintings are displayed on the walls. In the foreground, a diverse group of people, including many of Asian descent, are seen from the chest up, looking towards the art. They are dressed in casual attire like t-shirts, hats, and backpacks. The lighting is warm and focused on the artwork.

# Accessible Storytelling

## Improving Chinese Audiences' Learning in American Museums

Written by  
Yu Zhang

Photo Credit: Forbes 2019

## Accessible Storytelling: Improving Chinese Audiences' Learning in American Museums

A thesis submitted to The University of the Arts in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts in Museum Exhibition Planning + Design graduate program.

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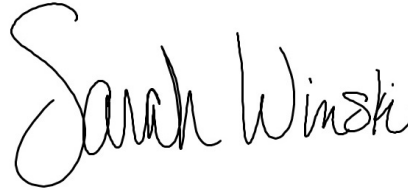
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# Abstract

The United States has many incredible museums that are not only enjoyed by Americans, but also attract visitors from all over the world. However, international visitors may not be able to understand the exhibitions American museums designed due to culture and language barriers. This is especially true for American history museums, which require English fluency and specific knowledge of American history—things that international visitors may not be confident about—to appreciate their exhibits. As a Chinese student who studies and lives in Philadelphia, I researched on what resources American museums offer to support the Chinese audiences' visit experience. I interviewed the National Constitution Center, the Museum of the American Revolution, and The University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology to investigate their resources, and three tourist agencies and several Chinese museum visitors for their visit feedback. I analyzed the engagement between the museums and the Chinese tourist group. I found not all of the three museums have strong connections/considerations for Chinese visitors, and Chinese visitors, if very new to the country, normally experience challenges when appreciating the exhibitions. My thesis suggests that 1) museum workers should do enough research to know about international visitors; 2) museum exhibitions reflect the learning capability of the international audiences; 3) museums consider hiring professionals from other cultures if feel challenging to involve international visitors in their spaces.

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## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I respectfully recognize and acknowledge Philadelphia, the land I reside on as the ancestral homeland of the Lenape, a territory known as Lënapehòkink. I take this opportunity together to honor the Lenape as the traditional stewards of this land, and to be mindful of the legacy of colonization, erasure, and oppression that informs the history of America and Philadelphia. The presence and resilience of the Lenape continue to this day and their descendants include the Delaware Tribe and Delaware Nation of Oklahoma; the Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape and Ramapough Lenape of New Jersey; and the Munsee Delaware Nation of Ontario.

## CULTURE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I respectfully recognize and acknowledge the historical Chinese migrants in America, who earned the living rights in this country by hard-working. Their sacrifice laid the foundation to allow future Chinese to be able to come to study and live in the U.S. more easily. The proof of their stories — Chinatowns, Chinese American museums, and the people who work in various fields in the U.S. — inspired me for the thesis. This thesis continues their journey to make an inclusive and diverse society in modern America.

# I. Personal Statement

As an international student who is passionate about museums and interested in America, I felt that to appreciate the exhibitions from a visitor's perspective is very hard, and accompanies pressures and struggle. I found language is not even the most challenging barrier; the unfamiliarity with the history and the cultures cause the most obstacles.

I was wondering, are there any other Chinese here facing the same embarrassment in the museums; do the museums know that international visitors experience issues; if so, have they done anything to support international or Chinese visitors?

I have an extreme example of how cross-cultural learning can be specific and difficult. When I visited The Faith and Liberty Discovery Center (FLDC), I was confused about whether the exhibition is about Bible education, using America's founding history as a supportive example. I also thought maybe it is just about the values attached when people were making the country, and I couldn't fit the Bible part in, as the values can stand alone. But the truth is that the Bible is historically significant in the foundation of the country, and Christianity is a common element in American life. For example, parents pick infants' names from the Bible; many leaders of the country have been Christian; court witnesses swear on the Bible; and there are many more examples. Through out my whole visit, I struggled to fit the exhibition content into my own mindset, plus I read slowly and I had to follow the teachers' lecturing, the guest speaker's introductions and explaining, and to stick with my cohort and chat. So while my cohort was enjoying the amazing supplement of their existing knowledge, I was messing up with figuring out the

mismatches in my brain because previously I never had a concept that religion can be so powerful and significant.

In China, religion wasn't used as a basis during the establishment of the new China. Contrastingly, old China destroyed many religious objects and banned lots of religious thoughts to show a thorough break-up between the old and new Chinas. Even today, religion hasn't become part of the education for students in China and is not encouraged by the government.

**In the United States, many exhibitions are developed with American cultural norms in mind. This can put up barriers to understanding for visitors who don't share those cultural norms, as described above. How do museums address these barriers with international visitors in mind?**

# Glossary

1. **Chinese:** Both race and ethnic, people who spend the majority of their lives in China, speak Chinese better than English, no matter if their status is U.S. citizenship.
2. **American history museums:** museums that tell specific history stories; historical sites; history exhibitions.

## II. Introduction

American museums by definition are designed for an American audience. While the museums and people honor Americans' histories and achievements, international audiences from other places of the world come to see and experience them every day too.

People may already know the general history, but history museums study and display American history with **more specific details**. The museums that tell specific history stories are harder to understand for international visitors compared to other types of museums. For example, **people do not need background knowledge to connect with the collections in art museums**, "to stand in front of a work of art where Degas, Botticelli, or O'Keeffe once stood before, to listen to a Stradivarius playing Beethoven, or to imagine.... They let greatness imbue them, they transform that greatness into their own lives, and in doing so, they become better people."<sup>1</sup> People understand the art by standing and looking at it. On the other hand, **history stories, like other stories, rely on specific languages, pre-stories, specific situations, background, hidden plots, relationships, different standpoints, specific reasons, etc., to be fully understood by visitors**. This may be complicated for people from different countries.

**For international visitors who are not specialists on the content of the museums, or aren't familiar with the story context, and may not be fluent in English, understanding the stories that museums interpret can be difficult.**

Research by The U.S. Travel Association shows that in recent years from 2013 to 2018, Chinese visitation to the U.S. varied and remained between around 1.9 million to

<sup>1</sup> Smith, Jeffrey K., and Jeffrey K. Smith. "Introduction - Who We Are, Who We Were, Who We Might Become." Essay. In *The Museum Effect: How Museums, Libraries, and Cultural Institutions Educate and Civilize Society*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Travel Association. "International Visitations to the U.S. from China." U.S. Travel Association, 2019. [https://www.ustravel.org/system/files/media\\_root/document/Research\\_Country-Profile\\_China.pdf](https://www.ustravel.org/system/files/media_root/document/Research_Country-Profile_China.pdf).

3.5 million people, including around 3.2 million in 2017 and 3.0 million in 2018.<sup>2</sup> **Facing a large group of Chinese tourists, the American history museums risk the stories that they intend to tell getting lost in interpretation.**

Coming from China, where history museums aren't a common form of casual learning or regular entertainment, Chinese people, are unfamiliar with how the museums work. When the museum itself is unfamiliar territory, the format of exhibitions and the use of technologies in them can be overwhelming. On top of that, the history being told in the museum is itself hard to access, because of a lack of general foundation in American history to put the exhibition in context.

# III. Thesis Statement

This thesis will explore **how history museums resolve the barriers that Chinese visitors experience when they visit American history museums**. The study will further analyze how current efforts aim to solve the problem and how they may fall short.

Not everyone can understand an American exhibition easily and successfully, especially people who are from vastly different cultures. The cultural divide comes from several factors that include 1) **different mindsets and thinking styles** make people from different cultural groups have different understandings for the same things; 2) the **perception of things** makes it harder to welcome new information; 3) **people's pursuit for social belonging** makes them prefer their own cultures and seem less appealing to out-group cultures; 4) **untruthful resources from governments and media provide an incorrect understanding of things** for people; 5) people **tend to adopt the beliefs and values of their own groups**, even if they are not correct <sup>3</sup>.

Therefore, it is **not easy for foreign people with those pre-existing barriers to understand and learn new things in a foreigner setting**. For Chinese visitors, except for the above barriers, the methods of causal learning such as exhibitions is not common in China, not to mention to appreciate such well developed and fabricated exhibitions in a world's leading country, which makes the exhibition experience even more challenging.

<sup>3</sup>“Cultural Divide.”  
Wikipedia.  
Wikimedia  
Foundation,  
February 13, 2022.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural\\_Divide#Factors\\_and\\_causes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_Divide#Factors_and_causes).

The methodology to find out what American museums are doing that relates to Chinese visitors is to interview and visit them directly; ask the museums if they consider and do anything for international or Chinese visitors; and observe what the resources are like, and how they work.



## IV. Rationale – Defining the Issue

The museum workers need to recognize the **cultural inclusion and exclusion** present in museums. Not everyone is able to engage with the museums even if they go and be there. As previously mentioned, **people who don't share the culture find it hard to share the museums' exhibitions.**

The American Alliance of Museums' (AAM) 2010 research *Demographic Transformation and the Future of the Museum* (Picture 1) reports that **only 9% of core museum visitors are minority groups, while there are 34% minority groups in the U.S. population. U.S. society is predicted to be more diverse in the next twenty five years.** Indeed, "... museum audiences are radically less diverse than the American public, and museums serve an ever shrinking fragment of society."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Betty Farrell et al., "Demographic Transformation and the Future of Museums," 2010, <https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Demographic-Change-and-the-Future-of-Museums.pdf>.

The article provided deeper **analysis for this phenomenon**: 1) **historically - grounded cultural barriers** to participation that makes museums feel **intimidating and exclusionary** to many people; 2) the **lack of specialized knowledge and a cultivated aesthetic**



Picture 1: The graphic shows the contrast between the diverse U.S. population and the White -overwhelming museum visitors. (The American Alliance of Museums)

**taste** (“cultural capital”) to understand and appreciate what is perceived by many as elite art forms, especially in art museums; 3) **no strong tradition of museum-going habits**, whether these were **fostered in childhood or other family experience** and tradition; 4) the **influence of social networks** to encourage museum-going rather than other leisure activities—i.e., if none of your friends go to museums, you don’t go either.

**How do American history museums address the challenges of exhibition interpretation when they face cross-cultural learning? What are some learning goals that history museums try to achieve for international audience - Chinese tourists in this thesis specifically?**

## Different Culture Expectations

First of all, the museum workers have to understand **how the cultural expectations for museums in the U.S. and China differ**.

What are China’s history museums and visitor experiences like?

Many of China’s museums are normally **government museums**, and they are also **political centers**. The museums display China’s histories, wars, cultures, geography, science, and prominent members. When people learn in the museums, they also **receive strong political directions and propaganda**. China’s museum culture is young. China does have old museums, but **most museums were created after 1949**, the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. China’s museums **seldom display foreign cultures even those cultures are great**, partially due to the past that China was invaded by those countries, and itself did not have a conquering history. China’s museums are **not kid-friendly yet**, but museum professionals are recognizing the education needs of Chinese children, due to a Chinese museum practice

book, called 博物馆之美「*The Beauty of Museums*」. China seldom has **university museums**.

Most of both **national and provincial-level museums in China are about histories**. In 1958, China's previous president Mao Zedong said "each major city in a province should have such a museum (An Hui Museum), it is a significant thing that people recognize their own history and their ability to create/build..." 「一个省的主要城市都应该有这样（安徽省博物馆）一个博物馆,人民认识自己的历史和创造的力量是一件很要紧的。。。」.<sup>5</sup> Many of **China's history museums educate visitors about striving against class conflict in China to strengthen people's faith in being a Socialist country and working towards Communism**. China's history museums' educational content is normally supported by China's various stages of history, from Slave society, Feudal society, Capitalist society, to Socialist society. This revolutionary process has specific meanings for the country. The **funding** resources for the Chinese museums **simply come from the government**. Chinese museums are "political tools," and the museums are able to **work on their exhibitions without considering what people really want**.

<sup>5</sup> Chen Lüsheng. Bo Wu Guan Zhi Mei = Bowuguan Zhi Mei. Guilin, Guangxi: Guangxi shi fan da xue chu ban she, 2020.

**China's museum exhibitions have shorter development terms compared to Americans'**. Chinese museum exhibitions have **less time to do the research, content development, collection acquisition, fabrication, and installation**. Therefore, **they are not complicated shows**. The display period of the exhibitions is very short, normally 5 days and no more than 30 days. It is possible that when the public hears the news, the exhibitions are almost close.

Nowadays, China is experiencing a boom in art and cultural facilities, one type of them being museums. There are **"...thousands of museums have been built across the country over the past decade, with a staggering 451 being opened in 2012 alone."**<sup>6</sup> Many of them have **extraordinary architecture and modern equipment** (Picture 2). However, after waves of first several visits upon their openings with shows and events, the museums later became dead regarding content and visitors. **The reason is that "... there's no one running them (the museums), there's no content;"** the museum building boom is "as part of a broad central government initiative," which did not truly reflect Chinese people's needs. Therefore, museums are often be empty <sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Shepard, Wade. "Why China Has Hundreds of Empty 'Ghost' Museums." Forbes. Forbes Magazine, June 21, 2019. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/pard/2019/06/20/why-china-has-hundreds-of-empty-ghost-museums/?sh=29e3d1e26f39>.



Picture 2: A view of building's outside of the Ordos Museum in China; an example of the investigation of China for its museum architecture. (inexhibit)

## How are the cultural expectations for museums similar/different between America and China?

In the U.S., “...what the museum might be envisioned as offering to the public has grown **from mere refreshment (the museum as carbonated beverage) to education (the museum as a site for informal learning) to nothing short of communal empowerment (the museum as an instrument for social change).**”<sup>7</sup> One example of museums as a social change instrument is that the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) spent \$2.75 million to acquire works exclusively by women, BIPOC, and LGBTQI artists.<sup>8</sup> BMA is an art museum that has around 95 thousand items in its collection, with 96% of those works being by white male artists. This acquisition demonstrates an acknowledgment and empowerment of the cultural production of historically under-represented groups and shows museum leadership’s response to the nation’s attention on the diversity and equity in society.

<sup>7</sup> Weil, Stephen E. “From being about something to being for somebody: The ongoing transformation of the American museum.” *Daedalus* 128, no. 3 (1999): 229-258.

<sup>8</sup> Ober, Cara. “The BMA Spent \$2.57 Million on Art by 49 Women in 2020. Guess How Many Are from Maryland?” *BmoreArt*, January 25, 2021. <https://bmoreart.com/2021/01/the-bma-spent-2-57-million-on-art-by-49-women-in-2020-guess-how-many-are-from-maryland.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Chen Lüsheng. Bo  
Wu Guan Zhi Mei =  
Bowuguan Zhi Mei.  
Guilin, Guangxi:  
Guangxi shi fan da  
xue chu ban she,  
2020.

In China, “... the routine or tradition to visit museums is **not formed yet...**”<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, China’s museums are the result of government’s decision instead of people’s needs. As said previously, China got fancy museum buildings, filled with politically directed content, yet not many Chinese visit them. **The true cultural expectations of the Chinese public regarding museums might be the next step for them to think and explore.**

## Challenges For Comprehension

What are the exact challenges a Chinese audience faces when understanding complex histories in American history exhibitions? To answer this question, this study looked at some of the challenges of comprehension. There is not a lot of literature on this topic that talks about the challenges experienced by Chinese visitors. Therefore, I looked at information about Chinese children’s history and English courses to know what they have prepared.



## How Much do Chinese Tourists Typically Know About American History?

Chinese tourists are normally permanent residents in China. In China, before the students go to university or college, the history education in schools **focuses on Chinese and world histories. American history is included within world history.** According to the History Education Course Standard For Full Time Nine-year Compulsory Education 2019 (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China 2021) by the Education Ministry of the People's Republic of China, **the parts directly related to America are the independence of America, including the Declaration of Independence and United States Constitution; and the American Civil War, including Abraham Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation.** America is also mentioned in the two **World Wars** and mentioned together with Europe as the whole concept of **Capitalist** countries. This is what Chinese students learn about American history from **elementary to middle school.**

In **high school**, history education focuses on Chinese domestic stories and overall human achievements, and there is **no specific American historical stories being mentioned**, according to the web page of the Ministry of Education (the Ministry of Education 2019). When it comes to **university education**, history courses become **electives**, if the student is not a history major student. We can see that Chinese students have a very limited understanding of America and its history, they are **stories being selected, translated, and interpreted in the Chinese language, supported with several pictures.** If the Chinese tourists are middle-aged or senior people, **they might have forgotten** some of what they learned as students.

## What is the Typical Level of English Language Comprehension Among Chinese Tourists in American History Museums?

Chinese university students can normally pass College English Test Band 6 (CET-6), which some Chinese people think it may **equals 3rd-year elementary students' English level in western countries**. Although, many Chinese students are able to pass the CET-6, they **seldom have the opportunity to try and use their English skills in real situations**.

## Universal Application

We need to recognize that some of **these challenges are universal** — they apply to other international audiences and even Americans, too.

## What Are the Difficulties that American Audiences Face When Understanding Histories In Museum Exhibitions?

I had a conversation with an educator staff member of the Museum of American Revolution (MOAR) when I visited there. I got to know that **the content in their museum is college-, graduate-, and PhD-level with rich details. Generally middle and high school history classes do not teach students that deeply**. The educator staff member shared with me that when he was at school, they **generically learned the years and significant actors in various historical events**. The students got a taste with a series of historical stories. **So visiting the museum**



<sup>10</sup> Original words  
from an educator at  
MOAR

and learning the American Revolution at MOAR is like “from baby steps to running”<sup>10</sup>. The educator also shared with me that when he looked at pieces — he used the painting of Battle of Yorktown for example — **he had to read the didactic panel a bit, look at the painting for a second, and read a bit more, and go back to the painting again. The knowledge he learned from the label and the collection were small pieces, and was not confident if he understood the content exactly.** MOAR’s ticket is valid for two days to allow people enough time to explore and learn in the museum. I also learned from the educator that the various interpretation methods of the museum are accessible for ordinary people, who are not Masters or PhDs of History, and to support their understanding. For example, when he takes children on tour, he associates a moment in daily life to a moment during the war time, in order to inspire the kids to think about what the historical people would do during that time. Other things, such as interactive, costume play performance, and the film similarly help people to fulfill the same role of helping people access of the historical content.

We can see that, **even American visitors, who have learned U.S. history in school, may still not know everything** that history exhibitions talk about. That’s normal, as the exhibitions might take years to be developed, and they are handled by professionals in that area. The exhibitions can be demanding for people to understand. The public might have general knowledge of the history, but the exhibitions may go into greater depth or detail, which wasn’t covered in the general education. Additionally, **adult visitors have been out of school for many years and might have forgotten many of the historical details.** Lastly, **for some specific historical events, the people who come from the area specific to the event may be more familiar with the story.** However, for the people who live in other cities or states, visiting museums in places that are new to them, they may not know the things that happened in those regions. Hence, **they might not be fluent with the regional histories.**

## How Might Some Of These Approaches Make These Histories More Universally Understood?

Although many Americans have natural English skills, a comprehensive education in American history, and live within the context of American culture, they may still encounter unfamiliar information when visiting museums. Therefore, **the accessible interpretation of the historical stories is significant for both domestic and international audiences.**

## V. Current State: Educational, Cultural, And Hobby Barriers

Chinese visitors to the U.S. come from a continent and a culture both distant and different and can experience a sense of exclusion in American museums. **What are the specifics challenges they meet during the visit?** I interviewed five Chinese people I personally know.

## Chinese Visitors May Not Know Enough About General American History to Support Their Understanding of History Exhibitions

American histories are particularly complicated, including social, political, and racial dynamics that are very unfamiliar to Chinese audiences. These audiences lack context and background knowledge to truly understand the stories and empathize with the people involved. They may need to look up some background information in order to make sense of the interpretation, which makes the learning overwhelming. Chinese tourists also may not know the hidden cultural dimensions that are involved in the interpretations. For example, in one of the National Constitution Center's (NCC) temporary exhibitions, Civil War and Reconstruction, the "reconstruction" refers to the specific

era from 1865 to 1877 following the Civil War. The country was trying to reunite with the Southern states from the Confederacy as well as the four million former enslaved people. The country was transforming and faced many challenges during the process. Chinese people who **don't know the overlapping elements contained within this term may have problems making sense of the exhibition**. For me, since I only know that this exhibition talks about the stories when the Constitution was created, I was expecting exciting stories since there is "reconstruction" - how the U.S. was rebuilt and made progress. However, I saw seemingly frustrating historical photos and sentences which all conflicted with my previous positive mindset. Until then, I recognized I might have mistaken the direction of this exhibition. I then Googled and figured out the term meant a specific historical event.

I talked with Yuxin Liu, who also studies the development and design of exhibitions, with a history major and a business minor for her undergraduate. Yuxin mentioned that if they have options, she and her other friends **won't go to history-type museums**. Firstly, it is because **they don't know enough about American history** to support their understanding and learning in the museums. Secondly, the **exhibitions themselves are not that approachable and understandable**. If they have to visit history, they would prefer to visit museums

with Chinese content. I think Yuxin's point is that if the audience doesn't understand the exhibition, it's not their responsibility, so they simply don't visit them anymore. Yuxin's argument is that **"Audiences don't get a choice of which exhibition or museum they want to visit. They can only visit museums that are understandable and meaningful to them**. If we don't understand the shows, it's not our fault"

I also met and talked to a Chinese couple at the cannon installation area in front of the MOAR. I noticed them because I heard them talking in Mandarin. They are now two years out of university. They had not visited the museum yet; they were just using the bench to take a rest. But they did visit some history museums in Washington DC, such as the National Museum of the American Indian. I shared with them my difficulties when visiting history museums. They pointed out to me that **"we are not international students"**<sup>11</sup>. They answered that they had their middle and high schools here, they learned about American history, and knew much of the history without needing to visit the museum. Then I asked them what museum help them with, they thought for around three seconds, and first said "还好吧 (it works fine)"<sup>12</sup>, a common Chinese sentence to express not good and not bad. They then said museums help them to **"refresh the memory"**<sup>13</sup>, and provide more details compared to school

<sup>11</sup> Original quote from the couple.

<sup>12</sup> Original quote from the couple.

<sup>13</sup> Original quote from the couple.

education, as the instructor may not teach everything in the textbook. From the conversation, I recognize that middle and high school education might be significant for people's pre-knowledge to enjoy the museums. For international students and tourists from other countries, that might be a big barrier.

I interviewed with Rui Yan who has a PhD degree in science, and currently works in a government-funded institution as a scientist in Washington D.C. She shared with me that at the beginning, **she did not know there was coat check, library, volunteer-lead tour, and other "additional services"** at museums. She gradually got to know them after several visits, through watching and learning about what other audiences were doing in the museums. Rui mentioned that she was brought to The Palace Museum in Beijing, China, by her father several times when she was a kid. But it did not become a hobby for her to visit this place weekly. Her other museum experience was visiting the rest of the museums in Beijing when she was young.

The unfamiliarity of the American museum system does not hinder her interest in the museums of the U.S. She has visited several museums in D.C., such as the National Museum of American History, the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center, and the National Museum of Asian Art; as well

as museums in other states, such as The Getty in Los Angeles, California, and the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, Hawaii. In the history museums, and other types of museums such as natural history and art museums, Rui is always browsing and wandering, instead of trying to understand the stories. **She does not look up the background information or unfamiliar terms to make sense of the information. If she could not understand it, she moved on to the next spot. She said that "I know Chinese history, but I don't know American history. So I just browse."**

Yuyang Chen is from the Master's program of Jazz Studies. Unlike Rui Yan, she always visited museums in China before she came to the U.S. In China, once she traveled to a new place, she visited the provincial museum in that province. This helped her quickly understand that city. However, she still has difficulties understanding the museums in Philadelphia. She said **"I respect and embrace the content, but I don't understand all of the content."**

## Chinese Audiences May Have Difficulty With The English Language

English skill also plays an important role in the understanding of the exhibits. Chinese people might feel stuck or have a hard time understanding the labels when facing another language. Daisy Bian is a professional accountant working at a famous accounting company. She earned her master's degree in the U.S., and her undergraduate degree in China. I asked about her experience visiting history museums. She told me that **she does not make sense of most of the history museums. She is confident that she could, if she searches related information and looks up a dictionary for the unfamiliar terms. But she just does not want to. She is unwilling to do that additional in the museums.** She would like to **just enjoy what she can get immediately**, like interesting objects, pictures, and beautiful architecture. **If the readings on the panels are too difficult, she just doesn't read.** Daisy also told me that she would not visit museums she could not understand,

or she would just wander without really looking at the panels. She prefers museums that have many objects to look at. She is not going to pay for the tickets to do research and dictionary-look up. She also asked me “Are there other people (both American and Chinese) really looking at the readings, they're all just wandering around, right?” Daisy told me about what she would like history museums to change to help her understand the stories. She was hoping they would have **easily-understandable cartoon videos to interpret the historical stories.** For her, watching videos is easier than reading panels.

I also talked with Linda Zhou, who learned accounting at Boston University for her undergraduate and business in another state for her master's degree. She told me she chose religion studies for her history course. She is the only Chinese student in the class, and the instructor understood her challenges to learn this field. Linda said she is able to understand each specific story in history exhibitions if given time and a quiet environment to look at things. **If she is in a situation where people have to look at things quickly, then she can grasp nothing. Linda feels pictures and labels that have interactives are helpful tools for her to understand stories.** Pure-text labels are hard for her to finish reading. Tours that are hosted by volunteers are helpful as well. The **volunteers use their own experiences for the stories and use more plain**



language with emotions, which are more engaging and understandable, while the labels are didactic and hard to read. Another interesting thing Linda shared with me is that the reason she tried to understand all the stories is because she paid for the ticket, and she wanted the money to be worth it.

I also asked another person, Xiaohai Yu, who came to the U.S. twenty years ago. **He completed middle and high school, undergraduate and graduate in the U.S. He is not a big fan of museums, but he understands “everything” in American museums.** When he was still in China, he was often brought by her mom to a museum near their living place, as his mom’s friends worked in that museum, so they just wanted to take advantage. In the U.S. he visited several museums but not too many, such as the American Museum of Natural History and The Museum of Modern Art in New York City; the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum in the D.C.; the Museum of Pop Culture in Seattle. **He told me that except for airplane and spacecraft exhibits, he won’t read labels on the other types of exhibits. Even he can totally understand the stories for any type of the show.**



## VI. Project: A Cross-Cultural Examination

**American museums are serving different and even conflicting audiences.** On the one hand, the American audiences have learned the history well, the issues are just that they might need a reminder of what they learned and if they can get new and deeper knowledge out of the exhibition. On the other hand, for the international audiences, using Chinese tourists as an example, their varying fluency in English, limited knowledge regarding American history, and the cultural background can impact Chinese people's interest in visiting history museums.

However, the common thing is that both groups are not historical experts. And Chinese people might need more help compared to Americans in order to understand the exhibition context.

**What are museums doing to accommodate these needs from Chinese visitors? What is the feedback from the international visitors?**

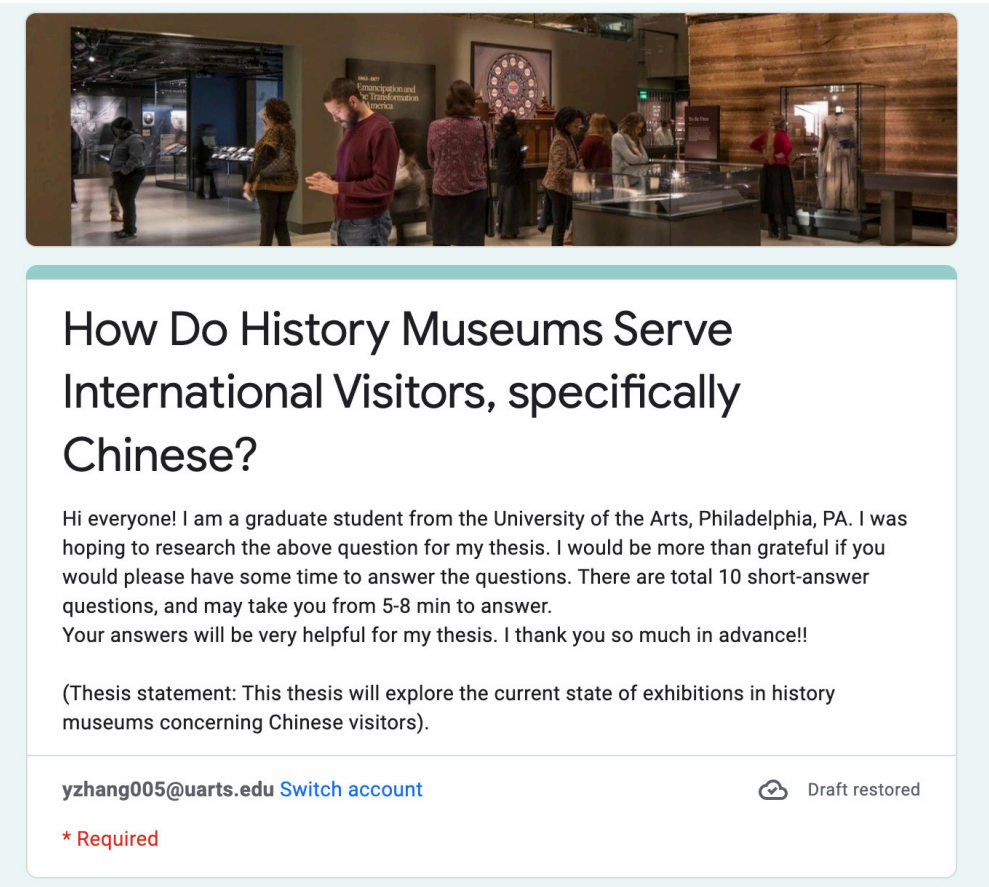
# Methodology

Through site visits and interviews with staff, I investigated three history museums to see what they have done regarding supporting Chinese audiences in their institutions, . For **the National Constitution Center** (NCC), I talked with **Sarah Winski** — Director of the Exhibit; at the **Museum of American Revolution (MOAR)**, **Matthew Skic** — Curator of Exhibitions; and at the **Penn Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology**, **Xiuqing Zhou** — Collection Registrar, **Kevin Schott** — Associate Director of Interpretive Programs, **Joanne Tionson-Perez** — Chief Marketing and Communications Officer, and **Gaia Faigon** — Marketing and Communications Manager.

<sup>14</sup> This survey was distributed more widely but response rates were insufficient to result in usable findings.

When facing Chinese tourists, how do we as museums address the challenge of cross-cultural comprehension? What should our goals be? I prepared ten questions. In order to look neat, I made them into a survey (<https://forms.gle/1wvUzBMFpMBAKygw5>)<sup>14</sup> (Picture 3). I used these case studies, interviews, survey results, analysis of travel & tourism trends to develop a series of takeaways to inform museum workers of what they should keep in mind when designing exhibitions.

Here are the ten questions:



Picture 3: Screenshot of the survey to show the title and introduction of it. (Yu Zhang)

I also contacted three tour agencies to ask them for their visit experiences in any of Philadelphia's history museums and historical sites. I also got some information from touring the Independence National Historical Park.

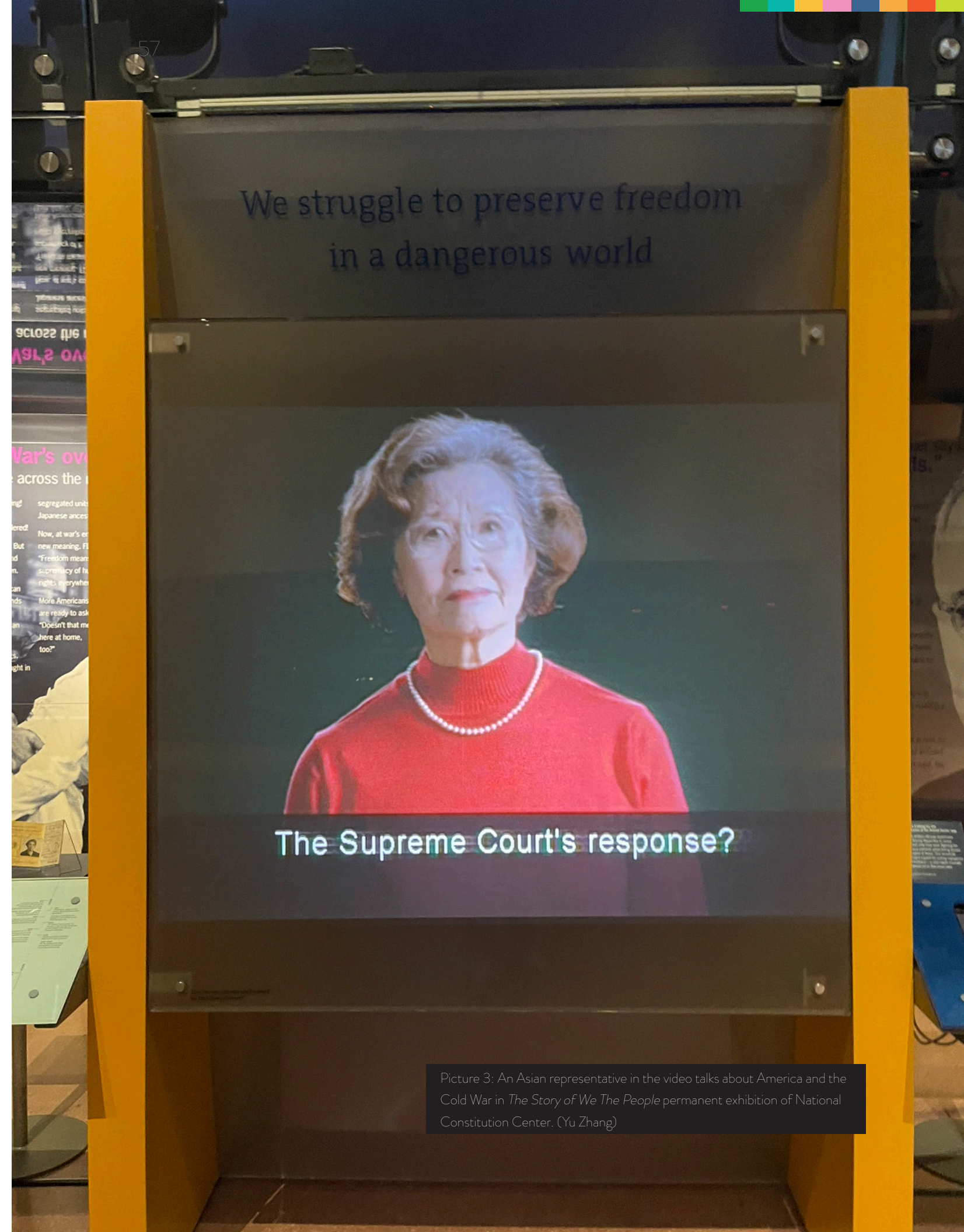
- 1. Who is your intended audience? Why?
- 2. What are your visitorship Demographics?
- 3. How many international visitors do you get per year? (percentage)
- 4. How many Chinese visitors do you get per year? (Percentage)
- 5. Do you have resources for Chinese visitors?
- 6. Would you consider adding them if you don't have Chinese resources? Why?
- 7. What languages (other than English) are your labels written in?  
  
Español  
  
Deutsch  
  
Français

- Japanese
- Italiano
- Nederlands
- Português
- Chinese
- Other:\_\_\_\_\_
- 8. What reading level do you use for interpretive materials (and/or interactives)?
- 9. How important is the role of prior knowledge of US history in a successful visitor experience?  
  
Not important 0 1 2 3 4 5 very important
- 10. Please explain your response.



## Three Case Studies: What Resources do Museums have for Chinese Audiences?

Here are the results of my interviews with the National Constitution Center, The Museum of American Revolution, and the Penn Museum. I chose these museums because they are well-known institutions. I got to know them after I came to Philadelphia. I think they might have more chances to receive a larger audience, which might include more international visitors too, compared to other Philadelphia museums.



Picture 3: An Asian representative in the video talks about America and the Cold War in *The Story of We The People* permanent exhibition of National Constitution Center. (Yu Zhang)



## National Constitution Center (NCC)



Picture 5: The front door of NCC, with the museum name on top of the building, and the big poster of the current two exhibitions. The outside grassland is a popular gathering and sitting place for the public. (Yu Zhang)



I reached out to Sarah Winski through emails first. She gave us a field trip tour in our third semester at NCC. Though I was unable to go on that field trip, I watched two videos of her introducing Signer's Hall and Headed To The White House exhibits separately. I found the videos on C-SPAN's official website, a non-profit television service for the public, focusing on federal government and public affairs programming. I got the chance to chat with Winski through ZOOM. She not only shared things that normally could only be known by experienced staff, but also provided me with her personal experience and opinions regarding cross-cultural learning, accessibility of the exhibitions, and resources that I would be able to research for the thesis. The conversation broadened my horizon about both NCC and what I can do for my thesis. We ended up scheduling an in-person meeting at the



Picture 5: Statues of the 1st (right) and the 4th (left) presidents of the U.S. in the Signers Hall at NCC. (Yu Zhang)

NCC. Winski offered to take me to the Center and give me a tour. The visit was successful and fun.

Many of the results written below came from both my research and observations, as well as information from Winski, who provided me with both the introduction and explanation of NCC, and her personal perspectives to inspire me and enrich the content of my thesis.

NCC's mission statement is "The National Constitution Center serves as America's leading platform for **constitutional education and debate**, fulfilling its congressional charter '**to disseminate information about the U.S. Constitution on a nonpartisan basis in order to increase awareness and understanding of the Constitution among the American people**.'"<sup>15</sup> The center is built for **civic education, with a focus on but not limited to middle and high school students**. The center **welcomes visitors who live in the Old City, and other broader audiences**. The Center's famous displays include the first public printing of the Constitution, Signers Hall (Picture 5), The Story of We the People permanent exhibit, and **special exhibitions on various topics**. NCC also aims to disseminate information about the Constitution. It has multiple interactive programs and rich online resources about the Constitution for people to research and to

<sup>15</sup> "National Constitution Center." National Constitution Center – constitutioncenter.org. Accessed March 27, 2022. <https://constitutioncenter.org>.

learn. NCC is a private non-profit institution that relies on ticket and membership sales, philanthropic and other types of funding to operate. NCC is located in a big open area that faces Independence Hall, which is another well-known institution regarding the history of America's independence.

As mentioned, the Center's primary audience is middle school and **high school students, and they occupy around 50% of total visitors**, who the Center devotes much of their resources, energy, and time to. The Center designates middle and high school students as their primary audience because **those students best utilize the center's resources, and vice versa, the Center has the most impact on them**. Middle and high school students currently are actively learning American histories and the Constitution in their curricula and using related textbooks. Visiting the NCC is a great supplement for them to further experience and understand the history. Winski personally believed that **since resources such as budget, time, staff are limited and valuable, they have to be invested on priority areas**. But increasing accessibility for one group of visitors, also helps with accessibility for other groups of people. I agree with this idea but also I do not. I understand that the resources will benefit everyone, but it is compromised. By comprised I mean, the accessibility resources that prioritize the most

**pressing needs of students, residents in the Old City, and other national visitors, may not match the most urgent issues of the international visitors, though it might help something else.**

Winski provided the data of the visitorship demographics of NCC, from 2010 to 2015. The data included all the General Admission visitors, however people who visited the center as a group, such as tourist or student groups, are not counted.

Among the General Admission audience, NCC had **40% of local visitors**, who were from Philadelphia and all the surrounding counties in Pennsylvania and Southern New Jersey, which are also the center's designated marketing areas. **20% visitors were regional from surrounding locations, including** north to New York City; west to the region of Harrisburg, Lancaster, Lebanon, and York, PA; and south to Washington, D.C., and Baltimore. **32-35% visitors were domestic** tourists from **elsewhere across the nation**. The Center had **5-8% international audience**.

There is no particular data of the breakdown of the international visitors, so the specific amount of Chinese tourists is uncertain. Winski mentioned that **"Historically, I very rarely if ever remember seeing any Chinese tour groups in our ticketed exhibit spaces**





Picture 6: The theater where the *Freedom Rising* performance took place. The speaker will stand in the center, with a 360° projection screen playing videos, with sound effects. (Yu Zhang)

<sup>16</sup> Original words  
from Sarah Winski

because we are pretty inaccessible for all the reasons that you (Yu Zhang) are studying.”<sup>16</sup> For the Chinese tour groups who do not visit the center, they use the empty open area in the front of NCC as a drop-off location to visit the historical Old City section of Philadelphia. They could be “taking pictures of the building, maybe coming inside for the restrooms, café, or museum store”. When the Signer’s Hall was previously free to visit, Chinese tourists also went to the second floor to take pictures of the statues.



Picture 7: A volunteer and visitors doing a Constitution quiz together. (Yu Zhang)

The Center uses the English language, for their welcome signage, exhibition labels, and the 17-miniyue performance called *Freedom Rising* (Picture 6). Besides English, the Center offers the **online Visitor Guide in another eight languages, including Simplified Chinese**. The guide includes the Center’s highlights and visiting tips, which appear on the website. The Center has a volunteer program. Volunteers normally wear red uniforms, so visitors can distinguish them from other people easily. The volunteers actively engage with visitors to answer questions and explain the story of the museum and exhibitions. When I visited, a volunteer was doing a Constitution quiz with visitors (Picture 7). There were two

monitors set up with the questions, and the volunteer acted as host and judge, to tell if people's answers were right or wrong and to give further explanation.

During the ongoing COVID-19 situation, the most urgent thing for the Center to do is get back their audience of school groups. Therefore, adding resources for international or Chinese visitors is not within discussion for the staff members. This makes sense because, firstly, the Center is built for civil, not global education; secondly, schools provide many more ticket sales that support the Center.

NCC aims for an **8th- to 10th-grade reading level** in their exhibitions, because **“a lot of concepts in American history and government that we cover are not introduced until the end of middle school or high school.** In terms of their primary audience of student groups, the Center targets 8th to 10th-grade children instead of 4th- to 5th-grade children, because the exhibition content is more familiar to them. However, the Center understands that a 4th to 5th-grade English level would be more accessible for the general public. So they try to make the reading easier in other ways, for example, by “shortening word counts, lengths of sentences, simplifying sentence structure, etc.”<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Original words  
from Sarah Winski

**A successful visitor experience requires a baseline understanding of the history of American independence and some of the forms of government. But the Center “always explains everything most relevant to understanding a given point and never assumes that you already know”.**<sup>18</sup> This consideration and decision were made based on the primary and secondary visitors to the Center. As mentioned, the primary audience is school kids who are actively learning about the history and governmental functions. The adults and domestic tourists have also learned about the history and government knowledge once upon a time, but “don't remember all the details now or never knew why something happened or works the way it does.”<sup>19</sup> For these primary audiences, their English level and prior knowledge are sufficient for the exhibitions. Winski also shared that the **reading level is also closely associated with the Center's mission and top audience groups.**

<sup>18</sup> Original words  
from Sarah Winski

<sup>19</sup> Original words  
from Sarah Winski



## The Museum of The American Revolution (MOAR)



Picture 8: MOAR's traditional building style with real 18th century cannons from the war at its front. (Wikipedia)

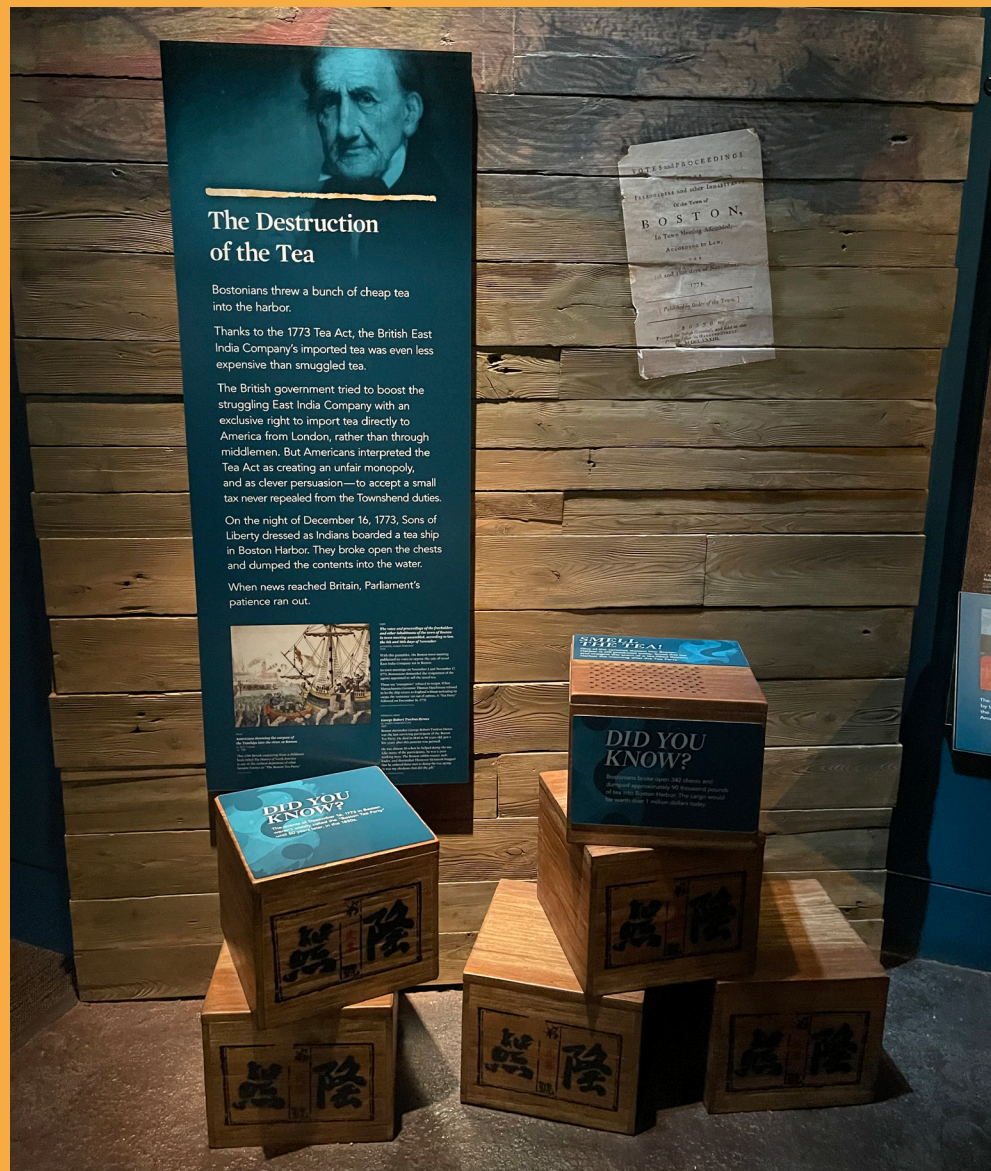


I found Matthew Skic's name on the MOAR's website and LinkedIn. Skic is an expert in history and material culture with a Museum Studies background. On the museum's website, Skic appears in the virtual tour video to share the stories he knows and showcase historical materials of the American Revolution. He showcases historical and replicated collections such as a copy of the Pennsylvania Evening Post with a full printing of the Declaration of Independence; soldiers' personal belongings, such as a wooden canteen, a knapsack, a pocket book, various weapons, and a cartridge box. I also saw the museum news about Skic talking in an event about a special collection loan for the museum's exhibition — Flags and Founding Documents, 1776 - Today.

I directed an email to the MOAR's general email address with his name and title addressed. I introduced myself and the thesis, and asked for an interview. Then I received a reply from Skic directly. We scheduled a ZOOM meeting to allow me to ask questions and get answers from Skic. Skic was very sympathetic. He not only tried his best to answer my ten questions on the survey, but also offered me with his ideas about researching audience feedback and situations regarding the inclusion and accessibility of international audiences.

MOAR is a new and modern history museum opened in 2017, **located in the Old City of Philadelphia**. MOAR features history education with **immersive exhibitions, rich interactives, real historical collections, programs, and academic events**. For example, the museum houses a tent that George Washington lived in and made strategy in the American Revolution for six and a half years; several tea boxes with holes on top (picture 9) that visitors can smell the tea that Boston people dumped to protest against the Tea Act; and a replica of the Boston Liberty Tree (picture 10), with posters on the tree stem, lamps on the branches, and footprints on the ground to enable visitors to experience the scene where colonists were rallying against British government. The museum also has online interactives, which supplement its physical museum and can be viewed individually or with the physical museum. For example, the film *Washington's War Tent* takes place at a theater with a media screen to play the video. To learn about this tent on the museum website, visitors can play with an interactive video called *Washington's Field Headquarters*, where visitors can better make sense of the stories and the importance of Washington's tent groups. Visitors can see the whole site of the area, with several more tents serving various functions. Visitors can change their perspective to view





Picture 9: Tea boxes with holes to allow people to smell. (Yu Zhang)



Picture 10: The American Liberty Gallery features tree replicas. (Visit Philadelphia)

the tents from different angles and take a look inside (picture 11). The interactive is composed of photographs of tent replicas, costumed characters, and collections, which provide a feeling that is both real and immersive.

The mission of MOAR is **“The Museum uncovers and shares compelling stories about the diverse people and complex events that sparked America’s ongoing experiment in liberty, equality, and self-government.”**<sup>20</sup>

MOAR welcomes a broad audience: national international, people from Philadelphia and the surrounding areas, the young and the old, and families. The museum’s labels are designed to be accessible in terms of content, language level, and font size for a wide public. MOAR recognizes that Philadelphia is a major city for tourists interested in American history themes. The

<sup>20</sup> “Mission & Vision,” Museum of the American Revolution, accessed May 13, 2022, <https://www.amrevmuseum.org/about/about-mission-vision>.



Picture 11: Online Washington’s Tent interactive. Visitors can click the circles to explore various tents and their interior. (MOAR)



Independence Hall, the NCC, and the Liberty Bell are top attractions of this type. MOAR sees this situation and tries to best take the advantage of it, without repeating the content or approach of existing museums. Therefore, in terms of the target audience groups, unlike other museums that have a focused group as the primary audience, MOAR welcomes a broader public.

**The museum does not track the demographics of the visitors. It also does not collect and organize the number of international visitors. The museum staff can see the locations of where people come from when the visitors use the museum's online and onsite ticketing system, but the museum does not count the number of international locations. Some tickets are also sold at the Independence Visitor Center and some other venues, whose audience data are not shared with MOAR.**

Interestingly, the museum **offers a Mandarin version of its introductory film - *Revolution*** (Picture 12). It is played on the first floor, where people normally start the exploration of the galleries. The Mandarin version can be played with advanced notice, as the museum staff needs to prepare and get it set up ahead of time. I emailed Skic to ask if he could let me see the Mandarin film for free. Skic scheduled a Monday afternoon time and received me by the visitor entrance of the museum. When we



Picture 12: Visitors are watching the introductory film at the Lenfest Myer Theater. (Yu Zhang)

arrived at the theater, he asked his colleague Ryan, the staff member in charge of the play of the introductory film, to help me with the Mandarin film. **It is the same film as the English version, except the “speaker” of the film spoke in Mandarin.** Skic and Ryan **struggled to inform people that they were going to play the Mandarin version. They said to people it was a private screening of the Mandarin version, but also they said people feel free to watch the Mandarin version if they wanted.** The museum also has a **headphone set** (Picture 13) that **can play the Mandarin version.** It was used previously so that both English and Mandarin users can enjoy the film at the same time, except that even with the headphones on, people can still hear the public English version a bit.





Picture 13: The headphone set for personal use. Chinese visitors can keep Mandarin speech to themselves. (Yu Zhang, 2022)

The headphones' channel one plays English, and channel two plays Mandarin. It is also used to support hearing impaired people.

The museum and its website are in English, but it **has** map guides in various languages, including Chinese. Those maps are displayed in front of the ticket desk (picture 14). The museum is also **aware of what other museums offer regarding international or Chinese resources**. During staff meetings, staff members discuss how to better help international visitors.



Picture 14: Map guides in five languages other than English at MOAR. (Yu Zhang, 2022)



## The University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Penn Museum)

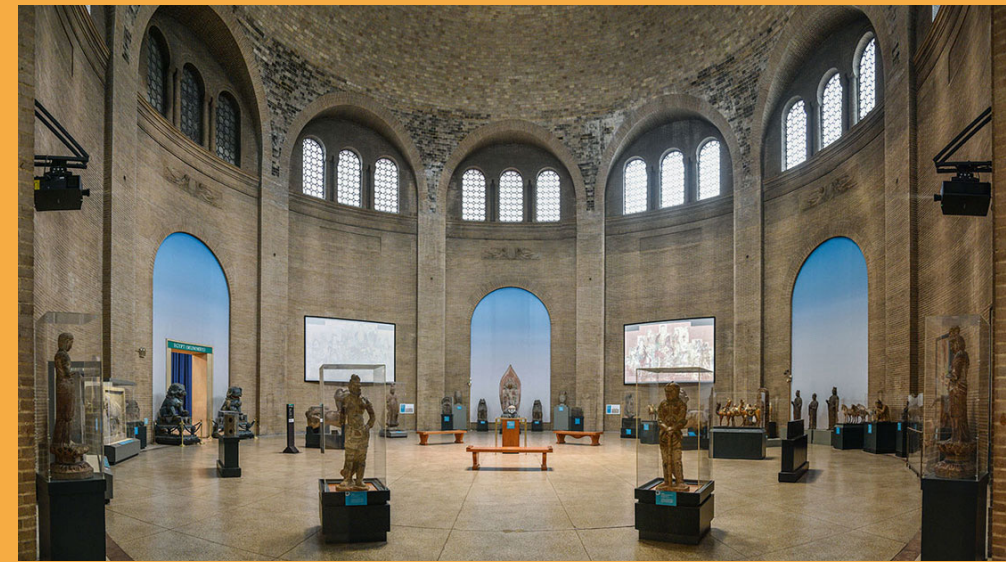


Picture 15: Amazing Penn Museum's architecture, an angle from the entrance towards the major building. (The New York Times)



I got several people's help to learn about the Penn Museum. My teacher, Kathleen Quinn, who taught the Museum in Society course in the second semester, had worked at The Penn Museum before. She introduced me to Xiuqing Zhou, her previous colleague at the museum. Zhou provided a sense of overall audience groups and inclusive methodologies the museum used regarding Chinese audiences. Zhou introduced me to Kevin Schott, who knows more about the education and public engagement situations of the Penn Museum. I then contacted Joanne Tiongson-Perez and Gaia Faigon, who provided the specific numbers regarding the visitors.

Penn Museum is **a university museum located on the University of Pennsylvania campus in West Philadelphia**. The museum also connects to the other school buildings. It features unique **traditional style architecture. Its Asian style gate with dark roof tiles made me feel welcomed** (picture 15). The museum organizes its galleries by culture, for example, the Mediterranean Gallery, the Greece Gallery, and the Etruria and Rome Gallery. **The Chinese section (picture 16) belongs to the Asia Gallery and has its own room**. The other cultures in the Asia Gallery are Indian and Japanese. The museum is famous for its African, Asian, and American collections, such as sphinxes, mummies, and two of the Six Steeds of Zhao Mausoleum.



Picture 16: Overall look of the Chinese section in Asia Gallery. The room has same length and height of 27 meters. (The Penn Museum)

Penn Museum's mission is **"Transforming understanding of the human experience"** Due to the interview, I got to know that Penn Museum **targets the general public of all ages, including students and specialists**. The museum **features worldwide collections that people from different cultures can enjoy**. The students who are learning human history find the museum a good learning resource, and specialists can do research with its world-class collection. **Penn Museum's secondary audience is Chinese visitors. The Chinese rotunda section occupies a good amount of the space of the whole museum**, and contains precious collections.

Tiongson-Perez provided me with a screenshot of **general admission statistics that includes Chinese visitors (picture 17)**, and a written result of the museum's

general admission of all visitors. There were 269 respondents, and the survey took place between October 2021 and February 2022. According to the survey, the total population was 75% White; 6% Black or African American; 4% Asian; 5% Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin; and 1% Middle Eastern or North African; 5% respondents preferred not to disclose their race, while 2% did not listed it. In this five month period, there were around eleven Asian visitors, based on the percentage of total respondents. How many Chinese among the eleven Asian visitors is unknown. It is likely that there were few Chinese visitors partly because of COVID.

Faigon mentioned there is a growing number of Chinese visitors to the Penn Museum. Group visits came to the museum through tour operators, Wharton Business School, and third-party ticketing sites in China, i.e., Ctrip (携程旅行). The Chinese group visitors mainly fell into two categories: middle school students traveling through the tour groups and visiting the Penn Museum/ Penn Campus, and Chinese business people on campus for programs hosted through Wharton Business School who visited the Museum for a tour and private dinner. For those specific events, the museum sometimes prepares brochures in the Chinese language and docents who can speak Chinese.

←

X Chinese visitation stats[69].xlsx

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1			US	Anonymous/Declined	Foreign	China	Notes
2	2018						
3	All Programs		173,503	32,529	1,191	463	
4	Museum Admission		31,905	27,824	962	456	Africa, Mexico
5							
6	2019						
7	All Programs		159,796	39,868	232	65	
8	Museum Admission		20,957	34,685	93	55	Main Level closed
9							
10	2020						
11	All Programs		75,032	15,316	250	15	
12	Museum Admission		6,314	332	15	3	COVID closure
13							
14	2021						
15	All Programs		80,972	17,325	415	25	
16	Museum Admission		41,808	5,301	185	24	COVID closure
17							
18	2022 To date (1/1 - 3/15)						
19	All Programs		19,386	4,445	163	8	
20	Museum Admission		7,623	845	92	8	
21							
22	Notes:						
23	All Programs includes general museum admission and all other programs held by the Museum that do not require a ticket.						
24	Museum Admission only includes guests that came to the Museum just to visit the galleries.						
25	The numbers represent tickets sold.						
26	Anonymous/Declined are tickets purchased in which the guest either declined to give us their zip code or declined to provide any contact information.						

Picture 17: Records showed the number of Chinese visitors at the Penn Museum. (Gaia Faigon, the Penn Museum)

The Penn Museum uses English as a primary language. However, there is **an Asian Galleries Tour session (picture 18) on the website with several Mandarin-presented highlighted Chinese objects.** This session is found on the page of the Penn Museum Virtual Guided Tours, alongside tours of other galleries, such as the Mediterranean, Mexico, and Middle East galleries.<sup>21</sup> Two things needed to be pointed out about the Virtual Guided Tours. **First is that though the Mandarin session is called “Asia Galleries”, visitors can only see Chinese objects here. I think it might make people wonder what happened to the collections from other countries in the Asian territory. The second is that all the gallery tours, including the Asia Galleries tour, are in English, with the Mandarin Asian Galleries Tour an “addition”, appearing at the end (In sum, there are two tour options for the Asia Gallery: one in English, as in other galleries, and one in Mandarin). There is no Mandarin option for other culture’s galleries, and other galleries use only English for tours.** I think the museum can add additional curatorial words for this specific arrangement. **I found it is very efficient to use the Mandarin virtual tours to get to know the collections, so I looked for more Mandarin language tours other cultures but did not see them.** While the Penn Museum's foreign language tours off to a good start, **I wonder why they are limited to just several objects.** I found that the current curator

<sup>21</sup> Link to the page of the virtual presentation (guide tour): <https://www.penn.museum/tour/>

<sup>22</sup> Olszewski, Deborah I. “Nancy S. Steinhardt, Curator of Chinese Art, Asian Section.” Expedition Magazine Nancy S Steinhardt Curator of Chinese Art Asian Section Comments. Penn Museum, November 15, 2008. <https://www.penn.museum/sites/expedition/nancy-s->



Picture 18: The home page of the Chinese virtual tour. (The Penn Museum)

of Chinese Art in the Asian Section, Dr. Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, who is “well-versed”<sup>22</sup> in Chinese language, who seems should be able to work on the Mandarin presentations. Or is it because the museum couldn’t get enough people who know Mandarin, enough budget to continue the work, or the museum assumes a Chinese person won’t be interested in studying other cultures? **Schott answered that the virtual presentations were done by the Graduate students at the museum who study that area and can speak the language. But “we don’t currently have graduate students who speak Mandarin and have content knowledge in other galleries. However,**



if this becomes available we would happily include these areas.” I respect the way the museum collaborates with graduate students, but I feel I do not see the necessity that the curatorial staff must find someone who knows both the content and speaks the language. There could be a collaboration between two students, one knows the content well and one speaks the language well.

The Mandarin tours for the Chinese objects are in the format of slides, filled with Chinese descriptions, supportive pictures, and audio interpretation in Mandarin. **Schott mentioned that the making and maintaining the Chinese Virtual Guided Tours is not easy. Because the museum itself did not make the videos, and they currently do not have the Chinese staff for the interpretation work, therefore, the museum is not confident about the quality and accuracy of the videos they provide.**

On the museum website, the descriptions of some Chinese collections include Chinese characters (picture 19), which translate the English names in the Pinyin version. The museum also has Chinese tours onsite (<https://www.penn.museum/calendar/list.events/-?start=0>), visitors need to book ahead.

## Description

Chinese map showing the county town of Ninghai (寧海縣城), with numerous small islands off the coast, and specifying divisions between administrative districts. Ninghai is located on China's east coast, about 200km south of Shanghai across the Hangzhou Bay. It and many of the other names that appear on the map can be readily identified with place names on modern maps. The map belongs to a Chinese tradition of cartography in which features are pictorially rendered, and distances and relative positions are not shown to scale. Maps belonging to this tradition were widely used in the 17th-19th centuries for representing administrative districts for coastal defense purposes, and it is likely that this map would have had such a function. Compared with the more elaborate examples, which often represent much larger sections of the coast, this is a relatively simple map showing the administrative extent of just a single county town. The map is oriented with East at the top, as if looking out over the East China Sea from the walled town of Ninghai at the bottom. The most distant features represented on the map (such as the island of Tantoushan 檀頭山) are about 60km away from Ninghai. Scales appear to have been considerably compressed in an E-W direction, and the nominal East of the map is in fact more like Southeast. Ruled red lines indicate the limits of responsibility of three administrative units, the Ninghai Jiantiao Left Garrison 寧海健跳左營, the Linhai Huangbiao Left Garrison 臨海黃標左營 to the south, and the Xiangshan Changshi Garrison 象山昌石營 to the north. There is no explicit record of the date or for whom the map was produced.

The map was received from Gregory Bernard Keen (Librarian. University of Pennsylvania, 1887-1898). At the top, an annotation in English incorrectly identifies the map as a "Plan of a Chinese burial place," presumably because the labeled islands bear a passing resemblance to graves.

Picture 19: Use Chinese characters in the description for a Chinese painting. (Penn Museum)



<sup>23</sup> Original words  
from Zhou Xiuqin

The Penn Museum is not sure if they want to add resources for Chinese visitors. The Chinese audience is currently not their primary visitor group, and “China’s national power is not strong”<sup>23</sup>. Zhou explained that “if Chinese visitors become part of the mainstream of American museums’ visitation (maintaining their “power” to visit, participation, and purchase)”, then Penn museum might make effort on uploading more Chinese presentations for both Asian and other galleries<sup>24</sup>. I agree with Zhou and understand why the American museums don’t have resources for Chinese visitors. As mentioned in the study of NCC chapter, American museums do not rely on Chinese visitors to survive or to do any other things. The Chinese audience does not have any type of significance to motivate American museums to consider them. It is always good to be inclusive and accessible, but the current issue that Chinese audience experience difficulties in history museums does not impact the museums themselves, other people or groups.

**In terms of the interpretive materials, they are catering to the general public, and each gallery has a different level. The average level is Grade 6 English.**

In their interview, Zhou and Schott held two different perspectives for how important prior knowledge of history is for visiting the Penn Museum. **Zhou thought**

it was very important as background knowledge helps people successfully experience the museums, while Schott thought prior knowledge is not the point; if people know more, they will learn more. It was interesting to see how different the two ideas of a Chinese and an American staff were. Zhou was worried that lacking background knowledge makes Chinese people “weak” in getting knowledge, though she did not mention which side — the museum, or the audience — the responsibility of supporting people’s learning should rely on. Schott thought the museum was not going to be responsible for people’s success in learning at the museums. Groups of audiences that have “followed up,” have “approved” that the museum is doing right, it follows that if some visitors cannot catch up, it is their issue. It seems that, in this opinion, museums “give up” on the audience that experiences difficulties in their exhibits. For my thesis, I think the museums themselves should enable everyone in their exhibits to learn equally well, no matter what and how much knowledge or information they are originally equipped with.

# Travel and Tourist Data

Though the numbers regarding tourists collected from the three museums are limited **data showing Chinese tourists or those who study and work in the U.S. provide an overall idea of how many Chinese people might be in the U.S.**

## Data about the amount of Chinese People in the U.S.

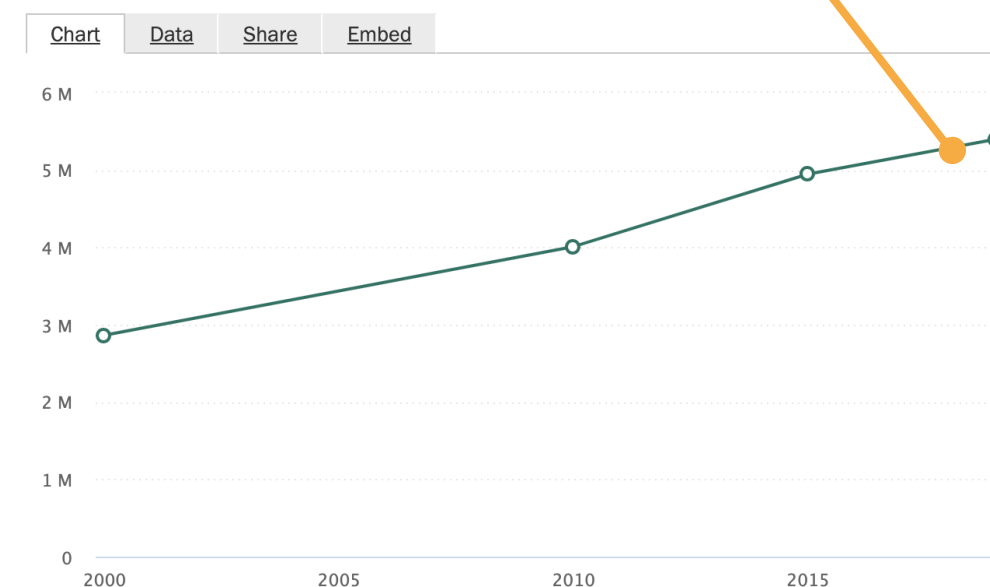
The Chinese in the U.S. have three major groups that are decided by the visa types that are issued — **Tourist groups traveling to the U.S., and Student and Worker groups who live long-term.**

## Total Chinese Population in the U.S.

The Pew Research Center reported that the **Chinese population in the U.S. grew from 2000 to 2019 (picture 20)**. Resources from the U.S. Census Bureau supports this data. We can see that in 2000, the Chinese population in the U.S. was less than **3 million**, since then the amount kept growing and became almost **5.5 million** in 2019.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Abby Budiman, "Chinese in the U.S. Fact Sheet," Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project (Pew Research Center, June 16, 2021), <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/fact-sheet/asian-americans-chinese-in-the-u-s/>.

"Almost **5.5 million** Chinese people in the U.S. in 2019."



Picture 20: Line chart shows an increase of Chinese people in the U.S., data organized by each five years. (The Pew Research Center)

<sup>25</sup>“Top 10 U.S. Metropolitan Areas by Chinese Population, 2019,” Pew Research Center’s Social & Demographic Trends Project (Pew Research Center, April 29, 2021), <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/chart/top-10-u-s-metropolitan-areas-by-chinese-population-2019/>.

Other research from Pew mentioned that the **top metropolitan cities by Chinese population are New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco**, each of which have an average of around **700 thousand** Chinese residents (picture 21). <sup>25</sup>

Chart	Data	Share	Embed
City		Chinese population	
New York		865,000	
Los Angeles		678,000	
San Francisco		582,000	
San Jose, CA		239,000	
Boston		174,000	
Seattle		166,000	
Washington		135,000	
Chicago		135,000	
Honolulu		117,000	

Picture 21: Popular city ranked by the number of Chinese residential. (The Pew Research Center)

"New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco each have around **700 thousand Chinese residents.**"

Tourists

A study of the number of tourist arrivals in the United States from China from 2005 to 2020 shows that there were **2.83 million tourists from China in 2019**, and 0.38 million in 2020.<sup>26</sup> The number continued growing since 2005 and peaked in 2017 at 3.17 million Chinese tourists (picture 22).

Even though the number declined after that, there were always around 2.9 million Chinese tourists before the pandemic years.

Number of tourist arrivals in the United States from China from 2005 to 2020 (in millions)



Picture 22: Bar chart shows the number and changes in the number of Chinese tourists who came to the U.S. (Statista inc., 2022)

"**3.17 million Chinese tourists** in the U.S. in 2017."

<sup>26</sup> Statista inc. Published by Agne Blazyte and Feb 8, "Visitors to the U.S. from China 2005-2020," Statista, February 8, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/214813/number-of-visitors-to-the-us-from-china/>.

<sup>27</sup>Stuart Anderson, “Decline in Chinese Tourists Visiting America Continues in 2019,” Forbes (Forbes Magazine, July 8, 2019), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stuartanderson/2019/07/08/decline-in-chinese-tourists-visiting-america-continues-in-2019/?sh=1dd052034f3e.8>

<sup>27</sup> Skift October 25th Rashaad Jorden, “U.S. Tour Operators Could Face a Long Wait for the Large-Scale Return of Chinese Travelers,” Skift, October 25, 2021, <https://skift.com/2021/10/25/u-s-tour-operators-could-face-a-long-wait-for-the-large-scale-return-of-chinese-travelers/>.

<sup>29</sup> The U.S. Travel Association, “International Visitations to the U.S. from China,” 2019, [https://www.ustravel.org/system/files/media\\_root/document/Research\\_Country\\_Profile\\_China.pdf](https://www.ustravel.org/system/files/media_root/document/Research_Country_Profile_China.pdf), page 3.

The decline of the Chinese tourists was caused by several factors. From 2017 to 2019, the situation was caused by the trade war between the U.S. and China and the immigration-related policies. According to Forbes news, “For the first time in more than a decade, the number of Chinese travelers to the U.S. dropped last year, partly because of the stricter immigration policy of the U.S. President Donald Trump’s administration as well as a year-long trade war between the two countries.”<sup>27</sup> The dramatic decline in 2020 was caused by the Coronavirus pandemic. Reported by a travel industry news site, Skift, “Currently, the Chinese government is prohibiting all travel agents from promoting or arranging any outbound tours for groups and fully independent travelers.”<sup>28</sup> China also stopped issuing and renewing passports for non-urgent reasons, including tourism; many flights between the U.S. and China were canceled; and traveling VISA applications to the U.S. were slow to be issued.

What American cities do Chinese visitors go to? The U.S. Travel Association reported that in 2018, the most-visited cities in the U.S. by Chinese tourists are: “Top cities visited included New York City (25%), Los Angeles (23%), San Francisco (14%), Las Vegas (10%), Boston (9%) and Washington, D.C. (8%).”<sup>29</sup>

## Total Chinese Residents In Pennsylvania

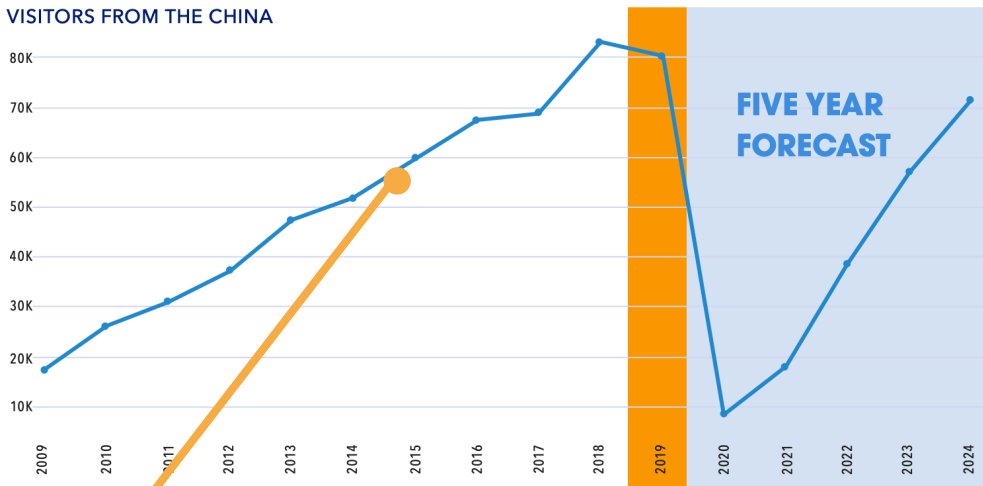
From the 2018 State Factsheet Pennsylvania, we can see there were **111,904 Chinese Americans in Pennsylvania**, and “79% of Asian Americans in Pennsylvania speak a language other than English at home, and of those, more than 47% speak English less than ‘very well.’”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> GOVERNOR TOM WOLF, “Assessing Aapi Population - Governor Tom Wolf,” GOVERNOR TOM WOLF, September 2018, <https://www.governor.pa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/20181018-Assessing-AAPI-Population-PA.pdf>, page 1.

Philadelphia

<sup>31</sup> “Overseas Visitors to Philadelphia: 2019 Snapshot China,” accessed April 3, 2022, <https://www.discoverphl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/China-2019-SnapShot.pdf>.

Discover Philadelphia reports that “**China is Philadelphia’s #1 market for direct visitor spending, a title it has held since 2014,**” and in 2019, China was “... **Philadelphia’s 2nd largest overseas source market for the fourth consecutive year**”<sup>31</sup>. The research shows **78 thousand Chinese traveled to Philadelphia, with 64% for leisure purposes, 18% for education/other, 10% for convention, and 8% for business** (picture 23).

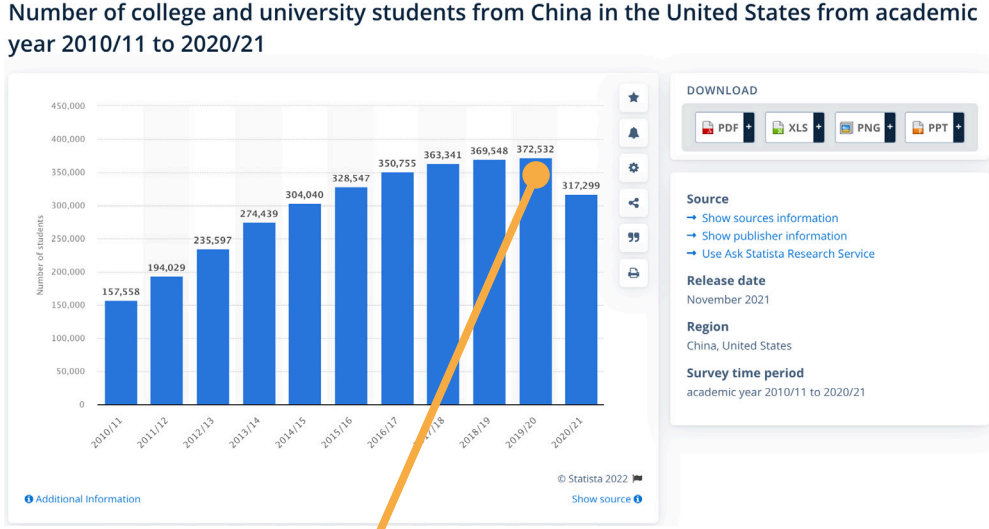


Picture 23: An increasing number of Chinese travel to the city of Philadelphia. (The Discover Philadelphia)

“Sharp increase of tourists travel from China.”

Students

In addition to tourists, there are also students from China studying in the U.S. The U.S. Embassy & Consulates in China reported that “**China Remains the Top Sender of International Students to the United States in 2020/2021.**”<sup>32</sup> To be more specific, the number of Chinese students grew steadily from 2010 to 2019, from around 157 thousand to as high as about 372 thousand (picture 24).<sup>33</sup>



Picture 24: The number of Chinese students studying in the U.S. by each school year from 2010 to 2021. (Statista, 2021)

“372 thousand Chinese students in the U.S.”

<sup>32</sup> The U.S. Embassy & Consulates in China, “China Remains the Top Sender of International Students to the United States in 2020/2021,” U.S. Embassy & Consulates in China, November 17, 2021, <https://china.usembassy-china.org.cn/china-remains-the-top-sender-of-international-students-to-the-united-states-in-2020-2021/>.

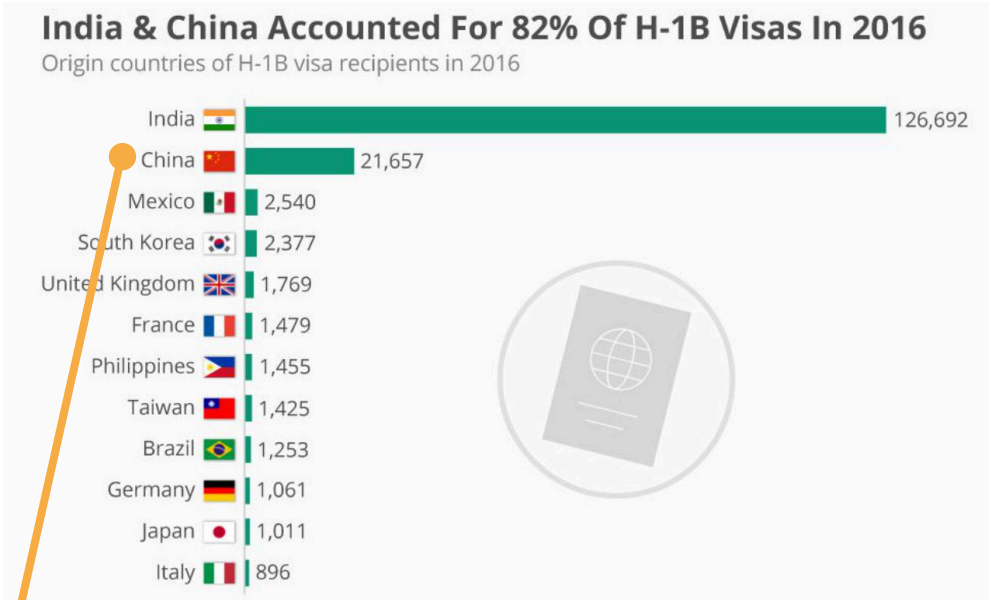
<sup>33</sup> C. Textor. “Number of Chinese Students in the U.S. 2019.” Statista, November 26, 2021. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/372900/number-of-chinese-students-that-study-in-the-us/>.



Workers

<sup>34</sup>Niall McCarthy, "India and China Accounted for 82% of U.S. H-1B Visas in 2016 [Infographic]," Forbes (Forbes Magazine, April 19, 2017), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2017/04/19/india-and-china-accounted-for-82-percent-of-u-s-h-1b-visas-in-2016-infographic/?sh=57a1edb65344>.

Chinese workers also make up the total number of Chinese in the U.S. **It is hard to find any institution to collect statistics regarding Chinese workers, but an estimate can be made by the number of H1B visas released to Chinese citizens in any given year. Both Indian and Chinese people receive a greater overall number of working visas, and the number far exceeded the number of other countries:** there were a total of 21,657 Chinese who got their working visas in the year of 2016 (picture 25).<sup>34</sup>



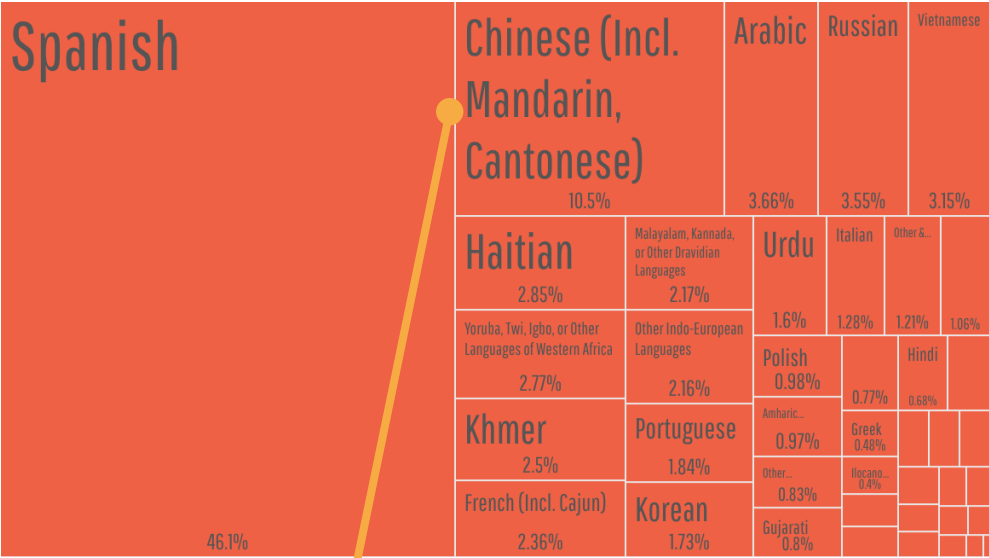
Picture 25: An infographic shows how many people receive American H1B working visa, organized by countries. (Forbes, 2017)

**“21,657 Chinese People got working visas in 2016.”**

Various Languages are Used In Philadelphia

A study from Data USA shows that the **Chinese language was the second most spoken language in Philadelphia;** “The most common foreign languages spoken in Philadelphia, PA are Spanish (164,712 speakers), Chinese (Incl. Mandarin, Cantonese) (37,706 speakers), and Arabic (13,086 speakers)”<sup>35</sup>(picture 26). The research is based on the 2019 Philadelphia population of 1.58 million people.

<sup>35</sup>“Philadelphia, PA,” Data USA, accessed April 3, 2022, <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/philadelphia-pa/?compare=united-states>



Picture 26: Other languages spoken in Philadelphia by percentage. (DATAUSA)

**“37,706 Chinese speakers in Philadelphia.”**



<sup>36</sup> “State Language Data - PA,” migrationpolicy.org, November 1, 2021, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/language/PA/>.

The Migration Policy Institute reported that in the state of Pennsylvania in 2019, **around half of the Chinese spoke English “very well” and half spoke “less than very well,” no matter whether they born in the U.S. or other countries**<sup>36</sup>(picture 27).

## Pennsylvania

Language & Education	2019		2000		1990	
English Proficiency	Foreign Born	U.S. Born	Foreign Born	U.S. Born	Foreign Born	U.S. Born
Chinese (including Mandarin, Cantonese)	90,890	100%				
Speak English "very well"	44,436	48.9%				
Speak English less than "very well" (LEP)	46,454	51.1%				

Picture 27: Chinese people’s English level is around half well and less than well. (The Migration Policy Institute, 2019)

## A Global Increase in Chinese Tourism

<sup>37</sup> Jing Travel June 23rd Samantha Shankman, “Museums Are Catering to Chinese Travelers’ Interest in Cultural Experiences,” Skift, June 22, 2018, <https://skift.com/2018/06/23/museums-are-catering-to-chinese-travelers-interest-in-cultural-experiences/>.

In America, museums are visited by foreign tourists. The article 「Museums Are Catering to Chinese Travelers’ Interest in Cultural Experiences」 on Skft stated that **major global museums are experiencing a significant number of Chinese visitors**<sup>37</sup>. For example, it mentioned that at the Louvre Museum in Paris the second-most common foreign nationality is Chinese visitors; The Art Newspaper reported that “Chinese tourists to Russia

are having a major impact on the country’s museums as their numbers grow by 20% annually.”<sup>38</sup> In the article, the Associate Director of Tourism and Group Sales at the American Museum of Natural History mentioned that “Our goal is to make the Chinese visitors feel as welcome and comfortable as possible. We approach the market through the tour and travel industry, and strive to form relationships of friendship, trust, and sincerity with travel agents, tour operators, and airlines who send visitors from China to NYC.”

As discussed in the New York Times article, 「Chinese Tourism Increases, American Museums Adapt」 , **museums, no matter size or type, are trying to cater to Chinese visitors.**<sup>39</sup> The changes include adding guided tours and maps in Mandarin language, providing Chinese payment methods, and advertising on Chinese social media platforms. For example, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, they offers a one-hour walking tour to introduce collection highlights in Mandarin and creates traveling collections to China.

<sup>38</sup> Sophia Kishkovsky, “Influx of Millions of Chinese Tourists Wreaks Havoc for Russian Museums,” The Art Newspaper - International art news and events (The Art Newspaper - International art news and events, September 28, 2021), <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2019/12/09/influx-of-millions-of-chinese-tourists-wreaks-havoc-for-russian-museums>.

<sup>39</sup> “As Chinese Tourism Increases, American Museums Adapt - the ...,” accessed April 3, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/19/arts/artspecial/as-chinese-tourism-increases-american-museums-adapt.html>.

## Three Tour Agencies

I contacted three tour agencies that specially serve Chinese clients. They coordinate U.S. and international trips and have a focus on U.S. cities. The three companies have offices in the U.S. and have U.S. phone numbers. I was able to speak Mandarin during the call. I prepared several questions for the interviews: **1) Do you tour Philadelphia? If so, where do you go, and why do you choose these places? 2) How long do people stay, and what do people normally do for the visit? 3) How are people's experiences in any history museums or historical sites, and do they get to make sense of the history? 4) What do you think museums can do to improve you and your clients' experience there?** The agencies provided on their websites the information I was seeking in the first two questions; therefore, in the call, I tried to let the representatives focus on answering the latter two questions around visitor experience and the museums' support of international visitors.

## Tour Agency One

The first agency is called 途风 (Travel Along the Wind) (picture 28). The website uses Toursforfun for the domain. It is a brand that belongs to a larger tour company in China called Trip.com Group Ltd (携程集团). The Ctrip tour company mentioned in the study of the Penn Museum session is also part of Trip.com Group Ltd and is the company's major online-booking platform. 途风's office locations include Los Angeles, CA; Chengdu, China; Mexico City, Mexico; New Delhi, India; and Manila, Philippines. I called the American line, and a customer representative who speaks fluent Mandarin answered the phone. **She told me that they tour Philadelphia, as part of the whole trip, and people have to gather in New York City to board the bus. The tourist spots include the Liberty Bell and Independence National Historical Park.**

<sup>40</sup> Interview content from the customer representative

The company chose these two places instead of other historical tour spots such as NCC and MOAR because **they think Philadelphia is a history-heavy city, and the history of the writing and signing of the constitution in Independence Hall is significant, as The Hall “witnessed the independence of the U.S.”**<sup>40</sup> Another layer of the meaning, I strongly felt, but the customer representative failed to clearly articulate, is that **both Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell are the real, original sites of history heritages, while MOAR and NCC are history themed newly-made buildings, though of course, they hold historical artifacts.** The representative said that since people have limited time, they won’t learn history, just “走马观花” (appreciate flowers on a running horse, look at things superficially). She also mentioned that museums/historical sites don’t do anything for them, as they are big American institutions. When asked about the tour experience and how museums could help, she said

**American museums won’t have the human resources to help.** I wondered if she might doubt the ability for visitors to have meaningful engagement with the historical sites when on a short thirty minute tour. **She added that maybe some translations could simply support people’s understanding in a limited time.**



Picture 28: Screenshot of 途风 company’s website. (途风)

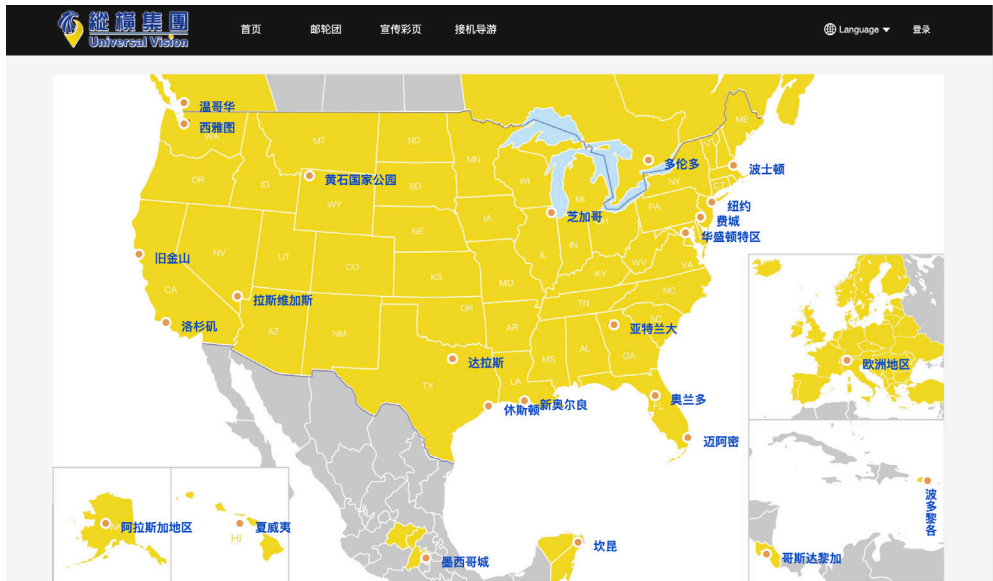


## Tour Agency Two

The second company 纵横集团, Universal Vision, located in Flushing, NY, does global tours and features tours of U.S. and Europe tours (picture 29). The only tourist spot they have for Philadelphia is the Independence National Historical Park. A customer representative, Jayant Huang, answered my call. He said that **it would be hard to understand the history if the clients tried to read the didactic panel and explore the space by themselves, so their tour lead briefs the history on the bus’ way to the site. It is “生动, 详细, 好理解” (vivid, detailed, and easily understandable).**<sup>41</sup> The customer representative focused on how helpful the tour lead’s introduction and storytelling is for people’s understanding of the history. He was very sure that the tourists wouldn’t understand the history if they visited the place by themselves. When

<sup>41</sup> Jayant Huang  
Customer  
representative of  
纵横集团

I asked what he would like museums to do, if they were willing to change and help in terms of enabling people to understand the history better, Huang answered with several seconds’ hesitation, and said they (the tour company and guide) help more than the museum. I agree that a tour leader, a docent, or a gallery volunteer’s interpretation and explanation help a lot with people’s understanding. Yet I think there is bias for the customer representative to say they (the tour) are the best choice to support the visitors' experience of the museum, so they are helpful and necessary. It sounds like the museums do not do anything for the tourists, which is not true. I think museums and tourists could collaborate to improve the museum experience for Chinese visitors.



Picture 29: Screenshot of 纵横集团 company's website. (纵横集团)

## Tour Agency Three

The third tour company is called 欣美途. Its website domain name makes more sense; it translates as “Joy in Tour.” They have international tours but feature tours in the U.S. Their American headquarters is located in Baton Rouge, LA, and the Chinese one is in Chengdu. For the tour in Philadelphia, they visit Independence National Historical Park, just like company 途风 and 纵横集团. I called their American line, but it was always occupied, so I used their online chat services. **The tour gives people thirty minutes to visit the Park. The tour leader from the company briefs people about the history on the way there. They think that since the Park doesn’t have too many didactic boards with too much reading, it is possible that clients can understand the history by reading the didactic panels without the briefing.**

## VII. Findings / Analysis

The museum research shows the **connections and gaps between the entry requirements of American history museums and the current situations of Chinese visitors.**

Implementation, observations, and evaluation will be explained through tourists' and museums' perspectives separately.

## My Expectations for History Museums

From the museum interviews and visit results, we can see that the resources for Chinese visitors fall into **three categories**: 1) the exhibit content—the collection and history; 2) the exhibit interpretation—how museums communicate stories and objects to visitors; and 3) the museums general information—hours, memberships, and guides. **This thesis focuses on the content communication related to the visitors.**



## The Broader DEI: Equitable Learning

<sup>42</sup> American Association of Museums, "Excellence and Equity - The American Alliance of Museums," 2008, <http://www2.aam-us.org/docs/default-source/resource-library/excellence-and-equity.pdf>, page 3.

<sup>43</sup> American Association of Museums, "Excellence and Equity - The American Alliance of Museums," 2008, <http://www2.aam-us.org/docs/default-source/resource-library/excellence-and-equity.pdf>, page 3.

**Most of what we discuss about DEI is on the delivery side** – whose story is being told, who is seen, the authenticity in narratives, and ethical collecting. **However, visitors who are able to understand and learn the stories are significant for museums' DEI success, too.** In an AAM report "called for new thinking about the role of museums in public education. It recast the definition of excellence not merely to include equity, but to require it — for museums to embrace cultural diversity in all facets of their programs, staff and audiences, in order to have any hope of sustaining vitality and relevance."<sup>42</sup> The article also recognizes that the way to attract a broader community is to empower the community's learning ability and interest. **"If we want our communities to support us, to keep coming through our doors, we must ensure that we reflect their varied interests, that we tap everyone's strengths."**<sup>43</sup>

NCC and MOAR are based on specific episodes of American history, both providing briefing on the first floor, where people normally start their visit. From my perspective, NCC's live performance *Freedom Rising* focuses on being proud to be American, and the significance of the values (such as liberty, justice) brought by the Constitution. It also stimulates people's patriotism to the country. MOAR's introductory film *Revolution* talks more about origins of the American Revolution and builds the stage for people's following exploration in the museum. The film has a Mandarin version, but no other language available. **Both speech and film provide a direction to approach the following exhibitions.** *Freedom Rising* had a certain amount of new words for me; without the captions, I did not know what these words meant, which obstructed the details of the performance. *Revolution* has a more accessible level of English, but the story is sudden and specific, and I did not know what to associate it with. In addition, the film include many oil paintings whose characters are unfamiliar to me, so I lost interest before the film ended.

During my second visit to MOAR, I saw there was a costume play (picture 30). There was a lady wearing a traditional dress and hat and sewing something. Through the conversation, she told me this was a typical 18th century women's outfit and she was sewing a sleeve for a

dress. She also told me the museum will have more live scenes like this in May, one of which will have people sew the flag. **I learned to sew things when I was kid, so I can imagine during the war time, women contributed to the country in the way they could help, and they worked hard too. The live scene had no didactic panel that I need to work on at all, but I got its meaning and emotion by interacting with the costume player.**



Picture 30: A costume play at MOAR. The lady is wearing a typical 18th century dress and sewing women's clothing. (Yu Zhang)

## Ease of Access: In People's Own Terms

The journal *Cultural Inclusion, Exclusion and the Formative Roles of Museums* has a very similar opinion: **“the inclusive solution ... is not simply to extend an invitation to ‘come be like us’ (2002, 211). Rather, the intention must be to seek out and embrace, on their own terms.”**<sup>44</sup> The important thing for access to the story is not to tell international visitors what American museums are saying to the first and secondary audience groups, as international visitors they are not targeted by museums. **The way to let international visitors learn and understand the history is just like how we, the museum professionals, develop the interpretation for the domestic audience, but now, our users shift to people who come from other countries. How much do we know about those people, might they be Chinese, Korean, Mexican, Greek, French, or German?**

The Penn Museums lets people introduce their own culture and collections. As mentioned, there is a Chinese onsite tour every Friday at 2.30 pm. Though I did not catch this tour, I joined the Middle East Gallery tour during my visit. It is guided by a volunteer who is an

<sup>44</sup> Kevin Coffee, “Cultural Inclusion, Exclusion and the Formative Roles of Museums,” Taylor & Francis, August 19, 2008 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09647770802234078>, page 12.

Iraqi man who came to the U.S. in recent years. **When he explained the collections, he connected his own experience with the objects, enabling me to see how those things got to be used in life by a typical Iraqi individual, which let me understand and remember the artifacts well.** I think this interpretation does the job of presenting collections in people's "own terms". Even though the interpreter was not Chinese, I felt I experienced this person's unique culture. Interpreting collections in people's own terms "In People's Own Term" is a way to make personal connections with visitors.

**MOAR's Mandarin version of the introductory film helped me to figure out the timeline of each turning point of the historical event, who was involved in the war, and what the different groups of people fought for.** Though the film mentions specific names for the groups of people that I did not recognize, it gave me a quick and easy start, to allow me to continue to Google the war by myself. However, after the film, it was hard for me to start viewing the exhibitions immediately without any self-study. As the film is broad and conceptual, while the exhibition is very specific, I was unable to fit the story to the briefing.

**NCC's *Freedom Rising* is very impassioned. It talks from the first person-perspective, "We the (American) People". The good part is it sets the tone, which let me know it is a patriotic museum and will study the Constitution and the functioning of the government, but I have to imagine I am an American to enjoy the show. The film is so powerful that I felt I deeply associate with this country, which is very amazing and also weird.**



## Inclusive Spaces: Cross-Cultural Design

Inclusive spaces in museums would allow people from various cultures to be able to engage with the exhibitions.

**A cross-cultural design is a human-centered design. It focuses on the shared experience of being human, “... including behaviors and personalities.”<sup>45</sup>** As mentioned previously, some American adults and Chinese visitors need a reminder of the historical events, and need additional clarification a history briefing. **Museums’ help with visitors working on background history would benefit both sides.** Importantly, briefings are needed on multiple levels. For Chinese visitors probably need to check out many terms for more details to be able to fully understand the stories and meanings of historical events. For example, the introductory film *Revolution* uses specific names directly, such as American colonists, Continental Congress, and monarchy. These names sound familiar to me, but I do not really know them. Another example is that the film lightly touches on what happened before and after the American Revolution, which is actually something I do not know, and if I knew, it might help me better fit the American Revolution into my existing knowledge of U.S. history, which is good for people’s learning.

<sup>45</sup> David Kelley, “Human-Centered Design,” David Kelley: Human-centered design | TED Talk, February 2002, [https://www.ted.com/talks/david\\_kelley\\_human-centered\\_design](https://www.ted.com/talks/david_kelley_human-centered_design).

<sup>46</sup> BAHRAM, SINA. “Welcoming the Widest Possible Audience.” Tessituranetwork.com, July 2019. <https://www.tessituranetwork.com/items/Articles/Thought-Leadership/2019/Welcoming-the-Widest-Audience>.

Cross-cultural design is universal design. It provides equal access to people, to “... make our places, our institutions, our products, our services more accessible, inclusive to as many people as possible.”<sup>46</sup>

**The key principle is to lower the difficulties to use and understand the design so people who originally may not be able to use the design can have a chance.** The NCC needs to support the learning of middle school students, so instead of adopting universal design, their museum purposely targets the students, which tends to exclude other types of visitors. The MOAR mentioned they welcome all tourists, and the Penn Museum mentioned they welcome people of all ages, including students, and professionals. Both of the museums did not mention people from different cultures as well. It seems that different cultures other than American culture are not considered when the three museums think about their audiences. Cross-cultural design is a collaborative design. The book *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need* mentions that, “... design justice also emphasizes accountability (those most affected by the outcomes should lead design

<sup>47</sup>Sasha Costanza-Chock, “Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build ... - Oapen,” OAPEN Online library and publication platform, 2020, [https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/43542/external\\_content.pdf;sequence=1](https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/43542/external_content.pdf;sequence=1), page 85.

**processes) and ownership (communities should materially own design processes and their outputs).<sup>47</sup>**

Though it is not necessary that the visitors participate in the design work, they can appear in many processes in the design, such as consultation, brainstorming, presentation, user research and testing.

## Potential Barriers

From the previous research, I found several phenomena that I think, on the one hand, may speak to America’s uniqueness, but on the other hand, might be barriers for the museums to be accessible to international visitors.

## Museum Funding Models

American museums have similar roots to British museums, which is to say that the rich and powerful people or the elite ruling classes owned and had access to the collections. However, American museums developed their own “entrepreneurial” model as time went on, in that by selling tickets they granted access to the public to view the collections, and they raised funds from other various sources.<sup>48</sup> This foundational tradition and basic model of American museums charging the public for admission as a significant source of funding may affect the museum’s decision making, which may sacrifice other things that could also be important. For example, the international visitors who are seen not to contribute as much paid admission income as a local audiences may be a group that is less considered by museums.

<sup>48</sup> Alexander, Edward Porter, Mary Alexander, and Juilee Decker. *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums*. Lanham, MD: Rowman et Littlefield, 2017.



## Limited resources

American museums, mostly non-profits with limited resources, have to be careful about the places they invest money. Since museums do not make a profit, operating museums economically is significant for survival. For example, many small to medium-sized museums only have one exhibition designer to do all the designing of the exhibits in addition to helping with the design of educational and marketing materials/communications. Those museums might hire some interns to share the work but are unlikely to hire them. Similarly, the money and staff resources may not give much attention to international audiences, and instead focus their efforts on whom they believe ensures their survival: their local communities and donors.

## Staffing Issues

The museums don't have enough diversity among the board members, the positions that make significant decisions for the museums. An AAM study reports that "forty-six percent (46%) of museum boards are all white ...Ninety-one percent (91%) of white Americans' social networks are other white Americans, which is the racial group that dominates nonprofit board and chief executive positions."<sup>49</sup> It is possible that those museums might only think about engaging with the white community even though there are other types of races in society. There are also not many Chinese museum professionals who can prepare resources for Chinese visitors. Indeed, when I participated in the Building Museum 2022 conference in Washington D.C., another Chinese student from my cohort and I were the only two Chinese people we could see during our stay there.

<sup>49</sup> "Based on Museum Board - American Alliance of Museums." Accessed May 8, 2022. <https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/eyizzp-download-the-report.pdf>.

## Tour Access

Museums and tour agencies seem to have little collaboration. The museum workers see Chinese tour groups come and go, and the tour brings its own interpreter so that visitors don't need to look at labels or hear English audio/volunteer tours. It seems both sides do not come together at all. The museums' primary audiences are normally local visitors from the museums' areas. The tours know that they come from other cultures/countries that museums seem not to be interested in, so tour groups just figure out the challenge by themselves. This awkward situation is also one of the obstacles to the museum's being accessible to international visitors.

## The Large Diversity in America Already vs Global Diversity

Regardless of the potential barriers mentioned previously, the current social movements for diversity and an eagerness to take action may support the inclusion of international communities. As America moves forward, it continues to struggle with racial conflicts steeped in a long history. Nowadays, the discussions of the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) exists in our institutions and society, and it is known that there is much work to be done as people continue to seek more understanding and pursue diversity, equity and inclusion in all aspects of life and work. At the same time, people from other cultures enter the U.S., to live, work, and study in such a land. In the U.S., it is not unusual to come across people in our everyday lives who might speak another language fluently. In our society, the need for DEI has extended to those communities. American museums, as leading cultural institutions, must react to the trend of global diversity to keep up with the current society. America is already a globally diverse place, and museums need to recognize this global diversity to become more accessible to an already diverse public that includes international visitors.

## Final Takeaways

I think there is limited connection between the American history museums and the Chinese visitors and tourists. The tourists do not trust museums, and do not think museums will be accessible for them. The museums seem do not know much about the Chinese visitors and tourists either. Not all of the three museums that this thesis researched conducted visitor surveys, or had a plan to help international visitors.

We need to keep in mind that Chinese visitors have different language and cultural backgrounds and may experience challenges visiting a western country's exhibition. Imagine that American tourists try to look at a Chinese history exhibition in a museum in China. The take-aways of this thesis are: **1) There are limited staff, money, and time resources to support the Chinese audience's visit experience; 2) Museums currently do not recognize or respond to the difficulties that Chinese audience experience; 3) Building an accessible museum for international visitors is a long-term journey that requires the efforts of people from different positions; and 4) Human interpretation and engagement, whether by staff or volunteers, dramatically increases audiences' interest and understanding of exhibition content.**

## Recommendations

Firstly, museums need to know about their international visitors, such as the Chinese. Some significant things to know about are their actual English reading and listening comprehension, their knowledge level of American culture and history, and their specific culture backgrounds. Museums could do research or conduct visitor surveys to get this information.

Secondly, museums need to reflect the learning capability of the international audience in their exhibitions to make the shows accessible to them. This might require a team effort of designers, educators, and curators. A curator is responsible for knowing about the audience, an educator is responsible for setting a suitable learning plan for them, and a designer makes the plan happen through the exhibitions.

Thirdly, if museums feel it is challenging to get to know about and consider international audiences when making exhibitions, they should hire museum professionals from those cultures to work on those projects so they can help with what they are familiar with.



## VIII. Conclusion

Based on my research and findings, I listed **some points that are good to keep in mind** when we museum workers build exhibitions and galleries.

## Conclusion + Continued Research

This thesis started with quantifying Chinese people who work and study in the U.S. and Chinese visitors who temporarily stay in the U.S. and visit American museums. Chinese people on both long-term and short-term stays experience difficulties in museums on various levels. However, there is a big difference between the two types of visits in the U.S. People who stay longer have more chances and time to explore museums, while Chinese travelers have limited time. The next step of the research is finding out the needs of the two groups of visitors and what learning methods would be suitable for them to use in the museums.

The research questions could ask about people's expectations, English language level, and original knowledge about American history and culture. The survey could be distributed through both WeChat and Google Forms. The surveys could be conducted both inside and outside of the museums to target people who haven't visited the museums yet. Ideally, fifty respondents would produce reliable results.

I believe Chinese people are not the only community that experiences difficulties in American history museums. My thesis project led to other parallel questions: What are some other cultures that people come from who currently live in the U.S. also experience similar issues? What are some of the specific challenges they have? In the case of American visitors, the thesis mentioned that history exhibitions are overwhelming for them to appreciate too, even though they do know American culture and history. As the thesis mentioned previously, learning American history at school compared to seeing exhibitions is like from “baby steps to running.” Though there is no direct literature talking about the difficulties visitors face to appreciating the historical exhibitions, prevalent books, articles, journals, and news resources talk about efficient and accessible museum interpretations, it is not easy for American visitors to understand the stories museums share too. What are the challenges that American visitors experience?

To sum up, accessible storytelling in American history museums should consider the challenges experienced by both domestic and international visitors. The future of this thesis project will focus on researching and exploring those issues.

# Addendum: Thesis in the Time of COVID

The COVID 19 pandemic changed the world a lot, including Chinese visitation to the US. My studies about museums and their audience happened during this special time period. There was, and continue to be a big decline of the Chinese visitorship to the museums.

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Picture 1 The American Alliance of Museums.

<https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Demographic-Change-and-the-Future-of-Museums.pdf>

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Picture 2 in exhibit

<https://www.inexhibit.com/mymuseum/ordos-museum-mad-architects/>

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Picture 3 Yu Zhang

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Picture 4 Yu Zhang

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Picture 15 The New York Times

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Picture 16 The Penn Museum

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Picture 28 途风 Travel Along the Wind

<https://cn.toursforfun.com/>

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Picture 29 纵横集团 Universal Vision

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Picture 30 Yu Zhang

# Appendix A

## Screen shots of Museum Survey



### How Do History Museums Serve International Visitors, specifically Chinese?

Hi everyone! I am a graduate student from the University of the Arts, Philadelphia, PA. I was hoping to research the above question for my thesis. I would be more than grateful if you would please have some time to answer the questions. There are total 10 short-answer questions, and may take you from 5-8 min to answer. Your answers will be very helpful for my thesis. I thank you so much in advance!!

(Thesis statement: This thesis will explore the current state of exhibitions in history museums concerning Chinese visitors).

yzhang005@uarts.edu [Switch account](#)

Draft restored

\* Required

Email \*

Your email

1. Who is your intended audience? Why? \*

Your answer

2. What are your visitorship Demographics? \*

Your answer

3. How many international visitors do you get per year? (percentage) \*

Your answer

4. How many Chinese visitors do you get per year? (Percentage) \*

Your answer

5. Do you have resources for Chinese visitors? \*

- ☐ Lables
- ☐ Gallery guides
- ☐ Mobile apps
- ☐ Other:

6. Would you consider adding them if you don't have Chinese resources? Why? \*

Your answer



7. What languages (other than English) are your labels written in? \*

☐ Español

☐ Deutsch

☐ Français

☐ Japanese

☐ Italiano

☐ Nederlands

☐ Português

☐ Chinese

☒ Other:

8. What reading level do you use for interpretive materials (and/or interactives)? \*

Your answer

9. How important is the role of prior knowledge of US history in a successful visitor experience? \*

012345

not important

☐☐☐☐☐☐

very important

10. Please explain your response. \*

Your answer

Submit

Clear form

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