

# How Asian International Students are Treated in America and Following Considerations

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## ABSTRACT

Asian international students suffer from intense discrimination as they go to the universities or stay in the United States. Many factors together incur this phenomenon. First, English proficiency occupies an important position since the students have experienced "text-based" language education and are unfamiliar with foreign cultures. Secondly, skin color plays a crucial role because local students are likely to judge a single person with sight blocking by smoking engendered by stereotypes of a group of people. Thirdly, racism is also indispensable since people often have a sense of exclusiveness. However, potential solutions can be applied and thus lead to positive changes on racial discrimination against Asian international students caused by the factors above.

**Keywords:** Asian international student, Discrimination, Discrimination elimination.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As our society develops, people's mind has been gradually changed. Their opinion on certain things changed. One of the most significant changes must be people's pursuit of equality. People have long been fighting for a equal world. They fight for disadvantaged groups who hardly have a chance to talk about their appeal to people worldwide. Asian international students are the group of people the paper aim to focus on. Many scholars have done much for them. For instance, some have done propaganda to raise a voice for all international students to show the inequality they are facing, which is trying to figure out how to solve the discrimination problem against international students; some have done research on how international students are treated around the world, which is trying to investigate on what is happening on international students, and the rests have tried to figure out why international students are under a condition like that, which is trying to find out why are these kinds of discrimination happening on international students. So, to take a comprehensive overview of Asian international students, this essay will look at the discrimination problem of Asian international students in all three aspects mentioned above: what is happening to Asian international students who have been

discriminated against in the US? Why are these kinds of discrimination happening to Asian international students? And what are potential solutions to racial discrimination against Asian international students?

## 2. TYPES OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ASIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE US

The number of Asian international students continues to climb at American universities. However, they had suffered intense discrimination because of their bad English proficiency, skin color, or race [1]. First and foremost, many East Asian students mention the English language barrier as a challenge. They find it difficult to keep up with professors, and they consider language difficulties to be the most significant challenge they face. Despite this, it is extremely difficult for Asian students to understand what domestic students are saying because their speaking speed is very fast, and they speak in a different manner. These East Asian students have been studying English since primary school or even kindergarten. However, they claim their previous English education was too "text-based." Despite having "good grammar in writing", some Asian students find it difficult to understand conversations with domestic students and

their "broken sentences or phrases." East-Asian international students use a "silent strategy" due to the language barrier. Rather than passively participating in class, they remain silent. As a result, they will not make mistakes and be embarrassed [2]. They may believe they are international, and they may mispronounce words. And they normally believe that people will judge them based on that. Asian international students are hesitant to speak in public without prior preparation. They prefer to stay silent to avoid making mistakes and being judged, as well as leaving a negative impression on other students and professors. And they are attempting to establish a reputation and gain recognition by delivering well-planned speeches.

However, this "silent strategy" has not helped Asian international students better adapt to their university life in the United States. But it contributed to forming a stereotype or even discrimination in Americans' minds that Chinese, Japanese or Koreans have poor class and group participation and are not willing to communicate with the local students [3]. Even though they have shown great English proficiency when giving the presentation and completing the paper. Thus, as time goes on, this stereotype will render the Americans to discriminate against Asian international students and even repelling them from joining the university.

Even though English proficiency is a great factor that makes Asian international students suffer discrimination, there are more critical causes. Racism has been talking for many years, and it is an essential reason why Asian international students suffer discrimination.

Asian international students have established stereotypes and assumptions based on their race. They reported having encountered stereotypical beliefs and statements about their intelligence, such as Asian should be smart, have good grades, excellent at mathematics and science and cannot play sports. Some Asian American students perceive statements as positive compliments. However, most of them felt both pressured and insulted to be judged based on stereotypes. When non-Asian domestic students engage in the above-mentioned abusive behavior, Asian American students will immediately recognize it and incurs negative emotions [4,5].

Despite this, skin color is a great factor that renders discrimination as while. The differences between regions and nationalities create the diversity of the world and make human society become colorful and full of vitality. Everyone is born with uniqueness, and individuals should not be treated differently based on their appearance, skin color, height and race [6]. This is the consensus that all people in the world should have, and it will not change as time pass. Not long ago, a black man named Floyd was knelt on his neck by a white policeman for more than 8 minutes, which eventually led to his death of this man. Discrimination and unfair treatment of black people have

always existed in European and American countries, so what is the situation faced by the Chinese? A recent incident can reflect this to some extent. According to an Australian woman, when she and her Chinese husband go out, they are often looked at by other white people with strange eyes, and even some men directly scream loudly, saying, "Let go of our women and go back to your hometown"! Listening to the tone of these words, it is "outrageous" for a Chinese-American man to hold a white woman's hand, which is unacceptable as if they are a white person who has been insulted in some way. Something like this involves "racial discrimination". It can be said that it is endless, especially common in Europe and the United States. The unfair treatment received by Chinese or Chinese in foreign countries may be comparable to that of black people or even worse. Therefore, from this point of view, it is not only those blacks with darker skin that should be sympathized with; the discrimination against us Chinese and even Asians may not be much different. But what makes it even more difficult to handle is that Asian international students have not suffered racism before. Take Chinese international students, for example. They come from a society where race is not a salient social category. They do not really have the experience in their home country. China is not an ethnological and racial society as the United States is. Many of them came here to attend college and probably had a conversation about race and racism for the first time. As a result, they have no strategies to cope with these situations, and they will somehow suffer a negative impact on their emotions and even mental.

Moreover, racism has been aggravated by matters such as pandemics and political and trade tension today. Domestic students in the United States do not treat Asian international students well; many Americans think that China produced the COVID-19 and the pandemic was incurred by the Chinese. And with the development of Asian countries such as China and Japan, the dominant status of the United States in both economic and political fields has been threatened. So domestic students with national pride will be hostile to Asian international students, and discrimination emerges.

### **3. REASONS FOR THE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ASIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

To begin with, English proficiency is mostly caused by the differences between natures as different countries have distinct cultures. Language is also an indispensable part of a country's culture. The components of culture are actually affecting each other. For instance, as a part of a culture, language can be affected by a region's lifestyle, some people's speaking habits, or a region's history. As with other parts of a culture, those factors affect the formation of language. So, it becomes necessary to learn

about a country's knowledge or culture before going deeper into its language. Getting to know more about a country's culture help with the understanding of a country's language. In another word, people may have difficulties understanding a native speaker's words if they do not have any backup knowledge about that country's speaking habits.

That is the problem many international students in Asia are facing now. During communication, Insufficient understanding of cultural knowledge in America has led to many troubles in Asian students' English proficiency and their communication with native speakers, which leads to international students' childlike oral speaking or difficulties when interpreting other's sentences. Thus, the unwillingness to communicate with such poor speaking skills seems to be understood when it appears among native speakers. Imagine a local student who would like to add some jokes in their talk with others, whereas an Asian student never gets what they mean every time they tell a joke. They will feel disappointed and will not be eager to chat with that Asian student the next time. It is quite easy for students like that to be seen as "boring" or "ineloquent". In some situations, the local students must cooperate with Asian students, while he/she keeps asking you "pardon?", "excuse me?", and "could you please repeat what you have said again?". Finally, the local students become fed up and decide not to be working with Asian students anymore. When the problem becomes even more severe, it finally steps into discrimination among the whole international student group with low English proficiency [3]. Some Asian students are discriminated against even before they talk to others.

But why do Asian international students know such a little about American culture? This is related to how Asian students learn English. Mostly, Asian students learn English by remembering new words, reading English books, and practicing listening. Those sources of learning English have a common disadvantage: they are too "formal". The sentences and ways of expression are highly academic, which leads to the result that Asian students lack knowledge of daily expression language. It is hardly seen words like "dude", "lol", "newbie", and "lame" in those situations. However, those are the words that American students may use in their daily chatting. It seems impossible, but that is what confused many Asian students. American students know about those words as they grow up because they have heard other people say those words in certain situations. Thus, they gradually learn the meaning of those words in an English-speaking environment. But Asian students do not have an opportunity to live in an environment like that, which directly leads to the difference between Asian students and American students' different English proficiency.

Besides the cause of discrimination on skin color, most of the discrimination on skin color, which is called colorism, is brought about by people's stereotypes due to some historical or intuitive factors. Colorism has long been a controversial topic in the field of human rights. It remains debatable for such long that it has become a sensitive issue in certain areas. Things became much more complex in places like America, which is called "the melting pot".

The most well-known and influential historical event that contributes to stereotypes about skin color should be a chattel system of slavery [4]. At that time, many black people were seen as slaves. Some of them were even not seen as normal humans. White businessmen used them as their products. They mostly had to work in heavy industry factories and farming fields. What was most miserable was that although their work was heavy and time-consuming, their salary was so low that they even had difficulties earning a normal life. Many people stereotype black people as poor and low compared to white. That kind of thought kept harming black people for centuries [7,8]. Some of them even became less confident due to the discrimination they have met, which further indulges the discrimination and thus forms a cycle going worse and worse.

But why is that related to discrimination that Asian international students face now? One explanation may be that many people take "Asian students" as a whole. Asian consists of a wide range of countries, the same as Asian students. Students of different races, colors, languages, and cultures come together to form the group "Asian students" in people's minds. This happens automatically because people unintentionally see Asian students as a whole. Remember, even when people are asking the question, "why are discriminations happening to Asian international students?", people are actually taking them as a single group of people. In this group, people do not have too much discrimination against normal white people but against black and yellow people. When people they do not have any ideas about and people they discriminate against appear in the same group, they tend to reflect the whole group with the people they discriminate against. They tend to spread their dislike of certain people within a group to all the people in that group. Their dislike outweighs fairness [9].

Last but not the least, discrimination among races, which is called racism, is a problem closely related to colorism. Colorism should be a part of racism or a factor that causes racism to be more severe. When talking about racism, it usually represents discrimination among the culture of one race. Because skin color is a part of one's culture, it may be included in racism. It is also reasonable to take colorism as a factor that leads to racism because sometimes people tend to use one's color to distinguish

their race. So, when discussing discrimination among Asian international students, this paper takes colorism and racism as a whole because it is quite difficult to distinguish between colorism and racism clearly.

To talk about why racism happens, reasons besides what is causing colorism to avoid repetition need to be considered. In general, the cause of racism should be a sense of exclusiveness, which means people tend to expel those who are not in the same group as them. There is a theory in psychology called Social Identity Theory (SIT) about a sense of belonging [4]. It says that people feel a sense of belonging within their group. When other groups are present, they may compare their group with others. Thus, the sense of exclusiveness forms. There was a study proving that people, even children, develop a sense of exclusiveness when living in an environment that compares groups. The study by Sherif et al. tests how children in different groups would perform in a competitive environment. Those children are divided into two groups based on their physical properties. They develop their own culture within their group and try to find sources for building up their team. During their competition, their conflicts became more and more severe, leading to the formation of strong exclusiveness, which perfectly explains how exclusiveness appears between different race groups [10].

#### **4. POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS FOR ELIMINATING DISCRIMINATION**

Potential solutions can be seen to be in an interculturalism approach, which may effectively solve the problem of discrimination as a whole. It was described as involving "the recognition of common human needs across cultures and dissonance and critical dialogue within cultures" in Martha Nussbau's "Cultivating Humanity", indicating its support for cross-cultural dialogue and challenge for tendencies of self-segregation within one culture [11]. This concept emerged as a response to multiculturalism, whose policies failed to create an inclusive society for the coexistence of different cultures.

The means of discrimination can be attributed to two types of causes. The first is a cultural shock that international students receive to make them more vulnerable to discrimination; the second cause is subjective racial discrimination from residents of the host country, which is, in this case, the United States [12,13].

Racial discrimination toward Asian international students is unlikely to be eradicated without being put into a bigger social and cultural context. The stereotypes of ethnic minorities were formed largely due to the construction of a racial narrative that often portrays specific groups with prejudice to establish cultural or racial superiority and help with the formation of racial

stereotypes that intensify the conflict between different ethnic groups. The racial narrative of the United States was previously controlled by predominately the Caucasian population of the country; however, this can change in the future. Recent population growth in the United States all came from people of color. A greater population including Asian people potentially means they could have a bigger voice and influence on the American society in the future, which can reduce the extent of social disparity regarding the problem of ethnicity since they can potentially have more control over the narrative of their own group, leading to less content of prejudice and prevents the reinforcement of racial stereotypes in the narration. This way, future generations of the United States will be less subjugated to the topic of racial discrimination and stereotypes since the disparity is reduced. There would also be less tension for Asian international students with less domestic racial tension. This means that Asian international students will also be less of a subject for racial stereotypes since the difference between individuals could appreciate more by then.

Content about racial diversity and equality can be incorporated into the early stages of education where children, regardless of their ethnic identity, should be taught values of equality that "they look at others as equal to them," according to Rita Izsák-Ndiaye, an expert member of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Though quality and opportunity for education are not distributed evenly across the United States due to the taxing system, despite trying to eliminate the racial stereotype, it still reflects the reality that certain ethnic groups usually belong to a certain social class in the hierarchy.

Social inequality of races results from a history of the United States and is deep-rooted in American society, meaning there is unlikely to be an immediate resolution to the problem. However, an effort aiming to increase the mobility between social classes and reduce the wealth gap between ethnic groups can be effective in eliminating long-term discrimination and racial stereotype, such as a government expenditure plan that emphasizes improving the nationwide quality of education, especially in the less developed, privileged regions through providing education of high quality to people of color who previously did not have the opportunity to improve their status within the society. However, it may spur social tension between different groups since the money collected through federal taxation and spending it on education for poorer regions does not benefit all taxpayers equally.

When putting racial discrimination in a microscopic scope, as mentioned above, English proficiency appears to be a major barrier for international students, especially Asian, in adapting to the culture of the United States as it stops them from having effective communication with

people in the host country and therefore stimulate racial tension. This can be solved by either proposing educational reform in Asian countries since their English education does not focus as much on aspects of speaking and listening and need improvement in this area. However, this situation is usually caused by lacking educational resources for speaking and listening, meaning the cost of doing so may be massive and potentially unrealistic to implement. Unless innovation in language education can improve the quality of speaking and listen effectively, the burden on government finance is not favorable.

Institutions can also raise the language requirement for entry for listening and speaking in examinations results accepted or provide extra support for international students to improve their English proficiency. Such projects have always existed, usually commonly referred to as English as Second Language. However, it mainly focused on academic English, which is important for students, rather than English that is more commonly used in daily life and an essential part of an international student's life. In doing so, international students will be able to adapt more comfortably to the foreign environment and carry out the cultural exchange, which can gradually break the boundary between people of different cultural backgrounds and stereotypes commonly related to international students and their home countries.

Moreover, international students who, due to cultural reasons, adapted to the "silent strategy" can be encouraged to speak out and fend for themselves, especially when they often the disadvantaged side conflicts of most sorts since they come from abroad, therefore, do not have the same level of resources and familiarity of the environment as local parties. This type of support can be offered by institutions that the students attend. However, because many international students were not very initiative and did not seek help themselves, some of that resources may not be used effectively. The institutions, in this case, can take on more responsibility in creating a comfortable environment for international students to talk about this subject, also initiate and invite international students to events and offer them support. The content of support can include extra language training and acknowledging the students about the social and historical context of the host country to reduce cultural shock.

There are means by which discrimination toward Asian international students can be alleviated, which fixes minor problems such as language barrier though sometimes at a great cost, it would give the students a better experience when studying abroad. However, until the bigger problem of racism and tension between the different ethnic groups is resolved, discrimination will remain influential for international students and society as a whole.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in the United States, Asian international students suffer from discrimination of different severity ranging from being expected to have certain same traits as others from similar backgrounds, verbal bullying, and even violent acts. Such phenomenon can be seen to be caused by poor English proficiency, which led to ineffective communication between Asian international students and their surrounding environment; deep-rooted stereotypes which led to people from the host country believing that individuals from the same cultural background share many of the same traits; the sense of cultural superiority from local people has led to the exclusion of Asian international students. Depending on the extent of severity, acts of discrimination can be both intentionally and unintentionally. It could potentially be solved through help offered to international students, especially Asian students, to enhance their language skills and encourage them to have their own voice in society; by taking back the narrative, the false stereotypes could be reduced. Content regarding the importance of ethnic diversity can be included in the early stages of the educational curriculum so that the future generation will understand and appreciate the importance of equality and would not have sense of superiority over other ethnic groups such as Asian people, though this is most likely to have long term impact in alleviating and resolving social tension from racial discrimination.

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