INTERPRETING ASIAN AMERICAN IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCES:
HISTORIC SITES, MUSEUMS, AND THE INTERNET

By

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To my family
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This thesis analyzes the interpretation methods of Asian American immigration experiences through traditional vehicles of historic sites and museums. Ellis Island, Angel Island Immigration Station, China Camp Fishing Village, New Americans Museum, Wing Luke Asian Museum, and the Japanese American National Museum represent case studies for historic sites and museums. These historic sites and museums illustrate a broad spectrum of immigration experiences of people all over the world to that of a specific ethnic group. Discussion of the history of Asian American immigration, incorporating common themes of assimilation, discrimination, biculturalism, community and identity, creates a foundation for understanding the interpretive approaches utilized by these case studies. Historical backgrounds, architectural history, and exhibition models are other means to examine the interpretive approaches.

Online resources and computer technology, including their benefits and challenges, are explored to understand how traditional methods and concepts of interpretation, as well as practical application, can be transferred into a virtual environment. Common interpretive approaches within case study historic sites and museums, research articles, and journals are outlined. These guidelines act as basis
around which the virtual museum of the Asian American immigration experience is structured. The virtual museum is organized around a set of relevant themes, like the home country, coming to America, establishing a new life, family and community, traditions and rituals, and social and political prejudices. Specific information is then structured by those categories. Additional suggestions are also made to enhance the virtual museums through the usage of multimedia, social networking, and interactive programs.

This thesis concludes that the case studies also demonstrate less noticeable, but important themes such as hope, fear, regret, transition, and triumph. These themes connect everyone regardless of race, class, or gender. These themes and other general interpretive approaches utilized by historic sites and museums could also be transferred into a third medium, the Internet. However, different mediums require specific elements. Even though the benefits of a virtual museum are numerous, its challenges are also abundant. In essence, the virtual museum would be most effective if it is associated with and acts as an extension of the physical organization.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The word “interpretation” is defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary as “the act of or result of giving an explanation to something” or “a teaching technique that combines factual with stimulating explanatory.” History is interpreted through numerous means, all of which including books, films, television, as well as existing material resources. Among many other things, these resources may be comprised of buildings, objects, or artwork. Interpretation allows people to connect with the past visually, audibly, and tactilley, thus bringing them closer and helping them to realize that the past is not made up of bygone eras shown in black and white photographs, but that of real people and experiences. Interpretation is also essential in the preservation of history. A good interpretive museum program makes visitors become more aware of their local or national history and culture (Knudson, 1995, p. 5). Interpretative programs educate people from every age group on subjects and ideas not elaborated upon in formal educational institutions. These programs can, consequently, inspired them to gain more in-depth knowledge about their past, which can impact their present and future (Knudson, 1995, p. 60).

Historical sites are considered valuable resources in the teaching of historical events. These sites allow visitors to gain a sense of place about where certain events had transpired and how or why they had happened there. The type of story or stories to be told, the types of audiences, and how to effectively reach these audiences are essential questions to consider when developing an interpretive program for such places. After those questions are answered, others emerge regarding the uses of the collection at the sites, including objects, photographs, buildings, and landscape. Putting
those elements together to develop exhibitions requires a vast amount of evaluation to ensure their success in communicating the story. Methods of interpretation, which engage the visitors physically and mentally, like graphics, audio and video presentations, brochures, objects, and interactive media are used as well (Knudson, 1995, p.6). Successful interpretive programs make people more aware of their local and national history, and such awareness is most beneficial in the preservation and management of these historic sites (Pitcaithley, 1987 p. 208).

Generally, museums utilize collections of objects taken out of their natural or original environments and create an interpretive program around them. While some historic and cultural museums are located at historic or archaeological sites, many museums are not, so they do not have those onsite benefits for their interpretive process. Museums are often seen as intellectual institutions and accessible only to scholars and the social elite. This notion is not without cause because, historically, precious objects, exotic pottery and clothing, and art masterpieces were privately collected by the upper class and royalty, and the collections became unavailable to the general public (Knudson, 1995, p. 232). However, changes within the social and political structures caused museums to have a more open door policy. They allowed their collections to be more accessible, therefore making the museum a more democratic institution.

Traditionally, museums and historic sites in the United States focused on the culture and heritage of European descent (Loukaitou-Sideris & Grodach, 2004, p. 53). Historical events such as the Civil Rights movement, and changes in immigration laws during the past 50 to 60 years triggered an increase in ethnic study and diversity
programs within educational institutions. This increase results in more awareness and efforts to preserve minority cultural heritage within the country, and “gives voices to other perspectives and ensures that historic preservation is an activity that has a continued broad appeal” (Irwin, 2003, p.175). Professionals from National Park Service, state agencies, private organizations, local grassroots groups, and private individuals, have worked together to document, preserve, and develop interpretive and educational programs to promote diversity within our multicultural history.

Advances in technology have made accessibility of information and communication easier. Museums and historic preservation organizations have taken advantage of this technology to promote their mission and objectives, to showcase their exhibitions, and to facilitate their educational outreach programs, leading to further democratization of information and resources (Howes, 2007, p.75). The Internet has revolutionized the ways information can displayed and accessed, thus causing museums and historic preservation organizations to reorganize their interpretive planning methods to accommodate such changes. The physical walls and geographical barriers of these institutions are no longer issues because the Internet enables website visitors to access information from anywhere in the world. Of course, traditional interpretive methods need to be modified to fit within the online environment (Din & Hecht, 2007, pp. 11-12).

**Purpose and methodology:** This thesis explores and analyzes the interpretive methods of historic sites and museums in conveying the various themes of Asian American immigration history. Various interpretive principles as well as characteristics traditionally associated with interpretation of historic sites and museums are identified to
understand the different approach toward interpretive planning. Ellis Island in New York, Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco, California, and the China Camp Fishing Village in San Rafael, California are chosen as case studies for historic sites, while museum case studies consist of the New Americans Museum in San Diego, California, Wing Luke Asian Museum in Seattle, Washington and the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, California. These places were chosen because they illustrate diverse perspectives in interpreting the Asian American immigration experience. Ellis Island and the New Americans Museum represent broad aspects of immigration in the United States, which include interpretive programs relating to immigrants from all over the world. Ellis Island, however, epitomizes the historical events of immigration in the United States in the early 20th century, while the New Americans Museum demonstrates a more contemporary viewpoint of immigration. The historic site of Angel Island Immigration Station and the Wing Luke Asian Museum narrow the study down to the immigration experiences of Asian Americans. China Camp Fishing Village and the Japanese American National Museum further narrow the study and explore the methodology used to interpret the history of a specific Asian group. Historical backgrounds, exhibition models, philosophies, and mission statements are examined to determine their interpretive goals.

Internet resources and computer technology are investigated to determine the proper approaches for interpretation of culture for a virtual environment. The history of technology within the cultural institutions, the benefits such technology provides, as well as challenges created by them, are also examined. Websites of these case studies and others illustrate examples of how the Internet and online technology are conceptually
and pragmatically applied to the interpretation of Asian American immigration history. The method of comparison and contrast between these case studies creates in-depth comprehension. The analysis of computer technology and the Internet, along with the interpretive processes of the six case studies, develop foundations for a guideline of a third media of interpretation in the form of a virtual museum.

The majority of the research for this thesis was done through diverse historic preservation and museum studies books and research articles from various professional journals including the Journal of American Ethnic History, American Quarterly and Architectural Records. Information was obtained through the National Park Service website, as well as websites of the case studies. In addition, the author also visited Angel Island Immigration Station and the China Camp Fishing Village to gain a clearer understanding of both sites since limited information was available about their methods of interpretation from other sources.

Chapter 2 sets the stage for the rest of the thesis by providing an overview of Asian American immigration history, and addresses the legal aspects of the process like laws which greatly affected Asian immigrants. It also examines the human perspective of immigration by exploring different themes prevalent to most Asian immigrants.

Chapter 3 shows how the history of preservation and interpretation of ethnically historic sites came into being in the United States. Principles of interpretation from various scholars and professionals are explored to provide a basis for understanding the interpretive methods implemented at the case study sites. The case study sites include the Ellis Island Museum, the Angel Island Immigration Station, and the China Camp Fishing Village. The general backgrounds, architectural history, preservation
efforts, and exhibition models of the case study sites are investigated to understand how they interpret the Asian American immigration experience. An analysis of how the methods utilized within these sites fit within conventional interpretive principles is also established.

Chapter 4 addresses the growth of ethnic museums and the challenges they face. Chapter 4 also talks about general exhibition methods of museums, as well as specific characteristics of ethnic museums. It specifically examines the New Americans Museum in San Diego, California along with Asian American museums like the Wing Luke Museum in Seattle, Washington and the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles. Overall history and exhibition models of these museums are explored to provide an analysis of their roles as ethnic museums and their interpretive approaches in the representation of Asian immigration history in comparison to the historic sites as discussed in Chapter 2. Comparison of their similarities and differences enables interpreters to correctly use these methods to interpret Asian immigration online through the implementation of a virtual museum.

Chapter 5 explains the history and roles of technology within the field of historic preservation, museums, and other cultural institutions. Various computer technology resources encompassing online databases, multimedia, emails, along with issues of authenticity, authority, quality, and credibility, are just some topics this chapter addresses. Examples of websites created by the case study sites and others are also examined to see how they transfer their interpretive objectives into a virtual environment.
Chapter 6 provides some guidelines for the creation of an Asian American immigration virtual museum. These guidelines incorporate interpretive methods gleaned from research and case studies analyzed in Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5. The guidelines consist of conceptual theories and practical applications. This chapter also addresses the issues of accessibility, navigation, multimedia and social networking along with the general organization of this virtual museum.
CHAPTER 2
ASIAN AMERICAN IMMIGRATION

History

The term “Asian American” is a fairly new term, coined during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. The Asian American immigration experience is in many ways similar to the immigration stories of other racial groups. Fleeing hardships, assimilating to a new country, and achieving the American dream, are basic themes that could apply to most stories of immigration. However, the nature of these themes tends to be generic, therefore overlooking significant events in history and the characteristics which specifically defined the Asian American experiences.

William S. Bernard, a professor in sociology, suggested Asian American immigration took place in five phases. Those five phases include: the Colonial Period (1607-1775); the Open Door Period, (1776-1881); the Regulation Period, which introduced discriminatory laws to restrict immigration from Asia (1882 to 1917); the Restriction Period, which was a time of intense enforcement of these laws (1918-1945); and finally the Liberalization Period, in which amendments were made to immigration laws and quotas lifted restrictions imposed on Asian Americans and Asian immigrants (1946-present) (Joyner, 2005, pp. 7-10). Asian immigration to the United States had been documented since the mid 1700s, but immigration had only started to become prevalent in China in the mid 19th century due to economic hardship brought on by the Opium War and natural disasters. Motivated by the opportunities provided by the Gold Rush in California, thousands of Chinese men left their home villages in southern China to work as miners, planters, railroad workers, and eventually become business owners in their new country. Most Chinese immigrants came as sojourners, in which the idea
was to work and save money then return to China. They were initially welcomed because of the need for laborers, however, later, cultural conflicts and their willingness to work for less pay made them targets of racial discrimination by white laborers competing for the same jobs. The majority of American society and government at the time saw the Chinese immigrants as second-class citizens and as threats to the white Protestant social and political “norms.” Such attitudes led to the implementation of discriminatory laws like the California Foreign Miners Tax and the Chinese Exclusion Tax in 1882. These laws imposed taxes and quotas specifically on people from China to discourage immigration to America and advancement within its society (Kitano and Daniels, 1988, p.11). Japanese immigrants faced the same barriers when they started arriving at the end of the 19th century. As with the Chinese, Japanese immigrants were mostly male laborers and worked in the railroad and agricultural industries. The Japanese population remained in the Western Hemisphere and totaled up to approximately 200,000 by the beginning of the 20th century. Faced with racism, inequality within the workplace, and general hardship within the host society, the Japanese turned to their countrymen and formed economic enterprises within their own communities (Takaki, 1989, pp. 184-186). They became entrepreneurs and opened their own businesses, as the Chinese had done before, which resulted in strong bonds among their ethnic group. Through different systems of land accumulation, which consisted of contract, share, or lease, Japanese laborers ventured into the agriculture field by becoming farmers of fruit farms, beet fields, and vineyards. Their goal was to accumulate enough financial resources to pay off their debts and buy their own plots of land (Kitano & Daniels, 1988, p.12).
The general American population saw the Japanese immigrants as competitors and threats to their way of life, so they lobbied to have a treaty called Gentlemen’s Agreement implemented to reduce the immigration of Japanese onto American soil. According to the treaty, the Japanese government agreed to restrict laborers from coming to work in America, and in exchange, the United States government consented to allow those already residing in the country to bring their wives and families with them (Kitano & Daniels, 1988, p.12). However, this treaty had a reverse effect in which the population thrived rather than declined. In 1913, Congress passed a law that denied landownership to those who were “aliens ineligible to citizenship.” The law specifically targeted Japanese farmers. However, the Japanese bought land in the name of their American-born children instead, finding ways around the discriminatory law. Discrimination intensified during the World War II period, which resulted in the relocation of Japanese Americans to internment camps (Takaki, 1989, p. 203).

World War II, however, brought forth changes in immigration laws, thus making America more accessible to newcomers from Asia. Since China was allied with the United States during the war, the U.S government saw it as good diplomatic practice to make changes to the Chinese Exclusion Act, enabling 105 Chinese per year to enter the country. Such actions were followed by other laws allowing wives of citizens to come into the country without being subjected to the quota system. In 1952, the McCarran Walter Act took away race and national origins from immigration laws. These reforms enabled a steady increase in population within the Chinese and Japanese communities, and encouraged emigration from Korea, India, and the Philippines (Kitano & Daniels, 1988, p.15).
Other laws such as the 1965 Immigration Act, soon followed and allowed for a quota of 20,000 people from each country in Asia to come to America per year. As the Vietnam War ensued in the 1960s and 1970s, new groups of Asian immigrants from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia found their way to America, this time as refugees seeking asylum for political reasons in time of war. During this period and later, two different groups of refugees arrived on American shores. Most who came before 1975 were from the upper and middle class and were civil servants, teachers, wealthy businessmen, employees of American companies or organizations, and Catholics. They escaped in fear of persecution from the communist government for their social and economic status. The second group came after 1975 due to such factors as a poor economy, bad harvests, job losses, and fears of re-education camps. Unlike other immigrants before them, they often had to leave at a moment’s notice. Most people did not know where they were going until they had gotten there. Due to these new groups of immigrants, the Asian population grew to 3.5 million in the United States in 1985 (Rutledge, 1992, p.23).

**Common Themes**

The immigration laws, wars, and economic and political hardships are factors which had defined the history of Asian American immigrations, but the memories and experiences of individuals account for the human aspect of such history. To discuss the human perspective of the collective immigration experience, it is necessary to understand that certain themes are prevalent among all Asian American immigrants. Uprooting from the old countries, relocating to America, creating a new life, and establishing new roots are common themes of immigration. They are intermingled with issues of assimilation, discrimination, acculturation, self-identity, biculturalism, and
community relations. These themes should be considered in the development of the interpretive programs of cultural sites. Assimilation is defined as a minority group trying to adapt to the lifestyle and culture of an already existing majority group. Rainer Baubock, in his article for *International Migration Review*, stated, “Whether assimilation is an option thus depends not on just individual efforts, but on the power of the group which they leave and of the group which they could join” (p. 207).

The effectiveness and efficiency of the process of assimilation is also dependent upon physical appearance, cultural differences, religion, language of origin, economic and social statuses (Zhou, 1997, p. 976). Because of their appearance and cultural traditions, early Asian American immigrants were not fully able to assimilate into the dominant white American culture as their European counterparts did. These issues and the general discriminatory attitude from the general public caused them to be denied employment and upward social mobility. Federal laws, which restricted them from owning land, becoming citizens, and coming into the country, only served to slow the assimilation process of these immigrants. Such constraints took away the individual option of assimilation into the larger culture, and these restraints made Asian immigrants segregated into smaller ethnic communities for economic purposes, thus forcing them to remain “strangers” within their adopted home (Takaki, 1989, p. 131).

Children of the immigrants found it easier to assimilate. They were able to obtain citizenship by being born in the Unites States, and so they thought of it as their homeland. In order to assimilate within the American culture, they often changed their names and appearances to sound and look American, and often denied their culture and ethnic origins because they saw them as hindrances to becoming fully assimilated.
However, adaptation to the ways of the social majority did not instantly guarantee the second-generation Asian Americans full admission into its society. Many found themselves still excluded because of their Oriental appearances and background, and therefore they were torn between two cultures (Takaki, 1989, p. 140).

Discrimination caused the delay of assimilation for Asian American immigrants, and consequently further antagonism between them and the majority of the white population. Competition for employment caused distrust and conflict leading to imposed discriminatory taxes and exclusion laws. Because of immigration laws, most men who came over to the United States could not bring their wives or families. Early Asian American populations primarily consisted of mostly males. They formed communities known as “bachelor societies,” which involved men of similar ethnic groups, social background, and values coming together to share living spaces and domestic tasks, thus resulting in companionship and social bonds (Espiritu, 2008, p. 22).

The formation of these ethnic communities helped to combat racial discrimination, and to provide economic means to those excluded from the general society workforce; it also established ethnic solidarity. Due to ethnic antagonism in mines, factories, and agricultural fields, Chinese laborers were forced to establish their own businesses. Laundries, retail stores, and restaurants were opened as a means of economic survival. Such businesses accumulated and formed segregated communities known as “Chinatowns.” One of the earliest and most visible groups was the Six Chinese Companies. Formed to protect the interests of Chinese immigrants, they became the immigrant community representatives to the white society (Kitano & Daniels, p. 26). The group often spoke out against unfair laws and discrimination
against the Chinese. They fought in court for the rights to become citizens, and they lobbied for laws to protect the Chinese immigrants during a negotiation process between the United States and China in 1867 regarding Chinese immigration. This negotiation resulted in the 1868 Burlingame Treaty, which allowed for “free migration and emigration” of the Chinese to the United States, and the right to “enjoy the same privileges, immunities, and exemptions in respect to travel or residence, as may there be enjoyed as the citizens or subjects of the most favored nation” (Takaki, 1989, p. 115). In addition to fighting for social justice, the Chinese Six Companies also assisted new arrivals in finding housing, employment, and arranged medical services and funerals (Kitano & Daniels, 1988, p. 28). Even though these communities and social networking groups were essential for survival, their formations tended to further isolate them from mainstream society and therefore also hindered the assimilation process.

Asian American immigrants played influential roles in shaping the social, political, and economic structure within the American cultural landscape. Their neighborhoods, places of worship, work, community halls, and homes, as well as rituals and festivals reflect the combination of old traditions and new values. As with the stories of other immigrants, their history in America is characterized by hardships, struggles, and inequality, as well as hard work, success, and hope. However, their choices and actions regarding events and situations presented to them make their stories unique. The preservation and interpretation of their tangible and intangible heritage is necessary to “give them and their children pride in their heritage and allow them to make distinctive contributions to the diversity and richness of American life” (Haseltine, 1989, p. xxi).
CHAPTER 3
INTERPRETATION OF HISTORIC SITES

This chapter examines the interpretation of historical sites related to the immigration experiences of Asian Americans. It discusses the philosophies of historic preservation and how interpretation fits within these philosophies. Chapter 3 also explains how preservation and interpretation of ethnic- influenced historic sites came into being. Case studies of the Ellis Island Immigration Museum, the Angel Island Immigration Station, and the China Camp Fishing Village are chosen as examples because they demonstrate broad aspects of immigration, as well as the specific attributes of Asian immigration history. General overviews, architectural history, preservation efforts, and interpretation methods are explored to understand similarities and differences between each site.

Overview of Historic Preservation Practices

The field of historic preservation was defined by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Before this time, historic preservation focused mainly on well-known landmarks, and preservationists were more interested in turning them into museums. Since preservation laws had applied separately for local, states, and federal agencies, discrepancies existed regarding the practices of preservation. For example, few historic districts were designated because the federal courts did not recognize the rules and regulations at the local level. Significant changes have been made following the designation of the Preservation Act of 1966, including the establishment of the National Register of Historic Places and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. This law restructured the field of historic preservation and made it “an integral part of society” (Tyler, 2000, p. 45)
The field of historic preservation focuses on four main types of treatment for historic sites and structures: preservation, restoration, reconstruction, and rehabilitation. Preservation requires the least effort and is considered to be the most traditional approach. The historic built environment is left alone and only regular maintenance and upkeep are required. Restoration is another treatment option for historic structures in which the interior or exterior of the structure is restored to a certain period in history. Proper research is required to ensure accuracy within the results. It is generally required that the older historic fabric should not conflict with the newly installed structure; but instead there should be a distinct difference between both. The new structures should complement and bring out characteristics of the historic structures and not compete with them. The process of reconstruction goes into effect whenever it is necessary to rebuild a structure which no longer stands. Rehabilitation is another type of intervention method, and it occurs when a building is going to be used for purposes other than its original intention (Tyler, 2000, pp. 22-28).

Where does interpretation fit into these processes? Interpretation of historic sites and structures is a fairly new concept within the field of historic preservation; however, it is a necessary component of preservation because it adds meaning and purpose to the “bricks and mortar” (Irwin, 2003, p. 175). During the infancy stages of historic preservation in the United States, interpretation was deemed unnecessary because places of great importance were already ingrained into people’s lives and culture at the time. However, as time went by, social and economic development caused changes within the cultural dynamics. Even though more information and education are available to us today, we have become less aware of our cultural heritage. Interpretation is
necessary to the preservation process because it communicates the meanings and relationships between the nation’s cultural heritage and the public. Interpretation allows the public to gain more understanding about values these places hold, thus encourages them to see to the continuation of the preservation efforts (Alderson, 1976, pp. 6-7).

One of the earliest attempts at interpretation was traced back to the project at Colonial Williamsburg. Helen Bullock, a historian, was in charge of re-creating the kitchens in Colonial Williamsburg. Through much research, she instead re-created the methods of cooking, which encompassed baking, frying, grilling, or boiling. This interactive approach helped visitors visualize how pieces of kitchen equipment and utensils were actually used, and consequently added to the greater picture of colonial livelihood (Fitch, 1982, p. 336). The preservation and interpretation of Colonial Williamsburg had set a standard for other historic site interpretation projects which came later. Colonial Williamsburg utilized methods which brought energy and interaction to the built environment, thus emphasizing the human actions and decisions which shaped the site (Pitcaithley, 1987, p. 210).

**Methods of Interpretation**

Interpretation of historical sites involves significant effort and thorough research from architects, archaeologists, historians, curators, and, of course preservationists. Available historical resources, funding, public interest, and importance on a national or international level should all be addressed before the actual work process takes place. All those questions should result in a clear objective in which the interpretation of a particular site can be centered upon (Pitcaithley, 1987, p. 218).

William T. Alderson, author of *Interpretation of Historic Sites*, categorizes historic sites interpretation into three groups: documentary, representative, and aesthetic. The
documentary sites call for accurate depiction of an important time in history when a significant event that taken place at the site, or a famous person or persons had lived there. Not every aspect of the re-creation must be “provable,” but it must be as precise as possible to the time it is portraying. The second group, representative site interpretation, tends to focus on educating visitors about a time in history and how people lived and interacted during that time; it is less concerned with significant events or specific people. The third group refers to aesthetic sites. The preservation and interpretation of these sites promote their ingenuity and beauty in design and not historical events. Frank Lloyd Wright’s “Falling Water” house is cited as an example (Alderson, 1976, p.12). Of course, some sites fall into more than one category, so it is important to identify the primary goals.

Well-known National Park Service interpretation writer and educator, Freeman Tilden, has identified six main principles of interpretive planning (1967, p. 9);

- Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.

- Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.

- Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical, or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.

- The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.

- Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part and must address itself to the whole person rather than any phase.

- Interpretation to children should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program.
• In his book *Interpreting Our Heritage*, these interpretation theories are followed by sections which emphasize methods of interpretive writing by touching upon composition, structure, and delivery styles. Tilden (1967) explains that excessive uses of words, objects, information, props, panels, or any other interpretive devices would only hinder the process. Interpretive writing should focus on the readers and how they will perceive the message. The writing should be short, direct, and full of meaning and delivered with enthusiasm in which action words should convey a sense of liveliness and energy, therefore making the interpretation more dynamic. Tilden (1967) mentions that linking the past to the present for historic sites tends to be an important aspect because it serves to “keep them from seeming to have been frozen at a moment of time when nobody was at home” (p. 69). This linking also lends a human presence to the sites because those sites became important and famous not on their own but because of the human lives and interactions which had taken place there (Tilden, 1967, pp. 70).

**Multicultural Historic Sites**

Traditionally, the preservation and interpretation of historic sites focused on national heroes, lifestyle, history, and accomplishments of white European persons or groups. Ethnically influenced historical sites were not acknowledged until the end of the 1950s when the Civil Rights Movement was under way. The National Park Service became one of the first organizations to document and preserve these culturally diverse sites when it acquired the Frederick Douglass House in Washington D.C. in 1962. Before then, the preservation of this site and other ethnically influenced sites and their history had been achieved through smaller community organizations and family groups. As the 1970s emerged, leaders, such as Joan Maynard and Carl Westmoreland, paved
the way for the preservation of ethnically diversified historic places. Joan Maynard was the president of a Brooklyn preservation group, Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bed-Stuyvesant History. Carl Westmoreland was known for his work in community revitalization projects in his hometown of Mount Auburn, Cincinnati. They both used their reputations and influence to advocate the necessity of preservation of African American sites (Stipe, 2003, p. 387).

Significant publications, including A Nation of Nations exhibition at the Smithsonian Institute and Cultural Conservation: The Protection of the Cultural Heritage of the United States, promoted cultural diversity and made the general public more aware of the importance of multi-ethnic historic sites within the American cultural landscape. Cultural Conservation: The Protection of the Cultural Heritage of the United States was published in 1983 and recognized the fact that historic preservation encompassed rituals, art, traditions, and other means of cultural expression, as well as buildings and landmarks (Stipe, 2003, pp. 388-389). Due to changes within society and demographics in the past 40 years, these publications and preservation efforts among grassroot groups had more effect on the general population than ever before. Historic preservation of minority influenced sites has grown tremendously since the Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Such groups as the Underground Railroad Preservation and Education Initiative, the Tribal Preservation Program, and National Association for African American Historic Preservation along with the National Park Diversity Conferences and other diversity programs, were the direct results of earlier works to promote cultural diversity within the field of historic preservation in the United States. Preservation of minority culture started with significant African American cultural
heritage sites, which therefore resulted in others from the Latino and the Asian American communities to become more active in the preservation of their own history (Stipe, 2003, pp. 394-395).

Steps have been taken in historic preservation to not only document and acquire Asian American sites of the pre-World War II period but also of the recent past, in which a new wave of immigrants came into the country and profoundly shaped the cultural landscape of today. Dolores Hayden, author of The Power of Place, explained that “change is not simply a matter of acknowledging diversity or correcting a traditional bias toward the architectural legacy wealth or power” (1995, p. 9). She added, “it is not enough to add on a few African American or Native American project” (1995, p.9). Rather it requires preservationists to seek out larger common themes that surpass nationality, gender, ethnicity, class, race. These larger themes consist of the “migration experience, the breakdown and reformulation of families, or the search for a new sense of identity.” (1995, p. 9). Preservation of ethnic heritage is still a new and growing field, and it needs support from local communities to thrive. To ensure further successes and growth, preservationists must plan for the future and “must anticipate changes in the environment in which the preservation processes operates” (Lee, 1993, p. 95).

Even though great changes have taken place to preserve ethnically notable sites, the designation of Asian American sites happened only recently in the past decade. Sites such as the Manzanar War Relocation Center, which was an internment camp for Japanese Americans from 1942 to late 1945, and the Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco Bay became National Historic Landmarks in 1992 and 1997, respectively. Such slow progress is due to the lack of involvement of Asian American
groups caused by distrust of the preservation standards and laws and fear that their cultural heritage will be mismanaged. Because of this fear, preservation planners do not have the proper perspectives about preserving Asian American- influenced historical sites (Stipe, 2003, p. 397).

Asian Americans have influenced the American landscape culturally and physically by the constructing ethnic neighborhoods within cities, transportation systems, agricultural systems, and industries. Other challenges preservationists face in documenting Asian American sites could be the confusion of ownership of property due to the Alien Land Laws, which prohibited Asian immigrants from owning lands. People found ways around these laws through complex systems of leasing and ownership through their children’s names (Dubrow, 2000, p. 146). In light of this, more surveys and research must be done to properly document, manage, and interpret these historic sites to the public. The following sections in this chapter discuss Ellis Island Immigration Center, Immigration Station on Angel Island, and the China Camp fishing village, and they analyze the interpretation methods implemented at these sites to tell the history and experiences of Asian American immigrants.

Ellis Island Immigration Center

Ellis Island Immigration Center is a well-known historic site, which most Americans believe to be a symbol of United States immigration history. It is therefore necessary to explore its history, location, culture, and daily operations to understand its interpretive methods and the roles it plays in the broad immigration history of the United States, as well as that of Asian American immigration history. Originally named Gull Island or “Kioshk” by Native American tribes, the 27.5-acre island was later purchased by the U.S. government from the State of New York in 1808 and was made part of the
defense system along New York harbor. It was deemed as the first federal immigration center by President Benjamin Harrison in 1890. Before a federal system for immigration was implemented, most immigrants were processed through individual states. From its opening in 1892 to its closing in 1954, the center processed approximately 12 million immigrants (National Park Service: Ellis Island, 2009).

**Architectural History**

The main building was constructed of wood, but in 1897, it burned down and was later replaced by fireproof facilities in the 1900s (National Park Service: Ellis Island, 2009). In addition to fireproofing, the government wanted the new buildings to address human circulation issues throughout the building. The main concerns were to reduce the amount of disorientation and to quickly facilitate the immigration processes. In addressing these issues, the New York architecture firm of Boring & Tilton also had to consider the 5,000 to 7,000 people who passed through the center on a daily basis. The firm designed the processing center’s main building in a French Renaissance style. It was constructed of granite and limestone held together by a Flemish bond. The symmetrical building, estimated to have cost $1.5 million in its construction, consisted of three archways and two towers on both sides with an elaborately decorated façade. The two-story building consisted of a reception area, waiting and processing room, inspection area, administration offices, baggage rooms, and telegraph offices in which immigrants could inquire about purchasing of railway tickets. Other parts of the facilities included showers, a kitchen area, dining rooms, and dormitories. The surrounding buildings were hospitals, a power plant, a prison, and a laundromat. Vaulted herringbone patterned tile ceilings were installed in the Great Hall in 1916 (Figure 3-1).
Then, more repairs and construction of the new ferry house and general landscaping occurred in the 1930s (Twombly, 1989, pp. 127-130).

**Daily Operations**

During its peak from 1892 to 1924, the Ellis Island Immigration Center processed as many as 200,000 individuals a year. Processing individuals was based on class and race. First and second-class passengers arriving on boats only had to go through an overall ship inspection, and did not have to endure the longer inspection process as those in third-class, or steerage (National Park Service: Ellis Island, 2009). Generally, the health inspection was completed in a matter of minutes in the Great Hall and then the new arrivals answered some questions about their purposes and destinations; their travel papers were also examined. The whole process could last up to five hours, and then most were able to continue on their way the same day. Those who were detained were suspected of various health problems, including that of contagious diseases like tuberculosis, measles, favus, and trachoma. The hospital contained 275 beds and the contagious facility had 450 beds to accommodate such situations. Due to changes in the laws, health inspections were done at the country of departure after 1924. The whole process became much smoother for officials on Ellis Island (Koman, 1999, p. 32).

Immigrants from all over the world came through Ellis Island; however, most were from a European background. Some Asian immigrants also came through, but difficulties due to the Chinese Exclusion Act and other restrictive immigration laws and taxes prevented many Orientals from entering (Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation, 2009). Other race-based immigration laws such as the Quota Laws and Country of Origin Act in the 1920s, were in place to prevent immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe because they were deemed inferior to those of Northern and Western Europe. These laws
revised the processes of immigration after 1924, so that travel papers and application and health inspections were completed at the American consulates in other countries before their journey. This new process decreased the workloads of the immigration center on Ellis Island, and it evolved into being a detention center before and during World War II. Ellis Island was closed by the government in 1954 (National Park Service: Ellis Island, 2009).

Preservation Efforts

The Ellis Island Immigration Center was incorporated into the Statue of Liberty National Monuments in 1965 due to recognition and preservation efforts by Secretary of the Interior, Stewart Udall. Approximately $1 million was donated to its preservation, and its doors were opened once again to visitors. However, more work had to be done to keep the site from further deterioration. Groups like the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation and private individuals organized fundraising campaigns and donations so that actual restoration work could be done to save the center. The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Centennial Commission became the main advisory group to the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service in 1982. In that same year, the National Park Service also created the “General Management Plan.” This plan outlined the following goals and objectives for the preservation and restoration of Ellis Island:

- To preserve the Ellis Island complex and return the buildings to active life by devoting major historic structures to public use and interpretation and by making the contributing structures available for adaptive use.

- To preserve the interiors of the major historic structures on Ellis Island, and through tours and programs, recall the human drama that occurred within these walls and explore the far-reaching effects it had on our nation.

- To preserve the thousands of artifacts that are extant on Ellis Island and those that have been donated by families of immigrants to develop a collection that will record and help convey the Ellis Island story (Tifft, 1971, p. 175).
Major works were under way to achieve these goals. The process of drying out the building alone took engineers almost two years. The exterior of the building needed to be washed of dirt and soot, and new duplicate ornamentations were made to replace the broken ones. Other tasks included wall, floor and ceiling repairs, all of which were rotting and crumbling due to the natural process of time. Other work involved installation of sprinklers, electrical units, and air ducts. Some parts of the roof structure also needed repairs and replacement (Tifft, 1971, p. 177). One of the most important components of the process was the preservation of the writings and carvings of poetry, cartoons, flowers, and portraits on certain wall sections (Smith, 1992, p. 90). The Ellis Island Immigration Center was opened to the public as a museum and a historic site in September 1990 after eight years of restoration work. The total estimated cost was $156 million (Tifft, 1971, p.178).

**Interpretation and Exhibits**

Ellis Island receives 10,000 to 15,000 visitors on a daily basis. Because of increased interests in diversity and ethnic studies during the 1970s, Ellis Island became the well-known symbol of the multicultural or “melting pot” society of the United States. The preservation and interpretation of the tangible and intangible characteristics of such a place was redone to uphold these symbolisms. As visitors arrive at the entrance of the main immigration building on Ellis Island, they are confronted with piles of antique luggage, trunks, and wicker baskets plus large hanging black and white photographs of people arriving and waiting to be processed (Figure 3-2). The first floor of the museum features an exhibition titled, “The People of America” in which the overall history of settlers in America is chronologically depicted in the “national and international contexts” (Smith, 1992, p. 88). This exhibit also includes comparisons of experiences
between recent immigrants and immigrants of the past. These comparisons are done through brightly-colored demographics charts, graphics, photography, and personal audio interviews (Wallace, 1991, p. 1029).

On the first floor, visitors can walk through the exhibits by themselves or go with a tour guide. To re-create the pathways of the immigrants, the National Park Service exhibition planners decided it would be best to re-create the stairways from the first floor to the second floor Great Hall, which was where inspections took place. The stairways are interpreted as “The Stairs of Separation” because this was where doctors and health inspectors would observe the new arrivals to see who had troubles climbing, a possible indication of medical issues, and they would be marked for further examination. The second Great Hall has minimal interpretation with old photographs of how the room had once looked are placed by the east and west balconies. It is also known as the “Registry Room,” which was where many waited for hours on benches or in line to be questioned by immigration officials and then be registered. An exhibition titled “Through America’s Gate: Processing Immigrants at Ellis Island from 1892 to 1924” is displayed throughout the 14 former inspection rooms to the west of the Great Hall. Text, photographs, charts, newspaper articles, audio recordings, and film clips are some of the mediums used for interpretation. Each room illustrates a step in the process of immigration (Wallace, 1991, p. 1025).

“Leaving the Homelands” and “Paths of Migration” are the beginning segments of the exhibition titled “The Peak Immigration Years: 1880-1924.” and mainly address the reasons for immigration, including political conflicts and economic hardships in different countries of origin. Other segments include “Passage to America,” which
describes the different methods of arrivals in America. This section utilizes ship models, timetables, postcards, passports, and ship manifests to reflect the themes of travel. “Ports of Entry” explains processing and inspection procedures which happened after arrival to the new country. It highlights briefly about other places of entry like Angel Island Immigration Station. It also portrays the treatments of Asian immigrants through photographs and notes written by Chinese residents to new Chinese arrivals about different methods to get around the Chinese Exclusion Act. The exhibition also illustrates what happened to the immigrants after their time at Ellis Island in the segment titled “Working in America.” Factories, mills, mines, construction industries, and various small businesses were places where immigrants worked to create a new life, and the exhibition segment concentrates on this information, as well as hardships like low wages, exploitation, and child labor (Wallace, 1991, p. 1026).

The theme of biculturalism is touched upon in the section called “Between Two Worlds,” which focuses upon ethnic neighborhoods, communities, churches, and organizations, as well as the experiences of immigrants’ children born in the United States. “The Closing Door” segment explores themes of racial discrimination and anti-immigration sentiments by displaying political cartoons and posters of the Ku Klux Klan along with exclusion policies. Items brought by immigrants from their countries of origins are displayed on the third floor in an exhibit entitled “Treasures from Home.” It consists of objects like prayer books, shoes, pillowcases, and clothing. Most were donated or lent to the Ellis Island Museum by those who had passed through its doors or by their children. Audio statements from the donors describe the importance of these objects (Wallace, 1991, p. 1027-1028).
Analysis

In reviewing the Museum on Ellis Island, Judith Smith (1992) of *American Quarterly* explained that the different exhibits within the museum worked to portray the immigrants as “decision makers and actors rather than passive victims buffeted by alien forces.” She added that these exhibits strive for visitors to understand the relationships between the past collective immigration experiences and the culture and society it had created within the United States. She explained that such portrayal of the immigrants as “decision makers and actors” is most likely a consequence of social restructuring of the 1970s and 1980s, which resulted in the general acceptance and tolerance attitude toward multiculturalism and ethnic culture (p. 97).

As far as grouping this site into various categories, as suggested by William Alderson in previous sections, Ellis Island would probably be categorized as a documentary site because the significant event of immigration into the United States had occurred here for numerous years. According to Freeman Tilden’s interpretive principles, “The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation” and “interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part and must address itself to the whole person rather than any phase”. These principles are suitably applicable to the Ellis Island Museum. Based on information presented, interpretive planners appear to have created exhibitions which interpreted the collective immigration experience. For example, the multiple themes of coming to America, finding occupations, establishing communities, along with issues of assimilation, biculturalism, and discrimination, resonate with immigrants from all nationalities. In essence, the interpreters used these themes to address the entire immigration experience.
Angel Island

Angel Island is located in San Francisco Bay in California, and is most often referred to as the “Ellis Island of the West Coast.” The island’s size, estimated to be 740 acres, and its isolated characteristics made it a perfect multifunctional site, including an immigration station from 1910 to 1940. It originally had been the home of a Native American group called the Miwoks for thousands of years before European settlers arrived. Documentation shows the island was later named and used by Spanish Navy lieutenant Manuel de Ayala as a base for his surveying work of the San Francisco Bay during the 18th century. It also acted as a trading post for whalers. Later, in the 19th century, Camp Reynolds was established on the island for military coastal defense purposes during the Civil War. It became a property of the U.S. army and was renamed Fort McDowell. Along with the base, the Army established a quarantine station to inspect incoming ships for diseases and to implement a fumigation process before the ships’ immigrant passengers stepped on U.S soil (Angel Island Association, 2009).

Architectural History

Due to the overcrowded and unsanitary conditions of a previous immigration detention center on a San Francisco wharf, the Department of Commerce and Labor was permitted by the Army to establish an immigration detention center on the island in 1910. The Chinese Exclusion Act had already been established for 30 years at that time, so the station became known as the “Guardian of the Western Gate,” and it was meant to be a place to enforce the law. It symbolized the unwelcoming attitude of the general public toward Chinese and other Asian immigrants at the time. The site was located on the east side of the island in an area called China Cove (Joyner, 2005, p. 52). After survey work was completed in the area in 1905, Oakland architect Walter
Matthews designed the station to be a collection of wooden buildings with facilities like a detention barracks (Figure 3-3), hospital, administration building, powerhouse, and wharf. Later on, employee cottages were erected, plus a laundry and carpenter shop. Multiple obstacles including the 1906 earthquake, fire, and financial issues delayed the opening of the facility for five years. When all the structures were finally completed, the overall cost was estimated to be $250,000. It remained in operation until 1940 when the administration building burned down. This incident resulted in the relocation of remaining detainees to a temporary facility on the mainland (Daniels, 1997, pp. 3-5). In 1941, the property was acquired by the Army; the detention barracks were used to process and hold German and Japanese prisoners of war during World War II. The Immigration Station finally shut down all operations in January 1946, but it was later rediscovered in the 1960s (Soennichsen, 2001, p. 138).

**Daily Operations**

During its operation from 1910 to 1940, the Immigration Station processed almost 1 million people from China, Japan, Korea, India, and the Philippines, including persons from Mexico, Australia, and Africa. Many were detained and questioned for a few weeks or months, while a few remained on the island for a couple of years (Joyner, 2005, pp. 51-53). Such a long detention time was the result of a complex interrogation process to prove eligibility for entry into the United States. The Chinese Exclusion Act was meant to keep out all Chinese except merchants and their families, diplomats, students, and those related to a citizen in the United States. After the San Francisco earthquake in 1906, fire had destroyed most official immigration paperwork. Many Chinese immigrants took advantage and claimed themselves as citizens as a way of getting around the discriminatory laws.
Many advantages came with citizenship, including the right to come into and leave from the country without any problems and the ability to bring their sons and daughters to this country. It was not uncommon for a Chinese American to bring over members of the extended family, as well as their own children. Some even sold their spots to those who wanted to make the journey (Daniels, 1997, p. 17). Those who bought false documentation, which identified them as a son or daughter of a U.S citizen, had to memorize numerous and minute details about the lives of those they bought their paper from in order to pass the interrogation process. Since officials were aware of this practice and no records existed to prove otherwise, a long and complex interrogation process, involving testaments from other witnesses, was implemented to validate the authenticity of these people. Those who came into the country through this process were called “paper sons” or “paper daughters.” The alleged father and his “paper son” were often questioned at the same times about their places of origin, family history, and intricate details of their old home and villages. Sometimes, investigators would go to their home villages in China to validate their stories. Some cases arose in which the questions were so unreasonable that legitimate sons also failed the exam and had to be deported (Yung, 1977, pp. 52-55).

Many were admitted into the country despite the harsh and sometimes demeaning interrogation and examination procedures. However, about 5% to 15% were deported. Except for the Chinese, this grueling interrogation process did not apply to most other nationalities that came through Angel Island. In fact, a significant number of Japanese women came to join their husbands in the country, and they were processed within a matter of days. These women were known as picture brides because they’d
only known their husbands through photographs. The Japanese were banned entirely from coming all together later on due to the Immigration Act of 1924. This act created quotas for different countries and stated that immigration was not allowed for “all aliens ineligible for citizenship,” which applied to all Asian nationalities (Kitano & Daniels, 1988, pp. 12-13).

Complaints about the living conditions and the humiliating examination processes were expressed during most of the time the immigration station was open. Many critics, including the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce and the Department of Labor, cited the place as filthy and inadequate. Most of the quarters were only supposed to sleep 10, however such space was occupied by 45 to 100 men at one time. The barracks consisted of three tiers of bunks to accommodate the number of men being detained. Women were housed in separate quarters which had more space. The inadequate janitorial staff resulted in unsanitary living conditions, which led to numerous healthcare issues that the island hospital was unprepared for. The dining facility was separated by race, so that the Asians ate on bare wooden tables in one room, while the Europeans ate in another on covered tables. The men also ate at different times than the women. The food was not only bad, but also defined by race. Europeans and Asians had different menus, and Asians were reportedly given less bread and potatoes (Soennichsen, 2001, p.120-122). This difference in food distribution led to riots of which one was so dire that the military was summoned to retain order. The detainees were not allowed outside except for a walk to the storage shed once a week to get personal items from their luggage. On rare occasions, officials allowed some women to take a walk around the island. Many read, knitted, wrote letters, slept, or just sat on their bed and
awaited their fate. Many private organizations and individuals, including Methodist deaconess Katherine Mauer, the San Francisco Y.M.C.A, and the Angel Island Liberty Association, worked to help improve the physical and emotional comfort for the detainees and their transition into American society (Soennichsen, 2001, pp. 124-125).

Preservation Efforts

California established Angel Island as a state park in 1963, which resulted in the recognition of the Immigration Station as a significant national landmark (Angel Island Station Restoration and Preservation Act). Its historical significance was brought to light by California park ranger Alexander Weiss. Weiss noticed numerous Chinese characters written on the wall, which turned out to be poetry written by Chinese men detained there. This discovery renewed interest in the Immigration Station among the Asian community and the general public. The California legislature soon succumbed to public demands for preservation efforts to be implemented on the former immigration facility (Daniels, 1997, p. 17). It was not designated as a National Historic Landmark until 1997, but publications of the poetry in the book Island and other scholarly works helped it to be recognized as an important cultural resource. The National Park Service received $100,000 in funding from Congress to assess its historical values for preservation and interpretation in 1998. A nonprofit organization called the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation joined forces with the National Park Service to preserve and develop an interpretive program for the site. For its efforts, the foundation was granted $15 million by the state. It was also able to raise $1 million through grants and private donations, as mentioned in the Angel Island Immigration Station Restoration and Preservation Act. In 2005, the site was closed to the general public and restoration work got under way. The project called for removal of certain trees to make the landscape
similar to what it was in 1910. Trees from inside the building were also removed. Recreation of the dock on which the ferry carrying the immigrants landed, recreation of the stairway from the Administration Building to the detainees’ barracks, and installation of supporting structures for the original building fabric were among many other tasks which needed to be accomplished to turn the Immigration Station into a place for visitors. Preservation of the poetry was an especially important aspect of the project so great care was taken not to damage the walls. Restoration work went on from 2005 to early 2009 (Angel Island Association, 2009).

**Interpretation and Exhibits**

The process of documentation and interpretation for the Immigration Station is difficult because most of the records were lost during a fire in 1940. However, after visiting this site in person, the author believes interpretive planners have indeed developed a thorough interpretive program with the resources available. The 13-acre site is located on a higher ground on the island, and a tall barbed wire fence around the perimeter is in place to signify its isolation from the outside world (Figure 3-4). A small laminated paper sign hangs on the fence to explain the differences between the Angel Island Immigration Station and its Ellis Island counterpart on the East Coast (Figure 3-5). Accessibility into the site itself is through a simple gateway leading into a pathway. Interpretive signs along the way show the significance of the surrounding structures on the site. Most of the interpretation for the exterior aspect of the station is done with signs in English and translated Chinese text and old photographs.

The Administration Building facing the ocean and the employee cottages are no longer on the premises, so only the detention barracks, the hospital, the mule barn, the World War II watch tower, mess hall, and the central heating plant remain. A
A commemorative plaque with Chinese characters is erected on the highest point of the site, close to the still standing hospital, to commemorate the Chinese American contributions to American culture. The plaque reads, “Leaving their home and villages, they crossed the ocean. Only to confinements in the barracks. Conquering frontiers and barriers, they pioneered a new life by the Golden Gate” (Figure 3-6).

As observed by the author, visitors can only enter the detention barracks only on guided tours. The tour starts by the grounds of the old Administration Building, and the docent points out the ground areas which used to be the examination room and the interrogation room. No interpretive signs, however, explain the purpose and processes which took place within these rooms. Visitors are given laminated paper of the different meal items available to the detainees as they got ready to climb the re-created stairs from the Administration Building to the detention center. The meal plans were different for Asian detainees and European detainees, thus emphasizing the racial segregation attitude of the time. The interior of the detention barracks has almost no interpretive panels; the original building fabric, objects, and the docent facilitate its interpretation.

The detention barracks are most famous for the poetry carved onto its wall (Figure 3-7). Interpretation of the poems is important to convey the themes of loneliness, desolation, anger, regrets, and homesickness, which are applicable to most detainees on Angel Island. A poem (Figure 3-8) written by an anonymous detainee encompassed all those feelings:

Detained in this wooden house for several tens of days. It is all because of the Mexican exclusion law, which implicates me. It is a pity hero have no ways of exercising their prowess. I can only await the word until I snap Zu’s whip.

From now on, I am departing from far from this building. All of my fellow villagers are rejoicing with me. Don’t say that everything within is Western
Interpretive boards indicate that most of the poems are related; one poem inspired creation of other poems. These poems created bonds and a sense of community between the detainees. English translation of the poems is kept at a minimum, and only certain poems are translated. The majority are left in their original language to better express their authentic emotional intentions.

Exhibitions tend to utilize objects in three ways: 1) explaining how objects work and how people use them, 2) comparing similar objects, and 3) grouping the objects with other items related to them. Using the objects in these ways creates meanings for them, thus incorporating them into the overall theme of the site (Knudson, 1995, p 130). Reproductions of the original objects are used to furnish the men’s barrack areas (Figure 3-9). The reproduced three-tier bunks have many objects on them, including suitcases (Figure 3-10), shoes, hats, musical instruments, books, and newspapers. Clothes are hung on lines over the beds. Such reproduction depicts the crowded condition of the barracks. The theme of immigration, for example, is emphasized through luggage filled with clothes. Other items, involving the arrangement of card games, musical instruments and books on the bunks, illustrate the human aspect and how their normal livelihoods were dependent on and entangled within the bureaucratic process. Even though our experiences are vastly different from the immigrants, certain items, such as clothing, shoes, card games, and knitting, are artifacts which everyone can relate to.

The women’s dormitory also displays these objects and appears less crowded than the men’s dormitory. In addition to all the objects on the bunks, an exhibition space
shows the typical objects belonging to women of different nationalities. Vertical pastel colored banners with names of different countries including Japan, China, Korea, and the continent of Africa, are displayed with suitcases beneath them to explain about the women who had passed through the Immigration Station (Figure 3-11). Besides these banners and a few laminated signs to translate the poetry, the upper interior does not have many other interpretive signs or labels. An Immigration Station interpreter explained that too many interpretive elements would take away from the emotional experience that the place was trying to achieve. She also stated the site is projected to be a house museum in the future.

A larger men’s dormitory on the lower floor of the detention barracks has been turned into the main interpretive center using interpretive panels with photographs and text (Figure 3-12). The panels are attached to old floor-to-ceiling bunk bed poles. The panels provide an overview of the history of immigration on the West Coast, the specific immigration process on Angel Island, and the discriminatory exclusion laws directed toward Asian immigrants. More in-depth information is also available for the poetry written on the barrack walls, which includes details about the different kinds of poetry in the Chinese culture along with their structures and patterns (Figure 3-13). One interpretive panel explains that such “public poetry” was traditionally made to “promote the common good, decry injustice, and champion the oppressed.” Other panels elaborate more on the writers of the poems and themes of loneliness, isolation, feelings of injustice, and homesickness expressed in most of the poetry.

Analysis

The Angel Island Immigration Station could be categorized as a documentary site according to William Alderson’s three groups of historic sites. Angel Island interpreters
attempt to depict an accurate portrayal of the immigration process on the West Coast. Relationships between existing elements within the site consist of the arrival dock, the pathway, the landscape, and the collections of buildings established to tell the collective story of the immigration experience on the West Coast. Such relationships create \textit{genius loci}, or sense of place within the site for visitors. Interpreters choose to show the experience rather than just merely tell it. By using minimum signage, the interpreters allow the site itself, the interiors of the detention barracks building, and the poetry on the wall to tell about the lives and struggles of Asian immigrants and the racially biased immigration system at the time. Interpretation labels are kept at a minimum to avoid excess of information, which could hinder emotional responses. This concept adheres to one of Freeman Tilden’s principles by allowing the interpretation to “not be instruction, but provocation.”

The crowded barracks with multiple tiers and the enclosed barbed wired fence around the perimeter also serve to provoke emotions. Tilden’s other principle that is, “Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information,” could be applied to the interpretive method used in the downstairs main interpretive room. It provides background information of immigration history and laws, along with information about the poems, to make up for the minimum signage and labels in other areas. The interpreters also take into consideration Tilden’s principle regarding interpretation to children in which it should not be diluted from the adult version. The guided tours of the station are geared toward both adults and children. It therefore appears from the author’s observation that the Angel Island Immigration Station interpreters have
acknowledged most of Tilden’s six principles of interpretations during the planning process.

**China Camp**

Along the shore of San Pablo Bay and approximately four miles east of San Rafael in San Francisco, California, the China Camp fishing village has been a part of the cultural landscape since the 1870s; it thrived in the 1880s. According to the China Camp State Park brochure (2005), about 30 fishing villages had existed along the coast of California, but the China Camp fishing village was one of the bigger and more durable ones. It is located within the 1,640-acre property which is now China Camp State Park. Archaeologists determined about 10 to 12 households including three general stores, a barber shop, and a fishing supply store were all located here. Some of the structures had remained after its acquisition by the state in 1977. The village now consists of a shrimp drying shed, shrimp grinding shed, a 305-feet-long wooden pier, two floating houses, and a shrimp drying platform, plus several surrounding individual houses. The typical materials used had been wood, grass, and tule thatching (Wey, 2004).

**Daily Operations**

The men who settled here were fishermen by trade. As with others before, they had come to the United States in search of gold. In the 1880s, records indicated that about 500 people lived in the fishing village. The majority of the population was men with 19 women and 31 children. A teacher and a physician were known to have also resided among the fishermen. The fishermen brought with them age-old techniques of shrimp fishing and preparations. Most of the shrimp caught were dried and shipped to China to be sold because there was not a high demand for fresh shrimp in the United
States back then. Exclusion laws and anti-Chinese sentiment within the general population contributed to the growth of the fishing village because it forced people to seek alternative means of survival through their own community businesses rather than just depending on mines, farms, or factories (Wey, 2004).

A certain pattern of life existed for the fishermen when the return of a boat filled with shrimp prompted all the activities within the camp. Such activities tended to cease during the slow winter season when most went to look for other forms of work. As the demand grew, their businesses and village grew; competition with other American shrimp fishermen became inevitable. Such competitions led to laws which forbade fishing during the peak shrimp season plus drying and exportation of shrimps to other countries and using certain nets. These laws forced the Chinese fishing industry to limit its operation, and they compelled the inhabitants of the China Camp village to move out and find other means of income. The village shrimping business, however, was kept afloat for a long while by Quan Hung Quock’s family business, which was a convenience store. It was eventually purchased by the California State Park Foundation in 1976 for $2.31 million (Hill, 2001)

**Interpretation**

The China Camp fishing community now exists as a California State Historic Landmark. One of its existing structures is made into an interpretive center to tell the history of the China Camp shrimp industry and the successes and struggles of the immigrants. The following description is based on first-hand experience since the author had an opportunity to visit the site. The fishing village is located two miles from the main entrance of the China Camp State Park and lies hidden from the main roadway. A brown sign with red lettering in English and Chinese indicates the existence of this
isolated but once thriving village (Figure 3-14). Visitors are greeted at the entrance by a small convenience store owned by a descendent of one of the fishermen, Frank Quan. The store is originally part of the village, and is still in operation today by selling drinks and snacks as means to support the preservation effort for the village.

The remaining family homes surround the main shrimp processing buildings and outdoor community eating area. A large green fishing net covering the platform (Figure 3-15) in front of these buildings explains the overall characteristic of the village, shrimp fishing. Unlike at the Angel Island Immigration Station, the China Camp Fishing Village interpretive center is a self-guided tour. In fact, no staff members are present anywhere on site. The interpretive building sits on stilts and goes out into the water (Figure 3-16), and interpretive panels line the walls of the dimly lit interior of what used to be a shrimp processing building.

Old photographs and text on metal interpretive panels and collections of objects navigate the visitors through the different methods of shrimp fishing, the everyday patterns of the fishermen, and the laws which prohibited their activities (Figure 3-16). A small sampan boat acts as the centerpiece of the interpretive room (Figure 3-18). Interpretive panels next to the boat inform visitors of the ancient ways of fishing taught to the people by the emperor Fu Hsi thousands of years ago. The boat itself, constructed by the Small Boat Shop of the San Francisco Maritime National Park, is a replica of the original, which was made of redwood indigenous to California. A letter from an investigator of the Fishing and Game Office is printed up on the interpretation panel to convey a picture of a typical day within the China Camp fishing village.
The China Camp fishermen usually processed the shrimp, and then sent live or boiled shrimp off the markets in the United States. They also cooked the shrimp, dried them in the sun, and then sent the dried shrimp and their separated shells back to China to sell. This process is illustrated through text and photographs along with the display of multiple instruments consisting of a scale, shrimp sorting machine, and a large brick oven. In order for visitors to see this process, a reproduction of large shrimp piles, baskets and netting sits in one corner of the room (Figure 3-19).

With the technical aspects of shrimp fishing, the human aspects are also touched upon through the interpretation of community lives and interaction, cultural identity, and darker themes of exclusion and discrimination. Red and yellow color painted images of anonymous individuals (Figure 3-20), along with translated verses of folksongs, connect visitors to the human dramas which existed among all the fishing nets within the walls of this aging shrimping village. Original eating bowls, jars, and other pieces of everyday pottery displayed in a glass case are also used to interpret the lifestyle of the fishermen. Even though active and thriving in their own community, the Chinese fishermen still felt isolated from the rest of the American society. This notion is further illustrated through the site’s physical characteristics, consisting of its secluded wooden village and isolated landscape.

**Analysis**

Unlike Angel Island Immigration Station and Ellis Island, the China Camp fishing village could most likely be categorized as a representative site. This is because it represents the daily routines and livelihood of an early Chinese immigrant community. One of Tilden’s six interpretive principles, that is, “Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely
different things. However, all interpretation includes information,” illustrates the purpose of the China Camp Fishing Village. Even though information tells about the lifestyle of Chinese fishermen on the West Coast, more universal themes of assimilation, acculturation, and discrimination were interpreted within this historic site. Difficulties of assimilation into the general population, which were due to political, social and economic prejudice, forced them to form their own isolated community and establish their own means of resources. However, discrimination followed them here as well as in the form of fishing regulations, which eliminated their traditional fishing methods. These underlying themes are reinforced through specific interpretive materials, which are in the form of informative text, photographs, fishing schedule charts, and lists of fishing regulations. Everything preserved and displayed in the interpretative center and around the village is relevant to the themes and overall story. Another one of Tilden’s principles, that is, “Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part and must address itself to the whole person rather than any phase,” is brought into practice by incorporating the historic fabric of the village like the houses, dock, and shrimp processing buildings, along with nets, weighing scales, eating bowls, and fishing boats to demonstrate the lifestyle of early Asian immigrants. As with Angel Island, visitors gain a sense of place because of these elements and how they fit into the surrounding landscape of San Pablo Bay, and therefore they add to the interpretation process.

Summary

Both similarities and differences can be recognized in the interpretive methods of Ellis Island Museum, Angel Island Immigration Station, and the China Camp fishing village. All three sites focus upon the different aspects of immigration in the United States, and all touch upon the Asian American immigration experiences. Ellis Island
illustrates a broader perspective of immigration, whereas Angel Island is narrowed down
to experiences of Asian immigrants, and the China Camp Fishing Village is reduced
further to focus on one ethnic group. Even though the sites focus more on events which
had occurred there, they all exhibit familiar, universal themes and issues concerning
immigrants, including relocation, assimilation, biculturalism, and discrimination. The
historic structures act as vehicles in which the hardships and triumphs of the immigrants
are told.

They all follow most of Tilden’s six principles within their interpretive process,
particularly concerning the principle which stresses “Interpretation should aim to present
a whole rather than a part and must address itself to the whole person rather than any
phase.” They differ in that Ellis Island addresses a more well-known history of
immigration, while Angel Island and the China Camp Fishing Village address a lesser
known, and possibly darker, past. Arguably, Ellis Island discusses more about
European immigration while Angel Island Immigration Station focuses on Asian
immigrants. Ellis Island has been portrayed as a place of hope and welcome into the
new world, while Angel Island has been viewed as a place to keep out the unwanted.
Ellis Island and Angel Island are documentary sites, which depict the events and
procedures of immigration, while China Camp, a representative site, subtly employs the
themes of immigration into its depiction of life and community after the initial entry into
the country.
Figure 3-1. The Great Hall at Ellis Island Immigration Museum. Photographed by Ngoc Huynh.

Figure 3-2. Luggage and baskets exhibit at the front entrance of Ellis Island Museum. Photographed by Ngoc Huynh.
Figure 3-3. Angel Island Immigration Station barracks and staircase. Photographed by Tram Tran.

Figure 3-4. Fence around Angel Island Immigration Station. Photographed by Tram Tran.
Figure 3-5. Interpretive sign comparing Angel Immigration Station and Ellis Island. Photographed by Tram Tran.

Angel Island vs. Ellis Island

The United States Immigration Station on Angel Island is sometimes called the "Ellis Island of the West", both were immigration stations on islands and that is where similarities end. In stark contrast to the light lifted by Lady Liberty to welcome the tempest tossed near Ellis Island, Angel Island's station was actually called the "Guardian of the Western Gate" charged with keeping unwanted immigrants out of America.

Between 1910 and 1940, the staff checked papers, examined immigrants for disease and conducted entry hearings with the goal of keeping illegal immigrants out, particularly those from China. The Chinese Exclusion Laws were in affect from 1882-1943, initially intending to keep out cheap labor from the east, the racist laws made it difficult for anyone of Chinese descent to come into the country. Come see the poems left behind by those struggling to enter our "golden door" when work is completed in spring 2008.

*Check www.angelisland.org for updates, schedules and reservations.
Figure 3-6. Plague commemorates experiences of Chinese American immigrants. Photographed by Tram Tran.
Figure 3-7. Poetry on the wall of Angel Island Immigration Station. Photographed by Tram Tran.

Figure 3-8. Poetry on the wall of Angel Island Immigration Station. Photographed by Tram Tran.
Figure 3-9. Reproduction of the men’s dormitory in the barracks of Angel Island Immigration Station. Photographed by Tram Tran.

Figure 3-10. Reproduction of suitcases in the men’s dormitory on Angel Island Immigration Station. Photographed by Tram Tran.
Figure 3-11. Banners in the women’s dormitory along with suitcases from women of different nationalities. Photographed by Tram Tran.
Figure 3-12. Former men’s dormitory now used as interpretive center at Angel Island Immigration Station. Photographed by Tram Tran.

Figure 3-13. Interpretive panel explaining the poetry on the walls of Angel Island Immigration Station. Photographed by Tram Tran.
Figure 3-14. Sign in front of China Camp Fishing Village. Photographed by Tram Tran.

Figure 3-15. Fishing net on platform leading into China Camp Fishing Village interpretive center. Photographed by Tram Tran.
Figure 3-16. Former shrimp processing building now main interpretive center at China Camp Fishing Village. Photographed by Tram Tran.

Figure 3-17. Interior of the interpretive center at China Camp Fishing Village. Photographed by Tram Tran
Figure 3-18. Sampan boat used by fishermen in the interpretive center at China Camp Fishing Village. Photographed by Tram Tran.

Figure 3-19. Reproduction of the shrimp sorting process at China Camp Fishing Village. Photographed by Tram Tran.
Figure 3-20. Images of anonymous individuals on wooden crates, who were possible former residents of China Camp Fishing Village. Photographed by Tram Tran.
CHAPTER 4
INTERPRETIVE APPROACHES OF MUSEUMS

This chapter examines the roles of museums in the interpretation of ethnic history, then becomes more focused on toward Asian American immigration history. A brief history of the evolution of museums into educational institutions is discussed to provide a background for understanding how ethnic museums came into existence. Characteristics of ethnic museums, as well as general exhibition methods, are also explored and they provide a basis for analysis of the case studies. Case studies sites consist of the New Americans Museum, the Wing Luke Asian Museum, and the Japanese American National Museum. As with historic sites in Chapter 3, these case studies are chosen because they offer a broad as well as a specific perspective on Asian American immigration history.

History

The concept of museums has been in existence since ancient times. Collections were often acquired by nobles and the social elite to display their wealth and power. Even though these acquisitions have contributed much to the knowledge of human history and culture, they did not start evolving into educational institutions until the 19th century in Victorian England. This was when organization and cataloging of collections took place. In the United States, one of the first museums which aimed to use its collections to educate the public was the Museum of Natural History. It was established by Charles Willson Peale at his home in Philadelphia at the end of the 18th century (Knudson, 1995, p. 234). Originally, Peale wished to create a gallery to display his own artwork, but instead it evolved into a museum consisting of a wide variety of art, culture, and scientific artifacts from his own collections. Partnerships with painters George...
Caitlin and John James Audubon helped the Peale museum to communicate and educate the general public about ideas of the Enlightenment and theories of civic virtues. Unlike other museums of its time, the Peale Philadelphia Museum had an open door policy with the public in which only the price of admission was necessary for entry. Additional fees were also required for special exhibitions, lectures, or concerts. Peale did not keep his collections in storage drawers or special rooms. Instead, he displayed them with labels to describe and identify the items. He also printed up guidebooks and made them available free of charge to visitors.

Peale’s innovative approaches encouraged the public to view museums as more democratic institutions instead of the elitist establishments they had been for so long. Peale’s museum grew in popularity and became well known in Philadelphia and throughout the country. Eventually, organizations and individuals from the United States and other countries started to donate artifacts to add to the museum’s growing collections. With such widespread support, the museum eventually moved to the American Philosophical Society and then to the State House. The Peale Museum paved the way by changing the roles of museums within society by making them more accessible to the community, therefore allowing the general public to learn through their exhibitions and artifacts (Hart & Ward, 1988, pp. 389-394).

**Principles of Ethnic Museums**

Since Peale’s museum opened in Philadelphia, more organizations started to veer toward public displays of collections and the development of interpretive educational programs around their collections. However, events of the 20th century brought forth changes to the country’s social, political, and economic system, therefore causing the museum institution to once again evolve to meet the challenges set forth by
the changing times. Even though most museums have been opened to the public at that time, their interpretive planning and educational programs were criticized as having a Eurocentric mindset. They were criticized for depicting white European culture as elite and progressive while creating a social hierarchy among different cultures and racial groups when they depicted non-white cultures as “exotic” or “primitive.” Such representation unintentionally promoted prejudices and stereotypes of minority cultural contributions. The Civil Rights Movement and the change in demographics in the United States and other Western cultures caused the restructuring of social and political systems and brought about interests in multiculturalism. These changes also brought up the question of the preservation and interpretation of minority cultures (Loukaitou-Sideris & Grodach, 2004, p. 53). In order to address such issues, museums from around the country therefore started to implement exhibitions and programs to include cultures which had been traditionally excluded. The role of museums changed significantly to be “agents of social change, deploying their collections and other resources to contribute, in varied ways, toward a more just and equitable society” (Sandell, 2007, p. 6). This leads to promotion of diversity and differences rather than conformity and assimilation (Sandell, 2007, p. 6).

Since the 1960s, a significant increase has occurred in ethnic museums and minority-influenced historic sites. It is estimated that 26 % of newly opened museums between 1998 and 2000 were based on ethnic culture. Ethnic museums are often more prominent within the local level and are often started by members of different ethnic groups. These museums act as representatives of minority groups to the general public. Through their exhibitions and interpretive programs, they educate the public about the
history and culture of certain ethnic groups along with contributions and accomplishments within the country. In fact, according to Loukaitou-Sideris and Grodach (2004, p. 59), ethnic museums tend to encompass five main approaches in their interpretive planning:

1. Advocating a particular culture
2. Interpreting the culture and history of the ethnic group
3. Identifying the zone of contact between the ethnic culture and the culture of others
4. Keeping the ethnic traditions
5. Identifying the site of contest

In addition to these strategies, ethnic museums still need to adhere to basic philosophies: “1) collect and preserve the past, 2) record and educate the present, and 3) provide perspective, and 4) inspiration for the future” (Knudson, 1995, p.131). It is also important to take into account Tilden’s six ideal principles of interpretation when analyzing the museum’s interpretative methods, as well as the practical approaches to interpretation.

To successfully convey the five characteristics which make up the ethnic museum, interpreters must develop exhibits which connect to the visitors on personal as well as universal levels. Exhibitions need to focus on individual memories of daily activities and life events to connect on a personal level with visitors. The human factor plays an important role in helping the visitors grasp the main ideas and universal themes the exhibitions convey. Exhibitions often use examples of daily rituals, like eating, working, and playing, to illustrate the past because those human experiences can be related to audiences in the present. It is also necessary to incorporate these
personal memories and rituals within the larger framework. Exhibits demonstrate a more global perspective by including “broad reflections on social or demographic change or references to specific world events.” These reflections enable the visitors to make connections with the messages of the exhibits in regard to their own life experiences (Sandell, 2007, p. 113).

**Exhibition Methods and Museum Collections**

Most museums consist of multiple modes of exhibitions, which include permanent, temporary, special, traveling, portable, mobile, and loan exhibitions. Depending on the type of museum, a permanent exhibition is defined as a long-term exhibition which may generally be extended for up to 10 years and should encompass the main themes and collective messages of the museum. Classic design elements are recommended for permanent exhibits to retain a continual “freshness” and “timeless” characteristic. A temporary exhibition can last from a week to six months, and sometimes involve obscure and controversial topics because it does not hold as much risk as a permanent exhibition. Topics can consist of a significant individual or persons within the local, national, or international community, important historical events, works from different community establishments, artistic accomplishments of individuals or groups, and works from the museum’s own departments. These types of exhibits can be featured in a temporary show (Belcher, 1991, pp. 44-49).

Along with the modes of exhibitions, the exhibitions within the museum are categorized according to their purpose. An emotive exhibition tends to provoke emotions and feelings from their audience and can be divided into aesthetic and evocative categories. The aesthetic exhibition focuses solely on the beauty of certain objects, and additional visual aids and interpretive texts are generally very minimal.
They therefore would not clutter but rather emphasize the aesthetic qualities of the objects. The evocative exhibition stirs emotional connections from viewers to the exhibitions itself. One approach is to create an environment that illustrates the atmosphere in which certain stories take place. The didactic style of exhibition relies more on interpretive materials to educate the visitors than on certain ideas and messages. Unlike the emotive approach, the objects used in the exhibitions are accompanied by graphs, charts, personal quotes, and maps plus other interpretive mediums to engage the visitors’ modes of learning. The evocative exhibition’s main purpose is to inform rather than to incite emotional responses. To successfully develop these two main types of exhibitions, a systematic approach should be undertaken to identify how the exhibition should be arranged. If possible, interpretive programs must also appeal to the five senses seeing, touching, hearing, smelling, and tasting to make the exhibit a “multiple-sensory experience.” Depending on the museum and the exhibitions, some may be arranged chronologically, categorically, or hierarchically and they must be based on overall themes or storylines (Belcher, 1991, pp. 59-66).

Historic sites are known for their built environments and historic structures, while museums are known for their collections of objects and artifacts. Most historical and cultural museums rely on objects to comprise their exhibitions, interpretive and educational programs, research, and public outreach. Museums tend to collect objects based on physical, historical, and social values, and exhibits are also based on how such objects represent past lifestyles or events. As with structures of historic sites, the objects would just be inanimate entities if no meanings or history are associated with them. Objects are so much a part of human identity, experiences, and memories so that
they sometimes are “anthropomorphized,” or made to appear human and “incorporated
within the human forms.” The objects themselves do not have the power to act.
However, the actions and decisions of humans make these objects significant and
relatable to other humans. As psychology professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi pointed
out, objects are related to humans in three ways (Kavanagh, 2007, p. 105):

1. Objects demonstrate the owner’s power, vital erotic energy and place in the
   social hierarchy.

2. Objects reveal the continuity of the self through time, by providing foci of
   involvement in the present, mementos and souvenirs of the past, and signposts
   to the future.

3. Objects give concrete evidence of one’s place in a social network as symbols of
   valued relationships.

By understanding these three functions of objects, curators and interpreters are able
categorize, research, and plan exhibitions so that most visitors will understand the
circumstances and contexts which created those objects and how they link our past,
present, and future (Kavanagh, 2000, pp. 98-99).

The following sections in Chapter 4 will include discussions of case studies of
New Americans Museum, the Wing Luke Asian Museums, and the Japanese American
National Museum. These sections will analyze how such museums play a role in the
interpretation of the immigration experience in the Asian American culture. Analysis and
comparison of museums’ interpretative planning goals, exhibition models, and
education programs, as well as the modes and categories of exhibitions, will serve to
fully understand their mission in the promotion and preservation of Asian American
history and culture. Their usage of objects, exhibition spaces, and interpretive materials
will also be compared to those implemented in historic sites mentioned in Chapter 3.
Comprehension of interpretive planning for Asian American museums and historic sites
will assist in the process of developing a guideline for the virtual museum of Asian American immigration experience in Chapter 6.

**The New Americans Museum**

The New Americans Museum’s mission is the “preservation and presentation of the immigrant experience in the United States,” and does so through oral and visual presentations of history, cultural events, performing arts, exhibitions, and conferences. Deborah Szekely, founder of the museum, was originally from Brooklyn and was born to Russian and Austrian immigrants. The museum was first opened to the public in June 2008 at the site of the historic Naval Training Center Promenade at Liberty Station in San Diego, California (The New American Museum website, 2009).

**History**

Even before it was established at the restored Naval Training Center, the museum, nicknamed “museum without walls.” had already been in operation. Its mission is the documentation of immigration history through collaborations with San Diego Community College, local organizations, and private individuals. It has been sponsoring family history essay contests since 2002 to encourage immigrant students to learn more about their own history and origins and to promote appreciation for their family and community. Szekely once considered establishing the museum in Los Angeles, but her love for San Diego and its diverse immigration population from Portugal, the Philippines, Italy, China, East Africa, and Iraq prompted her to relocate the museum to San Diego. With an annual budget of $530,000, the museum opened in the 4,000 square-foot space of the Naval Training Center, including a 1,200-square-foot exhibition space, oral history and lecture space, and cultural events space (Berestein, 2008).
Exhibition Model

Szekely and board members were determined not to include the word “immigration” in the museum’s name because they felt it would conjure up words like “legal” or “illegal” that would hinder the museum’s mission of honoring the immigrant experiences. The goals of the museum are to get past the political aspects of immigration and work to make sure the stories of the immigrants are preserved and interpreted as a crucial part of the history of the United States (Berestine, 2008). The museum focuses its exhibits and programs on the collective immigration experiences of ethnic groups from all over the world. One of the first shows was a Smithsonian Institute Traveling Exhibition called “Becoming America: Teenagers and Immigration,” which consisted of black and white documentary photography by Barbara Beirne. The 59 photographs of contemporary teenagers from various countries were accompanied by interview quotes from the teenagers and informational text panels. The museum saw this exhibition as a way to illustrate biculturalism in which young adults struggled to find their identity between their native culture and their new American way of life.

Another documentary photography show exhibiting this theme and the theme of assimilation is called “Between Cultures” by Gina J.Grillo, who captured images of everyday life, cultural events, and citizenship ceremonies. Other themes of discrimination and injustice against immigrants are depicted in the “Immigrants and Caricature” exhibit, which opened in 2009. This exhibit consists of political cartoons and posters from the Civil War through World War I, which show the general public sentiments toward immigrants at the time and how they have shaped today’s society (New Americans Museum, 2009).
Analysis

Even though the New Americans Museum is a fairly new and local institution, it encompasses all the characteristics of an ethnic museum. However, this museum is different because it preserves and interprets, as well as embraces and promotes, all immigrant culture, rather than just one ethnic group. As with the Ellis Island historical site, this museum focuses on the shared immigrant experience, therefore resulting in a wider perspective of immigration and ethnic culture in the United States. Some of its exhibitions seem to be emotive in which the main purpose is to provoke emotions, while others, such as the “Immigrants and Caricature” exhibit, are both emotive and didactic in nature.

Wing Luke Asian Museum

The Wing Luke Asian Museum is a community-based museum located in Seattle, Washington, in its International District. The museum advertises itself as the only Asian American museum in the United States that includes all Asian ethnic groups. The museum is named for prominent Chinese American attorney Wing Luke, who was an enthusiastic advocate for the preservation and interpretation of Asian American history and cultural contributions.

History

Originally located in a former Chinese import-export company, the Wing Luke Museum first opened in 1967, which was just two years after Mr. Luke died in a plane crash. The building itself was remodeled into a museum space by architect Ben Woo and his firm. During its first years, most of the museum staff consisted of volunteers from the community. The museum had no budget, and its collections were donations from local Asian American residents, historical organizations, and artists. Their opening
exhibit was on Chinese pioneer families in Seattle using old photographs and newspaper clippings. As the museum expanded, a new professional museum director, Kit Freudenberg, was hired to thoroughly research, manage, and organized the museum’s growing collections. She coordinated fundraising events to eventually raise $350,000, thereby allowing the museum to remodel and expand its exhibition and storage space. The available funding also enabled the museums to hire more staff, consisting of a volunteer/membership coordinator, collections manage, and an education curator to develop new programs and to manage existing ones (Chew, 1999).

The museum has since moved to a new space, the East Kong Yick Building, consisting of 57,000 square feet. This building has been in existence since 1910 and was constructed by 170 Chinese immigrants using combined personal resources. In addition to Chinese immigrants, its brick structure housed immigrants of Japanese and Filipino origin, most of whom worked at the local fish canneries, farms, and construction sites around the State of Washington and the West Coast. The architectural firm of Olson Sunberg Kundig Allen was in charge of remodeling the crammed interior into spacious exhibition areas, and they did so by preserving as much of the original structure and material as possible. For example, the old floorboards were reused as treads on the main staircase. Tin from the old fire doors was incorporated into the ticket counter, and the original windows and doors were refurbished and reinstalled into the remodeled space (Broom, 2008).

Most of the second floor was removed to make space for the installation of the entry lobby and the main steel staircase. One of the most interesting and dynamic features of the old building was the existing light wells in which skylights were installed
to maximize the creation of interior space. This was utilized by the architects to orient circulation throughout the museum (Pearson, 2009). Some spaces, like the Gee How Oak Tin Family Association Room, however, were preserved and kept as they existed before. The room was the meeting place of an organization named the Gee How Oak Tin Family Association, which was established in the 1900s by immigrant men who shared a common surname or were from the same villages. The names Chin, Woo, and Yuen belonged to this organization and were known as the largest association in the State of Washington. Their main purpose was to assist its members in finding jobs, housing, and other necessities for their new life in America. They also met for cultural activities and social purposes, such as playing mah jong and eating meals together (Broom, 2008).

After the project was completed, the museum has 10,000 square feet of exhibition space, including space for the permanent galleries. This space encompasses the Community Exploration Gallery, Community Portrait Lab, Chinatown International District Exhibition, and Wing Luke Museum Exhibition. Other spaces consist of the community hall, theater with 59 seats, learning studio classrooms, community conference room, along with Museum Marketplace, Governor Gary Locke Library, and Community Heritage Center make up the rest of the museum. The new building itself was opened to the public May 2008 (Pearson, 2009).

Exhibition Model

The museum’s growth is due to the support of the local community, therefore the museum relies on a community-based exhibition model to plan and interpret its exhibition (Chew, 1999). On most occasions, the exhibition team is made up of the museum staff, including the exhibition developer, collections manager, and education
coordinator plus core community members and participating community members. The core community members, also known as Community Advisory Committee (CAC), typically consist of 10 to 15 people. Generally, they make decisions on the theme and storyline of the exhibitions. They also decide how the exhibition should look in addition to offering directions on how to obtain resources and guidelines for educational programs. Museum staff members, on the other hand, act as “technical advisors” by coordinating resources, managing the timeline and budget plan, and implementing the actual construction process of the exhibition. They also assist in allocating resources from other museums or institutions. In addition, the exhibition team relies on participating members to provide photographs, documents, and artifacts along with the tasks of conducting interviews, research, and general public outreach and marketing purposes (Chinn, 2006, p. 15).

According to Chinn (2006, p.18), the development of exhibitions involves 7 steps:

1. Initial outreach
2. Exhibition Development
3. Research and Gathering
4. Exhibit Design
5. Exhibit Fabrication and Installation
6. Exhibit Opening
7. Follow-up

The first step is designated as the “initial outreach,” in which assessments are made about the community, its concerns, stories and history in order to come up with general ideas for the exhibition. These assessments enable the museum to compile a list of community members who could be part of the CAC, and they could put together potential budgets, timelines, and a set of goals for the exhibit. The exhibition development process is the second step of the entire project and requires numerous
meetings among the museum staff to determine the main themes and storyline in addition to discussions on the look and feel of the overall exhibit. The third step centers on the research, in which inquiries are made from other museums, libraries, and historical organizations to come up with the necessary resources. Conducting and processing of oral interviews are part of this third step. The design of the exhibition is the fourth step and revolves around selecting the material gathered from the research phase to feature in the exhibition. This phase also involves plans to adapt those research materials into storylines and premises for the physical exhibition space. The fifth step is exhibit installation. With the combined efforts of contractors, museum staff, and volunteers, it generally requires two and a half weeks for the actual exhibit installation. The sixth step involves exhibit opening. Whenever the exhibit is ready to open, invitations are sent out to its members and others who participated in the process. The last step includes sending out thank-you cards and summary reports to exhibition contributors. Exhibition evaluations and surveys are also conducted in this stage to make improvements for the future (Chinn, 2006, pp. 14-19).

One of Wing Luke Asian Museum’s most notable and first community-based exhibits was about the internment camp experience of Japanese Americans. It was called “Executive Order 9066: 50 Years Before and 50 Years After.” About 100 members from the local Japanese American community contributed time and resources, and the project took about one year to complete. The exhibition not only told of the story of Japanese Americans forced to leave their homes to move into government controlled internment camps, but also told of the betrayal, pain, and injustice felt by them at the time. Through interviews with former internees, the exhibition illustrated themes of
survival and freedom along with struggles to demonstrate loyalty in the face of widespread fear and discrimination (Chew, 1999).

The pre-war, war, and post-war eras were three main sections featured in the exhibition, which utilized old photographs, borrowed artifacts, mementos, and oral interviews with the community elders to bring forth the main message. The pre-World War II era section was about the history of Japanese immigration to America and their assimilation into the general American society before the war. It explained lifestyle, employment, family, and growth within the Japanese community and how racism developed and became intermingled with their livelihood. By using actual quotes and individual stories in conjunction with statistics and population data, the audience were able relate personally to those who had lived during that period. Statistics, charts, and population demographics woven within political and economic contexts gave a global perspective to the individual stories, as mentioned by Richard Sandell in his book *Museums, Prejudice and Reframing of Difference*. The section titled “The Turning Point” had other subsections with headings like “Dec. 7 and the Days of Infamy,” “Evacuation,” “Camp Harmony,” “Question of Loyalty,” “Military Services,” and “Court Challenges, and Continued Hostility.” These sections depicted the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the internment of the Japanese, and their roles in World War II.

In order to bring forth the reality and drama of the internment camp experience, the exhibit provided the text of Executive Order 9066 at the entrance of the exhibit with various recordings of President Franklin Roosevelt’s announcements played in the background. Personal letters, diaries, arrest papers, and photographs were also utilized to convey individual personalities, which then put faces to statistical data. Objects
“reveal the continuity of the self through time, by providing foci of involvement in the present, mementos and souvenirs of the past, and signposts to the future” (Kavanagh, 2000, p. 99), Items including discarded Japanese flags, language books, toys, and luggage not only acted as powerful mementos to the internment camp experience of the past but also as a mean to link audiences of the present and the future. The years following the war and the internment camps were encompassed under headings called “Starting Over,” “Breaking Barriers,” “Quest for Redress,” “What the Future Holds,” and “Return to Minidoka.” Once again, multiple mediums in the form of text and images were employed to address the aftermath of the experience, the lingering prejudice, and the quest for justice (Silverman, 2007).

Other exhibitions in the museum are both permanent and temporary. The museum features multiple themes relating to the history and culture of Asian Americans. One of its permanent exhibitions, located in the main gallery on the second floor, is titled “Honoring Our Journey.” This exhibit examines five main themes prevalent to most Asian American immigrants: “Home,” “Getting Here,” “Making a Living,” “Social Justice,” and “Community.” The exhibition relies on personal artifacts including wedding dresses donated by the local community, old photographs and newspaper clippings to tell stories. In addition to these traditional interpretation methods, a video showing images of different types of shoes is projected in a circle on the floor at the entrance of the gallery to depict the Asian custom of taking one’s shoe off before entering the house and also acts as a welcome sign to visitors. This method also implies a diversity of history in the Asian immigration experience.
Another notable part of the exhibition is a “Memory Wall,” which details the history and lives of individuals in the community through videos, photographs, poetry, and text. Other permanent exhibitions include ones on the story of Wing Luke, explanations of the museum and its purpose, and the Chinatown International District Exhibit. In its smaller community portrait galleries, the museum provides rotating exhibitions on different Asian communities like those of the Vietnamese, the Filipinos, and the Cambodians (Broom, 2008).

Analysis

The Wing Luke Museum’s continued growth and expansion is due to the continued support of its local community. It follows the basic five philosophies typical of ethnic culture museums mentioned earlier. Its mission statement is “to engage the Asian Pacific American communities and the public in exploring issues related to the culture, art and history of Asian Pacific Americans,” This validates the first guideline of the five main approaches by advocating certain cultural groups, that of Asian Americans. The museum also interprets the history and culture of many Asian cultures, and it emphasizes the similarities between the different nationalities, therefore creating interpretations of the identity of Asian Americans. The ethnic museum also acts as a zone of contact between its culture and the culture of others. The Wing Luke Asian Museum fulfills this purpose by thriving to “build bridges to other communities” (Chinn, 2006, p. 9). It does so by creating exhibits on race relations and racism, including the one which featured artwork from 12 contemporary artists titled “Beyond Talk: Redrawing Race” and another one about the meaning of being an American, called “I Am American: A Community Journal,” and featured in 2003.
The Wing Luke museum also sees itself as a keeper of traditions in which it documents and preserves history, heritage, culture, and art of its respected culture. Exhibits such “Celebrating Asian New Years in America” are meant to celebrate and uphold cultural traditions. Others exhibits like “Executive Order 9066: Fifty Years Before and Fifty Years After” and “The First 100 Years: Reflections of Seattle's Chinese Americans” are meant to preserve and depict history not elaborated upon in the mainstream culture. By situating the museum in the East Kong Yick Building and recycling its fabric to be incorporate in the museum setting, the Wing Luke Asian Museum preserves the building that played a large role in Asian American immigration history on the Pacific Coast. Some rooms within the building, consisting of the hotel rooms, hotel manager’s office, import-export store, family room, and communal kitchen, are preserved and interpreted as part of the Kong Yick Immersion Exhibitions (Chinn, 2006, p.10).

The museum also offers tours of surrounding Asian American neighborhoods, Chinatown, Japantown, and Manila Town, as other means of preserving the culture. Lastly, the museum acts as sites of contest where “prejudice, bias, bigotry, and racism are exposed, confronted and challenged” (Loukaitou-Sideris 2004, p. 59). Determined to uphold this role in the community, the Wing Luke Museum has organized the “Out of Focus: Media Stereotypes of Asian Pacific Americans” to illustrate the many stereotypes of Asians throughout their history in America. The exhibit also has personal testimonies from those who had experienced racism and their perspective on the prejudice and racism in today’s world. The museum also works with educational programs like Day of Remembrance with support from the Washington Civil Liberties Public Education
Program to educate people about the Japanese internment camp experience and to spread the message of civil rights and equality locally and nationally.

Japanese American National Museum

The Japanese American National Museum is located in the Little Tokyo Historic District in Los Angeles, California. It was conceptualized in 1982 by the joint efforts of Little Tokyo real estate businessmen and Japanese American World War II veterans. The State of California granted $750,000 to its development and the city of Los Angeles followed suit by donating an additional $1 million (Japanese America National Museum, 2009).

History

The museum was established in a building which used to be a Buddhist temple. Japanese immigrants constructed the Nishi Hongwanji Buddhist temple in 1925, and later on it became a multi-functional building with spaces for community gatherings, offices, and social halls. During World War II, it was used to store belongings of Japanese Americans and their families after they had been sent away to internment camps. The building was later sold to the City of Los Angeles in 1973 and became a city historic landmark (Japanese American National Museum, 2009). As pointed out by Yasuko Suga, a professor of design at Tsuda College, in her research paper titled “Rethinking Museum Display: Designing ‘Locality’ at the Japanese American National Museum,” the location of the museum “reinforces and reproduces its cultural meaning, and enables it to grow communication network around the museum site” (Suga, 2009, p.3).

The museum opened in 1992 and was able to raise enough money to expand through donations. Sony Corporation and organizations like the National Endowment for
the Humanities, the Smithsonian, and the U.S. Department of Defense contributed an estimated $65 million necessary for its expansion. In 1999, the museum expanded and built an extension to its original building. The new building, named the Pavillion, was designed by the Obata and Kassabaum Firm and designed to link the past with the present and the East with the West. These goals were achieved by relating the red sandstone and marble to the red tiles on the original buildings and through its curved yellow granite walls. The water and stone garden was inspired by European megaliths and traditional Japanese stone gardens in which American vegetation was planted to provide a space of peace and reflection. Its flagstone terrace created a connection between the lobby space and the café. The new space was measured to be 85,000 square feet, which included 18,000 square feet of gallery space and a 3,000-square-foot National Resource Center for research (Japanese American National Museum, 2009).

**Exhibition Model**

Unlike the Wing Luke Asian Museum, this museum centers on one ethnic group, the Japanese American, rather than on all Asian American groups. The museum claims to be a community-based organization in which it develops exhibitions with the help of other Japanese communities in the country. However, the majority of its shows seems to be more curator-driven. The museum has the largest collection of Japanese American objects: 47,000 artifacts from 5,000 individuals, families, and groups nationally. Its exhibitions focus on themes of cultural assimilations, discrimination, occupations, family, lifestyle, and community.

Its permanent exhibition demonstrates the overall history of Japanese Americans in the United States: “Common Ground: The Heart of Community.” This exhibition includes a little bit of each theme by depicting 130 years of Japanese
American history from the time of the early Japanese immigration to World War II and to the present. For example, one display in the exhibit is titled “Immigration: Japanese Pioneers in Hawaii.” It portrays the stories of early Japanese laborers and shows the tools of their trades and items used in everyday life, such as pots, pans, and washboards. The exhibition utilizes photographs, moving images, films, and letters to convey the individual stories of Japanese Americans immigrants. Other artifacts consist of a wedding dress, a Dodger’s baseball uniform, and a Japanese American Civil Liberties banner used in a 1963 march in Washington D.C. These artifacts were obtained from Japanese American communities around mainland United States and Hawaii, and they demonstrate a collective Japanese American immigrant experience.

These objects are necessary to entice the audience into the past, but to also show a similarity of past and present lifestyle and to highlight between different cultural backgrounds. An exhibit by artist Hirokazu Kosaka displays of suitcases which contain personal belongings. This exhibit enables the visitors to understand the identity of the people who owned them and to imagine what their lifestyle had once been (Suga, 2009, p. 4). The exhibit also illustrates life in the internment camps by featuring a 120 by 40-foot-long restored barrack from the Wyoming Heart Mountain camp. A previous exhibit titled “The Power of Place: Boyle Height Projects” demonstrated diversity. Along with such exhibits, the museum also puts on shows from local and nationally known artists to express the themes relevant to Japanese American culture and history. Exhibits like “Crossings: 10 Views of America’s Concentration Camp” feature artwork from artists across the generations. They center on themes of Japanese American incarceration during World War II, and others focus on art forms like sculpture, murals, photography,

**Additional Programs**

In addition to the exhibition galleries, the Japanese American National Museum also includes a theater, a Life History Studio showcasing personal histories of individuals or families, two educational centers, central halls located on both the ground floor and the second stories to serve as temporary exhibition spaces, and a 90-foot-long water and stone garden. The museum offers lecture series and educational programs, like the National Diversity Education Program to help engage educators in new ways of teaching diversity and democracy in public education. The museum also gives tours of Little Tokyo and provides workshops on arts and crafts. The museum engages the visitors’ multimodal methods of learning to carry out its mission of “promoting understanding and appreciation of America’s ethnic and cultural diversity by sharing the Japanese American experiences” (Ryan, 1999).

**Analysis**

The Japanese American National Museum features the five qualities which define an ethnic museum. First of all, the museum acts as an advocate and interpreter of a particular ethnic group. It centers most of its exhibits and educational programs on themes relating to Japanese Americans to “instill pride in the members of the ethnic group” and to “develop a sense of appreciation in the general public for the ethnic group’s achievements and contribution to society (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2004, p. 59). The museum’s collections are incorporated into the exhibits for the purpose of learning and research. Programs such as The National Diversity Education Program and “The Power of Place: Boyle Heights Project” exhibit enable the museum to reach out to the general
public and bridge the gap between the Japanese culture and other cultures. The museum recognizes that the Japanese is but one culture among many other cultures, therefore it thrives to promote understanding and harmony between these different groups. The museum also acts as a “keeper of the traditions” by being a place where the cultures, history, values, and experiences of Japanese Americans are preserved and interpreted. The museum is a site of contest, which means it is a place where prejudice and racism are “exposed, confronted, and challenged.” The museum also claims to “believe in the importance of remembering our history to better guard against the prejudice that threatens liberty and equality in a democratic society” (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2004, p. 61).

**Summary**

These three case studies of immigration/ethnic-themed museums all demonstrate similarities in their interpretation of immigration issues. As previously described, the three case study museums rely on multiple forms of exhibitions, which mostly are emotive and didactic in character, to illustrate these issues. All three case studies exhibit the five characteristics of ethnic museums, as discussed by Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris (2004) and Carl Grodach in their research article, “Displaying and Celebrating the ‘Other’.” The museums highlight these characteristics through their cultural, historic or art exhibits, and public programs. As with the historic sites case studies in Chapter 3, these case studies are chosen because they represent diverse aspects of immigration and the Asian American experience.

The New Americans Museum, for example, characterizes a larger perspective of immigration, therefore encompassing memories, stories, and history from immigrants all over the world, much like that of the historic Ellis Island Immigration Center in New
York. However, unlike Ellis Island, The Americans Museum is a newly established institution and shows a more contemporary aspect of immigration, while Ellis Island focuses on the historical aspects. On the other hand, the Wing Luke Asian Museum represents the Asian American perspective of immigration, thus shifting the focus to one racial group. The Wing Luke Asian Museum is comparable to the historical site of Angel Island Immigration Station because it also concentrates more on issues concerning Asian American immigration. They both contain interpretive programs relevant to multiple Asian American groups: the display of suitcases from people of various Asian countries at Angel Island to the rotating exhibitions on the history and stories of various Asian communities at the Wing Luke Museum. Interestingly, the museum is also appropriately located in a building with a long history of Asian immigrants, which indirectly adds to their interpretive goals. The Japanese American National Museum is the last case study of this chapter, therefore narrowing the interpretation to one ethnic group. Similar to the China Camp Fishing Village with its focus on one ethnic group, the Japanese American National Museum also concentrates mostly on the experiences of Japanese Americans. Once again, familiar interpretive elements can be found between this museum and the other case study museums and historic sites.
CHAPTER 5
ONLINE INTERPRETATION

Asian American immigration history is preserved and interpreted through various methods within the traditional mediums of historic sites and museums, as was discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. However, as technology advances and becomes more complex and integrated within the 21st century, the traditional roles of these two types of institutions are re-examined to determine how they would change to adapt and assimilate to available new technology. Issues of authenticity, quality, credibility, authority, and values are among the many challenges facing interpretation planners, museum professionals, and preservationists.

Chapter 5 discusses the advantages and challenges of the third interpretive media, the Internet. Interpretive planning for the Internet is vastly different than planning for physical spaces, so specific methods are necessary to accommodate goals they seek to achieve. This chapter provides explanations of different computer technology that are now utilized by museums and historic preservation institutions to communicate their interpretive goals and mission statements. Various computer programs adopted by cultural organizations are explored to show the numerous options available. Comparison of websites from Ellis Island, Angel Island and China Camp fishing village along with those of the Wing Luke Asian Museum and the Japanese American National Museum are made to accurately assess their various strategies and approaches to the online interpretation of Asian American immigration history.
Historic Preservation and Digital Technology

Technology was first incorporated into the field of historic preservation through means of text database, then eventually progressed into the storage of digital images to accompany the text information. The stored images allowed for understanding and comparison of design elements within these built environments. Surveys showed that in the early 1990s the State Historic Preservation Offices or SHPOs converted most of their information of historic structures into digital databases. They were organized into categories, including historic buildings and structures, archaeological sites, and historic districts for accessibility purposes. As a topic is selected, it can be narrowed down to more specific information (Chittenden, 1991, p. 55).

Other historic structure databases, including the National Register of Historic Places, were also implemented at that time. The responsibility for cultural resource information management and distribution fell to a subdivision of the National Park Service, known as the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training. Due to the Preservation Technology and Training Grants program and collaborations with other institutions, consisting of the Arizona State Museum, Arizona State Historic Preservation Offices, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Partners for Sacred Places, the program was able to create digital databases of information and conduct researches on multiple historic properties, archeological sites, objects. The program was also able to develop the Geographic Information System (GIS) data and a database on preservation methods like the CAMD, the Conservation and Art Materials Dictionary (Carroll, 2000, pp. 7-8).

The advancement of the GIS system allows professionals to create spatial data for historic sites, thus adding to the amount of digital information available. The GIS has
been in existence since the 1960s and with data obtained from aircrafts and spacecrafts sensors. In addition to using GIS for the development of maps, cultural resource managers, archaeologists, and city planners have applied it to study, analyze, and compare spatial features, such as topography, geology, vegetation, and other elements of the terrain to determine the cultural values of different historic sites. The combination of multiple types of databases has helped to enhance the preservation and interpretation process of these sites (Williamson, 2000, p. 6).

The Internet has evolved to make this information easily accessible and available through websites, archives, and other types of online databases. The integration of information with virtual reality and other types of media consisting of videos, audio, maps, and images, has vastly improved the general public’s knowledge and empathy for certain sites. It also plays important roles in collaboration and networking between larger organizations and grass roots preservation groups, as well as private individuals. Virtual reality is often used in the interpretation process through the development “walk-through” models of the actual sites, enabling users to obtain an overall perspective without having to go to these sites. While some virtual reality site models are vague, others contain more in-depth details (Caroll, 2000, p. 8). Computer modeling is done through programs like AutoCad, Autodesk Revit, and other model-rendering technology.

A system was proposed by Anat Geva (1996), a professor in architecture at Texas A&M University, in the research article titled “A Multimedia System Organizing Architectural Documentation of Historic Buildings.” She outlined a theoretical system called the Historical Architectural Documentation System or HADS. The system included multimedia in forms of photographic images, drawings, text, animation, and
sound to create an electronic platform on which all these information can be stored, therefore making it easier for research and analysis purposes. HADS followed four principle guidelines in its format: familiarity, multimedia, flexibility, and accessibility (Geva, 1996, p.20).

A familiar format organizes information in commonly used hierarchies so that users would be able to find the information more easily. For example, a website about historic houses starts with a list of houses available for research. Once a house is selected for further analysis, the system shows general information, which includes the type of building, location, and historical background of the building type, the time period, and the community. The system then narrows into the specific building’s identity, which would include the history of the building itself and other details like material, structure, interiors, exteriors, doors, windows, and other architectural elements (Geva, 1996, pp. 20-21).

Multimedia is incorporated into text information to make information more comprehensible. Visual information about the specific building is in the forms of video clips, photographs of the overall sites, scale drawings, floor plans, elevations, sections, and architectural details. Maps are integrated into the system to provide users with spatial understanding. Animation features like “walk through” models provide an interactive element to the interface and also contribute to spatial understanding. Inclusion of audio component in forms of music, narratives, interviews, or sound clips, is also important. These features “accentuate the historical background of the building” and make for an animated interpretation of the historic sites (Geva,1996, p. 20).

The hierarchy of information and methods of delivery need to have flexibility.
Flexibility allows viewers to navigate easily from one part of the website to another, and flexibility enables them to bring up information they need without going through multiple steps. Geva also suggested that accessibility of the application to a large and diverse audience is crucial and should be factored into the HADS development process. In addition to the application being on a widely used platform, the digital sizes of images and drawings are reduced so that they do not take a large amount of time and memory space to download (Geva, 1996, pp. 22-24).

Anat Geva’s proposal for Historical Architectural Documentation System was featured in the Association of Preservation Technology Bulletin in 1996. It was used to document and store information about 19th century community churches in south central Texas (Geva, 1996, p.18). It is not clear if it was used for documentation of other historic sites.

**Websites from Historic Sites Case Studies**

Many websites are focused on Ellis Island, and one of them is from the Statue of Liberty/Ellis Island Foundation Inc. This website is well developed with multimedia-like video and audio clips, photographs, timelines, charts, and personal accounts to represent multiple aspects of the immigration experience on Ellis Island. In addition to information about the past, personal stories are available about descendants of immigrants trying to trace their ancestry. The website’s topics are organized into categories, such as passenger search, Ellis Island history, and genealogy on the homepage. One of the unique features on the website is a database that enables visitors to search by last name or ship records for their ancestors who came to America through Ellis Island. Family charts are also provided to help people map their ancestry. As far as specific information about the actual site and structure are concerned, the
website has brief textual information and a photo album section which compares the structure of the past to the present. But the website does not have many architectural details about the structure or the geographic details about the site itself.

Since Ellis Island is a national landmark, the National Park Service also created an official website. The website is straightforward and accessible through several main categories like culture, history, photos, multimedia, news, park management, and visitor information. A collections section offers information on certain objects relating to immigration, consisting of buttonhook devices used by women to tie laces and button blouses and also of health inspectors examining the immigrants for contagious eye diseases. Information about the historic structure is also minimal here, but numerous past and present-day photographs of various aspects of the island, the building, and the people are shown. The photographs displayed here are unique because visitors to the site have an option of zooming in and out to examine details of photographs, as well as being able to view them as slideshows. A brief history about the island, the immigration center, and its procedures are found with links leading visitors to information on U.S. population statistics and information on immigration procedures today. Images of objects are listed under collections. The website also includes educational materials for teachers, including field trip planning guides and lesson plans. An information and activity booklet for children is downloadable to guide teachers and their students through the exhibits at the site.

The Angel Island Immigration Station is featured on two official websites: one is produced by the Angel Island Association, and the other by the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation. The Angel Island Association website addresses the
overall history of the island and provides information about the Immigration Station and other existing historic sites on the island, consisting of Fort McDowell, Camp Reynolds, and the old quarantine station. Its home page consists of broad facts and news announcement about the island. The layout of the site is not as hierarchical, but more organic. Its organization revolves around topics about structures on the island, available tours, and tour information, natural history, and photos. The topics on the top of the page and on the side bar are listed in a random fashion with no particular order, which can cause visitors to hesitate and be confused during their navigation through the site. However, the navigation of the site can be easier if users click on the “site map” option. This organizes the topics into a more structured and hierarchical system by listing broad subjects about visitor information, events, historic sites, information about the Angel Island Association, links, contacts, and general photographs. The site then classifies more specific information about each of those topics.

The general information on the immigration station is classified into subjects, such as its purpose, its background, specific immigration history including the paper sons and daughters, and a general overview of the interpretation development process. The website has sections showing black and white photographs of the station’s interior and recent photographs depicting the current state of the station’s hospital. It features a great deal of information organized chronologically to illustrate the restoration construction, interpretation, and preservation process from 2005 to 2007. The website relies mostly on old and current photographs and informational text rather than other mediums like music, videos, or video clips, to explain Angel Island’s past stories, current events and future plans.
The California State Park system sponsors the official website for the China Camp Fishing Village. A brief textual explanation of the site is included on the home page with visitor information on park hours and directions and schedules of events. Google maps and satellite images are incorporated into the website to pinpoint the physical location of the historic site. As with Ellis Island and Angel Island, the website has an image archive with photographs of different features of the village, however, it does not offer any information on the photographs themselves. Documents, applications, brochures, and maps can be downloaded in the form of PDF files.

More complex websites are dedicated to the education and research of historical sites, and some also include virtual tours with the information and images. The National Park Service site for Manzanar Internment Camp features a virtual tour of the site and the facility. To access the virtual tour, visitors need to download the Quicktime software which will allow them to have a 360-degree perspective of different parts of the site. The buildings on the site are indicated by numbers on the map provided, and visitors can click on a number to get an interactive tour and specific information about a particular structure or landscape. Once a structure is chosen for further analysis, visitors can pan 360 degrees around the screen and zoom in and out to acquire specific visual information.

**Museums and the Internet**

Museums have been incorporating the advantages of new technology into their infrastructure as early as the 1960s. Database systems used to organize collections gradually transformed into more sophisticated means of collection management. This collection management allows for further digitalization of all information, including the images of the actual objects within the collections. Besides the collections management,
other technologies, including touch screen exhibition kiosks, video clips, audio guides, and other digital displays, have also been a part of the exhibitions within the museums’ galleries.

Since the usage of technology continues to rise within the museum profession, the International Committee for the Training of Museum Personnel of ICOM (International Council of Museums) has republished the ICOM Basic Syllabus to accommodate the changing technological advances of the information age. In 2000, the document evolved into the ICOM Curricula Guidelines for Museum Professional Training. This publication discusses the issues of general competencies, museology, management, public programming, collection care, and information management. Guidelines regarding subjects about emails, websites, databases, and multimedia formats for the purpose of interpretation and education are all targeted under the heading of information management (Din & Hecht, 2007, p.13).

A guideline like the one published by ICOM motivates museums and museum organizations similar to the American Association of Museums to offer workshops, internships, and conferences. These guidelines help museum professionals be more aware and knowledgeable about the different technology available to them, thus making the integration of technology more efficient within museums. For example, the Museum Computer Network (MCN), which started in 1967, was formed to “help information professionals use technology to serve their institutions” (Din & Hecht, 2007, p. 14). It started out as an informal organization for the museums of New York to “automate their registration records.” The MCN provides resources to help their members in the form of special interest groups, listservs, newsletters, websites, and an annual conference
Formal educational programs for museum education also propose interdisciplinary approaches to their programs by including technology-centered classes specifically for museum studies majors or encouraging students to take classes within other departments, such as computer science, graphic design, or communications (Din & Hecht, 2007, p. 16).

As the Internet became more widely available in the late 1990s and more easily accessible as it is now, museum professionals look to incorporate its capabilities into the museum system. However, the question arises on how to integrate the authenticity and tangibility of objects and spaces of the physical museum into the virtual world of the Internet in which everything is comprised of images and data (Howes, 2007, p. 67). The Internet is known to provide instant results to large amounts of information, but also to offer the audience an innovative approach to learning and research. Compared to the physical exhibition of the museum, the Internet allows visitors to control the amount of information available based on factors of availability, time, and interests, so that the visitors will not feel overwhelmed by the information they receive.

By feeling comfortable with the amount of information, visitors also tend to acquire more knowledge. Because of its wide range of accessibility, information put on the Internet is more likely to draw larger demographics of people worldwide. In addition to the quantity of information and accessibility the Internet offers, quality is also an important factor to consider. The virtual spaces of the Internet present multiple alternative possibilities for exhibition and interpretation for museums. Instead of just text and images, highly developed programs, combined with the capabilities of the Internet,
allow the visitors to enter virtual worlds in which they can explore and interact at their own leisure (Mintz, 1998, pp. 24-25).

The recent development of Web 2.0 on the internet offers users an opportunity for “decentralization of authority” (MacArthur, 2007, p. 61) which results in a more democratic distribution of information, as well as an opportunity for better user interactions and open communications. Web 2.0 includes applications consisting of blogs, wiki, mashups, social networking, and folksonomies, that is “the application of user-supplied subject terms, known as tags, to describe everything from web pages to works of art.” However, issues of authority and authenticity are some of the problems facing Web 2.0. Museum institutions and historical organizations have always been the main authority on the interpretation of art, history, and culture, and the expansion of user contributions due to Web 2.0 technology brings to question the issues of authenticity of information and other issues of ownerships, copyright, and trust (MacArthur, 2007, p. 62).

Experts argue that such user interactions and exchanges of information are conducive to learning, and break down barriers of elitism and superiority. In order for Web 2.0 technology to be successful, however, “radical trust” must be involved. Radical trust is defined as “the need for a more intimate, equal relationship between museums and constituents” (MacArthur, 2007, p. 62). Blogs, chats, social networking applications, and other means of community interaction have been included into the museum system, and they are seen as beneficial to roughly 43% to 54% of people polled in a survey conducted by the National Museum of Natural History in 2007. In essence, a balance must be maintained between interpretation based on expert opinions and contributions
and involvement of the audience to produce worthwhile educational programs
(MacArthur, 2007, pp. 61-63).

Similar to historic sites, the physical spaces of museums can be transferable to
virtual ones. Deborah Seid Howes expressed in her essay titled, “Why the Internet
Matters: A Museum Educator’s Perspective” that the physical space of the museum and
the virtual space of the Internet shared two obvious constituents: information and
visitors. Though information is delivered by different modes, both the physical and the
virtual museum consist of labels, collections databases, audio and video clips, press
releases, teacher packets, scholarly essays, reproductions, and catalogs. As far as
visitors are concerned, Howes (2007) suggested they can perform the same function as
teach, socialize, plan, learn, research, and shop in a virtual museum as they do in a real
museum. Virtual museums continue to be on the rise due to the ubiquity of the Internet,
the economic advantages in production and distribution of interpretive materials, the
collaborative learning environment, and its capacities for reaching more extensive
groups of prospective audiences (p. 68-69).

With these abilities, the virtual museum breaks down the physical and figurative
walls of the traditional museum. History, culture, objects, artwork, and ideas are now
being transferred from the traditional walls and spaces to the audience’s own
environments, while the figurative walls between the audience, scholars, and museum
professionals are broken down to bring forth a more collaborative and democratic
learning experience. The virtual museum enhances information search by its
organization system of timeline, charts, photographs, maps, collection databases, and
research articles. The virtual museum is able to store a larger amount of information for
a longer amount of time than a physical museum. As mentioned before, chat rooms, emails, discussion forums, and social networking sites offer visitors opportunities for shared learning experiences, social interactions, and generation of contents (Perlin, 1998, pp. 83-84).

The content within websites for cultural resources requires proficient management to succeed as a preservation and interpretive center. Technical elements, which involve graphic design, animation, images, video and audio clips, sounds, software, processing and formatting, must follow standards consisting of the principles outlined by the ICOM-CIDOC Multimedia Working Group. Digital images must be easily transferable and downloadable to most computers, so it is necessary to reduce their size. It is also necessary that these images be in form of JPEG, TIFF, or other commonly used image software (Keene, 1998, p. 87).

**Websites of Case Study Museums**

As the author visited the web pages of the New Americans Museum, the Wing Luke Asian Museum, and the Japanese American National Museum, she noticed they all contain visitor information, museum history, sections with brief descriptions about past and present exhibitions, events, educational programs, collections, and links to other resources. The New Americans Museum and the Wing Luke Asian Museum websites are in similar formats with minimal differences in complexity level. The Japanese American National Museum website is by far the most in-depth in comparison to the other two museums. This is because their collection database contains detail information, including accession numbers, measurements, materials and other specific information.
The New Americans Museum adopts a very simple and straightforward format for its website with little interpretation, instead focusing on more general information. However, despite its lack of a collections database and specific interpretative materials or even social networking capabilities, the site does provide multimedia components in forms of slideshows and multiple news clips of its citizenship ceremonies and essays written by student contestants for the museum’s annual Family Histories Essay Program.

The Wing Luke Asian Museum website has a similar layout to the New Americans Museum website, but contains more interpretive information about its current exhibits; therefore, the website has taken on the characteristics of a virtual museum. The website shows materials from its current exhibit titled, “Sikh Community: Over 100 Years in the Pacific Northwest.” The site contains such topics as the introduction to the Sikh community, Sikhism history and beliefs, life in the Pacific Northwest, distinguished community members, mis-identity, being Sikh in the Western World, and other resources. As in a physical exhibit within solid museum walls, photographs of individuals, images of political cartoons, quotes, historical information, text, and a timeline are used to interpret the history and culture of the Sikh community.

Presentation of the permanent exhibits, however, is not available on the web page. One can’t help but feel it would be essential to include the permanent exhibitions into the online database as a mean to establish a well-developed virtual learning experience. In addition, a collection of work by Japanese American artist, Jimmy Tsutomu Mirikitani, is included on the website. The artwork focuses on Japanese internment, atomic bomb and Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and immigration.
The Japanese American National Museum web page contains some of the same materials as the other two museums. However, this museum website is unique because of its large online collections database and some other features. Selected historic documentary photographs, drawings, a personal diary, paintings, and letters are categorized accordingly with detailed measurements, descriptions, inscription, history, accession numbers, and subject tags. The museum has brief descriptions of current and past exhibitions with links leading to more details. Even though these pages are customized to fit the type of exhibits, they all contain detailed information, including activities and programs, articles, exhibition descriptions, artist information, publications, and press releases. The Watase Media Art Center, a part of the museum which offers multimedia productions as part of the interpretive program, is accessible through a link on the museum’s website. The online Watase Media Art Center provides brief descriptions and video clips from some of its films and presentations.

The museum coordinates and sponsors various projects, one of which is the “Discover Nikkei: Japanese Migrants and their Descendants” project which the technology of the Internet is dependent upon for sharing, learning, preserving and researching Japanese American immigration history. Multiple forms of media, consisting of personal essays, fictions, photo albums, and video clips of interviews, serve these purposes. They are connected to social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as having its own online community, therefore allowing members from all over the world to connect and share their experiences. Overall, the Japanese American National Museum website appears to be more comprehensive compared to the other two sites.
Advantages of Web Technology in Online Interpretation

As seen in previous research and examples above, advantages of online interpretations are numerous. They consist of:

- Ease of accessibility
- Elimination of geographical barriers
- Unlimited information storage
- Fast access of information
- Control of information quantity
- Connections to everyone around the world
- Democratization of information

Online programs allow for the audience to have easy access from their home, offices or anywhere a computer is available without having to travel to the physical locations of the historic sites or museums. The online environment provides an unlimited storage space for digital databases, so all information and resources could be stored and made accessible for the audience. The speed of information transferred through the Internet enables it to be received by a very large group of audience. Virtual museums are able to connect to and reach out to more people than any physical museums are capable of doing. The audience, on the other hand, has the ability to control the amount of information they received on a virtual museum. They can also do this in the time frame that’s convenient for them. Blogs, discussion forums, and social networking allow the audience to contribute to the already available information and encourage them to actively participate rather than passively receiving information. These programs make the audience feel as if they are contributing to the body of knowledge.

Challenges of Web Technology of Online Interpretation

Even though the Internet offers many advantages to the interpretation of cultural resources, various challenges must also be acknowledged. The challenges are:
Issues of authenticity, legitimacy, and authority are of some concerns of virtual museums. Due to the readily available software and instructions on website developments, information on websites could be put forth by anyone, experts or non-experts. This often makes it difficult for visitors to know the difference between reliable sources and unreliable ones (Kennedy, 1997, p. 3).

Another issue concerns the reproduced images of the material cultural resources like objects, structures, and artworks. These images might lack in quality, and may not accurately represent the right colors, materials, craftsmanship, or texture. Pixelated computer images never truly express the characteristics of objects, and may flatten the details of 3D objects. It is a challenge when the descriptions of such objects and structures do not match the visuals provided, consequently causing distraction and confusion to visitors and deterring from the learning experience (McTavish, 2006, p.235).

Copyright issues involve people downloading and using images without permissions (McTavish, 2006, p. 235). The website needs to be constantly updated. The database needs to be maintained with newly discovered information, which may cause some challenges to the museum and cultural resource professionals (Chittenden, 1991, p. 60).
Summary

Easy and fast accessibility, larger information databases, wider public outreach, management of information and time, information sharing and collaborative learning are some innovations brought about by the Internet. Despite many successes, museums, cultural resource institutions, and the field of historic preservation also deal with the challenges brought on by the “Information Age.” In essence, interpretation of cultural resources is no longer hindered by geographical distances, time, and physical and figurative barriers. As outlined in this chapter, the Internet offers numerous options for cultural resource interpretation in the forms of slideshows, image albums, audio, video, animation, collections databases, charts, and interactive maps and programs. Databases of historic sites could benefit from programs like the HADS, or Architectural Documentation System, which breaks down the components of sites and structures also in the forms of photographs, drawings, and different types of maps or grids to provide the necessary details. Virtual walkthroughs with 3D models or 360-degree virtual tours using panoramic photographs are also available options for interpreting cultural heritage sites. Social networking options, discussion forums, and chat rooms are essential public relations tools, and they enable the institutions to advertise exhibits and programs, as well as create an environment for research and collaborative learning. If planned correctly, the virtual spaces of the Internet are able to adapt with the interpretive approaches of historic sites and museums, therefore creating a third media of interpretation.
CHAPTER 6
GUIDELINES FOR THE VIRTUAL MUSEUM OF ASIAN AMERICAN IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE

The following chapter discusses interpretation guidelines common to most of the case studies historic sites and museums. These guidelines are transferable to a virtual environment. The guidelines are applicable for most interpretation of history or culture, however, it is the specific information and elements integrated within that makes them unique in the interpretation of the Asian American experiences. Chapter 6 also proposes an approach to the organization of the virtual museum as well as additional suggestions regarding multimedia, interactive programs, social networking, and a virtual learning center.

General Interpretation Guidelines

Guidelines for a possible virtual museum for the preservation and interpretation of the Asian American immigration experience are based on common interpretive approaches outlined by previously discussed scholarly studies and analysis of the case studies. The following five principles are common interpretive methods seen throughout this thesis:

1) Interpretation should be based on thematic elements relevant to Asian American immigrants, consisting of the journey to America, immigration laws, means of livelihood, assimilation into American culture, bicultural identity, community, and discrimination.

2) Interpretation should focus on the collective experience of Asian immigrants, as well as that of specific ethnic groups.

3) Preservation and interpretation of the material and nonmaterial aspects of the immigration experience.

4) Interpretation of the immigration experience needs to incorporate broad historical events with personal memories.

5) Interpretation of the past should be relevant to those in the present.
As illustrated in the research of Asian American immigration history, as well as case studies of historic sites and museums in Chapters 3 and 4, themes play important roles in the interpretation of Asian American history. Ellis Island Museum and the Wing Luke Asian Museum both interpret immigration history involving various themes of home countries, journey, community, employment in America, and community. Assimilation, acculturation, biculturalism, and identity are other elements included in describing such themes, and they exist in case studies of museums and historic sites. In addition to relaying information in organized categories, creating an interpretive program based on themes allows the audience to make connections between seemingly different ideas or groups, therefore the program serves to “present a whole rather than a part” (Tilden, 1967, p. 9).

Taking into account all case studies, it is obviously essential to represent the experiences and history of different ethnic groups, as well as the shared experiences of Asian immigrants. By doing so, the diverse perspectives show similarities and differences in characteristics. Similarities in themes and history are seen across all nationalities as well as differences of circumstance and personal memories, consequently creating a well-formed and in-depth interpretation program.

All the case studies demonstrate interpretation through the integration of personal memories and mementos within the larger framework of general and well-known historical facts. Such a method generates personal connections from detached facts and figures of historical information. Because the audience tends to identify more with human stories, this method allows a more stimulating and emotionally provoking learning experience. This method is translatable to a website by means of oral history.
through interviews, letters, documents, newspaper articles, and photographs. Demographic charts and timelines could act as the larger structure in which these personal items are included. These interpretive options show how different immigration laws, population changes, and other universal events affected private individuals or family, thus putting faces and personalities to abstract numbers and statistics.

Inclusion of intangible elements, as well as material resources of cultural heritage, is also necessary to facilitate interpretation of Asian American immigration history. The material resource is defined as something physical and solid, including buildings, landscape, artwork, and objects; while the intangible consists of memories, customs, traditions, and beliefs. Both historical site and museum case studies show the intermingling of both physical and nonphysical characteristics of Asian American cultural heritage. Examples include the traditional Chinese poetry on the historic fabrics of the barracks at Angel Island Immigration Station and the film projections showing the Asian custom of taking one’s shoes off at the entrance of a gallery at the Wing Luke Museum. Dawson Munjeri, Executive Director of National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe, explained that “intangible heritage provided the larger framework within which the tangible could take its shape and significant” (2004, p.18). In other words, it is the daily actions, rituals, and values of people which created the cultural material resources. The preservation of both tangible and intangible aspects of cultural heritage provides the audience a deeper understanding of the main messages of interpretation.

The virtual interpretive program should show connections of past experiences to present experiences of visitors. These connections are made through identifying and interpreting shared human values, habits, family, communities, occupations, daily
rituals, and lifestyles. Time may change certain ideals, but it does not take away the core human traditions and values. Emphasis on these factors therefore influences the visitors’ interests and curiosity, resulting in a more profound learning experience.

**Organization of a Virtual Museum**

As mentioned in Chapter 4, a number of standards regarding elements of digital databases and web design must be met. Graphic design, images, audio and video quality, animation, and software are some of the essential components of the virtual museum. This will be discussed in the next section. The overall design scheme of the virtual Asian American Immigration Museum should be in a hierarchical order, depending on the type of information. Visitors should be able to access a broad topic and then be able to narrow it down to more details. Links to relevant topics should also be accessible from the selected topic. However, the navigation must be flexible. Visitors should be able to jump from one topic to another, even if they are irrelevant to each other.

As visitors access the virtual museum, they would be presented with numerous options about navigation throughout the site. The visitors could navigate the site and through different themes relevant to Asian American immigrants. These themes are the main topics around which other components are organized. Virtual rooms representing different themes like the home countries, coming to America, creating a new life, assimilation, social and political prejudices, family, and community, would have components within them that would interpret these themes in the form of objects, artwork, text, audio, video clips, maps, interactive historic sites, and architecture. The following list discusses the possibilities for these theme rooms.
1) The “Home Country” room would contain facts, statistics, and demographics about the immigrants’ countries. Historical facts about the economic, political, and social situations in their native country would be presented, as well as backgrounds of individuals. Interviews and personal memories of individuals about their home countries could also be included.

2) The “Coming to America” room should exhibit the means and procedures of how they came to be in America. Information on various processes of immigration could be a part of this room and as well as reasons for immigration. Stories of different individuals, such as the Chinese paper sons or paper daughters and the Japanese picture brides, could also contribute to the theme. This could be in the form of audio or video interviews with the actual people or their descendants. The inclusion of various immigration laws throughout history could also be an option. In some of the case study sites previously presented, the role of the luggage seems a very essential component to the interpretation of the immigration experience. The virtual museum could include images of items that could be in the actual suitcases and allow visitors to explore the objects and learn about their cultural meanings.

3) “Creating a New Life” and “Assimilation” themes could be combined into one virtual room, and would include topics about occupations, old traditions and new lifestyles, children of immigrants born in America. Various assimilation rituals from formal ones, consisting citizenship ceremonies to more informal ones as the practice of dyeing one’s hair, could also be a part of this room. Once again, interviews and quotes from individuals are important and should be integrated into this section.

4) “Family” and “Community” could also be put into one category, and obviously topics about family structures, ethnic neighborhoods, social groups, and political organizations would fall into this group. Population charts and maps could be used to pinpoint ethnic neighborhoods of Chinatowns, Japantowns, or Little Saigons throughout the United States. Details about the history, urban development, and architectural features of certain neighborhoods could also be important features.

5) The darker sides of Asian American history are issues concerning racism, discrimination, equality, and social justice all of which are placed into another category. This virtual “room” would explore immigration laws, social and political exclusions of Asian immigrants, stereotypes, segregation, and hate crimes through interviews, timelines, propaganda posters, and political cartoons.

6) Traditions, rituals, and festivals would also have their own “room” within this virtual museum. The custom of leaving one’s shoes at the door, wedding ceremonies, ancestor worship, and New Year celebrations are all intangible heritage. The differences between how these rituals are practiced here as to how they are practiced in the native countries could be significant elements for this room. As mentioned before, intangible heritage signifies unique ways of life and
It is because of these customs and festivals that objects and buildings came into being. Intangible heritage plays substantial roles in the expression and promotion of ethnic identity and cultural diversity.

Preservation of the Asian American immigration experience must also be focused on the built environment in which most of the experiences took place. Virtual rooms should also feature Asian American-influenced cultural heritage sites, historic properties, and significant cultural landscapes as within the themes previously discussed. For example, in the "Coming to America" section, the Angel Island Immigration Station could be interpreted as the place in which most early Asian American immigrants first arrived. Other examples could be occupational sites such as the Haraguchi Rice Mills in Hanalei, Hawaii, the Warren Mining District in Idaho, the western sections of the transcontinental railroads, and the historic industrial district of Lowell, Massachusetts, or communities like the China Camp fishing village and the towns of Locke and Walnut Grove in Sacramento California. Various ethnic temples and churches, stores, and private properties along with contested sites like the internment camps and the Los Angeles Massacre Site, would add to the interpretation of each theme and issue. The inclusion of the historic sites will enable the audience to gain a sense of place. These cultural heritage sites would have their own sections, and it would therefore be possible for each site to go from broad information to more specific details, consisting of its history, cultural significance, architectural details, possible measurements, elevations, floor plans, interior and exterior images, and maps showing its locations. Pop-up diagrams could be a form in which this information could be accessed. Simple to complex 3D models of these sites could be included as well, and virtual walk-through could be conducted through these sites.
As visitors visit these themed virtual rooms, they would be able to learn more about the different nationalities and backgrounds of these people. The “rooms” may feature the combined experiences of immigrants from all Asian countries, but navigational buttons would narrow the themes toward specific ethnicities. It would also be beneficial if links connected different rooms to one another, allowing visitors to more easily navigate between relevant topics of interests.

**Suggestions for Interpretation within the Virtual Museum**

As seen in Chapter 4, the Internet offers many options in regard to interpretation. To follow the previously mentioned theoretical principles, these various options must be considered carefully to develop a comprehensible and easily accessible virtual environment. Some components which could be included in the virtual museum are:

- Multimedia
- Collection
- Interactive programs
- Discussion forums and chat rooms
- Social networking
- Virtual library or learning center

First of all, all the case study websites incorporate multimedia to advance the learning process. Multimedia needs to appeal to the visual, audio, and kinesthetic modes of learning. Multimedia tends to be in forms of images, photographs, audio narration or clips, video clips, maps, and timeline. The added depth and dimensions they provide are invaluable to the visitor’s experiences within the virtual museum. However, their formats, in terms of digital size, download time, and software, must be easily accessible or available for the average computer user.

Second, if possible, the virtual museum should have online collections of objects or/and artwork. The collections could be categorized to fit into certain online exhibits or
could be organized according to history, ethnic groups, country of origin, among many other systems. A brief description and history of the objects as well as links to other websites should be included to guide visitors toward more information about them.

Third, the museum could feature interactive programs in which the visitors can actively participate instead of passively absorbing the materials. The interactive programs should revolve around historical facts, themes, oral interviews or objects. Rita G. Koman (1999), author of “Ellis Island: The Immigrants’ Experience,” suggested an interactive program in which students takes on the role of the immigrants to understand their experience and empathize with the fears, doubt, and hope they all had. The students could become an already existing person or they could create a character from different nationality and history (p. 32). Theoretically, this could also be done in the virtual museum as well. After choosing a character, visitors could interactively go through the immigration process, and therefore be able to experience the process rather than just reading about it. And as they go through the program, they would acquire more knowledge about the background, history, and immigration laws. This program would allow visitors to identify with different individuals who experienced those times.

Fourth, the virtual museum should incorporate some discussion forums, chat rooms, or other type of social networking. Social networking was mentioned in Chapter 4, and it appears to be an essential component in any organization’s websites. This allows visitors to take part in collaborative learning and sharing of information, therefore improving the learning experience. As with a physical museum or historic site, the virtual museum must also deal with community and public outreach. By having a profile or a page on social networking sites such as Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, or even YouTube,
the virtual museum could reach out to a larger demographic regarding its programs and exhibits. Ellis Island, Angel Island Immigration Station, Wing Luke Asian Museum, and the Japanese American National Museum all have pages on Facebook, which include status updates, news, discussion forums, photographs, member lists, and event information. Visitors could also sign up to become members to the virtual museum, then newsletters and brochures about museum programs could be sent to their emails.

Finally, a list of other sources concerning Asian American experiences, including books, research papers, and video documentaries could be included within the “library” or “learning center” of the virtual museum. These resources could also be organized according to the themes. This section of the virtual museum should feature references and links to other qualified websites from reliable organizations, encouraging further research and promoting collaboration with other institutions.

**Summary**

The virtual museum could incorporate many traditional interpretive approaches within its programs. The guidelines are general and could apply to interpretation of other history and cultures as well. The guidelines focus on an interpretive program with themes. They also propose interpretation of the collective experiences of Asian Americans as well as specific ethnic group and interpretation of tangible and intangible heritage. The virtual museum should employ personal stories and memories within the larger historic context. Even though some parts of the program focus on historical events, the subjects and themes should be relatable and relevant for contemporary audiences.

These interpretive guidelines could be modified to fit within the context of Asian American experiences by integrating specific information and elements. The virtual
museum would include various rooms relating to themes like home country, coming to America, family, and community. These rooms would be connected through navigational buttons and links within the website, permitting ease of accessibility and navigation between the difference rooms.

As with historic sites and museums, interpretation within the virtual museum would rely on the usage of multimedia, including text, images, music, audio and video clips, slideshows, interactive programs, animation, and walkthroughs. The virtual museum would also include a “library” or “learning center” for further research.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

Overview

This thesis examined the interpretation of the Asian American immigration experience through case studies of historic sites and museums. The interpretive methods were analyzed to understand how they fit within the nontraditional virtual environment. Research and analysis from Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 showed that interpretation is an intricate process which requires clear-cut goals, well-researched details, and diverse programs appealing to a large variety of audiences. Even though most of the approaches utilized by the case studies are transferable and adaptable to an online environment, different specificities may apply to historic sites, museums, and virtual museums due to the different nature of each medium.

Interpretive principles from Freeman Tilden and characteristics associated with ethnic museums were identified to understand the overall interpretive approaches of the case studies. The case studies represented a range of immigration experiences, consisting of experiences from people all over the world to Asian Americans and specific Asian nationalities. Analysis of their background, interpretive goals, and exhibition models helped find their commonalities.

Common interpretive approaches found in all the case studies as well as literary resources are outlined in Chapter 6. These guidelines are general and are appropriate for interpretation of other historical events and ethnic cultures, as well as Asian American experiences. They provide larger frameworks in which specific elements can be added to create unique interpretive programs.
Themes relating to Asian American experiences like coming to America, establishing a new life, assimilation, biculturalism, and social prejudices, were suggested as a way to organize information within the virtual museum. The virtual museum would include various “rooms” featuring these themes, which act as broad headings under which more specific information could be incorporated. These rooms would be accessible by navigational buttons and links throughout the website. The links would connect similar topics.

Numerous pragmatic interpretive approaches are available for the online environment. The integration of text, digital images, videos and audio clips, artwork, charts, and timeline are some options available to appeal to the audience’s senses and modes of learning. Additional features, including discussion forums, chat rooms, social networking, and interactive programs, would allow the audience to be more actively involved in the learning process.

Insights

Numerous insights can be gained from this study. First, it is obvious the case study sites utilized general themes of immigration in their interpretive programs. However, they also incorporated less obvious themes like hope, fears, regrets, successes, transition, identity, community, and family. Those themes go beyond the issues of race, class, or politics; they embrace the basic human experiences. For example, themes of regrets, hopelessness, and frustration could be found through the poetry on the walls at Angel Island Immigration Station. Themes relating to transition and personal identity are established through the displays of luggage and suitcases at Ellis Island Museum, Angel Island Immigration Station, and the Japanese American National Museum. Other important themes of community and family are prominent in
the exhibition model of the Wing Luke Asian Museum, as well as the interpretation of the China Camp Fishing Village.

Second, most of the case study sites focus on the history of immigration, and so it is interesting to reflect on how these interpretive programs are related to immigration today. Even though modern-day immigration issues are different, immigration today seems to be as controversial as it was in the past. Although Ellis Island mainly concentrates on interpretation of immigration history, it also features a comparison between past and present immigration using colorful demographic charts within its exhibit titled “The Peopling of America.” The New Americans Museum, on the other hand, seems to focus mostly on contemporary aspects of immigration. In addition to the museum’s annual Family Histories Essay Program, its “Becoming American” and “Between Cultures: Children of Immigrants in America” photography exhibitions concentrate on the experiences of recent immigrants. The exhibits at the Wing Luke Asian Museums and the Japanese American National Museum also showcase various perspectives of contemporary immigration, as well as how they correlate with history.

Third, all the museum case studies are also established within a historic environment. The New Americans Museum is located in the historic Naval Training Center, while the Wing Luke Asian Museum is situated within the East Kong Yick building, a former hotel and meeting space built by Asian immigrants in 1910. Part of the Japanese American National Museum was the Nishi Hongwanji Buddhist temple constructed by Japanese immigrants in 1925. Interestingly, the Wing Luke Museum took the most advantage of its setting by preserving and incorporating parts of the older fabric within the museum. It is an advantage for these museums to be located within
historically rich environments because these locations validate and enhance their purposes and objectives even more. Their locations within Chinatown and Little Tokyo also promote their roles as ethnic museums, which include “advocating a particular culture,” “keeping the ethnic traditions,” and “identifying the site of contest” (Loukaitou-Sideris & Grodach, 2004, p. 59).

With the exception of the Ellis Island Museum, another interesting similarity among most of the case studies is that they are more established locally rather than nationally. Angel Island Immigration Station and China Camp Fishing Village seem to be more well known in California and the West Coast. The Wing Luke Museum, for example, has a community-based exhibition model in which local residents collaborated on exhibition development. Several of their programs and exhibits are also geared toward their community, including tours of ethnic neighborhoods. The New Americans Museum is established in San Diego because of its diverse immigrant population. The museum collaborates with San Diego Unified School District and the San Diego Community College District annually on the Family Histories Essay Contest. The reason these sites and their programs are not as well known on a national level could be because they are recent developments and not well-established yet. Funding is another reason that could prevent them from being nationally prominent museums and historic sites. However, interaction with the communities does play an essential role in their establishments. It is the collaboration with local organizations and individuals that enables coordination of fundraising events, exhibition planning, and other additional education programs. Without local community support, it is doubtful that they would be as prominent as they are today.
This issue of establishment is an important one in regard to virtual museums. If the virtual museums solely existed online, the author then believes that it might be more difficult for them to become established as legitimate institutions. As with a physical institution, issues of funding, interpretive goals, mission statement, and collections are some of the many challenges that face virtual museums. Even though the virtual environment of the museum allows accessibility to anyone in the world, the physical environment and spaces of historic sites and museums make them more justifiable and valid. This draws more support from local communities and enables the establishment process to be much easier. Most likely, the virtual museum first needs to collaborate with existing physical institutions or organizations to launch a name for itself and build a reputation. Cooperation with other similar institutions allows the virtual museum to communicate its mission and attain support from readily available and interested audience groups.

The virtual museum, however, features numerous characteristics that are more beneficial to the interpretation process than a physical historic site or museum. It is impossible for the physical museum to display its entire collection. In the virtual museum, however, it is possible to store and display an infinite amount of relevant information so that it would be readily accessible to the audience. Cultural resource professionals, historians, and scholars could also benefit from the vast and readily available information within a virtual museum. The virtual museum serves as a connection for organizations and professionals with similar interests in a more extensive way than a physical institution is capable of doing. The virtual museum does not require many resources to build interpretive programs as a physical organization does. It could
be viewed as environmentally friendly because paper, wood, and other physical resources are not used for exhibition installations. It also does not take much manpower and material resources to change and update interpretive programs within the virtual environment. Economically, the maintenance of a virtual museum also is much easier and less costly than a physical museum space.

Because of its flexible and economical nature, the virtual museum can include nontraditional interpretive programs. Interactive online networking programs like Second Life could provide a platform in which the virtual museum could be situated. It is possible to create a model of a historic site or virtual museum in this program. Education programs and lectures could be accomplished through Second Life, and experts and audience could interact and talk in real time. The virtual museum could also have interactive gaming as a part of their nontraditional approach to interpretation. Games could be made for different age groups, and would encourage children to take more interests in the subjects.

Despite these benefits, the virtual museum would be most successful if it acted as an extension of a physical museum or historic site. The virtual museum would help the institution to reach out to a much larger demographic. It could be linked to many organizations, thus providing a space in which these organizations could share and contribute information and interpretation programs.

**Additional Research**

Numerous subjects are relatable to this thesis that could be researched more extensively. Besides the main interpretive programs and exhibitions, most of the case studies had additional programs associated with them. These programs may be community programs, educational outreach programs, as well as annual events and
traditional festivals. Further research could focus on these programs and how they fit within the institutions’ overall mission and concept. Inquiries could be made on how these programs attract more visitors. Additional inquiries could also concentrate on how they could be implemented within the virtual environment.

Most of the case study sites, except for Ellis Island, are located in the West Coast. Research into other Asian American influenced sites and museums on the East Coast could be valuable. Research indicated that comparisons between Angel Island and Ellis Island have already been made. Differences in environment, lifestyle, and demographics are just some of the many factors that could influence the interpretation of East Coast sites.

This thesis provides many opportunities for further research. Interpretive approaches are numerous, and they change with time and newly discovered historical evidence. In this light, interpretation of Asian American immigration is multifaceted, and it would require continuous research to gain comprehensive insights and knowledge.
APPENDIX A
ORGANIZATION FOR VIRTUAL MUSEUM

Home Country
- Statistics, facts, demographic charts
- Political and social situations, history

Coming to America
- Processes of immigration throughout history
  - Paper sons and daughters
- Occupations, lifestyle

Establishing a New Life
- Old traditions, new values
  - Family structures, relationships
  - Organizations, ethnic neighborhoods

Family and Community
- Discrimination, racism, segregation and exclusion
  - Annual festivals, religious celebrations
  - Weddings, coming of age rituals

Social Issues

Traditions, Rituals, and Festivals
LIST OF REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Tram Mai Tran was born in Saigon, Vietnam. She came to the United States at the age of 8, and grew up in Rockledge, Florida. She graduated from the University of Central Florida in 2006 with a Bachelor of Science degree in biology. Tram decided to attend the College of Design, Construction, and Planning at the University of Florida in 2007 because she realized her passion for design, architecture, and history.

Tram graduates with a Master of Historic Preservation degree in 2009, and hopes to attain a career in interpretation or exhibition planning with museums and cultural institutions.