

EAST MEETS WEST: INTERPRETING CHINESE HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE
IN AMERICAN MUSEUMS

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Historic Preservation Planning

by

Qing Cheng

January 2015

© 2015 Qing Cheng

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT

Traditional Chinese architecture was introduced to the United States through the flourishing trade with the Far East from the late eighteenth century. However, systematic interpretation of Chinese architecture exhibits in American museums didn't begin until the 1940s. This thesis documents the efforts of two museums to interpret historic Chinese architecture in the United States: the Peabody Essex Museum, where the Yin Yu Tang House, a Huizhou-style vernacular house, is preserved; the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, whose Astor Court is a recreation of a Ming Dynasty-style, Chinese-garden courtyard. The thesis aims to understand how the museums interpret the content, history, and physical appearance of these exhibits to their visitors through on-site interpretation, gallery display and outreach programs. Some feasible ways to improve the interpretations and outreach programs of the two Chinese architecture exhibits are also addressed after reexamining the current limitations.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Growing up in Nanjing China, Qing Cheng completed a Bachelor's degree in Architecture in her home city in 2012. In her third year in college, she developed a great interest in historic preservation and architecture history. She has been involved with professional historic preservation projects since then, including survey of historic districts and adaptive-reuse design of historic structures. In August 2012, she began graduate studies in Historic Preservation Planning at Cornell University. Having attending several museum planning and exhibition classes while at Cornell and visiting many museums in the United States, she became interested in the preservation and interpretation of historic architecture in museum sphere, especially with regard to Chinese historic architecture.

Dedicated to my dear family, who taught me to appreciate all kinds of beauty and joy in life, and encouraged me to affront all kinds of challenges with smiles.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to first acknowledge my advisor and dear friend Michael Tomlan and my second Committee Member Thomas J. Campanella for patiently communicating with me, guiding me, and offering valuable advice during the research and writing phases of this thesis.

In completing this thesis have benefited from the help of many individuals. I am tremendously thankful to the people who helped me study of Yin Yu Tang of the Peabody Essex Museum and Astor Court in Metropolitan Museum of Art, including Dr. Nancy Berliner from Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Emily Sheinberg, Juliette Fritsch and Daisy Yiyu Wang from Peabody Essex Museum, and Dr. Mike Hearn from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The thesis interviews would have been incomplete without insights of Prof. Sherene Baugher of Cornell University, Dr. Alfreda Murck and Asian Art Curator Ellen Avril of the Herbert F. Johnson Museum.

This research has been funded in part by a Barclay Jones Research Grant from Historic Preservation Planning Alumni, Inc., to whom I express my deep gratitude.

I would also like to thank all my classmates and close friends in Cornell University, with whom I shared my life in Ithaca and the dreams about the future. In the end, I want to express my greatest gratitude to my dear family, who always support me without a doubt; and Nanjing, my noisy but energetic and lovely homeland.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
INTRODUCTION	1
1. History of Chinese Architecture on Exhibits in United States	1
2. What to Interpret?.....	6
3. Why Research the Interpretation of Chinese Architecture Exhibits?.....	7
4. Methodology.....	7
5. Structure	10
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION TO YIN YU TANG PROJECT	12
1.0. Introduction.....	12
1.1. The Architectural Significance of Yin Yu Tang	12
1.2. Huizhou Region Vernacular Architecture and Historic Preservation	18
1.3. Conservation and Re-erection of Yin Yu Tang	21
1.4. The City of Salem and the Impact of Its Old China Trade	25
1.5. Conclusion	26
CHAPTER 2. INTRODUCTION TO ASTOR COURT PROJECT.....	27
2.0. Introduction.....	27
2.1. The Initiating of the Astor Court Project and the Construction Process.....	27
2.2. Jiangnan Private Garden Art.....	32

2.3. Significance of the Astor Court and Ming Room Design.....	35
2.4. Context for the Permanent Culture Exhibit.....	41
2.5. Conclusion	41
CHAPTER 3. MUSEUM INTERPRETATION OF THE EXHIBITS	41
3.0. Introduction.....	43
3.1. The Frameworks for the Interpretation of the Yin Yu Tang and the Astor Court	43
3.2. Implementation of the Yin Yu Tang Interpretation	45
3.3. Planning and Implementation of the Astor Court Interpretation	56
3.4. Comparison and Conclusion of the Museum Interpretation	63
CHAPTER 4. OUTREACH PROGRAMS FOR EXHIBITS	67
4.0. Introduction.....	67
4.1. Why Museums Need Outreach Program?.....	67
4.2. Outreach Programs for Yin Yu Tang.....	69
4.3. Outreach Programs for the Astor Court	87
4.4. Comparison	94
4.5. Conclusion	96
CHAPTER 5. SUGGESTIONS FOR ON SITE AND GALLERY INTERPRETATION	97
5.0. Introduction.....	97
5.1. What is An Appropriate Interpretation for Chinese Historic Architecture Exhibit?	97
5.2. Suggestions for On Site and Gallery Interpretation for Yin Yu Tang	100

5.3. Suggestions for On Site Interpretation for the Astor Court	107
5.4. Comparison and Conclusion	114
CHAPTER 6. CREATING NEW OUTREACH ACTIVITIES	116
6.0. Introduction	116
6.1. Museum’s Outreach Programs	116
6.2. Suggestions for Yin Yu Tang’s Outreach Programs	118
6.3. Suggestions for the Astor Court’s Outreach Programs	125
6.4. The Comparison and Conclusion	129
CONCLUSION	131
BIBLIOGRAPHY	134

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: View of Chinese Exhibit in Main Exhibition Building of the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial.....	3
Figure 2: Chinese Pavilion at the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco.....	3
Figure 3: Reception Hall from the Palace of Duke Zhao in Philadelphia Museum of Art.....	4
Figure 4: Ceiling from the Hall of Great Wisdom at the Zhihua Monastery in Philadelphia Museum of Art.....	5
Figure 5: Qing Dynasty Scholar’s Study in Philadelphia Museum of Art.....	5
Figure 6: Yin Yu Tang, after re-erection at the Peabody Essex Museum.....	9
Figure 7: Astor Court: a Chinese Courtyard in the Style of the Ming Dynasty.....	10
Figure 8: Yin Yu Tang, in Huang Cun, backed by a hill with an open expanse in front.....	15
Figure 9: Front facade and entryway of Yin Yu Tang while still located in Huang Cun	15
Figure 10: The Horse-head wall of Yin Yu Tang.....	17
Figure 11: Yin Yu Tang’s skywell with fish pools.....	17
Figure 12: Reception Hall in Yin Yu Tang.....	18
Figure 13: Outer lattice screen of the bed on the first floor in Yin Yu Tang	18
Figure 14: Map of Huizhou region and location of Huang Cun.....	19
Figure 15: The village of Nanping, Yixian County, Huizhou.....	21
Figure 16: Dismantling Yin Yu Tang in Huang Cun.....	23

Figure 17: Wood conservation.....	24
Figure 18: Stone conservation.....	24
Figure 19: Chinese workmen maneuvered a Taihu rock into the Astor Garden.....	31
Figure 20: Overview of the east side of the lake in the Master of the Fishing Nets Garden in Suzhou.....	32
Figure 21: The north side of the Astor Court in Metropolitan Museum of Art.....	36
Figure 22: The moongate entry of the Garden Court.....	37
Figure 23: The south wall of the Garden Court.....	37
Figure 24: The Cold Spring Pavilion and the Spring.....	37
Figure 25: The rocks and plantings against the west wall.....	38
Figure 26: The covered walkway.....	38
Figure 27: The Ming Room and the moon terrace.....	39
Figure 28: The interior of the Ming Room.....	40
Figure 29: The gray bricks paved courtyard.....	40
Figure 30: The Yin Yu Tang Brochure.	45
Figure 31: The information desk for Yin Yu Tang in front of the entry to the house front yard.....	46
Figure 32: The installation of the “Double Happiness” gallery.	51
Figure 33: The gallery interprets Yin Yu Tang’s daily activities.	51
Figure 34: The mahjong table.	52
Figure 35: The hanging scroll.	52
Figure 36: The altar set.....	52
Figure 37: The auditorium presents documentaries of the culture in Huizhou region.	53

Figure 38: Interpretation panels on the first floor of Peabody Essex Museum.....	54
Figure 39: Interpretation case on the second floor landing.	54
Figure 40: Computers with Yin Yu Tang animation are available to visitors.	55
Figure 41: The genealogy map of the online animation.	56
Figure 42: Exploring the house history and construction through online animation..	56
Figure 43: One visitor reading the metal panel close to the doorway of the garden...57	
Figure 44: Visitors discussing the information on the interpretation panel along the walkway.	58
Figure 45: Text panels located along the lattice window in the Ming Room.....	59
Figure 46: Visitors taking audio tour in the garden.....	60
Figure 47: Visitors viewing the contemporary art exhibition “Ink Art” in the Ming Room.....	62
Figure 48: The Peabody Essex Museum’s teacher’s sourcebook for Chinese Art and Culture.	70
Figure 49: A docent-guided school tour in the Yin Yu Tang.....	75
Figure 50: The “Double 7” celebration.	85
Figure 51: The Silk Road Project performances in Yin Yu Tang.....	86
Figure 52: The kunqu performance “The Peony Pavilion” in the Astor Court.....	93
Figure 53: The current Museum gallery ground level floor plan.	103
Figure 54: The current Museum gallery second level floor plan.	104
Figure 55: Advice of relocating panels on the ground level.	105
Figure 56: The view into the house front court from the Museum’s second floor landing.	106

Figure 57: The wall of the moongate entry. 110

Figure 58: The warning sign close to the pond, which is a good location to install the
text label for “Die Shi Li Shui”..... 112

Figure 59: The location of the text label in the Ming Room, which is an ideal place for
tablet. 115

INTRODUCTION

As old as Chinese civilization, Chinese architecture has maintained an indigenous system of construction and has continued for more than four thousand years over a vast territory. It remains a living architecture, retaining its principal characteristics. However, Chinese architecture was not introduced to the United States until the late eighteenth century. Through flourishing trade with the Far East, Americans got their first chance to see the differences in that part of the world. Moreover, interpretation work of Chinese architecture exhibits for viewers and visitors in museums didn't start until 1940s. This thesis tries to examine the efforts to interpret Chinese architecture in the United States. Because a museum must incorporate a variety of issues, many of the most essential problems cannot be solved without successfully balancing subjects such as architecture, historic preservation, interpretation planning, education, and cross-culture study. In order to promote Chinese architectural art and improve interpretation, we need to acknowledge its interdisciplinary nature and determine the most effective means to present the enduring vitality of Chinese architecture.

1. History of Chinese Architecture on Exhibits in United States

Long isolated by both physical and political barriers, the old Chinese empire was cut off from the rest of the world for centuries, and had little contact with Western civilization until the late eighteenth century, when China gingerly opened its doors. Since then, along with merchants and traders, collectors and exhibitors began sailing

to the Orient in search of art and treasure; they returned home with enormous amounts of ideas and material objects.¹

Most Americans first learned about Chinese architecture from exhibits during World's Exhibitions and Fairs. In the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial International Exhibition, miniature Chinese structures such as the Gateway, Pagoda and Pavilion were temporarily assembled for exhibits (Figure 1).² A Chinese village was designed by American architecture firm for the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition in 1893.³ At the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition, China had her own pavilion constructed by Chinese craftsmen in the center of the exhibition grounds (Figure 2).⁴ At these exhibitions, exhibitions and fairs, Chinese architecture functioned more like an exhibition booth to house other delicate art objects. Through such displays, China and Chinese culture were more a source of amusement, than anything meant to command study, admiration and respect.⁵

¹ Shastri, Vanita. *The Salem-India Story: Maritime Trade Between Salem, Massachusetts, and India, 1788-1845*. Lexington, MA: Meru Education Foundation, 2008.

² Pitman, Jennifer, "China's Presence at the Centennial Exhibition, Philadelphia, 1876," *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, Vol.10, No.1 (Fall-Winter 2002-2003): 35-73.

³ Rydell, Robert W. *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire At American International Expositions, 1876-1916*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. 49.

⁴ Markwyn, Abigail. "Economic Partner and Exotic Other: China and Japan at San Francisco's Panama-Pacific International Exposition," *The Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 4, (Winter, 2008), 439-465.

⁵ Rydell, Robert W. *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire At American International Expositions, 1876-1916*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. 49.

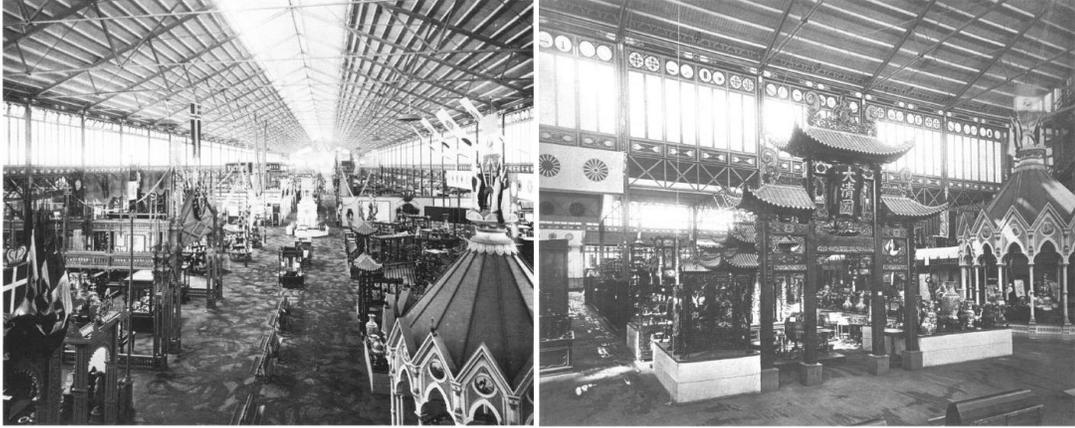


Figure 1: View of Chinese Exhibit in Main Exhibition Building of the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial International Exhibition. Source: “China’s Presence at the Centennial Exhibition, Philadelphia, 1876,” *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Fall-Winter 2002-2003, 38. 46.

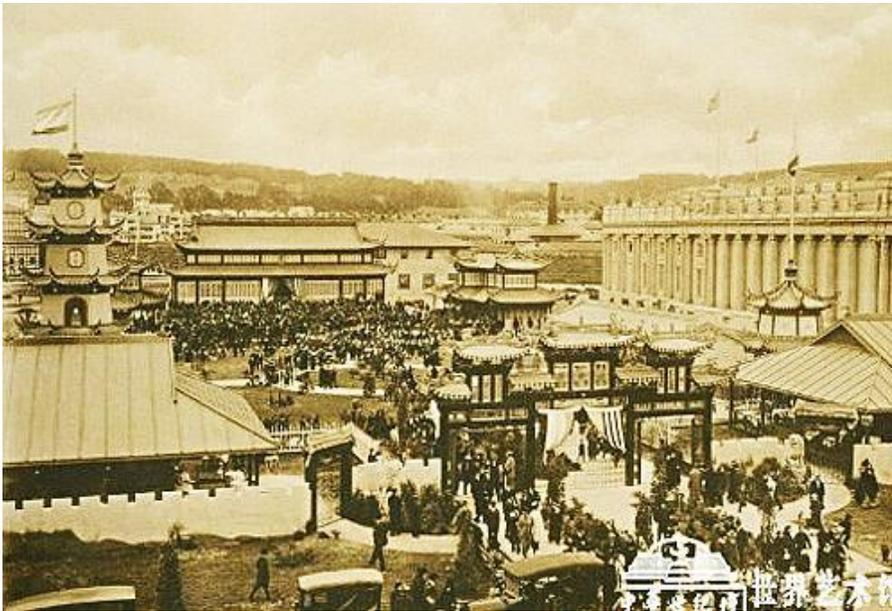


Figure 2: Chinese Pavilion at the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. Source: http://www.bjreview.com.cn/expo2010/2010-04/27/content_267377.htm

As Chinese architecture and art became better known, American collectors began making buying and acquisition trips to China. Museum collectors filled up their private collections and museums with spectacular Chinese objects, including furniture as well as entire rooms and structures. In 1928, Philadelphia Museum of Art acquired a Ming dynasty (1368-1644) reception hall (Figure 3), a carved and painted ceiling from the Ming dynasty Buddhist Temple of Wisdom (Figure 4), and a Qing dynasty (1644-1911) scholar's study (Figure 5). Due to the Great Depression and lack of technical support, the installation did not begin until in 1937. It opened to the public in 1940. The period Chinese room functioned as a significant educational tool to provide the historical context for the display of Chinese paintings, sculptures, ceramics, and other decorative arts at the museum.⁶



Figure 3: Reception Hall from the Palace of Duke Zhao (Zhaogongfu) in Philadelphia Museum of Art. Source: <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/42422.html#>.

⁶ Proser, Adriana, "A Chinese Reception Hall from the Place of Duke Zhao," *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin*, Vol. 92, No. 389/390, Painted Splendor (Winter, 2004). 10-29.



Figure 4: Ceiling from the Hall of Great Wisdom (Dazhidian) at the Zhihua Monastery (Zhihuasi), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Source: <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/44151.html>



Figure 5: Qing Dynasty Scholar's Study in Philadelphia Museum of Art. Source: <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/42577.html?mulR=1190979129|11>

2. What to Interpret?

With no intention of doing much to interpret the pieces they collected, the objects were seen as little more than curiosities from a far-off foreign land. Exhibitions displayed them in ways that simply feed fascination for the exotic and unusual, a glimpse of life on the other side of the world. With increased public exposure, viewers wanted to know more. Many layers of information are embodied in every piece of architectural work, and once such a work is moved away from its original site especially into another country in another culture, these can easily get shuffled and rearranged in a special group of exhibits, making their relationships change. This forces museums and exhibitors to do more interpretation work to explain all the relevant issues. Just as with smaller objects in museums — bronze, ceramics, sculptures and paintings, Chinese architectural exhibits in museums first must convey the basic information of Chinese culture and history: the aesthetic and functional values, where object is from and when it was created, what kinds of materials were used, how it was built, details about craftsmanship and even the imagination of the designer. Hence, the architecture work on exhibit is a product, while the interpretation work tries to approach the process of making the product.

Different from other collections, architecture works, especially some full-size structures, functioning like a house museum, can educate viewers on history more vividly. They provide the visitors a space to view and to touch. To achieve the best experience for visitors in a Chinese architecture surrounding, several issues need to be addressed in museum exhibitions. These include the characters of the activities

associated with the architecture; landscape and context; and design concepts and theories. In addition, the acquisition of architectural exhibitions can include interpretation of the efforts of moving, preserving and reassembling the structure. The viewers can be interested in why these exhibits were selected, how they were brought here, and who brought them here.

3. Why Research the Interpretation of Chinese Architecture Exhibits?

There are several reasons for investigating exhibits of Chinese architecture. First, this effort will help visitors to appreciate and understand the distinctive beauty and culture of China from the perspective of museum education. Second it will help to draw public attention to Chinese historic architecture and explain some small international efforts for historic preservation of Chinese art and artifacts. Third it will provide a reference point for the interpretation of architecture exhibits in Chinese museums.

4. Methodology

The literature research for this thesis began in the summer of 2013. Through both a literature review and on-site visits, it became clear that the Chinese architecture exhibits in American museums can be divided into two basic types: (1) a full structure of a typical kind of Chinese architecture, such as a vernacular house, or a garden, or a full-size hall from a courtyard style housing complex; and (2) Chinese architectural elements, such as tomb tiles, doors, murals and reliefs presented in isolation of context. Several museums have these collections of Chinese artifacts but have not attempted to use them to create a complete architectural settings; rather, they are typically displayed

as individual pieces of sculpture. Both case studies examined in this thesis fit into the first category. Yin Yu Tang House, a Chinese vernacular house that was moved to Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts (Figure 6) and the Astor Court (Figure 7), a recreation of China's Suzhou Garden in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, New York were chosen because they are exhibitions of Chinese architectural structures that offer both rich and challenging information for a museum to interpret. They also were permanent exhibitions that require periodic interpretive updating. This provided enough materials to carry out the research, and at the same time offered room to explore some important but undervalued aspects.



Figure 6: Yin Yu Tang, after re-erection at the Peabody Essex Museum.

Source: <http://www.jgwaarchitects.com/portfolio/educational-cultural-facilities/yin-yu-tang/yin-yu-tang.htm>



Figure 7: Astor Court: a Chinese Courtyard in the Style of the Ming Dynasty.

Source: <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/galleries/asian/217>

The photography of the museum exhibition sites and interviews of museum staffs and visitors were conducted from 2013 winter to 2014 spring. The literature research continued until June 2014. This covered four subjects: 1) the Museum's revolution in United States; 2) the Yin Yu Tang project, Huizhou vernacular architecture art and the old China trade in Salem; 3) the Astor Court project, Chinese private garden art and the establishment of Sino-US diplomatic relations; and 4) interpretation for heritage and historic museums. Most literature referenced is in English, while literature related to Huizhou vernacular architectural art and Chinese private garden art is in Chinese. In addition, because these two exhibitions attracted considerable attention and discussion in media, museum and historic preservation communities, news reports are also included, so that a more realistic view on the projects and on the public opinion can be discussed. By incorporating different sources of information and examining the Chinese architecture museum exhibitions' interpretation in United States, this study will offer a fresh look at communications between Eastern and Western culture.

5. Structure

The chapter sequence presents the case studies before going on to consider the broader aspects of museum interpretation and management. Chapter One will introduce the early information of the Yin Yu Tang project: how the curator generated the idea of this exhibition; how Yin Yu Tang was found; and the moving and preservation process. Chapter One will also offer readers the background of the history for city Salem, Peabody Essex Museum and the origins of the China Trade.

Chapter Two will trace the early information of the Astor Court project, tracing how the museum derived the initial idea to how staff selected what kind of space and approach to present Chinese culture. Also, this chapter discusses the context of the first permanent culture exhibit after the establishment of Sino-US relations.

The next two chapters are devoted to a comparison of the two case studies. The first considers the museums' on-site and gallery interpretation methods. The fourth chapter explores the museums' reach-out activities, including educational programs for school-age children, public performances and enabling scholarly research on Chinese architecture.

Chapter Five provides suggestions for practice by examining the current on-site and gallery interpretation approach of the two Chinese architecture exhibitions. Chapter Six discusses some possibilities for adding content to existing education programs,

and proposes new outreach activities for community service based on the two exhibits for the museums.

The Conclusion raises questions and issues worthy of further investigation. It also points to omissions, as there was a limited time to investigate the material presented. In the end this discussion returns to an emphasis on the importance of inspiring public awareness of studying and preserving Chinese historic architecture through effective museum exhibition interpretation.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION TO YIN YU TANG PROJECT

1.0. Introduction

This chapter begins with an examination of an example of a Chinese architectural exhibit in the United States, the Yin Yu Tang House, a Huizhou-style vernacular house in the Peabody Essex Museum. It starts with brief background information on the Huizhou region and Huizhou-style vernacular residential architecture. The third section of the chapter reviews Chinese and American joint efforts to move and preserve Yin Yu Tang. The final section discusses the historical connection of Chinese trade with the City of Salem, the establishment of Peabody Essex Museum, and its display of Chinese-American economic linkages.

1.1. The Architectural Significance of Yin Yu Tang

In 1996, Nancy Berliner, an independent scholar of Chinese art and the then Curator of Chinese Art and Culture at the Peabody Essex Museum, saw the Yin Yu Tang House while traveling in the rural Huizhou region of China. The residence stood empty, as the remaining Huang family members had left in 1982 to live where job opportunities were better. On a return visit, she learned that the family had decided to sell the house. At that time, the Xiuning County Cultural Relics Administration was coincidentally looking for a United States cultural institution with which to form a cultural exchange. Initial plans to move the Yin Yu Tang House to the United States unfolded in May of 1997, with discussions between the Huang family and regional Chinese authorities. A Culture Exchange Agreement was drafted at that time,

allowing the Yin Yu Tang to be moved to the Peabody Essex Museum in United States, which would assume responsibility for preserving and utilizing the structure to interpret historic Huizhou architecture and its regional culture.⁷ By fall 1997, the Peabody Essex Museum had incorporated the relocation of the Yin Yu Tang House into its expansion plans.

Yin Yu Tang was built in the late eighteenth century during the Qing Dynasty, by a prosperous merchant of the Huang family in their village in the Huizhou region. Finely crafted, the house was two stories high and five bays wide. It was given the name of Yin Yu Tang, which means Hall of Plentiful Shelter.⁸ Like the other houses in Huang Village, the house faced north out of respect for a large mountain to the south and a waterway to the north (Figure 8). The architectural form chosen was already well established in the Huizhou region — a fortress-like structure with walls enclosing a central courtyard. The mortise-and-tenon timber frame had brick walls covered with white lime and stone foundations (Figure 9). Parapet walls stepped up on the east and west ends of the house, which were known locally as horsehead walls (马头墙 matouqiang), capped with black upturned roof tiles and decorated with painted geometric designs (Figure 10).⁹

⁷ Interview with Nancy Berliner, conducted by author on December 13, 2013.

⁸ John G. Waite Associates, Architects. *Yin Yu Tang: Preserving Chinese Vernacular Architecture*. Albany, N.Y.: John G. Waite Associates, Architects, 2003. 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.



Figure 8: Yin Yu Tang, in Huang Cun, backed by a hill with an open expanse in front.

Source: Berliner, Nancy. *Yin Yu Tang: The Architecture and Daily life of a Chinese House*, 2003, 32.



Figure 9: Front facade and entryway of Yin Yu Tang while still located in Huang Cun.

Source: Berliner, Nancy. *Yin Yu Tang: The Architecture and Daily life of a Chinese House*, 2003, 142.

Open to the sky, the central courtyard, usually called a sky-well (天井 tianjing), was the most important source of light and air for the house. It also connected two essential parallel structures of the Yin Yu Tang: the lower hall, on the north side of the house, and the upper hall, on the south side (Figure 11). The most important room in the house was the reception hall, a large room on the first story in the center of the upper hall. It was a place for welcoming guests, family dining, and worshipping ancestors (Figure 12). Sixteen bedrooms, two at each corner of each story of the house, were assigned to family members according to their rank in the family. While the exterior was austere, the interior was ornamented with handsome wood and brick carvings. Exquisitely carved wood screens covered the windows of the first-story bedrooms, providing both privacy and ventilation for rooms (Figure 13). A narrow corridor on the second floor overlooked the interior courtyard. Each end of the courtyard concealed a flight of steep, narrow stairs. A spring underneath the house's stone paving allowed the family to keep fish in stone pools at both west and east ends of the central courtyard (Figure 14).¹⁰

¹⁰ John G. Waite Associates, Architects. *Yin Yu Tang: Preserving Chinese Vernacular Architecture*. Albany, N.Y.: John G. Waite Associates, Architects, 2003, 7.



Figure 10: The Horse-head wall of Yin Yu Tang.
Source: Berliner, Nancy. *Yin Yu Tang: the architecture and daily life of a Chinese house*, 2003. 141.



Figure 11: Yin Yu Tang's sky-well with fish pools.
Source:
<http://poppygall.com/blog/2010/12/06/design-inspiration-yin-yu-tang/>



Figure 12: Reception Hall in Yin Yu Tang.
Source: <http://poppygall.com/blog/2010/12/06/design-inspiration-yin-yu-tang/>



Figure 13: Outer lattice screen of the bed on the first floor in Yin Yu Tang.
Source: Berliner, Nancy. *Yin Yu Tang: the architecture and daily life of a Chinese house*, 2003. 157.

1.2. Huizhou Region Vernacular Architecture and Historic Preservation

The Yin Yu Tang is a typical Huizhou-style residence house. Currently, the Huizhou region consists of four counties and three districts all within Anhui Province. These include Qimen County, Xiuning County, Yixian County, Shexian County and Huangshan District, Huizhou District, and the Yunxi District.¹¹ The Yin Yu Tang is from a small village, Huang Cun of the Xiuning County, one of the counties in Huizhou (Figure 14).



Figure 14: Map of Huizhou region and location of Huang Cun.
Source: Berliner, Nancy. *Yin Yu Tang: The Architecture and Daily Life of a Chinese House*. 2003. "Maps and Names".

With myriad mountains and extensive rivers, the Huizhou Region nurtured a unique culture and population. From the thirteenth century to the twentieth century, Huizhou enjoyed significant trade based on water transportation. Because of the lack of flat fields, the residents were not able to produce enough rice for their daily consumption. This situation led the Huizhou people to become more merchants, trading their local resources for rice from neighboring regions.¹² Abundant waterways, particularly the Xin'an River flowing

¹¹ Berliner, Nancy. *Yin Yu Tang: The Architecture and Daily Life of a Chinese House*. Boston: Tuttle Pub., 2003. "Maps and Names".

¹² Ibid., 3-4.

east from Huizhou all the way to the metropolis of Hangzhou, supported this trade. “Huizhou Culture” developed as male merchants from Huizhou, absent from their home all the year around were selling goods throughout China. At the same time, they got the chance to see, aspire and try to imitate a more respected lifestyle of scholars, literati and urbanities. The money they produced was sent back home to build luxury homes for their wives, children and descendants, and magnificent clan halls for worshipping their ancestors. The House of Yin Yu Tang was built by following this tradition, and serves as typical Huizhou style vernacular architecture encountered by these merchants.¹³

The distinctive Huizhou style architecture was also highly influenced by Yue Culture, originally located in China’s central-plains civilization. In the fourth century, this population migrated from the central plains into the Huizhou region, influencing their new home’s later architecture and art.¹⁴

A typical Huizhou house appears as a two-story residential fortress with austere high lime white walls ornamented with small, detailed carved tiles, ink designs and paintings. Both east and west ends of a house are enhanced with characteristic Huizhou horsehead walls. The entrance to the house always utilizes a doorframe built from stone, with a roof or an arch over the gateway. The front door opens to a winged forecourt, which ventilates the rooms and provides more natural light. In the center of

¹³ Berliner, Nancy. *Yin Yu Tang: The Architecture and Daily Life of a Chinese House*. Boston: Tuttle Pub., 2003. 4.

¹⁴ Zhao, Yan, and Yang Zhang. *Fa Xian Huizhou Jian Zhu*. Hefei Shi: Hefei gong ye da xue chu ban she, 2008. 12.

the first story is a central hall and in some houses, a stage is set up opposite the hall, across the central courtyard. On the upper story, around the court, a veranda is built on three or four sides. Some wealthy families have special benches set along the balustrade where the women of the family could sit during their leisure time with a view into the view of the courtyard. These benches, intended as both practical and artistic, were locally known as “beauty recliners” (美人靠 mei ren kao). (Figure 15)



Figure 15: The village of Nanping, Yixian County, Huizhou.
Source: Berliner, Nancy. *Yin Yu Tang: The Architecture and Daily Life of a Chinese House*, 2003. 2.

With the current rapid urbanization in China, people living in rural villages often yearn to move into the cities. Due to long years of neglect, disrepair and the lack of utilities, old residential houses are not appealing to many people. Because villagers do not value their historic houses, they give permission to antique dealers to dismantle the historic houses, especially those that have not been designated as historic sites.

Numerous historic houses have been dismantled, moved and reconstructed at locations that are many miles away from Huizhou region. A report submitted by the Anhui Democratic League in 2007 stated that the number of Huizhou historic houses is decreasing at the rate of 5% every year.¹⁵

On Jan.1 of 1998, “Regulations for Preserving South Anhui Vernacular Houses” were established as the first local regulation of preservation for vernacular houses in China. Residential houses, ancestral halls, memorial gateway, academics, pavilions, terraces, pagodas and towers, and the many civil structure with historic, artistic and scientific value built before 1911 within the region south of the Yangzi River in Anhui province would be categorized as “South Anhui Vernacular Houses” according to this regulation.

1.3. Conservation and Re-erection of Yin Yu Tang

The purpose of the Yin Yu Tang project was to interpret and disseminate Chinese culture by accurately presenting the history of one house and the lives of its owners, the Huang family. Yin Yu Tang provided an unusual opportunity for interpreting Chinese culture. To achieve the goal, a three-part mission statement for Yin Yu Tang project was formulated. This included the preservation of the house, its contents, and the family documents; the presentation of the house to the public as an important example of Chinese vernacular architecture and the interpretation of the house and its

¹⁵ Xiaoxia, Zhao. “How to Save the Disappearing Historic Architecture,” accessed June 22, 2014, <http://ah.sina.com.cn/news/zt/gujian/index.shtml>.

associated decorative arts for visitors; and raising awareness of Chinese culture.¹⁶ The project team also drafted preservation guidelines for the conservation of the house and its re-erection.¹⁷

Before work began, family members from Huang Family performed traditional Chinese ceremonies to honor their ancestors who built the house and to inform them that their home was going to be moved to its new location in the United States. Chinese engineers in Huang Cun then began the four-month process of dismantling the Yin Yu Tang House in July 1997. Each wooden and stone component was labeled to describe its original location in the house. The whole dismantling process started with the most fragile elements of the house, like the large lattice windows and doors, then roof tiles, which were removed one by one. The last segments of work entailed disassembling the partitions, followed by the bricks of the second-story walls. In February 1998, nineteen crates filled with components of the Yin Yu Tang were delivered to a storage facility in Massachusetts (Figure 16).¹⁸

¹⁶ John G. Waite Associates, Architects. *Yin Yu Tang: Preserving Chinese Vernacular Architecture*. Albany, N.Y.: John G. Waite Associates, Architects, 2003. 11.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Interview with Shukai Wang. Source: <http://www.pem.org/sites/yinyutang/house/base.html>.



Figure 16: Dismantling Yin Yu Tang in Huang Cun. Source: John G. Waite Associates, Architects. *Yin Yu Tang: Preserving Chinese Vernacular Architecture*, 2003. 5.

Next, conservation work started, including the repair of wood and stone elements. Preservation guidelines required all of those who became involved in the project to retain as much of the original wood as possible. New wooden components were fabricated where the original structural materials were weak, utilizing American species that were similar in character and strength to the original Chinese wood (Figure 17). For the stone work, the original materials were cleaned and conserved. Biological growth and dirt were removed from exposed surfaces. The conservation work included pinning broken stones, installing Dutchman repairs, applying color-matched cementations patches, and backing weakened pieces of stone with new stone. Chinese masons, working with their American counterparts, created new components using the original handcrafting techniques and by duplicating the original forms and joint connections (Figure 18).¹⁹

¹⁹ John G. Waite Associates, Architects. *Yin Yu Tang: Preserving Chinese Vernacular Architecture*. Albany, N.Y.: John G. Waite Associates, Architects, 2003. 13.



Figure 17: Wood conservation.
Source: John G. Waite Associates, Architects.
Yin Yu Tang: Preserving Chinese Vernacular Architecture, 2003. 15.

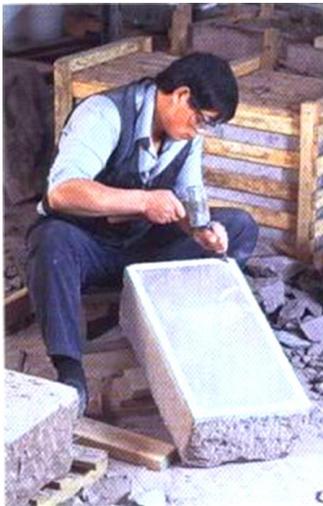


Figure 18: Stone conservation.
Source: John G. Waite Associates, Architects. 2003.
Yin Yu tang: Preserving Chinese Vernacular Architecture, 14.

In the summer of 1998, the team of preservation architects, curators, and timber frame specialists began the task of fitting together the giant jigsaw puzzle of Yin Yu Tang. A trial reassembly of the stone and wooden components was conducted prior to the final reassembly on the museum grounds. They team assembled the entire frame off site to verify the success of the repairs. Then it was taken apart and shipped to the museum site by truck, where a crane lifted it into place, piece by piece.²⁰

²⁰ John G. Waite Associates, Architects. *Yin Yu Tang: Preserving Chinese Vernacular Architecture*. Albany, N.Y.: John G. Waite Associates, Architects, 2003. 12.

1.4. The City of Salem and the Impact of Its Old China Trade

Though located in the New England Region of North America, the Peabody Essex Museum and the city of Salem, Massachusetts have a long-standing relationship with China.

Settled by Europeans in 1626, Salem sits at the mouth of the Naumkeag River on the site of an ancient Native American village and trading center. From the late 18th century to the early part of the 19th century, Salem's ships were pioneers in the East India trade and opened up commerce with Africa, China, Russia, Japan, and Australia. This period marks the beginning of US international relations with East Asia and reveals the global trade connections that Salem had established with faraway lands.²¹

As Salem's seamen gained increased familiarity with these foreign lands, they founded the East India Marine Society in 1799, which eventually became the Peabody Essex Museum. For its establishment, the society was chartered as a "cabinet of natural and artificial curiosities," which is what people today would call a museum. Society members brought to Salem a diverse collection of objects from faraway places, such as the northwest coast of America, Asia, Africa, Oceania, India and elsewhere, and the records of Salem's commerce with China are carefully preserved in the museum today.²² The logs and sea journals of adventurous voyages in Eastern waters, written and kept by Salem's seamen, left both the city and the Museum a

²¹ Shastri, Vanita. *The Salem-India story: Maritime Trade Between Salem, Massachusetts, and India, 1788-1845*. Lexington, MA: Meru Education Foundation, 2008. 54.

²² http://www.pem.org/about/museum_history.

glorious heritage, setting up a solid cultural environment for the Peabody Essex Museum to embrace Yin Yu Tang as a Chinese vernacular house through today's "New China Trade".

1.5. Conclusion

Given the historical relationship between New England and China, it was appropriate that the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem to acquire, disassemble, transport, reconstruct, and interpret a typical house from the Huizhou Region. The fact that the Yin Yu Tang had faced neglect and abandonment and that it was available meant that the Museum was able to save the structure. The fact that the family which owned the house was able to provide information about its use was an added benefit. In addition, the restoration and interpretation would not have been possible without the cooperation of a large and capable group of scholars, professionals and crafts experts. Finally, the project benefited enormously because it enjoyed the Museum's financial backing to make everything possible in a relatively short time frame.

CHAPTER 2. INTRODUCTION TO ASTOR COURT PROJECT

2.0. Introduction

This chapter examines the Astor Court Project, which is a recreation of a Ming Dynasty-style, Chinese-garden courtyard in Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Although it is a replica of a private garden in the region of Jiangnan, the design and the craftsmanship display more generally the essence of classical Chinese gardening art. Here the discussion focuses on how the garden features are incorporated in a museum period room to present the elegant life of a Chinese scholar in feudal society. The last section of this chapter provides background about the social context of the Astor Court Project.

2.1. The Initiating of the Astor Court Project and the Construction Process

In early 1970s, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York was planning to enlarge its current Far Eastern collections and reinstall permanent galleries for Asian Art. Roberta Brooke Russell, also known as Mrs. Vincent Astor, a trustee of the museum and chairman of the visiting committee to the Department of Far Eastern Art, suggested that a garden court could be built in the midst of conventional galleries.²³ Ideally, the garden court space would serve not only as a quiet area where visitors could rest and reflect upon the works of art in the adjoining galleries, but also as a transition that would permit the visitors to bridge the culture gap between the more familiar arts of the West and the less known ones of the Far East. It was decided that a

²³ Murck, Alfreda, and Wen Fong. *A Chinese Garden Court: The Astor Court at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: The Museum, 1980. 54.

concrete floor slab with an existing light well could be placed on the second floor of the Museum's north wing for this purpose. In 1976, the museum acquired a group of Ming dynasty hardwood furniture, which would be displayed in the gallery at the north end of this garden court.²⁴

At that time, the Museum considered several proposals regarding how to design the garden, including how to build a modern garden that could be interpreted as an abstract image of a Chinese garden, and how to construct a thematic Chinese garden designed by famous architects. However, all of them turned out less than satisfactory.²⁵ In the fall of 1977, Wen Fong, current consultant of the Department of Asian Art at the Museum visited the People's Republic of China with a delegation of American scholars. There, Chinese architectural historian Chen Congzhou, and Fong spent a day visiting gardens in Suzhou, and together they decided that the garden court in New York should be based on the Late Spring Studio courtyard at the Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets.²⁶

After Fong returned to the United States, he proposed the project to the Museum and then the director of the Cultural Relics Bureau in China. Subsequently, China assigned the project to the restoration team of the Suzhou Garden Administration. By the end of 1978, a model was made and revised by experts from both American and

²⁴ Murck, Alfreda, and Wen Fong. *A Chinese Garden Court: The Astor Court at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: The Museum, 1980. 55.

²⁵ Interview with Maxwell Hearn, conducted by author in December 30, 2013.

²⁶ Murck, Alfreda, and Wen Fong. *A Chinese Garden Court: The Astor Court at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: The Museum, 1980. 55.

Chinese sides, along with photographs of the Taihu Rocks proposed by the Chinese professionals for use in the garden court.²⁷

In January 1979, the Museum's director, Philippe de Montebello, inspected the site chosen in Suzhou's East Park for building a full-scale prototype, which would remain there as a permanent exhibit. Meanwhile, the logging of nan wood²⁸ and reopening of an old imperial kiln for making tiles were undertaken for both the Suzhou prototype and the New York courtyard. In the summer of 1979 two rounds of inspection were carried out, the first review was by American architects and the second by Museum's staff members. Final suggestions for changes in the choice of the Taihu rocks and other design details followed. Immediately, the crafting of the materials began for use at the Metropolitan, and all the components were received in New York City in early December. On December 30, 1979, a team of twenty-seven engineers and craftsmen from the Suzhou Garden Administration arrived in New York City, and the work of assembling the Astor garden court began in early January 1980.²⁹

Supervised by four university-trained engineers and one foreman, the Chinese craftsmen were divided into teams of carpenters, masons, tile workers, and rock experts. The work in Manhattan started with on-site dressing and finishing of the

²⁷ Murck, Alfreda, and Wen Fong. *A Chinese Garden Court: The Astor Court at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: The Museum, 1980. 60.

²⁸ Nan Wood: a very knotty wood. It does not react to humidity and temperature much in the way of expansion or contraction and makes superior furniture which tends not to get loose or crack because of changes in climate. Nan tree is a kind of broadleaved evergreen of the cedar family found in the interior southwestern provinces of Sichuan and Yunnan.

²⁹ Murck, Alfreda, and Wen Fong. *A Chinese Garden Court: The Astor Court at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: The Museum, 1980. 60-61.

materials that had been prepared in Suzhou. Since every piece had been carefully numbered, the assembly of pillars and beams for the entire Ming Room only took a several days. Laying the terra-cotta floor tiles in the Ming Room took five men about two weeks: first a layer of sand was spread on the floor and sprinkled with water to pack it firmly; then four bottom edges of each tile were chipped for a better grip in the sand; after that, the large floor tiles were held together with a mixture of finely ground lime, bamboo fiber, and tung oil. After two weeks when the mortar was cured, the surfaces of the tiles were ground with a block of carborundum to an impeccable smoothness. The fine texturing lines of the granite terrace, steps, and ramps were chipped by hand with a sharp-edged hammer.³⁰

For absolute authenticity, the Chinese applied over the bricks their own powdered wall surface, which was made of lime, paper, straw, and mud. The problem of the weight of the mud would cause a big problem, however, if it fell from the museum structure. As a result plaster was substituted and applied to a wire mesh. For maintenance as a museum display open to the public, the plaster wall would be painted rather than whitewashed in the traditional manner. The Chinese reluctantly agreed that a washable painted surface was a necessary concession to modern practicality in an otherwise meticulously accurate Ming-style installation.³¹

³⁰ Murck, Alfreda, and Wen Fong. *A Chinese Garden Court: The Astor Court at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: The Museum, 1980. 60-61.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

The Chinese craftsmen were responsible for the entire project with the exception of the preparation of the shell, the staining of the wood, the plastering, and the painting, which were done by Americans.³² With masterly skill and obvious pride, they pursued authenticity in every detail with traditional tools and methods (Figure 19).



Figure 19: Chinese workmen maneuvered a Taihu rock into the Astor Garden.
Source: Murck, Alfreda, and Wen Fong. *A Chinese Garden Court: The Astor Court at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 1980. 58.

³² Murck, Alfreda, and Wen Fong. *A Chinese Garden Court: The Astor Court at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: The Museum, 1980. 61.

2.2. Jiangnan Private Garden Art

The design of the Astor Chinese Court is modeled on a small court-yard within a scholar's, the Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets in the city of Suzhou (Figure 20). Since the twelfth century, when the garden was built, it passed through the care of numerous officials in history, who all devoted their ideas to its design.



Figure 20: Overview of the east side of the lake in the Master of the Fishing Nets Garden in Suzhou. Source: http://www.orientalarchitecture.com/china/suzhou/mastnets_gallery.php?p=master-of-nets15.jpg

These traditional Chinese scholar-officials stood at the pinnacle of the society with power, money and status. The influential social and political position of scholar-gentlemen allowed them to accumulate wealth along with prestige, which provided them with sizable property. After the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279) moved its capital to Lin'an (modern Hangzhou), the number of private gardens grew steadily in Jiangnan region, or "South of the Yangtze River", particularly in the city of Suzhou. Both the temperate climate and the great agricultural and commercial wealth of the

region encouraged the members of the upper class to lavish their resources on the cultivation of garden arts.³³

Instead of building numerous grand monuments to brag about their successes, Chinese garden owners only wished to create refined surroundings in which they could pursue the peace and solace of nature and find refuge from the noise and dust of the world. Having a garden in the city was just like living as a hermit in the middle of a vulgar marketplace. After the gates were closed, all the noise would be shut out from the well-planned urban garden.

The garden design is closely associated with Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, the three belief systems that shaped Chinese culture, and which later manifested in theories about nature in Chinese garden design. Confucian concepts directed individuals to be focused inward for self-cultivation, and in this way, gardens became an important space for study and artistic pursuits, as well as for social gatherings.³⁴ Taoism's cyclical idea of life and death leaves a more physical impact on garden design. The eternally shifting patterns of annual blooming and death of flowers in gardens overcome fear and all uncertainty. A garden also reflects another principle of Taoism, "wu-wei", which means non-action to nature. Supposedly free to express his own unfettered imagination without leaving any visible designing efforts, a garden

³³ Hammer, Elizabeth, Felicia Blum, and Maxwell K. Hearn. *Nature Within Walls: The Chinese Garden Court at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003. 18-19.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

designer designed all garden elements to flow with the soft curves of the nature.³⁵

Instead of the Taoist preference for wandering along in the hills, the Buddhists often encouraged to joining together to enjoy the fruits of solitude in gardens. Buddhism added the ideal of monastic life to garden art, in which a community of men sought spiritual enlighten together.³⁶

When laying out a garden, the designer divides a large space into small areas, then uses many ways to make small spaces look larger and interesting. Compositions of garden rocks are viewed as mountain ranges and towering peaks; miniature trees and bushes suggested ancient trees and forests; and small ponds or springs represent mighty rivers and oceans. Overall, the garden represented the larger world of nature in microcosm. Another basic approach lies in the proper juxtaposition of contrasting and complementary qualities in shapes, forms, colors, textures, and spaces, such as large and small, high and low, open and closed, sparse and dense, void and solid, light and dark, straight and crooked, hard and soft, rough and fine, dynamic and static. For Chinese, the pairing of these Yin and Yang concepts imply their very interdependence and interaction; their combinations and permutations guarantee infinite change as well as ultimate harmony in the universe. It is the small that makes the large look larger, the dark that makes the bright seem brighter, and the incomplete that makes us imagine the complete. Each of these supposed opposites is the half that awaits its

³⁵ Keswick, Maggie, and Charles Jencks. *The Chinese Garden: History, Art & Architecture*. New York: Rizzoli, 1978. 74 -76.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

other to make a complete statement; and all together, the multiplicity of qualities achieves a harmonious oneness through infinite metamorphosis.³⁷

“Borrowed scenery” is another principle guiding garden’s lay-out. This could mean using scenes outside the garden, such as a view of distant mountains or the trees in the neighboring garden, to create the illusion that the garden is much bigger than it is in reality. This approach could also bring other natural elements – things less tangible like rain, wind or sound into the beauty of a scene to create a particular feeling. This involve locating a pavilion near a temple so that the chanted prayers could be heard; planting fragrant flowers next to paths and pavilions, so visitors would appreciate their aromas; or creating bird perches to encourage birds to come to sing in the garden, or introducing streams that are designed to make pleasant sounds.³⁸

2.3. Significance of the Astor Court and Ming Room Design

Adopting the plan of Late Spring Studio (Dian Chun Yi) from the Master of the Nets Garden, the completed Astor Chinese Garden Court along with the Ming furniture room provides an authentic setting for the display of Ming-dynasty furniture and a sanctuary for rest and contemplation in the center of the Far Eastern galleries. The entire courtyard demonstrates both simplicity and harmony of a Ming dynasty Jiangnan private garden (Figure 21).

³⁷ Hammer, Elizabeth, Felicia Blum, and Maxwell K. Hearn. *Nature Within Walls: The Chinese Garden Court at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003. 15.

³⁸ Chen, Zhi, and Cheng Ji. *Yuan Ye Zhu Shi*. Beijing: Zhongguo jian zhu gong ye chu ban she, 1981.45.



Figure 21: The north side of the Astor Court in Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Source: <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/galleries/asian/217>

The main entrance to the Court is a moon gate in the south wall. The circular-shaped opening shows viewers only parts of the garden, primarily the zones of darkness and brightness. According to an ancient conceit in China, the moon gate, like the round frame of ancient bronze mirrors, provided the best possible setting for a view. Through the frame, the eye moves from the white wall to the dark vestibule, to the sunlit garden, to the dark Ming Room, and on to the bright windows at the far end. The contrasts create a sense of rhythm, distance, and space (Figure 22).

Moving into the garden, the courtyard is surrounded by white walls, maintaining the original idea of keeping away the hustle-and-bustle of the profane world and creating an oasis of calm and harmony. In addition, the white walls serve as a backdrop for the fantastic forms of rocks and luxuriant plants in the composition (Figure 23).



Figure 22: The moongate entry of the Garden Court.
Source: The picture was taken by author in March, 2014.



Figure 23: The south wall of the Garden Court.
Source: The picture was taken by author in March, 2014.

One main structural feature of the courtyard is Cold Spring Pavilion (or Lengquan Ting), a half pavilion with exuberant upswept roof corners standing against the west wall. With no function as habitation, the pavilion only provides shade or shelter from light rain in open air. In this court, the Cold Spring Pavilion offers a fixed point of view in the spacious landscape and functions as a showcase for a fine rock. To the left of the pavilion, a small pool called Deep Jade Green Spring (Hanbi Quan) is nestled among the rocks, with goldfish adding color and liveliness to the southwest corner of the courtyard (Figure 24).



Figure 24: The Cold Spring Pavilion and the Spring.
Source: <https://www.flickr.com/search/?q=Chinese%20garden%20metropolitan%20museum%20of%20art>

The walls at the south end and west side of the courtyard both conceal areas for cultivating plants and arranging rocks, intended to evoke a wilderness landscape. Some of these rocks have been piled up to form peaks, others form a grotto for the pond and beds for the plantings. Against the west wall, a large peak dominates a group of three rocks while at the south end of the garden and just in front of the lattice pattern of the window, the peak with a lean and bony appearance seems to rise from the earth (Figure 25).



Figure 25: The rocks and plantings against the west wall.
Source: The picture was taken by author in March, 2014.



Figure 26: The covered walkway.
Source:
<https://www.flickr.com/search/?q=Chinese%20garden%20metropolitan%20museum%20of%20art>

Along the east side in the garden court is a meandering covered walkway. Originally it provided pleasant shelter from the rain or scorching sun, today it guides visitors through interesting scenery. In Chinese garden design, these walkways never go in a straight line. They make several detours, rising and falling, winding around hills. In the Astor Court, even on the level ground, with the garden utilizing angles and bends,

the walkway creates an alcove space for a tall sleek rock called a "bamboo shoot," surrounded by live bamboo (Figure 26).

At the court's north end lies the Ming Room. Following the traditional fashion, the Ming Room faces south with its tall lattice windows and doors opening into the garden. The north wall of the room opens to a shallow garden of fantastic rocks and bamboo visible through fretted windows. The Ming Room is rectangular with crossbeams and pillars dividing it into three bays. The best available woods in China were used in its construction. The fifty pillars are made of wood from the rare nan tree, logged from southwestern China; the horizontal beams and some of the rafters are made of fir; curved rafters in the back of the Ming Room and the balustrades are camphor wood; and the window frames and fretwork are made of the hard ginkgo wood (Figure 27, Figure 28).³⁹



Figure 27: The Ming Room and the moon terrace.

Source:

<https://www.flickr.com/search/?q=Chinese%20garden%20metropolitan%20museum%20of%20art>

³⁹ Murck, Alfreda., and Wen Fong. *A Chinese Garden Court: The Astor Court At the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980. 48.



Figure 28: The interior of the Ming Room.
Source: <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/galleries/asian/218>

The ancient Chinese mortise-and-tenon system and joining techniques are also introduced in the construction of the Ming Room. And the furniture is formally arranged for receiving guests and viewing the garden, as it might have been in a typical sitting room. Contrasting with the rich brown tones and ornamentation of the woodwork, the floor and ceiling tiles show a smooth pattern of cool colors. The floor of the roofed areas, the trim around the door and window openings, and the decorative low balustrades along the walkway are smoothly ground, bluish gray terra-cotta

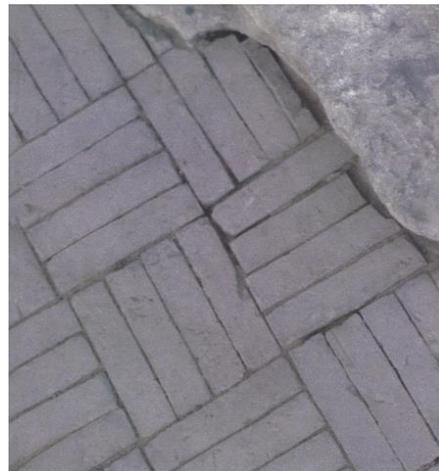


Figure 29: The grey bricks paved courtyard.
Source: Murck, Alfreda, and Wen Fong. *A Chinese Garden Court: The Astor Court at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 1980. 65.

tiles, made from local Suzhou clay. The stonework of the terrace and other trim was cut from local Suzhou granite. Small rectangular gray bricks paved for the courtyard were also made near Suzhou (Figure 29).⁴⁰

2.4. Context for the Permanent Culture Exhibit

The project of the Astor Court along with the Ming Room was the first permanent cultural exhibit in the United States from the People's Republic of China. Similar to the political effort of forming full Sino-US diplomatic relations during the 1970s, the fulfillment of Astor Court project developed during the 70s, with Mrs. Vincent Astor initiating the idea of installing a Chinese garden court in the Museum. The construction of the Astor Court started with a warm ceremony held on January 10, 1980 while the Chinese and American workers exchanged hardhats emblazoned with both Chinese and American flags. This was to set the tone of smooth collaboration between the Chinese and American workers.⁴¹ It reached fruition when the Astor Court opened to the public in the year of 1981.

2.5. Conclusion

A garden court in the Museum in New York City presents an exceptional opportunity for visitors unable to visit China to experience the art of Chinese residential architecture and landscape art within an authentic context. It assists visitors in their understanding of Chinese philosophies, traditions and life styles rather than viewing a

⁴⁰ Murck, Alfreda., and Wen Fong. *A Chinese Garden Court: The Astor Court At the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980. 50.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

series of interesting and exotic but disassociated objects. The construction and interpretation of such a space came about through the cooperation of Chinese and American scholars, professionals and craft experts, witnessing a great moment in the establishment of a new cultural relationship between these two countries.

CHAPTER 3. MUSEUM INTERPRETATION OF THE EXHIBITS

3.0. Introduction

This chapter begins with discussions on the work plan that museum staff developed for the interpretation of the two specific Chinese architecture exhibits introduced in the previous chapters — the Yin Yu Tang House in Peabody Essex Museum and the Astor Court (and the reception hall adjoining it) in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In the second section it further explores how the two museums interpreted the content, history, and physical appearance of these two exhibits from the time they were first introduced to the museums. The final section of the chapter compares the methods utilized to interpret the exhibits, and how effectively these interpretations convey information to their visitors.

3.1. The Frameworks for the Interpretation of the Yin Yu Tang and the Astor Court

In the Peabody Essex Museum, the Yin Yu Tang joins an existing collection of 23 historic houses, an example of institutional commitment to cultural education. Yin Yu Tang added a dramatic new perspective to the museum's interpretation of Chinese culture, its collections of Asian art, and the historic connection between China, the museum, and the town of Salem, Massachusetts. The Yin Yu Tang is preserved in a manner that differs from other similar projects because the two-hundred-year house was not restored to any specific time period in history. The Yin Yu Tang House has been kept as it appeared in the 1980's when the house was abandoned, however it aids

in the interpretation of more than just that short and most recent decade. The interior decorations, finishes and house belongings represent the two hundred years that the house and the family have existed together. A particular object might be significant in one time period and the appearance of the room would be of a different time altogether. The approach is very different from the one most historic houses take to function as house museums, which is to limit the decorations of the house to a particular period of significance and interpret the entire site to that time period. The on-site interpretation for Yin Yu Tang House includes a well-produced audio presentation, which relies on the house and its contents to tell the family's story from eighteenth century through 1980's. Some objects that might not otherwise be regarded as "historically significant" still play a great role when depicting the image of that period in China.⁴² The self-guided tour was designed by a team composed of an architectural curator, Asian art curators, the staff from the museum education department, professionals who deal with historic house tours, the museum's website company and its audio tour company. This tour's aim is to make the visitors feel they are really in an authentic Chinese vernacular house. It is of particular note that no labels are placed in the house.⁴³

⁴² Interview with Juliette Fritsch, Chief of Education and Interpretation in Peabody Essex Museum, conducted by author on April 21, 2014.

⁴³ Interview with Nancy Berliner, conducted by author on December 13, 2013.

By comparison, the interpretation in the Astor Court in the Metropolitan Museum was less complicated. The Astor Court is the re-creation of one part of a Chinese Jiangnan private garden. It functions more like a period room, in that it shows Ming-dynasty garden and architecture art as it was enjoyed by the literati class. The interpretative labels were written by the Met's Asian art curators, and edited by the museum's Editorial Department.⁴⁴

3.2. Implementation of the Yin Yu Tang Interpretation

When a ticket to view the Yin Yu Tang House is purchased, visitors receive a brochure that introduces the exhibition with the answers to frequently asked questions, a geographic map and a floor plan of the house (Figure 30).⁴⁵



Figure 30: The Yin Yu Tang brochure. Source: Peabody Essex Museum

⁴⁴ Interview with Dr. Alfreda Murck, curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York from 1978 to 1991, conducted by author on April 26, 2014.

⁴⁵ The Yin Yu Tang House Brochure, Peabody Essex Museum.

From the information desk, a hand-held keypad is delivered to each visitor, to access the self-guided tour. A member of the museum staff gives a summary of Yin Yu Tang House in front of the main entry to the house's front yard (Figure 31).



Figure 31: The information desk for Yin Yu Tang in front of the entry to the house front yard. Source: The picture was taken by author in April, 2014.

The self-guided audio tour lasts about thirty minutes. Stone blocks carved with numbers mark each stop where information about the Yin Yu Tang is given. Visitors enter those numbers into the museum's hand-held device, and receive information on what they are viewing as they tour through different architectural spaces. All the rooms represent a different period as shown through the room's interior decoration and belongings. The path goes from the forecourt to the courtyard, then room by room, from first floor to second floor. On the tour, apart from narratives addressing the issues of architecture significance, visitors also hear stories of merchant families and Chinese history through the past two hundred years. Some recordings from members of the Huang family share their memories of life in this house, and in others curator Nancy Berliner and other experts explain areas in the house that have

particular significance. For example, one of the Huang family descendants, Huang Xiqi, talks about worshiping ancestors in the reception hall, recalling details of activities in the house when he was a teenager. A ritual presentation to the ancestors is performed by a male actor, and the chanting lyrics demonstrate how these people cherished a feeling of great reverence for their ancestors:

Presenting refined sacrifices, we are facing the ancestors who passed away long ago. Please enjoy this banquet and accept the offerings we provide. Every one of your offspring will be noble and famous, and they will have gold and jade piled up. Whenever they try to obtain something, they shall achieve it. In every season of the year, they will enjoy hundreds of good fortunes. In this way, there will never be a shortage of the wealth used in the ceremonies for the dead, and they will use their money to improve the offerings to ancestors and deities as well. Please consider this and accept our offerings.⁴⁶

When introducing the subject of wood-carving and window lattice in the tour, the audio narrative begins with basic information about the function of the window lattice in the house and the many meanings that it symbolized. A recording from family member Huang Binggen, points out a special wood carving, a longevity symbol on the horizontal lattice of the reception hall, as he retells a story that the house was a gift to the family's ancestors on one of his birthdays.

⁴⁶ The audio tour script of Yin Yu Tang House, Peabody Essex Museum 2012.

The audio tour narrative uses several other parts of the house and its history to tell the waxing and waning fortunes of the Huang family over the past two hundred years. When discussing the construction, it talks about the change of the gutter materials from ceramics to imported tin in the 1920s period. In one of Nancy Berliner's narratives, she emphasizes four rooms of the house that were "given up" for a period of time because the family became poor after the early death of a son. In another area, the audio tour emphasizes the ornamentation of the house while the visitor is inside a lavishly-decorated bedroom that displays the use of European style floral wallpaper, another feature added by a successful businessman from the Huang family.

While touring in the house room by room, other recordings are focused on young women's lives through voices of female family members. In a story told by Huang Cui'e, she describes the comparatively modern elementary education she received in the 1920s:

My mother did not want me to go to school. She wanted me to stay home and learn to sew. It was a good elementary school, revolutionary and progressive. We didn't have to read the traditional Chinese primer. We wore the same clothes as the boys at school, played soccer and everything. Everybody was afraid of violating the rules. We weren't allowed to spit. The county praised our environmental sanitation.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ The audio tour script of Yin Yu Tang House, Peabody Essex Museum 2012.

Another educated young lady in the family provides insights about the arranged marriages at the time:

My younger sister has been promised to the Chen family son. I was frantic upon hearing this news. I have always said that my sister is both beautiful and talented. Among the girls of the village, she is the finest. Furthermore, she is so poised. It would be proper for her to marry a handsome scholar. But this bridegroom of hers is as ugly as a ghost, a fifty-year-old evil spirit. To make matters worse, he has skin ulcers on his face.⁴⁸

The information presented is not limited to the story of the Yin Yu Tang House. A greater context is portrayed to inform audience the historical events in China through the two centuries, especially carried along with a talk on Culture Revolution. To understand the controversial issue, objects such as a government loudspeaker and a large portrait of Chairman Mao were featured in the tour:

High on the right hand wall is a government loudspeaker, one of millions installed in villages all over China in the 1960s, when few people had radios. For twenty years, it broadcast news, music and political announcements. No one could turn it down or off.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ The audio tour script of Yin Yu Tang House, Peabody Essex Museum 2012.

⁴⁹ The audio tour script of Yin Yu Tang House, Peabody Essex Museum 2012.

After the revolution in 1949, Chairman Mao really wanted to change the family focus of Chinese society. He wanted to make himself the great ancestor, the great father, the great caretaker of the society. And people would hang posters of Mao in the same place where they hung the ancestors' portraits.⁵⁰

More than simply narrating the history, the audio emphasizes the changes in the two-hundred-year history of the Huang family along with a broader context of China: the ups and downs of the family members' fate, the public's change in orientation from ancestor worship to leadership-worship.

Two new galleries have been created within the new museum facility recently, presenting Yin Yu Tang within the larger context of Chinese culture. One is dedicated to describing the family, the house, its history, and Chinese architecture; the other features rotating exhibits of Chinese art.

Stepping out of the Yin Yu Tang House, the two accompanying galleries provide more information about Chinese culture. With the theme of "Double Happiness: Celebration in Chinese Art", one newly installed gallery contains 30 highlights from the museum's wide-ranging Chinese collection spanning 3,000 years (Figure 32).

⁵⁰ The audio tour script of Yin Yu Tang House, Peabody Essex Museum 2012.



Figure 32: The installation of the “Double Happiness” gallery.
Source: The picture was taken by author in April, 2014.

Topics have been discussed in the tour of the Yin Yu House, such as “Weddings” “The Altar” “Feasting” “Reverence for the Dead”, are brought into a broader context in the gallery space. These celebrate China’s artistic achievements in seasonal festivals and religious ceremonies. To the east of the “Double Happiness” exhibition gallery, a smaller gallery is

dedicated to displaying more objects, interpreting the everyday activities of people in Yin Yu Tang House (Figure 33). One mahjong table with a full set of mahjong (Figure 34), and another table with two abacuses and a tangram puzzle are on view. Along the gallery walls stand some living



Figure 33: The gallery interprets Yin Yu Tang house’s daily activities.
Source: The picture was taken by author in April, 2014.

appliances, like bamboo baskets and trays, bamboo hats and brooms made from sorghum stalk. Also in the same gallery, we can see the hanging scrolls of calligraphy

work (Figure 35), the altar set (Figure 36), and finely handcrafted wooden furniture. All the objects in this gallery space are not originally from the Yin Yu Tang belongings, but they visually portray the significance of a prosperous Huizhou merchant family's life in the context of China's traditional farming culture.



Figure 34: The mahjong table.
Source: The picture was taken by author in April, 2014.



Figure 35: The hanging scroll.
Source: The picture was taken by author in April, 2014.



Figure 36: The altar set.
Source: The picture was taken by author in April, 2014.

Another small auditorium located inside of the small gallery plays three short video documentaries that describe age-old traditions and contemporary lifestyles in the villages of the Huizhou region of China's Anhui province (Figure 37). The first film, “Yin Yu Tang”, presents how the home was dismantled and re-erected at the Peabody Essex Museum, describing the significance of the ancestral home in rural China. The second video “Guo Nian”, translated as “Passage into a New Year”, documents contemporary New Year's celebrations and reminiscences of celebrations. The last one, “Guo Men”, meaning “A Village Wedding”, describes traditional rituals experienced by a bride and her family as they prepare for her wedding, and elders recall their own nuptials. Once again, when visitors choose to spend some time watching these videos, they gain more understanding of the Yin Yu Tang House and its associated Chinese culture. The tour in the Yin Yu Tang opens a window for visitors to experience life in China. The films depicting this life bring visitors back to the Yin Yu Tang to enjoy those celebrations.



Figure 37: The small auditorium presenting the documentaries of Huizhou region
Source: The picture was taken by author in April, 2014.

At the beginning of April, 2014, the Peabody Essex Museum was making arrangements for all new galleries. The changes are significant. Apart from the two

galleries attached to the Yin Yu Tang House, there is an interpretative space on the Museum's first floor, explaining the concept of families and ancestors, with information about the Huang family's genealogy (Figure 38). Another interpretative space on the second floor landing of the main stairs is dedicated to the merchant culture rooted from the Huizhou region and showcasing a group of construction tools, including 1900s' saw, chisel and axe, for constructing Hui-style housing (Figure 39). A group of mortise-and-tenon joints models is on display to explain the wood joinery in the Yin Yu Tang's structure.



Figure 38: Interpretation panels on the first floor of Peabody Essex Museum. Source: The picture was taken by author in April, 2014.



Figure 39: Interpretation case on the second floor landing. Source: The picture was taken by author in April, 2014.

Two computers are placed in both the small gallery, next to the Yin Yu Tang House and the second floor landing space (Figure 40). A well-designed website illustrates the richness of the region's artistic and cultural heritage and the story of the Huang family through original audio and video clips, photographs, and text. The online animation is divided into two parts. First is the genealogy educates viewers about the Huang family structure (Figure 41). By clicking on every member's picture in the family tree, the person's story is revealed, with more general background information in that generation of Chinese history. These present the lives of 32nd to 35th generation of the family. The chief issues include the unnatural death of males, and the widow's lives during wars. The second part is dedicated to architectural design details of the house and explore its orientation, construction, ornamentation, belongings, and preservation (Figure 42). Just like the audio, more quotes and narratives from the Huang family and the museum staff are included, along with a well designed animation model which explains how the house is sited within the village, shows each room's allocation within the house, and the function of furniture and other decorated objects therein.



Figure 40: Computers with Yin Yu Tang animation are available to visitors.

Source:

https://www.flickr.com/photos/second_story/3176774455/.



Figure 41: The genealogy map of the online animation.
 Source:
<http://www.pem.org/sites/yinyutang/house/base.html>



Figure 42: Exploring the house history and construction through online animation.
 Source:
<http://www.pem.org/sites/yinyutang/house/base.html>

3.3. Planning and Implementation of the Astor Court Interpretation

Differing from Yin Yu Tang House's interpretation as a house museum, from the time the Astor Court and Ming reception hall were introduced at the Metropolitan Museum, they have functioned together more like a single period room to accommodate Ming dynasty furniture. The principle interpretation method for the space in the Museum is to use text panels and labels to educate visitors about the Chinese private garden design, as it originated in the Ming dynasty Suzhou private gardens of the Jiangnan region of China.

Walking into the moongate through a small dark reception room, a bright garden space becomes evident. On the south wall, there is a metal panel for each side of the doorway, one is pointing out that the garden court and reception hall are based on the ideas of Museum's trustee, Mrs. Brooke Russell Astor's who wanted to build an authentic Ming Scholar's retreat space. The other panel indicates the construction of the garden court is a product of the joint efforts of American and Chinese craftsmen and engineers (Figure 43).



Figure 43: One visitor reading the metal panel close to the doorway of the garden.
Source: The picture was taken by author in April, 2014.

As visitors continue to stroll down the zigzag walkway along the east side of the wall, they encounter two labels along the colonnades (Figure 44). The two labels focus on the theories and strategies used in Chinese private garden design, including the Yin Yang theory, the symbolized meaning for introducing water and rocks into garden design, and poetic names that garden owners chose to enhance the vista. The most important, on one label, the narratives depict what the garden owner, the scholar's life looked like in the old days:

On the moon-viewing terrace before you, the master of the house might have gathered with a few friends to write poetry, sample a new tea, or enjoy a full moon. The Ming Room, or Scholar's Retreat, beyond would have provided a place for work or entertainment within view of the garden. Indeed, the courtyard was an extension of the residence and was used, weather permitting, as another room of the house.⁵¹



Figure 44: Visitors discussing the information on the interpretation panel along the walkway.
Source: The picture was taken by author in April, 2014.

Moving into the Ming reception hall, on a wall with lattice windows there are two panels delineating the east and north interior elevations. The format of the two panels is similar, both with the elevation drawing on top and sketches of the detailed wood work of the room and furniture layout. The text on the panel with the north interior elevation notes that the installing the room is inspired by the Museum's Ming dynasty

⁵¹ Museum label, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

furniture collection. It discusses traditional Chinese timber construction, the large
woodwork and the small woodwork,⁵² with a clear statement of how to differentiate
the woodwork in the Ming reception hall (Figure 45).

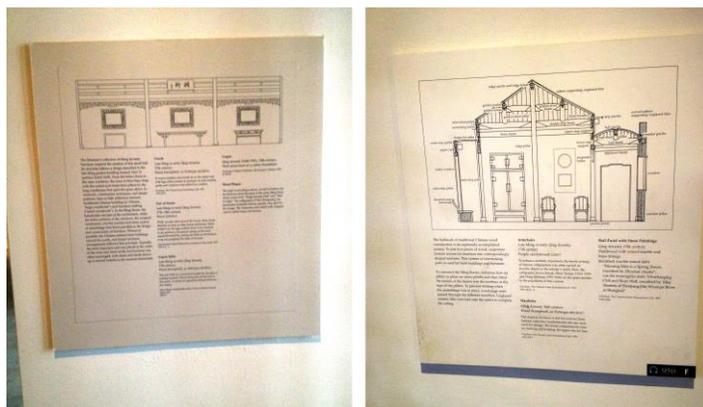


Figure 45: Text panels located along the lattice window in the Ming Room.
Source: Pictures were taken by author in December, 2013.

Apart from the information about the structure, all of the information about the
furniture and decorative objects in the room is provided on these two panels. Some
items are only listed by name, period, material and credit line, such as the Qin (Seven-
Stringed Zither), ornamental Ying Rock, and Meiping Vase. Others, such as
armchairs and the wall panel with stone paintings, are provided with a detailed
explanation which includes information on the inscribed Chinese characters:

Armchairs: to enhance aesthetic enjoyment, the brush writing of
famous calligraphers was often carved on favorite objects in the
scholar's study. Here, the calligraphy of two literati, Zhou

⁵² In traditional Chinese wooden structure frame, “the large woodwork” 大木作 refers to load-bearing structures, such as columns, pillars, beams or rafters, while “the small woodwork” 小木作 refers to architectural finishing and ornamentation, such as doors, windows, ceilings or furniture.

Tianqiu (1514 -1595) and Dong Qichang (1555-1636), on the splates testifies to the popularity of that custom.⁵³

Wall Panel with Stone Paintings: hardwood with veined marble and brass fittings. Inscribed: (on the round slab) ‘Morning Mist in a Spring Forest, inscribed by Zhushan zhushi’; (on the rectangular slab) ‘Overhanging Cliff and Sheer Wall, inscribed by Yibai Sharen at Shenjiang [the Whampo River at Shanghai].’⁵⁴

Visitors also can choose to rent the audio tour for highlighted exhibitions at the information desk when they enter the museum (Figure 46). The audio includes two pieces for the Astor Court. One piece guides its audience along the most significant route: entering from the moongate through the sunless antechamber, then strolling on the zigzag walkway all the way down to the reception hall. It points out the highlighted scenery in the garden, such as the vertical rocks and the limestone borders. The other



Figure 46: Visitors taking audio tour in the garden. Source: The picture was taken by author in April, 2014.

⁵³ Museum label, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

audio tour provides information about who used to own and use this kind of space in China. Following the ideals formulated by Confucius in the fifth century B.C., the scholar strove to educate himself, to cultivate wisdom as well as knowledge, and to serve a worthy sovereign.

More than a public garden space in the Asian art galleries, the Astor Court also plays an important role as a space for themed exhibitions. The Chinese garden court can function as a backdrop, giving context to special objects on display. Those exhibits become a supplement for visitors to understand the design elements in the garden space more thoroughly. For example, the exhibition "The World of Scholars' Rocks: Gardens, Studios, and Paintings" in 2000 brought more than thirty scholars' rocks and almost ninety paintings to the Asian art galleries.⁵⁵ Along with gallery lectures from museum professionals about these art works of rockery, the exhibition enhanced the visitors' understanding that the placement of rocks in a garden is linked with their resemblance to mountains or caves. Another exhibition "Chinese Gardens: Pavilions, Studios, Retreats", held in 2012, showcased paintings together with ceramics, carved bamboo, lacquerware, and contemporary photographs in eight galleries encircling the Astor Court. These explored rich Chinese architectural design, the scholar's life, and meditation ideas for pictorial and garden art. In Late 2013, the Metropolitan Museum opened "Ink Art", a Chinese contemporary art exhibition at the Asian art galleries, which included Astor Court and the Reception Hall. By inserting contemporary

⁵⁵ The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "*The World of Scholars' Rocks: Gardens, Studios, and Paintings*", accessed June 25, 2014. <http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2000/world-of-scholars>.

rockery artworks and furniture, a great contrast was created between the new landscape and the historic setting, which allows visitors to develop their own ideas about the impact of Chinese culture on today's Chinese art (Figure 47).



Figure 47: Visitors are viewing the contemporary art exhibition “Ink Art” in the Ming Room
Source: The picture was taken by author in December, 2013.

Overall, the exhibitions held in galleries surrounding the Astor Court and Ming room provide different perspectives for visitors to examine both garden landscape art and architecture. They are able to study a single element of garden design like rock art, widen their view with a journey into the gardens of history, and even experience contemporary Chinese art that is inspired from traditional art.

3.4. Comparison and Conclusion of the Museum Interpretation

Located in American art museums⁵⁶, the two Chinese architecture exhibits incorporate different approaches to inform visitors in two very different historic settings. The interpretation of the Yin Yu Tang House in the Peabody Essex Museum begins the moment visitors get their tickets and brochures, but the audio tour plays the most vital role in the interpretive experience. The interpretation of the house doesn't end when people step out of the house itself, however, because additional galleries and an auditorium with other objects, films and online interactive animation discuss the house, the family, and the specific region and China, with some issues repeatedly highlighted in different interpretation mediums. The interpretation process centers on an in-depth discussion of Huizhou vernacular architecture design, the daily activities of family members in the house, the ethics of a Chinese family and the impact of historical events on them. This is consistent with the Museum's mission statement, which encourages its visitors to discover and explore the rich interconnections between international artistic and cultural expressions and traditions.

In comparison, the Astor Court provides two ways for visitors to increase their knowledge of the exhibits: using both labels and an audio tour. Both these methodologies discuss the significant design elements in the landscape and architecture, as well as acknowledge the life of the Ming dynasty's scholar-official.

The information on the labels and the audio are clear and concise. Functioning more

⁵⁶ Both Metropolitan Museum of Art and Peabody Essex Museum are considered as Art Museums, which are explained in the museums' mission statements. For Metropolitan Museum of Art: <http://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-museum/mission-statement>; For Peabody Essex Museum: http://www.pem.org/about/mission_vision.

like a public open space in the Museum, the Astor Court keeps itself as a pure garden to let visitors walk away from massive art objects, allowing them to sit and relax. Without any obvious advertising or written instruction, for most first-time visitors stumble upon the Astor Court galleries as a surprise. Its calmness gives people a perfect opportunity to appreciate its beauty and meditate. Even without instruction, visitors develop their own self-cultivation in the garden, in the manner that scholars did. This also matches the mission:

... to stimulate appreciation for and advance knowledge of works of art that collectively represent the broadest spectrum of human achievement at the highest level of quality.⁵⁷

The interpretation for Astor Court and the Ming room doesn't deliberately rely on design. Instead, designers let the landscape speak for itself: the soothing sounds from the gentle stream slipping down the rocks into small pool, and the bamboo swaying slightly in the breeze behind a lattice window. The museum is currently devising a way to play birdsongs in the garden.⁵⁸

In art museums, the interpretative program is designed to show that this is beautiful, this is sublime or grotesque, this is a sculpture, and this is how we should think about art.⁵⁹ Using exhibits, the audio, and label texts, the docents are educating their

⁵⁷ "Museum Mission Statement", accessed in June 25, 2014. <http://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-museum/mission-statement>.

⁵⁸ "A Conversation with Tan Dun: A New 'Peony Pavilion' in an Old Context", A talk in Metropolitan Museum of Art, November 29, 2012.

⁵⁹ Meszaris, Cheryl, Twyla Gibson, and Jennifer Carter, "Interpretation and the Art Museum: between the Familiar and the Unfamiliar," in *Museum Gallery Interpretation and Material Culture*, edited by Juliette Fritsch. New York: Routledge, 2011. 35.

visitors about the significant architecture designs, how the landscape is laid out and what kind of life people had in a given occasion. For visitors familiar with those aspects of Chinese art, architecture or tradition, the information might be somewhat redundant. In the Astor Court, more than one visitor told me that they've been to Chinese gardens or they are familiar with Chinese art, so that there is no need for them to read the text on those labels. From their point of view, they come just because the garden court in the museum is basically a relaxing space to "escape" the other exhibits and visitors. However, many people who visit these historic Chinese architectural exhibits are not familiar with the culture, hence, interpretation gives shape to thoughts, opinions, ideas and actions that people can call their own. This is also a significant challenge for the interpretation designers: how to make sure that visitors easily understand the information provided in Chinese architectural exhibits when they lack previous exposure to the design principles involved. For both Yin Yu Tang and Astor Court, the cross-culture understanding of artistic design is the major difficulty. One approach to deal with this problem is to determine what concepts are shared by people in the East and the West.⁶⁰

For Yin Yu Tang, the bond of family relations is the common theme that guides the whole interpretation. This is something that you can't physically see, but it is reflected in every single object and space within the house. The relationship between the family members, the ideas shared by the people around the world, guides the audience to appreciate the beauty in this exhibit. For the Astor Court and the

⁶⁰ "A Conversation with Tan Dun: A New 'Peony Pavilion' in an Old Context", A talk in Metropolitan Museum of Art, November 29, 2012.

accompanying reception hall, while the theories associated with laying out the landscape are complicated, the beautiful and calm landscape are valued by all people regardless of where they were born. In the garden space, the gold fish in the pond attract a considerable amount of attention, especially from children just sitting by the pond and watching fish swimming freely.

In summary, the Yin Yu Tang House exhibit provides a great varieties of choices, from the self-guided audio, gallery information, films to reference websites and books, while the Astor Court's interpretation basically relies on the label text and audio, which visitors can choose to take or not at will.

CHAPTER 4. OUTREACH PROGRAMS FOR EXHIBITS

4.0. Introduction

In this chapter, outreach programs for the two Chinese architecture exhibits will be examined. The first part will look at the important role that outreach programs play in museum interpretation, and addresses the impact those programs could make on exhibiting architecture from another culture to the visiting public. Next, the outreach programs that the two museums developed for their Chinese historic architecture exhibits will be discussed in detail. The final section of the chapter will compare the outreach programs for these two exhibits focusing on the audiences being targeted by these programs and what information is being used to educate people.

4.1. Why Museums Need Outreach Program?

During the 1990s, museum staff working in areas such as visitor services, public programs, education, marketing, promotion and development came to understand that the museum has to attract and target a range of diverse visitors, both local residents and tourists. During that decade, there was also a change as planning for the museum visitor shifted from the curator, scientist, historian to the educator and to the visitors themselves.⁶¹ Currently, the emphasis is about the visitor's firsthand experience touring the museum's exhibits with the education central to their purpose. This kind of informal learning provides the foundation for all other kinds of leaning. It begins

⁶¹ Lord, Barry, Gail Dexter Lord, and Lindsay Martin. *Manual of Museum Planning: Sustainable Space, Facilities, and Operations*. Lanham, Md: AltaMira Press, 2012. 55.

at birth and develops through life through social interaction with other people.⁶²

Outreach programs provide a chance for an audience to have this kind of social interaction in museums rather than just watching exhibits. This group learning method increases the chances of conversations about an exhibit. The communication goes beyond the viewers and the exhibit to include the host who is providing education program and the attendees who are participating in the program process. This kind of informal education program can be entertaining and bring sensual pleasure to members of the audience.

For the Chinese architecture exhibits under discussion in this thesis, these outreach programs have several functions in addition to just being instructive and enjoyable. They provide a chance for the audience to think about cross-culture understanding. For many westerners, China can appear dauntingly foreign. Barriers are often reinforced by the representations of China in popular western culture and the media, which emphasize the “mysterious” and “exotic” elements of the Far East culture without context or explanation. In a more carefully constructed learning experience, visitors are asked to compare the Chinese culture with their own experience, to link what they are not familiar with to what they are familiar with. The information given to them by experience created through interactive outreach programs is designed to be more accurate and create long-lasting memories.

⁶² David Anderson, “A Common Wealth: Museums and Learning in the United Kingdom”, in *Manual of Museum planning: Sustainable Space, Facilities, and Operations*. Lord, Barry, Gail Dexter Lord, and Lindsay Martin. Lanham, Md: AltaMira Press, 2012. 56.

4.2. Outreach Programs for Yin Yu Tang

Yin Yu Tang provides a rich resource for the museum to develop outreach programs in which visitors learn Chinese culture and art, apart from the information during an on-site visit. The house, the only freestanding Qing dynasty Chinese home on exhibition in a U.S. museum with the museum's other collections of Chinese art and material culture provide many opportunities to learn about China. The 200-year-old house shows layers of cultural influence that range from the ancient to the modern, the local to the global. By examining this house, from the Huizhou region in Anhui province, and considering the activities of one particular family, the Huangs, visitors learn that much of Chinese art and culture and Chinese life is neither mysterious nor exotic after all.

The outreach programs for Yin Yu Tang House exhibition in Peabody Essex Museum can be divided into two kinds. The first is the educational program for teachers and school students, and the second serves a more general public audience. With more specific goals in each of them, the outreach programs interpret more specific information of the house and its history to the program's targeted audience.

Lesson Plans for Elementary, Middle and High School Students

A large number of teachers and their students visit Yin Yu Tang every year. According Emily Scheinberg, the Student and Teacher Programs Manager at Peabody Essex Museum said, "Every year, around 47% or 48%, almost the half of the teachers

come and bring their students to Yin Yu Tang. They seek out the museum and want their students to see Yin Yu Tang.”

The Museum works with Primary Source, a history educational organization, which hold an annual for teachers actually to develop lesson plans for school groups. The content of the lesson plans is not only related to just Yin Yu Tang, but also other Chinese collection and Asian art collections in the museum. Some of the lesson plans discuss the house, while the others focus more on the collections which surround the house.⁶³

A teacher’s sourcebook for Chinese Art & Culture covers the issues to be taught by teachers to different age groups of students. Information about Yin Yu Tang House provides an opportunity to address several topics (Figure 48).

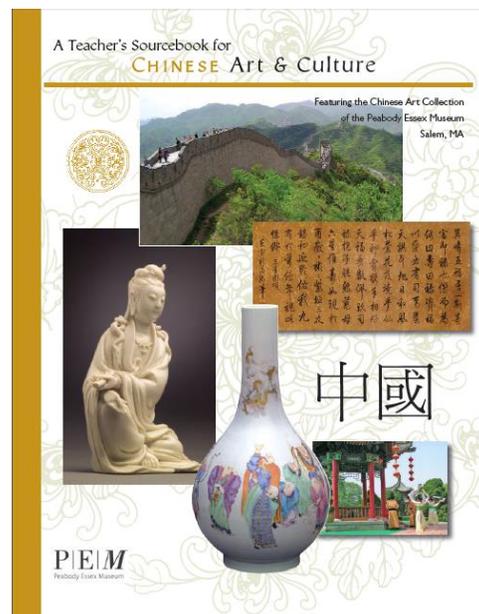


Figure 48: The Peabody Essex Museum’s teacher’s sourcebook for Chinese Art and Culture. Source: The Peabody Essex Museum.

⁶³ Interview with Emily Sheinberg, the Student and Teacher Programs Manager in Peabody Essex Museum, conducted by author on April 3, 2014.

For the “Introduction to Qing Dynasty China”, the teacher’s source book talks about the merchant and reading culture of Huizhou region to give an image of a prosperous and flourishing 18th century Qing Dynasty:

In the 18th century, during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor, China underwent a period of expansion and prosperity. For the Huizhou merchants of southeastern China (the original home of Yin Yu Tang), the Ming and Qing dynasties were times of prosperity. There was significant growth of the merchant networks that dealt in salt, tea, and porcelain as well as the growth of pawn brokerages, the predecessors to modern banks. This period of economic strength was accompanied by a flourishing of the arts, spurred by increased wealth among the populace and patronage by the emperor. Huizhou merchants had long maintained businesses in areas of literati culture, and they incorporated the values and pastimes of the scholar-official class into their own lifestyles by collecting art, supporting scholarship, and building elegant homes. The construction of Yin Yu Tang began during this time (around 1800).⁶⁴

Then the talk on local trading business of the Huizhou region gave a transit on the discussion of the international trade in Qing dynasty, which also introduces the museum’s Asian Export Art exhibition:

⁶⁴ Peabody Essex Museum. *A Teacher’s Sourcebook for Chinese Art & Culture*, 4.

“The reign of the Qianlong Emperor was also a time of dramatically increased contact with foreign states in the form of both trade and diplomacy. The emperor received gifts of art and technology from foreign dignitaries and was not hesitant to incorporate foreign-made goods and their designs into the collections of artwork made for him in his imperial studios. Foreign trade became increasingly profitable as Europeans desire for Chinese goods such as tea, silk, and porcelain increased. Foreigners were restricted to doing business with Chinese trading companies (hongs) in Hong Kong, Macau, and Guangzhou (called Canton by Europeans and Americans). Chinese trading companies were keen to adapt their wares to the needs of foreign commissions, producing a diverse body of work now categorized as Asian Export Art.”⁶⁵

Modern China is covered in the section entitled the “Introduction to China Since 1911” in the teacher’s source book. Yin Yu Tang House is used to help the students understand Chinese public actions during times of change, such as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution initiated Chairman Mao:

Red Guards destroyed many cultural monuments and artworks associated with the previous regime help rid the country of the “Four Olds”: old ideas, old culture, old habits, and old customs.

⁶⁵ Peabody Essex Museum. *A Teacher’s Sourcebook for Chinese Art & Culture*, 4.

Members of the Huang family of Yin Yu Tang smashed tiles of opera scenes above the entrance to their home to indicate solidarity with the movement.⁶⁶

For the discussion on “Philosophy and Religion in China” in the teacher’s resource book, Yin Yu Tang and its belongings once again provides rich explanations for folk religion practices and Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism.⁶⁷

Detailed lesson plans are developed from the topics discussed in the source book of Chinese art and culture to serve for different age group students. For example, the lesson plan for elementary school mainly talks about Chinese New Year Celebration. The resources provided to tell students about the idea of the Chinese New Year celebration are all associated with Yin Yu Tang and its story: the Museum’s Art Cards featuring items in Yin Yu Tang, primary source documents from a member of the Huang family, and a film about how the new year was celebrated in Huizhou region, Yin Yu Tang’s original location. From these resource, the lesson plan develops the teaching strategy “Object-to-Self Questions” to ask students to compare their own experience to what they learnt from Yin Yu Tang, such as “How does your family or community show respect for its living and deceased elders?”

For the middle and high school groups visiting the house in the museum, the understanding of the Culture Revolution will be one part of the lesson plan. Since the Yin Yu Tang House was not interpreted as a specific time period of Chinese history, it

⁶⁶ Peabody Essex Museum. *A Teacher’s Sourcebook for Chinese Art & Culture*, 6.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

also holds a lot of objects that reflect the life in rural China during the Cultural Revolution (ca. 1964–1976). The portrait of Chairman Mao, the loudspeaker hanging on the wall, and the newspapers articles in the Yin Yu Tang House provide a very physical appearance of that period. Together with other literature and media resources available to the museum, students could have an opportunity to understand the motivation of Cultural Revolution, what was going on at that time in China, and what impacts the Cultural Revolution have left today.

Hence, for the teacher's source book of Chinese art and culture and the lesson plans, Yin Yu Tang House and its story provide a very lively and specific example to help illustrate the issues to teachers. It also provides a window to view the larger picture of China, which is not only limited what happened in that house and that region.

Guided Tours for School Groups

When school groups make a reservation to visit the Yin Yu Tang House, the Museum always sends to the school three films, “Guomen: A Village Wedding”, “Guo Nian: Passage into a New Year”, “Yin Yu Tang: A Chinese Home”, which are all filmed in the Huizhou region. They describe the project of the Yin Yu Tang project, in order to give the teachers and students a context to learn something before the school trip.

Emily Sheinberg said, “School groups always have a half-hour long docent guided visit in the Yin Yu Tang House itself. Some tours are more focused on what life would be like in the house, some more focused on the house itself, on the design and the architecture. A lot of the groups come just because the students are studying

about China, even ancient China. Those students come just because they want to make a very direct connection to China. The teachers hold the idea that visiting Yin Yu Tang is a transformed experience for students to be in the house, see it and feel it what it's like."⁶⁸ (Figure 49)



Figure 49: A docent-guided school tour in the Yin Yu Tang.
Source: <http://www.pem.org/about/employment/volunteer/>

On April 4, 2014, I attended a school group visit in Peabody Essex Museum including a 30-minute tour in Yin Yu Tang. The large school group was composed of about sixty to seventy elementary school students from grade one to three. During the tour, the large group was divided into smaller groups. Each had around twelve school kids with two school teachers. Every small group was led by a docent from Peabody Essex Museum. At the atrium, in front of Yin Yu Tang's frontcourt, the docent asked two questions, first how many of the kids have been into the Yin Yu Tang House before and second, how many of them are learning Chinese language. Among of the twelve students, one of them has visited the Yin Yu Tang exhibit before and almost

⁶⁸ Interview with Emily Sheinberg, the Student and Teacher Programs Manager in Peabody Essex Museum, conducted by author on April 3, 2014.

everyone of them is studying Chinese. In the next step, the docent guided students into the Asian Export Art gallery. There the docent started to inform students about the history of Salem and Peabody Essex Museum by using the words which were very concise and easy to understand. While talking about the wealthy merchants' lifestyle, and the benefits of trade with the Far East, the docent directed the students' attention to those objects surrounding them, which were exported from Far East into America, especially those with Chinese patterns. By distributing print-outs, the docent taught students about several important objects that deliver very specific symbolized meanings in Chinese culture. These include the plum blossom as a "friend of winter," representing the value of endurance; water carried out the meaning of the harmony and prosperity; and the Phoenix, the symbol of high virtue and grace. Then the students were asked to search for their favorite objects in the galleries and show their classmates how the Chinese design symbols they just learnt are represented in these objects.

After acquiring some basic ideas about the values that Chinese people cherish and present in their design objects, the docent led the school group into the Yin Yu Tang House. Entering directly into the courtyard space, all the school children were attracted by the two large fishing ponds in the center of the courtyard. The docent first asked the kids to compare the house with their own houses, sharing their impressions. When the students brought up their surprise at finding a courtyard space within the house structure, the docent explained the importance of the fishing ponds. Standing in the reception hall, objects such as the childminder, the heater and the tray

were also discussed to give the students an image of the rural life in this region of China. After that, the school children were sent to observe the first floor's four bedrooms by themselves. When they returned, they were very anxious to share what they saw and especially emphasized on how different those rooms looked from their own bedroom. Before getting onto the second floor, the docent took the students to an adjacent kitchen of the house so that they understood where it was located. Stepping onto the second floor, two features were pointed out by the docent to help school kids understand the activities in the houses: one was the lattice windows which can be opened to let people living upstairs view into the courtyard. The other was the very steep staircase that was used to guard the house from bandits during the war era. During the half hour onsite visit, the students took a very active role in the tour. When discussing the house, they compared the differences about the overall structure, room arrangements and detailed ornamentation. They also asked questions, such as "Don't people feel cold as there is such a large opening space in the center?" "How many people live in such a small room?" The docent addressed their questions by providing more detailed information, such as where the house was originally located in China, or what the Huang family structure was like. Since the audience for this tour are school kids from grades one to three, they are around age six to eight. Some issues, such as ancestor worship are too complicated for them. The docent conveyed the information in a more appropriate way for the young age kids by telling the importance of respecting senior people in Chinese culture. With the encouragement of the docent, the students imagined themselves as young family members in the Huang family living in the house. They would offer their old grandma the bedroom

on the first floor, which has the most convenient connection to the entrance of the house, and during festivals, they would help the family's senior members to prepare for some ritual activities. In a space which looked very different to these school kids, they were always attracted by some objects and stories which looked or sounded very exotic. These included the two large fishing ponds in the courtyard, the artificial rice in the kitchen, and the steep staircases which triggered their curiosity about the bandits' attack.

Instead of an audio-guided tour, the docent-guided tour incorporates the knowledge from the docent's own experience and interpretation. During the tour I followed, while the docent was touring the students on the aisle of the second floor and showing the students the thresholds, she said, "once I heard this from one of my Chinese visitors, in Chinese tradition, there is a rule to follow while you stepped over these thresholds, that the boy should step out his left foot over the thresholds, and a girl should step out her right foot." After hearing this, those kids in the tour cautiously stepped out properly in this fashion. Later during the tour, one small boy looked very sad since he took a wrong foot while walking over one threshold.

Currently, the museum has nearly one hundred volunteer docents. They teach all of the museum's student groups, pre-K to university level and offer public tours of historic houses, special exhibitions and permanent collections, which also means they

all have the experience of touring visitors in the Yin Yu Tang House.⁶⁹ Says Emily Sheinberg:

The docents really have a great knowledge of the house and they all heard from Nancy's⁷⁰ speak about this, many times they have been into the house, many times they have listened to the audio tour, many times they have heard from each other, and most of them have been here since 2003. Some of them even visited where the house comes from. They do a lot of interpretation independently. Individual docents have their favorite things to talk about. We are OK with that because a lot of times the goals that the teachers have are not for us to teach very specific information but to experience the inside of the house.⁷¹

These docents are the vital circuitry that connect the ideas to real, interpersonal experiences on the museum floor.

Students' Essay Contest

From 2006 to 2008, the Peabody Essex Museum worked with both public and independent schools of Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Maine to host annual essay contests for children in grades 6 through 12. The essay contests required students to show their understanding of Chinese art and culture, based on their

⁶⁹ Interview with one of the Museum docents, conducted by author on April 4, 2014.

⁷⁰ Nancy refers to Dr. Nancy Berliner, the Museum's Asian Art Curator till 2012, who was the force behind the acquisition of the Yin Yu Tang House.

⁷¹ Interview with Emily Sheinberg, the Student and Teacher Programs Manager in Peabody Essex Museum, conducted by author on April 3, 2014.

experience visiting Yin Yu Tang House and their research on Huang family and Yin Yu Tang Household objects.⁷²

After receiving the information that the museum provided to the schools, these students developed their own interpretation for the 200-year old Chinese house with an emphasis on different aspects of the property. The students incorporated their research and study about Chinese culture, their experience and observations about the architecture, and even their memories of their childhood and family life into their understanding and appreciation of Yin Yu Tang.

In one essay, the student showed her great interest of the skywell located in the center of the house, and the most important, she connected the courtyard in the Chinese house with the “patio” in her grandma’s house in Venezuela. By recalling the earlier happy time she spent in the patio, she could imagine what everyday life would be like in the Yin Yu Tang House:

As I stood in the courtyard, it was quiet. I stood there listening to the tape, imagining what it would be like if all of the people still lived in Yin Yu Tang. I wondered what everyday life would be like. The atmosphere in courtyard was so calm, soothing, and peaceful.⁷³

⁷² Interview with Emily Sheinberg, the Student and Teacher Programs Manager in Peabody Essex Museum, conducted by author on April 3, 2014.

⁷³ Source: the Peabody Essex Museum’s annual Yin Yu Tang student essay contest.

I imagine that the sounds of the courtyard that I know in Venezuela may be similar to the sounds of the courtyard that were once there in Yin Yu Tang. While I was standing in Yin Yu Tang I could hear the laughter again, and the voices of others chatting away. I could feel the house come alive. I could relate to the glory of the courtyard, and the noises that went along with it.⁷⁴

With respect to the orientation of this structure, the author of this essay talked about the similarity of the type of house looking inward, and also compared it with the other kind of house looking outward, which she lives in right now. By making the connections between the Yin Yu Tang House and two other types of housing space that she has experienced, the girl could explain how people's behavior was affected:

The idea of the courtyard may have changed how they reacted with their community and how they play their role in it. The houses with inward looking windows that looked toward the courtyard illustrated that in that society there was more of a focus on family. In houses with outward looking windows the family had to look beyond the house and onto the community that they were living in.⁷⁵

Both in China and in Venezuela houses face inward and both concentrate on family. I wonder if the common house styles of

⁷⁴ Source: the Peabody Essex Museum's annual Yin Yu Tang student essay contest.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

China and Venezuela say something about their culture. I wonder if they both tend to look inward toward family with little interest and even trust in people outside the family ‘compound.’ I do not imply that this is a problem only that it is different. It might be important to understand this difference.⁷⁶

Another student documented his ideas and imagination after observing objects like the loudspeaker and Chairman Mao’s portrait, which highly represented the significance of that time period. He wrote a very sharp and incisive comment about the impact that Modern China has left on the historic Chinese house, placing the house structure as a witness of Chinese history:

Chairman Mao had declared these decorations superstitious and tied to the past, so every such decoration had to be destroyed. The family members of Yin Yu Tang smashed all of these precious decorations and did not replace them, to show that they were loyal to Chairman Mao. They got rid of the portraits of their ancestors and statues of the kitchen God and replaced it with a giant picture of Chairman Mao.⁷⁷

“The loudspeaker would constantly praise Chairman Mao and the Communist Party, and criticize innocent people for unbelievable reasons. ... I closed my eyes and suddenly found

⁷⁶ Source: the Peabody Essex Museum’s annual Yin Yu Tang student essay contest.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

myself standing on a platform, surrounded by a sea of jeering faces. A heavy wooden sign hung from my neck, cutting into the flesh of my back. A group of kids faced me, each with a red scarf around his or her neck. They mocked me and commanded me to kneel. The pain and humiliation were almost too much to bear.⁷⁸

For the same topic, another student's essay interpreted the Culture Revolution as "striking the prominent value of respect", "The Chinese people also had a certain level of respect for the government and others in power. This respect may have been built upon fear, but it was respect nonetheless."⁷⁹

In this student's eyes, the Yin Yu Tang House is "a house built on respect", "shown through its construction, as well as objects within". Through his essay, he tried to explain the design idea of the house space, the relationships among Huang family members and even the exterior decoration of the house by emphasizing respect, the extremely important value in Chinese culture and society:

In the Yin Yu Tang House as well as throughout the country, respect for family has been critical. This is made apparent through the placement of family members in their respective rooms. ... In China, family members were allotted rooms based on the location of the room and their status within the family. ...

⁷⁸ Source: the Peabody Essex Museum's annual Yin Yu Tang student essay contest.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Elders were respected by being given rooms that let in more light. These rooms, located on the second floor, were therefore given to parents and grandparents.⁸⁰

The exterior of the Yin Yu Tang House shows that the builders also had a high respect for nature. Ornate designs located near the roof feature flowers and birds, as well as ducks and magpies over the door. ... Fish were stored in pools of water located in the main foyer of the house. These fish were respected for the good fortune they brought to the family, because they were believed to be able to influence the spirit world.⁸¹

Hence, the Yin Yu Tang House provides material that aids communication between the exhibit and its audiences. The museum informs the visitors with the same knowledge for the house and the culture, while the feedback from visitors forms their very own interpretation, based on their own interest in the exhibit.

Special Celebration: Double 7

In the summer of 2013, the museum held a large Chinese celebration of romance, “Double 7”, with an overall focus on Chinese artwork in commemoration of the Yin Yu Tang House’s tenth anniversary in the Museum. With a wide range of performances and activities, the main event of the night came in the form of “Four

⁸⁰ Source: the Peabody Essex Museum’s annual Yin Yu Tang student essay contest.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Letters”, a story inspired by the Yin Yu Tang House.⁸² The original novella, written by Wang Yaozhen, an educated female from the Huang family in the 1920s, illustrated her personal history in the turbulent century of China, which later became a memorial both to herself and to the many thwarted women of her era.⁸³ Four performances of the play were held inside the Yin Yu Tang House throughout the night.

On “Double 7”, a “Valentine’s Day” in Chinese lunar calendar, this summer celebration of romance mixed various Western musical performances with the

Oriental novella on the stage in the Museum atrium, decorated with paper lanterns. Targeting at the Museum’s adult visitors and the local communities, the shows gave the audience a romantic atmosphere to appreciate the art, and provided a considerable amount of historical information in brilliantly acted, well-constructed performances

(Figure 50).



Figure 50: The “Double 7” celebration.
Source: <http://www.nsarthrob.com/2013/08/ending-the-summer-with-double-7/>

⁸² “Ending the summer with ‘Double 7’,” Chris Ricci, accessed June 30, 2014.
<http://www.nsarthrob.com/2013/08/ending-the-summer-with-double-7/>

⁸³ Berliner, Nancy. *Yin Yu Tang: The Architecture and Daily Life of a Chinese House*. Boston: Tuttle Pub., 2003, 90.

The Silk Road Project

In January 20 to 31, 2004, the world-renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma brought his Silk Road Project, a series of innovative performance, educational and cultural activities to the Museum. Great works of visual art from the Museum's collection together with the international music and storytelling created greater public awareness for the public of the rich and diverse cultural traditions in the lands along the ancient Silk Road. One of the special collections of the Museum that all musicians loved was the Yin Yu Tang House. When the music appeared in the house, it made the tour much more compelling for the visitors. The Chinese house provided these musicians with an authentic environment to interpret their music to the audience, and with the music, the house came alive for its visitors (Figure 51).



Figure 51: The Silk Road Project performances in Yin Yu Tang.

Source:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNhnTxcC5mw> “The Silk Road Project: Creative Exchanges at the Peabody Essex Museum”

4.3. Outreach Programs for the Astor Court

As an art museum with the mission “to collect, preserve, study, exhibit, and stimulate appreciation for and advance knowledge of works of art that collectively represent the broadest spectrum of human achievement at the highest level of quality”,⁸⁴ the Astor Court and Ming Reception Hall for Metropolitan Museum is a piece of art work itself which represents Chinese craftsmanship of garden design, the philosophy of harmony in Chinese culture as well as a Ming dynasty literati’s life. From another perspective, the garden and the room space function more like a gallery to display and interpret other artifacts in a Chinese context.

Most of outreach programs related to the Astor Court and Ming Room use the some objects, or scenery, or design concepts to help the museum’s audience to understand other art works, especially during the gallery talks for themed exhibitions in Asian art. In some specific tours, Astor Court is featured as one unique art work.

Public Program: Guided Tours

In the Museum, at least four docent-guided tours will visit the Astor Court and Ming room, and they are the museum’s highlights tour, the director’s tour for the second floor, a tour for highlights of Asia, and a tour of the Arts of China.

In the Museum’s highlights tour, the Astor Court, is featured along with Cubiculum Nocturnum, a reconstructed bedroom from the Roman villa, the Kongo Power Figure

⁸⁴ Museum Mission Statement, accessed June 30, 2014. <http://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-museum/mission-statement>.

from African collection, the Van Gogh's Wheatfield with Cypresses, and the Neoclassical facade of the Branch Bank of United States. In the tour for Arts of China, apart from viewing rare Chinese jades, bronzes, ceramics and sculpture dating from the Neolithic period to the twenty-first century, the Astor Court is featured to provide the tourists with an authentic atmosphere to appreciate the beauty of Chinese painting and calligraphy.

For those tours that visit the Astor Court, the tour guides have the great freedom to decide what information they are going to convey to the audience.⁸⁵ This means the interpretation of this space depends on their knowledge and interest. In the two tours in the garden court in early April, 2014, one tour that was led by a female docent, was composed of middle aged couple with a great diversity of nationalities. The Astor Court was their last stop in the tour, and the docent specifically informed her audience that the garden belonged to highly-educated Chinese scholars in the history. Also she highlighted the design and layout of the rockery in the garden, comparing to the contemporary rock-shaped object of the exhibition "Ink Art". The stop was quite short and after a small talk about the rockery design, the docent led the group out from the Asian Art gallery, which didn't leave any chance for leisure in the garden. Soon after this, a Chinese tour group arrived. It was very different from previous museum staff's interpretation, emphasizing on the garden design. The Chinese tour guide talked more about how the museum got the idea of installing a seventeenth century

⁸⁵ Interview with Metropolitan Museum's staff at information desk who was in charge of the reservation for museum tours, conducted by author on March 31, 2014.

Chinese private garden and how the garden was built through the joint efforts from both Chinese and American people.

From these two examples, it is obvious that docents give their audiences is quite limited due to the restricted amount of time they spend. Even though the Garden is designed to be a space for leisure activities while strolling in the corridor or reciting poetry, a short tour really does not give the visitors a chance to sense that kind of beauty.

School Program: Lesson Plans

The lesson plans designed for the Garden Court space are available through the Metropolitan Museum's website. Different from guided tours, the lesson plans specific goals for visiting school groups, and also they reflect the essence of landscape design for Chinese private garden:

Students will be able to identify ways traditional Chinese gardens embody the concepts of yin and yang through the harmonious arrangement of contrasting elements; recognize how material selection and design can be used to convey ideas about humans and the natural world; and use drawing, writing, and verbal

description to communicate sights, sounds, and textures found in this landscape.⁸⁶

The methods chosen are designed to get the students actively involved in experiencing Chinese landscape, and in understanding the concepts that make small spaces look larger and interesting:

Imagine you are flying above the scene; everything appears small and distant below. Choose a spot to ‘land’ and describe the sights, sounds, and textures you might experience as you travel from this point to a nearby destination. Ask a partner to close his or her eyes and listen as you recount the journey orally or capture your experience by writing or drawing.⁸⁷

In addition, during the interactive narrating and painting process, questions are given to students so that acquire more detailed knowledge of the landscape layout. These questions lead into a deeper discussion of Chinese philosophy embodied in these landscape and architectural elements, and their impact on people’s behavior in the place, for instance:

In Chinese culture, the circle symbolizes the universe, and the square, which has sides facing the four cardinal directions, represents the earth. What do you notice about the way the

⁸⁶ Claire Moore, “Lesson Plan: The Astor Chinese Garden Court,” The Metropolitan Museum of Art, last modified in 2010. <http://www.metmuseum.org/learn/for-educators/lesson-plans-and-pre-visit-guides/the-chinese-garden-court>.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

garden entrance engages both of these shapes? What might this tell us about what lies inside?⁸⁸

Observe visitors engaging this space. What do you notice about the way they move, their path, speed, and demeanor? How does this compare to your experience moving through a grocery store or train station?⁸⁹

Special Event: the Peony Pavilion Performance in the Astor Court

In the November of 2012, a 16th-century kunqu opera masterpiece, “The Peony Pavilion”, in a new version developed and directed by celebrated composer Tan Dun with other China's most prominent dancers, was shown in the Met's Astor Court (Figure 52). The kunqu performance together with a gallery talk “A Conversation with Tan Dun: A New Peony Pavilion in an Old Context” were presented with the exhibition “Chinese Gardens: Pavilions, Studios, Retreats”, with the aim of animating the museum’s traditional gallery space in a new way.⁹⁰

In the gallery talk, Tan Dun discussed his vision for restaging the classic kunqu opera “the Peony Pavilion” with Maxwell Hearn, the Asian Art Curator in Met. They talked

⁸⁸ Claire Moore, “Lesson Plan: The Astor Chinese Garden Court,” The Metropolitan Museum of Art, last modified in 2010. <http://www.metmuseum.org/learn/for-educators/lesson-plans-and-pre-visit-guides/the-chinese-garden-court>.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ “Met Museum Presents The Peony Pavilion, Version by Tan Dun and Huang Doudou: Performed by Zhang Jun and the Shanghai Zhang Jun Art Center Company in The Astor Court,” Metropolitan Museum of Art. Last modified August 9, 2012. <http://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-museum/press-room/news/2012/peony-pavilion>.

about several things that were closely related to the garden. First, Tan got the inspiration of reinterpret the kunqu opera in a garden space when he was having tea in a garden outside of Shanghai, listening to the birds and insects. Second, the opera tells a love story that transcends time and space, which happened in the heroine, Du Liniang's family garden. Third, for the technical support, Tan brought the outdoor sounds of the garden to the Museum that he and his colleagues have recorded. Hundreds of hours of audio have created a sound installation for the audience, so they can hear the wind and the water, and the insects.⁹¹

The whole talk sounded like they were explaining the reason why they wanted to do such a show in the Astor Court. Yet, the conversation explained how the landscape of a Ming garden played the important role in Chinese literati's life, which is presented in Mike Hearn's words in another gallery talk which examined Chinese landscape:

The landscapes of China unlike those celebrate western landscapes that are vast but empty of people. In China, landscape is incomplete without the human presence. You can think about that, China has been occupied by mankind for millennium, and they have farmed the land, left their mark. In China, in a particular extraordinary way is that people leave their

⁹¹ "A Conversation with Tan Dun: A New 'Peony Pavilion' in an Old Context," The Metropolitan Museum of Art. <http://www.metmuseum.org/metmedia/video/concerts/conversation-with-tan-dun>. Composer Tan Dun and Maxwell K. Hearn, Douglas Dillon Curator in Charge of Asian Art, discuss Tan Dun's new version of Peony Pavilion which was staged in The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Astor Court. Inspired by Chinese gardens and previous versions of the Chinese opera, Tan Dun's restaged the classic kunqu opera by condensing it into four acts and presenting it within the confines of the Astor Court, a replica of a Chinese Garden. This program is presented in conjunction with the exhibition Chinese Garden: Pavilions, Studios, Retreats, on view August 18, 2012–January 6, 2013.

mark to build a pavilion, inscribe a poem directly on the cliff, so there is a whole poetic, architectural presence in the landscape. Men merge themselves into the nature.⁹²



Figure 52: The kunqu performance “The Peony Pavilion” in the Astor Court.

Source:

<http://www.newyorksocialdiary.com/node/1908891/print>

⁹² “Human Landscapes: Gardens in Chinese Art,” The Metropolitan Museum of Art. <http://www.metmuseum.org/metmedia/video/collections/asian/chinese-gardens>. This lecture by Maxwell K. Hearn, the Douglas Dillon Curator in Charge, Department of Asian Art, was presented in conjunction with the exhibition Chinese Gardens: Pavilions, Studios, Retreats, on view August 18, 2012–January 6, 2013.

4.4. Comparison

The Peabody Essex Museum and Metropolitan Museum create different kinds of outreach programs to interpret their respective Chinese architecture and artifacts, more specific knowledge and information to distinctive groups of audience. Some programs share great similarities, like the performance of musical instruments of the Silk Road Project in Yin Yu Tang House, and the kunqu opera show of “the Peony Pavilion” in the Astor Court. The Peabody Essex Museum and the Metropolitan Museum both treat architecture as more than just standing-still structures. They brought sounds, music and stories into those spaces which made them alive, giving people a more diversified experience.

At the same time, the two exhibits are very different. The Chinese architecture structures, have different functions in the two museums and the outreach programs also interpret them to the public in many different approaches. Although both museums’ two exhibits have designed guided tours for their audiences, their audiences differ. The majority of the docent-guided tours in the Yin Yu Tang House are student groups organized by schools. As Emily Sheinberg explained:

The school groups are from all over the place, and some of them even are from other parts of the United States. They come and visit Salem and they interested in heritage. A lot of the schools are from the north shore of the Boston, in the towns up here around Boston, and in New Hampshire, Maine. These school groups see the Yin Yu Tang House, as a place can provide them

something they couldn't see at somewhere else. In one school semester, a couple hundreds of school groups are coming to visit the Yin Yu Tang, in total number, between 17,000 to 22,000 students come.⁹³

By comparison, the guided tours in the Astor Court in Metropolitan Museum serve a more general audience. They are divided into different tours serving visitors' diverse interests, such as those interested in Chinese art or Asian art. Different from Yin Yu Tang's specific tours assigned to school groups, in the Met, decent-guided tours are not a "must-have" for school groups visiting the Chinese garden. On Mar 31, 2014, for example, four groups of students visited the Astor Court and Ming room space but only one group took the self-guided audio tour for reference, while other three went through just to view the garden court.

Since both exhibits are showing Chinese architecture, the outreach programs more or less talk about the design ideas and artisan skills embodied in these full scale structures. The interpretation for Yin Yu Tang House programs discusses more about the "inward" space design, the placement of the skywell in the center of the house and rooms surrounding it, and the family's wishes represented in the house's decoration with brick, stone and wood carvings. By comparison, the interpretation of the Astor Court places more focus on the understanding of Chinese philosophies, such as yin-

⁹³ Interview with Emily Sheinberg, the Student and Teacher Programs Manager in Peabody Essex Museum, conducted by author on April 3, 2014.

yang theory, characterized by the architecture and landscape design in the garden setting.

In addition, as Yin Yu Tang is a vernacular house that was occupied by a family in rural China for more than two hundred years, the property enjoyed a rich family history that reflects the Chinese turbulent history. The programs for interpreting the house make an effort to tell the audience the story of human activities through objects, possessions, and family decedents' oral narratives. The case for Astor Court and the Ming reception hall is totally different. First, the garden along with the room are a piece of reproduction work based on a Chinese garden. Second, the prototype of that Jiangnan Style Chinese garden, "the Master of the Nets Garden", as a designated Historical and Cultural Site, has been restored to a pure Chinese official-scholar's garden without many traces reflecting who lived there before. The interpretation for the Astor Court centers on the "human landscape" instead of "daily life".

4.5. Conclusion

With decent guided tours, gallery study for school students, and festival celebrations in the architecture exhibition space, these outreach programs for the two Chinese historic architecture exhibits share a lot of similarities in the forms of conducting outreach programs. Their contents and the information they are using to educate visitors are totally different. Yet, these outreach programs remove many of the cultural barriers around Chinese traditions and practices and go beyond the 'mysterious' and 'exotic' elements of Chinese culture without context or explanation.

CHAPTER 5. SUGGESTIONS FOR ON SITE AND GALLERY INTERPRETATION

5.0. Introduction

This chapter presents some feasible ways to improve the current interpretations of the two Chinese architecture exhibits. The first section discusses what a proper interpretation for Chinese historic architecture exhibit in American museums could be, considering the issues of interpreting art works, guiding visitors in architecture space and managing the conversation from different cultural perspectives.

Suggestions are made about the two exhibits onsite and gallery interpretation after reexamining the current limitations. In the final portion of this chapter, a comparison is made between the differences and the changes for the two exhibits. The conclusion indicates why these changes should be made.

5.1. What is An Appropriate Interpretation for Chinese Historic Architecture Exhibit?

As distinctive Chinese architecture exhibits, the interpretation for the general public⁹⁴ will point out that both the Yin Yu Tang House in Peabody Essex Museum and the Astor Court with Ming Room in Metropolitan Museum will not only represent or present for a general idea of “Chinese culture”, but also identify significance of their own typical architecture art, regional culture and human spirit.

⁹⁴ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*. “They were those who were in search of something they did not have, who lacked information, who were in need of instruction, and who were intended to act as receivers of knowledge, empty vessels to be filled. These visitors were represented as an undifferentiated mass, as ‘the general public’.”

With an emphasis on Chinese architecture, the exhibits help visitors appreciate the distinctive inspiration and craftsmanship of the work. The interpretation is supposed to give the visitors the idea that the architecture on display is typical of the region at that time.

Architecture is an art object, which means the interpretation should at least provide the information that is given for other art objects: the dates, material, provenance research, who is the artist, and how the museum acquired the object. At the same time it is different from other art works, such as paintings or sculptures, it enclose a space that visitors would stand inside, which means it requires some typical methods for its interpretation.

Interpretation for exhibit needs to be taken seriously, not simply as a way of ‘explaining’ art, but as a practice with significant political and social consequences. The local culture and people nurture architecture work. The interpreting process is to evoke a long-lasting memory for the history associated with the architecture structure in a new museum setting. This piece of memory should not be termed simply “Chinese culture”, as today large number of visitors have the ability to travel to China and experience “Chinese culture” on their own. Today’s museums also encounter large amount of Chinese visitations but it doesn't mean they all know the story of that specific Chinese architecture exhibit. Emily Sheinberg shared one interesting story with me during our interview,

We had some groups which came from China. When they came here they were presenting to us some things. When they went to Yin Yu Tang and the docents were expecting those students could have much to tell them about Yin Yu Tang. Surprisingly the students told us that they never see any house like this, they live in apartments and Ying Yu Tang is such an amazing thing to them. This was eye-opening for docents too.⁹⁵

So to serve visitors like these, the museum is expected to specify the exhibit significance through interpretation along with sharing mutual experience.

Basic principles should be adopted to guide the interpretation of these Chinese historic architecture exhibits. First, the information must be authentic and accurate. Narratives from the museum staff are always based on their knowledge and understanding. For the exhibits which touch “culturally” or “politically” sensitive issues, sometime there is a need to inform the exhibits’ audience the source of the interpretation. In addition, the amount of information should be carefully calculated. Visitors come to the museum to see the artwork itself; the interpretation should be the supplementary information to understand the art and not overwhelm the audience. Multiple options for acquiring knowledge should be provided. Today’s museum is

⁹⁵ Interview with Emily Sheinberg, the Student and Teacher Programs Manager in Peabody Essex Museum, conducted by author on April 3, 2014.

encouraged to give visitors the freedom to select what interpretation they want to learn and what they can develop by their own first.⁹⁶

5.2. Suggestions for On Site and Gallery Interpretation for Yin Yu Tang

On Site Interpretation

Interpretation for Yin Yu Tang is mainly divided into two parts: on-site interpretation provided by the audio or the docent, and the accompanying gallery that includes related Chinese art exhibition materials, principally objects and videos. From 2012 to 2014, several changes occurred. A new introductory video for the house has been filmed, and a new themed Chinese art exhibition was installed at the beginning of April of 2014. Some secondary information has been cut from the audio tour in the year of 2012, which didn't really affect the physical integrity of interpreting the house since there are still plenty of knowledge.⁹⁷

For individual travelers, the self-guided audio tour is the main source of information for them. By comparison, group tours make reservations and get a docent-guided tour, which offers the visitors a teaching-learning process in the house. Conversations are created between visitors and docents in the guided tour. Some visitors who have visited the house, comparing their experiences with both self-guided tour and docent-guided tour, comment they prefer a docent-guided since it is a more interactive way to learn about the house and would address their questions immediately.

⁹⁶ Interview with Ellen Avril, Asian Art Curator of Herbert Johnson Museum of Art in Cornell University, conducted by author on April 8, 2014.

⁹⁷ Interview with Tara Cederholm, the Vice President of Brookfield Arts Foundation, conducted by author on April 29, 2014.

For first-time visitors into the house, the self-guided tour is recommended since they could gain a broad background about the house and its history, but for returning visitors⁹⁸, they might have developed their specific understanding and interests, and a guided-tour will offer them a chance to exchange their thoughts among the group with docents. Also from my observation and the interview with Emily Sheinberg, we agree that the security guards on duty in the house always serve the visitors as docents, especially self-guided visitors to answer their questions. The guards hear and see the docent-guided tours hundreds of times so that they have their own understanding and love for the exhibit. Perhaps the museum should increase the training of the security guards about the house, its history and related Chinese culture, so that they can provide better service for self-guided visitors experience in the house.

Gallery Interpretation

Currently there are three spaces provide supporting interpretation of Yin Yu Tang House: the new Double Happiness exhibition and the adjacent Ground Level Chinese art gallery with furniture, furnishings and films about Yin Yu Tang; interpretive panels and a video on the Ground Level outside the Morse Auditorium (Figure 53) and other interpretive objects on the museum's Level 2 landing (Figure 54). Located at different spaces surrounding the Yin Yu Tang House, the three accompanying galleries look a little dispersed for visitors to gain a cohesive story for the house exhibit and might have some important information ignored by the visitors due to the

⁹⁸ The interviews conducted by author with the Museum staff and visitors showed that the Yin Yu Tang has a large number of returning visits, especially for the Salem City's citizens who have free entry into the Museum.

isolation of gallery locations from each other. Because the Double Happiness exhibition just got installed in Chinese gallery, there is no specific plan for the museum to adjust the arrangements for those interpretive galleries.⁹⁹



Figure 53: The current Museum gallery ground level floor plan.¹⁰⁰
Source: <http://www.pem.org/sites/mobile/floor1.php>.

:

⁹⁹ Interview with Juliette Fritsch, Chief of Education and Interpretation in Peabody Essex Museum, conducted by author on April 21, 2014.

¹⁰⁰ In the map of ground floor, space 1 has the interpretive panels and the video on the wall outside the Morse Auditorium; space 2 has the new “Double Happiness” exhibition and the adjacent ground level Chinese art gallery with furniture, furnishings and films about Yin Yu Tang.

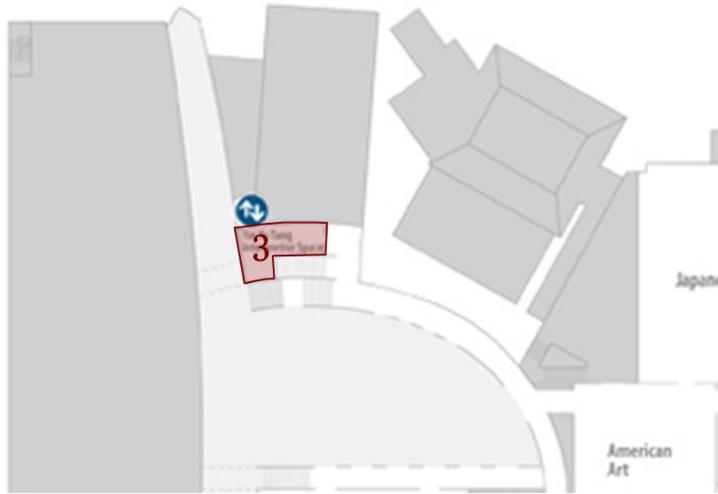


Figure 54: The current Museum gallery second level floor plan.¹⁰¹
 Source: <http://www.pem.org/sites/mobile/floor2.php>.

The information on the Ground Level outside Morse Auditorium provides an introduction of the Huizhou area and the Huang family genealogy, which is supposed to a “preparation information panel” before visitors get into the house itself. Unfortunately because these panels are hung on the side wall of the Yin Yu Tang House entrance, which actually is the elevator hall, they are not obvious to visitors so it is unclear what knowledge they could gain before entering into the historic house. Visitors always sit on the bench or stand in the atrium waiting for their tour to begin, instead of acquiring some basic knowledge first. The suggestion here is to reposition those interpretive panels, and put them on the wall at the glass opening entrance to the house, which makes them more apparent and approachable (Figure 55).

¹⁰¹ In the map of the second floor plan, space 3 is the second floor landing, which has interpretive objects, such as the mortise-and-tenon joints models, the construction tools.



Figure 55: Advice of relocating panels on the ground level.¹⁰²
 Source: <http://www.pem.org/sites/mobile/floor1.php>.

At the exit, visitors will enter into the new Double Happiness exhibition first. Drawing on the Museum's wide Chinese collection spanning 3,000 years, objects on display are not directly related to Yin Yu Tang House history, but celebrate Chinese artistic achievements in seasonal festivals and religious ceremonies in a broader context. Another small gallery and the auditorium linked with this exhibition have more Chinese furniture, books and films which have a more direct connection with Huizhou region. Due to the small scale of the gallery, it gives viewers an impression that it is "hiding" behind the themed Chinese exhibit. The small auditorium is quite invisible for visitors who are not familiar with the gallery space. The three short films playing there is a great supplementary source for the "Double Happiness" exhibit, explaining what "happiness" looks like in Chinese weddings and New Year celebrations.

¹⁰² On the map of the ground level, the interpretive panels and the video on the walls outside the Morse Auditorium could be moved to Wall A and B just in front of the front court entrance of Yin Yu Tang.

The Level 2 landing exhibits models for mortise-and-tenon joints of Chinese traditional architecture, and a large cabinet for construction tools. The advantage of this exhibit location is that, when visitors reach there, they have a wonderful view of Yin Yu Tang House's forecourt and roof line (Figure 56). It is a very enjoyable



Figure 56: The view into the house front court from the Museum's second floor landing.

Source: The picture was taken by author in December, 2013.

learning experience by viewing the interpretive objects and the house at the same time.¹⁰³ Since the exhibit is located

behind the museum's main staircase, however, it is also not noticed by most of other popular themed exhibitions on the

museum's second floor. In the future, the museum could provide another small

gallery that can be situated close to the

small auditorium on the ground level to tell the construction story for Yin Yu Tang House along with the film that describes the house's deconstruction and re-erection process. The drawings of the Yin Yu Tang should also be available on view.¹⁰⁴

Currently the gallery space dedicated to the Yin Yu Tang is limited, but these ideas could be incorporated in the Museum's 2019 expansion plan.

¹⁰³ Interview with Juliette Fritsch, Chief of Education and Interpretation in Peabody Essex Museum, conducted by author on April 21, 2014.

¹⁰⁴ From the interview with Juliette Fritsch, I got the information that Peabody Essex Museum has lost their copy of these documented drawings which were on display before. A solution is that to contact Professor Gong Kai at Southeast University in China, who directed students for Yin Yu Tang's survey drawings. It is important for the Museum to keep one copy of these drawings for future house conservation.

Hence, the route of the visitor could begin by gaining information from the introductory panels, the video and the museum staff outside the entrance of the Yin Yu Tang House. This would give visitors a basic ideal of where the Yin Yu Tang originated and who used to live in that house. Next, the visitor would walk into the house and take the audio-guide or docent tour. Then, while exiting the house, the visitors understanding of Chinese concepts for family value, ancestor worshipping and happiness celebration with the Double Happiness exhibition would be made obvious. Last the visitor would encounter the two interactive galleries dedicated to Chinese rural life and constructing and preserving the Yin Yu Tang.

In addition, it might be very helpful to inform Yin Yu Tang's visitors about the locations of these galleries through the brochure they get after purchasing tickets, and it could be mentioned by the docents.

Other Suggestions for Interpretation Improvements and Modifications

The Yin Yu Tang House characterizes superb Chinese vernacular craftsmanship, but as a single free standing house, it does not present the idea of a series of houses all sharing similar characteristics. Especially during raining season, a stretch of white walls and grey roof tiles provides a very poetic picture in the misty drizzle. The exhibit could do more to provide its audience an even more comprehensive vision for a better understanding the whole context of this village, rather than presenting a single architecture structure without its original geological setting. Nancy Berliner has talked a lot about these in her book, and the online interactive animation in the gallery

has presented the idea to some extent. Due to limited examination of the book and online interactive animation, however, some initiative could be taken to show the information in a more popular form of media.

Another modification that would be helpful could be more information about the winter season. Due to harsh winter season in New England, the forecourt and the kitchen are closed for visiting. This makes the interpretation of these two spaces unavailable. The narratives for the forecourt discuss the house's appearance, structure, decorative tiles, the people's activities in this space and how the fengshui theory guided the locating Yin Yu Tang House. The audio part for the kitchen mainly discusses Chinese dietary habits, cooking utensils and the women's jobs for cooking. For this part, my opinion is during winter season, the museum staff at the Yin Yu Tang's information desk could point out the numbers in audio for these two special spaces to inform visitors that even though they won't get the chance visit them, the information is still available.

5.3. Suggestions for On Site Interpretation for the Astor Court

Different from Yin Yu Tang House, the Astor Court aims to display a Chinese scholar's garden space for visitors relaxing in the Museum, appreciating garden art design. Supposed to be an open space for "fun" and showing a genuine Chinese garden environment, interpretation could be overwhelming if it had excessive text panels and labels. This might be "interference" for people to experience the "authenticity" of the garden. The Museum's goal for this space is to make visitors

commit themselves in the Chinese garden both physically and mentally, instead of studying objects in a museum gallery. Different from Chinese gardens in other open spaces in the United States, which function like botanic gardens with beautiful scenery, the Astor Court in Metropolitan Museum has the goal of educating its audience as an authentic Chinese garden, and it is a supplementary for accompanying Chinese gallery to interpret other Chinese and Asian art objects. It still needs accurate, comprehensive and interactive interpretation for its general audience.

The goal for the interpretation of the scholar's garden and its accompanying reception hall is not simply introducing the design technique of a Chinese garden. Quite a few of Metropolitan Museum's visitors have been to China, and many have visited the imperial gardens in Beijing. For these visitors, some garden design elements are familiar, similar to what they know. The goal of interpretation for them would be to emphasize the differences between imperial and private scholars' gardens, and to experience a Ming dynasty scholar-official's life. For visitors who are not familiar with the Chinese garden, an artificial space with a great design, combining natural elements.

On Site Interpretation for the Astor Court

Currently, in the garden space the interpretive information is mostly located close to the moongate entrance. Two metal panels are mounted on the wall and two text labels are placed at the corridor. Due to the fact that the garden and Ming room are directly connecting to adjacent galleries, not all visitors enter the space through the moongate.

Many people find the garden court by accident while they are touring the Chinese galleries. The number of visitors is unpredictable. In addition, some visitors believe that they should experience the space first without reading labels. After forming their own ideas, they might read the labels to compare their understanding with the information that the Museum provides.¹⁰⁵ All of this leads



Figure 57: The wall of the moon gate entry.
Source: <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/78870?=&imgNo=1&tabName=related-objects>

to a comparatively low use

of the labels both in the corridor and the Ming room. To increase the educational influences for the Garden Court, the labels should be reedited and arranged in better locations. In addition, the exhibit could provide more interactive methods for visitors to choose how much information they want to acquire, perhaps with a touch screen. The moon gate, as the main entry into the Garden Court, is not very obvious for visitors because of the grey circular shape and low lighting in the Museum. Since there are large blank walls next to the entrance opening, perhaps a Chinese traditional poem could be painted on the wall in both Chinese characters and English text (Figure 57). The content of the poem could be directly related to the Astor Court's prototype, the Garden of the Master of Nets, describing some highlighted scenery in the Ming garden. Such a poem first would attract people's attention to the moon gate entrance

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Professor Noelle King and her two students majored in Asian Art Studies, conducted by author on March 30, 2014.

and serve as an introductory panel. A poem would immediately create the literal atmosphere for such a scholar-official's living space. The original Chinese Jiangnan gardens, visitors can often see poems inscribed in garden architecture space. A possible choice could be the poem, *The Banana Tree Railing*, written by Wen Zhengming, a leading Ming dynasty scholar, representing views from another Jiangnan Garden¹⁰⁶:

The new banana is more than ten feet tall; 新蕉十尺强,
After rain it is clean as though washed. 得雨净如沐。
It does not dislike the high white wall, 不嫌粉堵高,
It elegantly matches the curved red balustrade. 雅称朱栏曲。
Cool autumn sounds come to my pillow, 秋声入枕凉;
Green morning colors are seen through the windows. 晓色分窗绿。
Let no one take the heedless shears, 莫教轻剪取;
Leave it until its shade reaches my house. 留待阴连屋。

Along the west wall, the fishing pool, the half pavilion and one group of rocks and plantings comprise the most popular portion of the garden. Currently, all of the text panels are in the corridor, close to the garden court's east wall. While children spend time watching the gold fish, their parents or grandparents wish they could get some knowledge of the garden scenery design.¹⁰⁷ It could install a text label to discuss the

¹⁰⁶ Murck, Alfreda., and Wen Fong. *A Chinese Garden Court: The Astor Court at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980, 24.

¹⁰⁷ Interviews with visitors, conducted by author in March, 2014.

rockery and water design skill “Die Shi Li Shui”¹⁰⁸ in between the pond and the pavilion (Figure 58). For the “rockery design”, the text needs to guide its audience to “read” the grouped rock design around the garden court, like the peaks at the northwest corner of the court, the freestanding scholar rock in the pavilion, the tall sleek rock called "bamboo shoot" along the zigzag walkway, and the rough rock steps connecting the court and architecture shelter. In this way, the label could direct the visitors provide the visitors with a better understand the rockery design and compare various techniques used for rock lay-out.



Figure 58: The warning sign close to the pond, which is a good location to install the text label for “Die Shi Li Shui”.
Source: The picture was taken by author in April, 2014.

In England and American people plant a garden, while a Chinese garden is built.¹⁰⁹

The plantings are also “built”, by being chosen to be integrated with the garden

¹⁰⁸ Die Shi Li Shui 叠石理水 in Chinese for the garden design technique.

¹⁰⁹ Keswick, Maggie., and Charles Jencks. *The Chinese Garden: History, Art & Architecture*. New York: Rizzoli, 1978, 116.

architecture. Every plant grown in the scholar's garden has a meaning related to the garden owner's aesthetics and life ambition. For example, bamboo that bends in the wind but never breaks is a Confucian symbol of the true gentleman. Most visitors know that bamboo stands for Chinese culture but an explanatory sentence in label can tell them why the Chinese praise bamboo so much in their tradition. In this garden, a banana palm stands against the whitewashed wall among the rockery peaks. Planted in gardens all over China, the banana palm tree is not only famous for the melancholy sound of rain dropping on its leaves, but also known as the tree of scholarly self-improvement.¹¹⁰

A label that describes the design of the Cold Spring Pavilion and the planting of the banana tree could replace the current two text labels at the corridor because while visitors stroll down the walkway, they have a wonderful view facing the pavilion and landscape. Other garden architecture design can also be discussed in-depth here. For example, the moongate entrance illustrates the yinyang theory and the lattice window and the plants behind these openings create the illusion of space beyond space. If these ideas were highlighted in a label, the visitors would better understand that the garden for ancient Chinese scholars is more than just a place for appreciating the color, taste and sounds from nature. It is also a space for spiritual cultivation and thought.

¹¹⁰ Keswick, Maggie., and Charles Jencks. *The Chinese Garden: History, Art & Architecture*. New York: Rizzoli, 1978, 180.

On Site Interpretation for the Ming Room

The Ming Room has less visitors. The large text labels by the window are ignored by most visitors, even though they provide considerable information about Chinese wood construction. Because Chinese traditional architecture design and furniture making might be complicated to many people, the Museum might install an interactive touch-screen monitor to illustrate what has been discussed on the large text panel.¹¹¹ An animation could be provided on the screen to dismantle and explain the details of the large and complex architecture structure. The screen can also create a 3D space to mimic the room and locate every piece of furniture with more thorough explanation for its material and function.

Other Suggestions for Interpretation Improvements and Modifications

Apart from the information about the reception hall, the tablet could also display more background about Chinese Jiangnan garden design. A video could present where the Astor Garden's prototype is located, what the regional culture is like there and the daily activities. Visitors frequently use their phones or cameras taking panorama in the Garden Court. A film recording the full view of an original Chinese garden would provide them with more knowledge of Chinese garden art. In addition, just it is hard for its visitors to imagine a picture of vernacular houses like Yin Yu Tang stretching out on the mountains in a beautiful raining day, the garden should change through the

¹¹¹ The installation of tablets can refer to those which were installed in the museum's period rooms in American wing a few years ago. Amelia Peck, "New Touch-Screen Labels for the American Wing Period Rooms," the Metropolitan Museum of Art, last modified on June 22, 2010. <http://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-museum/now-at-the-met/features/2010/new-touchscreen-labels-for-the-american-wing-period-rooms>

seasons. A short video could compensate for the static nature of the exhibit (Figure 59).



Figure 59: The location of the text label in the Ming Room, which is an ideal place for a tablet.
Source: The picture was taken by author

5.4. Comparison and Conclusion

The two Chinese architecture exhibits will continue to change. The exhibit of Yin Yu Tang and its associated galleries are going through a lot of changes, so that the biggest problem is that the interpretation is dispersed all over the Museum. Hence, some visitors, especially those who are self-guided miss information. Reorganizing the visiting route and adding a little more guidance from the museum staff will offer exhibit visitors a chance to learn more about this special house. The docent I interviewed mentioned that she always felt that what people learned from the guided tour on-site is too limited. “I always tell them please go home and check the on-line website for Yin Yu Tang, you will learn more about the house there.”¹¹²

¹¹² Interview with one of the Museum docents, conducted by author on April 4, 2014.

The suggest for redesigning the interpretation for the Astor Court and Ming Room aims to enrich the information associate with Chinese Jiangnan private garden art and official-scholar's life, without visitors experiencing the genuine garden space. At the same time, more diversified and interactive methods for interpreting the space are proposed. Traditional paper labels could point out the scenery of the garden court to visitors, but couldn't possibly accommodate the many stories that the garden has to tell. The unique history and architectural relevance, the interesting people associations, and the information about each object within the room deserve more attention. Installing a touch-screen for the exhibit could provide more information, and some videos could make everything easily accessible for audience.

Interpretation is not just a teaching process, but creating a conversation between museum professionals and visitors using the exhibits. To start such a dialogue, museums need to explore as much as they can about the exhibitions and present their thoughts in an objective perspective, to stimulate visitors' own active thinking towards exhibitions. In this way, visitors can bring their personal knowledge, attitudes and perceptions.

CHAPTER 6. CREATING NEW OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

6.0. Introduction

This chapter outlines suggestions for the outreach programs of the two Chinese architecture exhibitions. The discussion begins by outlining the existing outreach programs and continues to describe how they should serve local communities. In the following sections, detailed improvements of current lesson plans, designs for museums' community events and ideas for new related exhibitions are suggested. The last section of this chapter compares similarities and differences of the two exhibits' outreach programs and explains why the suggestions are made.

6.1. Museum's Outreach Programs

Today's museums are being expected not only to preserve the material culture of vanishing communities, but also to preserve those communities themselves.

Museums are seen as centers that can provide a focus for a sense of community that is being threatened by population movement, social deprivation or property development.¹¹³ Exhibitions in museums, like people, have their own individual personalities, depending on their objects, the on-site interpretation, gallery design, and their associated outreach programs. Unlike individuals, however, museums can choose to change the kind of personality for their exhibitions by rationally and systematically evolving their interpretation contents, especially their outreach

¹¹³ Lord, Barry, Gail Dexter Lord, and Lindsay Martin. *Manual of Museum Planning: Sustainable Space, Facilities, and Operations*. Lanham, Md: AltaMira Press, 2012. 21-24.

programs, which closely connect the museums and their impacting communities and help shape the exhibitions' personalities. For Chinese historic architecture exhibitions, the on-site interpretation translates the culture to the audiences who are not familiar with them. Further on, the outreach programs reproduce the 'color' of the culture and render its significant meanings. Outreach programs explain where the culture is created and why it is interesting. Different from on-site interpretation serving the general visitors to the exhibits, outreach programs always target on specific groups by their diversified program contents, such as school programs for different age groups of school kids or annual events for local neighborhoods. Outreach programs in art museums link the art to the wider world and its communities.

Outreach programs for Chinese historic architecture exhibits have two goals. First, the programs should generate in-depth discussion with particular audiences about the distinctive culture represented by the historic Chinese architecture. Second, creativity and innovation should be developed through exploration with technology, materials and ideas. The outreach programs should bring together inspiring objects from the exhibits and celebrating creative expression through human ingenuity.¹¹⁴

For student programs, outreach programs will support classroom instruction and motivate student learning by providing opportunities to discover and explore unique works of art and culture from the Chinese architecture exhibits. Interactive guided tours create meaningful connections across time and space to students' own lives, and

¹¹⁴ Lord, Barry, Gail Dexter Lord, and Lindsay Martin. *Manual of Museum Planning: Sustainable Space, Facilities, and Operations*. Lanham, Md: AltaMira Press, 2012. 55–60.

promote critical and creative thinking through gallery-based lessons that can align with schools' curriculum requirements. For the teacher's program, learning resources should include curriculum guides, videos and other resources that are specifically related to a museum exhibit and be available to provide classroom connections and enhance and complement the school visit. For community outreach, the museums' role in both the local community and the global community at large continues to transform people's lives by broadening their perspectives, attitudes and knowledge of themselves and the wider world. The outreach programs celebrate the outstanding artistic and cultural creativity of their community members.¹¹⁵

6.2. Suggestions for Yin Yu Tang's Outreach Programs

The Peabody Essex Museum has developed a series of outreach programs which include serving school kids and adults in the local communities, covering various topics ranging from the Yin Yu Tang House itself to broader Chinese culture.

However, as the exhibit has a rich history with documented materials, a lot of more subjects could be developed into outreach programs to educate school students and the local communities.

Lesson Plans

In lesson plans, two discussions, "the Huang family's merchants" and "Women's lives in the Chinese house" are recommended to be added onto the current lesson plan for middle and high school students. Currently as the lesson plans design for middle and

¹¹⁵ Lord, Barry, Gail Dexter Lord, and Lindsay Martin. *Manual of Museum Planning: Sustainable Space, Facilities, and Operations*. Lanham, Md: AltaMira Press, 2012. 21-24

high school students emphasize on the Chinese New Year celebration and Culture Revolution's impact on modern China, but more discussions on people's lives associated with the Yin Yu Tang House could provide a chance for students to learn Chinese culture more comprehensively.

a. The Merchant Life: Bringing into the Home the Outside World

The objectives of incorporating “The Merchant Life: Bringing into the Home the Outside World” into the lesson plan are twofold. First, the Huizhou region and the Huang family have a proud history of producing merchants doing trade all over China and bringing back wealth that is seen in the Yin Yu Tang House. Second, the city of Salem is also famous for its trade around the world. This section of the lesson plan will let students compare the trading history of the two very distinguished cultures. Through a guided tour and investigation of the Yin Yu Tang's trading history students could explore the harsh life of a merchant, and learn how people from the comparatively isolated Huizhou region connected to the world.

The learning process can be taken in several steps. The materials include the house's objects and the family members' letters associated with the Yin Yu Tang. The school students will take a guided tour in Yin Yu Tang House that emphasizes the history of the merchant family. At that time, the docent needs to point out several important objects in the house to illustrate the direct impact of the trading businessmen brought to the family. These include the candle box, showing the availability of North American and European products in the trading ports of Shanghai and Hong Kong in

the late 19th century¹¹⁶; the hashed pork label, attached to the wall for decorative qualities, revealing that the modern-style canned pork, considered a luxury, was brought home from Shanghai as gifts for their family members by the travelling merchants¹¹⁷; the wallpaper, which fully covers the second-floor bedroom of Huang Zhenzhi and Wang Yaozhen, was imported to China from England or Germany, and created a very fashionable bridal room¹¹⁸; and the numerous photographs taken of the Huang family members¹¹⁹, which indicate the accessibility of photography to Huang Cun in early twentieth century. These images tell the story that the merchant members of the family have carried with them as reminders of their loved ones on their journeys away from home. At this point in the tour, the docent can provide students some questions, such as “Can you find some objects with western style patterns or are there any objects with English words?” and let the students discover the objects by themselves and give their own estimation of why these objects would appear in a remote village of China.

In addition, letters from the Huang family written by or to those travelling merchants can be printed out and given to students. The docent can work with school teachers to ask students to imagine the life as a young merchant travelling far away from his family to unfamiliar regions, and let them discuss.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Berliner, Nancy. *Yin Yu Tang: The Architecture and Daily Life of a Chinese House*. Boston: Tuttle Pub., 2003. 65.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 28, 59, 65, 72, 83, 84, 95.

¹²⁰ Letters written by Huang Zhenxi, one young Huang family's merchant are available from Nancy Berliner's book, “Yin Yu Tang: the Architecture and Daily Life of a Chinese House”.

The Museum also offers another guided tour to two merchants' houses: the Yin Yu Tang House and the Gardner-Pingree House. This can also be joined to a lesson plan. Even though this tour has been scheduled in the Museum's plan for visiting school groups, more details for a cross-cultural look at design, furnishings and family life of these two houses should be highlighted for students to compare the trading activities, daily lives, values and aesthetics in two cultures connected by trade.

b. Women's lives in the Chinese House

Even though in Huizhou the male ancestral line and the living men are considered the foundation and the roots of the family, a hometown house was primarily occupied by the women and the children. These women, who came as strangers to the house and to one another, were responsible for the spirits of the ancestors of their husbands. They were also responsible for giving birth to and raising the next male generation of their husbands' family. While those merchant males' stories are broadly promoted today, the woman's life in such a family cannot be neglected. From their personal experience, students could take the look at how a female was raised in old China, the time was highly influenced by tradition Confusion ideology a hierarchal practices, and what the changes have been taken regarding women's status in past two hundred years.

Two major issues will be discussed in this session of lesson plan. This first is the arranged marriage. After the guided tour in the house, students are introduced to what the process of an arranged marriage will be and what the wedding looks like. For this

part, a piece of narratives from Huang Cui'e describing her own wedding¹²¹ and a wedding poem¹²² will be introduced. Students will be guided not only to pay attention to the wedding process, but also to the narrator's own emotions. After listening to the story of what happened in the early 1900s, a documentary filmed in 1990s of another wedding of Huizhou region will also be made available to the students.¹²³ Following all these, the students are guided through discussion to comparing the two weddings with other weddings they attended here in the United States or other countries. The questions that can be raised include: What has changed in Chinese marriage and weddings? And what hasn't changed? What the differences you see in your parents' marriage with the Chinese arranged marriage? ¹²⁴

The other discussion will be focused on the tradition of the bounding feet. The docent shows the students several pictures or objects while touring the house, including shoes for both bound feet and unbound feet. When giving the description of female's housework in Huizhou, the docent can ask students to imagine how these women work with their bound feet.¹²⁵ Apart from that, another idea, "liberated feet"¹²⁶ is also

¹²¹ Berliner, Nancy. *Yin Yu Tang: The Architecture and Daily Life of a Chinese House*. Boston: Tuttle Pub., 2003. 23.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 78.

¹²³ "Yin Yu Tang: a Chinese Home", the documentary which has three short films describe age-old traditions and contemporary lifestyles in the villages of the Huizhou region of China's Anhui province. The third film "Guomen" describes traditional rituals experienced by a bride and her family as they prepare for her wedding, and elders recall their own nuptials in 1990s.

¹²⁴ Other available material will include the book "China: its State and Prospects" written by Walter Henry Medhurst talking "the arrival home of a Huizhou tea merchant after two years of traveling".

¹²⁵ Berliner, Nancy. *Yin Yu Tang: The Architecture and Daily Life of a Chinese House*. Boston: Tuttle Pub., 2003. 88. There is a paragraph which describes a young woman's job in Huangcun: "Her work burden was very heavy. Every day there were two or three tables of people who were eating. Every day she would make the long walk to the well, three or four times a day, to carry buckets of water. She was a good cook and also very clean and hygienic, and was praised by the teachers. In the winter, they

recommended. In the “Belongings” section for the Yin Yu Tang’s online animation, there is one piece of detailed information which introduces a pair of wedding shoes for unbound feet.¹²⁷ From this information, a history from bound feet to unbound feet gives the students the understanding how women’s life and social status changed through years in China.

Hence, “The Merchant Life: Bringing into the Home the Outside World” and “Women’s Lives in the Chinese House” separately discusses the men and women’s life in the Huizhou region. Together they depict a more comprehensive story of the activities in the Yin Yu Tang House. In this way the lesson plan not only guides the students to learn the facts of the house, it also leads students to study the changes of the house and its people through the history.

Special Event for Local Communities: Celebrating the Mid-Autumn Festival

The Chinese celebration “Double 7” that was held in the 2013 summer in the Museum was a big success. Also, at the beginning of every Chinese lunar year, the Museum holds big celebrations for Spring Festival. Through Chinese lunar year, however,

ate primarily vegetables, radish, doufu, salted vegetables. Sometimes they had salted vegetables with pork. And she made eggs for the teachers.”

¹²⁶ Berliner, Nancy. *Yin Yu Tang: The Architecture and Daily Life of a Chinese House*. Boston: Tuttle Pub., 2003. 88. “Liberated feet” is introduced, “Liberated feet -- women’s feet that had been bound at childhood but were then unbound and released to spring back for a more comfortable walking pattern -- were becoming more popular in the forties and fifties. The more liberal parents of young girls were deciding not to bind their daughters’ feet, and middle-aged women were unwrapping the cotton ties around their feet and allowing their heels to touch the inner soles of their shoes.”

¹²⁷ A picture of the wedding shoes and the narrative of bounded feet history is available in the section on “Belongings” in the Yin Yu Tang’s online animation. Along with those, quotations from Huang Xianying, Huang family daughter of the 34th generation tell the story of her generation’s unbounded feet.

there are other festivals. A celebration of “Mid-Autumn Festival” is recommended to develop into a yearly event for local communities, by watching performances related to the idea of celebrating the importance of the family reunion.

The Mid-Autumn Festival is a harvest festival celebrated widely by Chinese people. The festival is held on the 15th day of the eighth month in the Chinese lunar calendar, during a full moon, which is in September or early October in the Gregorian calendar. Like Thanksgiving Day, it celebrates harmonious family gathering and a successful harvest. For families that reside in the houses like the Yin Yu Tang in Huizhou, the Mid-Autumn Festival is an important event like the Chinese New Year. A series of activities occur on that day, including a family reunion dinner, mooncake tasting with moon worshipping, and a grass dragon dance. Bringing such a celebration to the Museum will give local people an opportunity to learn and enjoy the culture rooted in Huizhou region with families and friends. It will be both educational and entertaining.

This one night event could start around 5pm with the opening of grass dragon dance. The “dragon” is supposed to be made from straw and the dancing movements and postures will represent the wishes for a successful family gathering and harvest.¹²⁸ The next event will be the story telling for the origin of moon worship during this day,

¹²⁸ “The Mid-Autumn festival custom in Anhui Province,” <http://www.ahradio.com.cn/am936/system/2012/09/26/002422407.shtml>, last edited in September, 2012.

the romantic legend Chang'e Flying to the Moon.¹²⁹ After this, the letters from the Huang family of Yin Yu Tang, which will be presented in the stage to the audience, will tell the stories of the travelling merchants who could make a visit back home during the festival season. Those letters showed those travelling merchants' nostalgia towards their hometown.¹³⁰ Like the "Double 7" celebration, "The Mid-Autumn Festival" also targets families from local communities. Local musicians also will be invited to give performances to celebrate the beautiful harvest season. During the event, mooncakes will be offered as snacks. If possible, the Museum dining could support a "mooncake-making" section for the event, like the dining staff could teach visitors how to make some mooncakes.

6.3. Suggestions for the Astor Court's Outreach Programs

Located between the Chinese galleries at the Metropolitan Museum, the Astor Court along and the Ming Room function as a relaxing garden space for the museum exhibitions. The "human landscape" is what the Museum staff wants visitors to experience here, through either an ordinary museum visit or by attending special

¹²⁹ Yang, Lihui and Deming, An. *Handbook of Chinese mythology*. Santa Barbara, Calif. [u.a.]: ABC-CLIO, 2005. 89–90. One version of the legend Chang'e Flying to the Moon is described in the book: "In the ancient past, there was a hero named Yi who was excellent at shooting. His wife was Chang'e. One year, the ten suns rose in the sky together, causing great disaster to people. Yi shot down nine of the suns and left only one to provide light. An immortal admired Yi and sent him the elixir of immortality. Yi did not want to leave Chang'e and be immortal without her, so he let Chang'e keep the elixir. But Feng Meng, one of his apprentices, knew this secret. So, on the fifteenth of August in the lunar calendar, when Yi went hunting, Feng Meng broke into Yi's house and forced Chang'e to give the elixir to him. Chang'e refused to do so. Instead, she swallowed it and flew into the sky. Since she loved her husband very much and hoped to live nearby, she chose the moon for her residence. When Yi came back and learned what had happened, he felt so sad that he displayed the fruits and cakes Chang'e liked in the yard and gave sacrifices to his wife. People soon learned about these activities, and since they also were sympathetic to Chang'e they participated in these sacrifices with Yi."

¹³⁰ Available materials include a letter on page 73 of the book "Yin Yu Tang: the Architecture and Daily Life of a Chinese House", written by Huang Zizhi's brother to Huang Zizhi in 1912. Also in the book on page 95, there is another letter written by Huang Zhenxin to his mother in 1932.

events held in Chinese art galleries. However, the garden landscape is a product of the joint efforts of nature and human artifice. The Garden Court was closely associated with literati's life in history and this should be presented in the outreach programs to bring the humanistic environment to the nature. By providing more diversified activities the Garden Court will have its own attractions and significance to its visitors, hopefully causing them to return.

Special Event: Chinese Poetry Reciting

Private gardens in China have a rich and unique connection with the arts of gardening, painting, poetry, and calligraphy. A one-time event of poetry reciting is recommended for the Astor Court, targeting the Museum's adult audiences. During interviews with visitors in the Garden Court many people expressed their interest in knowing more about the activities in the garden. Such an event could provide visitors with an authentic Chinese experience. In addition, the poetry reciting in the garden will bring more vitality to the tranquil landscape. As the Garden Court is located in the closed museum space, it could hardly show the landscape changing with seasons and climate. The change is presented in numerous traditional Chinese poems, however, and these could provide visitors the vision to appreciate the beauty of garden landscapes.

The poetry reading in English will be led by Chinese art specialists, but visitors could also be encouraged to participate in the reading. Also in Chinese tradition, poems can

be chanted. The Museum staff is encouraged to search for the chanting skills for some poems, which could bring a new experience for its visitors.

The poems which incorporate landscape as a spiritual force are highly recommended, such as the poems from two fifth century great Chinese poets Xie Lingyun and Tao Yuanming, who both made gardens themselves, and wrote about them in their work.¹³¹ Also Wang Wei, a poet, musician and an influential painter during the Tang dynasty providedr great poems. In the reciting poem event, life stories of these poets, who were gardeners themselves could be introduced along with some relevant paintings. All the poems require accurate translation. In addition, poems from western poets depicting the nature could be introduced to the event for audiences to experience the spirits from different culture. In general, this event aims to develop people's poetic imagination in an authentic garden landscape setting. More than reciting and chanting poems, a calligraphy demonstration can also be introduced as one part of the event. While visitors enjoy reciting poems which will be presented in English, the demonstration of hand writing in Chinese will provide visual enjoyment.

Gallery Exhibition: Zhang Daqian's Paintings and The Master of Nets Garden

Functioning as one part of the Chinese art gallery, the Astor Court always helps to interpret the themed exhibition in gallery space. A gallery exhibition “Zhang Daqian's paintings and the Master of Nets Garden” is the center of the discussion below.

¹³¹ Keswick, Maggie, and Charles Jencks. *The Chinese Garden: History, Art & Architecture*. New York: Rizzoli, 1978. 79-80.

In 1930s, Zhang Daqian (May 10, 1899 – April 2, 1983), one of the best-known and most prodigious Chinese artists of the twentieth century, moved to Late Spring Studio (Dian Chun Yi) in the Master of the Nets Garden, the prototype of the Astor Court. Zhang Daqian(张大千) and his brother Zhang Shanz(张善孖), who is also one great traditionalist painter set up the art studio, produced art works and held art exhibitions there.¹³²

This themed exhibition in Chinese Art gallery will exhibit Zhang Brothers' paintings, of which the Metropolitan Museum of Art has a great collection. The holdings include from the small scale album leaf of traditional Chinese painting to the large hanging scroll of modern painting, spanning from 1920s to the 1960s. In addition, the Late Spring Studio in Master of the Nets Garden in Suzhou has been preserved into the period when Zhang Brothers stayed there. Many photos which documented Zhang Brothers' activities are available, which can be also produced for the exhibition in the Metropolitan Museum. One gallery talk could be developed to examine Zhang Brothers' ink art paintings, their life association with the Master of the Nets Garden and the development of Chinese paintings in early 20th century. Other lectures could discuss the lives and works of contemporary artists.

¹³² Li, Yongqiao. *Zhang Daqian Nian Pu*. Chengdu: Sichuan sheng she hui ke xue yuan chu ban she, 1987.

These ideas aim to bring the Astor Court and adjoining Ming Reception Room to life with more activities. From this perspective, the Garden Court is more than just a relaxing garden space with oriental style; it is more like a house museum which documents people's lives and help visitors create the sense of history. The Astor Court together with objects on exhibit tell the visitors a complete and convincing story of the great Chinese artist.

6.4. The Comparison and Conclusion

Currently, the majority of the Yin Yu Tang's outreach programs are dedicated to school groups, which combine the Museum's Chinese objects with the historic Chinese house to educate the young generation in the United States about Chinese art and culture. The programs directly related to the Yin Yu Tang for adults are limited. Even when the museum hosts a celebration of Chinese New Year every year, it does not have a direct connection to the house structure itself to educate local communities. The advice for this exhibit's school programs is to discover more aspects of Chinese culture to expand students' understanding towards Chinese society. At the same time, events and celebrations of Chinese traditions with the house structure settings will reach the local communities providing the Museum's adult with the opportunity to experience more of the beauty and richness from the oriental culture.

Different from the Yin Yu Tang House's outreach programs, which use the house's own belongings to educate visitors, the Astor Court and Ming reception hall need

better coordination with accompanying Chinese gallery exhibits and other performances to develop outreach programs for people to learn the art and history. Creating connections with other art presentation methods, like poem reciting, calligraphy, and themed exhibition's gallery lectures are important to reach out to the general public.

Overall, the outreach programs of the two Chinese architecture exhibits should have educational information, artistic value and appropriate entertainment for their audiences.

CONCLUSION

As the two case studies, the Yin Yu Tang House in Peabody Essex Museum and the Astor Court in Metropolitan Museum, demonstrate that each historic Chinese architecture exhibit has its significant architecture value. Each museum has developed interpretation techniques and public outreach programs that appear to be complementary for other museum's Chinese art exhibits. Upon closer inspection, however, there are ample opportunities for improvements.

When talking about traditional Chinese culture, people will often picture the Forbidden City, the Great Wall or even a Chinese dragon, which are all related to the imperial lives in feudal dynasties. The common goal of the two exhibits is to broaden those pictures by presenting the great diversity of Chinese culture. The Yin Yu Tang House, which makes use of its rich history and architecture exhibits through on-site and gallery interpretation along with the museum's Far East trading objects, invites visitors to discover the connections that link the traditions, connections that always influence art and culture and that now characterize people's lives in a global community. The Astor Court Garden with Ming reception hall, through its pure and authentic landscape display, together with Chinese art objects of highest quality in its adjoining galleries, provide visitors with a chance to develop the spiritual enjoyment, away from the noisy external world. The joint efforts of historic preservation, museum interpretation and education, and the cross-culture communication make them happen.

To improve current interpretation of the two exhibits, more interactive techniques and programs should be developed to create the communication among the visitors, the visitors and the exhibits, and the visitors with the museums. These goals will help visitors create their own experience while viewing the exhibits. Visitors will feel that they are travelling to a specific place in China during a specific period. They are actually talking to people there, asking questions and getting them solved. The exhibits are designed to create a piece of un-removable memory.

Because of restrictions of time and resources, only two Chinese architecture exhibitions in the museums of the United States are examined in this thesis. In other museums of the United States, there are other architecture structures on display, from miniature models of palaces to full size furnished study room with Chinese furniture. They are all educating museum visitors about the art and history of traditional Chinese architecture through various interpretation methods.

Another topic that deserves further investigation is background of the visitors to these two Chinese architecture exhibits. Further research could reveal more information about the visitors' preference of interpretation methods and preferred topics. Hence, the advice of outreach programs for the exhibits could be more specific for targeted audience, and more details could be discussed to determine what works best.

The museums' role in these cases was to bridge gaps in knowledge and guide visitors so that they can appreciate the beauty of Chinese architecture art and the wisdom of

Chinese people. In today's global world, it provides a powerful and effective method for cross-culture communication, which links the West to the East, and the past to the present. Although the architecture seems stand still in the museum, the information it carries is travelling around the world through the history.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Berliner, Nancy. *Yin Yu Tang: The Architecture and Daily Life of a Chinese House*.

Boston: Tuttle Pub., 2003.

Chen, Zhi, and Cheng Ji. *Yuan Ye Zhu Shi*. 园冶注释 Beijing: Zhongguo Jian Zhu

Gong Ye Chu Ban She, 1981.

Donnelly, Jessica Foy. *Interpreting Historic House Museums*. Walnut Creek, CA:

AltaMira Press, 2002.

Golding, Vivien., and Wayne Modest. *Museums and Communities: Curators,*

Collections and Collaboration. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

Hammer, Elizabeth, Felicia Blum, and Maxwell K. Hearn. *Nature within walls: the*

Chinese garden court at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. New York:

Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003.

Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean. *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*. London:

Routledge, 2000.

John G. Waite Associates, Architects. *Yin Yu Tang: Preserving Chinese Vernacular*

Architecture. Albany, N.Y.: John G. Waite Associates, Architects, 2003.

- Keswick, Maggie, and Charles Jencks. *The Chinese Garden: History, Art & Architecture*. New York: Rizzoli, 1978.
- Knapp, Ronald G. *Chinese Landscapes: The Village As Place*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992.
- Knapp, Ronald G., and Kai-Yin Lo. *House, Home, Family: Living and Being Chinese*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005.
- Knell, Simon J., Suzanne Macleod, and Sheila E. R Watson. *Museum Revolutions: How Museums and Change and Are Changed*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Li, Yongqiao. *Zhang Daqian Nian Pu*. 张大千年谱 Chengdu: Sichuan Sheng She Hui Ke Xue Yuan Chu Ban She, 1987.
- Lord, Barry, Gail Dexter Lord, and Lindsay Martin. *Manual of Museum Planning: Sustainable Space, Facilities, and Operations*. Lanham, Md: AltaMira Press, 2012.
- Macdonald, Sharon., and Gordon Fyfe. *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity In a Changing World*. Oxford: Blackwell/Sociological Review, 1996.

Markwyn, Abigail. "Economic Partner and Exotic Other: China and Japan at San Francisco's Panama-Pacific International Exposition," *The Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol.39, No.4, Winter, 2008.

Meszaris, Cheryl, Twyla Gibson, and Jennifer Carter, "Interpretation and the Art Museum: between the Familiar and the Unfamiliar," in *Museum gallery interpretation and material culture*, edited by Juliette Fritsch. New York: Routledge, 2011.

Moore, Claire. "Lesson Plan: The Astor Chinese Garden Court," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2010. <http://www.metmuseum.org/learn/for-educators/lesson-plans-and-pre-visit-guides/the-chinese-garden-court>

Murck, Alfreda., and Wen Fong. *A Chinese Garden Court: The Astor Court At the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980.

Peabody Essex Museum. *A Teacher's Sourcebook for Chinese Art & Culture*.

Pitman, Jennifer. "China's Presence at the Centennial Exhibition, Philadelphia, 1876," *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, Vol.10, No.1, Fall-Winter, 2002-2003.

Proser, Adriana. "A Chinese Reception Hall from the Place of Duke Zhao,"
Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin, Vol. 92, No. 389/390, Painted Splendor,
Winter, 2004.

Ricci, Chris. "Ending the summer with 'Double 7'," 2013.

<http://www.nsarthro.com/2013/08/ending-the-summer-with-double-7/>

Rydell, Robert W. *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire At American
International Expositions, 1876-1916*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press,
1984.

Shastri, Vanita. *The Salem-India Story: Maritime Trade Between Salem,
Massachusetts, and India, 1788-1845*. Lexington, MA: Meru Education
Foundation, 2008.

Steinhardt, Nancy Shatzman. *Chinese Traditional Architecture*. New York City: China
Institute in America, China House Gallery, 1984.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "The World of Scholars' Rocks: Gardens, Studios,
and Paintings". [http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2000/world-
of-scholars](http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2000/world-of-scholars)

Thomas, David C. *Cross-Cultural Management: Essential Concepts*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008.

Weng, Wango H. C. *Gardens In Chinese Art From Private and Museum Collections*. New York: China Institute in America, 1968.

Whitehead, Christopher. *Interpreting Art In Museums and Galleries*. Abingdon, Oxon [England]: Routledge, 2012.

Zhao, Yan, and Yang Zhang. *Fa Xian Huizhou Jian Zhu*. 发现徽州建筑 Hefei Shi: Hefei Gong Ye Da Xue Chu Ban She, 2008.

Zhao, Xiaoxia. "How to Save the Disappearing Historic Architecture," 拿什么挽救正在消失的古建筑 2013. <http://ah.sina.com.cn/news/zt/gujian/index.shtml>.