



Racialized Challenges to the Social and Academic Integration of Asian International Students in the United States: The Impact of Identity Confusion and COVID-19

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Abstract. This article evaluated and summarized the key problems faced by Asian international students in the United States, with a particular focus on three major areas: adopting US culture, mental health issues and pressures associated with academic and career pursuits, and racial discrimination. Through literature analysis, this article also investigates the causes of the problems encountered by Asian international students in the United States, including factors such as increased competitiveness and prejudice towards psychological health concerns during the COVID-19 period. The article finally provides suggestions that aim to support international students in their studies in the US, highlighting the importance of cultural orientation programs, introducing effective resources on campus, and providing access to mental health services. The article also advises Asian foreign learners to get connected with American life before leaving their home nation. By addressing these issues, international students would thrive and succeed academically while also establishing a more open and caring educational environment.

Keywords: Asian International Student, Mental Health, Discrimination, COVID-19, Academic Success

1 Introduction

Universities in the United States are globally recognized as having the highest quality and standard of education. The largest number of overseas students in the United States during the school years 2021 and 2022 were Chinese and Indian, with 290,086 and 199,182 students, respectively. They paid among the highest tuition in the country, with a mean of \$24,914 ^[1]. Many Asian students would opt to study in America mainly because of the prominence and reputation of American universities. Renowned schools in the US, such as the Ivy League colleges, were popular choices for both local and foreign students seeking quality education. Having a higher educational degree allows international students to reach out to career resources and research opportunities, and they could make the choice to work in the United States or go back to their home countries.

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Commonly, Asian international students were enrolled in engineering, math, and computer science programs.

Many people may have the impression that the life of international students is glamorous, filled with enjoying good food, studying in the sun on the grass, and taking scenic photos while traveling around during holidays. However, the reality for Asian international students is often quite different. Behind the seemingly ideal lifestyle portrayed on social media, there are countless sleepless nights and moments of collapse due to academic and social pressures. For Asian international students, there are many obstacles to overcome, including unintelligible classes, a vast number of projects and deadlines, and trivial and annoying situations in life. These challenges can be overwhelming, especially for those who have never encountered such difficulties before. Despite these obstacles, many Asian students continue to strive for academic and social success in pursuit of their goals.

This article will use the literature analysis method to explore the racialized challenges faced by Asian international students in the United States, focusing on the impact of identity confusion and the COVID-19 pandemic on their social and academic integration. The article will be structured in three parts: first, an analysis of the problems faced by international students; second, an examination of the root causes of these problems; and third, specific solutions to address these challenges. The significance of this study lies in its potential to provide Asian students' parents with a more rational understanding of the challenges their children may face when studying abroad and to assist students in better adapting to the education and life in the United States. Additionally, the study emphasizes the importance of providing academic, medical, and cultural resources needed by international students in American schools. By raising awareness of these issues, this research hopes to promote a more supportive and inclusive environment for Asian international students in the United States.

2 Problems

2.1 Adopting the United States Culture

The United States and Asian countries have distinct cultural differences that can influence how individuals interact with one another, approach social situations, and view the world. Asian students studying in America easily have a hard time acclimating to and embedding a new culture and environment due to certain important cultural differences, such as interpersonal communication, social conventions, and beliefs toward authority. In general, Asian American students have noticed that Asian students encounter obstacles when attempting to become members of fraternities or sororities or participate in social gatherings^[2]. These biased unfavorable impressions formed in U.S. racist culture toward Asian American students are similarly correlated with bad perceptions of Asian abroad students. Moreover, Asian international students in the United States face unique challenges that make acculturation even more challenging since political differences also contribute to culture shock. According to Rivas, students from collectivistic cultural backgrounds have difficulty connecting with American peers due to the emphasis on assertiveness and self-reliance in American culture^[3]. While the government

has significant influence over citizens' lives in many Asian countries, personal liberties and rights are highly respected in the United States. Further, compared to Asian nations, strong thoughts and feelings can be found on all sides of the political spectrum in American politics. Asian international students could be unfamiliar with the American political system and empowerment, resulting in confusion, worry, and a sense of alienation.

2.2 Mental Health Issues Brought by Academic Performance and Career Pursuit

Using quantitative studies, it was revealed that international students would have more reported discrimination and homesickness than students from the United States [4]. As shown in the study, Asian international students face significant mental health challenges as they navigate the demands of university and career pursuits in the United States. For instance, they may feel anxious about classroom participation and speaking, despite having passed English language tests before coming to America [4]. Asian international students' worries about participating in class and communicating in English are a big barrier that can influence their academic performance and mental health. This anxiety is frequently founded in a fear of making mistakes or being evaluated by peers or professors, and it can be especially strong for students who have passed English language examinations prior to arriving in the United States. One cause for worry may be the disparities in teaching styles and expectations between the American and Asian school systems. Education in many Asian nations is more traditional and focuses on rote memorization, whereas education in the United States stresses critical thinking, creativity, and classroom engagement. Due to the intense competition in the market, finding internships may be stressful and difficult, and some students may not have the required social security number, work experience, or network to get employment [2]. In a competitive labor market with fewer access points to resources and identity limitations (no social security number), studying abroad for Asian international students will be more stressful because they not only find it difficult to gain work experience in the United States, but it also fosters uncertainty and insecurity about their future in the United States. Students may be forced to rely on personal resources or financial help from family members if they are unable to lawfully work or intern.

2.3 Asian International Students Experience Discrimination Based on Their Colors and COVID-19's Report

Asian overseas students face race prejudice as well, which can have a negative influence on their mental health and well-being. According to the survey conducted on Asian American students, they expressed a sense of discomfort and fear regarding being mistaken for international students, and it's not uncommon for them to face harassment due to their physical features or way of speaking [2]. The presence of negative racial biases creates cultural and physical barriers that persist and contribute to the segregation of children based on their race. For students who are already struggling with issues connected to their cultural adjustment and mental health, the existence of these barriers might be damaging to their social and emotional well-being. Regardless of the

discrimination composite, children with poor social support are more likely to suffer higher depressed symptoms than those with strong social support (see Figure.1). Additionally, post-COVID prejudice against Asians has been increasingly prominent. Based on the reported statistics, 29% of the participants encountered more discrimination after COVID-19, while 41% experienced heightened symptoms of anxiety, 53% experienced a rise in depression, 15% experienced more physical issues, and 43% experienced an increase in sleep difficulties [5].

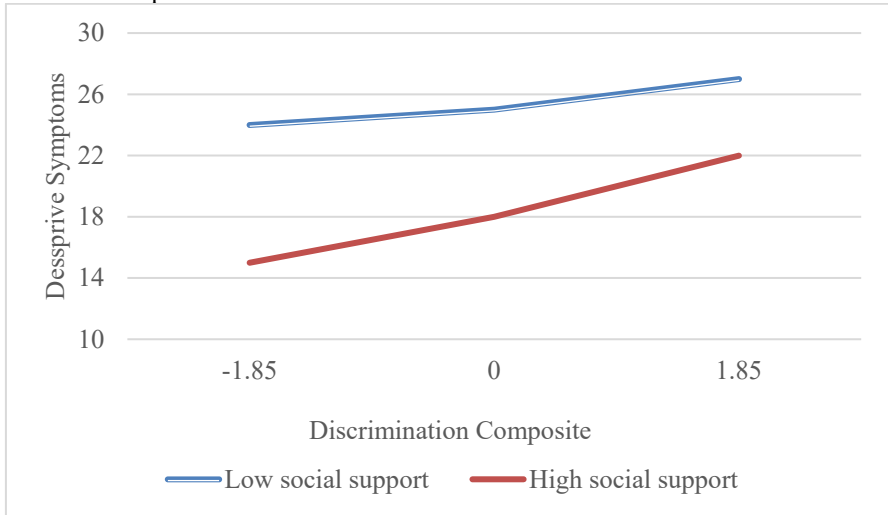


Fig. 1. The association between composite of experiences of discrimination and depressive symptoms moderated by the degree of social support.

3 Reasoning Analysis

3.1 Academic and Work Competency Raised by International Asian Students

United States' citizens treat Asian international students with the biggest hostility since they consider Asian international students as having the potential risk of taking their positions in employment and places in graduate school, leading to an increase in competency. The problem of Asian international students facing competition and hostility in the United States is not new. People in the United States frequently see these students as possible threats to their jobs and spots in graduate institutions. This hatred derives from the misconception that Asian international students are particularly capable of achieving in scientific subjects. Asian engineering PhD students' enrolment has consistently increased from 13.2% in 2009 to 13.9% in 2018 [6]. This indicates that Asian overseas students are eager to pursue master's degrees in STEM subjects.

However, despite their skills and successes, Asian international students frequently encounter job prejudice. In accordance with Pew Research Center research, blacks and Latinos working in STEM fields earn less than whites and Asians [6]. To be more specific, the data shows that there may be a prejudice against minorities in the STEM

profession, including Asian international students. The hierarchy related to race and ethnicity also applies to the system. Despite these obstacles, the majority of Asian foreign students want to stay in the United States and become citizens, generally by entering and majoring in STEM programs. The desire to remain in the United States indicates that they see the United States as possessing a higher hierarchy of power than their home countries, where they may have limited opportunities for social and economic advancement. Such desire, though, underscores the power imbalance between the United States and these students' home nations, as the United States is perceived as a more preferred destination for education and employment prospects. It demonstrates their determination to make significant contributions to the American economy and society.

3.2 The Real-life Classroom Is Different Than the Usual Educational System in China

Passive and Active Learning. Passive and active learning styles have been a topic of discussion in the context of educational differences, particularly in the context of international students. Chinese students exhibit specific learning approaches, wherein two types have emerged as significant factors in this area: active participation in class and analytical thinking. These students prioritize active class engagement, such as asking questions and participating in debates, but may struggle with critical thinking related to educational and cultural differences. In general, Asian students born into collectivist communities, on the other hand, tend to have more passive learning habits. They are frequently obedient, silent in class, and respectful to their professors. These students usually avoid expressing their opinions or asking questions unless their professors directly ask them to^[7]. This can result in less participation in class discussions and less interest in the material being taught. As mentioned, cultural values that emphasize obedience and respect for authority figures may discourage students from questioning or challenging their professors or peers, which can hinder the development of critical thinking skills.

Language Barriers. Language barriers can be particularly difficult for international students who are not native English speakers. Students who believe themselves to have inferior language competency and abilities have more academic challenges and higher levels of stress^[8]. Asian international students are afraid of being ridiculed for their accents, afraid of getting disdainful looks from their classmates when using translation software, and afraid of being in the first few pages of a book when others finish required reading early to attend an event. They are not able to accept the difference psychologically, but the truth is that there are many English Language Learners, and not everyone born in the United States has good literacy skills.

Nevertheless, even people with relatively good TOEFL and GPA scores may find difficulties in areas that require a deeper awareness of cultural, economic, and political allusions. In a study, international students struggled with these novel notions, especially in the humanities and social science areas^[9]. This is also because the lists of

words that are required to be memorized when preparing for these standard tests (TOEFL and SAT) do not appear very often in university textbooks because they are specific words that will only appear in courses related to biology and chemistry, for example. For many students studying psychology and sociology, there are a lot of names and theories that take time to understand and assimilate. While mathematics may employ a more common language, the increasing complexity at higher levels might be challenging for those with lower academic aptitude. These findings demonstrate that language limitations might cause foreign students' academic experiences to be enhanced or varied, emphasizing the significance of providing assistance and resources to help them overcome these challenges.

Stigma of Face Mental Health Problems. Many Asian international students endure the stigma of seeking treatment for mental health difficulties. The stigma associated with mental illness is a widespread problem that can have serious repercussions for those who suffer from mental health disorders. By way of illustration, the widespread belief that folks with mental illness are dangerous or unstable might result in prejudice and hostility against those people. Another kind of stigma is exclusion or discrimination based on one's mental health status, which can happen when someone is refused a job or housing due to a history of mental illness. Those who have mental health issues may also feel ashamed or embarrassed, which makes them reluctant to ask for treatment or share their experiences. As Maeshima speculate, Asian Americans may be more likely to have assimilated American values, allowing for a more open attitude toward obtaining mental health care as opposed to Asian international students, who may encounter greater cultural obstacles in responding to their mental health ^[10]. What's more, compared to their European American counterparts, Asian international students may be more hesitant to seek help and report more discomfort with therapy as well as being less receptive to counseling ^[10]. These cultural barriers emphasize the importance of culturally sensitive and adequate mental health interventions that address the specific requirements of Asian international students.

3.3 The Impact of Political Influences and Discrimination During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Political Influences on Social Media. The use of social media as a political platform can have serious ramifications for the experiences of Asian and Asian American communities. Studies have shown that the political rhetoric used by influential figures can lead to an increase in racial slurs and discriminatory language directed towards these groups. In a study in 2020, it was found that the use of racial slurs targeting Asians and Asian Americans, such as "chink," significantly increased after former president Donald Trump referred to COVID-19 as "the Chinese virus" ^[11]. This kind of language fuels discrimination and prejudice towards Asian communities, and social media can amplify these negative attitudes by allowing them to spread quickly and reach a wider audience. At the same time, Asian international students are frequently viewed as scapegoats for the general society's anger, carriers of illness, cash cows, and political pawns ^[12].

Multiple news articles have also demonstrated the hostility toward Asian communities by reporting on racist crimes and indiscriminate violent attacks on Asians in the United States, having a profound impact on the mental health and social experiences of Asian and Asian American individuals. As a result, Asian students reduced their social activities and avoided speaking with those who were not of Asian heritage [5]. Asian Americans or international students may feel uncomfortable participating in events with those outside of their own community, increasing their sense of isolation and exclusion.

Comparing Discrimination with Other Ethnicity Groups. Figure 2 indicates that compared to whites, Asian Americans and Asian immigrants reported a greater incidence of mental disorders caused by discrimination related to COVID-19. This outcome indicates that they may be more vulnerable during the pandemic due to the associated humiliation, aggression, and prejudice.

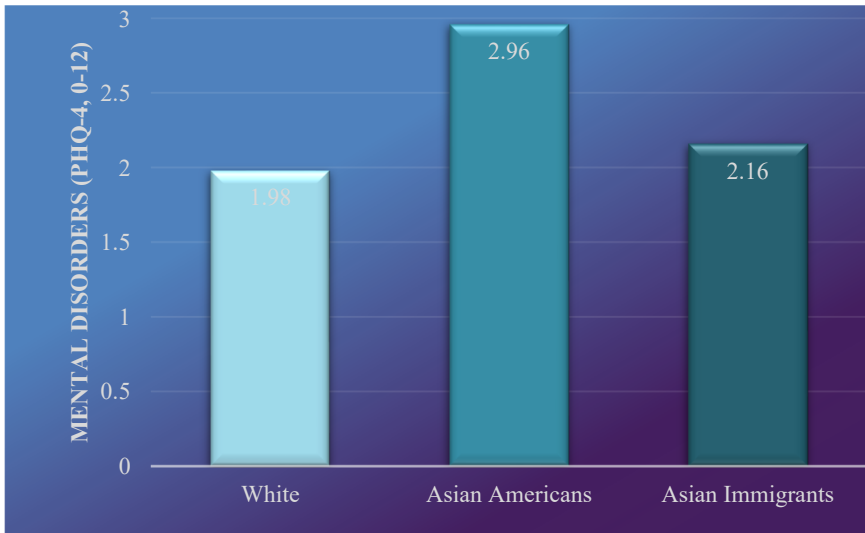


Fig. 2. Examining the discrimination in contrast between whites, Asian Americans, and Asian immigrants

The investigation of the relationship between COVID-19-related prejudice and Asian Americans' psychological well-being. According to the study, those who encountered racial discrimination because of COVID-19 had greater levels of anxiety and depression symptoms, which is consistent with earlier research on everyday discrimination [13]. Based on the results, pandemic-related prejudice may have detrimental mental health effects for individuals who encounter it. Surprisingly, the research revealed a finding that observing bias against people who belong to the same racial or ethnic group was connected to poorer mental health outcomes among young individuals. Attributing this to youth's growth stage and continuing social-cognitive and identity processes, adolescents are more likely to be sensitive toward any negative words and behaviors,

which can be impacted by their experiences and observations of bias against their racial or ethnic group.

4 Suggestions

4.1 Campus Resources in Higher Education

Conducting cultural orientation workshops is an effective approach to assisting international students in adjusting to a new environment and preventing culture shock. These programs can introduce students to the local culture, customs, and values of the host country. By learning about cultural norms and expectations, international students can better understand how to connect with their peers, professors, and other members of the community. This can also help them feel more comfortable and confident in their new surroundings. Cultural orientation programs can cover topics such as social norms, housing, transportation, and campus resources. These may also include chances for students to engage with local students or cultural groups, facilitating cross-cultural exchange, and assisting students in developing social networks. For example, each university has its own international student center that can accommodate students' requirements, whether they are relevant to living or academics. Universities also have student organizations for other nations. The student union will arrange events on home country legal holidays to alleviate homesickness as well as provide students studying abroad with a strong sense of belonging. Finally, these programs can play a significant role in improving academic performance and general well-being among international students.

Access to office hours and teaching assistants may be incredibly advantageous to Asian international students since it allows them to get specialized attention and support outside of the classroom. Because many Asian students are hesitant to ask questions and bring their thoughts into deep conversation in class, one-on-one conversations with professors and teaching assistants offer a secure environment for those seeking assistance. To make the most of these resources, students should come prepared with specific questions and concerns about the course material, as well as an ability to think critically and a readiness to actively participate in the discussion. Some benefits of using office hours and teacher assistants include clarifying ambiguous ideas, receiving feedback on projects or tests, gaining extra resources or recommendations for further study, and developing a stronger relationship with the instructor.

4.2 Accessibility of Clinical Help from Healthcare Centers

International students, particularly Asian Americans, are frequently subjected to racial trauma and discrimination. Access to clinical support from healthcare facilities is critical for addressing these concerns. But still, cultural awareness is also required when applying Asian American mental health interventions. One plausible method is through mindfulness and compassion meditation, which improve self-compassion and are techniques for addressing race-based trauma. This is a culturally appropriate technique for trauma healing. Counselors have to recognize Asian Americans' cultural backgrounds and equip them with strategies to cope with the psychological distress generated by

racism. Intergroup contact, cultural competence trainings, and anti-racism campaigns can also help combat prejudice against Asian Americans. These efforts are required to address the existing racial prejudice and prevent lower health outcomes among Asians and Asian Americans [5]. It is feasible to enhance Asian Americans' general mental health and well-being by dealing with the fundamental causes of inequality. Screening methods can also help identify adolescents who have psychological issues and facilitate directing them to mental healthcare services. Wu recommend employing culturally competent techniques when using these tools to evaluate and normalize Asian Americans' mental health treatment-seeking attitudes [14]. These techniques can help decrease the stigma associated with mental health concerns, making it easier for Asian international students to seek treatment when they need it.

4.3 Familiarize Themselves with the United States in Advance of Their Study Abroad

The capacity to communicate effectively in a second language may have a substantial impact on international students' psychological well-being. Students' judgments of their English competence were linked to positive psychological well-being results [8]. Therefore, it is critical to assist international students along their language learning journey in order to improve their mental health. One way of assisting students in this area is to encourage them to become acquainted with the language through daily conversation and to expect the real-life situations that happen in the United States before they arrive. Several months before the start of the academic year, summer camps and summer schools can provide possibilities for language immersion and cultural development. This early exposure can help students adjust to their new surroundings more readily and reduce the stress of utilizing a second language and noticing cultural differences. Asian students may get a head start on their homework by enrolling in summer classes, and they will be better prepared to manage the workload once the regular academic year begins. Summer school can also enable the students to narrow down their academic interests and explore their intended career pathways.

5 Conclusion

The experience of Asian international students in the United States is fraught with numerous difficulties, which have been well documented in existing literature. The major difficulties experienced by them in the United States were examined and condensed into three categories: assimilating to American culture, coping with academic and professional pressures, and facing racial discrimination. Additionally, this paper delved into the underlying factors behind these challenges. Asian international students are frequently seen as possible threats to job and graduate school spots, increasing competitiveness. Language barriers, variances in learning styles, and the prejudice linked to psychological health concerns would also make their school experience harder. Furthermore, political influences on social media have boosted racial insults directed towards Asians and Asian Americans, resulting in growing discrimination and social

avoidance. Asians may be especially vulnerable during the pandemic while experiencing COVID-19-related racial prejudice, which is connected with increased levels of anxiety and depression symptoms.

Among the suggested solutions are several approaches to assist international learners in their transition to studying in the United States. Cultural orientation programs at universities may acquaint international students with local culture, practices, and values. It is critical for guaranteeing the helpful utilization of office hours and teaching assistants. Students ought to receive instruction on how to get clinical support from healthcare institutions utilizing culturally sensitive practices such as mindfulness and compassion meditation, interpersonal engagement, and cultural competence training. Positive psychological well-being outcomes were shown to be related to students' ratings of their English skills. Finally, Asian international students are urged to spend time becoming accustomed to American life before leaving their homeland by attending summer camps or summer schools several months before the start of school.

One limitation of this paper is that it focuses primarily on the experiences of Asian or Chinese international students and may not be adaptable to other international student populations. Likewise, the literature reviewed in this paper may not capture the full range of experiences and perspectives of Asian international students, as it may be subject to bias and may not reflect the encounters of all Asian international students in the US. Meanwhile, the recommendations in this article call for more investigation into specific strategies and interventions that might effectively assist the social, cultural, and academic integration of Asian international learners in American colleges. Finally, future research can build on the findings of this paper by incorporating the perspectives and experiences of international student populations from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Future research can employ mixed methods approaches, and look into the long-term effects of Asian foreign students' issues on their mental health, academic success, and career outcomes, as well as discover efficient approaches to resolving these challenges.

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