TELLING OUR OWN STORIES:
AN ANALYSIS OF ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY MUSEUMS IN THE U.S.

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Introduction

From Chinese Transcontinental Railroad workers to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Japanese internment camps during WWII, and Asian American ethnic enclaves such as Chinatowns, Little Saigons, and Japantowns across America, the history of Asian Americans is a history of dreams, hard work, prejudice, discrimination, persistence, and triumph. As the fourth largest ethnic group in the U.S., Asian Americans counted for 6% of the total U.S. population in 2020. The history, heritage, and contributions of Asian Americans, however, have long been overlooked or excluded from national narratives. Less than one percent of all sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places reflect the history of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI). Many sites, that reflect the history and experience of Asian American communities, do not receive the resources, attention, and support they deserve.

In recent years, a growing number of museums that focus on Asian American history and experience have emerged across the U.S. Founded by community members or organizations, these museums offer spaces for sharing, preserving, and celebrating the diverse experiences and heritage of Asian American communities. Through exhibits, programs, and community outreach, these museums, named “community museums”,

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challenge dominant cultural narratives and advocate for a more inclusive and equitable society.

This thesis analyzes the role and significance of Asian American community museums in the United States. I explore their histories, genesis, programming, and impacts in telling the stories of Asian Americans and in promoting a greater understanding and appreciation of their cultures. I began with a survey to have a comprehensive understanding of the existing Asian American community museums in the US and compared their locations, associated communities, founding histories, missions, and functions. From these I selected three case study museums: Portland Chinatown Museum in Portland, Oregon; the Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience (Wing Luke Museum) in Seattle, Washington; and the National Cambodian Heritage Museum & Killing Fields Memorial (NCHM) in Chicago, Illinois. I selected these three since they are exemplary in terms of their close connection with their associated communities, well-developed exhibits, and established models for the exhibit development process and museum operation. By examining their history, development, exhibition, and programming, these three case studies reveal how Asian American community museums tell the stories of their associated communities through active community engagements and how they serve as places of dialogue, cultural hubs, community centers, and advocates for their communities.

Before diving into the research, there are a few key terms that need to be defined here.

Asian Americans - The United States Census Bureau defines Asian American as “a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the
Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.” This definition includes over 30 ethnic groups of different languages, cultures, histories, and socioeconomic statuses. This research defines Asian American as a person whose heritage traces from South, East, Southeast, and Central Asia. I exclude Western Asia as the region overlaps significantly with the Middle East, which is beyond the scope of this research. The complete list of Asian American ethnic groups included in this research is found in Appendix A.

Community museum - The terms “community museums”, “neighborhood museums”, “culturally specific museums”, “ethnic museums”, and “minority museums” have been used almost interchangeably over the past three decades. Although each term has its own focus, this research chooses the term “community museums” to emphasize museums’ connections with their respective communities. In the U.S., a few scholars have observed and attempted to define this type of institution. The curator of African American History and Culture at the National Museum of American History (NMAH), Fath Davis Ruffins, characterized community museums as those founded by grassroots organizations that aim to create shared curatorial authority between professional staff and ethnic enclaves they serve. Shared curatorial authority refers to an active collaboration between professional staff and community members to constantly shape the narrative process and

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improve interpretations in the museum.\textsuperscript{5} In Europe, the term “ecomuseum” has been used more widely. The ecomuseum refers to a type of institution in which the local community, serves as the primary curator, and thus has ultimate responsibility for their museum.\textsuperscript{6} The key characteristics of an ecomuseum include a shared sense of ownership over the museum, a place-based exhibition, and the preservation of local tangible and intangible heritage including skills, traditions, and social practices. I combine both definitions and define community museums as those founded by grassroots organizations or community members that aim to preserve shared community history and heritage through active engagement and interaction with their affiliated communities.

\textsuperscript{5} Ruffins, 109.
Literature Review

Museums have historically been regarded as permanent institutions whose purpose was to house, exhibit, research, and care for object collections, for aesthetic and educational purposes. At the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, some museum directors began to challenge this traditional “collection” and “art gallery” notion of museums. Among them, John Cotton Dana, the founder of the Newark Museum, in his famous 1917 essay The Gloom of the Museum argued that the sole function of conventional museums was to safeguard the objects. This role isolated museums from the communities they ostensibly served. He stated that a great city department store was “perhaps more a good museum of art than any of the museums we have yet established” given its accessibility, attractiveness, freedom for visitors to inquire and discover, and collections that were tailored towards the needs of the public. Dana advocated for museums to understand and serve the needs of their local communities. He is credited by some scholars as the first to propose the notion of “social museums” which emphasized the primary role of museums as service institutions to the general public.

7 Edward P. Alexander, Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums, Third edition. (The American Association for State and Local History, 1979), 5.
10 Dana, 22.
Thirty years later, Theodore L. Low, affiliated with the education department of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, wrote a visionary piece questioning the nature of museums and the role they should play in modern society. In the midst of World War II, the brink of democracy, and the rise of television and other communication technologies, he asserted that museums should act as democratic educational institutions for the general public. Similar to Dana, he emphasized that museums needed to become active institutions to serve the community instead of being “passive institutions used only by the scholars”. He stated that museums needed to be willing to alter their structure and ideas to adapt to the ever-changing world. Low believed that social consciousness and community service should be integral to the missions and operations of museums.

Influenced by Dana and Low, in 1971 Duncan F. Cameron, one of the most influential museum leaders of the 20th century, critiqued the conventional notion of “museum as a safe for its collection”. He stated that today’s museums must adopt and incorporate the manifestation of change and build their collections which will “tell us tomorrow who we are and how we got there.” Museums were not static. Instead, they should actively evolve and reflect the dynamic nature of society.

12 George E. Hein, 14.
14 Low.
15 Low.
In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the concept of community museums emerged along with the civil rights movement. They were proposed as an alternative space to serve underrepresented communities.\(^{18}\) In contrast to traditional museums which were founded by cultural elites and professionals, community museums were born with distinctive grassroots characteristics. The examination of this trend in the museum community did not appear until the late 1980s.\(^{19}\) In 1992, Edmund Barry Gaither, the executive director of the Museum of the National Center for Afro-American Artists in Boston and a longtime advocate for the underserved community, published the article *Hey! That’s Mine: Thoughts on Pluralism and American Museums*. In this article, he emphasized that museums should not only “delight and educate but also enhance understanding of humanistic and pluralistic values” by becoming the “institutional sponsor” of discussions, criticisms, interpretations, and reassessments of what relates to its disciplines and culture.\(^{20}\) By creating more socially responsible and responsive museums, underserved minority communities might feel less alienated and develop a sense of ownership through a more comprehensive story-telling approach in the exhibition development process.\(^{21}\) Gaither proposed that more museums should adopt a people-oriented approach in which community members served as primary


\(^{21}\) Gaither, 117.
interpreters of cultural artifacts displayed in museums, and professional staff helped to position artifacts and interpretations in a larger historic, social, and cultural context.\footnote{Gaither, 115.}

In 1998, Richard Sandell, a professor of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, argued that conventional museums had become a force of institutionalized exclusion which “promotes and affirms the dominant values, and directly, by subordinating or rejecting alternate values.”\footnote{Richard Sandell, “Museums as Agents of Social Inclusion,” \textit{Museum Management and Curatorship} 17, no. 4 (January 1998): 407, https://doi.org/10.1080/09647779800401704.} He proposed the museum’s three possible roles in relation to social inclusion: inclusive museums, museums as agents of social regeneration, and museums as a vehicle for broad social change.\footnote{Sandell, 416.} Inclusive museums aimed to increase the representation and participation of the excluded communities; museums as agents of social regeneration intended to improve quality of life issues through initiatives and programs that addressed social problems; museums as vehicles for broad social change aimed to influence society through social inclusion agendas and the creation of fora for public discussion and education.\footnote{Sandell, 416.} Many of Sandell’s proposals echoed Gaither’s socially responsible and responsive museums.

In recent years, the museum field has increasingly embraced the idea of community participation and social inclusivity and integrated these principles into its definition of museums. In 2022, the International Council of Museums updated its definition of a “museum” as,
a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets, and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally, and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection, and knowledge sharing.26

Although some scholars believed that this definition lacked progressiveness and failed to incorporate concepts like decolonization and repatriation, the current definition highlighted contemporary concerns regarding the civic role of museums.27 Given the greater emphasis on social responsibility, the distinction between traditional museums and community museums has narrowed. However, the key differences between these two are the grassroots origin of community museums and their focus on preserving the heritage of their respective communities.

Community Museums

In the 1950s, minority cultural activists, especially African Americans, started to establish “community museums” or “grassroots museums” across the country using the skills they learned as civil rights community organizers.28 In contrast with traditional, single-voice museums, these museums shared the curatorial authority with their community members and provided a platform for discussions of contemporary social issues that directly impacted their communities. Echoing earlier scholars such as Gaither, Ruffins

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summarized that some of the fundamental practices of the earlier grassroots museums were community empowerment and activism.\textsuperscript{29}

As mentioned before, the growth of community museums has been linked to the rise of social movements from the 1960s and 1970s.\textsuperscript{30} In her book, \textit{From Storefront to Monument: Tracing the Public History of the Black Museum Movement}, Andrea A. Burns explored the origin, objectives, and conflicts of the Black museum movement as it was shaped by the Black Power Movement of the 1960s. She examined four African American neighborhood museums—DuSable Museum of African American History in Chicago (founded in 1961), the International Afro-American Museum in Detroit (founded in 1965), the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum in Washington, DC (founded in 1967), and the African American Museum of Philadelphia (founded in 1974).\textsuperscript{31} The founders of these museums aimed to challenge and reexamine the biased presentations of African and African American history and culture in mainstream museums through exhibitions and collections.\textsuperscript{32} Established by Black community leaders, these museums utilized space including storefronts or apartment buildings with donations from their local communities and cultural organizations. Agreeing with Gaither, Burns pointed out that these museums offered spaces for Black communities to create a sense of dignity, independence, communal and civic identity, and to establish greater self-respect.\textsuperscript{33} In addition to the Black

\textsuperscript{29} Ruffins, 112.
\textsuperscript{30} Moreno, “Art Museums and Socioeconomic Forces,” 509.
\textsuperscript{32} Burns, 4.
\textsuperscript{33} Burns, 5.
Power Movement, Burns tied the birth of these museums to the social, economic, and political contexts of the communities and cities in which they emerged. Burns further pointed out that as these museums became more institutionalized and experienced relocation and expansion, they were often accused of losing touch with the needs of their original communities and audiences.\textsuperscript{34} María-José Moreno, the Sociology and Economics Professor from the University of Puerto Rico observed a similar trend in her analysis of El Museo del Barrio—a Latin American and Caribbean community museum in New York City.\textsuperscript{35} Moreno argued that as El Museo del Barrio became more professional and formalized, the operation and financial pressures forced it to shift from being a community education space to a more traditional museum-gallery space with a greater international focus. She revealed the complexity of community museums: whether they can be both “repositories of objects” and community centers.\textsuperscript{36}

Michelle G. Magalong, the Assistant Professor in the Historic Preservation Program at the University of Maryland, drew a connection between the rise of the AAPI social justice movement and the creation of community-based AAPI cultural institutions.\textsuperscript{37} Echoing Sandell, she stated that many of these organizations functioned as agents of social regeneration to save sites with cultural and historic significance amidst governments’ discriminatory policies and threats of displacement and demolition.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{34} Burns, 182.  
\textsuperscript{35} Moreno, “Art Museums and Socioeconomic Forces,” 506.  
\textsuperscript{36} Moreno, 509.  
\textsuperscript{38} Magalong and Mabalon, 108.
The existing literature on community museums focuses on specific geographic areas, examining these museums within the context of their particular locations. In her doctoral dissertation *Making and Remaking the Ethnic Museum*, Lucena Lau Valle studied the formation and impact of three downtown Los Angeles’ ethnic museums—the Japanese American National Museum (JANM), La Plaza de Cultura y Artes (LAPCA), and the Chinese American Museum (CAM). Valle argued that government technologies including land use, zoning laws, immigration policy, and urban redevelopment in ethnic enclaves in Los Angeles fostered the creation of these museums and impacted museums’ narratives and exhibitions.\(^{39}\) Valle pointed out that the introduction of multiculturalist and pro-development narratives in city planning actively reframed these ethnic neighborhoods as cultural assets and financially lucrative. Ethnic museums have been used as tools for creative placemaking to market these historic ethnic neighborhoods in the process of urban redevelopment and economic renewal.\(^{40}\)

In 2004, Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Carl Grodach from the Department of Urban Planning at UCLA examined the genesis and evolution of ethnic museums in Los Angeles. Agreeing with many early scholars, they stated that ethnic museums emerged to respond to the misrepresentation and exclusion by mainstream museums and contributed to community building and sustainability.\(^{41}\) In Los Angeles, they found ethnic museums


\(^{40}\) Valle, 141.

varied significantly by size, mission, and financial status. Most ethnic museums advocated for their cultural groups with the intention of instilling pride within their communities; cultivating awareness and appreciation in the general public regarding the achievements and societal contributions of ethnic groups; and interpreting, preserving, documenting, and promoting their cultural heritage and traditions.42 This research adopts some of the methodologies used by Loukaitou-Sideris and Grodach to examine the missions and functions of Asian American community museums.

In her 2008 doctoral dissertation, Rosa M. Cabrera examined four ethnic cultural institutions in Chicago: the National Museum of Mexican Art, the Korean American Resources and Cultural Center, the Polish Museum of America, and the Swedish American Museum Center. She found that these institutions formulated ethnic identities while simultaneously facilitating the integration of their respective community members into the host society and mitigating the impacts of their assimilation.43 Because community museums were perceived to be “trusted guardians and transmitters of cultural knowledge,” they were able to engage different voices from both within and outside their community.44

Historiographic accounts of community museums have much to say about the origin and roles of community museums in promoting cultural understanding and social justice. The existing research on community museums centers on a specific geographical region and analyzes these museums in relation to the political, economic, and social context.

42 Loukaitou-Sideris and Grodach, 61.
44 Cabrera, ix.
of the city they are located in. Although Burns and Gaither have conducted specific research on the history of Black museums in the United States, few scholars explored the genesis and evolution of community museums of other ethnic groups including Asian Americans. This study seeks to address this gap by offering a comprehensive review of Asian American community museums and examining their roles in preserving cultural heritage within their communities through an in-depth examination of three case studies.
Asian American Community Museum Overview

This section presents a comprehensive overview and analysis of Asian American community museums in the U.S. By surveying these museums’ locations, located communities, founding histories, missions, and functions, this section identifies defining characteristics of Asian American community museums and the key variables that differentiate their missions and functions.

This survey was limited to museums with a web presence. Google keyword searches with combinations such as “Chinese American museum” were used here to identify Asian American museums. Forty-two keyword combinations were employed using the list of ethnic groups that were previously defined as Asian Americans, listed in Appendix A.

In the introduction section, I define community museums as those founded by grassroots organizations or community members that aim to preserve shared community history and heritage through active engagement and interaction with their affiliated communities. Using the grassroots origin, shared community history and heritage, and active engagement with communities as the criteria, I excluded three types of cultural institutions from the survey results:

1) **Art museums and galleries**. Not surprisingly, there are a large number of Asian art galleries and art museums in the U.S. They are often associated with larger mainstream art museums and do not have direct connections with local Asian communities.

2) **Historic house museums**. The difference between community museums and house museums can be vague given that some historic houses are managed and curated by local
communities. However, house museums tend to center their collections and exhibitions around a specific period of history that is directly connected to the building. Community museums, on the other hand, extend their interests beyond a single building. They focus on the history of the entire community and have more interactions with their associated communities through programming and exhibitions.

3) Civil society organizations and historical societies (with one exception). Some civil society organizations and historical societies have developed their own historical exhibitions. However, civil society organizations often include the history of the organizations in the exhibits. Historical societies, on the other hand, tend to prioritize the collection and preservation of historical artifacts and documents whereas community museums often place a greater emphasis on public engagement and education. This survey includes the Chinese Historical Society of America Museum due to its educational mission, which aligns with the emphasis on public education and outreach among community museums.

The survey was not limited to physical museums. Some ethnic groups with relatively few resources rely on virtual museums as a means to preserve their history and promote their cultural heritage. Two virtual museums, the Vietnamese Heritage Museum, and Hmong Museum were included in this survey.
Survey Findings

With these criteria and filters in place, I identified twenty-one Asian American community museums across the U.S. The following data were collected for each museum: location, percentages of Asian Americans in the city and census tract where each museum is located, the importance of the museum building, and details pertaining to the museum's genesis. Demographic data were collected through U.S. Census Bureau. Details regarding the museum building and genesis were summarized based on the information provided on each museum’s website. Table 1 presents an abbreviated view of the museum survey. See Appendix B for a more detailed table.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Museum</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Asian American Percentage (%)</th>
<th>Founding Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese American Museum</td>
<td>Los Angeles, CA</td>
<td>11.87</td>
<td>1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego Chinese Historical Museum</td>
<td>San Diego, CA</td>
<td>17.87</td>
<td>1996</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chinese American Museum of Northern California</td>
<td>Marysville, CA</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>2007</td>
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<td>Chinese Historical Society of America Museum</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>33.93</td>
<td>1963</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chinese American Historical Museum</td>
<td>San Jose, CA</td>
<td>38.54</td>
<td>1991</td>
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<tr>
<td>Việt Museum</td>
<td>San Jose, CA</td>
<td>38.54</td>
<td>2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vietnamese Heritage Museum</td>
<td>Santa Ana, CA</td>
<td>12.25</td>
<td>2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Japanese American National Museum</td>
<td>Los Angeles, CA</td>
<td>11.87</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese American Museum of San Jose</td>
<td>San Jose, CA</td>
<td>38.54</td>
<td>1987</td>
</tr>
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<td>Portland Chinatown Museum</td>
<td>Portland, OR</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Cambodian Heritage Museum &amp; Killing Fields Memorial</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>7.01</td>
<td>2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chinese American Museum of Chicago</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>7.01</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum Name</td>
<td>City, State</td>
<td>Admission</td>
<td>Parking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Chinese Museum</td>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>8.29*</td>
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<td>Chinese American Museum in Washington, DC</td>
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<td>Museum of Chinese in America</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>15.73</td>
<td>22.96*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum of Korean American Heritage</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>15.73</td>
<td>13.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*At the edge of the Asian American neighborhood

Table 1: Summary of Existing Asian American Community Museums

Of these twenty-one museums, ten are associated with Chinese American communities; three are associated with Japanese American communities; and two are associated with Vietnamese American communities. The rest are associated with Filipino Americans, Cambodian Americans, Indo-Americans, Hmong Americans, and Korean Americans. Wing Luke Museum is the only pan-Asian Pacific American museum on the list. The prevalence of Chinese American community museums in relation to other Asian ethnic groups may correlate to the history of Chinatowns. These ethnic enclaves likely provided more economic, social, and cultural capital for the establishment of museums. As ethnic enclaves, they were also more vulnerable to urban renewal. The creation of community museums was often a way to preserve community traditions and culture and a means to physically assert their historic and contemporary presence in space.
In terms of geographic locations, thirteen out of 21 (62%) museums are located on the West Coast. Four (19%) are in the Midwest and the remaining four (19%) are on the East Coast. The locations of these museums on the West Coast are more diverse, which range from small cities like Marysville, CA (with a population of 12,664) to mega-cities like Los Angeles. The museums in the Midwest and on the East Coast are mainly located in larger cosmopolitan cities such as Chicago, New York, and Washington D.C.

All the museums are located in cities and neighborhoods with a strong Asian American presence. The survey finds that the cities where these museums are situated have an average Asian American population of 16.9%, which is almost three times the percentage of Asian Americans in the United States. The city with the lowest percentage of Asian Americans is Marysville, CA (4.2%). The city with the highest percentage is San Jose, CA (38.54%). Given the high percentage of Asian American population in San Jose and its ethnic diversity, it is perhaps not surprising that San Jose is home to three Asian American community museums--the most among all cities.

On average, the census tracts in which these 21 museums are located have an Asian American population of 29%, which is nearly five times the percentage of the national Asian American population. This suggests that these Asian American community museums are located in or around the neighborhood with a high concentration of Asian American population.

American residents. The census track with the highest Asian population percentage, 87.6%, is in Chicago’s Chinatown where the Chinese American Museum of Chicago is located. The Portland Chinatown Museum and the Japanese American Museum of Oregon are located in the census tract that has the lowest percentage of the Asian population, 2.27%. Both museums are located in an area that is referred to as historic Chinatown/Japantown. Over the past few decades, most Asian American residents and businesses moved out of this area due to increasing crime.47

Nine out of 21 (43%) museums occupy buildings with strong cultural, social, and historical connections to their local communities. The use of these structures is frequently a deliberate preservation effort to rescue these buildings from demolition threats. The previous owners of these buildings sometimes also desired a buyer who would value the historical significance of the buildings and was willing to sell them to cultural institutions like community museums.

All museums were founded by community members or some form of collaboration between communities and other entities. The founders range from existing organizations such as historical societies and civil society organizations to war veterans and local businessmen. Some museums including the Japanese American Museum of San Jose and the Museum of Chinese in America have a more academic origin. They either grew out of research projects, or their founders are historians. Six out of 21 museums have a lead founder, which indicates that these museums were established primarily through individual

efforts. Five out of 21 museums were established to counter external threats to their built environments such as the demolition of culturally significant buildings. The creation of a few museums is closely related to the shared traumatic experiences of their communities. For example, the Vietnamese Heritage Museum was created to preserve the history of Vietnamese refugees; the Japanese American National Museum was founded by a group of Japanese American veterans to memorialize their experience during World War II; the National Cambodian Heritage Museum & Killing Fields Memorial was created to promote Cambodian genocide awareness and help community members to heal.

All the museums were established post-1960, with a majority of them being founded between 1985 and 2008. The oldest among the surveyed museums is the Chinese Historical Society of America Museum which was created in 1963 (although it is difficult to distinguish the establishment year of the museum from the historical society). The youngest is the American Chinese Museum in Philadelphia which opened in 2021. Magalong linked the growth of AAPI community-based cultural institutions with AAPI social justice movements since the 1960s. Wing Luke Museum (founded in 1967) and Museum of Chinese in America (founded in 1980) directly link their creations to the Asian American Movement. Wing Luke Museum was created in honor of Wing Luke, an Asian American activist and politician who was active in the 1950s and 1960s. The founders of the Museum of Chinese in America began to collect historically and culturally significant artifacts relating to Manhattan's Chinatown in the 1970s, inspired by the Asian American Movement and its call for identity building and political empowerment. One possible

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48 Magalong and Mabalon, “Cultural Preservation Policy and Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.”
explanation for the majority of these museums being founded relatively more recently is that the establishment of a museum is a time-consuming process. The community needs to conduct multiple rounds of funding-raising events to secure the building, staff, and resources. Even though the idea of establishing a community museum may have been proposed much earlier, it often took many years for communities to realize their visions and bring their museums to life.

Mission Statement

To better understand the similarities and differences between Asian American community museums, I conducted a content analysis to highlight how these museums described their missions and what roles they identified for themselves in relation to their affiliated communities. This content analysis method is largely informed by Loukaitou-Sideris and Grodach’s work on ethnic museums in Los Angeles. Loukaitou-Sideris and Grodach analyzed twenty ethnic museums’ mission statements by identifying a set of keywords and calculating the frequency of their occurrence in those statements. Based on these keywords, they identified five roles of ethnic museums: 1) interpreters of culture and history, 2) keepers of ethnic traditions, 3) advocates of ethnic culture, 4) zones of contact, and 5) sites of contest. Loukaitou-Sideris and Grodach described the site of contest as a place where “prejudice, bias, and racism are exposed and challenged.” They acknowledged that these five roles are not mutually exclusive. For example, ethnic

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49 Loukaitou-Sideris and Grodach, “Displaying and Celebrating the ‘Other,’” 60.
50 Loukaitou-Sideris and Grodach, 60.
museums can be both advocates and interpreters for their communities. I employed the same role categories in my analysis of Asian American community museums' mission statements. I updated the list of keywords to better reflect the mission statements I collected. Key words are listed in Table 2.

Fifteen community museums post their mission statements on their websites. Four of the 21 museums do not have formal mission statements posted; however, they do outline their goals, which I treated as their mission statements. Three of the 21 museums neither publish nor describe their mission in any form. As a result, a total of nineteen community museums’ mission statements are analyzed. The results are presented in Table 2. See Appendix C for a complete list of mission statements.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Museum Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Museum as interpreter of culture and history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Museum as advocate of ethnic culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advance</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognize</td>
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<tr>
<td>Celebrate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Honor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledge</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Museum as keeper of ethnic traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preserve</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Museum as zone of contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridge</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Content Analysis of Mission Statements of Nineteen Asian American Community Museums in the U.S.
In Table 2, the frequency indicates how many mission statements contain this keyword. The number in each cell under Museum Role indicates the count of museums that have any of the listed keywords in their respective mission statements.

As evident in Table 2, sixteen of nineteen museums perceive themselves to be interpreters of history and culture for their communities and the general public. The American Chinese Museum, for example, aims to “promote mutual understanding, mutual respect, and mutual learning, between people of all backgrounds.”

Twelve museums assume the role of advocates in the promotion, celebration, and honoring of their respective communities’ heritage. They do this to enhance public appreciation, awareness, and respect toward their communities. The Chinese American Museum in Washington, DC, for example, claims to “advance the understanding, knowledge, and appreciation of the Chinese American experience by highlighting the history, culture, spirit, and contributions of Chinese Americans to our nation and beyond.”

Eleven museums also regard themselves as keepers of their culture and heritage. They assume responsibility for preserving and collecting the tangible and intangible heritage of their communities such as artifacts and oral histories. For instance, the mission of the Japanese American Museum of San Jose is “to collect, preserve and share Japanese American history, culture, and art with a focus on the greater Bay Area.”

Eight museums consider themselves to be zones of contact. Their goal is to build bridges across different ethnic groups and to initiate dialogue. For example, the National
Indo-American Museum “builds bridges across generations and connects cultures through the diverse, colorful stories of all Indian Americans.”

None of these community museums presents themselves as the site of contest in their mission statements. Loukaitou-Sideris and Grodach described the site of contest as a place where “prejudice, bias, and racism are exposed and challenged.” They stated that these museums serve as reminders to the general public of the painful injustices experienced by their communities. Although none of the surveyed museums expresses this role explicitly in their mission statements, some community museums fulfill this role in practices through exhibits and programming. The Japanese American National Museum, for example, has permanent exhibits that detail the history of Japanese American incarceration camps during WWII and their devasting impacts on Japanese American communities.

Museum Function

Depending on their sizes and resources, these museums fulfill a range of functions from that of research centers to the offering of educational programs. In their work, Loukaitou-Sideris and Grodach categorized museum functions into five groups: 1) museum displays, 2) service centers, 3) education programs, 4) social advocacy, and 5) research centers. Using their categorization method, I analyzed and identified the functions of these 21 museums. I added the memorial function since a few museums set up

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memorials to memorialize a specific period of history their communities endured. See Appendix D for the results.

All community museums contain exhibitions of their community histories. Most (71.4%) museums include educational programs for schools and educators. These exhibits and programming align with many museums’ missions to be the interpreter of their own culture. And one way to do that is through public educational programs. The museums without educational programs tend to be smaller and have limited resources. Only four museums have research centers. These museums are relatively larger, more professional, and better funded compared to the rest. Five museums function as social advocates in their communities. They actively participate in local social and political affairs, voicing their concerns and standing up for their communities. For example, the Japanese American Museum of Oregon partnered with Friends of Minidoka and Preservation Idaho to help Japanese American communities make effective public comments regarding a wind farm project which might impact the landscape of Minidoka, one of the WWII Japanese American incarceration sites. Four museums have memorials within their museums. These memorials are closely associated with shared traumatic experiences in their communities. Only two museums have social service programs catering to their communities. Wing Luke Museum offers summer camps to children in their communities. The National Cambodian Heritage Museum & Killing Fields Memorial offers youth leadership and mentorship programs and music and dance classes.

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53 This advocacy work is an ongoing process. More information can be found here: Protect Minidoka from Proposed Lava Ridge Wind Farm, https://jamo.org/lava-ridge-wind-farm-save-minidoka/
Summary

The existing 21 Asian American community museums share many similar characteristics. Most of them are located in cities and neighborhoods with high percentages of Asian American population. Many museums were founded by passionate individuals or community organizations that wanted to preserve community histories. Some museums were born out of partnerships with other entities, while a few emerged as a result of rescue efforts to preserve community cultural assets. These museums see themselves as interpreters, keepers, and advocates of their culture and history, and present these roles through exhibits and programming. In addition to the exhibits, these museums also serve as community centers, providing services, educational programs, and advocacy work to strengthen their connections with their respective communities.
Case Study Selection

This research explores how Asian American community museums actively engage with their associated communities through inclusive exhibition development and museum operation processes and serve as dynamic spaces for dialogue, cultural exchange, social service, and advocacy for their respective communities. To have an in-depth and nuanced understanding of Asian American community museums, this research selects three Asian American community museums as case studies: Portland Chinatown Museum, Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience (Wing Luke Museum), and National Cambodian Heritage Museum & Killing Fields Memorial (NCHM).

These case studies are a microcosm of the ethnic diversity and museum strategies found across Asian American community museums. My three case studies represent Chinese Americans, Cambodian Americans, and pan-Asian Pacific American communities. Another criterion for selection is the museum’s exhibition development process. Wing Luke Museum is well known for its community-based exhibition model. Although less well-known, NCHM’s Living Museum Model offered another community-based exhibition and operation model for examination. Other criteria for selecting these sites include the accessibility of museums and staff, their interactions with respective communities, and the range of programming and services they provide. While these three cases exhibit common characteristics that are found in other Asian American community museums, each is also distinct. Their distinctions and similarities are discussed in the “Comparison” section.
Portland Chinatown Museum presents an interesting case of a community museum that was created for an ethnic community that has since migrated to other locations. Its affiliated community no longer exists in the neighborhood. Wing Luke Museum, the most well-known pan-Asian Pacific American community museum in the country, provides an interesting example of how a well-established community museum operates and how it practices shared curatorial authority through the exhibit development process. The story of NCHM reflects the origins of a few Asian American community museums that aim to provide a space for their communities to memorialize and process the traumatic experiences they have endured.  

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54 My observations and analysis of these three museums were also informed my visits to other ethnic museums including Museum of Chinese in America (New York City, NY), Chinese American Museum in Washington, DC, Japanese American Museum of Oregon (Portland, OR), Chinese American Museum of Chicago, National Hellenic Museum (Chicago, IL), Polish Museum of America (Chicago, IL), and Swedish American Museum (Chicago, IL).
Case Study 1: Portland Chinatown Museum

Portland’s Chinatown is located at the center of the New Chinatown/Japantown Historic District in Portland, Oregon (Figure 1). Although this area is still referred to as Chinatown/Japantown, it is difficult to detect the existence of the Chinese and Japanese communities in this neighborhood. There are some hints on the street: a couple of Chinese restaurants with “closed” signs and boarded windows; red lanterns hung under the streetlights; a grand Chinese arch that seems more decorative and majestic compared to its other west coast counterparts; several Chinese historic family associations’ signs on the buildings and tightly shut front doors; and one Chinese restaurant which has only two tables of diners on a Saturday night. This neighborhood looks empty during the day. Few visitors pass by this neighborhood while a relatively large number of homeless people are camped on the sidewalk. The coffee shop, hotel, and convenience stores keep their doors locked at

Figure 1: Portland Chinatown Museum, New Chinatown/Japantown Historic District Boundary and its Nearby Cultural Institutions (ArcGIS, 2023)
all times and only unlock them when customers approach. At night, a vibrant bar scene appears a couple of blocks away and the noise can be heard loud and clear. It is safe to say that Portland’s Chinatown/Japantown is dying.

Beneath the seemingly desolate surface, this neighborhood has several well-curated Asian American community museums. Located at the heart of Chinatown/Japantown, Portland Chinatown Museum offers an interesting perspective regarding the relationship between an active museum and a declining community.

My findings on Portland Chinatown Museum draw from my site visits on March 4th and 5th, 2023; two one-hour-long interviews with Executive Director Anna Truxes and former associate curator Jennifer Fang; news articles; and a few published histories on Portland’s Chinatown, including *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey: The Chinatowns of Portland, Oregon*, and *Dreams of the West: A History of the Chinese in Oregon, 1850-1950*.

**History of Portland’s Chinatown**

The Chinese presence in Portland can be traced back to the late 19th century. As news of the California Gold Rush spread across America in the mid-1800s, tales of “Gold Mountain” also reached poor Chinese farmers in Guangdong Province who were suffering from famine, warfare, and social upheavals.\(^{55}\) With the hope of getting rich and providing for their families back home, many Chinese men left their homes and set off to the West Coast of the United States. As the Chinese population in California exploded in the mid-

19th century, anti-Chinese sentiment and violence grew. White workers burned and vandalized local Chinatowns and accused Chinese workers of stealing their jobs. To escape this violence, many Chinese workers moved north to Oregon. In addition to the mining industry, Chinese workers worked in canneries, railroad construction, and agriculture in Oregon. The arrival of Chinese workers helped a small number of Chinese businesses take root in Portland and other cities in Oregon. During the off-season at gold mines, Chinese miners resided in Chinese-operated boardinghouses in Portland. At the end of the 1860s, a vibrant Chinatown started to take shape on Southwest Second Avenue from Pine Street to Taylor Street. In the city, the Chinese worked as day laborers, shopkeepers, grocers, cooks, and bakers. Although the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 limited the number of Chinese immigrants to the U.S., the number of Chinese residents in Portland’s Chinatown increased steadily. The growth in Portland’s Chinese population was linked to urban expansion and inward urban migration of Chinese to escape anti-Chinese violence in rural communities.

The Portland Chinese population reached its peak of 7,841 in 1900. They occupied parts of seventy blocks of downtown making their neighborhood the second-largest Chinatown in the U.S. at that time, with San Francisco being the largest. The rise of the City Beautiful movement and the 1894 Portland flood accelerated the City’s desire to

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57 *Dreams of the West*, 66.
59 Wong, 250.
manage growth and redevelop the downtown area.\(^{60}\) As the downtown being redeveloped, the rising property values and rents forced many Chinese businesses and residents to relocate to North Fourth Avenue between Northwest Couch Street and Northwest Glisan Street—the core of today’s Chinatown (sometimes referred to as New Chinatown). At the beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) century, the Japanese community and Japantown developed alongside the new Chinatown. The forced incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII devastated Japantown which never recovered.

In the past few decades, Chinatown has entered into a downward spiral. A combination of neglect by the local government, an increase in crime and rents, and a decrease in foot traffic has had detrimental effects on the Chinatown community.\(^{61}\) Almost all of its long-standing businesses and residents have moved out of this area and resettled in the Jade District, a newly emerged Asian community located seven miles east of Chinatown. The dilapidated state of Chinatown has further exacerbated a decline in tourism and raised safety concerns. Today, only 89 Asian Americans, 2.3% of the total population in the census tract, live in Chinatown.

**History of Portland Chinatown Museum**

The history of Portland Chinatown Museum can be traced back to 1999 when Dr. Jacqueline Peterson-Loomis, a history professor from Washington State University, and Prudence Roberts, curator of American Art at Portland Art Museum conducted the Old

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\(^{60}\) Wong, 256.

\(^{61}\) Wittwer, “Our changing city.”
Town History Project. This project collected oral histories, organized walking tours, and designed exhibits with the participation of several ethnic groups in Portland. During this process, Peterson-Loomis developed a “particularly strong relationship” with the Chinatown community and was contracted by the Oregon Historical Society (OHS) to develop an exhibit on Portland’s Chinatown. Peterson-Loomis collaborated with Carey Wong, exhibition designer, and Jennifer Fang, associate curator to create the exhibit *Beyond the Gate: A Tale of Portland’s Historic Chinatowns*. The exhibit opened in 2016. This temporary, three-month exhibit broke OHS attendance records. The local Chinese community was “very pleased with how the exhibit turned out” and “how it was received.” Around this time the Portland Chinatown History Foundation was actively searching for a space in Chinatown to create a museum to honor and preserve Chinatown’s history. The Foundation was established in 2014 by a group of Chinese American elders who were concerned about the rapidly declining state of Chinatown. Given the success of the exhibit, the Foundation asked the OHS if it could have the *Beyond the Gate* exhibit panels and the rights to the accompanying historic photographs. With the OHS exhibit donations, the Portland Chinatown History Foundation next acquired the Kida Building at the center of Chinatown. The building owner, Louis Lee, had moved his accounting business out of Chinatown and rented the Kida Building to tenants seeking commercial space. Both Fang and Truxes pointed out that numerous vacant properties in Chinatown

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63 Jennifer Fang, Interview with Jennifer Fang, March 14, 2023.
64 Fang.
65 Fang.
had been rapidly acquired by developers, making it challenging for cultural institutions to compete. Despite Lee's initial intention to sell the building, he was attracted to the idea of having a cultural institution in Chinatown. Through multiple rounds of successful community fundraising and grants acquired from foundations and city agencies including Prosper Portland, the City’s economic and urban development agency, the Portland Chinatown History Foundation purchased the building and made it the permanent home of Portland Chinatown Museum.

Today, the Portland Chinatown Museum’s mission statement states, “Our mission is to collect, preserve and share the stories, oral histories and artifacts of Portland’s

Figure 2: NW Third Street Elevation and Main Entrance of Portland Chinatown Museum (Shang, 2023)

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66 Anna Truxes, Interview with Anna Truxes, March 4, 2023; Fang, Interview with Jennifer Fang.
Chinatown as a catalyst for exploring and interpreting the history of past, present and future immigrant experiences.” The museum owns the entire 9,500 sq. ft. of this one-story building. It leases the corner retail space to other businesses to generate rental income. The entrance is flanked by two bright red Portland Chinatown Museum logos (Figure 2). Through the door, the first space one encounters is a large gallery with a smaller space on the north side featuring contemporary Asian American artists. The permanent exhibit *Beyond the Gate: A Tale of Portland’s Historic Chinatowns* occupies the space in the back.

**Current Exhibit and Programming**

During my visit in March 2023, the contemporary art exhibit featured Wing K. Leong *60 Years: Painting and Calligraphy*. The exhibit celebrated the sixty-year career of Wing K. Leong, an eighty-nine-year-old, well-respected local Chinese artist. Truxes received six phone calls and emails from students of Wing K. Leong who asked the museum to host a retrospective of their teacher. With the help of his students and Leong’s family members, the exhibit opened earlier this year and many community members showed up at the opening night. The exhibit room on the north side featured another contemporary artist, Shu-Ju Wang. Unlike Leong’s work on Chinese traditional brush painting and calligraphy, Wang’s exhibit, *Postcards from Tanner Creek*, focused on the early Chinese American experience in the agriculture industry in Portland. Through paintings, installations, and writings, Wang’s work examined the late-19th-century

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67 “History.”
development and disappearance of the Tanner Creek Chinese Garden and its relation to the history and evolution of the Chinese immigrant community in Portland.

The permanent exhibit *Beyond the Gate: A Tale of Portland’s Historic Chinatowns* is the crown jewel of the museum. The entrance of the exhibit takes the form of a traditional Chinese entryway with a red-painted wooden door frame, six *menzan*—Chinese hexagon decorative elements, and a historic hand-carved and painted Chinese altar facing the visitors. The exhibit follows the chronology of Chinese immigration to the U.S. and the development of Portland’s Chinatown from the 18th century to the 1950s. In addition to major historic events, the exhibit highlights different themes such as social class, family associations, businesses, social activities, entertainment, and cultural traditions. Through historic photos, artifacts, maps, charts, and vignettes, the exhibit presents a detailed depiction of Portland’s Chinatown history. The presence of the curators is strong throughout the exhibit. With backgrounds in history, curators Peterson-Loomis and Fang developed panels, labels, and maps to interpret the Portland Chinese community’s history. The exhibit panels and labels are mostly in English. A few main titles have Chinese translations.

The exquisite vignettes of Chinese businesses and daily lives are the highlights of the exhibit. The exhibition designer, Carey Wong, has a background in scenic design and gave the exhibit some theatrical elements. Drawing from the oral histories of community members, Wong designed the vignettes with props, historic artifacts, costumes, and sound effects. Most of the historic artifacts were donated by community members. The vignettes include a dry goods store that closed in 1929, the life of a Chinese merchant in 1900, a
laundry shop, the façade of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in 1911, a 1928 Chinese restaurant, a Chinese apothecary, and a lottery store run by Chinese. One of the vignettes replicates the interior of Bow Yuen Dry Goods Store, once located at 69 NW 4th Ave. When Bow Yuen Dry Goods Store closed in 1929, the merchandise was saved and passed down through the family. When the museum opened, the grandson of one of the principal owners contacted the museum and generously loaned all the items to the museum. Fang vividly remembered accompanying the family member to the storage unit and seeing unopened jars of ginger from the 1930s. The Chinese restaurant vignette showcases the interior of one of the most famous Chinese restaurants in Portland’s Chinatown—Hung Far Low (Figure 3). Although Hung Far Low moved out of Chinatown in 2004 under new ownership, its iconic neon sign remains and has become a local landmark. Opened in 1928, Hung Far Low was owned and staffed by the Wong family for almost eighty years. The family donated a full set of utensils and an altar table to the museum. With the sound of the restaurant playing in the background, it is easy for people to imagine the lively ambiance of Hung Far Low during its prime. Fang also highlighted the Chinese apothecary vignette which was created in collaboration with the Oregon College of Oriental Medicine to ensure the historic accuracy of Chinese herbs, mixtures, bags, and names.

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68 Fang, Interview with Jennifer Fang.
69 Fang.
Although Portland Chinatown Museum is a small community museum with limited staff and resources, it manages to provide a variety of programming and activities to its members and visitors. Every year, in collaboration with the OHS and other community organizations, Portland Chinatown Museum organizes the Lunar New Year Dragon Dance Parade and Celebration to celebrate the Chinese New Year and honor Chinese cultural heritage. The museum hosts performing art events that invite Asian American artists whose works center on Asian American experience or Chinatown history. The Yat Sing Music Club, one of the longest-running community groups in Portland's Chinatown, has been invited to perform at the museum twice.
During the pandemic, the museum expanded its geographic and programmatic scope. In addition to Portland Chinese, roundtable and public lecture themes range from the history of WWII Chinese American veterans and rural Oregon mining towns to more contemporary matters of Asian and Black solidarity in response to the Black Lives Matter movement, rising anti-Asian sentiment during the pandemic, and Asian Americans’ participation in voting and census campaigns. Portland Chinatown Museum also partners with three cultural institutions in its neighborhood including the Lan Su Chinese Garden, the Japanese American Museum of Oregon, and the Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education on shared projects to collectively promote cross-racial solidarity. In one event, elders from the Chinese and Japanese American communities came together and shared their stories about their lives in Chinatown and Japantown between the 1920s-1960s. In collaboration, these cultural institutions have developed a strong network to respond to rising safety concerns in the area. Although these institutions are competitors for grant funding, Truxes expressed that “all of the organizations felt like if we don’t stand together, we will never survive.”

Museum in a Changing Neighborhood

The permanent exhibit ends with a panel titled “Portraits of a Community: 1930s-1950s.” The panel states, “…in the 1950s, Chinatown’s young families flocked to Portland’s east side neighborhoods, leaving crowded tenements and storefront apartments

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71 Truxes, Interview with Anna Truxes.
behind. New Chinatown would remain the community’s social and cultural center, but its future was departing.” When asked why the exhibit ended in the 1950s, Fang explained that the decision was made before she joined the team and conjectured that it was in part due to space constraints. She also admitted the challenges the museum faced in light of the demographic change in the neighborhood,

I don’t know if other people in the organization see it as a struggle, but to me, it seems like there is a struggle between what you are telling. Is this a museum about Chinatown? Is this a museum about the neighborhood or is this a museum about Chinese Americans? Is this a museum about Chinatown when it was inhabited by Chinese Americans? Or is this a museum about the neighborhood in general? Like what is it? 72

She referred to the museum’s mission statement which references “the history of past, present, and future immigrant experiences.” The lack of discussion regarding Chinatown in its contemporary urban and social contexts, the surrounding community of homeless, and its silence on the Jade District depict a museum largely focused on the past. According to Fang, this constrained view of significance is largely attributed to the Chinese elders of the Portland Chinatown History Foundation. Many elders who were deeply involved with the museum moved out of Chinatown in the late 1960s or 1970s. For them, Chinatown remains an imaginary infused with nostalgia.

Truxes asserts, “We have a community that loves and supports what the museum does" and we don’t “have to work hard to get people to our events.” 73 This raises critical questions: who is the museum’s target audience? Who is the community? It is easy to generalize the concept of “community” based on the group of people who have close

72 Fang, Interview with Jennifer Fang.
73 Truxes, Interview with Anna Truxes.
connections with the museum. How to make the museum more inclusive and tell the full history of this neighborhood is still a question worth asking and exploring. In our interview, Truxes expressed an interest in reinterpreting the Chinatown concept and revising some interpretations of the permanent exhibition. The museum is actively seeking ways to engage with the Jade District and is exploring various avenues to foster meaningful connections with Chinese American communities.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{74} Truxes.

“Wing Luke”, “Wing Luke”, “How about Wing Luke?” I heard this name repeatedly when I first started my research. Located at the center of the Chinatown-International District in Seattle, Washington (Figure 4), the Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience (Wing Luke Museum) has been well-known since the early 1990s. Its “community-based exhibition model” has been discussed and studied dozens of times by scholars across America. In this case study, I trace the history and development of Wing Luke Museum to explore the story behind its success.

My findings on Wing Luke Museum draw from my site visits on March 8th and 9th, 2023; a single one-hour interview with Jessica Rubenacker, the current Exhibit Director; and a few publications including a personal memoir written by Ron Chew, the former...
Executive Director of Wing Luke Museum, and a “Community-Based Exhibition Model” booklet published by the museum.

History of Chinatown-International District (C-ID)

The Chinatown-International District is fertile ground for the existence of a pan-Asian Pacific American museum. The name “Chinatown-International District” emerged as a compromise between recognizing the presence of Chinese communities and acknowledging the diverse ethnic groups residing in the neighborhood. The name was officially adopted by the city in 1999.  

Located at the center of Seattle, Asian Americans began to settle and develop this area in the late 1890s. The Chinese workers who came to the West Coast in the 1860s and 1870s became an important labor source for the lumber, cannery, and railroad industries in Washington. To meet the needs of thousands of Chinese immigrant workers, a cluster of boarding houses, restaurants, and other businesses was established south of Pioneer Square in Seattle. By 1876, about 550 Chinese workers lived in Seattle. The passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 and the Great Seattle Fire of 1889 displaced thousands of Chinese workers. After the fire, those who remained settled along King Street which is now the core of the C-ID. In the following years, Chinese investors and entrepreneurs flocked to this area. At the time, many Chinese were not U.S. citizens and could not own property. To circumvent these restrictions, they formed corporations to invest in the U.S.

The most famous Chinese corporation in Seattle was the Kong Yick Investment Company which was comprised of 170 Chinese immigrants. By pooling resources, the company was able to construct the East and West Kong Yick Buildings—the first Chinese-built structures in Chinatown. These buildings later became the boarding houses for hundreds of Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino immigrants. The East Kong Yick Building eventually became the permanent home of Wing Luke Museum today.77

The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act limited the number of Chinese immigrants entering the U.S. As a result, Japanese workers were increasingly welcomed by American companies. Japanese families and businesses began to settle near the established Chinese community. By 1900, Japanese immigrants had exceeded Chinese immigrants and became the largest Asian immigrant community in Seattle. Residences, restaurants, theaters, clubs, and hotels were established within Japantown. This vibrant community came to an abrupt halt in 1941 following the attack on Pearl Harbor. In response to the attack, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066. The Order authorized the forced removal of Japanese Americans and those of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast. Japanese families were forced to sell or abandon their homes, businesses, and property and were imprisoned in internment camps until 1944. After the war, lingering and widespread anti-Japanese racism on the West Coast compelled many Japanese Americans to settle elsewhere. Japantown shrunk significantly compared to its pre-war boundaries.78

The 1920s and 1930s brought a wave of Filipino migration to the U.S. Filipinos predominantly worked in the cannery and farming industries. Stores, restaurants, and nightclubs catering to Filipino communities emerged north of Chinatown and Little Manila was born.79

The 1960s and 1970s brought more significant changes to the C-ID. As part of a nationwide scheme of urban renewal and highway construction, portions of the neighborhood were demolished for the construction of Interstate-5. The highway tore through the center of the C-ID, forcing many Chinese and Japanese businesses to relocate. The fall of Saigon and US involvement in the Vietnamese war resulted in a new wave of Asian immigration to the US. As a result, the C-ID also saw an influx of immigrants from Vietnam. The Vietnamese immigrants settled and created Little Saigon east of the I-5.80

Today, the C-ID is the home to many Asian American communities. Every morning, Asian elders congregate in public parks to exercise or play table tennis. A modern poke restaurant is located across the street from an old dim-sum restaurant. Chinese family associations still occupy the upper floors of many buildings with well-decorated historic balconies to signal their existence. Street signs are bilingual in English and either Chinese, Japanese, or Vietnamese based on the communities that occupy the blocks. The devastating effect caused by the I-5 is still evident in the neighborhood. Little Saigon seems isolated

80 “Seattle Chinatown Historic District (U.S. National Park Service).”
from the rest of the community and pedestrians must traverse a bleak passage beneath the highway bridge to get to the other side.

History of Wing Luke Museum

The founding of Wing Luke Museum has a rather sad story. The museum was established to honor a well-loved local Seattle, Asian American politician--Wing Luke. A Chinese immigrant who came to the U.S. at the age of five, Wing Luke became the first person of color elected to the Seattle city council in 1962. In 1965, Wing Luke died tragically in a plane crash at the age of 40. Community members raised money for a search effort. The remaining funds were dedicated to a memorial fund to establish a museum in honor of his legacy. In 1967, with the mission to preserve Asian American cultural heritage, with a particular focus on folk art, Wing Luke Memorial Museum was founded in a small storefront on Eighth Avenue South. In 1987, the museum moved to a converted garage space and changed its name to Wing Luke Asian Museum.

By 1990, the museum was suffering from poor attendance and significant debt. In an effort to rejuvenate the museum’s mission, the board hired Ron Chew, a local community activist and a journalist at the International Examiner, as the new executive director. Although he lacked museum experience, Chew discarded the museum’s original Asian folk-art focus and decided to return to “its community roots.” The first exhibit under Chew’s leadership, Executive Order 9066: 50 Years Before and 50 Years After, presented the impact of Executive Order 9066 on Japanese Americans during World War

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II. The exhibition attracted more than 10,000 visitors over a period of six months. This success saved the museum from closing. In the following years, Chew and his staff developed a “community-based exhibition model” to empower the community to “tell their own stories on their own terms.” In his memoir, Chew wrote that he believed “museums should use their clout as represented arbiters of history and social movements to help lift up our society, much as African American churches did during the civil rights movements,” and that museums should “be as engaged in building a more just future as they were in reclaiming and commemorating the past.”

His idea was similar to what Sandell proposed in *Museums as Agents of Social Inclusion* when he called for creating museums as vehicles for broad social change. The concept of the “community-based exhibition model” is elaborated in the next section.

As the museum gained more popularity, Chew quickly realized that the converted garage space it occupied was insufficient for its needs. Chew had been aware of the East Kong Yick Building since 1998 after participating in a documentary featuring this building. East Kong Yick Building had a rich history and roots in this community and was home to many Asian social clubs and family associations. The shareholders of the Kong Yick hoped to sell it to an entity that would preserve the cultural heritage and history of the building. With extensive fundraising campaigns at federal, state, and local levels, Wing Luke Museum received millions in grants from the government and private foundations.

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83 Chew, 457.
and donations from community members.\textsuperscript{86} In 2008, Wing Luke Museum moved to East Kong Yick Building—its current location (Figure 5), and later became a Smithsonian Affiliate organization and a National Park Service Affiliated Area.\textsuperscript{87}

In recent years, Wing Luke Museum has been actively involved in advocating for the needs of residents and businesses in the C-ID. For example, in 2023, the city plans to construct a new light rail line and build a train tunnel underneath the C-ID. Many C-ID residents and businesses believe that this project will devastate this neighborhood. Wing Luke Museum has joined the force of opposition and actively raised its concern through

\textsuperscript{86} Chew, 548.
\textsuperscript{87} Chew, 559.
different mediums including media and community meetings. Its most recent exhibit, *Nobody Lives Here*, illuminates how the residents and businesses in the C-ID were displaced by the I-5 freeway in the 1960s. The exhibit demonstrates the detrimental impact of a mega-transportation project on the community and creates an interesting comparison between the historic event and the contemporary issue to highlight the similarities between these two events.

Wing Luke Museum’s mission statement reads, “We connect everyone to the dynamic history, cultures, and art of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders through vivid storytelling and inspiring experiences to advance racial and social equity.”

**Current Exhibit**

Wing Luke Museum offers a diverse collection of exhibits. With a focus on contemporary Asian American art and the pan-Asian Pacific American experience, the exhibits include contemporary AAPI artists, environmental justice, and community portrait galleries featuring different AAPI ethnic groups.

Entering the museum, the first thing one observes is a beautiful dragon costume used in the Chinese dragon dance performance. The first floor has five exhibits. A smaller exhibit near the entrance traces the history of the C-ID from its early settlement years to

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89 The exhibit opens after my site visit. My understanding of this exhibit is solely based on online information and Wing Luke Museum’s news releases.
the current day using historic photographs and artifacts. The panels across from it tell the life of Wing Luke and the legacy he left. The New Dialogues Initiative Gallery presents *Changing the Tide—Community Power for Environmental Justice* (Figure 6). Rubenacker explained that this gallery offers the staff an opportunity to build on timelier topics. The special exhibit, *Resisters: A Legacy of Movement from The Japanese American Incarceration*, explored the experience of Japanese American who incarcerated during WWII using art, historic photos, artifacts, oral history accounts, and interactive prompts and activities. The exhibit also went beyond the story of Japanese Americans during World War II and drew parallels between their individual and collective experiences of discrimination with that of Muslim, Arab, Indigenous, Black, and immigrant communities today.

90 Jessica Rubenacker, Interview with Jessica Rubenacker, March 24, 2023.
The second-floor features one permanent exhibit—*Honoring Our Journey*. *Honoring Our Journey* presents pan-Asian Pacific American immigrant and refugee experiences with five main themes: “Home”, “Getting Here”, “Making a Living”, “Social Justice”, and “Community”. The exhibit uses the first-person narrative to describe the impact of historic events on individuals. For example, the “Social Justice” section focuses on two topics: the effects of hate and stereotypes. The panel on “Effects of Hate” states:

**Effects of Hate**

…

We are constantly on guard, wondering what people are thinking when they stare at us. Because we wear a turban or scarf, we are hit on the head at school and told, “What’s that on your head?”
We are blamed for the unemployment of Detroit auto workers. We are blamed for 9/11.
We are murdered for being of a race that we aren’t.
We were at the wrong place at the wrong time.

Stereotypes
Exotic, passive, docile, quiet, polite, hard-working “Orientals”
Conniving, inscrutable, evil, menacing Yellow Peril

“Go back to where you came from!”

The panel uses a first-person narrative to create a sense of intimacy with the viewers to build a strong emotional connection. Instead of merely presenting facts and numbers, the texts intend to engage the viewers in conservation and share the anger and frustration felt by pan-Asian Pacific American communities with them. Included in this exhibit are dozens of artifacts directly related to organizing subtopics such as “Exotic Female”, “Commercialization of Asians”, “Chinoiserie”, and “Perpetual Foreigner”.

The second floor also showcases Community Portrait Galleries which include five exhibits depicting five different Asian American communities. At the time of my visit, these five displays were I am Filipino, Hometown Desi, Woven Together: Stories of Burma/Myanmar, Vietnam in the Rearview Mirror, the Cambodian Cultural Museum, and Killing Fields Memorial. These displays feature Filipino, South Asian, Burmese, Vietnamese, and Cambodian Americans respectively. The displays are periodically rotated. The museum states that they “capture the spirit of the museum—a living museum where communities come together to share, create, and build.” In each room, the names of sponsors, curators, community advisory committee (CAC), and other community partners
were listed in an entrance panel. Each room was decorated according to the cultural tradition of each ethnic group. The exhibit used oral history, objects associated with personal experience, photographs, and timelines to tell the experience of each particular community. *Hometown Desi*, for example, explored and shared the tradition, culture, and experience of South Asian immigrant communities. They included Sikh mill workers in 1907, Indian and Pakistan graduate students in the 1960s, and Bhutanese refugees today. The room was painted yellow and decorated with Tibetan *shambu*, a decorative ruffled banner hung around the top of the shrine room, and prayer flags around the ceiling (Figure 7). The exhibit started with a panel that showed photos of the CAC members and their personal stories. Historic photos with captions conveyed the arrival stories of each
individual depicted. Three display cabinets were filled with artifacts that play an important role in each of the personal stories. For example, a red hijab with a small panel told the story of a Muslim woman who was afraid to wear a hijab to express her Muslim identity post-9/11. She felt a sense of empowerment when she encountered another Muslim woman wearing a hijab in the airport. An aluminum-wrapped burrito represented the story of how a Nepalese boy fell in love with a chicken burrito after he left the refugee camp and arrived in Seattle. Several colored photos were also on display to show the lives of South Asian Americans today including events like weddings, middle schoolers’ cricket games, and family gatherings.

The third floor has a smaller-scale exhibit that features students’ work from Wing Luke Museum’s summer camps and after-school programs. Wing Luke Museum relates to another famous icon in the Asian American community—Bruce Lee. Lee first settled in Seattle when he arrived in the U.S. The first martial art school he opened is one block from the museum. Two exhibits in the museums are dedicated to the philosophy and life of Bruce Lee.

The museum offers a variety of walking tours throughout the week. The historic hotel tour visits the other half of the East Kong Yick Building where the Yick Fung Store, Freeman Hotel, and Gee How Oak Tin Family Association were located. The original interiors of these rooms are kept intact and open to the tour. The building contains replica rooms of early immigrant apartments of Filippo, Chinese, and Japanese Americans. Chinatown Discovery and Food Tours walk visitors through the C-ID and tell the stories of its various communities through the built environment and food.
The community-based exhibition model is at the core of Wing Luke Museum’s practice. In 2006, Wing Luke Museum published a small booklet, *Community-Based Exhibition Model*, explaining the philosophy, methods, and goals of the community-based exhibit development model and how the museum has implemented it. Rubenacker, the current Exhibit Director, expressed that she regularly referenced this book in her practice.91

The goal of the community-based exhibition model is to “serve communities, seek out and learn their visions, and work to bring them into being.”92 In this framework, community members are the decision-makers who determine the project direction, set main messages and themes, make sections, and guide the project execution. The museum staff serves as “technical advisors” to guide and facilitate the process.93 The community members include the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) which serves as the primary decision-making body and participating community members who conduct oral history interviews, gather artifacts, and do outreach. The CAC consists of ten to fifteen people who are community leaders and authority figures who can serve as bridges among different groups within the community.

In the first stage of the exhibition development process, the staff conducts outreach to learn about the community leadership, concerns, strengths, ongoing initiatives, and visions for the future. The staff then produces a general timeline and goal of the exhibit

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91 Rubenacker.
92 “Community-Based Exhibition Model,” 14.
93 “Community-Based Exhibition Model,” 14.
development process, a list of community partners, and eventually a list of potential CAC members. Once CAC members are on board, the exhibit development process begins. This process usually takes months to complete with multiple meetings held between the staff and CAC. In this process, CAC identifies the targeted audience, decides on the core message and themes, and creates a storyline for the exhibit. Other steps in the process include fundraising, publicity, and public education strategies. The role of museum staff is to create meeting agendas, take minutes, and keep the process moving forward.

At the exhibition design stage, CAC is responsible for reviewing and selecting explanatory quotes, artifacts, photographs, and design concepts and providing constructive feedback to the museum staff and exhibit designer. After the exhibit, the staff follows up with CAC to evaluate the whole process.

By working directly with community members and allowing them to guide exhibit narratives, Wing Luke Museum's community-based exhibition model shares its curatorial authority with affiliated community stakeholders. The affiliated community is able to tell its own history and experience in its own words. This creates a more meaningful and relevant exhibit for affiliated community members and visitors alike. For people outside the community, the exhibit provides a more nuanced and real portrayal of the community through insiders’ perspectives. The effort to build collaboration and inclusivity comes at a cost. This community-driven process is time intensive and requires significant human resources and community efforts to create an exhibit.

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National Cambodian Heritage Museum and Killing Fields Memorial (NCHM) is housed in a decorative, two-story building located at the intersection of North Branch Chicago River and West Lawrence Avenue at the west edge of Lincoln Square, Chicago (Figure 8). To its east is Albany Park, one of the most ethnically diverse neighborhoods in Chicago. Walking along West Lawrence Avenue, it is difficult to miss this beautiful building. The primary elevation is clad with large, decorative stone panels with a bas-relief depicting traditional Cambodian decorative patterns and Khmer goddesses similar to those of Angkor Wat in Cambodia. Khmer and English texts appear side by side on the façade. The building houses two institutions: NCHM and the Cambodian Association of Illinois (CAI). On the weekends, Khmer traditional music fills the building along with the sound of children’s laughter. Children attend Khmer traditional dance classes on the second floor while men play and sing traditional Khmer music on the first floor. It is difficult to imagine the other collective identity they share, that of genocide survivors. In the early 1970s, the Khmer Rouge exacted genocide upon its own people, forever altering the fate of the country. NCHM was established in 2004 with the idea of promoting “genocide awareness and social justice, advocacy for genocide survivors and their families, healing arts, and youth leadership development in social justice.”

My findings on the NCHM draw from my site visits on March 14th and 15th, 2023; two one-hour-long interviews with Kaoru Watanabe, the NCMH Associate Director, and one 30-minute-long interview with a museum volunteer; two museum tours given by Watanabe and Anneth Houy, the Khmer dance instructor; and many conversations I had with community members during my visit. Alexandra Salazar’s “Survivor Memory, Collective Narrative: Producing the ‘Remembering the Killing Fields’ exhibit at the National Cambodian Heritage Museum and Memorial in Chicago, Illinois” (2016) was useful in understanding the NCMH exhibit development process.

History of Cambodian Immigrants in Chicago

In 1951, the Khmer People’s Revolutionary Party (KPRP) was founded with the purpose of overthrowing French colonial rule and establishing a Cambodian communist state. After France surrendered in 1953, Cambodia gained its independence and established
the Kingdom of Cambodia. In 1970, the country was once again set into political tumult with the overthrow of Prince Sihanouk by Marshal Lol Non’s Khmer Republic, a US-backed regime. The KPRP, which had changed its name to the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), launched a civil war against the newly established Khmer Republic with the help of communist forces in Southeast Asia including the North Vietnamese army and the Chinese Communist Party. In 1975, after years of guerrilla warfare, the CPK won the war. With the vision of turning Cambodia into an agrarian socialist republic, CPK, commonly referred to as the Khmer Rouge, established an autocratic and totalitarian regime in Cambodia. All urban residents were ordered to leave the city without their belongings and to work in collective farms in the countryside. Intellectuals and professionals were targeted and executed as the “enemies” of Cambodia. Mass execution, harsh working conditions, starvation, physical abuse, and disease led to the deaths of 1.5 to 2 million Cambodians. In 1979, Vietnam invaded and overthrew the Khmer Rouge.96

From 1975 to 1994, approximately 160,000 Cambodian refugees entered the U.S. The majority of them arrived via refugee camps in Thailand. Through the Office for Refugee Resettlement (ORR), a newly established federal office after the passage of the 1980 Refugee Act, Cambodian refugees were relocated to various locations across the U.S. including Chicago. The ORR contracted with nonprofit agencies to find housing, jobs, and schools for the refugees. ORR intentionally selected cities with plentiful cheap housing and

entry-level job opportunities for relocation. Although the exact number of relocated refugees in Chicago remains unknown, the 2000 census showed that about 3,300 Cambodians lived in the metropolitan area of Chicago although the actual number might be higher.

The Cambodian Association of Illinois (CAI) was established in 1976 by a group of Cambodian refugees to help with the resettlement process. In recent years, CAI has become the community hub for the Cambodian community in Chicago and provides programs such as youth services, health support services, and senior in-home care services.

In an effort to reevaluate community needs, in the early 2000s, CAI conducted a community survey and found that “self-defeat/lack of self-confidence,” “self-hatred/lack of self-esteem,” and “self-isolation/lack of trust” were common feelings among the Cambodian community in Chicago. The experiences and memories of the Khmer Rouge regime not only impacted the genocide survivors or 1.5 generations (referring to Cambodians born in refugee camps) but also the second-generation Cambodians who grew up in families and communities that were wounded by the genocide. As a result, CAI

decided to provide more programs to promote self-empowerment, cultural pride, and a sense of belonging and ownership in the community. CAI developed the idea of creating a memorial and a cultural heritage museum. Although some community members wanted to forget the tragedy of the Khmer Rouge regime and others believed it would be more appropriate to have this museum in California which has a larger Cambodian community, many agreed that remembering the past was essential to healing collective pain and preventing it from happening again. In 1998, CAI purchased the building it currently occupies and raised over one million dollars to renovate it. In 2004, NCHM opened on the first floor of this two-story building (Figure 9). Although CAI and NCHM are two separate organizations on paper, they share the same staff, building, and sometimes the same programming. Watanabe explained their respective scopes of work as: CAI is largely responsible for social service and NCHM for the cultural life of the community.

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101 Salazar, 27.
102 Salazar, 28.
104 Kaoru Watanabe, Interview with Kaoru Watanabe, February 27, 2023.
NCHM does not have a written mission statement but its goals are described as:

"The Museum & Memorial is the only museum of its kind in the US, which dedicates its programs and activities to the Cambodian genocide awareness and social justice, advocacy for genocide survivors and their families, healing arts, and youth leadership development in social justice."

Exhibit and Programming

The museum occupies the first floor of the building. The entrance is decorated with traditional Cambodian Buddhist statues and artifacts. The permanent exhibit Remembering the Killing Fields opened in 2011. The exhibit depicts Cambodian experiences and lives
during the Khmer Rouge using artifacts, photographs, and quotes from the museum’s oral history collection. The exhibit features four themes: “Clearing the Cities,” “Destroying Society,” “Constant Fear,” and “The Killing Fields.” The exhibit has both Khmer and English texts on the panels. The panels are designed to be tall and slightly overwhelming to imitate the mental disturbance people experienced during the period of the Khmer Rouge. Several horizontal panels are placed on top of the vertical ones with Khmer Rouge slogans written in English and Khmer. The first few state, “To keep you is no gain, to destroy you is no loss,” “Intelligence is of no value, manual labor is priceless.”

Before viewing the exhibit, the staff first invited me to watch a five-minute documentary film about the history of Cambodia and Khmer Rouge. The exhibit begins with an introduction section titled “Perseverance. Strength. Courage,” (Figure 10). The section features biographies of six genocide survivors who are still active members of the Chicago Cambodian community. The next section, “Clearing the Cities”, describes the beginning of the Khmer Rouge regime when people were forced to leave the city and move into the countryside. Two Khmer Rouge uniforms were displayed here. The section “Destroying Society” describes how the Khmer Rouge destroyed society through family separations, forced labor, and confiscation of personal property. The following section, “Constant Fear”, features the horror under the Khmer Rouge regime including execution, starvation, disease, and overwork. This section displays a range of tools including those used for farming, torture, medical treatment, and execution. The staff commented that many survivors who visited the museum frequently picked up a condensed milk can from this section and recalled how they used them in communal dining halls. Most of the artifacts
on display are not original. The exhibit designer found a way to recreate them based on survivors’ accounts and trips to Cambodia to purchase similar items. The artifacts were designed to allow the visitors to pick them up and share their stories relating to the item. The memory of the Cambodian genocide might be too painful to recall, but a small object like a condensed milk can enables the survivors to share their experiences and memories.

Figure 10: The Introduction Section Titled “Perseverance. Strength. Courage” (Shang. 2023)
in a more subtle and approachable way. These simple exhibition design elements help fulfill one of the main museum missions--healing.

The last section, “The Killing Fields”, describes the history of the S-21 prison and mass graves. There is a memorial at the end of the exhibit in an enclosed space separated by a wall. The memorial includes the Wall of Remembrance--80 six-foot-high rectangular glass panels carved with the names of thousands of Cambodians killed during the Khmer Rouge regime. Backlit with gentle purple lighting, the center of the wall consists of a black stone panel with a white lotus carved in the center and a Buddhist altar in the front (Figure 11). Many community members gather here with monks from a nearby Buddhist temple.
during the annual Day of Remembrance, April 17th, to pray and memorialize people who died during the period of the Khmer Rouge.

This exhibit was developed through a collaboration between CAI, NCHM, and Northern Illinois University in 2009. According to Salazar’s account, CAI board members and staff, the museum board and staff, and the museum advisory committee were deeply involved with the exhibit development process.\textsuperscript{105} An interesting generational division can be found here. Most CAI board members were first-generation Cambodian Americans who either escaped from Cambodia before the Khmer Rouge regime or were survivors of their genocide. Most CAI staff and NCHM board members were mainly second-generation Cambodian Americans. The museum staff was composed of a mix of non-Khmer Americans, and first and second-generation Cambodian Americans.\textsuperscript{106} The generational division of the groups involved in the collaboration created some interesting discussions during the exhibit development process and, in the process, fostered one of the main goals of the museum—building a cross-generational bridge. The curator team consisted of museum staff, an NIU anthropologist (Judy Ledgerwood), an exhibition designer, and a graphic designer.

The exhibit narrative and content were largely based on interviews with survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime in the local community. The layout and content were created by the curator team and reviewed and decided by CAI, the museum board, and staff members. The title and informational texts were edited and revised to be more concise and

\textsuperscript{105} Salazar, 110.
\textsuperscript{106} Salazar, 111.
easier for visitors to understand. Unlike other historical exhibits where a timeline was always given, this exhibit intentionally did not include a timeline. Although Salazar did not disclose the details of internal debates, she did reveal the contentions around a timeline for the Killing Fields concerned political opinions that were divided along generational lines and questions regarding who should be featured in the timeline. 107 This generational difference also occurred in the exhibit design process. The exhibit designer originally wanted to create a relocation map to be placed on the floor so that visitors could walk over it. Although this idea was supported by second-generation Cambodian Americans, the survivors strongly opposed the idea as they perceived stepping on the map of their home country as disrespectful. In the end, the map was put on a small handheld panel which the docent carried to show to visitors. 108

A small exhibit near the museum exit features the lives of the refugees upon resettlement in the U.S. The volunteer who designed the exhibit is a second-generation Cambodian American who grew up in the neighborhood and attended language and art classes in CAI when she was young. When she left home for college, she experienced an identity crisis, struggling to find who she was. After graduation, she felt a strong desire to reconnect to her cultural roots. Once back in Chicago, she returned to CAI where she came upon boxes of photos documenting years of CAI-hosted community events. With the help of community members, she identified the individuals and events in the photographs. From these photos she created an exhibit to tell the stories of her community after coming to the

107 Salazar, 127.
108 Salazar, 138.
U.S. She found this community collaborative research process a useful method for connecting with her parents and learning more about their childhoods. She found a photograph of her father as a young boy sitting behind a food stand in Chicago many years ago.

Anneth Houy, the current CAI Khmer dance instructor, is another second-generation Cambodian who benefited from CAI as a young child. Houy received support and guidance from CAI when her family first arrived in Chicago. She studied Khmer dance at CAI as a young girl and now teaches Khmer dance in the museum. She believes that the Khmer music, dance, language classes, and youth membership and leadership programs provided by the museum are essential for the younger generation to learn about their roots and culture and understand who they are.

Living Museum Model

In 2015, NCHM reviewed its mission and developed a conceptual model as a guide for program development. This model, the Living Museum Model, is described as “an ever-evolving cultural agent” that is actively shaped by dialogues “among Cambodians from different generations, and dialogues between Cambodians and non-Cambodians.”¹⁰⁹ The model creates a space for people to “remember and acknowledge the past and suffering that Cambodians have gone through” using the exhibit, to “build hope for the future”

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through the Day of Remembrance and memorial service, and to “live the present” through services and programs.\textsuperscript{110}

The core of this model is the Day of Remembrance, which includes four themes: “Justice”, “Voice”, “Healing”, and “Future” (Figure 12). The annual event “provides a platform for survivors, their families, and the general public to come together to increase their awareness of the Cambodian genocide and its impact on the community, facilitate dialogues bridging generations, promote the role of art and creative engagement in healing, and facilitate youth leadership in social justice.”\textsuperscript{111} Community members told me that the Day of Remembrance is the biggest event of the year. Although some survivors might not want to visit the exhibit because of the painful memories it might raise, many of them attend the annual Day of Remembrance. The day of collective mourning allows community members to grieve and remember together and provides a sense of support and a space for healing and reflection.

In addition to the Day of Remembrance, the four themes are integrated into the museum’s operation. The museum records and preserves the memories of community members to amplify their voices through the exhibit. The art and dance classes offer survivors and their families a chance to revive and reconnect with their traditional culture; a relationship that was intentionally severed during the period of the Khmer Rouge. The community instills cultural pride and identity through practicing Khmer dance and instruments and heals the emotional pain in the process. These embodied practices of

\textsuperscript{110} “Living Museum Model.”  
\textsuperscript{111} “Living Museum Model.”
cultural performances are also a powerful medium for mending profound wounds and facilitating the healing of cultural trauma.

For second-generation Cambodian Americans, the museum offers an opportunity to learn about the Cambodian genocide, a historical chapter rarely discussed with them by their parents. The museum provides a way for second-generation Cambodian Americans to understand what their parents survived and to foster intergenerational dialogue.

Figure 12: Living Museum Model (National Cambodian Heritage Museum & Killing Fields Memorial, 2023)
Comparison

This section examines the similarities and differences between the three case studies in terms of their scale, scope, founding, community interactions, and targeted audiences. Examination of these three case studies offers a critical analysis of the diversity of Asian American community museums and how they interact with their respective communities.

Scale

The scale of a museum determines the types of exhibitions and programming it can provide. Museum scale can be measured in many different ways. Of the three case studies, Wing Luke Museum is the greatest in scale in terms of square footage and budget. Its physical home, the East Kong Yick Building, occupies an entire block. This three-story building provides enough room for the museum to install multiple exhibits and host walking tours of the historic hotel at the same time. NCHM and Portland Chinatown Museum, on the other hand, each only have one floor for their exhibits, which limits their ability to display a diversity of temporary and permanent exhibits simultaneously.

The differences in scale can also be observed through their financials. Wing Luke’s 2020 total revenue exceeded $3.4 million, while Portland Chinatown Museum received $225,203 and NCHM had $123,770 in revenues. The adequate budget allows Wing Luke Museum to have a broader scope of programming and exhibitions, include more topics and

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112 The tax form defines revenues as the combination of contributions, government grants, program services, investments, and sales.
communities, and to spend resources on temporary exhibits using the time-consuming community-based exhibition model. Portland Chinatown Museum and NCHM have considerably fewer resources to invest in exhibitions and programming and their ability to regularly provide new exhibits and programming is limited.

Scope

The mission scope of these three museums varies significantly. As reflected in its mission statement, Portland Chinatown Museum aims to “collect, preserve and share” the history of Portland Chinatown using oral histories and artifacts with the intention to explore and interpret “the history of past, present and future immigrant experiences.” Although “present and future immigrant experiences” are mentioned, the main focus of Portland Chinatown Museum is on the historic Chinatown, or more specifically Chinatown before the 1950s. The disappearance of the Chinese community from downtown Portland Chinatown poses a significant challenge to the main narrative of the museum. Museum founders and Board members play key roles in determining the mission, audience, and scope of each museum. Portland Chinatown Museum was founded by a group of Chinese American elders with strong personal connections to Chinatown. Their perceptions and memories of Chinatown are wrapped in nostalgia. As a result, the emphasis on the historic significance of the place limits the museum’s ability to tell the full story of this neighborhood and isolates itself from the Jade District and its vibrant Chinese American community. However, in its programming, the museum offers lectures and a roundtable series that are related to current social and political issues relating to the Chinese American community. The aim is to expand its history-centered scope and broaden its engagement.
with the Chinese American community beyond Portland’s historic downtown Chinatown. Portland Chinatown Museum also serves as an advocate to address Chinatown’s safety concerns. PCM does this using various means such as media campaigns and grant applications to city programs, including those related to place-making.

In its mission statement, Wing Luke Museum intends to “connect” people to the history, culture, and art of AAPI through “vivid storytelling and inspiring experiences” to “advance racial and social equity.” The phrases “connect”, “storytelling” and “experiences” indicate that the museum serves as a medium to bring visitors to the communities which its exhibits showcase. The communities are able to tell their own histories in their own words. The museum cedes narrative authority to the communities which it works with.

Wing Luke Museum’s exhibits go beyond the facts, maps, and numbers and focus on individual experiences and feelings of AAPI communities using various mediums including art installations, interactive panels, and walking tours. Central to its mission, Wing Luke Museum promotes racial and social equity. The museum does not limit itself to the Asian ethnic groups that reside in the C-ID. Wing Luke’s and Ron Chew’s experiences in Asian American social activism are foundational to the museum’s vision and practice of promoting social justice for all AAPI groups. During the exhibit development process, the museum staff seeks to include marginalized groups and to foster collaboration among diverse communities that may not typically work together. Wing Luke Museum also includes advocacy work in its mission. It has been a long-time advocate of the C-ID and represents the cultural institution in the city’s community engagement process.
It cleverly uses its expertise in community history to leverage its impact and connects its exhibit to the contemporary issues the C-ID is facing.

NCHM aims to promote “Cambodian genocide awareness and social justice” and advocate for the survivors and their families through its programs and activities. The scope of the museum is largely limited to one ethnic group--Cambodian Americans. Its targeted audience includes first-generation (survivors), 1.5th-generation (who were born in camps), and second-generation Cambodian Americans. It is the only museum that has panels in two languages--English and Khmer, which demonstrates that the museum wants its community members to tell their stories and read about their experiences in their own language. NCHM is not only a museum, but also a community center, service hub, and spiritual home for the local Cambodian community. Serving a community who were forever altered by the Khmer Rouge regime, the museum focuses exclusively on what the community has been through, how to process the traumatic memory and move forward, and how to educate the next generation about the community’s history and heritage. NCHM is also exploring ways to acknowledge subsequent layers of community history through small-scale exhibits that focus on what happened after the Khmer Rouge regime.

Community Museum Interaction Strategies

Each museum practices community engagement differently from how they design their exhibitions to types of programming and outreach.

My limited knowledge on the exhibit development process at Portland Chinatown Museum restricts my understanding of how Portland Chinatown Museum has engaged its
affiliated community. What is known is that the exhibition was designed with artifacts donated by community members and exhibition interpretation was based on oral history accounts. Chinese American community members who have close connections with the museum are able to propose exhibit ideas for more contemporary and temporary art exhibits.

Wing Luke Museum, on the other hand, actively invites community participation in the exhibit development process. Its community-based exhibition model abandons the traditional curatorial practice in which museum professionals collect, interpret, and present community stories with a presumed authoritative, objective, extra-communal perspective. The community-based exhibition model prioritizes community stakeholders in decision-making processes. In this model, the museum “willingly relinquishes” control of the final product. The community, on the other hand, determines the narratives of the exhibit, projects its own visions, and asserts agency over its own stories and exhibits. In this way, the museum creates a more inclusive, respectful, and equitable representation.

NCHM, the smallest museum of the three, has the tightest relationship with its respective community, benefiting from its close tie with CAI. The museum staff are mostly Cambodian Americans who grew up in this community and who have received services and support from CAI in the past. As members of the community, the staff understand what the community has been through and what they need. As described in its Living Museum Model, the museum is constantly evolving to better cater to the community’s needs. The

113 “Community-Based Exhibition Model,” 13.
exhibits reflect how the Cambodian community wants their story to be told and carefully balances the perspectives of different generations. The memorial provides a way to bring the community together by memorializing the pain and suffering they have collectively been through. Programming activities educate the next generation about the community’s cultural heritage. Survivors are able to share their stories through the exhibit, finding solace in the memorial and art programs. The 1.5 and second generations can learn about their history through exhibits and develop their cultural identity by participating in dance, music, and language classes.

**Network**

Community museums tend to be smaller in scale compared to well-established mainstream museums. Due to their modest size and limited resources, community museums benefit from partnering with other similarly resourced museums. Networks are crucial for Asian American community museums to benefit from the expertise and resources of other museums. These networks also help to increase visibility and have access to more professional development and funding opportunities.

Portland Chinatown Museum collaborates with three other cultural institutions in the neighborhood for programming, advocacy, and promotion of cross-racial understanding and neighborhood safety. NCHM benefits from membership within the Chicago Cultural Alliance (CCA), a nonprofit agency representing over 40 cultural heritage museums, centers, and historical societies. The Alliance provides a robust network of support to its core members with assistance in capacity building and professional development for museum staff; grant writing; collections management; advocacy; cross-
organization collaboration; and collaborating with academic institutions and artists. Wing Luke Museum is in the network of the National Park Service and Smithsonian and is an affiliate of the Smithsonian. As a Smithsonian Institution Affiliate, Wing Luke Museum benefited from the Smithsonian’s network and national name recognition. This was instrumental in Wing Luke’s fundraising efforts when it planned to purchase the East Kong Yick Building in 2001. Being part of the national networks of the National Park Service and the Smithsonian offers greater funding opportunities and more visibility for Wing Luke Museum.

115 Chew, My Unforgotten Seattle, 540.
Conclusion

This thesis examines the role of Asian American community museums in the United States and their significance in promoting a greater understanding and appreciation of Asian American cultures. The analysis begins with a comprehensive survey of twenty-one existing Asian American community museums. These Asian American community museums are diverse in terms of geographical location, founding stories, and their affiliated communities. Echoing the definition of community museums, these Asian American community museums are founded by individuals or groups of passionate community leaders determined to preserve their community’s heritage. Viewing themselves as interpreters of their culture and history and keepers of ethnic traditions, these museums provide various programming and services beyond museum exhibits.

To gain a deeper understanding of the interactions between community museums and their communities, I selected three case study museums: Portland Chinatown Museum; Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience; and National Cambodian Heritage Museum & Killing Fields Memorial. Portland Chinatown Museum tells a story of how a museum is profoundly impacted by its founding members and how it struggles to position itself within a declining Chinatown; Wing Luke Museum exemplifies the operation of a well-established museum with a mature and well-tested community-based exhibit development model; NCHM demonstrates a museum as an agent of social repair and healing, providing ways for the community to memorialize and process the traumatic experiences they have endured. These three museums have expanded their functions to better cater to the needs of their respective communities, going beyond their role as
collection and display spaces. Community museums are used as spaces to memorialize the past, preserve cultural heritage, promote ethnic traditions, share community experiences, and enhance cross-racial and generational understanding.

Due to the time and resource constraints of this thesis, I was not able to perform an in-depth analysis of each case study. Site visits were limited to two days per museum. These time constraints did not allow for in-depth relationship development and prevented me from observing exhibit development processes and event programming.

This study introduces the role and impact of Asian American community museums. There is room, however, for additional and more extensive research. A study to analyze visitor perceptions and experiences can help us understand what messages the visitors glean from the museum exhibits and programming. Examining the effectiveness of community participation in the exhibit development process through close observations can also be beneficial to understand how the community shapes the exhibit. The advocacy efforts conducted by the museums are also interesting to look at. Both Portland Chinatown Museum and Wing Luke Museum serve as long-time advocates in the neighborhoods in which they are located. They actively raise their voices in the public arena when their neighborhoods are in crisis. More observations and analysis can be done to explore how community museums use advocacy as a tool to promote social agendas and how the role of advocacy intersects and supports other community museum functions. Such research would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role and impact of Asian American community museums in the United States.
In conclusion, this study sheds light on the importance of Asian American community museums as sites for preserving and promoting the heritage of Asian Americans. Founded by community members, these museums enable the communities to tell their own stories in their own words. These museums are not only spaces of historical exhibits, but also places of dialogue, cultural hubs, community centers, and advocates for their communities. As the histories and experiences of Asian American communities receive more and more attention, it is critical that we understand the significance and appreciate the contributions of these museums to Asian American communities. I hope that this study will inspire further research and advocacy in support of these institutions and the communities they serve.
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Appendix A: Definition of Asian American

East Asian Americans: Chinese Americans, Hong Kong Americans, Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, Macanese Americans, Mongolian Americans, Ryukyuan Americans, Taiwanese Americans, and Tibetan Americans.

South Asian Americans: Bangladeshi Americans, Bhutanese Americans, Indian Americans, Indo-Caribbean Americans, Indo-Fijian Americans, Maldivian Americans, Nepalese Americans, Pakistani Americans, and Sri Lankan Americans.

Southeast Asian Americans: Bruneian Americans, Burmese Americans, Cambodian Americans, Filipino Americans, Hmong Americans, Indonesian Americans, Iu Mien Americans, Karen Americans, Laotian Americans, Malaysian Americans, Singaporean Americans, Thai Americans, Timorese Americans, and Vietnamese Americans.

Central Asians: Afghan Americans, Armenian Americans, Azerbaijani Americans, Georgians Americans, Kazakh Americans, Kyrgyz Americans, Mongolian Americans, Tajik Americans, Turkmen Americans, and Uzbek American
### Appendix B: Summary of Existing Asian American Community Museums

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Museum</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Census tract</th>
<th>Museum Building</th>
<th>Founder</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese American Museum</td>
<td>Los Angeles, CA</td>
<td>11.87</td>
<td>54.65</td>
<td>Strong community connection</td>
<td>Chinese Historical Society of Southern California and El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument</td>
<td>1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego Chinese Historical Museum</td>
<td>San Diego, CA</td>
<td>17.87</td>
<td>5.59</td>
<td>Strong community connection</td>
<td>San Diego Chinese Historical Society</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese American Museum of Northern California</td>
<td>Marysville, CA</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>Strong community connection</td>
<td>Brian Tom</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese American Historical Museum</td>
<td>San Jose, CA</td>
<td>38.54</td>
<td>58.09</td>
<td>Strong community connection</td>
<td>Chinese Historical and Cultural Project</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Việt Museum</td>
<td>San Jose, CA</td>
<td>38.54</td>
<td>58.09</td>
<td>Historic building but no connection</td>
<td>Vũ Văn Lộc</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese Heritage Museum</td>
<td>Santa Ana, CA</td>
<td>12.25</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Virtual</td>
<td></td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese American Museum of San Jose</td>
<td>San Jose, CA</td>
<td>38.54</td>
<td>30.71</td>
<td>Strong community connection</td>
<td>Historian Timothy J. Lukes and Gary Y. Okihara*</td>
<td>1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland Chinatown Museum</td>
<td>Portland, OR</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>Weak connection</td>
<td>Chinese American elders</td>
<td>2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Cambodian Heritage Museum &amp; Killing Fields Memorial</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>7.01</td>
<td>7.12*</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Cambodian Association of Illinois</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum Name</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Rating</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Founders/Leaders</td>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese American Museum of Chicago</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>7.01</td>
<td>87.64</td>
<td>Strong community connection</td>
<td>Dr. Kim K. Tee, Dr. Bennet Bronson and Dr. Chuimei Ho</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Chinese Museum</td>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>8.29*</td>
<td>Historic building but no connection</td>
<td>Jason Lam</td>
<td>2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese American Museum in Washington, DC</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>16.86</td>
<td>Historic building but no connection</td>
<td>Jenny Liu, Philip Qiu, and Neil Chen</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum of Korean American Heritage</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>15.73</td>
<td>13.98</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Minsun Kim</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*At the edge of the Asian American neighborhood
### Appendix C: Summary of Mission Statements of Existing Asian American Community Museums

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Museum</th>
<th>Mission Statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese American Museum</td>
<td>The mission of the Chinese American Museum (CAM) is to foster a deeper understanding of, and appreciation for, America’s diverse heritage by researching, preserving, and sharing the history, rich cultural legacy, and continued contributions of Chinese Americans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego Chinese Historical Museum</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese American Museum of Northern California</td>
<td>&quot;The focus of the museum has been on the forgotten history of the Chinese in America. &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Historical Society of America</td>
<td>The Chinese Historical Society of America collects, preserves, and illuminates the history of Chinese in America by serving as a center for research, scholarship, and learning to inspire a greater appreciation for, and knowledge of, their collective experience through exhibitions, public programs, and any other means for reaching the widest audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese American Historical Museum</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino American National Historical Society Museum</td>
<td>To promote the narrative of Filipino American experiences through preservation, inspiration, and education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Việt Museum</td>
<td>The aim of the Việt Museum is to create understanding and empathy for the experiences of the Vietnamese community in the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese Heritage Museum</td>
<td>Our mission is to educate, inform, and share our heritage with the public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese American National Museum</td>
<td>The mission of the Japanese American National Museum is to promote understanding and appreciation of America’s ethnic and cultural diversity by sharing the Japanese American experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese American Museum of San Jose</td>
<td>The mission of the Japanese American museum of San Jose is to collect, preserve and share Japanese American history, culture and art with a focus on the greater bay area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience</td>
<td>We connect everyone to the dynamic history, cultures, and art of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders through vivid storytelling and inspiring experiences to advance racial and social equity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland Chinatown Museum</td>
<td>Our mission is to collect, preserve and share the stories, oral histories and artifacts of Portland’s Chinatown as a catalyst for exploring and interpreting the history of past, present and future immigrant experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese American Museum of Oregon</td>
<td>The mission of the Japanese American Museum of Oregon is to preserve and honor the history and culture of Japanese Americans in the Pacific Northwest, educate the public about the Japanese American experience during WWII, and advocate for the protection of civil rights for all Americans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Cambodian Heritage Museum &amp; Killing Fields Memorial</td>
<td>&quot;The Museum &amp; Memorial is the only museum of its kind in the US, which dedicates its programs and activities to the Cambodian genocide awareness and social justice, advocacy for genocide survivors and their families, healing arts, and youth leadership development in social justice. &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum Name</td>
<td>Mission Statement</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese American Museum of Chicago</td>
<td>Our mission is to advance the appreciation of Chinese American culture through exhibitions, education, and research and to preserve the past, present, and future of Chinese Americans primarily in the Midwest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hmong Museum</td>
<td>The Hmong Museum exist to recognize and acknowledge the intersections of all things Hmong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Indo American Museum</td>
<td>The National Indo American Museum builds bridges across generations and connects cultures through the diverse, colorful stories of all Indian Americans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Chinese Museum</td>
<td>Our mission is to promote America’s diverse cultural heritage by collecting, preserving, and sharing American Chinese history, culture and art, serve as a center for research and learning, and inspire and connect audiences with American Chinese experiences, with a goal to promote mutual understanding, mutual respect and mutual learning, between people of all backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese American Museum in Washington, DC</td>
<td>The museum’s mission is to advance the understanding, knowledge, and appreciation of the Chinese American experience by highlighting the history, culture, spirit, and contributions of Chinese Americans to our nation and beyond.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum of Chinese in America</td>
<td>&quot;Since its founding in 1980, MOCA has celebrated the living history of the Chinese experience in America by preserving and presenting the 200-year history, heritage, culture, and diverse experiences of American communities of Chinese descent. Founded as a community-based organization, MOCA has over a period of four decades maintained our community centrality while gaining a national following of visitors and members. Our museum strives to be responsive to the moment; tell nuanced and unexpected stories; spotlight politically conscious issues; and provide a platform for open dialogue and dynamic programs. MOCA contributes to a fuller and more nuanced and layered American narrative in highlighting the stories of this immigrant community.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum of Korean American Heritage</td>
<td>&quot;The Museum of Korean American Heritage presents over 100 years of Korean American immigrant history. It preserves the roots of our Korean diaspora that connects multiple generations of immigrants together through their shared experiences.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The paragraphs with quotation marks are taken from museums’ news releases or websites. These museums do not have formal mission statements published. Instead, they list their goals and visions. The phrases are chosen based on my subjective understanding of mission statements, which might not reflect the real mission of the museums.
Appendix D: Survey of Functions of Existing Asian American Community Museums

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Museum</th>
<th>Museum Display</th>
<th>Memorial</th>
<th>Service Center</th>
<th>Education Programs</th>
<th>Social Advocacy</th>
<th>Research Center</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Chinese American Museum</td>
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<tr>
<td>San Diego Chinese Historical Museum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chinese American Museum of Northern California</td>
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<td>Chinese Historical Society of America</td>
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<td>Chinese American Historical Museum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Filipino American National Historical Society Museum</td>
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<td>Việt Museum</td>
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<td>Vietnamese Heritage Museum</td>
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<td>Japanese American National Museum</td>
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<td>Japanese American Museum of San Jose</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portland Chinatown Museum</td>
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<td>Japanese American Museum of Oregon</td>
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<td>Museum Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Cambodian Heritage Museum &amp; Killing Fields Memorial</td>
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<td>Chinese American Museum of Chicago</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Indo-American Museum</td>
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<td>Hmong Museum</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td>American Chinese Museum</td>
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<td>Chinese American Museum in Washington, DC</td>
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