Teaching Asia during a Resurgence of Anti-Asian Racism

Kin Cheung, Editor

ASIA SHORTS

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Introduction

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Kin Cheung

The terms "twin pandemic," "double pandemic," and "dual pandemic" have been used to refer to the birth of a different type of global outbreak concurrent with COVID-19: a resurgence in anti-Asian racism.[1] How can educators highlight content on Asia and Asians in a way that responds to the "[m]ore than 11,000 acts of hate against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders [that] have been reported" since early 2020?[2] This volume examines classroom experiences teaching about: (1) wartime sexual violence against the backdrop of hyper-sexualized Asian women; (2) Asian religions to resist Orientalist romanticization; (3) critical literacy theory and culturally sustaining pedagogy; (4) an Asian American Civil Rights activist; (5) Buddhism, gender, and sexuality as localized categories; and (6) "foreign," "bizarre," "quirky," or "weird" practices found in Asian contexts, in order to address unreflective xenophobic otherizing of Asians and Asian Americans. Contributors draw upon the fields of history, religious studies, education, and sociology to move beyond naïvely reifying human difference through an artificial hierarchy of race, or conversely, constructing some universal human experience that erases difference. Considering the colonialist legacy of area studies and academic disciplines, the authors write on how education on Asia and its multiple diasporas—especially Asian Americans, could contribute to anti-racism and solidarity among BIPOC and allies.

According to a Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism report, "anti-Asian hate crimes surge 149%, while overall hate crime drops 7% in 2020."[3] Yet, large

percentages of Americans are unaware of the increased attacks against Asian Americans. Significantly, in 2022, 58% of Americans are unable to name *any* Asian American, despite prominent figures such as Kamala Harris. Behind the number one most common answer of "don't know" or leaving the prompt blank when asked to name an Asian American, the second most common answer is Jackie Chan—who is not even Asian American. The third is Bruce Lee. This is a clear indication of the stereotypes Americans have towards Asian Americans.

More than four years since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, systemic racism in general remains endemic. Specifically, anti-Asian racism continues to impact Asian Americans. The majority of Asian Americans feel unsafe in public spaces, with young Asian American women being the least likely to feel they belong and are accepted in the US.[4] Political rhetoric is a key cause of this problem. American politicians continue to scapegoat China in a way that directly hurts Asian American communities. Researchers of anti-Asian sentiment report that:

> At present, there is an emphasis on anti-Chinese rhetoric, which results in the targeting of Asian Americans, including those who are not of Chinese descent.
>
> Our research has found that perpetrators of hate incidents toward Asians and Asian Americans repeat rhetoric they hear from candidates and elected officials blaming China for public health crises, for economic downturns and for national security concerns.[5]

Education on China and on Asia can alter nebulous ideas of "China" as a monolithic entity by showing that even the policies passed by the Chinese Communist Party are complex, nuanced, and often enacted in locally variegated ways. The implicit biases of associating Chinese and Chinese Americans with the rhetorically constructed enemy that is "China," employed by many politicians, impacts Asian Americans who are generally lumped together as "Chinese." Reminiscent of how Vincent Chin was murdered because he looked Japanese, anyone who looks Chinese is thus guilty by association with a constructed enemy of "China." The epithet "Go back to China!" is hurled at Asian Americans who have no connection to China. "Compared to 2021, Americans in 2022 are more likely to question the loyalty of Asian Americans and blame Asian Americans for COVID-19."[6] US history has countless examples of Asian Americans being perceived as perpetual foreigners and depicted as vermin that transmit vector-borne disease.[7]

A 2022 survey of Americans regarding anti-Asian sentiment finds that "Education is the most recommended solution overall to combat anti-Asian racism."[8] Survey respondents have in mind the teaching of systemic racism and

Asian American history, not teaching Asia *per se*. Nevertheless, courses on Asia can make a difference. Educators can highlight how Asia is constructed, and by extension, the categories Asian and Asian American can be interrogated, with questions of who benefits or is harmed in the deployment of these categories. Tina Chen argues for the use of "Global Asias" to, among other applications, study Asia and its multiple diasporas through the concept of "imaginable ageography," i.e., that the asymmetry of power between "Asia" and "the West" informs how these terms are used in a way that stems from, but is not exactly the same as their respective physical geographies.[9] Contributors to this volume provide case studies of classroom experiences in such attempts. Essay themes include: (1) deconstructing "Asian," "World Religions," and "tolerance"; (2) scrutinizing stereotypes of gender and (hyper)sexuality, and (3) analyzing the intersectionality of antiracism, feminism, and civil rights activism.

The initial seed for this collection of essays came from a summer 2021 conversation by members of ASIANetwork, a consortium of colleges and universities that promotes education about Asia within the liberal arts. Karen Kingsbury invited several scholars to propose panels engaging Asian Studies with Asian American Studies in response to a watershed moment in anti-Asian violence—the March 16, 2021, killing of six Asian women. Huijing Wen and I developed the title of our conference panel proposal—now the title of this collection—based on a recent volume that Minjung Noh and I contributed chapters towards (*Teaching About Asia in a Time of Pandemic:* Columbia University Press 2020). From there, Dr. Kingsbury connected us with Elizabeth Lawrence and I also invited Rachel Pang and Jue Liang to round out the collection. Besides Dr. Lawrence, whom I met through the formation of this panel, I already knew the other lead authors and we have had conversations on how anti-Asian racism has impacted us personally during the pandemic. We hope the panel and resulting essays are only the beginning of this conversation on how educators can respond. Earlier versions of four of these essays were presented at the 2022 ASIANetwork Annual Conference in Geneva, NY. On behalf of the authors, I thank the audience members there for their feedback. I am also grateful to David Kenley and Jon Wilson for their efforts in producing this online volume.

This collection will be of interest to educators in Asian Studies and Asian American Studies, and those in disciplines that cover content on Asia and Asians, including history, religious studies, comparative literature, anthropology, sociology, education, women's gender and sexuality studies, and other humanistic disciplines or fields of study. Similar to the creators of the #AtlantaSyllabus who have generously provided an educational response to anti-Asian violence, the contributors here anticipate these essays will "spark a more informed and sustained conversation" regarding this twin pandemic.[10] I hope these examples

inspire consideration of what it means to teach Asia during a resurgence in anti-Asian racism.

Notes

[1] More generally, COVID-19 has highlighted the global endemic of racial injustices. See Bailey et al. 2022 for how this affects the classroom. Alison L. Bailey et al., "Introduction to Twin Pandemics: How a Global Health Crisis and Persistent Racial Injustices Are Impacting Educational Assessment," *Educational Assessment* 27, no. 2 (April 3, 2022): 93–97, https://doi.org/10.1080/10627197.2022.2097782.

[2] Stop AAPI HATE, "Righting Wrongs," May 2023, https://stopaapihate.org/2023/05/03/righting-wrongs-how-civil-rights-can-protect-asian-americans-pacific-islanders-against-racism/.

[3] Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism, "Fact Sheet: Anti-Asian prejudice March 2020," February 2021, https://www.csusb.edu/sites/default/files/FACT%20SHEET-%20Anti-Asian%20Hate%202020%203.2.21.pdf.

[4] The Asian American Foundation, "STAATUS Index 2023: Attitudes towards Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders," 2023, https://www.staatus-index.org/.

[5] Stop AAPI HATE, "The Blame Game," October 2022, https://stopaapihate.org/2022/10/12/anti-asian-scapegoating/.

[6] The Asian American Foundation, "STAATUS Index 2023: Attitudes towards Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders," 2023, 6, https://staatus-index.s3.amazonaws.com/STAATUS%20Index%202022%20Report.pdf.

[7] Claire Jean Kim, *Dangerous Crossings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[8] The Asian American Foundation, "STAATUS Index 2023: Attitudes towards Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders," 2023, 5, https://staatus-index.s3.amazonaws.com/STAATUS%20Index%202022%20Report.pdf.

[9] Tina Chen, "Global Asias: Method, Architecture, Praxis," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 80, no. 4 (November 2021): 997–1009, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911821001595.

[10] Lori Lopez, Lisa Ho, and Erica Kanesaka Kalnay, "#AtlantaSyllabus," accessed December 2023, https://asianamerican.wisc.edu/student-resources-2/atlantasyllabus/.

1

Teaching the History of "Comfort Women" without Casting Asians as Other

Elizabeth Lawrence

In the city of San Francisco, a memorial called the Column of Strength, "bears witness," according to its plaque, "to the suffering of hundreds of thousands of women and girls, euphemistically called 'Comfort Women,' who were sexually enslaved by the Japanese Imperial Armed Forces in thirteen Asia-Pacific countries from 1931 to 1945." Unveiled in 2017, the monument caused a diplomatic incident: the termination of a long-standing sister city relationship between San Francisco and Osaka, Japan.[1] It was a flashpoint in a "history war" that has roiled East Asia, where memories of Japan's WWII-era aggression remain raw and contested. As the United States emerges as a "battleground" in this war over public memory, comfort women statues in cities like Glendale and San Francisco have garnered significant media and scholarly attention. Yet the teaching of comfort women history in American schools remains an underexamined topic.[2]

I argue that the difficult history of comfort women should be taught, but with special care. Comfort women history can all too easily reinforce dehumanizing stereotypes of Asian women as victims and sexual objects or leave students with feelings of shock and little else. This is especially true when comfort women are introduced as an isolated case study of Asian women's history, or when testimony is selectively framed as evidence of historical crimes, thus reducing the narrator

to a symbol of violation. A critical inquiry approach mitigates such problems by supporting a more nuanced examination of comfort women as complex individuals and not just victims.[3]

My experience teaching comfort women history has mainly been in the context of introductory-level history courses that frequently serve as my students' only formal education about Asia in college. Seeing as my students have had scant exposure to Asian histories or cultures, I take for granted that I have a role to play in combating ignorance and negative stereotypes about Asian people. This role has become weightier in the context of the pandemic and the anti-Asian sentiment and violence that has arisen, in part, because of the scapegoating of Asians as vectors of disease. Education can combat hate and I applaud legislation passed in the state of Illinois designed to guarantee that all K–12 public school students will receive some education about Asian American history.[4] I would argue, though, that efforts to confront stereotypes about Asian Americans, as "perpetual foreigners" for instance, will be less effective if students are simultaneously exposed to stereotypical portrayals of non-American Asians as unfathomable Others. Moreover, whether the topic is Asia or Asian America, and whether the context is a K–12 or college level class, curricular reform will not inevitably result in positive outcomes; *how* we teach matters. This article focuses on comfort women precisely because they have become such salient figures of public memory. But its broader goal is to encourage deep reflection on Asia-related pedagogy at a time of widespread xenophobia and discrimination, exacerbated by COVID-19.

The Danger of Comfort Women as a Single Story

American students who receive little education about Asia are susceptible to pernicious images of Asian women as victims devoid of historical agency. The novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie articulates the "dangers" of such stereotyping in a popular TED Talk. The Nigerian-born Adichie notes that many Americans cannot see past a "single story" of Africa as a land of "catastrophe," full of "incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves, and waiting to be saved by a kind, white foreigner."[5] Similarly, American students, shallowly exposed to historical topics like Chinese footbinding and WWII-era comfort women, may struggle to form an association with Asian women in history that exceeds the provocation of mangled and violated bodies.

Consider the California public schools. In 2016, a new History-Social Science Framework incorporated comfort women into guidelines for tenth grade World History in response to community advocacy. The guidelines indicate that "Comfort Women can be taught as an example of institutionalized sexual slavery."[6] At first glance, this would appear to be a victory for greater inclusion of Asia-related

histories in American secondary education. But any victory is compromised by the shoehorning of the topic into a larger curricular framework that completely marginalizes Asian and women's history. In the framework's 60-pages of guidance for teachers and textbook companies, Korean history gets two brief mentions (351, 363). The section on "The Rise of Imperialism and Colonialism," fails to address Japanese imperialism (333–341) and alarmingly mischaracterizes the history of imperialism in China (337). Meanwhile, women are all but absent throughout. There is nothing on suffrage, feminisms, or any topic related to women and gender save for one: comfort women.[7] If teachers follow the framework, California students could easily encounter only one story about the history of Asian women: a story about Asian women as victims of the violent brutality of Asian men. This single story of sexual objectification is especially concerning considering Asian women's hypersexualization, a phenomenon tragically spotlighted by the 2021 murder of six women of Asian descent in Atlanta by a self-proclaimed "sex addict."[8]

The troubling single-story effect is hardly a problem of the high schools alone. For one, experts in Asian Studies should very much concern themselves with the way Asia is being taught (or not) at the secondary level. Moreover, college level history courses are also apt to marginalize the histories of women. Taking my own field of modern China as an example, Klaus Muhlhahn's recent 600+ page history of China, "from the Great Qing to Xi Jinping, has only four entries under the index heading of "Women," three of which pertain to the post-Mao period.[9] When our histories are so bereft of narratives about women, any encounter students have with women's history can become a "single story."

With this in mind, supplemental teaching resources directed at a crossover audience of high school and college teachers should be scrutinized for how they frame topics like the comfort women. Unfortunately, the website Asia for Educators (henceforth AFE), does not fare well under such scrutiny. Its "Primary Source Document" featuring testimony of Kim Tŏkchin promotes a simplistic and dehumanizing reading of her story.[10]

I have a personal teaching anecdote involving this source. When I was a novice teacher scrambling to put together a lecture on World War II in Asia, I drew from the AFE reproduction of Kim's narrative the following quotations:

> "Each of us had to serve an average of 30 to 40 men a day, and we often had no time to sleep…In each room there was a box of condoms which the soldiers used…Quite a few would rush straight to penetration without condoms, saying they couldn't care less if they caught any diseases, since they were likely to die on the battlefield at any moment."

When I came to this slide during my lecture, I immediately felt I had made a mistake. Not only had I too casually introduced the topic of sexual violence to an

audience that may have included survivors of sexual violence, but I had crudely reduced Kim's life experience and the experience of Asian women during the war, to these few sentences. Perhaps I also intuited an insight made by historian Laura Hein, who has noted the "disturbingly pornographic quality" of accounts of sexual violence "even when a critique of violence against women is intended."[11] In her article "Savage Irony," Hein criticizes the tendency to emphasize the sexual violence in comfort women accounts while editing out the narrators' experiences before and after the war.[12] The AFE Primary Source Document does just that in its selective reproduction of Kim's translated testimony. In a convention of all AFE Primary Source Documents, the teaching resource first provides a very brief source excerpt followed by one that is longer but still incomplete. The very brief version contains just three sentences, which correspond to three points of emphasis: (1) the deception involved in Kim's recruitment, (2) her initial experiences of rape by military personnel in Japan, and (3) her forced sexual servitude in a comfort station in China. One of the sentences is the one I dropped into my lecture: "Each of us had to serve an average of 30 to 40 men each day, and we often had no time to sleep."

I would like to call this a shut-down quotation, or a quotation that shuts down discussion and analysis. A quotation like this resembles graphic images of historical violence, such as photographs of mutilated bodies from King Leopold's Congo. Speaking of such images, Nancy Rose Hunt has argued that scholars should "push beyond the shock of the photographic that tends to blot out all else, and seek more fragile memory pictures and acoustic traces" in our sources.[13] With comfort women testimony, we have a rich archive of women's voices, but we still have the same responsibility to "push beyond the shock." In addition to presenting survivors as full people, with lives before and after their experiences of wartime sexual violence, Nancy Rose Hunt's attentiveness to multiple sensory registers suggests a useful reading strategy. Students can be encouraged to identify what survivors recalled seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, and smelling. This approach to testimonial sources could give students the words to concretely grapple with survivors' accounts instead of falling back on platitudes about the horrors of war. But no close reading strategy or guided discussion can compensate for the pitfalls of presenting sexual violence as an isolated example of the historical experiences of Asian women.[14]

Learning Comfort Women History as an Exercise in Critical Inquiry

Teaching comfort women history can be fraught, but it should be done. It should be taught as a historical atrocity, but also as an exercise in critical thinking, source evaluation, and open-minded exploration of primary sources. Such an approach

cultivates historical thinking skills and also discourages reductive portrayals of Asian women as interchangeable symbols of victimization.

It is well-known that comfort women history is contested. But while there are serious differences in historical interpretation, there are also denialist counter-narratives that are flatly wrong. For instance, comfort women were not well-compensated prostitutes who willingly worked in wartime brothels, yet this distortion is promoted by the article "Contracting for Sex in the Pacific" by J. Mark Ramseyer.[15] The Ramseyer article bears many of the characteristics that I guide students to look for in credible, academic sources, including publication in a peer reviewed journal. But confidence in the article should quickly crumble if it is subjected to what history education expert Sam Wineburg calls lateral reading, a practice of fact checkers, who evaluate unfamiliar web sources not by reading closely, but by interrogating the source through other sources.[16] Read laterally, the Ramseyer article reveals itself as a lightning rod for controversy, having attracted multiple open letters by experts in East Asian history calling for a full retraction by the journal. Sometimes bad scholarship is good teaching material. Japan historian Tessa Morris-Suzuki has produced a "Study Aid" for the article that "aims to encourage debate about ways to encourage research integrity while promoting free speech."[17] The co-authored open letter "'Contracting for Sex in the Pacific War': The Case for Retraction on Grounds of Academic Misconduct," methodically exposes shortcomings of the article, including a basic failure to provide accurate citations.[18] These resources and others on the Ramseyer controversy have been collated online by *Asia-Pacific Journal Japan Focus*.[19]

Ramseyer's manipulative framing of primary source testimony, particularly that of Mun Ok-ju, provides an especially pertinent teaching opportunity for a history survey course. Such courses, after all, regularly present students with selectively excerpted primary sources, as in the case of the Kim Tŏkchin testimony discussed above. As historians will quickly apprehend, the Ramseyer article and the AFE primary source are not equivalent cases of selective framing. Ramseyer uses cherry picked testimony of Mun Ok-ju to support the false claim that comfort women were prostitutes who earned and saved money to the point of "flamboyantly" profiting (6). This is contradicted by decades of scholarly research, the bulk of competing testimony, and a fuller analysis of Mun Ok-ju's own account, as presented in "A Case for Retraction." Though the AFE primary source document also selectively excerpts testimony to elicit a certain reading, it does so for a different audience and with a different objective. For students, it underscores parts of the testimony that bear witness to an injustice. It simplifies but does not falsify the source material. Students should be guided to understand that some instances of source framing are acceptable, if not ideal, while others are dishonest. They should also receive the message that no source, including survivor testimony, should be shielded from critical analysis.

The testimonial sources of comfort women, after all, will not crumble if critically evaluated. In fact, they will yield fuller portraits of narrators as individuals, historical agents, and survivors. In one move, students can move beyond the shock of sexual violence and interrogate the omissions in selectively framed sources. Teachers can first assign the AFE Kim Tŏkchin source and then have students read the full translation, which is still short and accessible.[20] Even better, they can read the full translation alongside a corroborating account. I recommend "Bitter Memories I am Loath to Recall" by Kim Haksun, who is credited as the first survivor to speak publicly about her experience as a comfort woman.[21] Both Kim Tŏkchin and Kim Haksun describe family poverty and negative experiences of life under Japanese colonial rule before the war. Both women developed a long-term relationship with a man during their captivity in China. Kim Tŏkchin became close with a Japanese officer, whom she "came to regard almost as my father, husband, and family rolled into one" (47). Kim Haksun escaped her comfort station with a Korean man who was living in China and entered an abusive marriage with him. Both Kim Tŏkchin and Kim Haksun had children who died young. These details make it harder to view these women *only* as victims of military sexual slavery, though they *were* that.

Once we accept that the survivors are not just victims but complex people who exerted some agency over their life stories, we must ask the obvious questions about bias and the fallibility of memory. Of course, this is fertile ground for denialists, who like Ramseyer, are quick to draw on testimony as evidence when they can twist it to their ends, but even quicker to dismiss the voices of survivors. I encourage my students to see comfort women testimony as just another type of oral history, and to see oral history as "just as contaminated as any other retrievable fragment of the past" as China historian Gail Hershatter has written.[22] In Peipei Qiu's epilogue to *Chinese Comfort Women: Testimonies from Imperial Japan's Sex Slaves*, she discusses the extent to which the activist movement for legal redress has shaped the narratives of Chinese survivors. "Having little education and having lived in imposed silence for most of their lives, these women needed to be empowered through a larger socio-political discourse in order to overcome their fear, and they also needed a venue in which they could articulate and reframe their narratives."[23] While Qiu acknowledges this active "reframing" of comfort women narratives, she asks in the face of those who would deny their validity: "In the reconstruction of history, whose words count?"[24] Whose words count, which words count, what do they count for? These questions are fundamental to the discipline of history, and they speak to a prior issue examined in this article: that of the single story. When women's voices are too easily discredited, their histories will be further marginalized, allowing single stories to perpetuate. And single stories will always fall short, even when they are true.

Conclusion

Instructors who teach about comfort women as an exercise in critical analysis must be ready to say *this happened*. Large numbers of women were coerced or otherwise forced into comfort stations across the Japanese wartime empire. In the comfort stations women were repeatedly raped; they endured dismal conditions; they suffered multiple forms of physical violence; they could not leave at will. Too often, testimonial accounts provided as teaching resources are framed as evidential proof of these conclusions. A better approach is to present these facts—widely agreed upon by scholars—as part of the background knowledge that allows one to responsibly engage testimony with an open mind, understanding that a single testimonial source cannot, on its own, prove the truth about comfort women, but it can do so much more. It can open up a world. Let us enter that world with our students and let us populate it with other Asian women whose voices are less contested, and thus, even more infrequently heard. Then we can say, as teachers, that we did not passively stand by as violence was inflicted on women of Asian descent in the pandemic's long wake.

Notes

[1] Christine Hauser, "'It Is Not Coming Down," *The New York Times*, October 4, 2018. The former Osaka mayor specifically took issue with the wording of the inscription and its use of the disputed figure of "hundreds of thousands." For a balanced discussion, see The Contested Histories Initiative, "Comfort Women Column of Strength in the United States of America," last updated May 2021, https://contestedhistories.org/resources/case-studies/comfort-women-column-of-strength-in-san-francisco/

[2] For a teaching resource essay aimed at high school educators, see Jimin Kim, et al., "Teaching About the Comfort Women of World War II and the Use of Personal Stories of the Victims," *Education About Asia* 24:3 (2019), 58-63. The *Education About Asi*a article is from an activist perspective. The article stemmed from the authors' earlier contribution to a teaching resource book designed, most immediately, for California educators after a curricular reform that I critically examine in the next section.

[3] A note on terminology: I follow the practice of a number of other scholars, including Peipei Qiu (quoted here), who acknowledge the problematic nature of the terms "comfort women," "comfort station," and so on, while continuing to use them, "omitting the quotation marks" to enhance "readability," because "these terms, on which decades of international debate, historical research, and legal discourses are mounded, have become widely recognized as referring specifically to the victims and institutions of the Japanese military's system of sexual slavery." See Peipei Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women: Testimonies from Imperial Japan's Sex Slaves* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1.

[4] Deepa Shivaram, "Illinois Has Become the First State to Require the Teaching of Asian American History," *NPR*, July 13, 2021.

[5] Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," filmed 2009, TED video, 18:33, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en. Adichie's observation about the link between cultural Othering and white saviorism is pertinent to the topic of teaching comfort women. Engaging the issue from the perspective of Asian American Studies, Kandice Chuh notes a tendency to identify the "culture of the 'other'" as "patriarchal and oppressive while the United States appears in contrast as liberatory," potentially justifying U.S. militarism and violence in Asia. See, "Discomforting Knowledge: Or, Korean 'Comfort Women' and Asian Americanist Critical Practice," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 6, no. 1 (2003), 5-23, 8.

[6] California State Board of Education, History-Social Science Framework (Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2017), 353.

[7] The problem is not solved by the availability of teaching resources designed in the context of the revised California Social Studies Guidance; specifically, Phyllis Kim and Jimin Kim, eds., "Curriculum and Resources for 'Comfort Women' Education," Korean American Forum of California and Comfort Women Justice Coalition, 2018. Historical context is thin, and the curriculum is designed to lead students toward ready-made conclusions. As a historian of China, I find the resource guide's presentation of "Testimony of Zhou Fenying" (38) particularly concerning. Drawn from Peipei Qiu's *Chinese Comfort Women*, 89-93, the typo-filled excerpts strip content from the full translation that is extraneous to a portrait of Zhou's victimization and teachers are not prepared in any way to situate Zhou's life in a Chinese historical context. It is no wonder that the curriculum is designed to encourage students to make broad comparisons between comfort women experiences and contemporary cases of trafficking and sexual violence. Stripped of any social reality beyond her victimization, Zhou Fenying is available for all sorts of broad, but ultimately superficial, comparisons.

[8] See, for instance, Maria Cecilia Hwang and Rhacel Salazar Parrenas, "The Gendered Racialization of Asian Women as Villainous Temptresses," *Gender & Society* 35.4 (2021).

[9] Klaus Mulhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019), 716-717. This is not just a problem of indexing. To be fair, Muhlhahn's book has many merits.

[10] "Oral Histories of the 'Comfort Women,'" http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/tps/1900_ko.htm#women, accessed March 16, 2022. I focus my attention on this source because I have frequently used AFE resources myself. A project of Columbia University's Weatherhead East Asia Institute, AFE is accessible, well-organized, and features contributions from prominent scholars. It is also uneven, and in some places downright irresponsible, as in its astonishing misrepresentation of estimated deaths from China's Great Leap Forward. The website indicates "an estimated 30,000 deaths from famine." Actual scholarly estimates range from 15 to 45 million. Asia for Educators, "KEY POINTS Across East Asia–by Era 20th CENTURY 1950-2000," accessed September, 2022, http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/main_pop/kpct/kp_1950-2000.htm.

[11] Laura Hein, "Savage irony: The imaginative power of the 'military comfort women' in the 1990s," *Gender and History* 11, no. 2 (1999), 336-372, 343.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Nancy Rose Hunt, "An Acoustic Register, Tenacious Images, and Congolese Scenes of Rape and Repetion," *Cultural Anthropology* 23.2 (2008), 220-253, 230-231.

[14] How to better integrate Asian women's history into curricula is a subject beyond the scope of this article. But there are ample resources that teachers could draw on. One recommended book on women in twentieth century China is Gail Hershatter, *Women and China's Revolutions* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019). Hershatter addresses the issue of sexual violence in wartime (179-182), but in two chapters on "Wartime Women," she also examines women writers, like Xiao Hong and Ding Ling, women as refugees, women as nurses, women as soldiers, and more.

[15] J. Mark Ramseyer, "Contracting for Sex in the Pacific War," *International Review of Law and Economics* 65 (2021), 1-8.

[16] Sam Wineburg, *Why Learn History (When It's Already on Your Phone)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 150.

[17] Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "The 'Comfort Women' Issue, Free Speech, and Academic Integrity: A Study Aid," *Asia-Pacific Journal Japan* Focus 19 (2021), https://apjjf.org/2021/5/MorrisSuzuki.html.

[18] Amy Stanley et al., "'Contracting for Sex in the Pacific War': The Case for Retraction on Grounds of Academic Misconduct," *Asia-Pacific Journal Japan Focus* 19 (2021), https://apjjf.org/2021/5/ConcernedScholars.html.

[19] Alexis Duddin, ed., Supplement to Special Issue: Academic Integrity at Stake: The Ramseyer Article - Four Letters, *Asia-Pacific Journal Japan Focus* 19 (2021), https://apjjf.org/2021/5/ToC2.html.

[20] Kim Tŏkchin, "I Have So Much to Say to the Korean Government," in *True Stories of the Korean Comfort Women*, Keith Howard, ed. (London: Cassel, 1995), 41-49.

[21] Kim Haksun, "Bitter Memories I am Loath to Recall," in Ibid, 32-40. Kim Haksum is depicted in San Francisco's Column of Strength, mentioned earlier, as an elderly woman standing below the memorial's main column.

[22] Gail Hershatter, *The Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China's Collective Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 24.

[23] Peipei Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 193.

[24] Ibid, 194. For more on debates about the status of comfort women testimony as historical evidence see, for instance, Yoshiko Nozaki, "The 'Comfort Women' Controversy: History and Testimony, *The Asia-Pacific Journal Japan Focus* 3.7 (2005), https://apjjf.org/-Yoshiko-Nozaki/2063/article.html.

ELIZABETH LAWRENCE is Associate Professor of History at Augustana College. She specializes in East Asian and transpacific history, with interdisciplinary interests in memory, heritage, and material culture. Her most recent publications appear in *Asian American Literature: Discourses & Pedagogies* and *World History Connected*. Her current book project combines family memoir with scholarly synthesis to explore repercussions of US military entanglements across the Pacific.

2

What Does It Mean to Teach Asian Religions during This Moment of Anti-Asian Hate?

Rachel Pang

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, I taught courses on East Asian religions very much the way that I was taught the material when I was a university student. I would cover the main figures, beliefs, and practices of Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism and popular religions in China, Korea, and Japan while developing the students' critical thinking, reading and writing skills. However, during the pandemic, the anti-Asian Asian racism and violence that I and others racialized as "Asian" experienced profoundly changed the way I think of myself as a scholar and teacher of Asia.

One of my first reactions in the face of anti-Asian hate was to research the topic in more detail. I was shocked at both my ignorance and what I would find. Although some have dismissed this anti-Asian hate as an anomalous phenomenon associated with the pandemic, in fact, anti-Asian hate has deep historical roots that began in the era of European colonialism. It was further exacerbated by the United States' exclusionary immigration policies that began with the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and that was partially rectified by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. This anti-Asian hate continues to ebb and flow, resurfacing in various forms throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Anti-Asian hate is a trope deeply embedded in the U.S. psyche.

As a teacher of Asian religion, it may seem that we are automatically acting as a force against anti-Asian hate because we encourage inter-cultural dialogue. However, there are implicit assumptions within Asian studies and religious studies that left unacknowledged, continue to perpetuate the idea of Asians as wholly "other." In the context of North America, South America, and Europe, the concept of Asians as wholly "other" manifests in the phenomenon of Asians being viewed as perpetual foreigners despite having lived in these places for generations. One way we can begin to dismantle these implicit structures in our Asian religion courses is to: (1) demonstrate how the category of "Asian" is a constructed category and to uncover the implicit power structure it embodies, (2) acknowledge the Orientalist and colonialist roots of Asian studies and religious studies, and (3) incorporate Asian American history and methodologies into relevant Asian studies courses.

Deconstructing the Category of "Asian" vis-à-vis the History of European Colonialism and Race in the United States

The religious studies theorist Jonathan Z. Smith once famously observed that "'Religion' is not a native category" in his article "Religion, Religions, Religious" (269). I would argue, so too, with the category of "Asian." What Smith meant by his remark is that the term "religion" "is not a first-person term of self-characterization. It is a category imposed from the outside on some aspect of native culture. It is the other, in these instances colonialists, who are solely responsible or the content of the term" (269). Smith spends the rest of the article explaining how the term "religion" meant different things at different points in European and American history. Perhaps most significantly, he points out how "it is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore is theirs to define" (281). In this way, the term is fundamental to "establishing a disciplinary horizon" for the field of religious studies.

Smith's article is required reading in many religious studies classes. Countless undergraduate and graduate students have devoted hours to deconstructing and debating the term "religion" as result of it. I propose that in courses on Asian religion, instructors need to introduce to students how the category of "Asian" is constructed, very much in the same way that we analyze the term "religion" in religious studies classes more generally. Even more importantly, we need to point out the deep power imbalances that the term "Asian" has come to embody.

Very much the same way that Smith pointed out that the term "religion" was used by outsiders to describe a group of people, the term "Asian" was also not created by the people that the term signifies. The use of the term "Asyan" or "Asian" in the early modern period in England was used to describe the western peninsula of Asia, which is roughly modern-day turkey (OED). This is in contrast to the modern usage of the term as describing persons of East or Southeast Asian

descent in North America and South Asian descent in Britain (OED). The referent for the category of "Asian" remains a shifting one. In the early 20th century, U.S. immigration documents considered the Chinese to be a race separate from Korean, Filipino, and Indians who were categorized as "Other" (Brown). From 1920 to 1940, the US census classified Indians as "Hindus" regardless of their religion. From 1960–1990, the US census grouped Hawaiian, Samoan and Guamanian people into the "Asian" category as well (Brown). In 2000, a new category was created for this latter group, "Pacific Islander" (Brown).

The concept of biological race began in the late fifteenth century when European ships discovered different peoples on their travels (Anemone 14). The notion of "race" in the United States in particular was influenced by a misinterpretation of Darwin's theory of evolution and by the imperial subjugation of Asia, Africa and Latin America by Europe (Lockman 77). The Euro-American individuals who came up with this system believed that the superiority of Europeans was due to biological characteristic of the "white" (Lockman 77). The artificial hierarchy of race replaced the artificial hierarchy of socio-economic class as a way to structure society and to keep those in power on top (Anemone 15). This artificial act of dividing humanity into "races" and placing them into a hierarchy with the highest category being "white," the lowest category "black," and other "people of colour" such as indigenous, Asians, and Latinx individuals in the middle is rooted in Euro-American colonialism. This concept was used by Europeans and Americans of European descent to justify taking the land of indigenous peoples, the enslavement of African peoples, and the exploitation of people of color as indentured laborers working under inhumane conditions in order to satisfy their capitalistic greed. From 1500–1888, 10–12 million African slaves were transported to the Americas to make their economies possible (Lee). From 1838–1917, driven by civil war, drought, famine, or poverty, 419,000 South Asians migrated to the British West Indies and 140,000 Chinese men went to Cuba/Peru to work on the plantations as "coolies," or indentured laborers. These phenomena contributed to the stereotype of people of color being labor responsible for work "deemed too dirty, dangerous or degrading for white men" (Lee). Although these particular events happened over a century ago, the stereotypes that arose from them still resurface in contemporary times in insidious ways.

Another way to deconstruct the category of "Asian" is to demonstrate how people categorized as "Asian" in North America, South America, and Europe are actually very diverse. They come from a variety of nations and are diverse in terms of language, culture, and histories. However, once they arrived in the United States, they were largely treated by U.S. society in similar fashion due to "exclusionary immigration laws, restrictive naturalization laws, labor market segregation, and patterns of ghettoization" (Michael Omi and Howard Winant, 472). In Asian

religions courses, we generally assume that "Asian" is a natural category and we seldom deconstruct it. And yet, inherently embedded in this concept are structural hierarchies that perpetuate the notion of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners. Learning about "Asian culture" or "Asian religion" is not enough to dismantle these ideas. It is also necessary to think deeper about the assumptions that underly the very categories we use to lump people into a single category in the first place. Thus, very much like how the racial description of "white" or "black" are socially constructed categories, so too is the category of "Asian."

Acknowledging the Orientalist, Colonialist, and Imperialist Roots of Religious Studies and Asian Studies

By the nineteenth century, large parts of Asia and the Muslim world were subject to the colonial rule of European powers. This was also the moment when the modern academic disciplines, including disciplines that studied aspects of these conquered societies first emerged (Lockman 67, Masuzawa 15). Particularly relevant to this paper are the fields of Orientalism, anthropology, and religious studies. Moreover, during this period, writers, philosophers, and poets of the Romantic movement were influenced by Orientalism and began to idealize the Indian, Chinese, and Japanese civilizations as offering an "inaccessible source of wisdom" that could serve as antidote to rationalistic, materialistic West (Lockman 69). The flip side of this was the exoticization of their subjects as alien and mysterious (Lockman 70). The idealization and exoticization of Muslim and other civilizations existed within the greater context of helping to justify European rule. This cultural tendency to idealize or exoticize Asia and Islamic civilizations continues to resurface in dominant Euro-American culture today.

The academic field of religious studies and the category of "world religions" bears the imprint of European imperialism and colonialism. As Tomoko Masuzawa observes, world religions "as a category and as a conceptual framework initially developed in the European academy, which quickly became an effective means of differentiating, variegating, consolidating, and totalizing a large portion of the social, cultural, and political practices observable among the inhabitants of regions elsewhere in the world" (20). For example, Max Müller, one of the founding fathers of the field of religious studies, decided how to classify the religions of Asia in his *Sacred Books of the East* (Sun 60-1). He classified Confucianism as a world religion, when most Chinese would not consider Confucianism to be a religion.

Asian Studies has roots in Oriental studies but also belongs to Area Studies. Area Studies arose during the Cold War period after WWII. Officials and academics from the United Sates saw the Middle East, North Africa, Asia as being of strategic importance. The purpose of Area Studies was to "produc[e] policy-relevant knowledge" in order to maintain the United States as a global power

(Lockman 123, 127). In contrast to Oriental studies that viewed civilization as static, area studies saw polities as constantly adapting to new political, social, and cultural circumstances.

There exists an abundance of literature on the orientalist, colonialist, and imperialist roots of Religious Studies and Asian Studies. In my home field of Buddhist studies in particular, Donald Lopez and others have done some trailblazing work on this topic.[1] And yet, how many of us actively adopt these resources into our research and classroom teaching? I know that some of us do. I myself have incorporated, for example, excerpts from Lopez's *Prisoners of Shangri-La* in my coverage of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* in my Tibetan Religions course. However, incorporating these sources in a piecemeal fashion is not enough. We need to demonstrate epistemological awareness of the history and basic assumptions of our academic fields. We need to incorporate this self-reflexiveness about our academic fields in a more systematic way in our courses.

Asian Americans: An Invisible History

Finally, incorporating resources from Asian American studies into our courses on Asian religions can help to dismantle the idea of Asians and Asian Americans as being perpetual foreigners. For example, in my Buddhism in America course, we discuss the history of Buddhism in the United States from the Transcendentalists until the present. Popular textbooks for this topic, including Richard Seager's *Buddhism in America* and Charles Prebish's and Kenneth Tanaka's *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, discuss the crucial contributions of Asian immigrant communities to Buddhism in the United States. In their discussion of Buddhism among these immigrant communities, these textbooks discuss the discrimination and violence experienced by Asian American communities such as the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans in the internment camps of WWII. However, these standard textbooks do not analyze the intersection of Buddhism in the United States and race in-depth. Chenxing Han's *Be the Refuge* is the most recent book that demonstrates the inadequacy of current models within Buddhist studies to understand the intersections of Buddhism and race among Asian American communities in the United States.

In order to analyze this topic in a robust manner, we need resources from other academic fields such as Asian American Studies. For example, in my Buddhism in America course, we discuss the appropriation and popularization of Buddhism by the Beat poets in the 1950s. However, what we do not discuss is the way in which their representation of Buddhism embodies Orientalist attitudes and how it racializes Asians. An excellent resource to help us analyze this topic is Jane Iwamura's *Virtual Orientalism*. In this book, Iwamura analyzes the way in which the trope of the Oriental Monk has informed our understanding of key

figures in Asian American religions, including D.T. Suzuki. She demonstrates how despite the Oriental Monk being a seemingly positive stereotype, it is nevertheless a stereotype that needs to be held up alongside that of "such easily recognizable figures as the inscrutable Oriental, evil Fu Manchus, Yellow Peril, heathen Chinee, and Dragon Ladies" (8–9). Such stereotypes only serve to further the idea of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners.

In my Buddhism in America course, I discuss the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. This law changed the face of Buddhism in America by opening the doors to immigrants from all over the world after the previous immigrant restrictions beginning with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. However, this is not enough. In a course on Buddhism in America, it is necessary to incorporate the history of Asian Americans more systematically through source texts such as Erika Lee's *A History of Asian America*. Despite the lasting contributions that migrants from Japan, Korea, and China made to building the United States—whether through the building of Pacific Railroad or the plantations in Hawai'i—very little is known about the religious life of these communities. More research and teaching on the subject will render visible the invisibility of Asian American history in conventional presentations of American history. In the words of Erika Lee, teaching and learning about Asian American history is not only about "filling gaps" but is "also about combating racism" (Lee). She writes, "In the absence of any real knowledge about Asian Americans and their long history in the US, stereotypes flourish, repeating the fantasies of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners, exotic sexual objects, and model minorities who do not encounter racism" (Lee).

Conclusion

As the celebrated historian Erika Lee testified before Congress in the wake of anti-Asian racism and violence since the onset of the COVID pandemic, the rise in incidents of anti-Asian hate "are not random acts perpetrated by deranged individuals. They are an expression of our country's long history of systemic racism and racial violence targeting Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders" (Lee "Testimony"). She adds, "They will not simply go away after the pandemic" (Lee "Testimony").

Our classrooms in Asian religions and Asian studies represents a crucial arena for uncovering these histories in order to understand why this violence against those racialized as Asian continues in the United States and beyond. In this paper, I have proposed three modest interventions: to demonstrate how the category of "Asian" is constructed; to acknowledge the Orientalist and colonialist roots of our academic fields; and to incorporate more Asian American history and methodologies into our courses. Of course, there is much more that we can do. But we have to start somewhere. Uncovering histories may seem like a passive

approach in comparison to protests and marches. Nevertheless, as Bee Nguyen, the Georgia state representative, noted in response to the Atlanta spa shootings of March 2021: the fact that the long history of Asian American violence in the US was erased and "not told . . [is] very intentionally to make us keep our heads down, to pit communities of color against each other, to make us adhere to this model minority myth." Uncovering histories can be a powerful course of action that contributes to the dismantling of the very structures that perpetuate anti-Asian hate and violence.

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Note

[1] *Prisoners of Shangri la, Curators of the Buddha.*

RACHEL PANG is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Davidson College. Her research focuses on Tibetan Buddhist life writing and poetry, non-sectarianism, nineteenth century eastern Tibetan history, Buddhist nationalism, and the collected works of Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdrol (1781–1851). Her monograph, *Singer of the Land of Snows: Shabkar, Buddhism, and Tibetan National Identity* (UVa Press 2024), explores indigenous epistemologies of identity, community, and territory as articulated by Shabkar on the cusp of Tibetan modernity.

3

Preparing Teachers with Antiracist Pedagogy during the Pandemic

Huijing Wen and Valerie Harlow Shinas

Background

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, anti-Asian sentiment in the United States led to violence and persecution against Asian Americans. Therefore, there is an urgent need to promote social justice for Asian Americans in U.S. schools. Often considered perpetual outsiders and the model minority (Li & Nicholson, 2021), Asian Americans have long been disempowered by multiple biases and stereotypes assigned to them. This homogeneity bias led to the public's general lack of understanding of the diverse cultural heritages and lived experiences of Asian Americans. This is compounded by the long-held model minority stereotype, which describes Asian Americans as self-sufficient and naturally gifted in academics. This view has resulted in numerous, documented negative impacts on Asian well-being and self-concept (Shih et al., 2019).

These stereotypes must be considered alongside the long-standing under-representation of Asians in educational settings. Fewer than 24 million people in the United States, less than 6% of the population, identify as Asian (US Census Bureau. (2023, May 5). In K–12 education, Asian students account for about 5.4% of the total population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022), while in higher education, Asian American faculty account for just 10.5% of the less than 25% of faculty of color (*Higher Education Today*, 2018). The lack of representation of Asian Americans in education is also reflected in school curriculum, including

misrepresentation in American children's literature (Cai, 1994; Chen, 2009), literature that is likely to be integrated into instruction.

In the political landscape, the global pandemic positioned Asians and Asian-Americans as easy targets for violent, racist attacks. According to the Stop AAPI Hate Research Group (2023), anti-Asian hate crimes increased 149% in sixteen of America's largest cities in 2020 alone, while overall hate crimes dropped 7%. This culture of animosity against Asian Americans has forced Asian communities to live with constant fear and frustration.

With this context in mind, it is important to prepare teachers to teach from a social justice lens; in this way, they can make visible to all students, but especially Asian American students, the linguistic and cultural assets that Asian students and families bring to the classroom. This is critical given the predominantly white teaching force in American schooling and the lack of Asian American voices in teacher educator programs. In addition, it is important to understand the experiences of Asian American educators (Liao, Uan, & Zhang, 2017), and consider their reactions and responses to the social and political landscapes that impact the teaching and learning landscape.

This essay describes a collaborative research project embedded in a teacher education course designed by an Asian American scholar and a mainstream white scholar. The first author, an Asian and Asian American teacher educator, brought to the course a unique background and global perspective that helped her students transcend cultural boundaries and promote awareness and respect for differences in the society. The second author, a mainstream teacher educator, is an avid advocate for social justice in education and a strong supporter of Asian junior faculty who have experienced racism and aggression. As teacher educators, we argue that all teachers need to be adaptive to changes, including political shifts, that impact teachers and students. We also argue that raising awareness of anti-racist pedagogies is critical given continued hate crimes against Asian and Asian Americans. This research was conducted as a collaborative project based on the firm belief that mainstream and Asian-American teacher educators, especially in the field of literacy, should work together as agents of change by preparing future and current teachers with social equity awareness.

The Problem of Practice for Antiracist Teacher Educators

There is a critical need for teacher educators to prepare skilled teachers with the knowledge and skills to design equitable learning opportunities for students (Shin, Bae, & Song, 2022). This may be especially important in our increasingly diverse global society and well-documented violence against Asian and Asian Americans in the United States. According to Blakeney (2005), "Antiracist Pedagogy is a paradigm located within Critical Theory utilized to explain and counteract the

persistence and impact of racism using praxis as its focus to promote social justice for the creation of a democratic society in every respect" (p. 119). Emerging from the tenets of Critical Theory (Freire, 1970), antiracist pedagogy is centered on teaching practices that call into question culturally and socially unjust teaching that prevents equitable access to learning for BIPOC and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) students and those from underserved communities. Antiracist teaching challenges the dominant culture and ideologies that serve to oppress (Kishimoto, 2018); as such, teacher education programs aimed at ensuring equitable access to education for all students are strengthened by an antiracist approach to teaching.

The need for equitable practices is clear; a large and growing body of evidence reveals that students from underrepresented groups tend to achieve at lower levels than white students (Yu, 2022). BIPOC and CLD students have less access to enriched learning opportunities and tend to be overrepresented in special education classrooms (Fallon, DeFouw, Berkman, Cathcart, O'Keeffe, & Sugai, 2021). Interrupted and disrupted learning resulting from pandemic-related shifts in learning have made inequitable access to learning even more impactful (Jones et al, 2021). A history of structural, systemic racism is at the core of inequitable access.

Poor performance among American students has often been met by calls for educational reform. In 2020, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; NGA & CCSSO, 2010), aiming to address and ensure equitable learning nationally for all students, provided a framework for rigorous, research-based instruction centered on a broad vision of college and career readiness. However, the adoption of more rigorous standards did not address the nation's literacy crisis, perhaps due to hidden, institutionalized racism in the curriculum (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021). Educational scholars have long noted stark inequities in curriculum and pedagogy across different educational contexts (Finn, 2009). To effectively address poor reading performance, particularly among students from under resourced communities, teachers must be prepared with culturally responsive, antiracist pedagogies. Teachers must learn to create experiences that support knowledge and skill development as well as critical literacies that support authentic student inquiry and engagement. Teacher education grounded in a critical pedagogical stance prepares teacher candidates to question power, privilege, and oppression and the impacts these have on literacy learning.

What is Critical Literacy and Why is it Important for Literacy Practitioners?

The notion of Critical Literacy was forwarded by Paulo Freire (1970), a Brazilian educator and philosopher who proposed the idea that literacy is "a set of practices

that function to either empower or disempower people" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p.141). From this perspective, meaning making is viewed as a process of construction framed by a deep understanding of the historical, social, and political contexts that permeate and foreground any text. This view of literacy as a cultural and political tool highlights the role of education in systems of power, privilege, and oppression. According to Freire, readers must learn to read for empowerment, to look beyond the text to identify the hidden agendas behind the words.

Understanding the critical context of literacy is essential for literacy practitioners as it expands the cognitive view toward literacy and invites them to be agents of change in their educational settings (Stevens & Bean, 2007). This contrasts with the current perspective, which defines literacy as an acquired set of skills and strategies primarily focused on decoding and comprehension of written texts (Goldenberg, 2020). This cognitive approach to literacy instruction may ignore the social contexts for literacy practices, the particular needs of students who have a first language other than English, and the ways knowledge and power impact discourse in the highly dialogic classroom (Fairclough, 1989). When applied in isolation, the cognitive perspective tends to foster a deficit view of learners, thus placing students with diverse linguistic, cultural, and learning backgrounds at a disadvantage. Understanding literacy as a tool to empower those traditionally held outside of powerful positions, both informally and formally can be liberating to teachers.

Teaching Critical Literacy to Literacy Practitioners in K-12 Settings

Luke and Freebody (1999), argue that skilled readers engage in four processes when reading a text: (1) crack the codes of a given language; (2) construct meaning of the text;)3) apply pragmatic competence to understand the social function of the text; (4) engage with the text in critical stances by asking a series of questions such as: *Whose version of history is sanctioned?; Whose policy is supported by a text?; How the reader or characters in a novel are positioned by an author?* These four processes allow readers to search for the meaning behind the text and encourage multiple plausible interpretations of a text.

The Present Study

This exploratory, case study research was situated in a graduate-level literacy methods course. The course, *Literacy and Resistance in Secondary Schools*, was designed and taught by the first author at a small, private university in the Northeast region of the United States. Eight in-service teachers pursuing either reading specialist and special education licensure gave consent to participate in the research. The second author served as a collaborative colleague throughout

the course. The course centered on emerging and historical concerns in the field with an emphasis on meeting the needs of illiterate youth who demonstrate low motivation to read. Course design was guided by this question: *How do public school teachers who examine student resistance frameworks design improved instructional activities to foster critical literacy, authentic student inquiry, student engagement, and student achievement among all learners?* Course readings focused on exploring reasons and finding solutions particular to secondary students who cannot or will not read. For example, teachers were required to diagnose and design remediation plans for older students with reading difficulties.

Throughout the course, readings and course activities introduced teachers to critical literacy theory, antiracist pedagogies, and research examining social and political factors that impact literacy. Topics of particular interest to urban literacy educators, social class, language use, and oppositional identity, were discussed. Course assignments and activities are presented in Table 1. Course artifacts were analyzed using inductive methods to identify emerging codes and themes.

Table 1: Major Course Assignments and Description

Course assignment	**Description**
Reader Response Journal	Respond to weekly readings
Professional Journal Article Leading Discussion	Lead discussion on literacy topics related to BIPOC and CLD students
Literacy Statement and Reflection	Draft two statements on literacy with reflection on perception change
Literature Circle	Meet weekly to discuss a novel about a dyslexic child struggling through K–12 schools
Young Adult Literature Author Book Talk	Pick two young adult novels of interest and explore ideas not typically explored in secondary classrooms; plan evidence-based activities to support student reading.
Book Club Participation	Critique a professional book of interest to extend course learning
Literacy Attitudes Interview	Interview and analyze secondary students' literacy attitude
Discussion Board on Exploring Your Journey as a Reader/Writer	Reflect on one's own reader/writer identity connecting to the movie *Freedom Writers* and course readings

How do Literacy Practitioners Understand Critical Literacy Theory and Pedagogies?

Data analysis revealed that these teachers viewed their participation in the course as essential to their shifting perceptions and pedagogical development in designing literacy instruction shaped by sociocultural factors. This is important given the sociopolitical framing throughout the course and the fact that the faculty teaching the course, an Asian woman, taught the course at a time when anti-Asian sentiments in the U.S. were part of the daily political landscape. Most participants reported a deeper understanding of the institutionalized obstacles to learning for students, especially those outside of the dominant culture. For example, one teacher listed examples of oppression toward students, such as:

> Labels given to students create a preconceived perspective of what student can/can't do; Teachers lack knowledge about cultural differences; Students attending schools in the same district are not being given the same opportunities; Materials or supplies needed for curriculum are not provided; Textbooks or materials are outdated.

Throughout the course, teachers reflected on the relationships between teachers and students. Interestingly, word frequency analysis of course artifacts revealed that the most frequently used words were *power, violence, justice, struggle, system,* and *curriculum*. In addition, teachers' literacy statements revealed changing perceptions about literacy and effective literacy instruction. Most teachers initially took a cognitive view toward literacy instruction with strong emphasis on decoding and skillsets for comprehension. Final drafts reported multi-dimensional conceptualizations toward literacy. Teachers had growing understanding that literacy is more than a set of strategies and skills to be learned. They conceived literacy as being situated in social practices and impacted by sociocultural factors. This shifting stance resulted in a growing awareness of social justice factors of literacy learning and the ways the current system provides some with opportunities but others with obstacles. For example, one teacher shared:

> As I think about the idea of control in schools, I think of the affluent/progressive schools as a positive model. This is where students are free to move about the room and the school, are creating their own curriculum, and are interested in learning because of the high level of engagement in every task. However, the working-class schools overworked or bore the children into submission. Students are receiving skill and drill exercises. In these environments, skill and drill is predictable and highly controllable, especially with the scripted programs and the idea of teaching to the test.

Importantly, the course provided teachers with regular opportunities to examine their teaching practices. Although they acknowledged obstacles to change, these teachers developed plans for engaging standards-based instruction to support students' motivation, home cultures, creativity, and collaboration. One teacher wrote:

> I was reminded of the importance of keeping family and cultural backgrounds in mind when planning instruction and discussion for our students. Various families and cultural groups have different educational values and trust in the system. Families also have come to the educational systems for different reasons, some by choice, and others by no other choice. It is important that children see their story, or their face, or their family's traditions in texts that are read in the classroom.

Most teachers in the course identified the importance of developing students' stances as critical readers and writers. They did this by creating rich literacy environments and developing students' critical thinking skills. One teacher remarked:

> I believe Freire tried to make the connection between reading in schools and helping the students become critical thinkers. Many times, we get into a rut of just teaching to fill up curriculum. We never look to see what our students want to learn and get out of reading. We then get puzzled as to why our students do not want to read, but the fact is, we just don't ask them what they want to read.

Course readings and activities appeared to stimulate a shift in teachers' understandings of critical literacy as essential for obtaining power and privilege. Their growing understanding allowed them to reflect on their teaching in response to their shifting perspectives. This complex concept of critical social awareness in literacy instruction was key to promoting social justice in K–12 classrooms.

Implications and Conclusion

This study has important implications for teacher preparation that considers how we prepare teachers to navigate challenging and racist socio-political landscapes. The teachers in this study were able to name the challenges and obstacles that interfered with equitable, socially-just literacy instruction and consider how they will create safe spaces for all learners.

This findings in this study offer a valuable message to Asian American educators. Importantly, the authors did not set out to study anti-racism as the course was designed to explore the sources of reading difficulties among young adolescents. Yet, anti-racism emerged as an important factor in response to the

converging crises of anti-Asian hatred and persecution along with the turbulent domestic and international political landscape during the pandemic. As an Asian teacher educator in a white dominant teacher education classroom, the first author was both vulnerable and empowered to teach students how to design literacy instruction that reflected an antiracist, social justice stance. This teacher education classroom became a microcosm of current American society and allowed the first author to discuss the differences between American and Chinese sociopolitical landscapes (Liao et al., 2017) as a model for critical literacies. Although professionalism ensured that rational and collegial discussions were the norm, political sentiments at the national level against Asian Americans could not be ignored.

As an Asian American teacher educator, the first author shared her life story as a reader and writer, how she navigated through different educational systems as a student and now a professor. This provided teachers with the first-hand experience that mirrors the life and struggles of their minority students. For example, teachers were surprised to learn that different cultures have different narrative structures, leading them to reflect upon how they misunderstood and misjudged their minority students' story writing skills due to the variation in cultural norms in storytelling. Understanding the first author's racialized experiences prepared teachers to consider how the cultures and backgrounds of their non-mainstream culture students add value to the learning space while promoting their critical consciousness.

Although the study was not particularly contextualized with the experiences, histories, and learning of Asian and Asian American students as the teachers did not have Asian American students in their classrooms at that time, we think this research may be considered as our first step to explore the benefits of anti-racism pedagogy in teacher education. Future research with a revised course design and a focus on supporting Asian and Asian American students and their literacies will yield deeper understandings.

Finally, we argue that systemic racism against all cultures must be addressed in public education. Teachers must enter the classroom armed with the tools they need to empower all students and challenge long-held practices of oppressive systems. Teacher educators must work together to raise awareness of anti-racist pedagogies among teachers. The first author, as mentioned earlier, capitalized on her cultural, linguistic resources and professional expertise to model critical literacy and anti-racism practices. The second author, a white woman who represents the dominant culture, weaponized her white privilege to challenge existing perspectives. This collaboration can serve as a model in educational settings. By working together, we can become the catalyst for urgently needed change in K–12 classrooms.

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HUIJING WEN, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor in the Education Department at Moravian University. A former Fulbright scholar and a former professor of English, Dr. Wen has extensive experience in teaching English language, both as a first language and a second language across age groups. Her research interests focus on understanding effective and just ways to improve teaching and learning in language art classrooms, including early writing development and instruction, visual literacy in content areas, digital literacy, and cross-cultural literacy instructional practices. As a teacher educator, Dr. Wen, through teaching and scholarship, is passionate about preparing pre- and in-service teachers to teach English literacy skills to monolingual and multilingual students in this increasingly AI-saturated world.

VALERIE HARLOW SHINAS, Ph.D. is Professor of Ph.D. in Educational Studies and Associate Provost of Education at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA. A former middle school teacher and reading specialist, Dr. Shinas earned a Ph.D. in Literacy Education from the University of Delaware in 2012. Her scholarly work is centered on digital literacies, including the exploration of the ways that digital tools and texts transform reading, writing, and learning. As a teacher educator, Dr. Shinas also has a deep interest in teacher education and how to support the ongoing development of preservice and in-service teachers' knowledge and skills using technology.

4

Teaching Grace Lee Boggs (1915–2015)

Toward an Antiracist[1] Transnational Asian Studies Pedagogy

Minjung Noh

Grace Lee Boggs (1915–2015), a second-generation Chinese American, was a prominent Marxist philosopher and civil rights activist. Along with her partner James Boggs (1919–1993), an African American labor activist, she continued her seventy-years of activism throughout the twentieth century to the first decade of the twenty-first century. Renowned figures such as C. L. R. James (1901–1989), Raya Dunayevskaya (1910–1987), Richard Wright (1908–1960), Katherine Dunham (1909–2006), and Malcolm X (1925–965) were among the activists who crossed paths with the Boggs. While the life of Grace Lee Boggs provides an ample opportunity for students to learn about the history of twentieth-century progressive political movement in the United States, there is much to be gained by considering the pedagogical implications of teaching her in classrooms, particularly in the context of an antiracist transnational Asian studies.

In a conventional disciplinary categorization, teaching Grace Lee Boggs would fall under Asian American studies or an Ethnic Studies curricula, since she was an Asian American whose activism aimed at dismantling the white supremacist racial hierarchy of the United States and beyond. However, after teaching about the life of Lee Boggs in multiple classes, I realized that her story also serves as a point of

connection between Asian American history and Asian studies, particularly in a pedagogical setting. In this short essay, I argue that such materials that are typically categorized under Asian American studies can and should be more actively utilized in Asian studies classrooms to render Asian studies relevant to younger generation of students—as well as to the ongoing interdisciplinary academic research agendas. In addition, I argue that the confluence of Asian studies and Asian American studies is different from merging the disciplines, considering that this becomes collaborative research, as well as a pedagogical model. Hence, the respective disciplinary boundaries, which are the products of particular history of the twentieth-century U.S. academic institutions (Lee and Shibuwasa, 2005; Ryang, 2021),[2] should be critically acknowledged. I call this collaborative research and pedagogical practice *transnational Asian studies*, concurring with Sonia Ryang's recent suggestion (Ryang, 2021). This practice will be useful to address following points: when a classroom discussion explores a case that a foundational historian of modern Korea, Bruce Cumings (1943–) was included in a "Professor Watchlist" by an American ultra-conservative political group,[3] should it be considered to be only an American phenomenon, or should it be understood in the transnational history of the Cold War and the place of Korea therein? Or, when a South Korean film *Parasite* received multiple Oscars in 2020 despite the fact that Asian American filmmakers have been largely ignored by the white-dominated film industry, how do Asian and Asian American studies together make sense of such disparate treatment between the Asian (Korean) and Asian American cinema?[4]

In what follows, I articulate my argument for transnational Asian studies using examples from my teaching autobiography of Lee Boggs and the influence of my own positionality as an international woman scholar in the United States. First, I introduce the life of Lee Boggs and the course context of teaching her autobiography. In this part, I demonstrate how the Asian American immigration history and contemporary transnational conditions translate into transnational Asian studies pedagogy. Second, I illustrate the significance of positionality-oriented reflection in the pedagogical practice of transnational Asian studies. That is, I argue that discussions of immigration, diversity, and racism in the United States *necessitate* transnational perspectives that are reflective of the positionality of the instructor and the students. Lastly, I provide the envisioned aims and effect of antiracist transnational Asian studies pedagogy along with examples from the classroom.

Grace Lee Boggs in the Classroom

Lee Boggs was born in Providence, Rhode Island above her father's Chinese restaurant. Her father ("Mr. Chin Lee") was an immigrant from a peasant village Toishan in Guangdong province. It seems that he entered the United States after

the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) took effect, thus Lee Boggs wrote that "my father never told us how he got around the restrictions of the Exclusion Act."[5] The family's restaurant business thrived when they moved to the New York City. The Chin Lee restaurant in 1064 Broadway Street was a landmark establishment of the city until its closure in 1949. Although Mr. Lee was a remarkably successful businessman, the family could not own land in Jackson Heights where their house stood due to a restrictive law that prohibited non-Caucasians to own a piece of land. Instead, they had to put an Irish contractor's name in the deeds.[6] Lee Boggs later attended Barnard College as one of two non-white students in her class of 1935, and she continued her graduate studies in Philosophy at Bryn Mawr. After graduating with a Ph.D. from Bryn Mawr in 1940, she began to engage in the Socialist Worker's Party (later in the Worker's Party). Her background in Philosophy led her to work closely with Trotskyists in the party, resulting in the formation of Johnson-Forest tendency that advocated Marxist Humanism. C. L. R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya were her core colleagues with whom she translated Karl Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* into English.

Adding to such theoretical contributions to socialist philosophy, Lee Boggs began to concentrate on political activism with her partner, James Boggs (1919–1993), an autoworker and African American labor activist. They were married in 1953. Since neither of them were white, the anti-miscegenation law did not apply to them. Still, in their honeymoon, the couple was denied a lodging due to James Boggs' race. After their marriage they settled in Detroit and continued their local labor activism until their death. James Boggs's *American Revolution* (1963) gained fame during the civil rights movement, and FBI surveillance files on the Boggs were created. In the files, Grace Lee Boggs was described as "Afro-Chinese," a misidentification due to her intimate involvement with the civil rights movement and collaboration with African American activists. She penned her autobiography, *Living for Change*, in 1998 and *The Next American Revolution* was published in 2012. Her lifelong activism was celebrated in a PBS documentary, *American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs* in the subsequent year. She passed away in 2015 but remains as a historic activist who lived through a century of transformation and multiple revolutions.

I taught her *Living for Change* in a course titled "Living for Change: Autobiographies of Women in Radical Social Movement" in a Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies program at Temple University in the Spring 2019 and Fall 2021 semesters. Each semester, I taught two sections of the course, and each section was capped at between twenty-five to thirty-five students. Demographics were diverse but mostly white—approximately 60% White, 20% African American, and 20% Asian and LatinX students. A majority of the students identified as a woman or a non-binary. The course satisfies the U.S. Society category among the General

Education requirements for the students. The curriculum, initially developed by Patricia Meltzer and Christi Brian, aims at teaching the radical women's social movement in the twentieth-century United States through their autobiographical narratives, including the anarchist, Black Power, American Indian, Asian American, and labor movements.[7] I based my curriculum on the overall structure of Meltzer and Brian, but switched readings and assignments in each semester. For example, I taught Emma Goldman (Russian Jewish immigrant Anarchist), Elaine Brown (Black Panther party president), Mary Crow Dog (AIM activist), and Maggie Nelson (Queer poet)'s autobiographical writings along with Grace Lee Boggs'. As an interdisciplinary scholar-teacher who has taught in religious studies, Asian studies, and gender studies courses, I approached this curriculum from a gender studies disciplinary perspective. That said, as I discussed and engaged the course materials with the students, I began to see the usefulness of Grace Lee Boggs' autobiography in teaching transnational Asian studies.

Conventionally, Lee Boggs's autobiography would be considered an Asian American studies or ethnic studies material since her activism primarily took place in the United States. When Lee Boggs accounts her family's origin story in the States, it could be read a quintessential American immigrant narrative. Is this truly the case though? How about the motivations and historical conditions that enabled the Chinese migrants' arrival to the United States at that particular time of history and their continued connection to the motherland? I doubt, along with my students ("What brought her father to the United States? What happened in China at that time? Why does Grace say that she was a perpetual foreigner?"), that Lee Boggs' life narrative is a single-handedly American story. Rather, her family heritage, entangled with the history of Asian immigration to the United States, constitutes a transnational narrative. It shows the interdependency of American and Asian historical contexts, requiring the knowledge and insights from both disciplines in understanding her life. Furthermore, the persisting racism and recent incidents of Anti-Asian hate during the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States demand the critical understanding of immigration history and critical race theory, which has the potential to refine the racial narrative in the United States that has long been portrayed as a dichotomy of black and white races.

From this perspective, I suggest the category of Asia be considered not as a static region, but as networked points of connection where a transnational economy of human, material and symbolic capital, power, and affects are set in motion. That is, without inequality of power and resources between the Western colonial regimes and the Qing Dynasty, without the needs for plantation laborers after the Abolition of slavery in the United States and the social upheaval of the Taiping Rebellion in China, and lastly, without persisting Orientalist imagination and purveyance of pseudo-science of racial differences in the West, the pedigree of

Lee Boggs in the United States would have looked radically different.[8] In addition, the reason why Lee Boggs' autobiography is teachable for a transnational Asian studies classroom is due to the self-reflectivity of Boggs on her Chinese American identity and her overarching solidarity that challenged the existing inequality. It is her agency, activism, and reflective positionality that makes her life relevant for students in the classroom, not solely her ethnicity.

The Importance of Positionality: Asian or Asian American?

The teaching moments from Lee Boggs' autobiography often emerged during class discussions where diverse students ask questions which are not confined to U.S. history or Asian American history. Particularly, international students have expressed their surprise when confronted with the connections between Asian history and the life of an Asian American activist. For instance, students from China and Taiwan discussed how Lee Boggs' engagement with Marxist philosophy and her assessment of Maoism compares to their own, while contrasting the Black socialist movement to that of Asia. In addition, during the discussions of Asian American identity, a Korean American student and a Korean international student collaborated on researching the 1992 Los Angeles Riots, challenging an exaggerated narrative of African American and Asian conflict. While acknowledging the difference between the Korean diaspora in the United States and South Korean society, the students explored the distinctive but connected contexts of modern Korean history and the Korean immigration history. In the process, the U.S. society requirement course covered a much broader scope than the domestic history.

These moments are consistent with the pedagogical tools I employ. From the beginning of the semester, I suggested that they reflect upon their positionality and its connectedness to others in the classroom. In this reflective pedagogical practice, I use my own positionality to complicate the boundary-making between the academic disciplines such as Asian studies and Asian American studies. Once an international student from South Korea myself, I have permanently relocated to the United States. When does an Asian immigrant become a first-generation Asian American? Or, when does one assume the cultural identity of an Asian American, if legal citizenship does not fully account for one's belonging to the Asian/American identity? These are some of the questions I discuss with my students in the classrooms to understand the history of racism and immigration in the United States. I distinguish this practice from using one's identity as a resource to be exploited, or a cultural capital to expense; rather, it is a practice of "looking at where you stand (照顧脚下)" and making it a point of departure so that one can learn something that otherwise one would not be able to learn.

In conclusion, a transnational Asian studies classroom encompasses discussions of the politics of immigration, race, ethnicity, and cultures. Its

pedagogical anchor in positionality and a transnational approach are necessary, not optional, as Asia is not an isolated object of knowledge. This epistemological standpoint empowers the creation of solidarity for racial, gender, economic, and environmental justice between Asian studies and other disciplines. By acknowledging the connectedness of the Asian histories and cultures to students' social contexts, the transnational Asian studies pedagogy produces a relevant set of course contents and discussions. Lee Boggs' biography is one of the abounding examples of such pedagogy. For example, topics on comfort women and World War II, the nuclear power plants in East Asia and the transmission of the technology to the region through transpacific industrial network, reproductive justice in Asia, and transnational feminism can engender constructive discussions by considering multidisciplinary insights. In the following section, I will briefly discuss how such situatedness of transnational Asian studies can be useful in promoting antiracist perspectives.

Antiracist Transnational Asian Studies Pedagogy during and after the Pandemic

Among numerous possibilities of transnational Asian studies pedagogy, I find it effective in antiracist education in classrooms. Here, I am following Ibram X. Kendi's succinct definition of antiracist: "The one who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea."(Kendi, 2019).[9] This simple but powerful definition suggests that an antiracist's goal should be a specific action (i.e., supporting antiracist policy). Transnational Asian studies teaching, in this respect, can provide the knowledge and understanding that might link to such actions when the class encountered the specific social events, including anti-Asian hate incidents during the COVID-19 pandemic and Black Lives Matter movement following the brutal murder of George Floyd. The practice of transnational Asian studies primarily aims to illuminate flows of migration, cultural, social, economic exchange and network in and outside of Asia, therefore actively seeking association from other relevant disciplines. In an antiracist mode of teaching, the relevant discipline would be Asian American studies, critical race studies, and postcolonial studies to seek anticolonial/antiracist solidarity by analyzing and dismantling the transnational and domestic power structures. When a student has access to the transnational cartographies of power networks relations that eventually links back to themselves, the antiracist ideas and actions will have their foundations.

For example, I have met international students who feel disjointed from what they think are uniquely "American" debates on antiracism. To those who are new to racial dynamics in the United States, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the following social conflict can be something to watch from afar, as a distant observer. Or, the call for antiracism and racial justice might seem like an element for their

cultural assimilation to the United States since they do not align their positionality to the struggle. In other words, they might have difficulty finding reasons to care. However, once they are informed that the twentieth-century immigration policy in the United States has been formulated through the domestic struggle and transnational forces, they can make connections that enable their entry to the country. The 1964 immigration reform, which was influenced by the civil rights movement and the consideration for racial equity, is one of the significant examples of the struggle against racism that resulted in legal changes that made a transnational impact. (Chin, 2008) The reflection on the U.S. immigration policy can also generate parallel discussions on the migrant workers who move between Asian countries (e.g., from Nepal to South Korea) as labor migration is a phenomenon that spread following the movement of the capital.

In addition to the point on immigration, students can also consider the history of racialization in the US and its lasting impact both domestically and internationally, finding their connection to an antiracist narrative. After the abolition of slavery and the influx of Chinese (and later Japanese and Korean) labor to the US, the racialization of both African Americans and Asian Americans occurred simultaneously, serving to define the boundaries of whiteness.[10] The anti-Chinese (and Asian) racial imagination and antiblackness in the United States have evolved and become embedded in US society and also influenced globally through popular media and cultural transmissions. As a result, the anti-Asian rhetoric during the COVID-19 and anti-blackness in policing are the consequences of US history, not an anomaly, to which figures such as Lee Boggs have combatted to render meaningful change. Therefore, the reflection on a student's positionality concerning the social and racial context is pedagogically useful and provides motivation for antiracist engagement.

In the case of BIPOC or minority students (both from the United States and elsewhere), there are two significant points to consider in antiracist transnational Asian studies pedagogy. First, the discipline of Asian studies has traditionally been dominated by white, Western, male scholars, catering primarily to a white-centered audience. (Ryang, 2021) Within this context, BIPOC students represent a relatively new audience in the field of Asian studies and may find the discipline's historical perspective and gaze unsettling. Second, as a result of this dynamic, the gap in social and ontological understanding between "Asian" and "Asian American" cultures is often left unexplained. While exoticized Asian culture and history are frequently celebrated as unique and rare knowledge, topics related to Asian Americans are often marginalized within the United States, struggling to find their rightful place as a discipline within academia.[11] The aforementioned case of the film *Parasite* symbolically highlights this discrepancy once again. Why is the position of Asian American films so distinct from that of a well-made Korean film?

How does the Korean film differ from an Asian American film like *Everything Everywhere All At Once* (2022), which garnered seven Academy Awards two years later? I argue that antiracist transnational Asian studies pedagogy can provide a vantage point for addressing these new questions posed by the emerging—and the future majority—student body.

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Notes

[1] I thank Dr. Rachel Pang for suggesting the pedagogical orientation I presented at the ASIANetwork conference panel discussion ("'Teaching Asia During Resurgence of Anti-Asian Racism," April 9, 2022) is antiracist. I did not have "antiracist" in the initial draft, but thanks to Dr. Pang's comment, I decided to edit the title and later part of this essay.

[2] Particularly, Lee and Shibuwasa write about: "But during the first decades of Asian American Studies as a formal field of study, Asian Americanist historians emphasized the U.S. side of their narratives. This was an understandable strategy at a time when our

professors and colleagues routinely confused Asian American Studies with Asian Studies." Erika Lee, and Naoko Shibusawa, "Guest Editor's Introduction: What is Transnational Asian American History? Recent Trends and Challenges," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 8, no. 3 (2005): ix.

[3] According to the website: "Dr. Cumings placed most of the blame of North Korea's problems on the United States, while also whitewashing problems in Korea." Anonymous, "Bruce Cumings," Professor Watchlist (Turning Point USA), accessed April 16, 2022, https://professorwatchlist.org/professor/brucecumings.

[4] I also discuss the issue briefly in my essay, "*Parasite* as Parable: Bong Joon-Ho's Cinematic Capitalism." *CrossCurrents* 70, no. 3 (2020): 248-262.

[5] Grace Lee Boggs, *Living for Change* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 3.

[6] Grace Lee Boggs, *Living for Change* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 9

[7] Patricia Meltzer and Christi Brian, "General Education Course Proposal for Gen Ed Area U.S. Society" (Women's Studies Course Proposal, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, year unknown), p. 3.

[8] What I have in mind here is Lisa Lowe's *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015) since it is an example of transnational historiography that informs the lingering connections. In addition, I refer to Helen Heran Jun's idea that the racialization of Asian Americans and African Americans took place in the Americas in connected but distinctive ways. See Jun. 2011. *Race for Citizenship: Black Orientalism and Asian Uplift from Pre-Emancipation to Neoliberal America*. New York: New York University Press.

[9] Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* (Random House Publishing Group, 2019), p. 13.

[10] Jun, *Race for Citizenship,* Chapter 1.

[11] For the critical review of the history of Asian American studies in the US, see Mark Chiang. *The Cultural Capital of Asian American Studies: Autonomy and Representation in the University* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Also see Tina Chen's compelling vision on "Global Asia" which considers the academic landscape of Asian studies, Asian American Studies, and Asian Diaspora Studies. Tina Chen, "Global Asias: Method, Architecture, Praxis." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 80, no. 4 (2021): 997–1009. doi:10.1017/S0021911821001595.

MINJUNG NOH, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Religion, Culture, and Society at Lehigh University. A religious studies scholar with a transnational and interdisciplinary approach, she specializes in the confluences of religious cultures among South Korea, Haiti, and the United States from a decolonial perspective. Her work spans Korean religions, comparative ethnic and gender studies, and transnational Christianity. Her research has been published in the *Journal of Korean Religions*, the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, and *Religion, State & Society*. Her current book project, "Transnational Salvations: Korean Evangelical Missionaries in Haiti," is the first monograph to investigate the

multidirectional religious dynamics among South Korea, the United States, and Haiti through the lens of the evangelical missionary networks connecting these three nation-states.

5

Can Buddhists Be Feminists?

Thinking with and Learning from Others in the Asian Humanities Classroom

Jue Liang and Isabelle Peel

Ling Xingpo visited Master Fubei Heshang to pay her respects. They sat together and drank tea, and she asked him, "If a true word can't be spoken no matter how hard you try, how will you teach?"

Fubei said, "Fubei has nothing to say."

Ling was not satisfied. She placed her hands inside the opposite sleeves of her robe and cried out: "There is grievous suffering even within a blue sky!"

Again Fubei had nothing to say.

Ling said, "To be a human being is to live in calamity."

— "Ling's Question."[1]

Jue and Isabelle: Ling's lament of "living in calamity" resonated with us. As educator and student, we felt the impact of a global pandemic, as well as the uncertainty in the emerging post-pandemic world: the physical distance, the mental stress, and the emotional and personal challenges, just to name a few. For those of us dealing

with cultures and worlds that were once accessible but now continue to feel far removed, there is an added struggle to make connections, and to make them meaningful. At the beginning of every class meeting in our Buddhism, Gender, & Sexuality seminar in spring 2021, we read a short story from the *Hidden Lamp*, a collection of short stories highlighting the experience of Buddhist women. These pithy encounters serve as an entry point to that day's discussion. The details in the narratives also add a lived dimension that complements—and sometimes complicates—the Buddhist discourse on gender and sexuality. "Ling's Question" remains one of our favorites. For us, it speaks to the dissonance one faces between the ideal of enlightenment in Buddhism that is supposed to be beyond words and gender markers, and the usually disappointing reality of gender inequality and the ensuing struggles in Buddhist communities. It also asks, how can we relate to others' experiences and realities when the medium of language fails to bring us together?

One of the most challenging aspects of teaching about Asian religions is to invite students to set aside their presuppositions and to "see things their way," that is, to embody a sympathetic understanding, rather than observing from a distance. Some of these presuppositions are easier to recognize, while others slide into the intellectual exercise unexamined. For example, students might be conscious of the geographical and temporal distance, as well as their concrete manifestations in lived experiences—we eat different foods, dress differently, and inhabit different climates—but could overlook the various ways of "being minded"[2] about the world that promises a deeper understanding and even personal transformation. In a classroom conversation about "religion," "gender," and "sexuality," all of which are second-order categories that do not necessarily translate into languages other than English, it is easy to fall into the assumption that these categories are cross-culturally applicable and universally defined.

In this essay, we aim to address the challenge of teaching Asian religions in an undergraduate classroom by promoting a nuanced, sympathetic understanding, instead of a superficial celebration of diversity and, in worse cases, a reluctance to engage with differences. Jue Liang will speak from her perspective as the instructor, while Isabelle Peel will speak based on her experience as a student in the course, and as someone majoring in psychology. We begin with our respective motivations for teaching and taking the course, followed by a particular classroom conversation on the postcolonial critique of a liberal progressive hermeneutic and its unexamined application to Buddhist texts and traditions. Finally, we summarize by reflecting on one of the three principles for an Asian Humanities laid forth by Donald R. Davis, that is, how do we learn *from*, instead of learning *about* others.[3]

Motivations

Isabelle: While scrolling through a Spring 2022 scheduling guide, I came across a course called "Buddhism, Gender, and Sexuality." I had never taken a religion class, so these topics caught my attention—and appeared to offer me a break in my typical course load. Besides fulfilling my major requirements, I did not walk into Knapp 303 with a specific goal.

The first few days of class were slightly intimidating as I was unfamiliar with many of the terms and concepts that were covered. With no background knowledge of Buddhism, I found myself overwhelmed during lectures. Despite my initial hesitations, The *Hidden Lamp* stories that we discussed at the beginning of each class were always intriguing. These short pieces transported me into a new world where I engaged with various topics on a personal, intimate, and meaningful level. Through the lens of the narrators, I acknowledged different perspectives that I otherwise would not have encountered. Stories and anecdotes are powerful and arguably more helpful when trying to understand the experiences of others.

Jue: One of my favorite anecdotes to share with the students on the first day of the class is two interactions I had with Tibetan Buddhist nuns. The first one took place at the end of a four-hour-long conversation. I have been asking a Tibetan Buddhist nun about her role in publishing several collections of writings by and about Buddhist women, and what her life as a nun was like. She also asked me questions about the gender situation in the US and mainland China. She was particularly interested in the suffragette movement and the legal debates surrounding abortion. So I thought I would wrap up the interview by asking, "Would you consider yourself a Buddhist feminist?" To my surprise, she said, "No. I am a Buddhist, not a feminist. But I'd like to help to advance women's cause in whatever way I can."

Another encounter took place during an interview with another nun who was the provost of esoteric learnings at the same institution. She was known for her strict demeanor but, at the same time, her advocacy for nuns' education. She was making me lunch in her own hut. I was asking her questions about her own experience and her teaching. I asked the same question, she stopped and asked me what feminism is. After my quick explanation—"feminism is the ideal that all genders should be treated equally"—she shrugged and said, "Sure! I guess you can call me a feminist."

These two examples immediately prompt questions from students like "do Tibetan Buddhists care about feminism," "what does Buddhism say about gender," and, ultimately, "can Buddhists be feminists?" They vividly demonstrate the inadequacy of using terms like "feminism" in our critical analysis of a religious tradition that does not necessarily espouse such an ideal or has very different

ideas about personhood and gender identities. The challenges in a cross-cultural definition of "gender" and "personhood" remain central in the reflective exercises of our presuppositions.

Isabelle: About a month into the semester, I recognized that I was reevaluating my understanding of Buddhism, gender, and sexuality. The thoughts that I had established before this class were shifting away from the comfortable boundaries of a liberal-feminist mindset. As a psychology major, I recognized these shifts in my thinking as conceptual changes. In their 2014 article, Sinatra, Kienhues, and Hofer analyze conceptual change as it relates to the public's perception of science. However, the theory also plays a crucial role in academic environments as it affects how students engage with complex topics. Conceptual change is defined as "the process of restructuring one's knowledge that is influenced by a complex array of cognitive, motivational, affective, and sociocultural factors."[4] This concept describes my experience in Dr. Liang's classroom as we explored subjects such as feminism.

Case Studies: A Postcolonial Critique of Liberal Feminism

Jue: One example of such reflective exercises happens early in the semester. The seminar is divided into three sections. The first one is effectively a crash course on the key tenets of Buddhism and the central concepts in the study of gender and sexuality.[5] The second one surveys in broad strokes the chronological development of Buddhism and the rise of its many emanations: Mainstream Buddhism, Mahāyāna Buddhism, tantric Buddhism, and Chan or Zen Buddhism. The third and last section of the course responds to the many challenges and new circumstances contemporary Buddhist communities find themselves in, including homosexuality, transgenderism, equal access to education, and the restoration of full ordination for nuns.

At the end of the first section, after going through some general theoretical and methodological concerns of the study of women in religions, I assigned two readings that specifically counter the seemingly universality of categories like womanhood, equality, and feminism. One is a chapter from Nirmala Salgado's *Buddhist Nuns and Gendered Practice: In Search of the Female Renunciant*, entitled "Decolonizing Female Renunciation;"[6] the other is the introduction chapter from Amy Langenberg's *Birth in Buddhism: The Suffering Fetus and Female Freedom*.[7] Both readings tackle the deeply seated and prevalent liberal feminist hermeneutics present in many studies of women and gender in Buddhism. In her critique of Rita Gross's influential work, *Buddhism after Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism*,[8] Salgado examines three sets of problematic reasonings in the book: the overemphasized dichotomy between "traditional"/ "Asian" and "Western" Buddhism (and monastics and lay Buddhism), the flattening of Buddhism into its textual traditions, and the assumptions that "agency" and

"freedom" are universal and universally desirable principles. In her research, Salgado queries the identity of the female renunciants through a combination of textual and ethnographic study, and attends to the everyday, lived reality of female renunciants in Sri Lanka as narrated by themselves, instead of imposing any external interpretive frameworks.

Similarly, Langenberg also proposes a contextually sensitive and critically reflective methodology that maintains awareness of the limited applicability of liberal feminist perspectives in the study of early Buddhism. In short, their critique is not to categorically deny any possible connection between religious and feminist ideals, but "refusing to simply conscript the past into contemporary arguments between feminism and religion."[9] Finally, to offer a comprehensive discussion, I also provided in class a short excerpt from a later collection of essays by Rita Gross, published posthumously.[10] This excerpt responds to the critiques of her "feminist" reading of Buddhism. While Gross restates her advocacy for feminism as the "freedom from the prison of gender roles," she also resigns to a separation between "Asian" and "Western" Buddhist communities, arguing that "[w]hat Asians make of these suggestions is not for me but for Asian Buddhists to decide. Just as I insist that Asian Buddhists should not try to control Western Buddhists who do not want to adopt Asian Buddhist practices of male dominance."[11]

Isabelle: I was significantly impacted by this excerpt from Rita Gross's *Buddhism Beyond Gender*. Gross declares that Western feminism is the universal path forward. Prior to this class, I likely would not have thought twice about her argument as my definition of feminism was more closely aligned with hers: "Feminism refers to any movement that deliberately seeks to raise the status of women from an accepted status quo. It is presupposed that such movements result in greater gender equality and equity."[12] Using this framework, Gross explains that it may be beneficial for Asian Buddhists to adopt feminist ideas as they appear to ignore women's rights and gender equality. Instead of merely acknowledging Gross's work and moving on with my day, I felt I could not leave class without challenging her claims. My urge to dig deeper was an indication that my previous understanding of feminism was not in agreement with the content I was learning in the course. At this moment, my attitude on the topic shifted from what I had previously relied on, as I had replaced these points of view with updated ones. This is not to say that I have completely abandoned my previous definition of feminism, but I found myself asking whether it was applicable in the context of Asian Buddhism.

Can We Learn from Asian Religions?

Jue: But Ling's question remains: if the comparative study of feminism and religion is in many cases a flawed exercise, then what can we get out of studying Asian

religions, and their views on gender, sexuality, and personhood? In this concluding section, we would like to turn our attention to the call for a new vision of Asian Humanities proposed by Donald Davis. First, Davis notes the different treatment of subject matters on Asian persons, subjects, and disciplines with their "Western" counterparts—"[o]ne reads Plato not merely to learn about ancient Greece or the quaint customs of another place and time, but to learn from Plato how to think and rethink politics, art, and metaphysics today. We almost never do the same with Kautilya, though his *Arthaśāstra*, like Plato's *Republic*, contains an equally majestic vision of polity and statecraft."[13] He then proposes that we as educators and as students keep ourselves open to the possibilities of being changed or moved by the subjects of our study, be it the Buddhist contention that our notion of self is a falsely conceptual product, or the Hindu suggestion that spirituality, security, and pleasure are all worthy pursuits in life. In other words, we need to be open to being changed conceptually, and to embrace other ways of being minded in this world.

Isabelle: "Care First…Learn From…Connect Histories." This is how Donald R. Davis suggests we approach Asian Humanities. I was intrigued by Davis' piece because I had never contemplated how—and why—professors relay information to their students. However, these three principles are especially relevant in a fast-paced, high-stress environment like college. The principle of care demands us to slow down and pay attention to each other; to learn from helps us become more compassionate and capacious in our study; and the connections we make situate ourselves in the world in a more informed manner.

Davis states that "…much more has been written about what Asian studies should be and what is wrong with it than about what it might be and what its value is."[14] I immediately highlighted this sentence and recalled the articles I had read in the Buddhism, Gender, and Sexuality seminar. I asked myself if these various authors had emphasized the value of Asian studies rather than offering a critique of the subject. While it is essential to consider the content I absorbed in class, reflecting upon my engagement with Asian topics is more important. For the most part, learning is treated as a goal-oriented task. Whether the purpose is to pass an exam or write a paper, Davis's first principle, "care first," is often abandoned in the classroom. He states that caring encompasses both definitions: having a sincere interest and watching over someone and ensuring their well-being.[15] Even though I understood the meaning, it took me some time to apply it in the seminar context. To care extends beyond my personal or intellectual curiosities. Interacting with the history and culture of Asia could be no different from entering into a conversation with another person. Just as this interpersonal encounter requires respect and attention, Asian studies should be treated in the same way.

Davis' second principle is to "learn from." To learn *from* and to learn *about* are frequently used interchangeably, but there is a distinctly different concern. Academic endeavors are usually addressed in a "learning about" manner. The search for objectivity, facts, and validity prevents potentially more powerfully transformative conversations. I saw this dichotomy in Nirmala Salgado's *Buddhist Nuns and Gendered Practice*. After interviews and discussions with Buddhist nuns, she concludes that the relationship between the nuns and the Eight Heavy Conditions (Pāli *gurudhamma*)[16] is more complex than the prescriptive one portrayed by Western scholars. The principle of "learning from" is highlighted as Salgado "speaks first of the human and second of the culture."[17] Not only does she provide a transcript of the interviews, she also made clear the importance of the nun's perspectives. Such narratives are extremely valuable as they provide the most authentic information. Communication in this form is crucial because we subconsciously use heuristics in situations where accessible information is limited. Because these mental shortcuts are formed and influenced by past experiences, we are a reflection of our biases. When it comes to an academic discipline that is unfamiliar, like Buddhism, it is far too easy to make assumptions and generalizations based on one's own culture. To learn from others forces us to step outside our comfort zones and make the deliberate choice to refuse the patterns with which we have become complacent.

Davis' final principle is "connecting histories." Despite the thousands of miles that separate North America and Asia, both continents are a piece of the larger human history. We are all more connected than the history books often reveal. To focus on connection allows for deeper discovery and recognition of cultural agency and influence.[18] Superficial comparison, on the other hand, does not create productive environments and might widen the gap between the already distant cultures. Through much of my academic study, I have had more experience with comparison rather than connection. However, this course on Buddhism, Gender, and Sexuality has allowed me to break this habit. Dr. Liang prompts the class to practice connecting histories in our discussion board posts. We are asked to make a connection between the assigned reading and any other material we have covered. Since we began practicing this skill from the start of the semester, it has become second nature. Once we are able to recognize the history of others as our own, learning from these connected histories can then take place.[19]

Jue and Isabelle: We wrapped up the semester with presentations on student research projects, each firmly rooted in a contextually sensitive approach. Some projects utilize textual resources, where students disentangle the ambivalent attitude toward female enlightenment in Indian Buddhism, investigate the creative adaptation of Buddhist identities by Empress Wu of China, or analyze the discourse on gender by contemporary Thai female Buddhist leaders. One project

challenges the visual representation of Buddhism in America as predominantly white, middle-class, and female (as seen on several *Time* covers), while another examines Buddhism as social activism in Vietnamese American communities. In a post-pandemic world still wounded by hate and ignorance, an Asian Humanities classroom centered around care, humility, and engagement could offer a footing for us to venture into a potentially less calamitous future.

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Notes

[1] Florence Caplow and Susan Moon, *The Hidden lamp: Stories from Twenty-Five Centuries of Awakened Women* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2013), 260.

[2] As suggested by Sonam Kachru, to speak of "being minded" suggests that humans are oriented in their perception of, reactions to, and relationship with the world through their thoughts. For his salient argument for the entanglement of mind and world, as exemplified in the work of the Indian Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu, see Kachru, *Other Lives: Mind and World in Indian Buddhism* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2021), 1–2.

[3] Donald R. Davis, "Three Principles for an Asian Humanities: Care First ... Learn From ... Connect Histories," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 74, no. 1, 1 Feb. 2015, 1–25.

[4] Gale M. Sinatra, Dorothe Kienhues, and Barbara K. Hofer, "Addressing Challenges to Public Understanding of Science: Epistemic Cognition, Motivated Reasoning, and Conceptual Change," *Educational Psychologist* 2014 49 (2), 133.

[5] This is because the course is crosslisted with Religion, Women and Gender Studies, and Queer Studies at Denison University. Students who enroll in the course could come from any of these three disciplines and do not necessarily share the same background knowledge.

[6] Nirmala S. Salgado, *Buddhist Nuns and Gendered Practice: In Search of Female Renunciant* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013), 21-31.

[7] Amy Paris Langenberg, *Birth in Buddhism: The Suffering Fetus and Female Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 10–17.

[8] Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1993).

[9] Langenberg, *Birth in Buddhism*, 17.

[10] Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism beyond Gender: Liberation from Attachment to Identity* (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 2018), 132-140. Also see Amy Paris Langenberg, "*Buddhism beyond Gender.* By Rita Gross," *Journal of Global Buddhism*, 2019, Vol.20, 133–137.

[11] Gross, *Buddhism beyond Gender*, 139.

[12] Gross, *Buddhism beyond Gender*, 136.

[13] Davis, "Three Principles for an Asian Humanities," 12.

[14] Davis, "Three Principles for an Asian Humanities," 1.

[15] Davis, "Three Principles for an Asian Humanities," 5.

[16] The Eight Heavy Conditions are a well-known set of monastic precepts applicable only to fully ordained nuns. These rules prescribe nuns paying respect to monks irrespective of seniority, nuns' reporting duties to monks, and a mandatory presence of monks in some important gatherings and ritual occasions. For an introduction to the scholarly debates on this matter, see Bhikkhu Analayo, "Bhiksunī Ordination," in *The Oxford Handbook of Buddhist Ethics*, edited by Daniel Cozort and James Mark Shields (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 116–134.

[17] Nirmala S. Salgado, *Buddhist Nuns and Gendered Practice*, 17.

[18] Davis, "Three Principles for an Asian Humanities," 19.

[19] Davis, "Three Principles for an Asian Humanities," 23.

JUE LIANG is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and Severance Professor in the History of Religion at Case Western Reserve University. She holds a BA and MA from Renmin University of China (2009, 2011), an MA from the University of Chicago (2013), and a PhD from the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia (2020).

Her research and teaching engage with questions about continuities as well as innovations in the gender discourses of Buddhist communities. She is also interested in the theory and practice of translation in general, and translating Tibetan literature in particular.

ISABELLE PEEL graduated from Denison University in 2022, and is currently a research analyst at NielsenIQ.

6

"Foreign" Asia and Naïve Cultural Relativism

Kin Cheung

Introduction

The students I teach in United States classrooms indicate that one of the main reasons they take my courses is their interest in Asia. This interest usually reflects a preconceived image of Asia as quirky, weird, or simply different. As an educator, I typically encounter students' belief in naïve cultural relativism: that values and practices are all relative to each culture in such a way that precludes the ability to pass ethical judgments on any culture outside of one's own. This may take the form of a "different strokes for different folks" mentality, even if students find the practices covered in courses not simply bizarre, but unpalatable to the sensibilities of their, typically Protestant (-influenced) upbringing. For instance, the Electric Flower Cars in Taiwan that carry strippers performing at funerals are so unfathomable, some students give up hope of finding any common ground between the practices they study and their own expectations of propriety. In order to move students beyond the tempting position of naïve cultural relativism, I ask them to uncover underlying values of funerary services and to consider what that says about the human need for ritual acknowledgement of the dead.

The danger in such naïve cultural relativism—commonly elicited when students encounter, inside or outside the classroom, images of Japanese fashion or Chinese street food—is an exoticizing that leads to othering. In other words,

Asia and Asians are radically or even wholly other. This in turn, fuels a pervasive sentiment in the US of the difficulty in accepting Asian Americans as fully American. Though anti-Asian hatred in the US is not new, its resurgence during the COVID-19 pandemic is not limited to the general public but is also found in higher education.[1] The relativism casting Asia and Asians/Asian Americans as foreign or alien has immediate impact. Though relativism is not the only cause, Asian American students at Moravian University, where I teach, have been accused of bringing the coronavirus to campus.[2]

To help educators counter naïve cultural relativism, I provide case studies of how I teach: (1) Chinese physicians who may withhold diagnosis from patients; (2) Indian Ayurvedic healers' prescription of mercury; and (3) Japanese Buddhist priests bar owners who serve alcohol to patrons. I explain teaching strategies and my pedagogical framework to move students to more fully engage with human difference. My goal is for students to learn *from* Asian religious contexts and cultural values. This is not merely learning *about* (by memorizing facts or basic practices and tenets), because I push them to further reflect on and question the values they have previously assumed without deliberation.

Medical Ethics in China and Withholding Patient Diagnosis

In my Ethics in Asian Contexts course, I assign students an article co-authored by Ruiping Fan, an ethicist with a medical degree, and Benfu Li, a medical doctor, to teach that in China, physicians are legally obligated to consult with and obtain permission from a patient's family prior to informing the patient of a diagnosis of terminal disease.[3] Nearly all my students, especially those going into health professions, are shocked that patients are not automatically notified of their medical condition. If I stop here, I run the risk of naïve cultural relativism that many first-year students default to: that ethical values are relative to each culture. Thus, there is no way to judge. They prefer this over the more challenging position of trying to articulate why Chinese physicians are not acting ethically (keeping in mind following legal obligations does not imply ethical action) when they withhold diagnosis. Perhaps they do not wish to offend me, their instructor with the power to give them a course grade, who is Chinese American. Even if students would be less hesitant to articulate their discomfort or ethical reasoning to another professor, it is clear that learning about this practice in China makes students uncomfortable. Students prefer to dismiss their reactions using naïve cultural relativism rather than engage with conflicting values.

To promote learning from this difference, I urge students to investigate similarities and divergences. I draw their attention to US medical history that includes doctors performing mastectomies on women without patients' consent and the secret abusive medical experiments done on Black populations. However,

these examples do not serve to illustrate how the US made progress while China is ethically backwards. Rather, they show that what my current Pennsylvania-area students have taken for granted, in terms of patient rights, changes over time and is influenced by gender and race. I continue to press students to articulate why they value the right to personal medical information, and ultimately lead them to uncover their assumption that the basic unit of autonomy and agency is the individual person. Finally, their earlier knowledge of Confucian philosophical-religious foundations pays off: that in other contexts, the basic unit of autonomy and agency is the family. Students then ponder the trade-offs in valuing individual freedom versus familial harmony and some begin to articulate how this lesson has altered their world view.

Indian Prescription of Mercury and Incommensurable Conceptions of Health and the Body

In a course on the religious roots of Indian and Chinese medicine, I show clips from Pan Nalin's 2001 documentary *Ayurveda: The Art of Being*. Students find the use of herbs to be unremarkable. They are fascinated when they see the Ayurvedic doctor diagnose a patient simply through feeling—not counting—the pulse, checking the eyes, and examining the tongue. Some are incredulous that the diagnosis of cancer could be accurate without sophisticated medical equipment or technology. All my students are unsettled when they hear the doctor say that mercury can be prescribed as a treatment for disease. At this point in the film, multiple students would protest that mercury is poisonous. This is a turning point around week 3 or 4 in the semester. The course attracts students majoring in nursing and health sciences. They come in with curiosity and openness or some personal experience of Indian or Chinese medicine. However, none of them to date has learned of the use of mercury in Indian and Chinese medicine and the clip shatters their earlier confidence or openness to these medical traditions.

In this setting, my students do not default to cultural relativism. They are genuinely concerned that patients are being actively poisoned. In Indian and Chinese medicine, dose and context determines whether or not a substance is medicine or poison.[4] I make clear that they should never medicate themselves based on watching clips from a documentary. I show them the search results of "mercury Ayurveda" on PubMed, the database maintained by the US National Institutes of Health, considered to be a reliable source of medical research. I ask students if seeing peer-reviewed publications on the medical effects (and dangers of improper usage) of mercury in Indian medical contexts changes their mind on its safety. Some defer to the authority of PubMed while others remain skeptical. I invite students to reflect on where they turn for trustworthy medical knowledge and why.

Monica Chiu analyzes a journalist's account of Hmong medical worldviews in order to point out how average Americans would question Hmong medical knowledge, but not mainstream western biomedicine, even though there is "a dearth of information about the equally mysterious and relatively unknown culture of medicine—at least to the lay person."[5] Students are asked to consider what makes a documentary video clip of a physician in India speaking on the medical use of mercury different than a clip of a doctor in the US speaking on the newest drug developed by pharmaceutical corporations. I also press students to think through what happens when medical worldviews conflict.

Japanese Buddhist Priest Bar Owners and Bartenders

I teach multiple courses covering Japanese religions. In the section on contemporary Buddhism, I devote a class to what John Nelson terms "experimental Buddhism," which includes: (1) monks participating in fashion shows by strutting down a catwalk in regal robes; (2) the use of anime and manga at temples and on YouTube to draw younger congregants; and (3) Buddhist priests who are bar owners and bartenders serving patrons alcohol (see figure 1).[6]

I divide the class in small groups and assign short news articles on various experimental innovations by Japanese Buddhists for each group to read and summarize to the rest of the class. When the group of students present on priest bar owners who serve alcohol, other students are invariably surprised. As I show the image (figure 1) and narrate my experience of visiting the Tokyo bar Vowz, where I was served alcohol by a priest, the students and I typically have this exchange:

"Aren't Buddhists not allowed to drink alcohol?"

"Yes, that is usually how one of the five precepts for lay followers is interpreted. However, we can better understand the Buddhist bar by considering the following. First, the precept is not a commandment from the divine to abstain from all alcohol. Rather, the precise wording is to vow to undergo the training to abstain from intoxicants that cause muddleheadness. In other words, consuming small amounts of alcohol for medicinal purposes is allowed. Second, the priests do not imbibe themselves when they serve patrons."

"Isn't that enabling muddleheadness?"

"Correct, and that is precisely how this is experimental. Furthermore, in the Japanese context, after the nineteenth-century Meiji Restoration, government officials made sweeping legal changes that allowed Buddhist clergy to imbibe alcohol, consume meat, and get married."[7]

Though some students are satisfied by my answers, others remain puzzled. Ending the lesson at this point would lead students to naïve cultural relativism: that Japanese religions, and therefore the Japanese, are simply different. I take

Figure 1: A Buddhist Priest consults a copy of *The Bartender's Bible* for a cocktail recipe. Photo taken by author on July 3, 2017 at Vowz Bar in Tokyo, Japan.

this opportunity to make explicit their assumptions of Puritan religious propriety involving alcohol that ignores other Christian sentiments.

"What was Jesus able to turn water into?"

"Wine."

"What are Belgium Trappist monks known for brewing?"

"Beer!"

The influence of Puritan assumptions on my students are revealed by their astonishment when I explain yet another object that they expect to be distant from religion: *money*. I explain the Buddhist bar owner and his peers likely enrolled in the Cram School for Abbots of the Future, established by "an MBA-holding priest and a former financial advisor… [to offer] year-long courses in business strategy, marketing, leadership, public relations, and accounting to temple abbots and their families."[8] The lesson ends with more questions for students to reflect on their expectations of religious propriety and why they hold such assumptions. Educators can make the unfamiliar more familiar, and the familiar unfamiliar. What seemed foreign, alien, or quirky on the surface hopefully becomes less weird and what students take for granted gets interrogated. I remind students that our classroom is in a W.E.I.R.D—Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic society. The goal is for students to move pass naïve cultural relativism and examine the conditions and contexts for how religious traditions (including their own) have

changing relationships with alcohol use. An example of student learning is a group of students who created a fictional short film for their final project that explained this phenomenon of bars owned by Buddhist priests in Japan.

Relativisms and Implications for Pedagogy

Though students are able to explain away or contain their discomforts with Chinese medical ethics and Japanese Buddhist experiments, they have greater difficulty dismissing the prescription of ingesting heavy metals using the position of cultural relativism. This indicates the complexity of how cultural relativism is deployed and the diversity of relativisms as philosophical positions. Shuchen Xiang shows that mainstream Anglophone "academic philosophy's phobia of cultural relativism" is based on a racist fear of non-European cultures.[9] When I challenge students' naïve cultural relativism, I am careful not to perpetuate the "problematic structure of how cultural difference was and is interpreted through a racist lens (i.e., cultural difference is assumed to be 'incommensurable' or 'inexplicable' and 'antithetical' because it is understood as a sign of ontological difference/hierarchy)."[10] To be sure, there are more sophisticated and philosophically defensible positions of relativism, such as David Wong's development of a pluralistic relativism (based on his comparative work in western and Confucian ethical systems) in which there is still room to judge better or worse ethical systems within such pluralism.[11] Though an extended treatment of relativisms is outside the scope of my courses, I devote one class period early in the semester to warn students about the trap of naïve cultural relativism.

I advise students that the danger is a quick dismissal of radical difference that ends inquiry, rather than an extended investigation that includes reflection on one's own assumptions and values. Furthermore, when radical difference is left unexamined or tabled or essentialized, the Asian populations my students study may be otherized as aliens—foreign not only to the US as citizens, but also distant from humanity as fully human.

Conclusion: Teaching Content on Asia, Asian Americans, and Anti-Racism

Teaching Chinese ethics of truth telling (or withholding), Indian medical prescriptions of metals, and Japanese religious propriety involving alcohol are examples of lessons that fit easily in courses on philosophy, medicine, and religion. Each of these modules come in the middle or end of my courses as they require some foundational knowledge, such as the Confucian values that influence Chinese medical ethics, the range of Indian medical practices including evidence of their effectiveness, or basic Japanese Buddhist practices, beliefs, and rituals. These case studies help advance different learning objectives: (1) ethics is not so much about

distinctions between clearly right or wrong actions, but rather, focuses on grey areas and difficult decisions; (2) medicine and healing involves perspectives on not only, the mind-body, but also deeper commitments regarding ontology and epistemology[12]; and (3) religious practices are not static and regardless of one's own affiliation, understanding the world requires religious literacy—because religious illiteracy is dangerous.[13]

As a scholar of religion, I am excited to follow the work of my colleagues in their investigation of how the COVID-19 pandemic has led to innovation in religious practices.[14] Educators in other disciplines and fields of study can turn to the pandemic as an opportunity to introduce new case studies into their courses. Social scientists could examine facemask wearing norms or openness to contact tracing. Historians may consider how the COVID-19 pandemic could be better understood in the context of other coronavirus outbreaks (SARS or MERS) or past pandemics. Other topics include policy decisions to quarantine cities, ban or open travel along state borders, the efficacy of Ayurvedic or Chinese medicine on treating COVID-19, etc.

Beginning my position in 2016, now the sole tenured faculty at my university who researches and teaches content on Asia in the humanities, I am hyperaware of my obligation to humanize Asians and Asian Americans to students on my campus, where approximately two percent of the 1,800 undergraduates identify as Asian or Asian American. My responsibility has taken on heightened urgency during a resurgence in anti-Asian hate incidents during COVID-19. Serving as the academic co-advisor to my university's Asian Student Union, I gathered student requests on how our institution could respond to the racism Asian American students face. Their petition for courses on Asian Americans highlights the representational racism in Moravian's—and the majority of US colleges' and universities'—curriculum: a glaring lack of courses on Asian American history and experiences. My preexistent courses on Asian religious philosophical traditions are no substitute as Asian American history is American history.

I created a course on Asian American history and religious experiences for the spring 2022 semester as the first ever in our curriculum—Moravian boasts its origins traces back to 1742 and is the sixth oldest college in the US. In developing this course, I was assisted by the plethora of publically available resources and syllabi.[15] There is also a rich literature on how to incorporate anti-racist pedagogy into courses in terms of rethinking pedagogy, structure, and assessment—beyond simply decolonizing the syllabus. Aggie J. Yellow Horse and Kathryn Nakagawa explain how the pandemic presents a "pedagogical disruption" that gives us a chance to reorient towards new possibilities such as a "pedagogy of care."[16] Educators without the latitude to create a new course could consider incorporating discrete modules into existing courses. Hopefully, the three examples provided here serve

as prototypes to be adapted and improved upon. Ultimately, the challenge is to expose students to the spectrum of human variation in a way that overcomes mere gazing of an exotic or foreign other, and instead promotes reflection on their own assumptions of the world and sustained engagement with difference.

Notes

[1] Rose Ann E. Gutierrez, Annie Le, and Robert T. Teranishi, "A Racial Reckoning: Anti-Asian Racism and Exclusion in Higher Education," The Opportunity for Race-Conscious Policy and a More Equitable California. Research in Brief (Oakland, California: Education Trust-West, August 2021), https://west.edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/EducationTrust_2021_ANTI-ASIAN-RACISM-AND-EXCLUSION-IN-HIGHER-EDUCATION-_v5.pdf, 2-5. Rosalind S. Chou, Kristen Lee, and Simon Ho, *Asian Americans on Campus: Racialized Space and White Power* (Boulder: Routledge, 2015).

[2] Members of the Asian Student Union at Moravian University, "The Asian Student Union Responds to Rise in Anti-Asian Attacks," *The Comenian*, April 29, 2021, sec. News, https://comenian.org/5950/news/the-asian-student-unions-response-to-the-rise-of-anti-asian-attacks/.

[3] Ruiping Fan and Benfu Li, "Truth Telling in Medicine: The Confucian View," *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 29, no. 2 (April 2004): 179–93, https://doi.org/10.1076/jmep.29.2.179.31502.

[4] Priyabrata Mukhi et al., "Mercury Based Drug in Ancient India: The Red Sulfide of Mercury in Nanoscale," *Journal of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine* 8, no. 2 (2017): 93–98, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaim.2017.01.009. Yan Liu, "Poison or Cure? Traditional Chinese Medicine Shows That Context Can Make All the Difference," The Conversation, accessed January 6, 2022, http://theconversation.com/poison-or-cure-traditional-chinese-medicine-shows-that-context-can-make-all-the-difference-163337.

[5] Monica Chiu, "Medical, Racist, and Colonial Constructions of Power: Creating the Asian American Patient and the Cultural Citizen in Anne Fadiman's *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*," *Hmong Studies Journal* 5, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 1–36, 17.

[6] John K. Nelson, *Experimental Buddhism: Innovation and Activism in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013). I have students read in class a post by a scholar of religion: Jolyon Baraka Thomas, "Field Notes on Drinking at a Buddhist Bar – Sacred Matters Magazine," accessed January 5, 2022, https://sacredmattersmagazine.com/field-notes-on-drinking-at-a-buddhist-bar/.

[7] Richard Jaffe, "Meiji Religious Policy, Sōtō Zen, and the Clerical Marriage Problem," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 25, no. 1/2 (1998): 45–85.

[8] Beata Świtek, "Economic Agency and the Spirit of Donation: The Commercialization of Buddhist Services in Japan" in *Monks, Money, and Morality: The Balancing Act of Contemporary Buddhism*, edited by Christoph Brumann, Saskia Abrahms-Kavunenko, and Beata Świtek (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 32.

[9] Shuchen Xiang, "The Racism of Philosophy's Fear of Cultural Relativism," *Journal of World Philosophies* 5, no. 1 (June 16, 2020): 99–120, 115.

[10] Ibid 110.

[11] David B. Wong, *Natural Moralities: A Defense of Pluralistic Relativism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[12] "The truth of the matter is that 'traditional medicine' sparks the most controversy when its advocates insist on the idea that people can occupy different 'conceptual realities' and bodily 'modes of existence' at one and the same time. Ironically, this is exactly what so many people – including scientific experts – do all the time." Helen Tilley, "How to Make Sense of 'Traditional (Chinese) Medicine' In a Time of Covid-19: Cold War Origin Stories and the WHO's Role in Making Space for Polyglot Therapeutics," Somatosphere, May 25, 2020, http://somatosphere.net/2020/tcm-covid-19.html/.

[13] "The consequences of this religious illiteracy are profound and include fueling the culture wars, curtailing historical understanding and promoting religious and racial bigotry." Diane L. Moore, *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach to the Study of Religion in Secondary Education* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2007), https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230607002.

[14] See the research blog "CoronAsur: Religion and COVID-19" hosted by the Religion and Globalisation Cluster at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore available at https://ari.nus.edu.sg/coronasur-home/ and the collection of "pedagogical resources related to Buddhism and the coronavirus pandemic" gathered by Buddhist Studies scholars Pierce Salguero, Brooke Schedneck, Jeff Wilson, and Daigengna Rosin Duoer available at http://www.jivaka.net/pandemic/.

[15] See the #AtlantaSyllabus created by Dr. Lori Lopez, Dr. Lisa Ho, and Dr. Erica Kanesaka Kalnay from the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Asian American Studies Program available at https://asianamerican.wisc.edu/student-resources-2/atlantasyllabus/.

[16] Aggie J. Yellow Horse and Kathryn Nakagawa, "Pedagogy of Care in Asian American Studies during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 23, no. 3 (October 2020): 353–65.

KIN CHEUNG is Associate Professor of East and South Asian Religions at Moravian University, where he chairs the Global Religions Department and Philosophy Department. His research investigates how contemporary agents use Buddhist doctrine and ritual practices in Chinese and American contexts as well as transnational networks. Topics include Buddhists engaging with healing, meditation, ethical dilemmas, economics, capitalism, secularism, science, and technology. He is co-editor of *Buddhism and Healing in the Modern World* (University of Hawai'i Press 2024), and has published in journals such as *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, *The Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 마음공부 [*Mindful Practice*], and *Religion, State and Society*.