## Understanding cultural differences: student-teacher relationship

The biggest difference I have encountered from a high school in China to an Australian university was the relationship between students and teachers. During my education from primary school to high school in China, teachers had unquestionable authority and students were expected to comply with their guidance and should not disagree or question their ideas. However, when I started my studies at Monash University, I was struck by the contrast in student-teacher relationships, as teachers in Australia appeared not solely as figures of authority but more as facilitators and tutors guiding students through their academic journey. I found the expectation to actively participate and voice opinions in class both liberating and intimidating, and it boosted my confidence over time.

In the Chinese educational environment, the teacher-student relationship is hierarchical and teachers are respected and authoritative, reflecting a cultural emphasis on respect for hierarchy and authority figures. This relationship is deeply rooted in cultural values, which position teachers as moral exemplars or standards and sources of wisdom. This respect for teachers permeates the entire learning environment, often limiting direct student engagement in their learning process and inadvertently stifling the internal studying motivation and curiosity essential for effective learning (Zhai, 2023). In universities, dealing with high-level critical and analytical knowledge is challenging due to the lack of critical thinking, as these skills cannot be cultivated through memorisation alone but necessitate engagement in independent and inquiry-based learning methods (Chan, 2021).

In contrast, my experience at Monash University emphasised a cooperative and egalitarian teaching approach. Under the Western educational system, teachers act as facilitators rather than sole authorities, the teacher-student relationship is casual and loose, encouraging students to participate in the class and focusing on students (Zhai, 2023). This kind of environment promotes self-consciousness and openness, which promotes the development of students' critical thinking and self-directed learning skills. This approach aligns with Western countries' values that emphasise individualism, inquiry-based learning, and democratisation of knowledge to better prepare students for success in a globalised, rapidly changing world (Bear et al., 2014). In this context, teachers guide students in knowledge pursuit, serving as mentors and collaborators, and aiming to develop students to become independent researchers (Chan, 2021).

In conclusion, I realised the value of experiencing these very different educational models. While Chinese education is full of discipline and respect, Australian education fosters critical engagement and autonomy. In the future, I plan to combine them to continuously strengthen my academic pursuit. I will continue to develop critical thinking and analytical skills in the learning process, rather than use cramming methods to achieve high scores. In addition, I will transition from a passive learning style to an active learning style and increase my participation in class discussions, ask questions to clarify doubts, share my perspectives with teachers, and finally develop a proactive learning habit.

## Reference

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