

# New Strategies for Promoting Inclusive and Mindful Chinese Tourism in Venice

Xu Fei

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## Abstract

This research addresses the language accessibility gap for Chinese-speaking visitors in Venice's cultural attractions, with a primary focus on creating culturally tailored Chinese-language audio guides. Situated within the Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan, the study centres on important museums, particularly the Doge's Palace, aiming to elevate the overall cultural engagement for Chinese tourists.

In alignment with UNESCO's principles of actively disseminating knowledge, integration, and social inclusion, the research adopts a cultural mediation approach. Leveraging audio description as an audiovisual translation tool, the study seeks to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers, enriching the museum experience for all visitors.

Research activities encompass an in-depth historical study of Venice, examining literature in Italian, English, and Chinese. The analysis identifies common intercultural elements between Italy and China, informing a targeted translation strategy for museum texts. Despite challenges, the research team perseveres in exploring the preferences of Chinese tourists in Venice. Conducting surveys in both Simplified and Traditional Chinese, the study aims to uncover nuanced preferences and experiences.

The anticipated outcomes include the integration of Chinese-language audio guides, enhancing language accessibility, fostering a more inclusive museum experience, and providing valuable insights for strategic advancements in Venice's tourism sector. This abstract offers a concise overview of the research, highlighting its significance in bridging cultural gaps and improving the cultural tourism experience for Chinese visitors in Venice.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

The main objective of this research is to promote new, inclusive, and thoughtful tourism strategies tailored for Chinese-speaking visitors in the Venice region within the framework of the Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR).

Venice, a renowned aquatic city in Italy, was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1987. Comprising over a hundred small islands connected by canals and bridges, Venice is celebrated for its picturesque environment, architectural

marvels, and a rich collection of artistic treasures. The city, interconnected with the mainland through railways, roads, and bridges, boasts 118 islands, 177 canals, and 401 bridges, earning it nicknames such as "City of Water," "City of a Hundred Islands," and "City of Bridges."

Since the 18th century, tourism has been a vital component of Venice's economy. At that time, the city captivated European nobility with its beautiful urban landscapes, uniqueness, and rich heritage of music and art, becoming a sought-after destination for their grand tours. In the 19th century, Venice further solidified its status as a fashionable hub for affluent elites, who frequented its luxurious establishments for both lodging and dining. Today, Venice has transformed into a major global center for conferences and festivals, hosting renowned events such as the Venice Biennale and Venice Film Festival. It not only attracts numerous professionals from various industries but also entices curious travelers from around the world. The city's unparalleled features, including its unique canals, remarkable history, cultural offerings, and stunning architectural styles, continue to draw a constant flow of visitors from diverse countries and regions.

Among the bustling crowd of tourists, Chinese visitors stand out as a pivotal and indispensable group in the landscape of Venetian tourism, garnering constant attention in the tourism industry. Over the past three years, marked by the profound impacts of the pandemic, there has been a significant transformation. At the end of 2022, the Chinese government decisively lifted international travel restrictions, ushering the return of Chinese travelers to the global tourism stage. According to the optimistic projections from the China Outbound Tourism Research Institute, approximately 6 million Chinese tourists are expected to explore Europe in 2023, with a substantial 2 million opting for Italy as their destination. The Civil Aviation Administration of China reinforces this revival, anticipating a 75% recovery in air traffic between China and the rest of the world by the end of 2023. Looking ahead to 2024, the expectations for Chinese outbound tourism not only involve a recovery to the levels of 2019 but also surpassing them, signaling a robust resurgence in international travel originating from China.

Based on an extensive study conducted by the Italian National Tourist Board (ENIT) spanning the years 2018-2019, Italy emerged as the most captivating destination in Europe for residents of first-tier Chinese cities with a penchant for international travel. Beyond the traditional allure of artistic beauty, delectable cuisine, and cutting-edge fashion, Italy's magnetic charm extended to its pristine natural landscapes, diverse sports offerings, and rejuvenating wellness routes. The pivotal year of 2019 witnessed a historic surge in Chinese outbound tourism, with Italy proudly securing its position as the premier European destination, welcoming over 3 million arrivals and providing accommodation for a staggering 5.4 million stays.

As of the initial two months of 2023, Italy demonstrated a remarkable 30% increase in tourist visas issued to Chinese citizens compared to the levels observed in 2019. March 15 marked a significant milestone as Italy officially joined the list of authorized

destinations for group tourism, reflecting a positive trajectory in the industry's recovery. However, a nuanced picture emerged in the first half of 2023, with a notable divergence in the recovery rates of private versus group tours. Tour operators reported a more robust resurgence in individual tourism visa approvals, surpassing their group counterparts.

The insights gleaned from the ENIT survey offered compelling revelations. When respondents were asked to select the three most captivating attractions in Italy, Rome claimed the pinnacle with an impressive 63%, closely followed by Milan at 58%. Venice, securing a robust 56%, clinched the third spot, outshining Florence (35%), Pisa (22%), and Naples (13%). These findings underscore the enduring appeal of Venice among Chinese tourists, solidifying its standing within Italy's vibrant tapestry of tourist cities.

Based on the aforementioned context, the research is centered around examining the prevalence of Chinese language usage at local tourist attractions in Venice, while concurrently delving into the travel habits and preferences of Chinese tourists.

## 1.2 Assessing Language Accessibility at Venice's Tourist Attractions and Profiling Language Proficiency Among Chinese Travelers

Our research team meticulously scrutinized the local tourist resources in Venice, encompassing prominent structures strewn across Venice and the Veneto region, including museums, memorials, churches, villas, and more. The overarching research objectives were twofold: firstly, to gauge the appeal of these historical landmarks among Chinese tourists, and secondly, to explore the likelihood of tourists resorting to Chinese during their sightseeing endeavors – essentially, the integration of the Chinese language in Venice. Among the favored attractions in Venice, Doge's Palace and the Accademia di Belle Arti of Venice emerge as frontrunners in national museums. Simultaneously, private museums such as Collezione Peggy Guggenheim, Fondazione Prada, and La Biennale di Venezia draw heightened interest from art and design professionals. Notably, respondents expressed significant curiosity about Cappella degli Scrovegni in Padua, the Arena in Verona, and Juliet's House.

When considering the presence and usage of the Chinese language in museums, whether on official websites or audio guides, the landscape appears somewhat sparse. This poses a considerable inconvenience to the visiting experience for Chinese tourists. Taking the relatively renowned Doge's Palace and the Accademia di Belle Arti of Venice as examples, the official website of Doge's Palace supports Italian, English, French, German, and Spanish. However, when it comes to purchasing tickets on the website, the language options are limited to Italian and English. It is important to emphasize that whether browsing the website or buying tickets online, the available languages are exclusively European. Although there is mention of an audio guide, information obtained from the official website only

indicates the existence of the audio guide without specifying available languages. Conversely, the Accademia di Belle Arti of Venice provides more robust language support. The official website is available in Italian, English, and French, while the audio guide offers a more extensive range of languages, including Italian, English, French, German, Spanish, and even an oriental language, Japanese. When purchasing tickets, there are even more language options, such as Italian, English, French, German, Spanish, Russian, Japanese, and Chinese. While the experience of purchasing tickets online in Chinese needs improvement, it is indeed a commendable effort in the region of Venice.

Although English, a globally prevalent language, is available, the proficiency of the Chinese populace in English cannot be overlooked. In the 2022 EF English Proficiency Index, China ranked 62nd, characterized as a country with low proficiency, sliding from 49th in 2021 and 38th in 2020. According to the EF Education ranking report released in 2023, within just one year, China dropped to 82nd place, lagging behind Asian countries and regions such as the Philippines (20th), Malaysia (25th), Hong Kong (29th), and South Korea (49th). The primary cause of this phenomenon is the Chinese Ministry of Education's prohibition of the use of overseas textbooks in compulsory education schools since 2020. The Ministry of Education stated that the proportion of foreign language classes, including English, in China's compulsory education schools is 6%-8%, far lower than that of Chinese (20%-22%) and mathematics (13%-15%) (according to the "Compulsory Education Curriculum Plan (2022)"). Universities also do not encourage the use of English original or translated textbooks; artificial intelligence may also reduce the urgency of mastering English; data shows that English proficiency in the East Asia region has been declining for four consecutive years, possibly influenced by travel restrictions related to the pandemic.

In summary, English alone is not sufficient to serve as a bridge for communication between Chinese tourists and the distant historical and cultural heritage of Europe. It is imperative to introduce Chinese guides and promotional materials in museums and other attractions to provide Chinese tourists with a richer and more direct visiting experience.

### 1.3 Overview of Chinese Tourists' Travel and Spending Habits

Chinese tourists, the focal point of this study, are the primary demographic under scrutiny, shaping the focus and representation of our research outcomes.

With China's technological and economic advancements over the past two to three decades, Chinese tourists have emerged as a group that heavily relies on digital media. According to ENIT survey data, social media remains the paramount channel for Chinese tourists to gather information, with approximately 66% of travelers utilizing platforms such as Little Red Book, TikTok, and Weibo to search for destination information. Additionally, travel review websites (55%), domestic online travel agencies (49%), and official destination websites are reliable avenues for

accessing tourism products and planning travel. Chinese tourists prefer authentic content to gain insights into the destination and the practicalities of their journey. Consequently, they lean towards video formats or offline virtual reality experiences for a better understanding. Moreover, they seek travel guides and local life information to anticipate cultural experiences during their journey.

Regarding consumption behavior preferences, as per the "Chinese Outbound Tourism and Overseas Payment Behavior" report released by Mastercard in the first half of 2023, a comprehensive analysis compares the characteristics of outbound tourists before and after the pandemic. It delves into the demographics of outbound tourists, their travel intentions, destinations, consumption preferences, experiences, and pain points during their journeys. The report highlights the significant increase in outbound travel intentions among Chinese tourists post-pandemic and the notable changes in related consumption behavior. Notably, the report emphasizes the fierce competition in the overseas payment market with the progress in the payment industry. Bank cards, e-wallets, and cash cater to the majority of Chinese tourists' payment needs. Ninety-eight percent of respondents have used any of the three payment methods—bank cards, e-wallets, or cash—with bank cards being the most favored (used by 87% of respondents). The report specifically notes that post-pandemic, the popularity of the United States, France, and Italy has significantly increased, with rankings ascending by three positions each.

These two aspects underscore that Chinese tourists exhibit a relative dependence on electronic devices. They prefer to gather information before their travels, formulate detailed destination strategies, and make thorough arrangements to minimize potential issues during their journey, thereby saving valuable travel time. In terms of payment, Chinese tourists also prefer electronic methods for their convenience, expediting transactions and avoiding the inconvenience of carrying substantial amounts of cash.

## **2. Research Activities, Methods, and Expected Outcomes**

In response to the noticeable absence of Chinese-language content in Venice's attractions, our immediate focus is on bridging this gap through the creation of innovative and culturally resonant Chinese-language audio guides. These guides are not only tailored to the preferences of Chinese tourists but also designed to align with contemporary technological advancements and current cultural trends. We are considering in-house translation efforts and exploring the implementation of multilingual guides within museums to ensure a more inclusive experience for all visitors. Our primary objective is to develop scripts for audio guides and online/APP introductions, with a specific emphasis on major museums in Venice, particularly the Doge's Palace. This initiative aims to provide personalized experiences for visitors from Chinese-speaking cultural backgrounds, contributing significantly to the enhancement of the overall visitor experience and cultural engagement, which should be inclusive and mindful.

## 2.1 Theoretical Background of the Research

In the realm of museum translation, museums play a pivotal role in "actively interpreting and disseminating knowledge," with a focus on integration, accessibility, and social inclusion (UNESCO 2015). As cultural heritage providers worldwide adapt their communication strategies, our research goes beyond addressing the needs of visitors with various disabilities; it specifically considers the expectations of Chinese-speaking visitors. Adopting a cultural mediation approach to tourism communication (Magagnin 2023), our study aims to enhance the visitor experience. Audio description, as a specific form of audiovisual translation, is defined as "the acoustic verbal description of the visual elements of any cultural (static and dynamic) product for the benefit of people with visual impairment" (Perego 2019, 1). Museum audio description, focusing primarily on static artifacts and other non-verbal materials, is an evolving translational activity and professional service designed to enrich the cultural heritage experience. It caters not only to blind and visually impaired visitors but also to general visitors seeking an enhanced museum visit. According to Perego (2019), audio description is a unique text type that combines the communicative functions of literary and factual genres. It merges features of narrative, descriptive, and informative texts with the goal of entertaining, amusing, and instructing users by highlighting the most relevant characteristics of things or phenomena. Ultimately, museum audio description involves processes such as interlinguistic and intersemiotic translation, creative rewriting and transcreation, and simplification, aiming to reduce linguistic, cultural, and sensory barriers (Magagnin 2023).

## 2.2 Research Activities and Phased Progress

From the project's initiation, I have immersed myself in a comprehensive historical exploration of Venice. This involves delving into books available in Italian, English, and Chinese. The primary aim of this study is to analyze and identify shared intercultural elements, be they historical or related to tourism, between Italy and China. These findings will play a crucial role in crafting a translation strategy tailored for integration into museum texts.

The books used as reference are as follow:

- A Cheng 阿城《威尼斯日记》(*A Journey in Venice*), Zuoja chubanshe, Beijing, 2016.
- Chapin Lane Frederic, *Venice, A Maritime Republic*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1973.
- Thomas F. Madden, *Venice: A New History (Traditional Chinese version)*, trans. Fontaine Huang & Yueh Wang, Marco Polo Press, Taipei, 2019.
- Scarpa Tiziano, *Venezia è un pesce. Una guida nuova*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 2020..
- Shiono Nanami, *The Tale of the City of the Sea – One Thousand Years in the History of the Venetian Republic vol. 1&2 (Simplified Chinese version)*, trans. Xu Yue, China CITIC Press, Beijing, 2016.

- Shiono Nanami, *What is Renaissance?, (Simplified Chinese version)*, trans. Ji Liping, China CITIC Press, Beijing, 2015.
- Ullin Sophie, *The Venice Book – A Personal Guide to the City, Art & Culture (Chinese version)*, trans. Zhu Ziyi, Insight Media, Hunan Science & Technology Press, Changsha, 2020.
- E. H. Gombrich, *La Storia dell'Arte*, Phaidon, London, 2009.
- Zorzi Alvise, *La Repubblica del Leone: Storia di Venezia*, Bompiani, Milan, 2001.

In our pursuit of understanding the rich historical and cultural tapestry of Venice, we undertook a comprehensive study to establish a solid foundation for our promotional initiatives. Museums emerged as key attractions, with a curated list focusing on captivating Chinese tourists. Notably, we spotlighted iconic landmarks like the Doge's Palace and the galle. Concurrently, we initiated discussions with potential collaborators, including the esteemed translation company Soget-Est and the dynamic brand promotion entity Value China, both expressing initial enthusiasm.

Soget-Est, a leader in the translation realm since its establishment in Padua in 1982, has evolved into a trusted provider of comprehensive language and technological services, serving over 500 renowned companies in Italy and beyond.

Complementing this, Value China, a trailblazer in intercultural collaboration based in Italy, specializes in fostering synergy between Italian enterprises and China. Aligned with the Neosperience S.p.A. group, a frontrunner in the digital customer experience arena, Value China dedicates itself to facilitating Italian success in projects involving China.

Under the guidance of Professor Pesaro, the tutor of our research team, we engaged in multifaceted discussions with both companies, exploring the feasibility of collaborative projects. These interactions provided a rich exchange of practical experiences and achievements in their respective domains. Following discerning deliberations, our research focus crystallized on Venice's architectural gem — the Doge's Palace.

Additionally, proactive involvement from colleagues in Ca' Foscari University's Department of Asian and North African Studies injected vitality into the local tourism landscape. Aided by these experts in Chinese linguistics, I am presently orchestrating a survey in both Simplified Chinese (for tourists from mainland China) and Traditional Chinese (for tourists from regions like Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan etc.). This survey aspires to delve into the depths of Chinese tourists' experiences and preferences during their Venetian sojourn. The upcoming 2024 Chinese New Year promises an influx of Chinese tourists to Venice, offering a golden opportunity to glean fresh insights that will shape our strategies for enhancing the overall visitor experience.

Unfortunately, the envisioned collaboration with Soget-Est and Value China faced challenges due to perceived procedural complexities. Undeterred, our research team persists in unraveling the nuanced preferences of Chinese tourists in Venice.

Simultaneously, we explore innovative solutions. In the meantime, our historical and cultural study of Venice extends to the artistic part of the Renaissance era. Plans are afoot for on-site visits to pivotal museums across Italy, facilitating cross-comparisons and paving the way for a novel and more concrete research paradigm, yielding substantial outcomes.

## References

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