THIRD SPACE

A digital ecosystem for diverse US-China intercultural exchange, skill-building and professional development
OUR MISSION

To support intercultural engagement that allows diverse American and Chinese students to develop knowledge of one another's languages and cultures, cultivate core intercultural skills, and grow excited about navigating diverse cultural contexts.
WE'RE MISSING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT THAT SHOULD BE THE BEDROCK FOR FUELING CURIOSITY, SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE OF CHINA.

**Potential to grow**

Only 53,000 US college students study Chinese language. Less than 12,000 of these students go abroad. Put another way, 0.35% of domestic college students choose to study Chinese language, and the majority of them only do so for 1-2 years.

**Practical skills**

The most successful learners of Mandarin are those who manage to integrate language learning with authentic use. Despite 370,000+ Chinese students attending US universities, few learners engage with Chinese peers outside of class.

**Peer population**

60% of Chinese students abroad report having only one domestic friend or none at all. This trend has only grown with the present pandemic, as many students are stuck in China this year, taking courses virtually.

**Curiosity is in place**

190,000+ of college students from China claim “curiosity about US culture” as a major reason why they choose to study in America. Many students from China come here eager to meet peers from the US and learn about American life.
TWO CHALLENGES, ONE SOLUTION

There is a disconnect between the formal way in which Americans study Mandarin, and their lack of opportunities to practically apply knowledge of Chinese in meaningful contexts. American students study hard, but do not integrate knowledge into practical pursuits. This disconnect prevents many students from starting to study Mandarin, and stunts the proficiency of those who do try to learn.

Meanwhile, Chinese students continue to feel disconnected from their American peers, and because of this fail to develop nuanced appreciation for American culture, language, life and values.

Third Space provides a supportive virtual environment- rooted in research- where diverse American and Chinese students engage interculturally. Through story-sharing, students pick up practical knowledge of language and culture, and become skilled at the process of engaging across linguistic and cultural lines.
WHAT IS THIRD SPACE?

A virtual ecosystem where diverse American and Chinese students come together to share and critically reflect on diverse perspectives.
A RESEARCH-BASED APPROACH TO INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE

The Story Circle methodology was created by leading experts in the area of intercultural exchange, and is employed in a variety of contexts all over the world.

BUILDING ON UNESCO'S WORK

The Story Circle manual was commissioned by UNESCO, an arm of the United Nations focused on promoting world peace and international cooperation. We are exploring a formal partnership with UNESCO.

TAILORED TO OUR COMMUNITY

Our team spent three months piloting this initiative with hundreds of Chinese and American students, modifying the methodology to best serve the cultural and linguistic skill-building goals of this community.
Based on UNESCO (2020) methodology we've tested the procedure below with 215 Chinese and American students, tailoring it to best serve them.

**STORY CIRCLES**

**OUR CORE ONLINE ACTIVITY**

1. **10 min INTRODUCTION**
   Welcome students, read "intercultural affirmation" for engagement, and then engage in a centering activity (i.e., meditation)

2. **10 min GET ACQUAINTED**
   Students put into groups of 4, each share a story tied to their background, in order to break the ice and build rapport.

3. **12 min STORY SHARING**
   Participants share intercultural stories based on a weekly prompt, which was known in advance. All students share.

4. **8 min FLASHBACKS**
   All participants share one thing that "resonates with them" about each of the three stories that they have just received.

5. **20 min REFLECTION**
   Students have an open conversation, reflecting critically on what they have learned from the diverse stories that they received.
Curiosity 好奇心
we share a deep desire to hear from those with life experiences different from our own, and learn from this intercultural exchange

Subjectivity 主观性
we recognize that our stories and perspectives have been shaped by our personal histories and cultural backgrounds

Equality 平等
we welcome the opportunity for all community members to have equal status and opportunity to share and receive

Empathy 同感
we embrace the opportunity to understand and share one another's feelings, as a means of affirming our shared humanity
We come together, with curious hearts, to receive one another’s stories, to be present, not to perform, to be genuinely ourselves, to embrace diversity, to remain open.

Recognizing that sharing requires vulnerability, and that vulnerability requires courage, we come together to share our stories.

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Our intercultural affirmation
Two types of prompts

1. "CULTURAL"
   (FOR GETTING ACQUAINTED)
   1) Please tell us your name and the story behind your name.
   2) Please tell us three words or phrases that describe your background and why those words/phrases are important to you.
   3) What is your favorite holiday or festival and why is this your favorite?

2. "INTERCULTURAL"
   (FOR DIVING DEEPER)
   1) What is one of the most positive interactions you have had with someone different than you? What made it so positive?
   2) What is a memorable cultural misunderstanding you have had in the past, and what did you learn from this?
   3) Tell about how- in a way big or small- access to people from different cultural backgrounds came to alter your own sense of style, taste or aesthetic.

Based on UNESCO's (2020) methodology
Critical Reflection

An informal conversation centered around these questions:

- What are themes of the similarities and differences your group is sharing?
- What is your group learning about your own cultural backgrounds?
- What is your group learning about the process of intercultural engagement?

“What we say here stays here, what we learn here leaves here.”

Remember to honor confidentiality when we speak in the larger group. This involves asking before you share details (names, locations, etc) about somebody else’s story. We’re looking for analysis of themes.
‘Cultural is not a Monolith. It’s Like Clay.’

I learned that I am always learning about my cultural background because it is not fixed. It’s like clay.

‘Value Our Differences’

No matter what you identify with, we all share similarities, can empathize with our struggles, and value our differences.

‘That Gives Us Room for Empathy and Understanding’

Things experiences shared among Americans with my own unique background, are often shared with others from different backgrounds. That gives us room for empathy and understanding, and even reflection upon those experiences.

‘We Need to be More Open’

I learned that my own cultural is that we all suffer in some ways more than others due to systematic racism and it shows how much we need to be more open to cultural engagement.

‘I Learned About My Own Cultural Background’

One thing I learned about my own cultural background is that I am more happy as myself and also as a person now that I have more experience talking to others.

‘Accurate but also Sometimes Ridiculous’

Stereotypes are sometimes accurate but also sometimes ridiculous.

‘We can ALWAYS Find Connections’

I think there are many ways to find places in common – whether it’s with food, language, or culture – and then connect with each other.

‘Requires Extreme Vulnerability’

Intercultural engagement requires extreme vulnerability, yet the best bridges are built until the strength to show that vulnerability.

‘Films Also the Most Common Place for Stereotypes’

The most common and easy way of intercultural engagement is through the entertainment business. Films also the most common place for stereotypes.

‘It’s Hard to be Honest with Yourself’

I have learned that it’s hard to be honest with myself and to others.

‘Cultivation Theory’

Cultivation Theory repeated media exposure becomes a reality to the mind.

‘Breaking the Echo Chamber’

‘We are All People with Lives, Families, Friends, Culture’

Stereotypes happen all the time with different people and different cultures – the goal is that we all understand other people’s cultures and other’s lives. It is an issue, even if we all have families, friends, culture, etc., no matter who we are from so we have to remember that and actively work to break down these stereotypes.

‘We Are All Wired for Connection’

I learned that even though we all interpret these patterns differently we share in the context of our own backgrounds and cultural experiences, we still are able to find common thread because we are all wired for connection.

‘Being Mindful of the Ways We Assume Others’ Identity’

Integrity plays a major role in how we understand our identity, and being mindful of the ways in which we assume others’ identity can help us acknowledge whether or not to relate to other backgrounds.

‘It is Necessary to Have Multiple Voice and Story’

It is necessary to have multiple voice and story about the various group of people. More voices mean different roles of this same culture. I think that representation helps to bridge some work and remain authentic and respectful when creating, because that works are very influential and we don’t want to strengthen the stereotypes.

‘There are so Many Things I Have in Common With Others’

Intercultural engagement not only helps us understand others better, but also ourselves. I’ve realized that, while there are differences, there are also so many things I have in common with others.

‘Treat Everybody an Independent Individual’

I think we should treat everyone an independent individual, stop labeling people, and do as we need to be kinder to each other.

‘Not Knowing What was True/False’

I am connected to our fear of not knowing what was true/false in media we read.

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Organizing around the 24 traditional Chinese lunar periods (节气)

We describe our bi-weekly Story Circles after the lunar period that they fall within.

This offers an avenue for introducing an aspect of Chinese language and culture into the bi-weekly community event.

This also helps our students to keep track of- and proudly promote- their recurring attendance in our Story Circles.
Story Circles
故事会
A digital ecosystem for diverse American and Chinese college students to develop intercultural & second language skills

JOIN OUR BI-MONTHLY VIRTUAL MEETINGS FOR:

- Story Sharing
- Cultural Reflection
- Language Practice
- New Friends!

Contact our team to join the community!
Nedja Al-Shaari at nedja@usvaah.org
故事会

每月两次的线上故事会将为参与者提供机会：
- 分享跨文化故事
- 进行语言练习
- 建立跨文化友谊

如果你对我们的线上社群感兴趣，请联系我们！
Nadya Ali: Shouao: nhowtealworldchina.org
Post-Circle Survey

One way to evaluate student learning and assess the efficacy of our work.

1. Learning about culture?
To what extent are they learning about other communities of practice?

2. Picking up language skills?
To what extent are they developing their practical second language skills?

3. Forming friendships?
To what extent are they forming friendships across languacultural lines?

4. Listening-for-understanding
To what extent are they learning to flexibly recognize and handle diversity?
Methods for measuring success

**Through global membership**
The number of students who join our virtual community and participate in our bi-weekly skill-building sessions.

**Through shared student stories**
The number of pieces of student-generated content, e.g., stories, often bilingual, that we are able to post to our virtual platforms.

**Through diverse engagement**
Surveys asking how students engage interculturally, both before and after their participation in our Story Circle events.

**Through recorded skill-development**
Qualitative evidence of how Story Circles help students develop intercultural skills, based on Dr. Dolce's research background.
Digital means diversity

Diversity drives intercultural learning

Our virtual community is free and accessible to all students who can commit to doing one Story Circle each month. It is designed to bring together diverse students to learn.

Outreach
My team has developed channels for promoting the initiative among diverse college students on both sides of the Pacific.

Free
All students with an internet connection and passion can join us, including many who cannot afford an abroad program.

Membership
Story Circles scheduled at times that accommodate diverse student schedules. Students with jobs and heavy course loads can partake.
Two Internets, One Community

American and Chinese students live in different social media spaces.

Rather than fight this reality, we leverage it, by adding diverse bilingual content to our communities on a range of virtual platforms.

We then come together as one community, inviting students from all platforms to the same Story Circle skill-building events.

Keeping our members up to date

Mala Goodrich shared a link.

Attention Ambassadors —

Signup for the Asia Society Story Circle closes tomorrow at 12 AM EST! Be sure to register before then if you plan on attending. We’re a bit short on moderator this time around — if you haven’t moderated yet, now’s your chance!

Here’s the link to sign up:
https://forms.gle/1tF9qQdL9XMy16Ed9yB07Qy7xHy1sdGtSmk44Yf1yExOvYyYbM

And here’s the link for the Google form:

Sharing bilingual student stories across platforms

Mala Goodrich — Asia Society Bridge Student Ambassador Network

Attention Ambassadors — We have an exciting announcement to make:

One of Asia Society’s most distinguished events — the Asia 21 Young Leaders Summit — will be held virtually this year for the first time ever!

The coronavirus pandemic has shown a spotlight on the problems of our time — from global inequality and environmental injustice to digital access and the future of work. The Asia 21 Young Leaders Summit will explore these topics and more, PLUS how we can work towards a brighter future.

Promoting Asia Society events (e.g., Story Circles)

Mala Goodrich

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各位大使请注意，我们有一个令人激动的通知要发布！

Attention Ambassadors — We have an exciting announcement to make:

亚洲最出色的活动之一：21亚洲年轻领袖峰会今年将会首次线上举办！其中一个亚洲协会最出名的重要活动 —— 亚洲21年轻领袖峰会 —— 将会在今年首次线上举办！

新冠疫情加速了我们这个时代的问题——包括全球范围内的不平等、信息不对称等。亚洲年轻领袖峰会将会探讨上述以及更多能够让我们携手创建美好明天的议题。
The Team

Diverse undergraduate and graduate student interns are volunteering their time to build and maintain this virtual community for intercultural engagement and skill-building.

Outreach Team
Getting students involved with the initiative.
- Roxanne Jiawei Cen, University of Iowa
- Evan Poholchuk, SUNY New Paltz
- Frank Yijie Huang, New York University

Media Team
Maintaining community virtual platforms.
- Emma Fangzhou Gu, New York University
- Mala Goodrich, University of Virginia
- Yue Guan, New York University

Story Circle Team
Organizing community's recurring Story Circle events.
- Lindsay Acker, Eastern Mennonite University
- Victoria Sheung, SUNY Binghamton
- Gani Cunningham, Grand Valley State
- Maggie Allegar, Pomona College
- Carissa Yang, Colby College
Thank you

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

Frank M. Dolce, PhD
fdolce@asiasociety.org
GENUINE STUDENT TESTIMONIALS
ABOUT PARTICIPATION IN THIRD SPACE:

"It’s rare to hear such deep stories from almost a complete stranger so I love how unique the experience is... especially when it occurs in Mandarin."

"The story circles help me practice my second language listening skills and ability to relate to others through culture."

"Going to a predominately white school, I don’t often engage with people with the same background as me (as an Asian American) or people who have an appreciation for the Asian culture like I do. I love talking to others that share the same passion for Asian languages and cultures!"

"Everyone represented a different identity which was really interesting and challenged a lot of assumptions!"

"These are definitely helpful since previously I hadn’t been able to interact with international students very much."

"I’m always looking forward to the next story circle because I’m interested in learning more about students and their cultures through their stories. It’s a cool way for strangers to connect bilingually in ways that normally wouldn’t happen."

"I hope that the Story Circle initiative grows, because this sort of sharing is the best way to combat discrimination."

"Once the initial "putting yourself out there" is over with, intercultural engagement is very rewarding because you can learn other ways of viewing the world. Sometimes it takes hearing and understanding it in their language to really get it"

"I learn more about others culture, as well as my own culture."

"The Story Circles are so much fun. I love getting to hear everyone’s responses. When I struggle to answer questions in Chinese, no one judges me, which is really super nice."
Alana's journey
Growing into participation in our Third Space

20 years old
from Evanston, Illinois
college sophomore
interested in engaging interculturally and sharing her own voice.

NOTICE
Alana has never studied Mandarin, but she hears about Asia Society Bridge when a friend of hers posts an AS Bridge video she made to her Instagram feed.

VISIT
Alana follows a link at the bottom of the Instagram video to our Facebook Page, where she loves the diverse stories and focus on sharing stories interculturally.

JOIN
Alana reaches out to our team and does demo Story Circle. After completing the demo, she is invited into our diverse community of American and Chinese college students.

PARTICIPATE
Alana shares her own stories in response to the prompts posted on our WeChat page, and joins one of our community's virtual Zoom "Story Circles". She initially does this in English, but learns a lot about Chinese culture and life.

CULTIVATE SKILLS & CURIOSITY
Alana participates regularly in our many virtual events. She cultivates new abilities in engaging with Chinese peers, and starts using Mandarin during Story Circles, and eventually decides to enroll in a Mandarin course at her college.

composite based on interviews with over 200 student supporters in Spring, 2020.
Julia's journey
Growing into participation in our Third Space

composite based on interviews with over 200 student supporters in Spring, 2020.

18 years old
from West Orange, NJ.
college freshman
studied Mandarin in high school; now in college she wants to use it to connect

NOTICE
Julia hears about Third Space from her Mandarin professor, who shares a link to our website.

VISIT
Julia checks out our website and watches student stories and China-related content. She loves that these materials are bilingual, since she can use them to study Mandarin.

JOIN
Julia reaches out to our team and does demo Story Circle. After completing the demo, she is invited into our diverse community of American and Chinese college students.

PARTICIPATE
Julia shares her own stories in response to the prompts posted on our Facebook page, and starts regularly joining our community's virtual "Story Circle" sessions. Julia incorporates the Mandarin from class into the stories she tells during Circles.

CULTIVATE SKILLS & CURIOSITY
Julia participates regularly in our virtual events. This improves her practical Mandarin, adds nuance to her knowledge of China and sets Julia up for a career tied to China. Hearing stories from China get Julia excited to study abroad.
Suemei's journey
Growing into participation in our Third Space

composite based on interviews with over 200 student supporters in Spring, 2020.

01
NOTICE
Sumei learns of our initiative from the director of international education at her university, who provided Sumei with a flyer.

02
VISIT
Sumei scans a barcode on the flyer and is taken to our WeChat page where she loves watching the diverse, bilingual student stories in response to the prompts we post.

03
JOIN
Sumei reaches out to our team and does demo Story Circle. After completing the demo, she is invited into our diverse community of American and Chinese college students.

04
PARTICIPATE
Sumei shares her own stories in response to the prompts posted on our WeChat page, and starts regularly joining our community's virtual "Story Circle" sessions. In these Circles Sumei talks to diverse American students for the first time.

05
CULTIVATE SKILLS & CURIOSITY
Sumei participates regularly in our many virtual events, cultivating intercultural skills and developing knowledge and curiosity towards different cultural perspectives. Sumei also starts attending many other OTW events.

- 19 years old
- from Zhejiang, China
- college sophomore
- interested in making connections w/ more domestic students

19 years old
from Zhejiang, China
college sophomore
interested in making connections w/ more domestic students
Building a core coalition

Universities

NGOs
Strategic Outreach

I have built a broad coalition of students, professors and non-profits to promote our efforts.

**Student clubs**
There are large student groups across the country who believe this initiative is aligned with their intercultural aims.

**02: Bottom up**

**01: Top down**

*University professors*
We have the support of over 132 professors from universities across the country.

*Likeminded NGOs*
There are 12 different NGOs who are interested in promoting the project, including UNESCO.

*College administrators*
We are working with the executive director of the Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA).

**End target: Interested college students**
A diverse group of students with, all with interests and/or identities tied to China, we had 185 students participate as ambassadors this fall.

**03: Student driven**

*Ambassadors*

*New students*
Third Space 第三空间 supports student clubs on campus

01 through MATERIALS
The diverse stories that we collect and share bilingually in Mandarin and English support in-person events and drive intercultural exchange.

02 through ACTIVITIES
Our team is well-versed in US-China intercultural exchange, and have many activity plans to drive such engagement. We can offer ideas to your club.

03 through MEETUPS
We meet every-other-week (in the evening) to share stories and build global skills. This activity can complement what your club already does.

04 through EXPERTISE
Our team is led by experts in US-China intercultural communication. We want to help student groups ensure their own events support such outcomes.

05 through COALITION
We work with student groups across the country, and believe all groups are strengthened if they can come together and learn from one another.
Impactful research

I will leverage my PhD background as an applied linguist to assess the nature and outcomes of the US-China intercultural exchange that we support.

This provides us with important generalizable knowledge about how American and Chinese colleagues work together most effectively.

In addition to yielding publications, this research will allow us to assess initiative outcomes, which in turn will allow us to improve the program.