

THIRD SPACE

第三空间

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

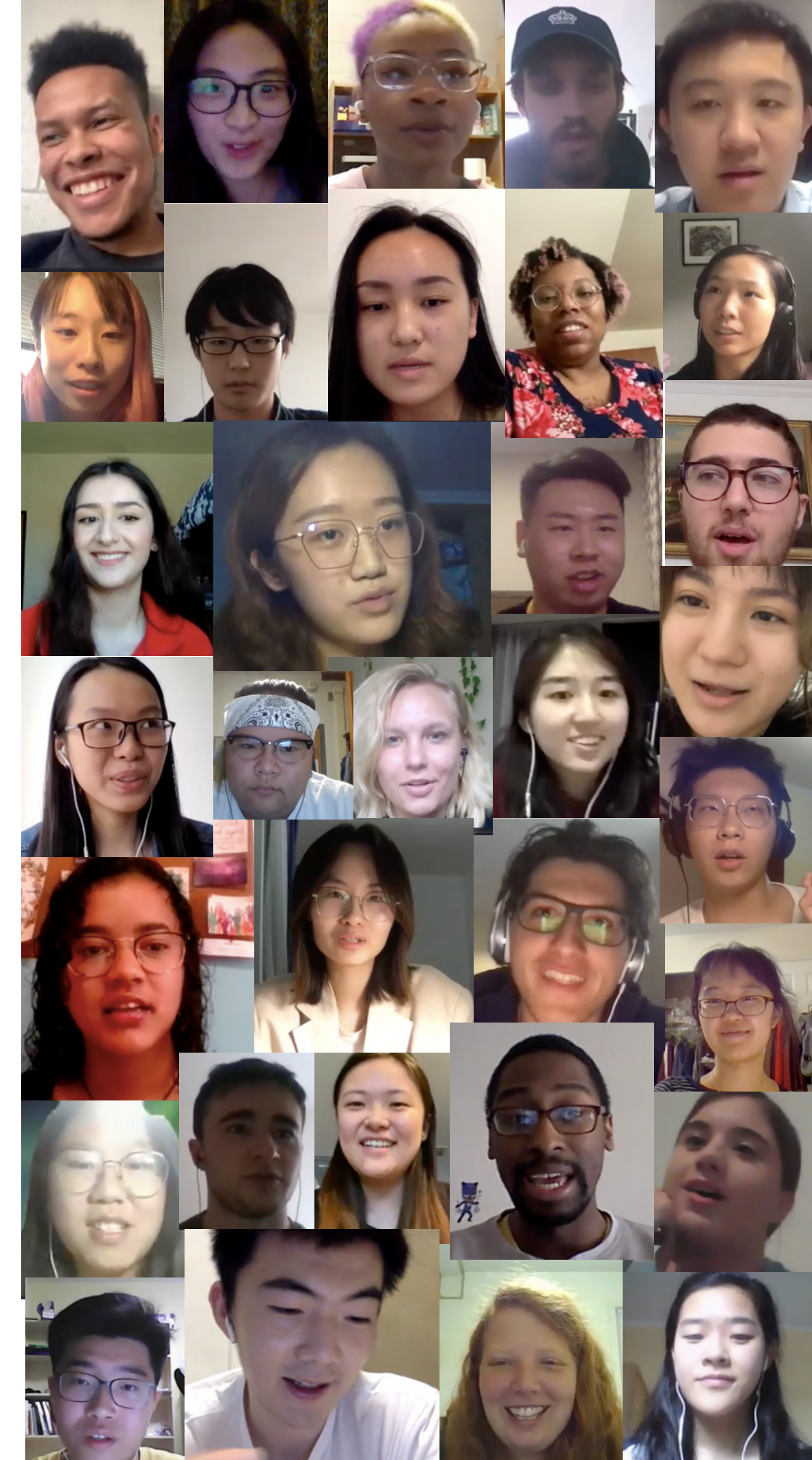
The Story Circle methodology was created by leading experts in the area of intercultural exchange, and is employed in a variety of contexts all over the world.

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.



STORY CIRCLES

OUR CORE ONLINE ACTIVITY

*we've tested the procedure below with
215 Chinese and American students,
tailoring it to best serve them*



Based on UNESCO (2020) methodology

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



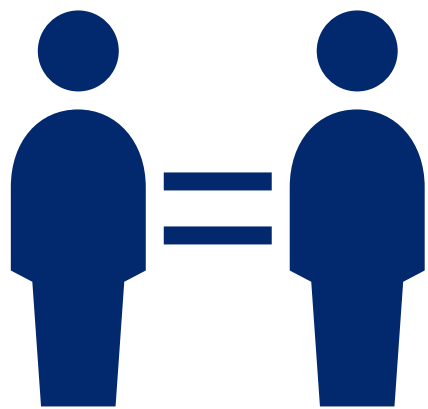
we share a deep desire to hear from those with life experiences different from our own, and learn from this intercultural exchange

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

A group of diverse people, including a woman in a striped shirt and a man with a beard, are sitting around a table, smiling and engaged in conversation. The image is overlaid with a blue tint.

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.

我们持着一颗好奇心聚在一起，分享聆听彼此的故事，
我们在场不是为了表演，
而是为了展现真正的自己，
我们保持开放，
拥抱多样性。

我们知道分享不易，
需要你的勇气，
我们聚在一起分享我们的故事。

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.

大寒 Story Circle - CHATTERFALL -



'Cultural is not a Monolith. It's Like Clay.'

I learned that I am still always learning about my cultural background because it is fluid. Cultural is not a monolith. It's like clay.

'Value Our Differences'

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

'That Gives Us Room for Empathy and Understanding'

Things I experience, even as an American 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'

What I learned about my own cultural is that we all suffered in some ways more than one 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 who I am 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'

Even virtual strangers like this group have lots in common - no matter where we're from, what language we speak, we can ALWAYS find connections with each other.

'Requires Extreme Vulnerability'

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

'Films Also the Most Common Place for Stereotypes'

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

'Being True to Oneself can be Challenging'

To be your authentic self, being true to oneself can be challenging.

'Not Knowing What was True/False'

We connected over our fear of not knowing what was true/false in media we read.

'We are All People with Lives, Families, Friends, Culture'

Stereotypes happen all the time with different people and different cultures -> the root of this seems to be not understanding other people's cultures and other's lives -> we are all people with lives families, friends, culture, etc. no matter where 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 prompts differently and each in the context of our own backgrounds and cultural experiences, we still are able to find a 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 better engage with one another or to relate to others' backgrounds!

'It is Necessary to Have Multiple Voice and Story'

It is necessary to have multiple voice and story about one certain group of people. More voices means different sides of this group/culture. I think the artists/writers/filmmakers to do some work and remain authentic and respectful when creating, because their works are very influential and we don't want to strengthen the stereotypes.

'Get Rid of Blind Spots'

The process of cultural engagement is extremely important for people to understand other cultures and backgrounds and get rid of blind spots that you may have about others backgrounds.

'There are so Many Things I Have in Common With Others'

Intercultural engagement not only helps us understand others better, but also ourselves. I'm reminded 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 everybody an independent individual, stop labeling everybody else. We need to listen to others with respect and try our best to understand them. The thing that I learned about my own cultural background is that China in the gender equality still have a lot work to do and I will try my best to push that equality.

'It's Hard to be Honest with Yourself'

I love that, [name]! It's hard to be honest with yourself or true to yourself, too, especially in the face of stereotypes or assumptions from others.

'It Smooths Our Understanding'

I can always find something common between group members through communication despite the differences in cultural backgrounds. We can feel each other (I never thought of that before). Maybe that's how communication works, it smooths our understanding.

'Cultivation Theory'

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

'Breaking the Echo Chamber'



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.



UNITED STATES HEARTLAND CHINA ASSOCIATION PRESENTS



Story Circles 故事会



Connect with
our team on
WeChat!

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!

Nadya Al-Shawi at nshawi@usheartlandchina.org



UNITED STATES HEARTLAND CHINA ASSOCIATION PRESENTS



Story Circles 故事会



用微信跟
我们联系！

中美线上项目，能够敦促中国和美国学生获得第二语言能力，彼此了解对方文化，互相练习实际的跨文化交流技能。

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	进行最地道的第二语言练习	进行文化反思	建立跨文化友谊
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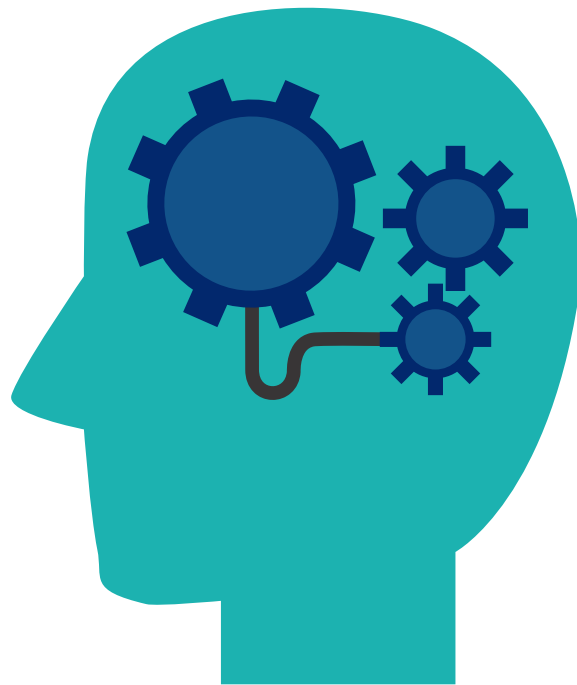
如果你对加入我们的线上社群感兴趣，请联系我们的项目成员！

Nadya Al-Shawi at nshaw@usheartlandchina.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 accomodate diverse student schedules. Students with jobs and heavy course loads can partake.

Two Internets, One Community

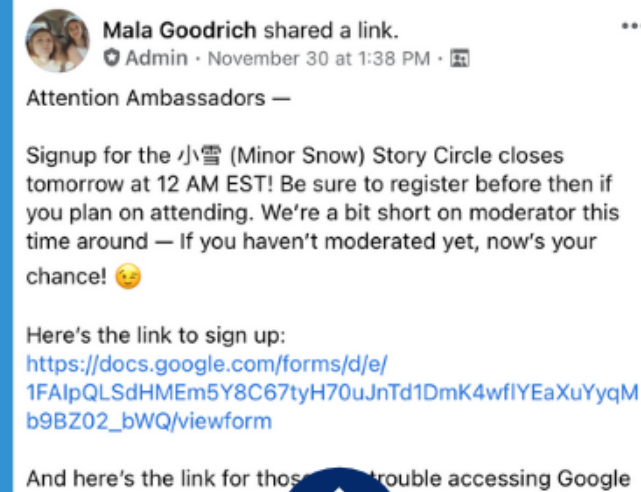
American and Chinese students live in different social media spaces.

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

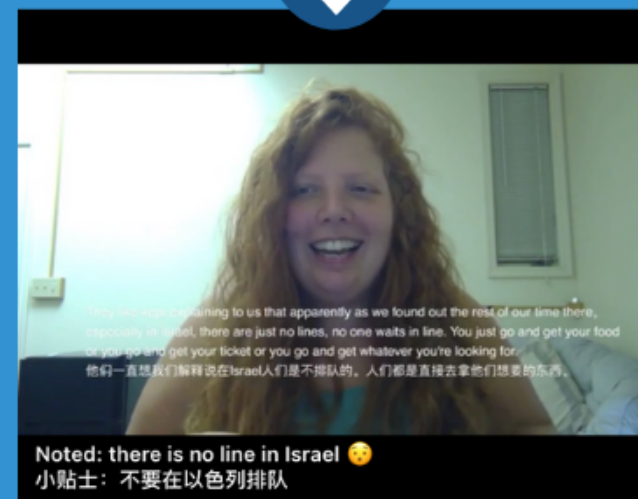
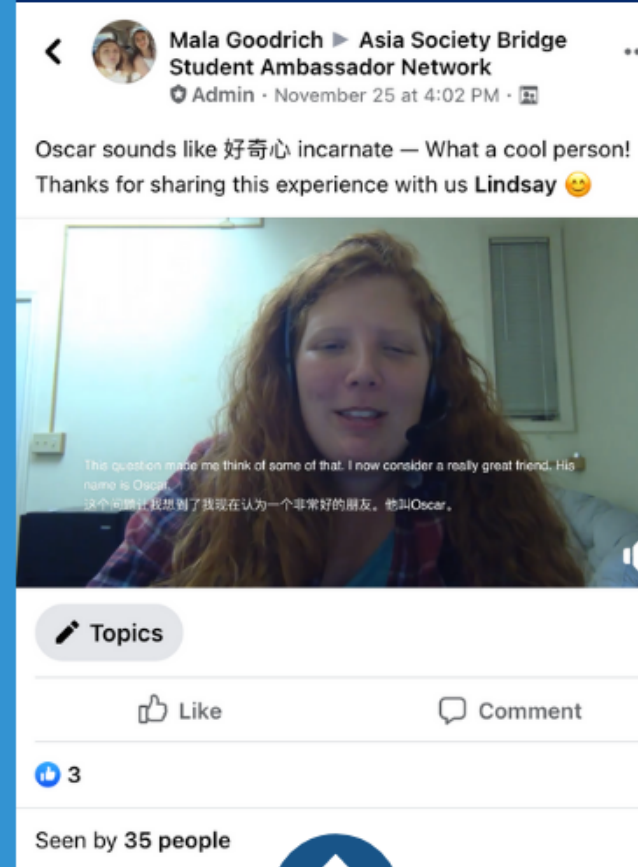
We then come together as one community, inviting students from all platforms to the same Story Circle skill-building events.



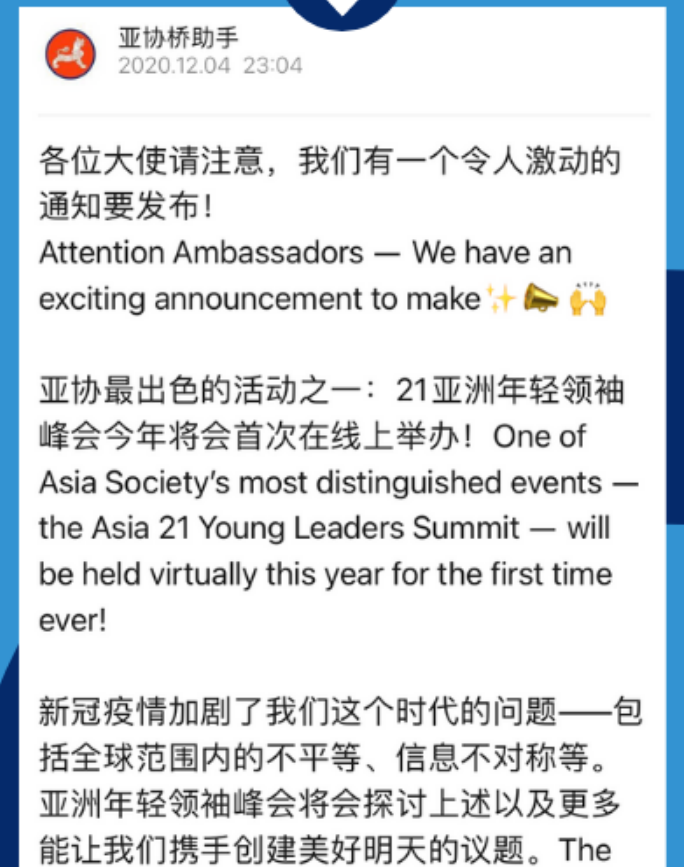
Keeping our members up to date



Sharing bilingual student stories across platforms



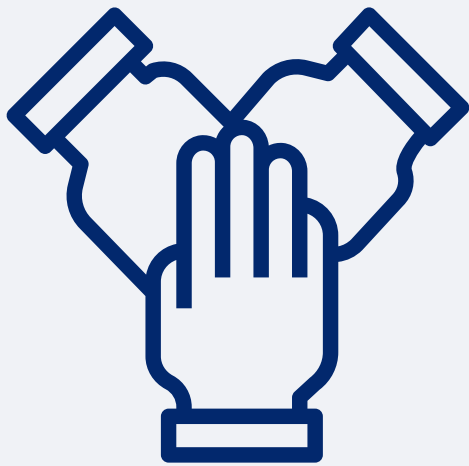
Promoting Asia Society events (e.g., Story Circles)





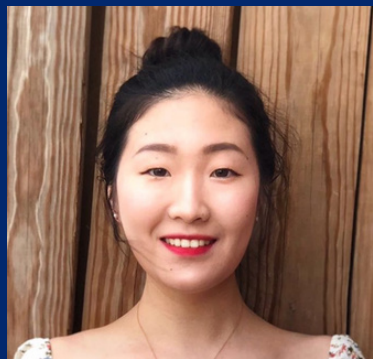
The Team

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 Pohlchuk,
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



Giani 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."

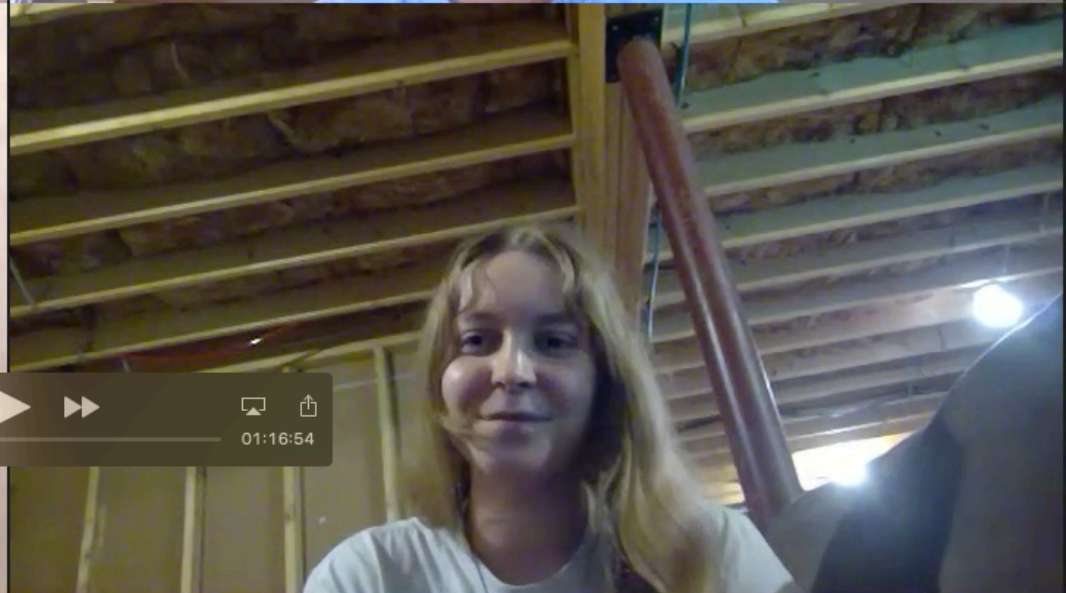
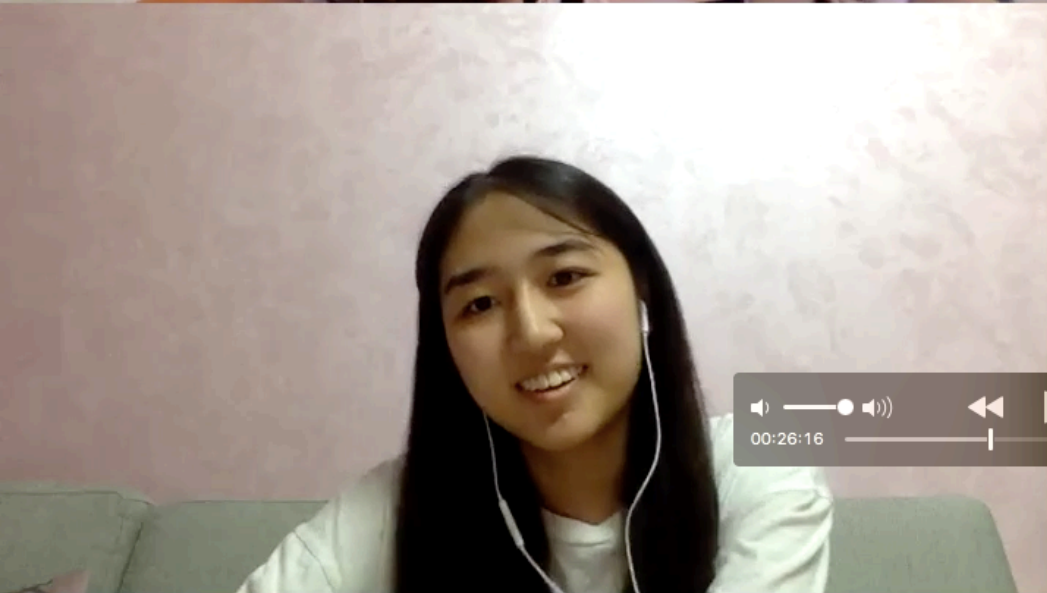
"I'm always looking forward to the next story circle because I'm interested in learning more about students and their cultures through their stories. It's a cool way for strangers to connect bilingually in ways that normally wouldn't happen."

"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

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



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

01

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.

02

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

03

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.

04

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.

05

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.

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

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.*



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

NOTICE

01

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

VISIT

02

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.

JOIN

03

Suemei 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

04

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 Suemei talks to diverse American students for the first time.

CULTIVATE SKILLS & CURIOSITY

05

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.

Building a core coalition

Universities



NGOs



Strategic Outreach

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

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).

Student clubs

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

02: Bottom up

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.

