

Interviewee: Lan Yang

Interviewer: Isabelle Becker

Date: April 29, 2021

Format: Video recording, Zoom

Location of Interview: Eau Claire, Wisconsin

Transcriber: Isabelle Becker

Additional Transcription Equipment Used: Otter.ai

Project in Association with: University of Wisconsin- Eau Claire

Abstract:

Lan Yang is an international student from China at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. In this interview, Lan talks about how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected her and her family. She shares her concerns and challenges with the pandemic and describes how she stays in contact with friends and family. She talks about school activities and classes online. Lan explains the pandemic's effects on homesickness and how she has been dealing with that as well as the pandemic's impact on nursing homes and hospitals. Lan also shares information about her job working in the Center for International Education at the university.

Isabelle Becker 0:04

My name is Isabelle Becker Today is April 29, 2021. It is 3:09 pm. Currently, in the US, there are 31,976,888 cases of COVID, and there have been 570,421 deaths. In Wisconsin, there are 596,552 cases, with 6807 deaths. 29.5% of the US population is fully vaccinated. Thank you for sharing your story with the oral history, could you please state your full name, and some demographic information such as race, ethnicity, age, and gender, if you're willing to share that?

Lan Yang 0:47

Yeah. My name is Lan Yang and Lan is my first name, and I'm an international student who come from China. And this year is my junior year, on this campus of the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, and my major is finance.

IB 1:08

What are the primary things you do on a day-to-day basis?

LY 1:13

Right now?

IB 1:13

Mm-hm.

LY 1:16

So I am currently a full time student, and I also do a part time job on campus. And- which is working in the front desk of the Center for International Education.

IB 1:34

Where do you live? And what is it like to live there?

LY 1:38

So I live on campus and in the city of Eau Claire [Wisconsin]. So it's a very safe place for me, but for my personal experience, Tuesday, because there's provides a lot of resources to students, including those resources during the COVID. And, and so it's also provide the max of [?] quantity of the COVID vaccine- vaccinations during this month and last months, which, which allowed all of students and faculties on campus to get vaccinated.

IB 2:31

And have you been vaccinated?

LY 2:33

Yes.

IB 2:39

Have you or anyone, you know, had any questions or concerns about the vaccine?

LY 2:45

Like my parents, because- but they live in another country. So they feel like it'd be safer to wait, most people get vaccinated, to- and then they can go together because I think that is not because of concerns for vaccinations themselves, of course. They do have some, like concerns of their health conditions. And there's certain group of people who are not encouraged to get vaccinated.

IB 3:25

And what was your experience getting access to the vaccine?

LY 3:31

So it is much easier than I thought. And the process is also shorter and convenient, more convenient, than I expected. I get vac- I got vaccinated on campus. And which means that I just need to signed up on the website and signed up on a paper agreement, then I can just walk in in my appointed time, which only takes at most six minutes to finish the whole process. And I do not have any like side effects after I get vaccinated and I got the one shot one so like everything is much more convenient than I expected.

IB 4:24

When you first learned about COVID-19, what were your thoughts about it and how those thoughts changed since then.

LY 4:32

At first that I know there's a virus is like around February two- 2020. And at the times the first few cases get identified in Wuhan Province, China, and at the time I don't think it will be spread out so quick and like to the other countries, and it's been like a really hard time since then because I just can't help scrolling every news online and- but mostly about my country, and I really worried about like how things is going to be, and, and also worried about my families as well. But [____? background noise] my expectations, [pause for background noise] [laughs] the situation in the US, like, got worse just after, I think, at the end of March, because the school canceled the spring break. And so then I realized it's like an international things to face because of [?] the COVID. And I can't say, like, conquer it or against it, because it's not very appropriate, but it's kind of an international pandemic, that we have to face it together around the world.

IB 6:18

What issues have most concerned you about the COVID-19 pandemic?

LY 6:24

Most concerns, of course, is out of like, the safety of my- like everyone I know. Because, like for my family, some of them are like, like, very, and very old age. So which means is more likely for them to get COVID. And I remember there was a month that when people still don't know this virus very well, we will, I would- like everyday topics that I talked to my parent is you have to wear a mask, and you have to reduce the time that [?] going out. And I remember there is like a very serious insomnia, along with the breakout of news of COVID. Because when you look at those bad news every day, it's very hard to keep focus on reality, and the reality at the time is the people here still don't know much about COVID-19 but after a month, like everything has been changed.

IB 7:40

Has COVID-19 affected your job and school and in what ways?

LY 7:45

It doesn't affect it much to my job. But it does affect a lot to my school because everything has been switched online for a while. And now we take a hybrid patterns of teaching, which means like half times online and half times go to the classroom. It reduced half of students who attend the class every day. I think that that's a very necessary protocol to take out and school has do a lot of- take a lot of actions to trying to reduce the spread of the COVID. I can feel that they have tried hard, but I have to admit that it doesn't help much because- so for example we use the public restroom, so it's our bed- bathroom so each restroom contends [?] for bathroom and to to cut up [?] the COVID spread pass they somehow decided that only two students can use the bathroom. So it's like four bathroom in the restroom, so I don't think that helps a lot because all they required us to do is after you use that you just leave the name on the name sheet hanging on the door. And I think it's doesn't help a lot because we all know how effective like this virus is.

IB 9:34

What other kinds of things has the school been doing because of this?

LY 9:39

So they have they have published an online software called Blugold Protocol and every students are encouraged to enter their temperature and what kind of symptoms related to COVID, encouraging [?] them every day, so if like someone reflects that there is the symptoms of the COVID, they need to move out the resident hall and either go to a house- those are [?]

quarantined in a school specific buildings or just go home. And we have like the school test in place, and each residents are required to get tested, I think, like, once, two weeks, so yeah, and oh, and they closed the school dining place on campus. Every students who came in the cafeterias on campus need to bring their own clam shell in then takes it to go. They don't allow it to, like, eat in a public place. And this is on campus, but I know off campus, the- that's the cafeterias areas still open.

IB 11:14

Has COVID-19 changed your employment status?

LY 11:20

Sorry.

IB 11:21

Has COVID changed your employment status?

LY 11:27

No, I don't think? I don't think so. Sorry.

IB 11:37

That's okay. How has the pandemic affected your experience as an international student here at Eau Claire?

LY 11:48

So, as the identity of international students, I don't think it affects a lot because I have been that a lot of friendly people here were willing to help, like, especially my host family when there's a quarantines like early last year's, at the end of March, so everyone have to move- either moved out of the resident hall, or they have to stay in the resident hall for weeks, at least for that spring breaks, and they just offer me to live with them, so I think that is really, that is like far more than their duty for being a host family, so I'm very grateful for that. And everyone has been so supportive, including the mental health center, and school's department, even though they may not be able to take really strong actions to a COVID 19. But I think they have tried, and they have shown off your- show off their attitudes about like how much they care about a students'

health. So yeah, so as for me as an international student living here, I didn't feel or experience any discriminations so far. So I think this campus climate is really good for me, at least until now.

IB 13:47

How has COVID-19 affected you and your family's day to day activities?

LY 13:56

So a lot of things got canceled and a lot of- [____?] my parents they [____?] work in business, so a lot of the meetings between them and their customers get cancelled. And I felt like for a period like everything gets [____?] that no programs or no projects can, can be just going on as it [____?]. And it still has its affections now, has its impacts now, like I still talk to you over Zoom. So yeah, but I think the most significant impact of COVID is it forced people to find out a new way of like online officing or online studying or like lecturing [?]. Yeah.

IB 15:03

How are you managing day to day activities in your household?

LY 15:10

So, I don't know [laughs] if myself can be called as a household, but. But for now I just trying to follow the schedules of the school and the schedules for me at my part time job on campus. And it's hard to just stay indoors for- for months. So I'm also trying to kind of join those online activities, time to time. Like, I would join, sometimes, like the presentations of the Culture Fest, and things like that, because apparently, a lot of programs and events we are hosting are switched online. But I feel like people are less engaged in those activities. But I think it will be like a new normality of our life, so I'm trying to adapt myself to them.

IB 16:27

What do you do for your part time job on campus?

LY 16:31

So I'm a student assistant for- working for a Center for International Education, so I need to take care of the front desk, which is answer the phone calling in and answer students' questions when

they've stepped in the office. And I also do some assisting job with my supervisor, and she's the manager of the Chinese students' program. So we just check in with the, with those Chinese students, especially during the COVID, to address their safety and to address if they have met any trouble when they book the tickets home, because there's still the travel restrictions between countries. So yeah, it hasn't been easy for them to further school work and decided to live here or just go back to China. And to check in with a student and sometimes I also do some, like assisting on the event, like their farewell reception. And the other events they hosted for international students.

IB 17:57

Has the pandemic affected how you associate and communicate with friends and family?

LY 18:05

Yes, because I mostly indoor person, so most of the times that I hang out with friends before is maybe go shopping, or just go to a movie theater. But now the things [?] have changed, I have to encourage myself to switch to an outdoor person, which means I nearly- so I rarely [?] make my friends indoor, especially in like, close close and smaller space because somehow it just give me the phobia that it's not safe. And it may spread the COVID, [laugh] and I only meet with those friends who get tested and get their result in the last weeks, so of course it just kind of reduced my connections with my friends a little bit, but we do talk online or over Zoom a lot. Yeah, but I remember when there's no- before the vaccinations came out, I never met any of my friends indoor. Just Just to- just to prevent that if there's anyone get affected.

IB 19:39

What have been the biggest challenges that you've faced during the pandemic?

LY 19:45

Like feeling homesick because now I live alone in Towers- so I [_____] live alone on campus, and I know that as I mentioned before, that I don't- I have to cut off a lot of social activities with my friends because that is not safe, but it like always making connections with the others online or so makes me feel that I'm- everything is too virtual and everything's too- everything's too hard to get controlled. Because it's like another pattern, it's different from the offline world. And sometimes I do feel that I'm disattached from the world because I go to a class online, and sometimes I work remotely. And sometimes if I want to hang out with friends, I talk to them on Zoom, so it's like, that's my whole day, and I spent the day in my own room. So it's the most- it's the biggest challenging for me. And I haven't seen my family for two years. I was supposed to go

back the, like last summer- no last summer when the COVID broke out. So yeah, it's very easy for me to feel homesick, if everything goes virtual.

IB 21:34

Yeah, that must be hard. What kind of things have you been doing to try to help with that?

LY 21:52

Trying to make my time occupied. Like if I'm busy enough that I don't have much time left to think about it. Yeah, and I also check in with my therapist in the counseling every month, so at least there's a place to, like talks about those negative feelings about the homesick. Oh, and I keep in touch with my parents like every day, just to make sure they are good and know- and know what's going on in their life because I feel like it's a very necessary way for me to keep in touch with them.

IB 22:46

What have you, your family and your friends done for recreation during the pandemic?

LY 22:54

Can you repeat the question?

IB 22:56

Yeah, what have you, your family and your friends done for recreation during the pandemic?

LY 23:07

[_____] Let me think about this. I think so, my friends, like most of them are just like me, so they're on-campus students, and so they get affected easily by those negative news, as well. So sometimes we talked about it, and the only result is make each other's like day worse. [laughs] So yeah, but for my family's that we were- I am sure that they have met some difficulties, either on job because they're losing customers or things like that, but we are trying to avoid the impacts caused by COVID in our life, because we- both of us don't want the others to worried about us. So we were trying to just pretend that there's no COVID and everything goes well.

IB 24:31

How has the COVID-19 outbreak affected your community?

LY 24:37

Do you mean the community here or community back home?

IB 24:41

You can talk about both, if you'd like.

LY 24:49

So, for community here, or back home, I think they have a similarity, which is everyone is trying to adapt it themselves into a new lifestyle, and a lot of people, like, seems to, like, they're really get used to it, and including me like, if I have seen someone with no mask on the street, I will, like, feel like it's very strange but only a year ago the things is not the way that we see today. So I think like the impacts that COVID left to the community is to let people keep the importance of like social distancing and those necessary protocol of COVID-19 in their mind, but as far as the time goes by, I nearly don't listen to, like, anyone like complaining about it or talk about it that much as compared to the beginning because everyone's trying to pretend that the normal life has started and, and I really hope it is.

IB 26:24

How are people around you responding to the pandemic?

LY 26:32

Responding to the pandemic?

IB 26:35

Mm-hm.

LY 26:40

So do you mean that how many people get affected?

IB 26:46

Yeah, you can think about how they've been affected or like how they've you know, maybe changed their activities or their relationships because of it.

LY 27:02

Well, so, I know a lot of, like, the elderly people they have to live in a nursing home or hospitalized, and there has been like some elderly people in my family or in my friend's family have left us in the past year, but that is not because of COVID it's because they- it's because their own like their own illness, but the most, like, heartbreaking thing about this is because the nursing home or the hospital has been carrying out a more strict protocol of COVID, which means even though like they are nearly dying, and no family or friends can just walk in to better them, and I know there are some- there are some people, like, died in the past year without saying- without the last chance of seeing their families, which including my own family like my grandfather who died this spring, so I think this is a very heartbreaking things about COVID, but we can't just change it. So when everyone has been sort of- pretend that everything back to normal, it always like those details and those experience always remind me that we still have a long way to go.

IB 29:05

“Self-isolation” and “flattening the curve” have been two key ideas that have emerged during the pandemic. Have you or people you know, done things to self-isolate or flatten the curve?

LY 29:20

Like myself. So, yeah, if I- as I told you that I kind of prevent every unnecessary indoor together, get together with friends, or with the others. And I've been follow the flat the curve protocol, and the last- in the last year, since I have a close contact with a friend who got the COVID even though I tested negative, I still like self quarantined for two weeks just to make sure that it's not false negative, so I think I've done a lot. And so has my friend and my families, I think everyone that I know, they have been trying, like everything to flat the curve. And yeah.

IB 30:19

Have you, or anybody you know, gotten sick during the outbreak?

LY 30:25

Getting sick in the outbreak but but either have to like because cause of the COVID?

IB 30:35

Either from COVID or from something else, and how did they like respond to the sickness?

LY 30:44

So, as I told you before, like my- so my grandfather died because of a stroke. And, and it has been really hard to go to the hospital, and even like book the bed in nursing home during the COVID. Because everywhere is full in every well- everywhere, like, take a very strong protocol to just to prevent any other people from the outside to get in their area, so it's been really hard. I know there's a certain group of people who need to take pills, or those people who are pregnant need to get tested regularly to the hospital, but it absolutely get- they have absolutely met some challenges and difficulties in the past year when they need to- they need to make an appointment within those health care organizations. Yeah, including my friends. So- so I don't think they can do any response to that, other than just follow the protocols because, like, normal peoples there's not much space for, for them to change.

IB 32:36

In what ways do you think that COVID is affecting people's mental and physical health?

LY 32:47

I have not met anyone around me that get physical health, like, like physically hurt by the COVID. But- but I can share some of my experience of, like the mental health experience Since I have been isolated myself for months and without seeing friends and families. So it's not now, like now I get some chance to, like, make connections with the others. But there is a- especially like, last month, no last year's, March to May like in this two months, like everything has been so stressful to me, and I can apparently feel that I can't- like my mindset is not as clear as before. So I think it just taught me a lesson that people are social animals and sometimes if you have lose connections to the outside for too long, and if, if I join myself in those negative news on TV, and concerns about the things that I have no idea how to change, it does give me a very strong sense of helpless, and make people more emotional too. And I really encourage everyone can feel the- like the change- this change or significant mood swings for themselves go to find help from those professional people or organizations.

IB 34:41

And you mentioned that you were that you've been to the counseling services here, if you don't mind sharing. Do you think that that has helped you?

LY 34:52

Yes, absolutely. Because I- because I regularly check in with the same therapist, so, she has been, like really helpful and supportive, and she knows that what's going on in the past years. And I think all of the advices she provided me are very helpful, and sometimes the mental health problems can be complicated, and they cannot be changed by a single appointment. So, I do encourage people to normalize, like, the counseling or the other like mental health places and use the resources around us, and trying to normalize that and it's a quite normal things to do. Like it's not because you're mentally healthy- mentally ill, that then it goes with counseling, is because we're all people and we all meet some troubles and to reduce the, like, the potential negative effects on ourselves or on the others around us, it's a very responsible way to do- to find a help from the professional peoples, but is, it is totally okay, if you are mentally ill, like you can also like find help from the others and everything can get controlled if you are willing to take this step.

IB 36:46 Yeah, what have been your primary sources of news during the pandemic?

LY 36:54

It's been plenty. So, like *New York Times* and *Voice of America* like, and a lot of like medias in China. So, I have known that there's like political opinions in the magazines and the TV news. And some people, like, trying to accuse it because they know like, if you always listen to one side of the media that your opinions will get affected, but for me like, because I don't know much about like, the perfect chance [?] or like the background stories of each media, I would try to read those articles published by those, like facts leaded media, rather than the fact and opinion mixed or the opinion leaded media because looking through those statistics [?] and looking to those academic research will, like take me closer to a fact from my perspective. But those like so-called academic reports are not those, like the health care papers or those statistic papers because I'm not very professional [laughs] on those fields, like most of the reports that I read are from like social- are from like, either psychological or sociology. No offense to those two like, [laughs] major, but they are more easy for like normal people to understand.

IB 38:59

Have your news sources changed during the course of the pandemic?

LY 39:05

It get expanded [laughs] because I don't really listened- or listen to the news before. But now I track the numbers and the percentage every day. Just when there is a uncertainty, I just trying to help- trying to find somewhere to track when this uncertainty can- can gone. So, I yeah, so I can't read more newses in the papers than before.

IB 39:52

What do you think are important issues that the media may or may not be covering right now?

LY 40:04

So, I feel like- I feel like our media kind of changed the focus, the international news to the local news. Of course, they's still, like, reported about the news, but they are not the main resources to, like, raise people's attention anymore, like, the oil in the Mid-East- like, people are more, like people are more intended to care about those statistic around us, like how much- what percentage of the increase of the people get infected by COVID-19 or how soon the vaccination can be booked, and what the- what kind of side effects there are. Like COVID has take a large portion of the news or of the magazines. So, for those diplomacy and those geographic politics or international relationships, like- oh sorry, I take back about the international policies, but the first two are really, from my perspective, they are really faded away from people's attention.

IB 41:42

How have government leaders and officials in your community responded to the outbreak?

LY 41:51

So they have- of course they have, like, states that how much they want to improve the situation, and they will talk about the expectations for the future, like, we were likely to open our small business by the end of, like a number, but I don't want to, like, address their name [laughs] and policies, but it feels like it's really out of their control because, because the numbers is raising up, and that is no way, for example, to predict how to take the best politics measure. It has just been hard, and yeah.

IB 42:55

[Sound cut out] thoughts on how local, state, and federal leaders are responding to the crisis differently?

LY 43:04

I haven't heard a lot of arguments about, like- so I don't know if it's appropriate for me to say that, but people are, are arguing about the different policies that different parties takes to kind of regards of the COVID. Like, but for me, like, as a foreigner, that I don't think I should express my politics opinion on that.

IB 43:50

Ok. Has your experience in the pandemic transformed how you think about your family, friends, and community?

LY 44:02

I think as, as we have been through this together, I will more kind of cherish, like, our relationships, and it's- now I will more likely to spend time with them when I can. So, but I didn't change an opinions- like the good part for them because I have them always supportive and, yeah. But I don't have any, like, bad part opinions towards them before. We have kept very close relationship as always.

IB 44:48

Knowing what you know now, what do you think that individuals, communities, or governments need to keep in mind for the future?

LY 44:59

I know it's very hard, like, for us to predict how the future will look like, but- and it's very hard to, like, keep all those strict measures of, like, flat the curves because there's a lot of people, like, lose their job, and lot of small business are facing, like, closing in the past year, so it's hard to, like, putout the ways that we should do this because no one knows what is the best solution for our community, but, if I [sound cut out-____?] to state that I'd like to suggest our politics- policy makers to always address, like, the human right and the needs of the people at the first place. Like, when I say that I mean those rights that can be measured and, like, can be measured, like our employment rate, and our average salary, and health care insurance, especially related to COVID symptoms and things like that. Yeah, and I think it should be always- it should always be

the base of their policy decision, but that is a very- that is a very vague concept because when it's put into, like, reality, it's very hard to apply it.

IB 47:14

Is there anything else that hasn't been discussed that you think would be important to add?

LY 47:21

No, [laughs] [____?] I have- I think you have designed your questions that well, and everything is involved and.

IB 47:35

Well, thank you so much for agreeing to do thin oral history. I'm going to end the recording now.