

## **Pedagogical Implications of Asian American Storytelling of the Covid-19 Pandemic**

Shu Wan

*The State University of New York at Buffalo*

I am a graduate instructor in history at the University of Buffalo, and I am a doctoral student originally from China. I am an oral historian studying Chinese immigrants' experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic in Western New York. I am a victim of the rising anti-Asian sentiments when Chinese Americans were scapegoated during this public health crisis. The intersectionality of my four identities helps me to deliberate on the pedagogy of racial justice during the pandemic and integrate it into history class.

When teaching a modern Asian history course in the winter of 2023, I arranged a roundtable discussion through Zoom and invited four guest speakers. They represented the Chinese, Korean, Burmese, and Indian immigrant communities in Buffalo. I designed this discussion to further students' understanding of racial justice in the local community as well as Asian Buffalonians' experience with the pandemic. I have already reported the preparation work for the discussion and its procedure elsewhere (Wan, 2023). For the roundtable, these speakers' talks primarily pertained to two topics: traumatic experience with racism and resilience to the pandemic. Reflecting on the implications of such a social justice-oriented and community-based discussion, I would like to examine how the storytelling section impacted my students and me differently.

According to their ethnic identifications, the enrollees in the course could be divided into two groups: white and Asian students. After attending the roundtable discussion, most white students articulated their concerns about the persistence of racial injustice in Buffalo. Moreover, they were also surprised by the local Asian community's activism in the fight against the pandemic through donating money and materials as well as providing volunteer services. Their social activism and engagement helped to change my students' stereotypical impression of Asian immigrants' indifference to affairs in the local community.

Asian students' responses were different. While most of them expressed their exemption from pandemic-related racial discrimination, these students were intensely concerned about the situation of Asian Buffalonians. Moreover, they realized the proximity of racial justice to their everyday lives. For both white and Asian students in the classroom, the discussion encouraged them to reckon with the relationship between racial justice and the pandemic.

Besides inspiring students to reflect on racial issues in their everyday lives and in the local community, the roundtable discussion also affected me. Like students of different racial backgrounds in the classroom, I also benefited from listening to Asian Buffalonians' voices. As I mentioned elsewhere, I suffered from anti-Asian hate during the pandemic (Wan, 2023). Unlike those fortunate students living in the culturally diverse state of New York, I heard a lot about Asian people's encounters with hostility in Iowa. As an instructor, I also felt empowered by the resilience in the stories shared during the roundtable talk. For example, an active member of the Korean church, Pastor Jhu, told us how the Korean immigrant community collaborated with other ethnic minority groups while facing the threat of the pandemic to racial justice. His narrative was immersed in positive energy, encouraging me to "overcome" the traumatic experience. While outside of my intention, the teaching practice helped treat my trauma during the pandemic. For both my students of Asian backgrounds in the classroom and me, the storytelling section rendered us confident and relieved our loneliness and helplessness during the national crisis. As ethnic minority people living in Buffalo, a city without the significant tradition of the presence of Chinese immigrants, we are encouraged by those Asian immigrants' achievement in aligning with people of Asian background.

Following the time-sensitive section in the first winter after the pandemic, I am considering how to integrate the community-based and social justice-related storytelling components into the classroom. Next time, when teaching the Asian history course, I will attempt to invite members of the local Asian community to join us. Instead of sharing their resilience to racial discrimination and traumatic experiences with the pandemic, they may tell other stories regarding the everyday life of Asian Buffalonians.

### References

Wan, S. (2023). *Sharing the pandemic experiences of Asian Buffalonians in the history classroom*. IEHS Online. <https://iehs.org/sharing-the-pandemic-experiences-of-asian-buffalonians-in-the-history-classroom/>