

Becoming an international student: Rethinking how we understand and support Chinese international students

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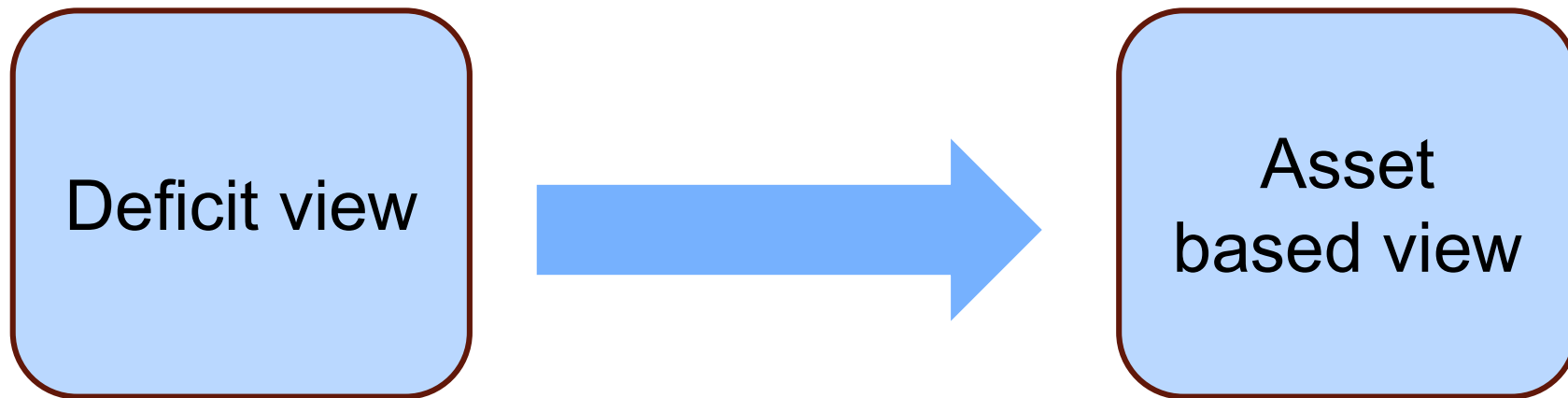
Agenda

- Challenges and differences students face
- Making the Implicit Explicit
- Supporting diverse students: advisor strategies
- Reflection & Q&A



Framing the Problem

- Avoid “deficit” view; see students’ strengths



- Students bring **rich cultural and learning strategies**

Challenges Students Face

- Cultural adaptation
- Differences in teaching & learning
- Identity reconstruction
- Emotional adjustment



Cultural Perspectives

Zhuangzi: Equality of Things” (齐物论):

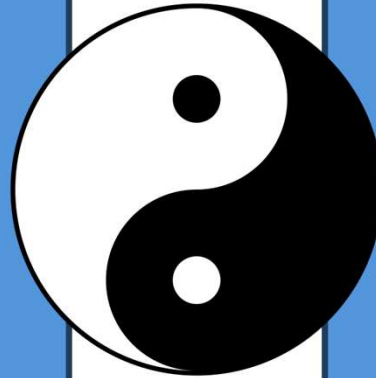
“There is no absolute right or wrong, only perspectives.”

- Knowledge is **shaped by context** - what is correct and effective in one situation may not in another.
- **Diversity ≠ deficit** – avoid assuming that one approach is better than another.

Different Educational Paradigms: China and Australia

Chinese Education

- Moral cultivation & discipline
- Respect for authority
- *Ren* (benevolence), *Li* (ritual propriety), *Xiao* (filial piety)
- Structured learning & ethical development
(*Du & Li, 2024*)

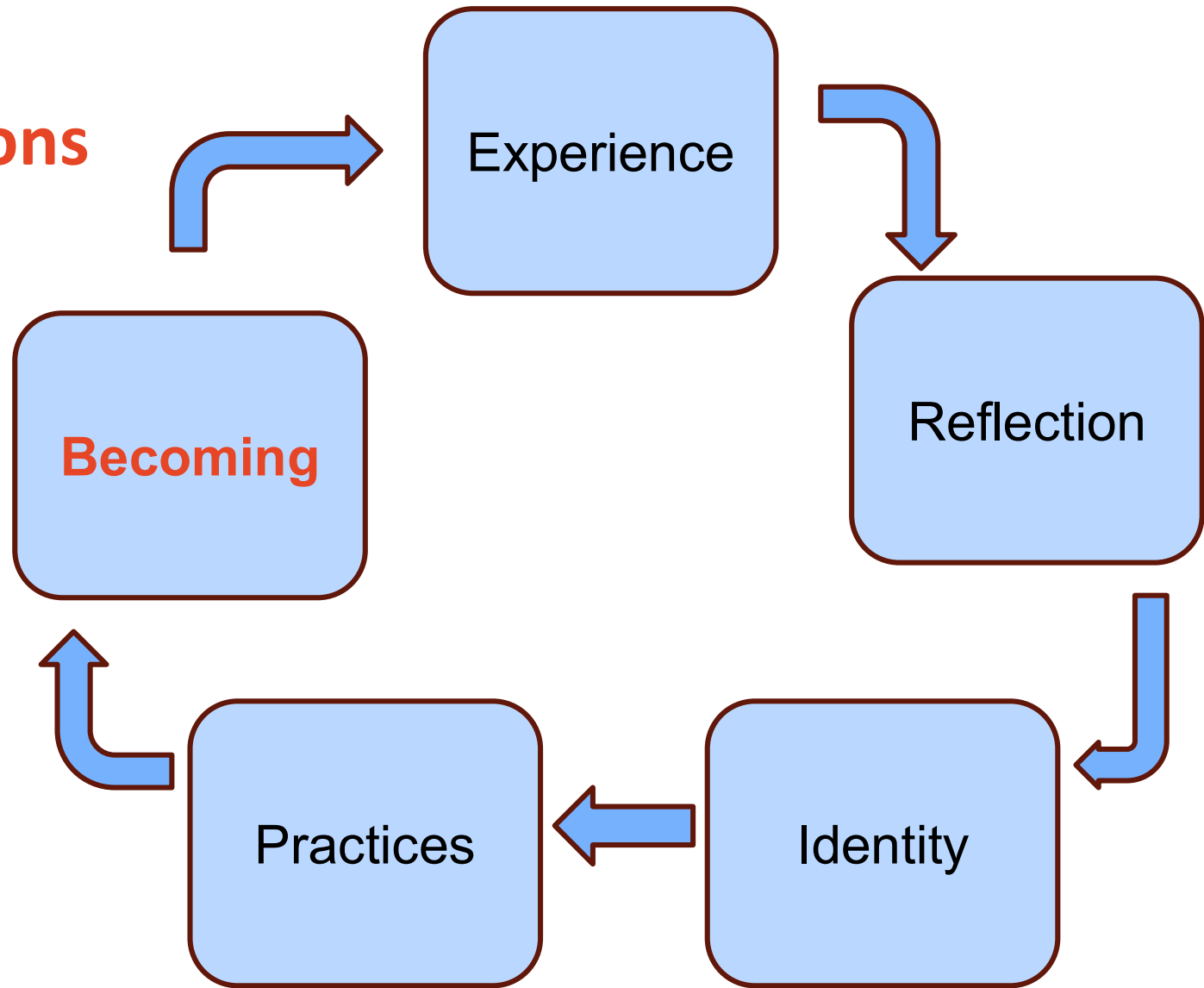


Australian Education

- Inquiry-based learning
- Collaboration & learner autonomy
- Critical thinking
- Self-directed exploration
(*Tomlins, 2025*)

Deep Transformations

- Transcultural learning → ontological shifts
- Identity emerges through experience
- “Becoming” through practices



Key differences in educational approaches

Educational Element	Chinese Education Tradition	Australian Education Model
Assessment	High-stakes, summative exams (e.g., <i>Gaokao</i>)	Continuous, formative assessment across different tasks
Learning Preferences	Emphasis on memorisation, accuracy, and internalisation	Emphasis on interaction, critical inquiry, and learner autonomy
Teacher–Student Relationship	Hierarchical respect; teachers as moral and academic guides	Equal engagement; teachers as facilitators and collaborators

Becoming Through Learning: Students' stories

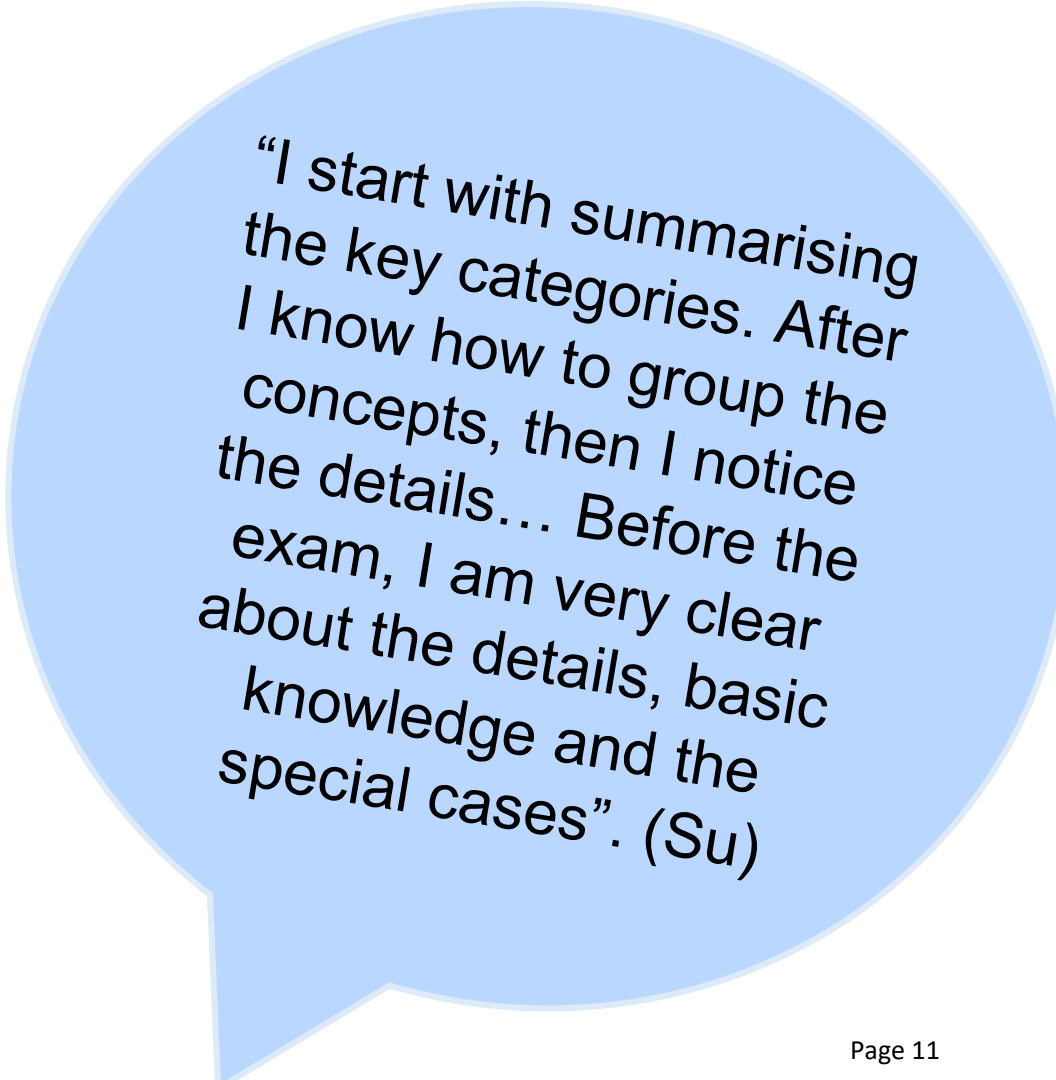
Putting things together

- Su – Entrepreneurial mindset and strategic cramming
- Haitao – Social learning and emotional reliance
- Ting– Silent Transformation



Su – Strategic Adaptation and Entrepreneurial Learning

- Clear career goal: business success before 30
- Prioritises networking and social learning
- Uses summarising and categorising to master knowledge
- Embodies “strategic hybridity” adapting Chinese learning habits to Australian contexts



“I start with summarising the key categories. After I know how to group the concepts, then I notice the details... Before the exam, I am very clear about the details, basic knowledge and the special cases”. (Su)

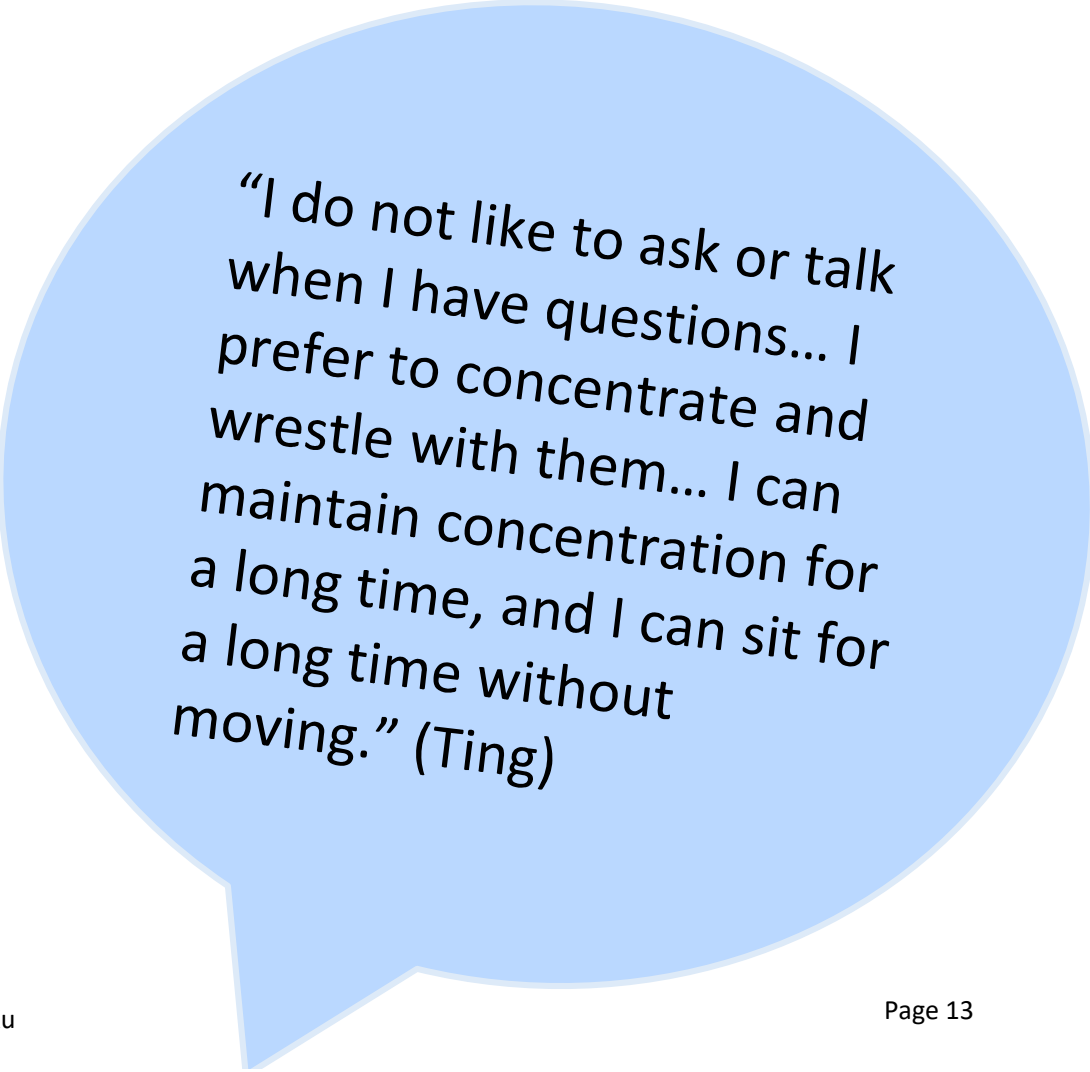
Haitao – Learning Through Relationships

- Learns best in social settings; struggles to study alone
- Motivation and accountability through relationships
- Balances family obligation and personal interest
- Learning shaped by emotion, care, and interdependence

I used to stay at home a lot, but after I knew her, I changed and now come to the library to study... It is a good study atmosphere in the library.” (Haitao)

Ting – Silent Transformation

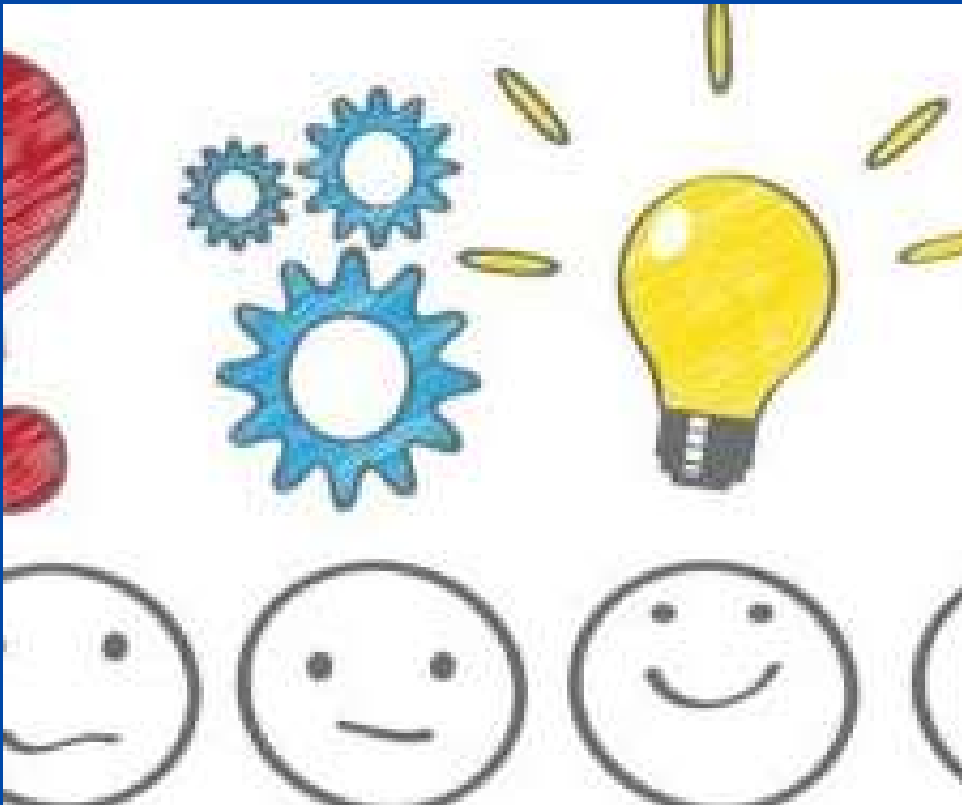
- Prefers solitary reflection and deep concentration
- Selective negligence — focuses on meaningful participation
- Gradually builds confidence to ask questions and present
- Silence as productive thinking, not disengagement



“I do not like to ask or talk when I have questions... I prefer to concentrate and wrestle with them... I can maintain concentration for a long time, and I can sit for a long time without moving.” (Ting)

Making the Implicit Explicit

Reflection questions



- What assumptions do I bring about students' understanding of academic expectations?
- How can I clarify unfamiliar practices, norms, or expectations for each student?
- What strategies can I use to invite different forms of student engagement and contribution?

Rethinking Misinterpretations

Silence $\neq$ lack of understanding

Memorisation $\neq$ rote learning

Participation $\neq$ constant talking

Adaptation $\neq$ one-way adjustment

Effective support involves mutual understanding:

- Students adapting to new expectations
- Educators acknowledging diverse learning histories and preferences

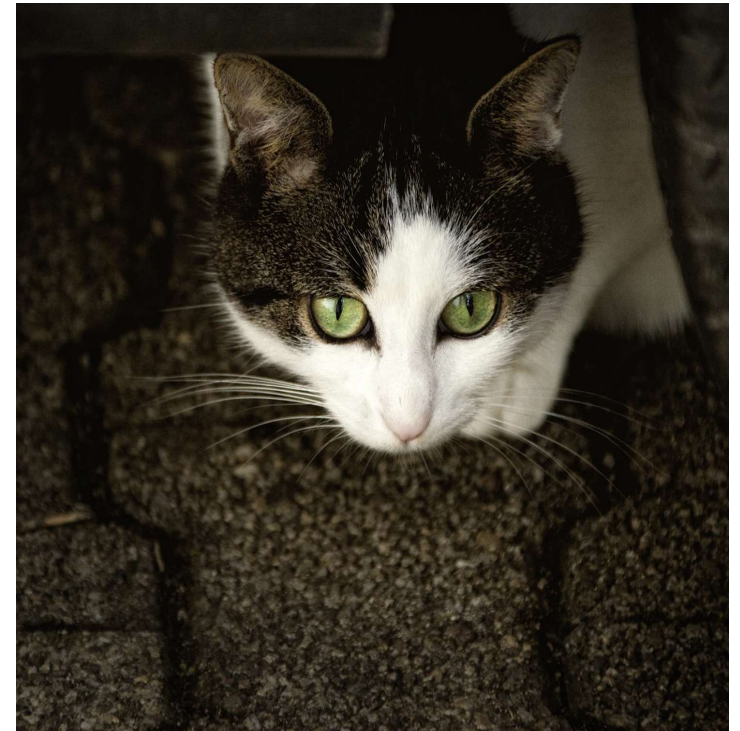


Are we anxious to student's silence?

- Reward spontaneity, critique, and individual expression
- Misinterpretation: Silence $\neq$ disengagement
- CHC context: respect for authority, teachers as knowledge holders
- Large class, taking notes, deep listening
- Silence can be a right, choice, resistance, or strategy

(Ha & Li 2014; Wang et al 2022; *Wang & Moskal, 2019*)

We must listen to silence
(Reda 2009)



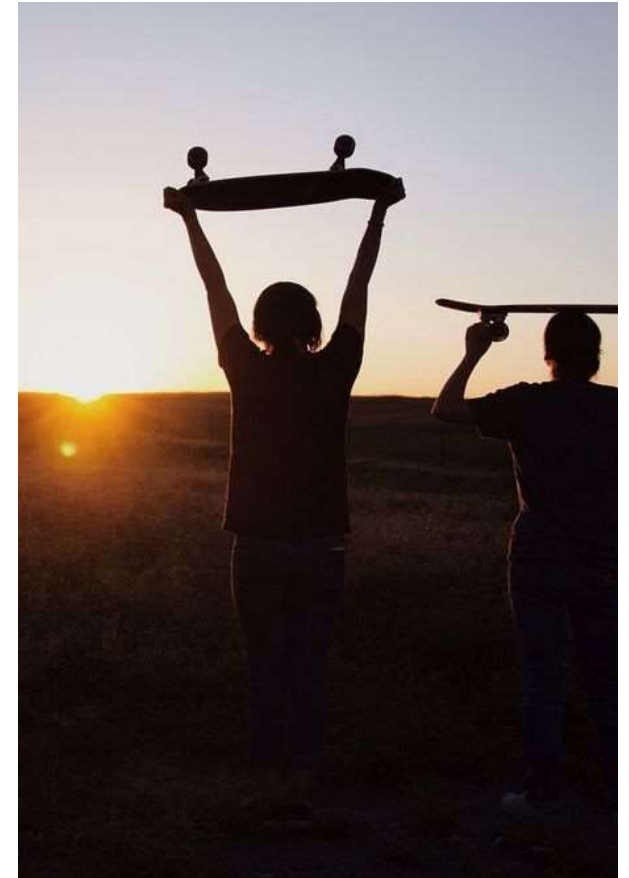
Cultural Interpretations of Silence

Chinese Student Intention	Western Interpretation
Respectful, humble	Passive, unprepared
Polite, not self-centred	Lacks initiative, too self-focused
Careful, thoughtful expression	Unengaged, unwilling to participate

(Wang & Moskal, 2019)

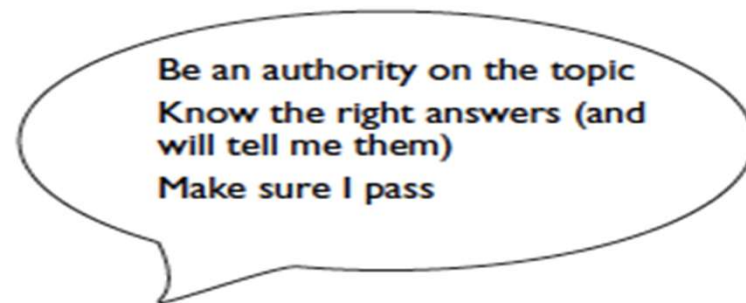
Understanding Engagement Beyond Speech

- Engagement has three dimensions – behavioural, emotional, and cognitive (Fredricks et al., 2004)
- Inclusive teaching recognises diverse ways of engagement (McMahon et al., 2020)
- Get to know our students and be responsive to collectivist and relational cultures
- Reflect on how our own emotions influence the way we engage with students

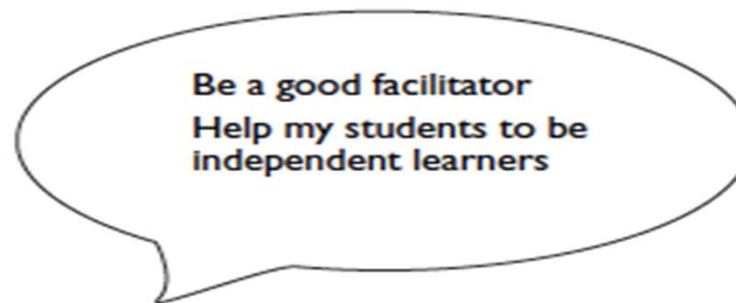


Different expectations of the teacher and the learner

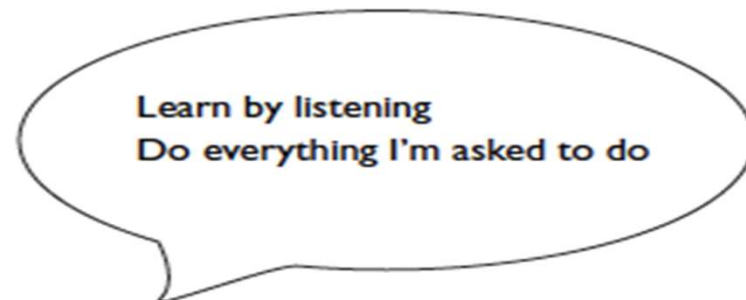
My lecturer should ...



To be a good lecturer I need to ...



To be a good student I need to ...



My best students ...



What students are expected to know, but might not be told 1

Supporting Students with Academic Expectations

- Expectations often unstated: referencing, questions, critical thinking, group work
- Clarify via induction sessions, rubrics, examples
- Model participation and collaboration
- Provide critical thinking templates or language pools (*Bi, 2025; Yeh et al., 2022*)
- Spread workload across semester, not just midterms/finals

What students are expected to know, but might not be told 2

Academic English: Beyond IELTS

- Passing IELTS ≠ fully prepared for academic English
- Challenges:
 - Understanding specialised terminology
 - Interpreting cultural metaphors & implicit cues
 - Navigating unspoken classroom norms
 - Responding to complex contextual cues (Ruegg et al. 2024 Fayziev et al. 2020)
- **Slow responses ≠ lack of knowledge**; students may need more processing time
- Support with practice, feedback, and guided skill development

Help Your Students Learn the Unwritten Rules 1



Planning & Mentoring

- Use a planner: track deadlines & break tasks
- Peer mentoring: connect with experienced students
- Practice self-adjustment: allow time to adapt

Participation & Preparation:

- Try different ways to participate: writing, small groups, forums
- Use platforms (e.g., Padlet) to express ideas
- Prepare before class: write points, clarify ideas, rehearse English

Help Your Students to Learn the Unwritten Rules 2

Reflecting on the Learning Journey

Reflect

Use journals or discussion boards to ask: *“What surprised me about learning in Australia?”*

Share

Discuss experiences and challenges in after-class chats, workshops, or consultations.

Engage

Encourage students to communicate with teachers; they want to understand the learning process.

Balance

Help students prioritise tasks based on deadlines and difficulty; remain flexible but consistent.

Be
patient

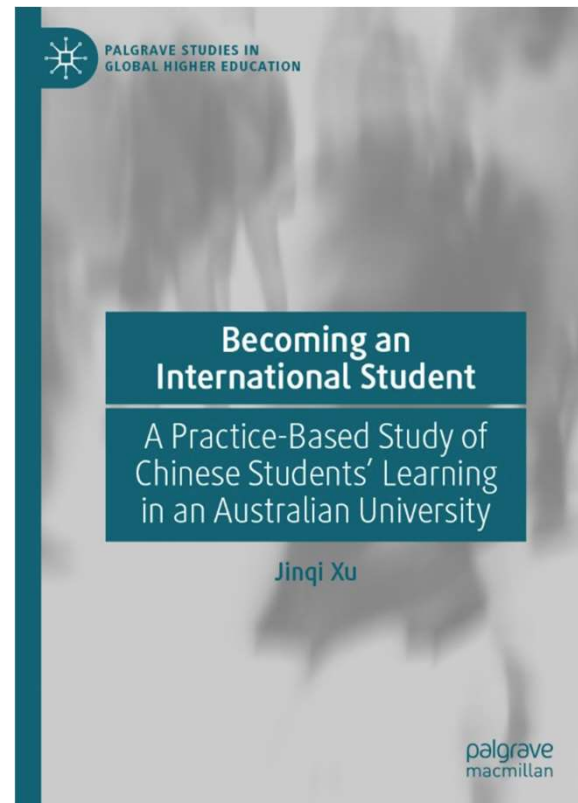
Emphasise that learning is a gradual process; growth takes time.

Bridging the Gap: What to do

- Encourage small steps: asking a question, sharing a comment, showing engagement.
- Learning happens through interaction, there's no need to wait until everything is 100% certain.



Becoming an International Student



Learning in Flux — A Journey of Becoming

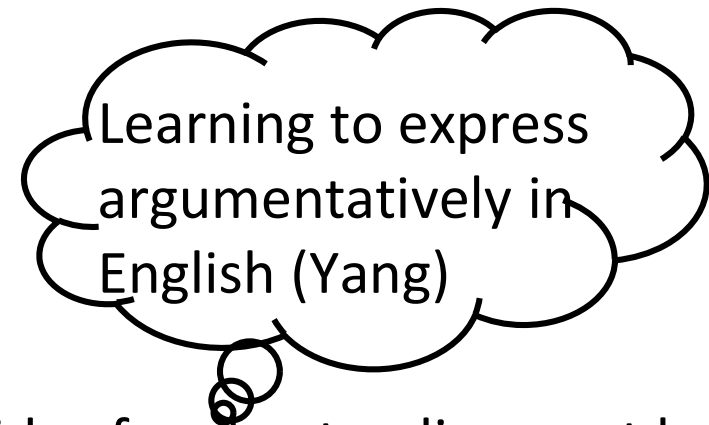
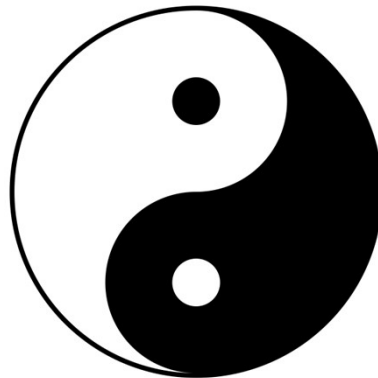
- Chinese students do not simply replace old habits with new ones. Learning is a fluid, non-linear process:
 - **Continuing practices** – maintain existing strategies within familiar contexts
 - **Discontinuing practices** – break away from established learning patterns
 - **Redeveloping practices** – reshape and reorganise prior approaches
 - **Acquiring new practices** – integrate new elements into the learning process
- This process is dynamic, not sequential, reflecting a state of “becoming” where identity, language, and practice are constantly evolving (Xu, 2025).

Yin–Yang in Learning Transitions

Learning across cultures is shaped by tensions, not contradictions.

Using a Yin–Yang lens:

- Students may move from Yin to Yang, from constraint to expression
- Yet both Yin and Yang co-exist:



- This fluid interaction generates new hybrids of understanding, not by rejecting one side, but by holding tensions together.
- "Becoming" means learning to live with flux (Xu, 2025).

Memorisation is not rote learning

Memorisation entails

a set of interconnected and embodied learning practices:

- **Reading – Thinking – Writing – Repeating – Remembering**
- **Reflecting – Highlighting – Circling – Organising – Rereading**
- **Summarising – Linking – Rewriting – Synthesising**
- **Translating** – a tool to overcome the *“hurdle of language”*

Through repetition, new meanings emerge.

An embodied and emotional practice that combines cognition, language, and identity.

CCAD - Academic Hero

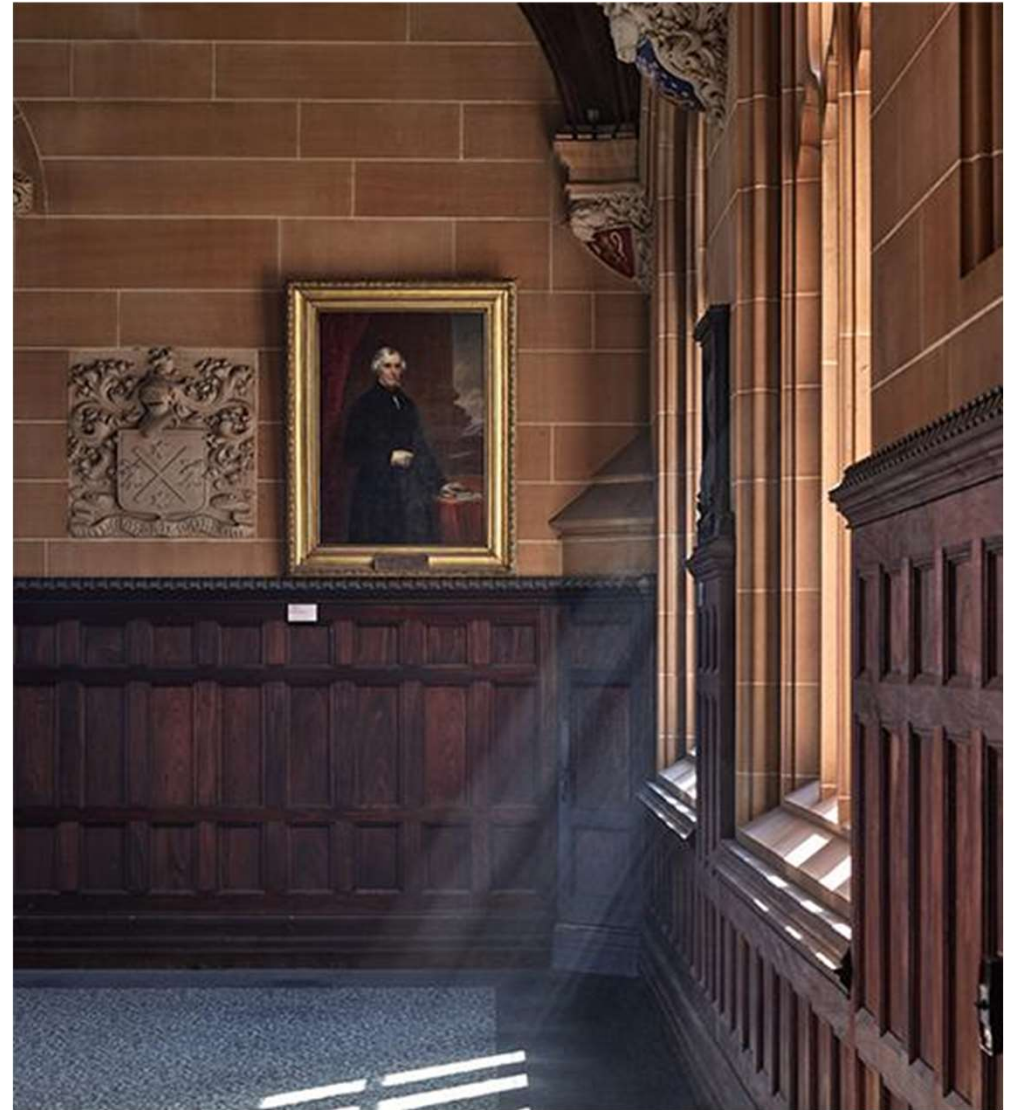
- Chinese students association volunteering
- Peer teaching and learning
- High achievers: PhD, Honors students, high marks, students lead
- Bilingual workshops
- Help to prepare for exams.
- Sense of belonging, interaction with familiar background, share thoughts, and learning tips and social connectic
- Make a smooth transition to Australia learning environment

"He uses the diagrams to show their relationship and how they affect each other, and then he explains and links the concepts together to make the relationship clear. He is very good at helping us to see the links between the concepts. He is very good at linking the concepts . . . There... "(S4)



Embracing the Differences

International students are not problems to fix, they are partners in learning. Embracing difference is key to building more just, relational, and globally responsive universities.



Three key takeaways

1. **Make the implicit explicit**

Guide students on referencing, participation, collaboration, and critical thinking.

2. **Support learning as a process of “becoming”**

Recognise that adaptation is gradual; use reflection, feedback, and scaffolding rather than expecting immediate mastery.

3. **Value diverse learning approaches** Acknowledge students' different cultural, cognitive, memorisation, and embodied practices (e.g., CCAD) to support their learning

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Menti activity:

What's one assumption or misunderstanding you might have about Chinese international students' learning or engagement?

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Thank you!



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