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Understanding and Supporting the Confucian Heritage Culture International Students in Victorian Independent Schools: A Perspective of School Leaders

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Abstract: Greater demand for quality post-secondary education has been seen in Asia, particularly in China. Many Western countries have seen a rise in international education. Increasingly, schools in Australia are embracing internationalisation policies, leading to an increase in international student enrolment before the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. International students in school education are something of a little-understood issue for educational scholars, policy makers and the general public. Leadership is seen as pivotal in the success of schools' internationalisation program. By applying a mixed-method approach to collect data from an online Qualtrics survey and semi-structured interviews with independent school leaders in Australia, this paper reports how school leaders understand Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) international students' linguistic, cultural and educational contributions to schools, and their experience in supporting the international students to adapt into the new educational environments through various programs and strategies. This article also advocates that it is vital to respect the international students' educational subjectivities generated in their "home" countries when providing support programs to help them engage with new educational contexts in "host" nations.

Keywords: internationalization; CHC international students; independent schools; student support; school leadership

1. Introduction

Rising living standards in Asia, and especially in China, have fuelled an unprecedented demand for quality tertiary education (Wade 2018). This has led to an international education boom in many Western countries. Australia is one of the top countries for attracting substantial numbers of international students. While a large proportion of international students are enrolled in higher education, schools in Australia have been increasingly adopting policies of internationalisation, leading to the growing enrolment of international students (DET 2018). The independent schools enrol roughly 30 percent of 25,564 international students in Australia (Independent School Australia 2019). In Victoria, there are 214 independent schools with 13,750 Full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers, 7222 FTE administrative and support staff and 147,006 FTE students in 2019 (Independent Schools Australia 2020a).

The experience of international students at Australian independent schools appears to be under-researched. Most of the literature focuses on the tertiary sector. Previous studies through a Western lens have indicated that the motivation for Australian schools to develop international programs was primarily economic driven (Arber and Blackmore 2010), and international students often report negative and even hostile attitudes and comments by educators (Rizvi 2010; Ryan and Louie 2007; Rowan et al. 2021). These studies have often illustrated negative attitudes towards international students and a "deficit" approach towards their capabilities. International students are often described

as passive, rote learners, lacking in critical thinking and independent learning skills and prone to plagiarism (Archer 2007; Grimshaw 2007; Ryan 2005). The public media even reported international students as problems for Australian schools. For example, “the principal reason for the choice of the Australian school appeared to be that these students had problems in schools in their home countries” (Smith 2015, para. 14). By employing a new methodological lens inspired by “Asia as method” (Chen 2010), our overall research project seeks to examine different perspectives of school stakeholders on international students’ programs in Victorian independent schools (Australia), which helps to shed light on this often-overlooked area of education. This article particularly focuses on school leaders’ perception of supporting Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) international students through different programs in their schools.

The research questions to guide this study are:

1. How do school leaders recognize and acknowledge the contributions of Confucian Heritage Culture international students in Victorian independent schools?
2. How do school leaders respect and support these international students through various school programs?

2. Literature Review

Internationalisation has become an imperative in many educational institutions. Embedded in the institutions’ mission statements and policy documents, it is often perceived as a strength, tied to the international ranking of the institution, its success and global outlook (Noorda 2014). From a Western institutional perspective, internationalisation is defined as the process of “integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight 2004, p. 11). Knight’s (2004) Western institutional definition of internationalisation stood in stark contrast to that of leading Chinese education scholar, Gu Mingyuan, who perceived it as “the exchange of culture and values, mutual understanding and a respect for difference . . . The internationalisation of education does not simply mean the integration of different national cultures or the suppression of one national culture by another culture” (Gu 2001, p. 105). At a broader level, the internationalisation of education is seen as the process in which the education sectors reconfigure and respond to globalisation and internationalisation (Rizvi and Lingard 2010).

While the majority of the studies on internationalisation of education have focused on students at the university level, there has been increasing interest in the issue in secondary schools. These studies seek to investigate the motivation of secondary schools to internationalise, and the effect of internationalisation on school culture, values, achievement and overall learning atmosphere (Fielding and Vidovich 2017; Tudball 2005). Consequently, tensions may arise in the development and implementation of an internationalised curriculum (Rizvi 2004), the corresponding changes in teachers’ pedagogical practices (Teichler 2004; Tudball 2005), and the adjustment of international students’ interaction with the teachers and local peers (Schweisfurth and Gu 2009).

Studies in both higher education and schools have pointed to leadership, teacher engagement, policy and financial support as essential enablers for successful and sustained internationalisation (Egekvist et al. 2017; Yemini 2014). These enablers are closely inter-related. Within the context of higher education, Heyl and Tullbane (2012) view leaders as important change agents in their institutions’ internationalisation effort. A skilful and transformational leader, according to Burns (1978), is able to inspire his followers to build a shared vision, and motivate them to take personal ownership to bring the vision to fruition. In a later definition specific to more than one culture, a visionary, passionate and patient leader is imperative in initiating and engaging the community in the development of an intercultural learning environment (Nolan and Hunter 2012). Even more specifically, the presence of an active and supportive head and a strong international coordinator is essential to driving the process of internationalization and teacher engagement (Egekvist et al. 2017; Heyl and Tullbane 2012; Yemini 2014).

Within the learning institution, the changing education context has called for a reform and renewal of its curriculum through incorporation of global dimensions (Rizvi 2004), strengthening of intercultural competencies among teaching staff, and the development of pedagogy and processes that are more inclusive of both local and international student needs (Absalom and Vadura 2006; Burdett and Crossman 2012; Knight 2013). Past research has also documented the challenges and struggles experienced by international students. These issues could range from having to adjust psychologically, social-culturally and academically to their new environment and also the lukewarm attitude of the host countries (Ryan and Louie 2007; Leask and Carroll 2011). In the meanwhile, studies (e.g., McKenzie and Baldassar 2017; Volet and Ang 2012; Wright and Schartner 2013) consistently identify three issues that hinder international students' adaptation to their new educational and social environment, including language barriers, cultural differences and the lack of strong motivation, particularly since intracultural networks have been built (God and Zhang 2019).

In the school context, this would mean building a team of passionate teachers who find meaning in the project and are committed to translate the vision of internationalisation in their teaching practice, so as to bring about the development of intercultural competence and achieve the outcome of internationalisation at the school level (Egekvist et al. 2017; Rahimi et al. 2017). Although internationalisation of education can positively enhance diversity in the school and provide valuable learning opportunities for intercultural learning and communication, the experiences of the stakeholders involved in the process, such as school leaders, teachers, parents and students, are sometimes filled with tension. While there is abundant research indicating that leadership is seen as pivotal in the success of a school's internationalisation program (Lin and Chen 2014; Nolan and Hunter 2012; Tinkham 2011), studies on the perception of school leaders in this area remain limited. The article addresses this gap by looking into the Victorian independent school leaders' understanding of CHC international students' contributions to school community, and their experience in supporting them through various programs and strategies.

3. Asia as Method

Differently from Western educators, who view their international students through a Western lens, which has inhibited the process of internationalisation (Singh 2009), our research is influenced by the approach taken by Chen (2010) who argues for critical studies of Asia using "Asia as method" to rethink the process of knowledge production in socio-cultural research. Chen (2010) insists that studies of Asia move beyond their paralysing fixation on the west as either a positive or negative referent, and that they develop their own standpoints, reference points and research agendas. Chen's "Asia as method" seeks to transcend the established East/West axis that has continued to empower West as method as the dominant mode of knowledge production. Recent work has shown a small but increasing number of Asian scholars taking up Chen's proposal to consider the unique histories and cultures of Asian societies while acknowledging the West as constitutive of Asian subjectivity when analysing situations in Asian societies. Zhang et al. (2015) indicate that "Asia as method" offers a new imagination of study that extends such a constant reference of the west towards alternate viewpoints, with Asian history, politics and culture as main points of reference.

This research project responds to Chen's invitation to move beyond Western obsession, and views international students from an Asian perspective—completely understanding the manner in which Asian education systems, policies, and activities have interpreted Western awareness differently in relation to their own unique changing societies, contexts, and policies. Employing "Asia as method" in this research suggests the value of starting where international students are, not where theory or critique would prefer them to be.

4. Materials and Methods

The project points to the benefits of dialogues about how to shift away from Western perspectives to perceive international students as “problems”, towards more Asia-centred perspectives to see them as “assets” to contribute to the process of internationalisation from multiple aspects ([Ryan 2011](#)). We employed a critical interpretive research methodology to analyse the data that will allow the researchers to make sense of and interpret the perceptions of school leaders in understanding and supporting CHC international students in Victorian independent schools. This project studies the CHC international students in Victorian independent schools, because Victoria State shares the biggest FTE student annual growth (2.7%) in the independent sector from 2014 to 2019 ([Independent Schools Australia 2020b](#)).

4.1. Data Collection and Analysis

This exploratory study starts with an interpretive quantitative component (Phase 1) by obtaining a more representative sample and providing a context for the second phase qualitative data ([Hesse-Biber et al. 2016](#)). Data were gathered via an online survey ($n = 42$) and semi-structured interviews ($n = 5$) with Victorian independent school leaders. Before the start of data collection, ethical approval has been obtained from the university ethical committee.

4.1.1. Phase 1: Online Survey

A multiple-choice survey was conducted online via the Qualtrics platform to obtain the perception of Victorian independent school leaders on CHC international students. The survey consisted of three sections. The first section with seven questions collected basic information about the school. The second section focused on international students at the school. Items relating to international programs, and to supporting programs for international students were created based on issues reported in previous literature. The last section contained nine questions looking into the adaptation of international students to the particular school culture. A link to the survey was sent to school leaders of Victorian independent schools ($n = 214$) by email. In the meantime, a post mail, addressed by name to each school principal was sent to school receptions to invite school leaders to take part in the project. In total, 56 school principals expressed their interests in participating in this project. Among them, 42 schools with international students' program completed the survey. The response rate was 19.6%. Survey data were analysed by Excel software. The analysis of data provided a general understanding of the research question ([Creswell and Creswell 2017](#)). It also guided the design of interview questions in phase 2, because the survey outcomes signalled potential issues with understanding and supporting CHC international students which have been further brought up in interviews.

4.1.2. Phase 2: Semi-Structured Interview

From the online survey, five school leaders were recruited to participate in the interview, based on their expression of interest in the online survey (see [Table 1](#)). They are P-12 schools located in South-Eastern Metropolitan region in Melbourne. All interviews were semi-structured, with six questions derived from the preliminary survey outcomes. School leaders were invited to discuss their understandings about the impacts of internationalization on school culture, the contributions of CHC international students to the development of school culture, the learning differences of CHC international students with their local peers, how important it is for schools to recognize and value such differences, how to support CHC international students by using tailored curriculum and specific teaching methods, and how the interactions between CHC international students and local peers are. All sessions were recorded, transcribed verbatim, then sent to each participant for checking. After that, transcripts were anonymised and analysed through thematic analysis ([Braun and Clarke 2006](#)).

Table 1. List of interviewed school leaders.

Name	School Type	Position	Level	Region	ICSEA Values ¹
Fiona	Girls' school	Principal	P-12	Metropolitan	1150
Charlotte	Girls' school	Head of senior school	P-12	Metropolitan	1195
Justin	Boys' school	Dean of international students	P-12	Metropolitan	1178
Lily	Co-ed school	Director of international students	P-12	Metropolitan	1145
Adam	Co-ed school	Principal	P-12	Metropolitan	1133

¹ ICSEA stands for the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage. ICSEA provides an indication of the socio-educational backgrounds of students; it has nothing to do with the staff, school facilities or teaching programs at the school (Source: drawn up by the authors).

Guided by the analytical interest underpinned by the research purpose, transcripts were coded and compared repeatedly until recurring themes began to emerge. Eventually, three themes related to the participants' experience to support CHC international students emerged in the analysis of each case and across cases: acknowledgment of their contributions to the internationalising of school culture; aspects of supporting CHC international students; recognizing and respecting their previous educational experiences.

5. Results

Based on descriptive analysis of the survey data and thematic analysis of interview data, two main themes have been identified. First, CHC international students' contributions to school culture have been highlighted, including improvement of cultural awareness and competence; enhancement of language diversity and proficiency; development of culturally responsive teaching strategies; promotion of multiple learning styles; and encouragement of diversified teaching materials and methods. Second, various supports, such as language, culture, academic, religion, student advisor, and parents' engagement to CHC international students have been reported.

5.1. CHC International Students' Contributions to School Culture

According to our research participants, students from Confucius Heritage Culture (CHC)¹ backgrounds can, ideally, contribute to the educational experience of anyone preparing for a global career or to live in a multicultural society. More than 85% of the school leaders consider that their international students contribute positively to their school's culture. Figure 1 illustrates the types of contribution of international students to their schools' cultures (22 school leaders responded this question): improving cultural awareness and competence: 86.36%; enhancing language diversity and proficiency: 68.18%; promoting the implementation of culturally responsive teaching strategies: 40.91%; multiplying learning styles: 27.27%; and stimulating the development of diversified teaching materials: 22.73%. The school leaders also mention "the particular talents each student brings to the school", "sharing cultural experiences", "demonstrating global connectedness" and "positive work ethic".

5.1.1. Improving Cultural Awareness and Competence

The CHC international students can contribute much to the internationalisation of school culture. In the state-wide survey, one third of school leaders recognised the contributions of international students to improve Victorian students' cultural awareness and competence. For example, Lily, the director of international students, emphasised such contributions by encouraging the whole school community to celebrate other cultural festivals, food and customs.

“On Shrove Tuesday, the school traditionally sells pancakes. The International Student Council is also selling dumplings as an alternative. We went on an excursion into the city and looked at the ways in which Melbourne celebrates Lunar New Year.”

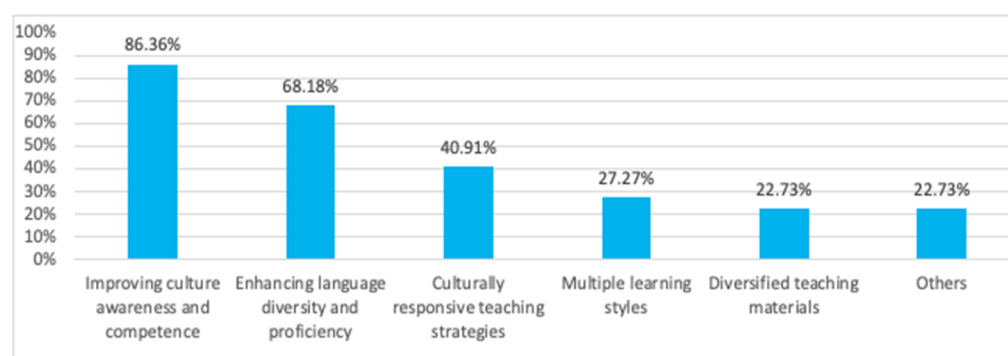


Figure 1. The key areas of international students contributing to school culture ($n = 22$) (Source: drawn up by the authors).

5.1.2. Enhancing Language Diversity and Proficiency

The Victorian Curriculum has 20 language other than English (LOTE²) subjects. According to the interview, most school leaders acknowledge international students' contributions on enhancing language diversity and proficiency of the schools. For them, international students can also utilise their native language skills to assist other students in learning within their school communities.

“Our international students work on Languages Day, work with the middle year students to help support them with their language skills.” (Lily)

International students are a great language resource for our local students. It is a “two-way street”. The international students are learning English, and the local English-speaking students are learning another language.

5.1.3. Culturally Responsive Teaching Strategies

The survey results indicate that more than 40% of responding independent schools prepared teachers to upgrade their culturally responsive teaching strategies through some form of teacher's professional development program to assist international students to make the transition as smoothly as possible. Since international students who attend Victorian schools have their own cultures and learning habits, Lily's school has professional development sessions with staff regarding those differences.

“We've had guest speakers come in and other staff, our Chinese teachers, have also an influence in that they can also assist us with our professional development and give us instruction about what it's like.”

It is also important to involve the school leadership team to understand the different teaching methods and cultures in other countries. Justin, the Dean of international students, highlighted that:

“We're getting the leadership team into China and visiting schools, visiting our sister schools, watching classes in action, talking to teachers. So, we're getting more and more involved in that. And that's been a really good thing.”

5.1.4. Multiple Learning Styles

International students come from, by-and-large, different educational systems. They have had extensive experience in the education system in their home countries. Therefore, they bring with them a great deal of solid subject knowledge and multiple learning styles

that they can share with students in Australia. The survey also identified the fact that international students bring diverse talents and skills. Fiona, principal of a girls' school, highlighted that:

"We like to help all students be able to work with people of different cultures, different interests, different perspectives to always find what is it that we can have in common, no matter how polar opposites you have of people."

Justin also mentioned that:

"We've a lot more to learn from the overseas students in the way they learn and work and it can benefit everyone in this school. So, I think it's becoming increasingly important."

Furthermore, Justin described his school as an "Asian values school", and those educational values have spilled over into the whole school. It has been beneficial for everyone.

Fiona's school also recognises the benefits of international students' learning attitudes and approach for the school community. She said:

"International students have had a commitment from a very young age to excellence, whether it's in academic or music too. They've started very young and just amazing what they can perform."

International students practise some of the Confucian virtues of filial piety and good work ethic in their studies.

"The family loyalties that Confucian cultures hold could be emulated. I think the work ethic that many of those students bring, is a positive influence on some of our Caucasian students." (Adam)

5.1.5. Diversified Teaching Materials and Methods

International students coming from different educational systems have diversified learning habits and learning styles. The school leaders realise that their teachers should recognize or acknowledge students' previous learning experience and incorporate it into their teaching practice. Most school leaders reported the use of English as an Additional Language (EAL) or personalising programs which can bridge the international students' previous learning experience with new changes and requirements in new school settings to help them effectively engage in the classroom. For instance:

"We have periodically some professional learning for staff about differentiation in the classroom and EAL students because I think English as additional language students need that support. ... But using simpler language, using visuals, repetition. ... It's a kind of awareness raising and appreciating that it's challenging, and giving some teachers some sort of acknowledgement of that as well as some tools for that." (Fiona)

Charlotte also shared the experience to successfully launch a school wide project called "EAL in the Mainstream" in her school. It was looking at how to teach EAL students in mainstream classes.

"We modify work or modify tests to make them EAL friendly. Yeah. Yeah. That does happen. And even keeping them in the mainstream English for as long as possible and also having the Language and Learning EAL and providing the double up of English, I think is helpful."

Some schools use specific PD programs to equip their staff to better support international students. For example, Justin's school worked with the EAL teachers who better know the specific need of international students to provide professional development programs for other subject teachers.

"So, we offer EAL classes. We've done staff PD's often with [Chinese teachers] for [other subjects'] teachers on how to teach students particularly from a Chinese background." (Justin)

At Lily's school, they invited the offshore teachers (China) who are familiar with different pedagogical theories and practices (West and East) to offer PD programs for the staff. Adam did much more around personalizing the learning at his school. At his school, teachers try to identify and understand the international students' specific needs, which means it has to be much more uniquely individual.

5.2. The Aspects of Supporting CHC International Students

When celebrating the contribution of CHC international students to their schools, the school leaders also identify some difficulties encountered by international students. The majority of participating schools provide various types of support to them in order to foster their learning in Australia (23 school leaders responded this question). The survey data in Figure 2 show that 82.61% of schools offer language support, 78.26% offer academic support, 65.22% offer cultural support (e.g., special events and celebrations), while there are designated international student advisers in 65.22% of schools. A total of 13.04% of schools offer religious support (e.g., prayer and worship rooms) and 21.74% have other supports, including homestay provision, chapel, international student council, international buddy programme and opportunities to integrate with the mainstream students.

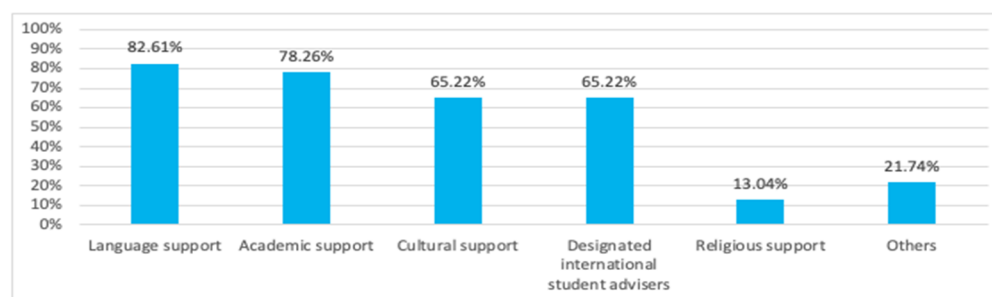


Figure 2. The critical elements in assisting international students ($n = 23$) (Source: drawn up by the authors).

5.2.1. Language Support

International students face struggles because of language barriers, which prevent them from proper communication with their teachers and local peers. Many school leaders mentioned that their language programs can relieve these problems.

“The school has an onsite language program, so the international students that enter that program become school students immediately.” (Lily)

Adam's school has bilingual teachers who can understand international students' needs better.

“Nearly 10% of our staff is bilingual, one staff member who actually was an international student in the past. We tried to leverage as much of that as we can for them.”

5.2.2. Academic Support

Many international students and their parents strive for academic excellence (Stevenson and Stigler 1994; Goyette and Xie 1999). Academic support is essential for CHC international students when they study in Victorian independent schools. Therefore, school leaders can understand parents' high expectations and students' aspirations on academic achievement. They found that international students come from a culture that values education and study and which prioritizes that, possibly over physical activity or other activities. For instance, as Fiona mentioned, international students' learning attitude and approach, that conscientiousness drives to obtain really good results. However, not all school leaders valued the academically focused international students. Charlotte, head of senior school expresses her concern:

“It really comes down to us working very closely with those students and saying that there is more to schooling than just getting an ATAR³ score. We know that universities are changing the way they look at students. So, we need to be working closely with them in that regard.”

5.2.3. Cultural Support

International students are sent to Australia to learn a sense of Western culture—to become more independent, more assertive, more capable of holding discussions, and being less hierarchical and more independent in their thinking.

“Their parents are sending them out because they want much more of an Australian style. We respect it, but we don’t wish to leave them in that spot. We wish to actually develop them.” (Adam)

School leaders would prefer to assist international students go out of their comfort zones, especially, living beyond an exclusively Asian community. Justin adds:

“International students with Asian background have often got actually quite a parochial view. They often don’t see life beyond Asian community. That’s something that I think we need to intentionally look at and focus on in the next few years.”

School leaders understand that there are some differences between cultures. They have carried out cultural awareness training with the teachers, and expect them to use it in teaching practice. Adam explains his school experience:

“All the teaching staff have had a couple of sessions on English as an additional language. It covered topics such as how you manage students where English is their second or third language in a normal classroom? What sort of triggers do you look for to accommodate them?”

5.2.4. Designated International Student Advisers

For schools, designated international student advisers are playing a significant role in assisting international students with all aspects of living in Australia. They can not only facilitate students in school life, but also refer these students to specialist and personal advice when their lives become complicated. These advisers may be multilingual or were even previously international students themselves. They prepare accommodation before students’ arrival and check with the homestay service frequently to make sure students are being looked after. They run different activities and excursions to have them welcomed and settled in the schools.

“Our director of the international program is bilingual. The school has made an effort to assist with staff designated to provide support. We’re now trying to work much harder to blend international students in. Not assimilate them, but to actually make them feel much more welcome and part of the school. And for them to contribute to the school culture.” (Adam)

At Justin’s school:

“We have someone whose sole job is to look after overseas students, international students. We run different activities and excursions and things for them to help them get welcomed and settled in.”

Lily’s school uses mentors to support international students at different year levels.

“International students have mentors in the ELICOS program. And then when they transition into mainstream school, their mentors move into a house with them, and those mentors stay with them from Year 10, 11, and 12.”

Adam’s school also established a pastoral care system based on tutor groups. There are four tutor groups in each year group, one from each house. All of the international students are integrated into those groups.

5.2.5. Religious Support

Schools respect international students' multiple religion backgrounds and provide relevant support, such as chapel and pray rooms. Some schools also have chaplaincy service to students. For example, Lily's school has a school chaplain, arranging a session in the chapel for newly arrived students as an introductory information session.

"The school chaplain can explain to the students about the practices of the Anglican Church. It's not an indoctrination at all, it's just you know it's sharing cultural backgrounds."

5.2.6. Other Supports

Accommodation is one of the key issues for international students. Schools provide homestay services to students. Schools also support parents when they are accompanying their children's study in Australia. School leaders recognize them as important people in the school community. Schools build specific program for parents to connect with others who arguably have similar issues. "They can practise their English together, have some fun, go on excursions, discover Melbourne" (Fiona). This is a very important program for school leaders, because it shows those parents that the school, as an institution, cares for them. In addition, increasing the number of bilingual teachers is another effective way to support CHC international students. Victorian independent school leaders understand the basic idea that it is beneficial to have a variety of teachers on a continuum. For instance, Adam's school has a group of teachers who are bilingual and yet another group of teachers who are Caucasian, but are either married to spouses from other ethnicities or have studied in other countries.

6. Discussion

Overall, the positive experiences reported by Victorian school leaders to work with CHC international students through international students' programs in different school contexts led us to consider two key aspects that have arisen from our findings. The first is to recognize and acknowledge the contributions of international students, via an understanding of these positive changes which were reflected by school leaders. The second aspect is to respect and support these international students, finding ways to engage with them by identifying their various specific needs.

6.1. Recognizing and Acknowledging CHC International Students' Contributions

People have different views about the impacts of internationalisation on education by using different lenses. We found that the school leaders of Victorian independent schools perceived the intensification of internationalisation in positive ways, as it provides opportunities for meaningful interaction and enhanced understanding at a cultural, social and academic level (Rizvi 2004; Rahimi et al. 2017; Rowan et al. 2021). School leaders in Victorian independent schools proactively made changes by recruiting international students through various programs (including an international students' program) to respond to the global movements (Rizvi and Lingard 2010). Differently from the literature which finds Western educators viewing their international students through a Western lens, which has inhibited the process of internationalisation (Singh 2009), we found that school leaders at Victorian independent schools have open-minded views about different cultural, intellectual, academic paradigms and learning approaches. Our participants do not hold a stereotypical view of CHC international students as problematic, and are not unwilling to change and adapt to new conditions and imperatives (Singh 2009). Instead, they sympathise with the difficulties of these international students, who have had most of their schooling in one particular way and must suddenly change within a short period of time (1–2 years) to a different way. Furthermore, they broadly view CHC international students as promoters of internationalisation of school education. As Borrey (2018, para. 12) argued:

“International students encourage teachers and students to develop their communication skills and awareness of different cultures. A teacher who works with international students has opportunities to develop a wider variety teaching of styles and strategies. This strengthens the quality of teaching and learning environments and the ‘global competence’ of teachers and students.”

In fact, the effects of internationalisation go beyond international students. Internationalisation is not just concerned with the academic, social and cultural engagement of international students, but affects domestic students as well, due to the change in dynamic of the whole school environment (Spurling 2006; Edwards 2010). The school leaders in this study also recognise international students’ diverse knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) generated from previous experiences in their home countries, and acknowledge their linguistic, cultural and educational contributions to the school community (Li 2002; Tweed and Lehman 2002; Rao and Chan 2010).

6.2. Supporting CHC International Students by Respecting Their Specific Educational Subjectivities

Adapting to a different academic culture can pose significant challenges for students studying in a country that is linguistically and culturally different from their own (Gu and Schweisfurth 2006). It is a challenging experience for most international students to cross their national borders to study in a new educational environment, especially for those for whom English is not their first language. They may experience discrimination, homesickness, fear, guilt, hatred, and stress due to the rapid change of their learning and living environments (Sandhu and Asrabadi 1994; Poyrazli et al. 2010). To battle these cultural and learning shocks, Victorian independent schools actively engage with CHC international students by identifying their various needs and provide specific support services, such as language support, academic support, cultural support, providing designated international students advisers, religious and other supports. This follows the suggestion from Isomine (2015) that “each international student should be free from any kind of barriers and be able to take advantage of what the institution has to offer” (p. 6). Furthermore, Victorian independent schools have started to reform and renew their curriculum through incorporation of international and global dimensions (Rizvi 2004), and by improving intercultural skills among teaching staff, and developing Asian value-based pedagogy that is more inclusive of international student needs (Absalom and Vadura 2006; Knight 2013).

While many Australians celebrate the country as one of the most successful multicultural nations in the world, school leaders with foresight place great emphasis on the needs of young learners for awareness and skills to sustain the cultural diversity of our society and to live and work in the globalised world. The school leaders in our study realise that there are other equally successful systems around the world. It is important to understand and value other education systems, other ways of learning and teaching in the context of internationalisation of education. International students undergo learning adjustments within the Australian schooling system due to the differences between their learning habits formed by earlier educational experiences, and the transformation of learning approaches required by their new educational environments (Dumenden and English 2013). International students studying in Australia with their diverse KSAs are enabled to effectively act in their studies and lead to superior academic performance. As Gu (2001) expressed, mutual respect or respect for difference is important in the context of internationalisation. Our school leaders respected CHC international students’ existing educational subjectivities and understood their expectations of academic success. They further suggested that academic achievement is not the only part of their lives in the Australian education system. School leaders aimed to help students in their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where knowledge and skills are too difficult for their students to master on their own, but can be developed with guidance and encouragement from their teachers at school (Vygotsky 1978). They intended to reconstruct CHC international students’ educational subjectivities

to encourage them to go out of their comfort zones by actively engaging with Western culture and ways of learning.

7. Conclusions

The findings of this study indicate that, in contrast to those scholars and educators using a Western lens to view international students as “problematic” in their adaptation to the “host” education system, school leaders in Victorian independent schools positively recognized and acknowledged their contributions. More specifically, school leaders looked at international students as promoters for their schools to deal with the challenge of internationalisation, and the opportunity to generate new knowledge and new ways of teaching. Meanwhile, internationalisation has effects that go beyond international students. The school leaders recognised the diverse experience, talents and abilities of students from their past life and acknowledged their contribution to the language, cultural and educational environments in the school community. In addition, school leaders declared that it is important for their schools to value and respect international students’ previous educational subjectivities to facilitate their adaptations to new educational environments. To do this, they offered various tailored programs to rebuild students’ ongoing educational subjectivities which bridge the different educational systems and cultural traditions between “home” and “host”. We believe that the findings of this study provide a useful pedagogical starting point for deployment by researchers and educators in other similar circumstances, who face the problems and challenges that the Australian independent schools have faced in the process of internationalisation, that they may better support the CHC international students in an effective way. However, the generalisability of this study is limited due to low response rate of the survey, and the self-nominated interviewees cannot represent the whole population spectrum in Victorian independent schools. While the findings are likely to be indicative of the challenges faced by other school leaders, more systematic and larger-in-scale follow up studies are needed so that a wider range of voices could be involved.

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Notes

- ¹ Such countries as China, Vietnam, Singapore, Korea and Japan are considered countries with Confucian heritage culture (Phuong-Mai et al. 2005).
- ² The Department of Education and Training Victoria expects that schools provide Languages other than English (LOTE) from Prep to Year 10. 22 languages are taught in Victorian government primary schools and 19 in secondary schools.
- ³ ATAR stands for Australian Tertiary Admission Rank. It is a number between 0.00 and 99.95 that indicates a student’s position relative to all the students in their cohort. So, an ATAR of 80.00 means that a student is in the top 20 percent of his or her cohort.

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