

## Racism Is More Than Skin Deep.

By David Harrles, Shanghai Star. 2002-09-05

"There is no racism in China because we don't have any black people."

Reading this comment in the Lonely Planet Guide Book I was intrigued to know whether the Chinese student who wrote it believes that racism only affects black people.

Racism has many forms. It does not solely manifest itself against one particular race. Black, White, Chinese, Indian; they can all suffer discrimination.

It is true that racism in China is nowhere near as prevalent as in other countries.

In the more cosmopolitan cities such as Shanghai and Beijing, there are significant numbers of foreigners who - though rarely encountering any serious problems - are still unfairly treated.

The dual-pricing system, though now abolished by the government and practised fleetingly in only remote provinces, in any western country would be classed as fundamentally racist. By its very definition racism is the "unfair treatment of a person, group or race on the basis of prejudice." Yet to many natives, overcharging is simply a habitual procedure rather than a real sign of racial chauvinism.

But do foreigners bring this upon themselves? By bringing more money into the economy they naturally push up prices for everyone, with locals invariably bearing the burden. Besides even Chinese people bargain fiercely for goods, it is part of the culture and not wholly reserved for the unsuspecting laowai! It is ironic that foreigners are too quick to impose western ideas on other countries, believing them to be superior, thus imposing their own discrimination and prejudices along the way.

However, there is another group that is discriminated against far more seriously than westerners - the Chinese themselves. Speaking to some local colleagues I was amazed to hear that they feel they are ignored in comparison to outsiders. They now speak in English wherever they go, receiving much higher levels of service and privilege as a consequence.

Though many young Chinese realise the need to learn English in order to advance their prospects, it is a pity that they feel obliged to speak it in their own country rather than their natural language to get noticed.

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