

A Review on the Discriminations Against Chinese International Students in the US

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ABSTRACT

With the trend of globalization, an increasingly amount of Chinese students entered U.S. seeking a better and quality education. However, the Covid-19 pandemic since the year of 2019 has significantly and negatively impacted Chinese international students' study in the U.S., in addition to difficulties already in placed due to the cultural and societal differences. As the China-US diplomatic relationship intensified over the past two years due to the Covid-19 global pandemic, Chinese international students encountered tremendous international and external pressures and difficulties studying in and outside of the U.S. This study reviewed the studies and policies impacting Chinese international students experiences studying in the U.S. from the following aspects: (1) Sino-US relations, (2) U.S. policies of studying aboard, (3) external pressure: stereotype and prejudice, (4) internal pressure: culture shock and acculturation. This study will have implications for future studies that are interested in further investigating Chinese international students' experiences of studying in the U.S. during the pandemic.

Keywords: Chinese International Students, Discrimination, Stereotypes, Acculturation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Under the background of globalization, international education has become a universal trend. As a representative country of western culture, the United States attracts many Chinese students with its powerful technology and advanced culture. However, due to the continuous conflict and contradiction of Sino-US trade relations, as well as the outbreak of the global COVID-19 epidemic, the subsequent tightening of overseas study, visa suppression, and anti-China sentiment on social media, etc., have added new difficulties to the cross-cultural adaptation of international students, making Chinese students in the United States feel marginalized. Thus, this paper aimed to review studies and policies on Chinese international students' experiences in the U.S., specifically during the intense diplomatic time since the Covid-19 outbreak in 2019, in order to shed light on teachers and school administrators on further addressing diversity issues at schools amidst intensified Sino-US relations.

2. SINO-US RELATIONS

2.1. SINO-US TRADE DISPUTE

The Sino-US trade dispute refers to the negative impact on the trade balance between China and the United States, which has become a major issue affecting the two countries as well as the global economy. Xu Yongji, Deputy Director of the Department of International Cooperation and Exchange under the Ministry of Education, pointed out that the forms of educational exchanges and cooperation between the two countries have become increasingly complicated amid the current economic and trade frictions between the two countries [1].

Xu Yongji indicated that the US Congress and federal government departments politicized some normal Sino-US educational exchanges and cooperation activities, labelled them as "China threat" and "China infiltration", and stigmatized Confucius Institutes as tools for China to

expand its political influence and spread values in the US. The crackdown from the US has failed Sino-US educational exchanges and cooperation, seriously hurt Chinese students in the US and the Chinese people, and affected relations and friendship between the two countries. The stance of the US government also posed negative influences on American people's cognition and attitudes towards Chinese people. The prejudice and misunderstanding of the American people against China, therefore, come into being, which Chinese students in the US are the first to feel.

2.2. COVID-19

Sino-US relations had entered a downward trend before the outbreak of COVID-19. The aggravation of the epidemic was expected to promote Sino-US cooperation so as to support the international community to strengthen coordination and work together to fight against the spread of the virus. However, instead of delaying that downward trend, the COVID-19 pandemic "has caused a considerable shock to and accelerated the decline of bilateral relations" [2,3].

Discrimination against Chinese Americans as well as Chinese international students has continued since the beginning of the outbreak. In early 2020, when China was struggling with COVID-19, the United States took the lead in evacuating its citizens from Wuhan and later suspended major air routes to and from the Chinese mainland. Under such suspension, Chinese students in the United States found it hard to obtain a ticket returning home due to a variety of reasons (e.g., limitations in entering and leaving countries), only to "be stranded" in the US. In May 2020, the Chinese government planned to take Chinese students who were in need back to their homeland by charter planes, but the United States government rejected the flights from entering U.S. For those who were lucky enough via a third country connected plane, they were most likely to be detained and interrogated jointly by the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service and law enforcement officials of border customs, specifically those who with a science and engineering background. Moreover, many of their computers, electronic devices, and carry-on luggage were also under strict examinations.

The racial discrimination and xenophobic behaviour of US government officials are reflected in the intentional connection between Coronavirus and specific political, economic and cultural issues, promoting racial prejudice, trade protection and white supremacy. Donald Trump has slandered China by calling the Novel Coronavirus "Chinese virus" more than once in public. Many new media channels such as American Fox TV also falsely claimed novel Coronavirus originated in China. The racialism rhetoric of many American public figures greatly incited fear and xenophobia among some Americans against the Chinese.

Media coverage is extremely important during special times specifically during the time with global public health emergencies [4]. Global media coverage of infectious diseases not only shapes the global understanding of infectious diseases, but also shapes the cultural memory of diseases, becoming part of the cultural meme. Reports of epidemic diseases will eventually be linked to the image of the nation, forming a national metaphor. The media in Europe and the US on the pandemic also included inappropriate prejudice and regional discrimination against the Asian community and thus further confused the public, contributing to be the catalyst for the growing racial discrimination and xenophobia in Europe and the US [4].

The Asian community, especially the Chinese community, has been the biggest victim of racial discrimination and xenophobia in European and American countries, mainly manifesting as identity exclusion, verbal abuse and aggression with racial discrimination. For example, in Manhattan, an Asian woman was verbally abused and beaten gratuitously that her jaw was dislocated. According to the statistics, "In just one month from February 9 to March 7, 2020, media reports of xenophobic attacks against ethnic Chinese increased by 50 percent, and this is only the tip of the iceberg, as only the more egregious incidents are reported." [5] Thus, it is inferred that Chinese international students in the US were suffered greatly from exclusion and discrimination.

3. AMERICAN POLICIES OF STUDYING ABROAD

Chinese international students' encounter with discrimination related to educational inequality in the United States is often related to the study abroad policies of the United States. Zheng indicated that international study abroad education is unequal in terms of personnel flow, academic exchange and benefit harvest, especially in terms of international study abroad education policies of many powerful industrialized developed countries towards developing countries [6]. In addition, educational research that are widely circulated in the field is mainly conducted by scholars from industrialized countries as developing countries often do not have enough funding and the necessary infrastructure for research purposes. Thus, developing countries are "consumers" rather than "creators" of knowledge.

3.1. Tuition

The major changes in the American study abroad policies were to raise tuition fees for Chinese international students. According to Carly, US tops the 2019 *TIMES* List of the most expensive countries in the world to study abroad [7] (see Figure 1).

Top 10 most expensive countries to study
Tuition fees and living costs listed are annual

Rank	Country	Average tuition fee	Average living cost	Average total
1	USA	£33,691	£15,505	£49,195
2	Australia	£19,382	£13,178	£32,560
3	New Zealand	£17,324	£12,304	£29,627
4	Canada	£16,825	£8,765	£25,590
5	Hong Kong	£13,598	£5,854	£19,452
6	United Kingdom	£8,994	£9,311	£18,305
7	Singapore	£12,079	£5,892	£17,971
8	Israel	£2,697	£13,932	£16,629
9	Switzerland	£1,175	£15,095	£16,270
10	Japan	£5,725	£7,833	£13,557

Figure 1. Top 10 most expensive countries to study

Zheng concluded that the annual tuition in the United States for their domestic students is often less than \$2,000, while the annual tuition for Chinese international graduate students is around \$20,000 by comparing the statistical data of the US government in 1994-1995 academic year [6]. American colleges and universities were not only expensive in their early years, but they have remained so in recent years. According to a Business Insider Research in 2016 by Si Chen, tuition fees for international students at US public universities are three times higher than those for in-state students [8]. Although the tuition fees are quite different for domestic students and international, Chinese international students have access to the same learning resources as their American domestic peers. In addition, 46th President Joe Biden promised to reduce tuition for certain groups of students, provide \$10,000 in undergraduate and graduate debt relief to citizens and community service providers, and attract more Chinese international students to study in the United States [9]. This policy means that under the education subsidy and tuition reduction policies of American students, the huge demand for education funds will have to be obtained from international students. Thus, the tuition of Chinese students studying in the United States is likely to continue to increase in the future, instead of decreasing. Such unequal tuition fees required for domestic and Chinese international students are not only closely related to educational inequality overall, but also reflect the vast discrimination encountered by Chinese students studying in the United States.

3.2. Visas

Discrimination in the process of studying in the US also is also reflected in America limited the number of visas approved for Chinese students to enter US in the past two years. According to Qinjun, Chinese students were almost completely barred from entering the United States, as America consulates around the world largely suspended visa services during the pandemic[10]. According to data, a total of 808 new visas were issued to Chinese students from April to September 2020, compared to 90,410 visas approved in the previous year 2019 [10]. The huge gap of the approved visas between

the two figures showed that Chinese international students studying in the United States has been negatively and significantly affected by the political and economic environment and the study abroad policies of the United States.

According to Sina.com, the US has rejected more than 500 Chinese students, mainly students with a science and engineering major and background [11]. The US government determined to decouple from Chinese technology and thus imposed a stricter technology blockade on China. It is predicted that visa restrictions for Chinese international students will continue to expand in the future. Due to the change of study abroad policies caused by the intensified relations between countries, many Chinese international students with excellent academic trajectories and eager to get more high-quality education in the United States will be very likely to give up the opportunities to further education in the United States. This is the education inequality as well as the discrimination most Chinese international students are now subjected to.

3.3. COVID-19

In response to COVID-19 global pandemic, many American universities have made changes to their teaching policies, such as adopting a hybrid course structure that include both online and in-person courses. The US Immigration and Naturalization Service (USCIS) has also released new rules in response to their course requirements for international students. Jie concluded that the core idea of the rule is that if international students are still in the US and do not attend offline courses, they will be deported [12]. This regulation has left most Chinese students in the US confused, unable to smoothly return home, while at the same time worrying about being deprived of their legal status in the US. In addition, due to the visa restrictions on Chinese international students in the United States, students located in China were not able to return to the United States to attend offline courses to maintain their legal status. The unequal education policies reflect the discrimination Chinese students encountered in the United States.

4. EXTERNAL PRESSURE: STEREOTYPE AND PREJUDICE

The word stereotype was first proposed by Lippmann in 1922, which refers to a framework used to form the first impression of others[13]. According to Shen and Shi, prejudice is a negative attitude that arises from lack of understanding about a cultural group[14]. On the one hand, stereotype often comes from people’s positive image of their own groups and the negative image of other groups. On the other hand, stereotype also comes from the threat of other groups.

Numbering around 372,000, Chinese international students accounted for 35% of the international contingent in the US in the 2019-20 school year, which according to International Education Exchange (IEE) are nearly twice as many as the next biggest group – students from India. Zhang mentioned that Chinese students studying in the United States have been shaped and imagined as a complex face under the view of the American public specifically during the time of the global pandemic [15].

The prejudice and stereotypes of American society for Chinese students have not disappeared as the US-China relationship up and down in the past decades, but only continue to develop and hide in different forms of expressions. Due to the prejudice and the separation, the image of Chinese international students in the United States is considered to be constructed as a grafting between the Chinese and western characters [15]. In American, stereotypes of minorities often occur in mass and new media. For example, in TV commercials, Asians are often portrayed or implied as rigid, diligent, and wooden images [16]. With the superiority of the whites, they often have a prejudice against the “yellow.” Zhang mentioned that “Zhongguolao (Chinaman/Chin),” a term used to describe blue-collar working Chinese working in the United States, such as laundries, restaurant workers, and other Chinese who labored for a living. Such term contains a hint of humiliation, irony and even abhorrence [17].

What is more, Chinese domestic society also have some inherent stereotypes on international students. There is no denying that in the current public opinion, international students seem to have become synonymous with the “rich second generation” and the “rebellious and extravagancy” [16]. Chinese students who studied in the United States have also been regarded as “hedonists” in the American public view [15]. With all these prejudices and stereotypes, Chinese students who study in America tend to be self-abased and they often cannot find their own values, which impeded the deep integration of this group in the US.

5. INTERNAL PRESSURE: CULTURE SHOCK AND ACCULTURATION

A questionnaire of Chinese international students in five universities in the mid-western America conducted by Yang and Chen in 2016 demonstrated that the biggest challenges that Chinese international students often have language barriers and also barriers of cross-cultural adaptation [18]. According to He and Tang, culture shock is one of the common experiences shared by students from abroad, which means that a psychological feeling and experience of confusion, frustration and helplessness would appear when someone move from his own country to a new country to study, work and live in a brand-new lifestyle and cultural atmosphere [19]. Cultural distance

also plays a significant role in the acculturation process. Kogut and Singh in 1998 defined cultural distance as the extent to which shared norms and values differ between one country and the other [20]. They also proposed a cultural distance hypothesis that the greater the cultural distance of the sojourners from the host country, the harder its cross-cultural adaptation and vice versa. He and Tang also pointed out that international students from European countries have small cultural distance and culture shock and they have a greater identity with British culture due to their small geographical distance between their countries and Britain. European countries have more common nature in language, religion, culture, social system and level of economic development. While international students from Eastern countries, especially Chinese students experience a larger culture shock. Therefore, Chinese international students are likely to take longer time to adapt to the culture shock they encounter.

The sense of national superiority refers to the extreme confidence in one’s own nation and one’s own culture, which makes people evaluate the good, right and wrong of other cultures according to their own cultural value and belief [21]. Most of the Chinese students tend to regard Chinese culture as a standard of normal behavior. They have been used to evaluating everything based on Chinese culture, which has virtually become an obstacle to the cross-cultural understanding and communication. Scholars also indicated that this cultural potential will hinder cross-cultural communication, especially the stereotypical and negative cultural setting which may hinder the communication between Chinese students and the locals, making it difficult for them to integrate into the local social life, thus leading to cultural shock [14].

Acculturation refers to psychological changes resulting from the imitation of behavior in the new culture from non-native cultures [22]. Acculturative stress (AS), stemming from feelings of alienation and discrimination [23], contributing to international students’ hesitance and reluctance to socialize with locals [24]. During the years of studying abroad in different countries, Chinese international students accepted and adapted to the new culture gradually. Thus, the first problem they often had to address is “westernization” [15]. As a result, students gradually ignored their own culture while seeking identity in the new country. Chinese international students who stay in the United States are often portrayed as “abandoning Chinese culture and worshipping for western culture” [25].

Wang conducted a survey and interview in 2011 and found that the primary problem Chinese students who study in America encountered was language [26]. Evidence showed that 71% of them can only passively participate in the classroom discussions, about 36% of them were not familiar with the requirements of American classrooms and about 29% of them believed

that the different thinking way of China and America also negatively influenced their adaptation in the classrooms. According to Tang, students' interaction with faculty members also suffered due to their limited command of English and unfamiliarity with self-directed learning [27,28].

Language is the main medium of cross-cultural learning and is the basic element of studying and living abroad. Although Chinese international students need to have the corresponding language scores, such as TOEFL and IELTS when before being admitted to overseas institutions, it does not mean that these applicants can feel homelike in a country where a non-native language is spoken. The rapid speed of English speakers in the classroom contributes to Chinese students' listening comprehension issue and consequently made it difficult for them to respond to teachers and peers. Besides the issue of speed, students and teachers from different countries speak English in a variety of different ways. Zhang and Zhou reported that the students had difficulty in understanding the accents of multicultural faculty members[29].

According to Wang, in classroom activities, students from collectivist countries are often more willing to maintain a harmonious classroom atmosphere to avoid debated discussion and try not to let other students feel "lose face" or feel hurt [30]. They are often more willing to form groups with students of similar cultural backgrounds. While students from individualist countries are more willing to form groups according to classroom tasks and they do not usually care much about the cultural background differences in the same group. They are more likely to consider it is beneficial to learn with open debate. China is obviously one of particular collectivist countries and most of Chinese international students in America are likely tend to have lower school performance, especially in the class performance, thus further losing their confidence and increasing their pressure. As Chen and Brown suggested that Chinese international students may experience cultural, linguistic, and educational barriers when using university libraries, thereby disadvantaging their academic success [31]. The different models of teaching and culture of classroom teaching also contribute to Chinese international students' acculturative stress.

6. CONCLUSION

As the China-US diplomatic relationship intensified over the past two years due to the Covid-19 global pandemic, Chinese international students encountered tremendous international and external pressures and difficulties studying in and outside of the U.S. This study reviewed the studies and policies impacting Chinese international students experiences studying in the U.S. from the following aspects: (1) Sino-US relations, (2) U.S. policies of studying aboard, (3) external pressure:

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