

Asians and Asian Americans in the US Higher Education System: A Minority to Be Noticed

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Abstract: Under social movements calling to stop Asian Hate, inequality in higher education admissions became a key focus, especially race-based admissions. Asians, as one of the main minorities in America, have an impact that can't be ignored. The research investigates the cause of inequality and how different social groups benefit or lose from current admissions policies. The issue directly challenges America's value of equity and is one of the greatest issues it ever faces. Research methods mainly include analysis of data from college official admissions office websites and government, along with a literature review of past authority scholars' research and conclusions. It could be seen that current policies and Asians themselves should both make changes in order to improve the situation including breaking stereotypes and race-based admissions.

Keywords: education policy, higher education, social justice, Asians, Affirmative Action

1. Introduction

Asians and Asian Americans, long defined as a “model minority”, whose fragility in American society, including in the higher education system has frequently been ignored. It wasn't until the COVID outbreak that many Asians started protesting and rose the public's attention. Inequality in the admissions process for Asians and Asian Americans has affected many Asian family's life and challenged equal access to get a good education, which is a core value in America. Protests and research had begun in 1925 but were back then aimed at the Jews. In the 1980s the supreme court pointed out that colleges are once again discriminating against Asian Americans in the admissions process by using stereotypes. Since 2013 Asians have been frequently taking top colleges to court, but little progress has been made. It wasn't until the supreme court decided to debate Affirmative Action that this issue came to the public's attention once again.

This paper aims to discuss the inequalities and discrimination Asians and Asian Americans face in the US higher education system, the stereotypes of the Asian ethnicity and how the stereotypes affect their daily life and education, how Asian families and Asian culture are also partly responsible for the issue, how Asians have shaped the American society, their contributions, why we should take their interests into notice, and possible solutions to improve the situation, such as abolishing race-based admissions, using social class to defend diversity and using media to break Asian stereotypes through statistics from colleges' official websites, past scholar's investigations and other social surveys conducted by authority Non-profit Organizations (NPOs). Investigating the issue doesn't just benefit the Asian ethnicity, but also a big step forward for American democracy and equality, as well

as preventing future discrimination towards any social group by any means. Solving the issue would prove the pervasiveness of democracy and equality in America, as well as defending the Declaration of Independence “we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal” [1].

2. The Minority-Asian Ethnicity

2.1. Stereotypes of Asians and Asian Americans

Why is the Asian ethnicity defined as a model minority? What are the stereotypes they’re facing? A model minority could be understood as a minority that achieved success through hard work and reached a good social status, generally a social class of middle class or higher. Some specific stereotypes of Asians and Asian Americans are good at some subjects such as science, technology, engineering and math. They are considered to be uniform, obedient and hardworking, only hanging out with people of the ethnicity, and playing a classic instrument, often the piano or the violin [1].

The stereotype is deep inside some people’s minds and cannot be easily changed, resuming to be a dead weight on Asian and Asian American students.

2.2. The Influence Brought by Stereotypes

It has been long noticed that Asians and Asian Americans, though having very good grades and standardized test scores, often do not receive good application results when applying to top universities. Not only that, when facing competitors of other races, Asians and Asian Americans need to score much higher to have the same competitiveness. According to Asian American Coalition for Education (AACE) Asian Americans and Asians, have the lowest acceptance rate for each SAT test score bracket, having to score on average approximately 140 points higher than a White student, 270 points higher than a Hispanic student and 450 points higher than a Black student on SAT [2]. Out of a full scale of 1600, the disadvantage is dramatic. What happened after that is Asians and Asian Americans began studying even harder to get higher scores in order to be competitive in the admissions process, as most of them don’t consider this a problem of the education system. This caused the peer pressure among Asian kids to get even stronger. They began attending tutor classes, which creates a huge financial burden, disadvantaging middle and lower-class family students. A common claim denying discrimination towards Asians says “Asians only make up less than 6% of the population, yet they are >20% of the student population at top universities” [2].

The logical fallacy in this claim is that the admissions process shouldn’t be regarded by the overall population, as not everyone completes high school and applies to top universities. The proportion should be viewed from the applicant’s pool. Asian Americans have the highest rate of completing high school and have the greatest proportion in the applicant pool [3]. In fact, according to UC data for the top 50 schools (Berkeley, LA, San Diego, Irvine, Davis), Asian Americans make up 35–40% of the applicant pool compared to 20-25% for White Americans [4]. Obviously, the enrollment proportion of Asians doesn’t match its percentage in the applicant pool.

Taking California as an example, the social status of Asians and Asian Americans in America could be further seen. After the outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic, Asian American and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders (NHPI) enrollment at California Community Colleges declined by 20%. This showed a very strong plummet in the enrollment of Asian Americans in the admissions process. Anti-Asian hate’s influence didn’t just happen in the community college enrollment process. COVID-19 also created a heavy burden for Asian Americans and NHPI in the labor market, with unemployment rates rising far faster than those for white Californians, from three percent to 15% for Asian Americans. Asian and NHPI workers are more likely to face long-term unemployment. “Anti-Asian hate crimes, including those committed on college and university campuses, grew by 420% from 2019 to 2020” [5]. For the first time, Asians began to stand out and call for attention from society.

“Not your minority” and “We’re here to study, not to die” were the loudest voices among those [6]. America’s diversity and equity were facing a greater challenge than ever.

3. The Disadvantages and Causes in the Higher Education System

3.1. Disadvantaged Asian Ethnicity

How is the fact that Asian ethnicity is being disadvantaged by the higher education system been found out and proved? Take a look at the California Institute of Technology, a college that only enrolls students according to merit, in other words, race-blind has a high proportion of Asian Americans, 44% to be specific, and more Asians among the 8% of international students [7]. While in other top universities, such as Harvard [8] and Cornell University [9], which use race as a criterion for evaluating applicants, have a proportion of around 25% of Asian Americans, much lower than that of Caltech. It can be seen that without the consideration of race, there would be much more Asian students in top universities.

From the race consideration policy, who is benefiting and who is being harmed? The group of people that benefited most are African Americans and Latinos and Hispanics with good economic backgrounds. They can attend tutor classes and strike for high standardized test scores that benefit them in the admissions process. For lower class families, however, actually, they cannot benefit from this policy, which means that the policy didn’t reach its target of increasing social equity. Since their economic status limits their access to education, the privilege of certain minorities means nothing to them. It is surprising that the majority population, white, ended up in a disadvantaged position, as the White is often blamed for discriminating against minorities and holding privileges, but in fact, they’re also receiving higher expectations from college admission officers. Due to the large proportion of minorities in universities, the spot left for white is very limited. They, however, face fewer stereotypes than Asians and are disadvantaged less. Rich Asians and Asian Americans, they’re wealthy enough to promote their backgrounds by attending activities that most people have no access to, such as golf and horseback riding in order to break the nerdy stereotypes. The greatest victims in this system are Asians and Asian Americans without a strong economic background, who are hardworking and wish to elevate their social status through education but have no way of escaping the stereotypes. Their high test scores are taken for granted and the hard work behind the scores is completely ignored.

3.2. Causes of the Disadvantages

To understand the cause of the issue human can be dated back to the Tang dynasty when China first developed Keju, a test that selects scholars to work in the government. With the strong influence of that, the East Asia and South Asia areas soon all adopted the system. The only standard of the test was the grade the students get, causing Asian families to have a mindset of nothing is more important than test scores.

This value causes very fierce competition among the children, making most families invest all that they had in their children. This phenomenon still exists today, reflected in the pervasive high scores of Asian and Asian American children. Due to the race policy, the score Asians and Asian Americans have to achieve is much higher than that of other races.

The famous sociologist Edward Said proposed a theory called Orientalism, which means that the Near East, Middle East, and the Far East are often considered to be the same and primitive by western men [10]. This phenomenon had caused the western man to misunderstand Asians for decades and disadvantaged the whole Asian ethnicity to be considered the same. The truth is, the difference between Asians is huge. The East Asia area is better developed while south Asia could still be struggling with hunger. Even in one country, the gap could be extremely large, such as the east coast

of China and the other parts of China. Therefore, considering all Asians to share similar backgrounds could be ridiculous.

The concentration of Asians and Asian Americans in particular majors is another cause. Asian parents frequently have high expectations for their kids, especially in terms of material possessions, therefore they push them to study subjects that would lead to successful careers, including economics and e-engineering. The fact that there are so many Asians and Asian Americans on campus but not enough open places for these majors makes the problem much worse. Asian families are less likely to select humanities or social sciences as their major if they'd be able to major in STEM subjects, as they believe STEM subjects bring higher income and are less likely to get in trouble such as political issues. Another observation is that Asians tend to only associate with other Asians, putting themselves in a comfort zone and not stepping out of it. They're often too obedient and try to avoid all conflicts, making themselves go unnoticed.

4. Reasons and Solutions to Improve the Situation

4.1. Social Reasons

Asians and Asian Americans are part of American society and the same chance should be offered to them to access higher education, which is necessary for maintaining social justice. Stereotypes and discrimination are not allowed to any extent. It might be the Asian ethnicity that's hurt today, but who knows who will be the next victim? The threat of using the term "model minority" as an excuse for ignoring a minority must be eliminated before it spreads [10]. The Asian ethnicity's influence on America also cannot go ignored. Asian Americans have contributed greatly to the science and arts industry, with representatives like Chen- Ning Franklin Yang and Amy Tan. The disadvantage for Asians and Asian Americans may cause America to lose its talents. A college with Asians being left out would lose a huge cultural treasure, as the diverse Asian culture is a highly historical culture that formed the lifestyle of one in third of the population on Earth.

4.2. Feasible Solutions

The very first action that should be taken is to break the stereotype of Asians and Asian Americans and stop the discrimination against Asians and Asian Americans. In May 2022, President Biden signed the COVID-19 hate crimes act to punish crimes against Asians after the COVID outbreak [11].

In November 2022, Asian Americans took Harvard and the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill (UNC) to the Supreme court for discriminating against Asians and Asian Americans, and this brought a national debate as to whether Affirmative Action should come to an end. So far, the Supreme Court is still considering the case, but the Asian ethnicity will never stop fighting for their natural rights [12].

As the initial purpose of the race admissions policy was to enhance equity in higher education. A certain policy should be developed to pull things back on track. As analyzed in the previous parts, the race policy is actually still benefiting the rich and harming the poor, students' admission should be processed according to their academic backgrounds rather than race.

From the aspect of Asians and Asian Americans, they should step out of their comfort zones, advocate for social justice and let society hear their voice. Senators should call for positive change in congress to defend their rights. Asian parents should respect their children's own ideas and allow them to pursue their personal goals rather than forcing them to major in some specific subjects.

5. Conclusion

Currently, the Asian ethnicity is beginning to rise up. It could be clearly seen that race-based admissions discriminate against Asian ethnicity and denies their chance of success and excellency. Media and Government should take action to break the Asian stereotype and adjust or abolish race-based admissions in college. However, a detailed and accessible policy isn't yet proposed. Further research would be the debate on Affirmative Action, which is already taking place in the Supreme Court. No matter the result, it would have a huge impact on future American education and the debate will continue.

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