



# **The International Student Experience: Making it better for everyone**

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## Summary of paper

- ◆ International students in Australia: The Challenges
- ◆ Recent research on international students
- ◆ Academic and social challenges faced by international students
- ◆ Implications for educators

# International Students in Australia: The Challenges

- ◆ Lecturers/Teachers: the students have varying needs and expectations; educators are not sure how to respond to these
- ◆ International Students:
  - academic challenges*: academic language and learning the conventions
  - social challenges*: dealing with unfamiliar social and cultural norms and customs



# Current Research

- ◆ The Social and economic Security on International Students in Australia and New Zealand
- ◆ The Pastoral Care of International Students in New Zealand
- ◆ University staff understanding of international students and intercultural teaching and learning (work in progress).



## International student security

- ◆ In this research study, international students are defined as having consumer, educational, legal, organizational and industrial *rights*



## Description of the research

- ◆ Interviews with 200 international students enrolled at nine universities from Victoria, NSW and Queensland (including Melbourne)
- ◆ Interviews with 70 international students enrolled at two universities in New Zealand
- ◆ Results not disaggregated by institution but other categories used
- ◆ Selection of students via international offices and snowballing.



## Aspects of student security

International student *security* includes health care, welfare, housing, financial welfare and freedoms, legal and civil matters including freedom of mobility, consumer protection, freedom from abuse and discrimination, freedom from exploitation at work and the educational rights of students to pastoral care

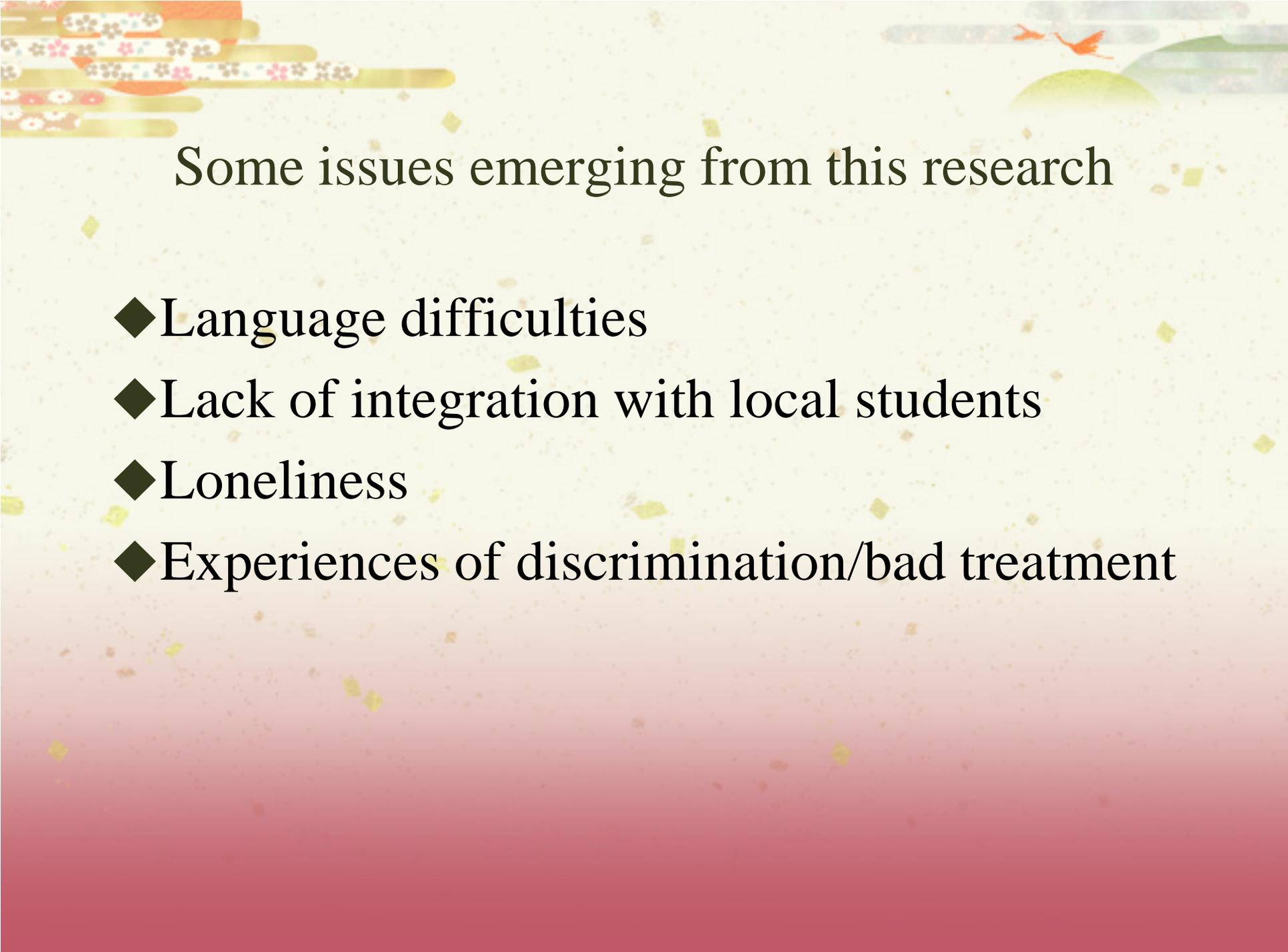


## Published papers arising from research

- ◆ Global migration and social protection: The social and economic security of foreign students in Australia', *Global Social Policy*, 5 (3), pp. 329-352 (2005)
- ◆ Loneliness and international students – an Australian study', *Journal of Studies in International Education* [in press]

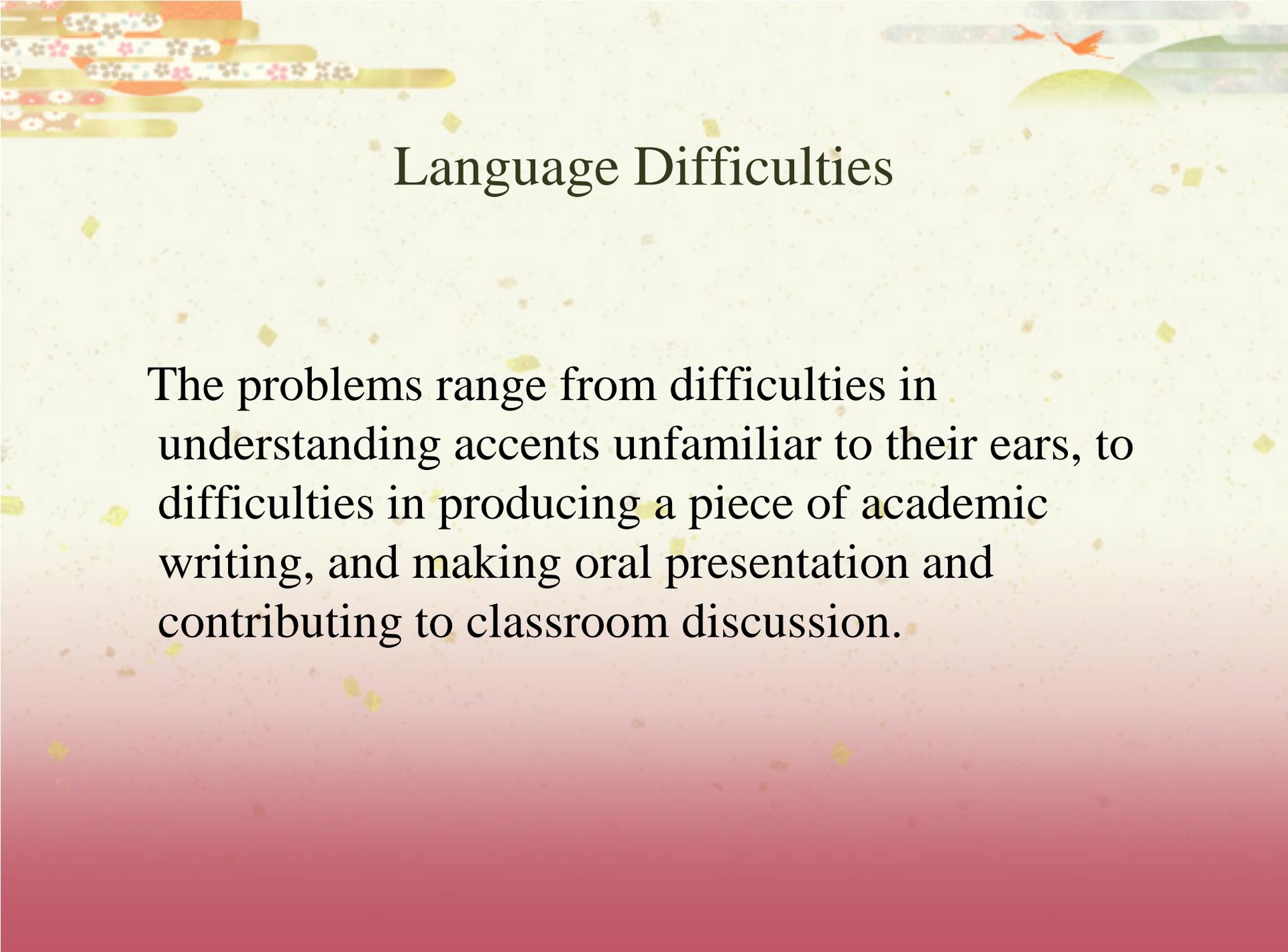
## Papers under review

- ◆ International business and cross-border education: A case of the Janus face of globalisation?
- ◆ Income security of international students in Australia
- ◆ The pastoral care of international students in New Zealand
- ◆ The social and economic security of International Students in New Zealand
- ◆ Further papers in preparation on (1) language problems and language use (2) health and welfare (3) housing (4) relations with universities and government (5) cross-cultural relations and discrimination (6) student networks
- ◆ Book based on the edited papers



## Some issues emerging from this research

- ◆ Language difficulties
- ◆ Lack of integration with local students
- ◆ Loneliness
- ◆ Experiences of discrimination/bad treatment



# Language Difficulties

The problems range from difficulties in understanding accents unfamiliar to their ears, to difficulties in producing a piece of academic writing, and making oral presentation and contributing to classroom discussion.

## Writing

*So far the writing system is very different, you know... because most Indonesian students, with assignments they don't get used to references, how to write references ... but know my writing is getting better and better.  
(female, 19, communication, Indonesia)*

## Translation strategy

- ◆ *My difficulty is in writing, academic writing is very different from, like, informal English writing... If I want to make a sentence in English I just make it in Indonesian, and then translate it into English. But then somebody who is a native speaker, when that person reads my writing they say oh, it's not English it's another kind of language ... so learning a second language is not as easy as learning the first language. (female, 30, food science, Indonesia)*

## Speaking/ oral presentation

*My main concern at the moment is that sometimes I find it's not that easy to communicate my ideas during the class... we understand, sort of, like, the concept of the subject but to communicate the ideas and to share them with our friends in the class is not that easy, especially where I'm sort of intimidated by local students as well. (female, 20, commerce, Indonesia)*

*I remember that when we have these presentations, it's just that I've never really... in Brunei we don't give presentations. the culture is different, I was just, like, tongue tied when I got up. I didn't know what to say. Like, I was being intimidated by these people that are staring at you. You're just, like, out of place. (female, 35, ceramics, Brunei)*

## Opportunity to speak

*If I am prepared I can get very high marks but without preparation it's very hard for me to express my ideas... especially now in this semester, we've got one course... most of our classmates are Aussie, yes. They talk very actively ...we cannot find any opportunity to speak at all.  
(female, 27, economics and commerce, China)*

## Accent

*I think, the first time I came here, I was not used to Australian accent. In South Korean we are exposed to American English, so my god, this is not English, what are they talking about?(male, 25, computer science, Korea)*

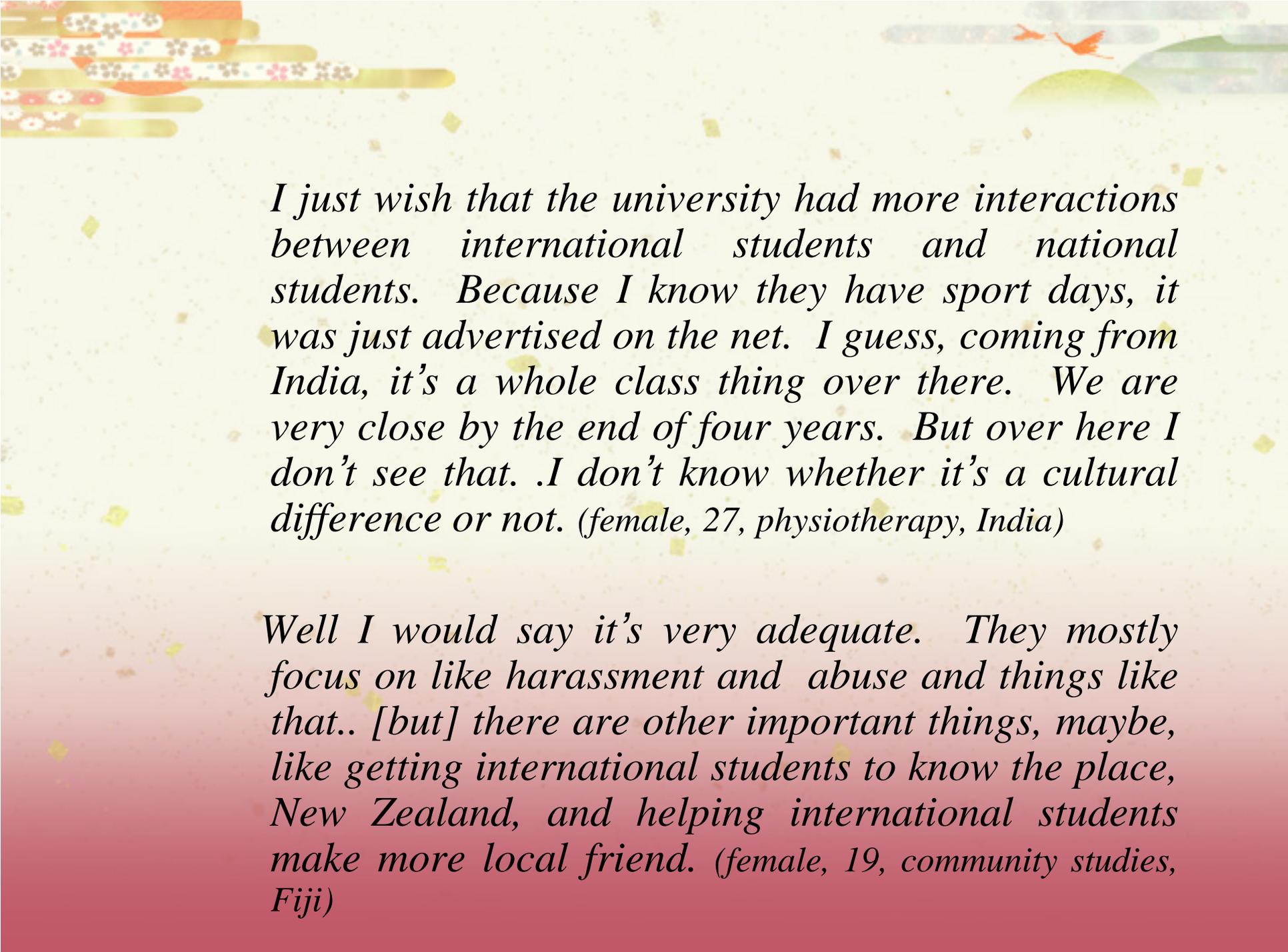
*Sometimes I find it hard to understand Australian dialect. When I learned English in Indonesian it was taught by an Indonesian teacher so I was so shocked when I first heard the Australian accent. (female, 28, early childhood, Indonesia)*



## Lack of integration with local students

*Yes... Sometimes in the school I feel lonely. Most people are Australians, and all are busy. They can't find time just say how are you or something like that (male, 31, biology, Egypt)*

*I make friends but not a lot. Most of my close friends here are international students as well. I find it really hard to make friends with Kiwis. Like we... I don't know... we can't get along as well as they get along with each other. Sometimes they discuss things just about New Zealand. I don't understand, so I can't join the conversation (female, 21, Communication Studies, Vietnam).*



*I just wish that the university had more interactions between international students and national students. Because I know they have sport days, it was just advertised on the net. I guess, coming from India, it's a whole class thing over there. We are very close by the end of four years. But over here I don't see that. I don't know whether it's a cultural difference or not. (female, 27, physiotherapy, India)*

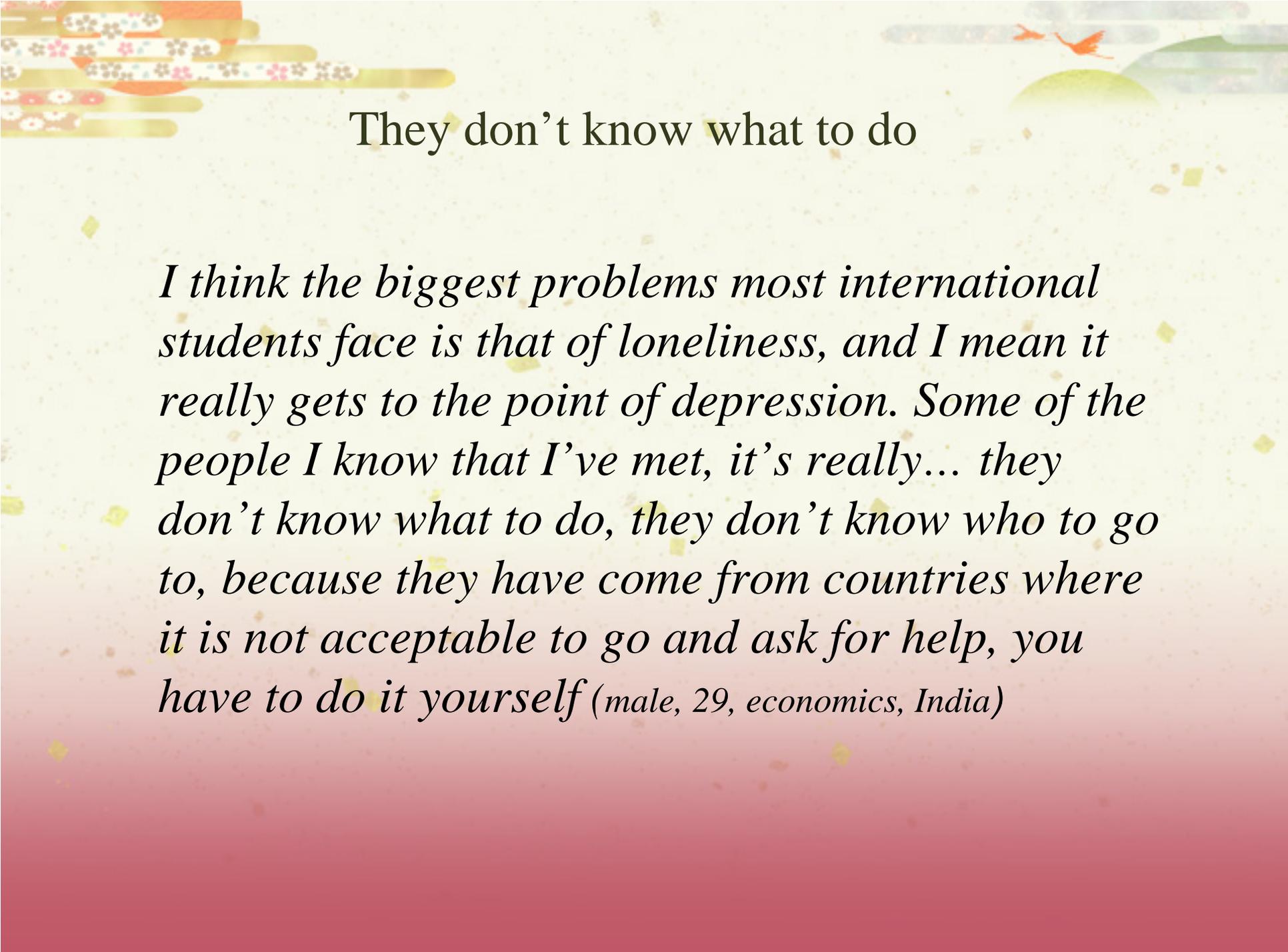
*Well I would say it's very adequate. They mostly focus on like harassment and abuse and things like that.. [but] there are other important things, maybe, like getting international students to know the place, New Zealand, and helping international students make more local friend. (female, 19, community studies, Fiji)*

## The question on loneliness

Q. Have you experienced periods of loneliness or isolation? *[if the answer is 'yes']* Q. Who did you turn to?

65% (Australian international students) and 66% (NZ international students) answered 'yes'

- ◆ The majority turn to friends for support
- ◆ Most severe in first few months



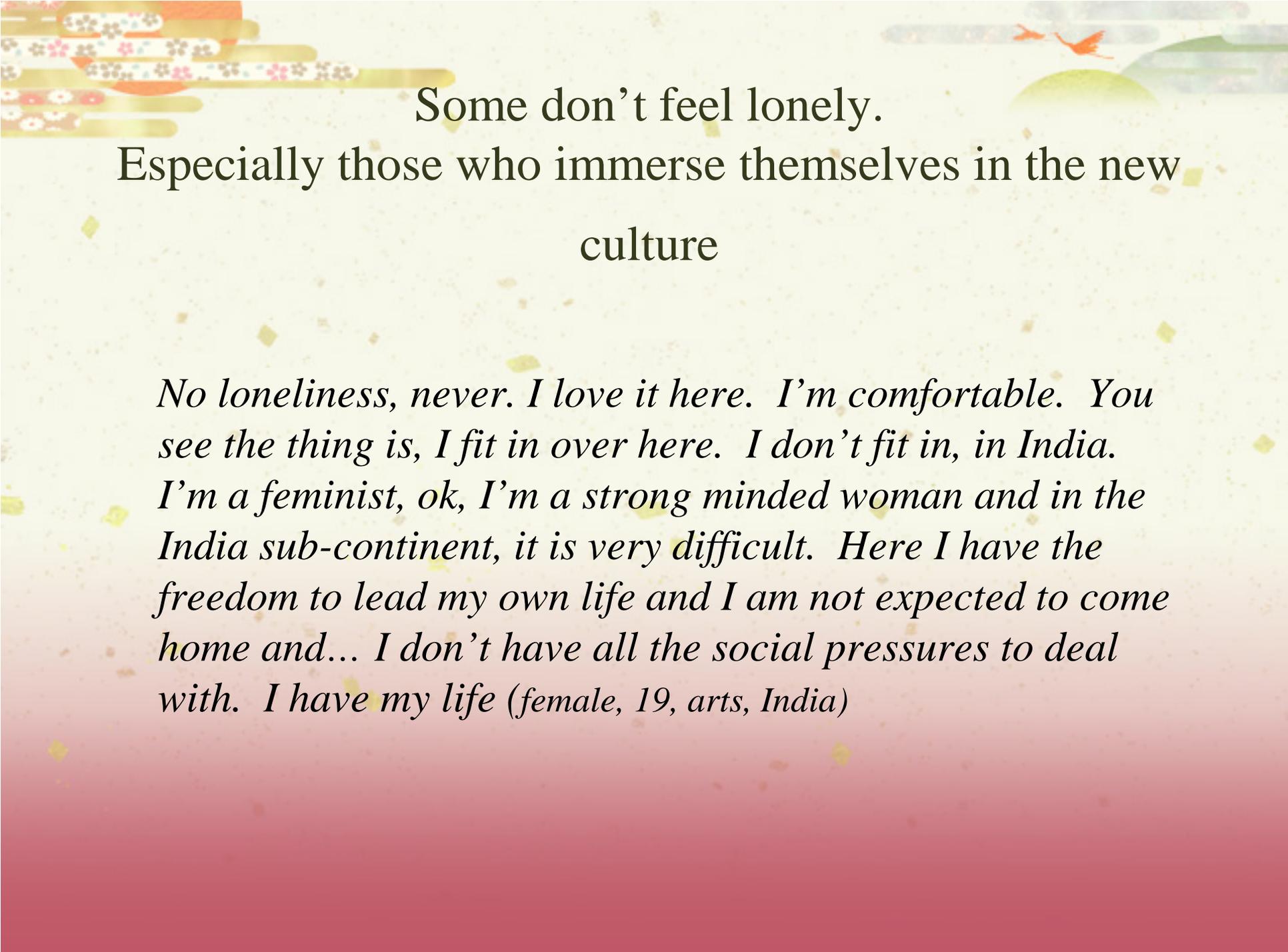
They don't know what to do

*I think the biggest problems most international students face is that of loneliness, and I mean it really gets to the point of depression. Some of the people I know that I've met, it's really... they don't know what to do, they don't know who to go to, because they have come from countries where it is not acceptable to go and ask for help, you have to do it yourself (male, 29, economics, India)*

## Crying on the phone

*Yes, yes, oh, especially right at the beginning when I first got here. I didn't have anyone to talk to, that was the thing. It was really hard because I couldn't have contact with anybody.*

*Initially I came all by myself... exactly who to approach, who to talk to, I had no clue. So I used to be on the phone everyday with my Dad, 'I wanna go home'. It's like every single day, I'll call my Dad and cry and cry on the phone ... at the beginning, no, I didn't know or didn't have someone to go to, so there was a lot of loneliness and things like that (female, 28, business, Zimbabwe)*



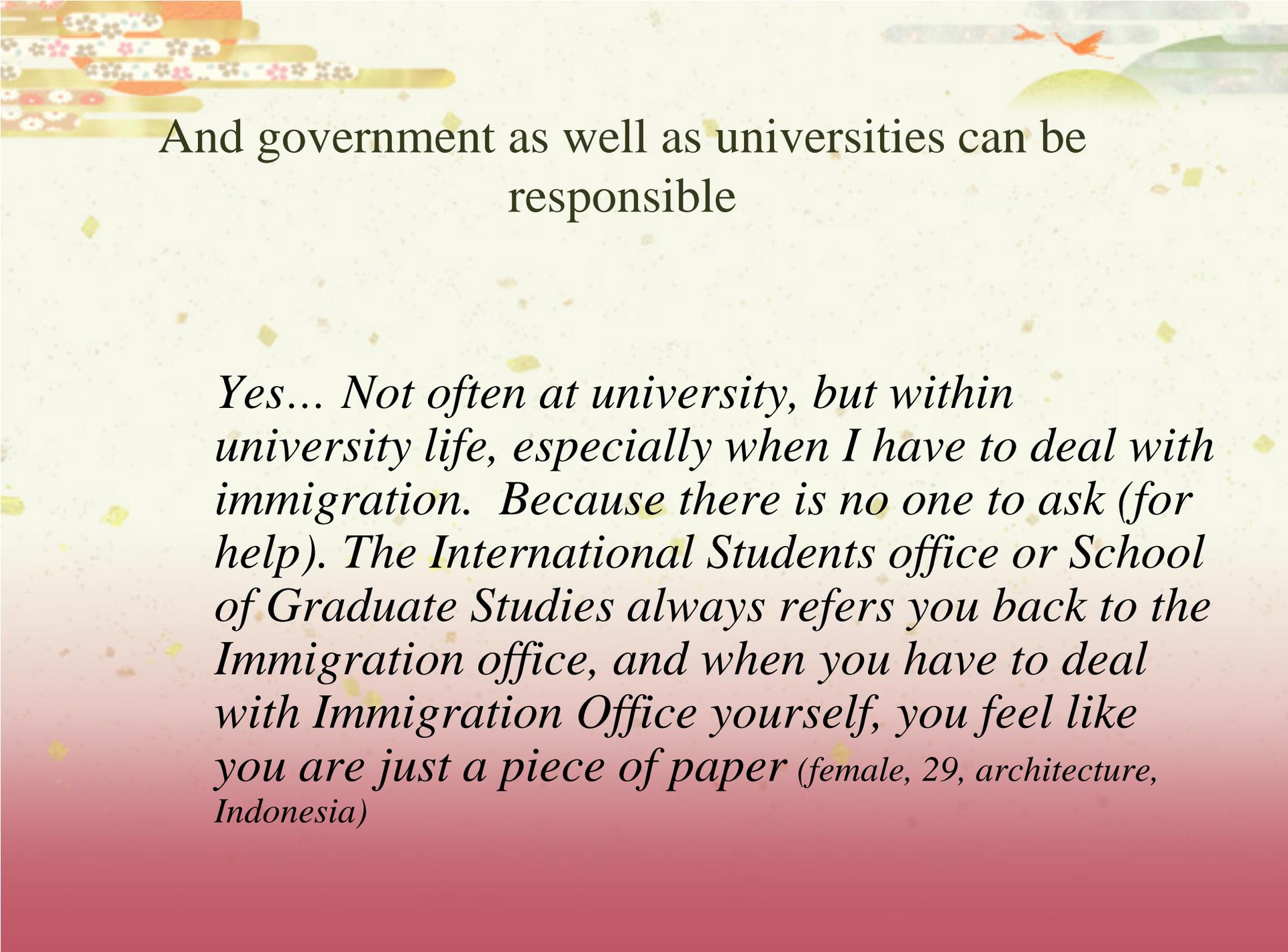
Some don't feel lonely.  
Especially those who immerse themselves in the new  
culture

*No loneliness, never. I love it here. I'm comfortable. You see the thing is, I fit in over here. I don't fit in, in India. I'm a feminist, ok, I'm a strong minded woman and in the India sub-continent, it is very difficult. Here I have the freedom to lead my own life and I am not expected to come home and... I don't have all the social pressures to deal with. I have my life (female, 19, arts, India)*

## For example: loneliness in research...

◆ *Loneliness in my research... it's a different type of loneliness, let's say topic-related loneliness. I can't talk to anybody, not even to my supervisor, because it's a field no one really has worked in. I guess you don't go out and say look I am lonely can I talk to you, rather you search for company and then you talk... (male, 40, PhD Education, Germany)*

*If I knew that I would be so isolated doing my PhD here, maybe I would not have come here. I chose to come to another country because I thought I would have more chance to attend conferences express my ideas, take part in discussion groups. But when I came here I realized that I make a mistake (female, 31, community development, Indonesia)*



And government as well as universities can be responsible

*Yes... Not often at university, but within university life, especially when I have to deal with immigration. Because there is no one to ask (for help). The International Students office or School of Graduate Studies always refers you back to the Immigration office, and when you have to deal with Immigration Office yourself, you feel like you are just a piece of paper (female, 29, architecture, Indonesia)*

## Discrimination/bad treatment

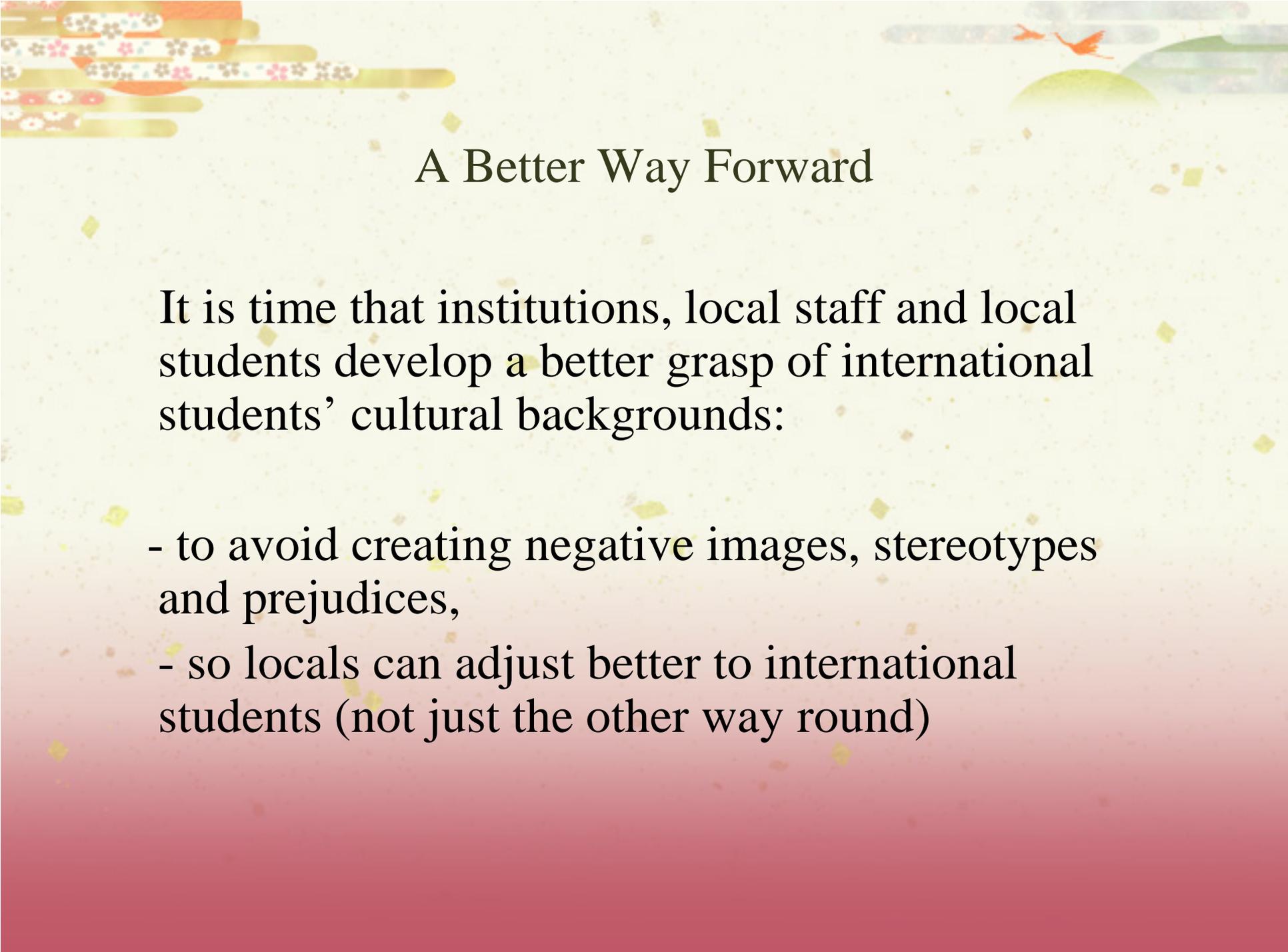
*As a foreigner... yes. Most of the time it was implicit... [it was] not explicitly stated that we don't like you because you speak English different. That's not explicitly stated but it's implied. That is not the purpose of the people, but yeah, it's been a major problem.*

*Some people for example don't make an effort to understand what you are saying when you speak with a different accent, it can be in a shop or it can even be in the university. Especially when your English is basic, they don't make an effort to understand. It is like a prejudice, they are probably not aware but this is a racist prejudice that this person is not able to communicate with me... that is the assumption behind it. It sounds trivial but it's actually very important when it happens systematically ... it kind of puts you off (male, 28, sociology, Cyprus)*

## Other examples

*I remember one time I go to the international office because I'm so ..... I don't manage my language very well so the reception ... [give me] not very patient looks because they think I'm stupid or maybe ..... just sort of sitting there... They should stand up and come to me not just [leave me] sitting there. (male, 25, information & technology, China).*

*No, but... when I first started, I find that a lot of the lecturers and tutors, because you are Asian, they stereotype you and think that you don't speak English. I've experienced some students, crying, running out of the classroom. (female, 32, commerce, Singapore)*



## A Better Way Forward

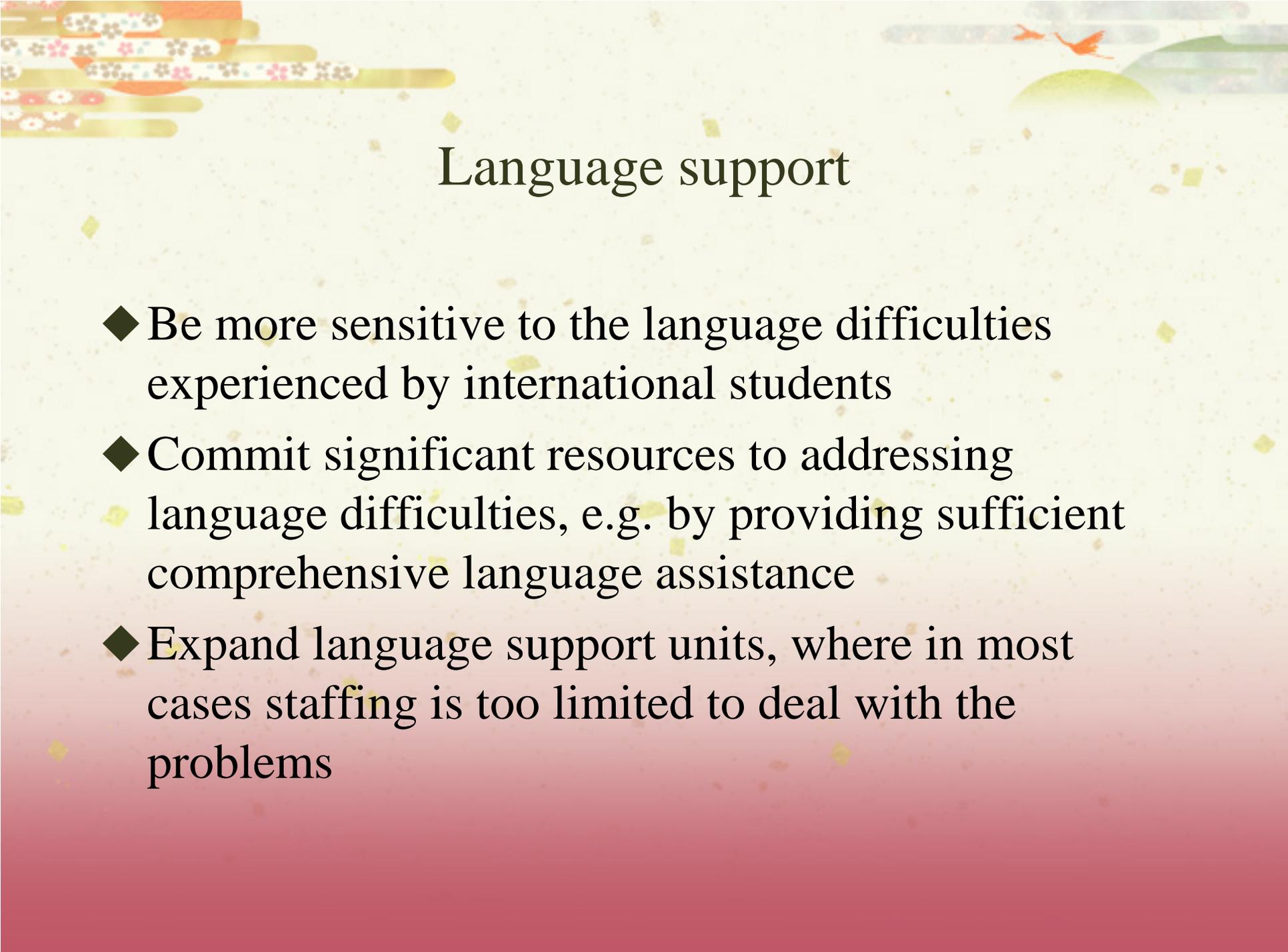
It is time that institutions, local staff and local students develop a better grasp of international students' cultural backgrounds:

- to avoid creating negative images, stereotypes and prejudices,
- so locals can adjust better to international students (not just the other way round)



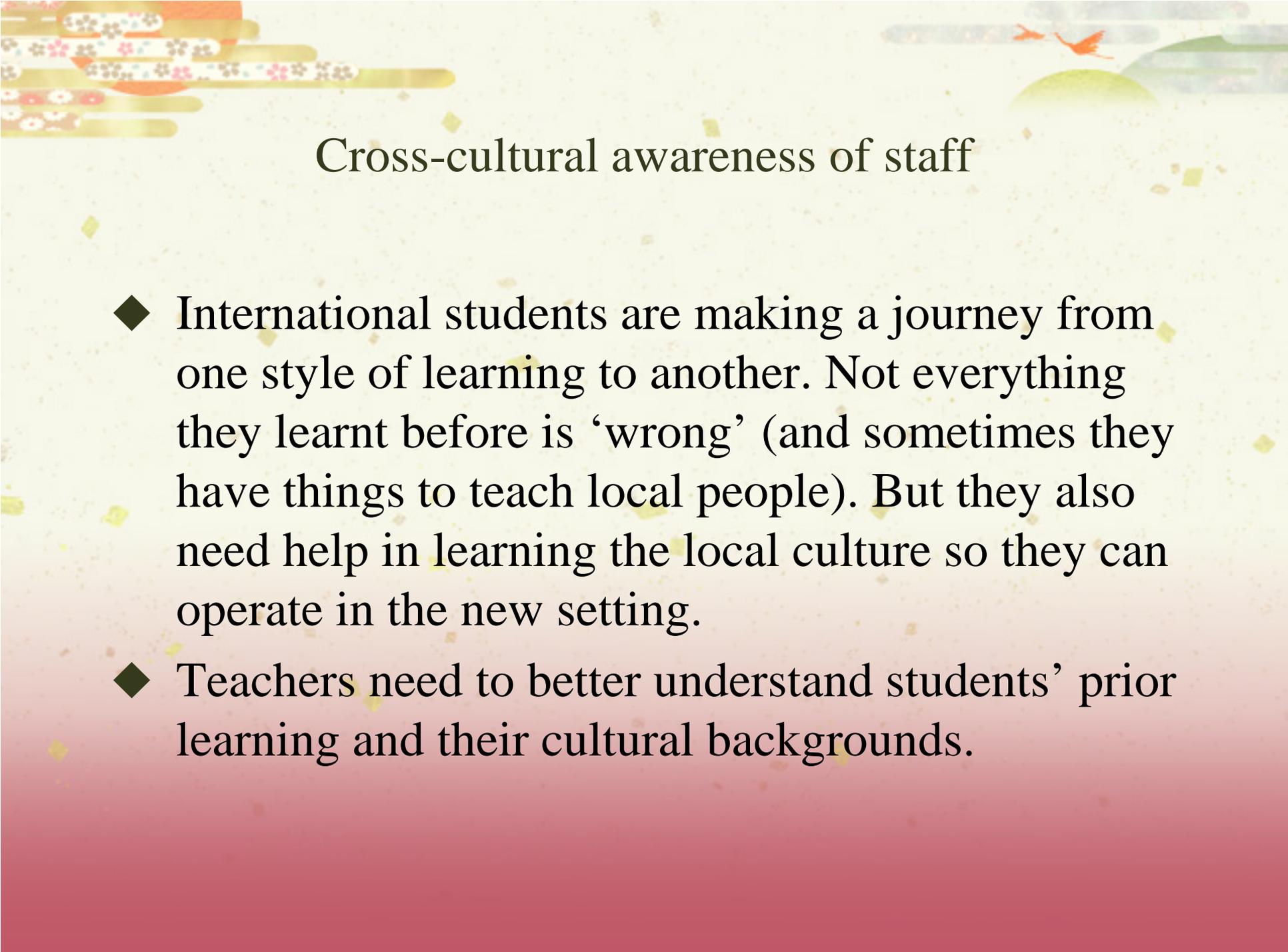
## Strategies for improving institutional practice

- ❖ Language support
- ❖ Cross-cultural awareness of academic staff
- ❖ Closer integration between international students and local students
- ❖ Protect students from discrimination
- ❖ Monitoring and evaluation of programs
- ❖ Changes in the classroom to promote a deeper shared cultural experience



# Language support

- ◆ Be more sensitive to the language difficulties experienced by international students
- ◆ Commit significant resources to addressing language difficulties, e.g. by providing sufficient comprehensive language assistance
- ◆ Expand language support units, where in most cases staffing is too limited to deal with the problems

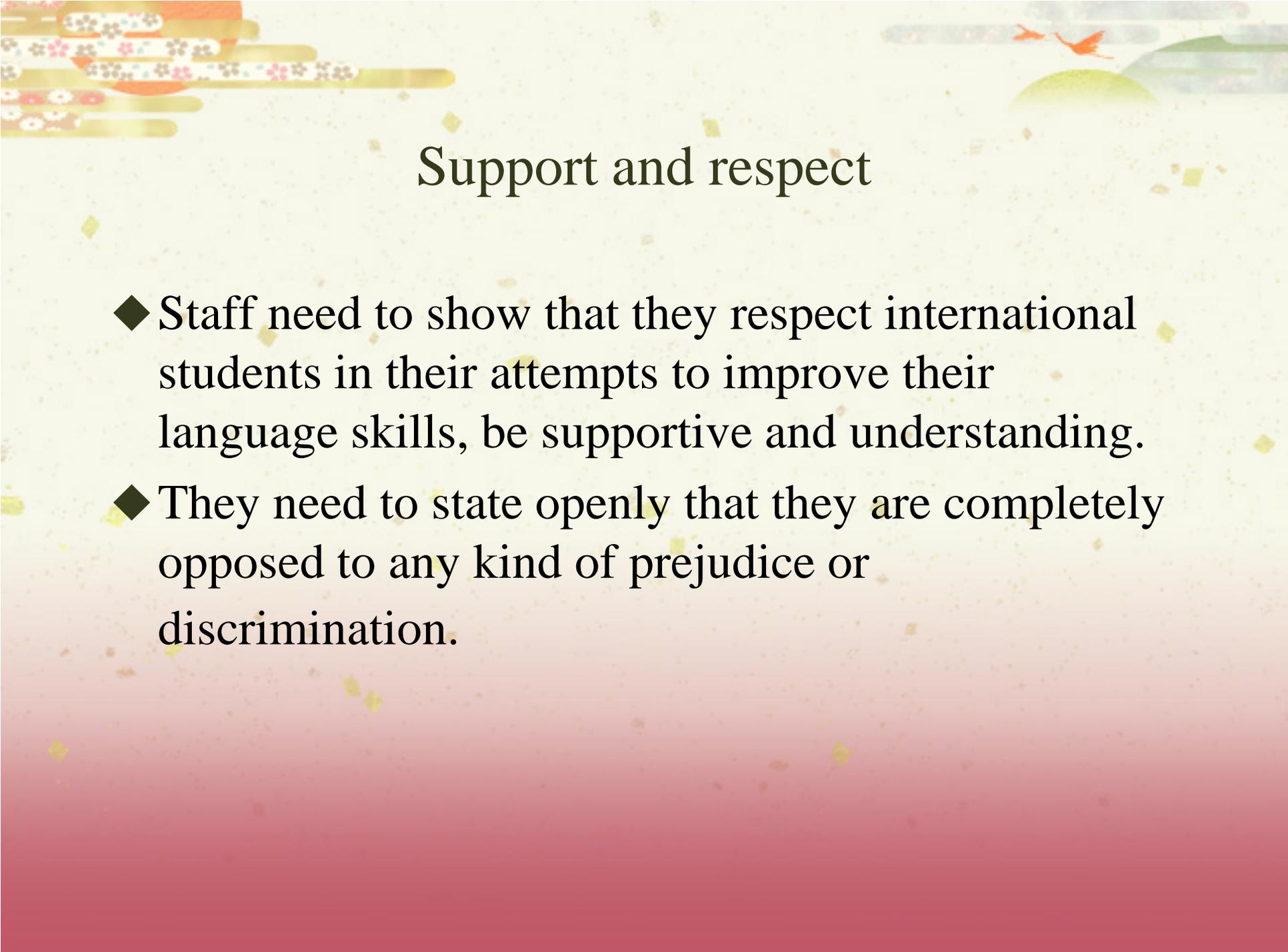


## Cross-cultural awareness of staff

- ◆ International students are making a journey from one style of learning to another. Not everything they learnt before is ‘wrong’ (and sometimes they have things to teach local people). But they also need help in learning the local culture so they can operate in the new setting.
- ◆ Teachers need to better understand students’ prior learning and their cultural backgrounds.

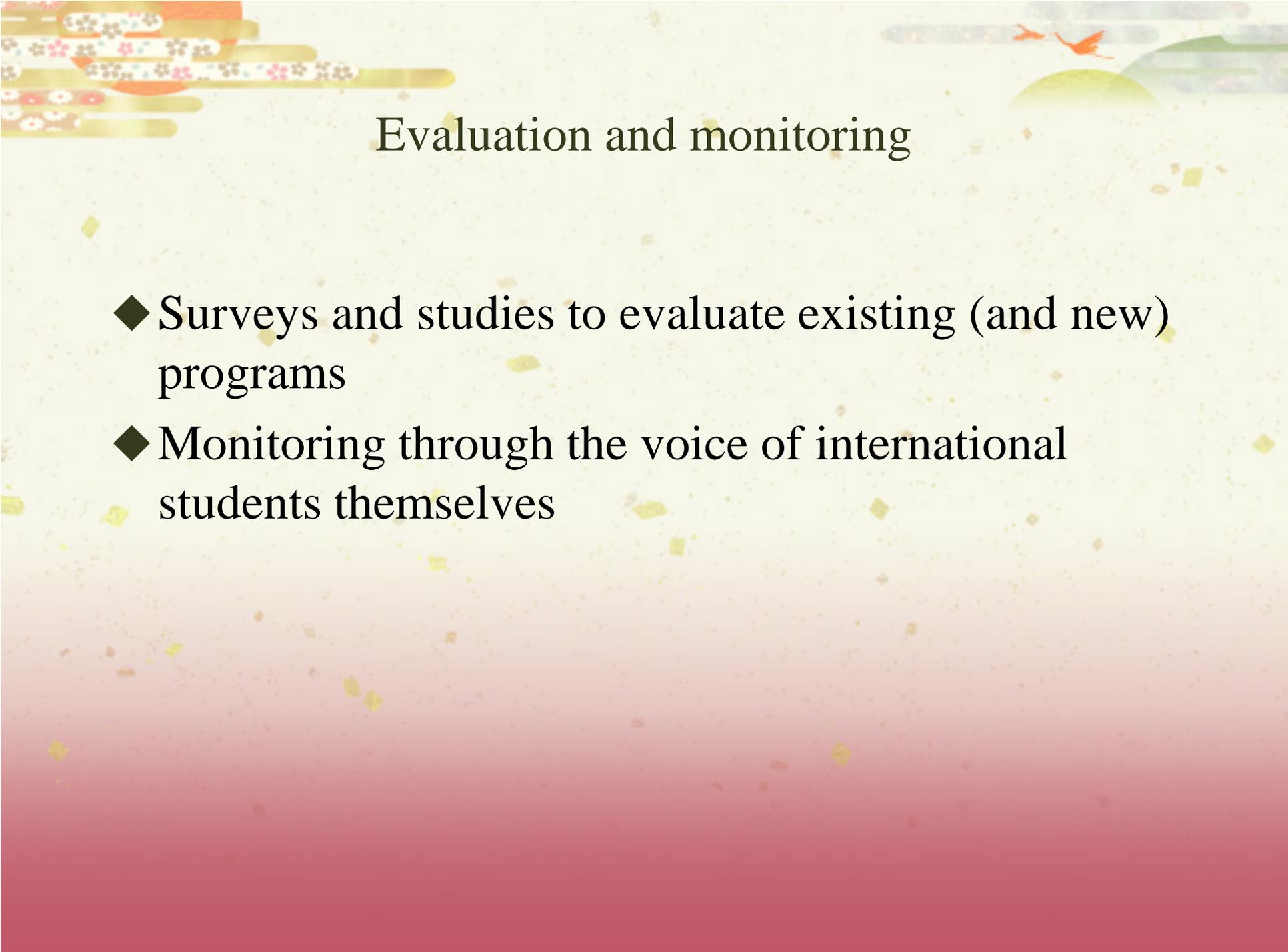
# Local and international students

- ◆ Local students play an important role in helping create a friendly and warm environment for international students
- ◆ They should be open and show interest to international students.



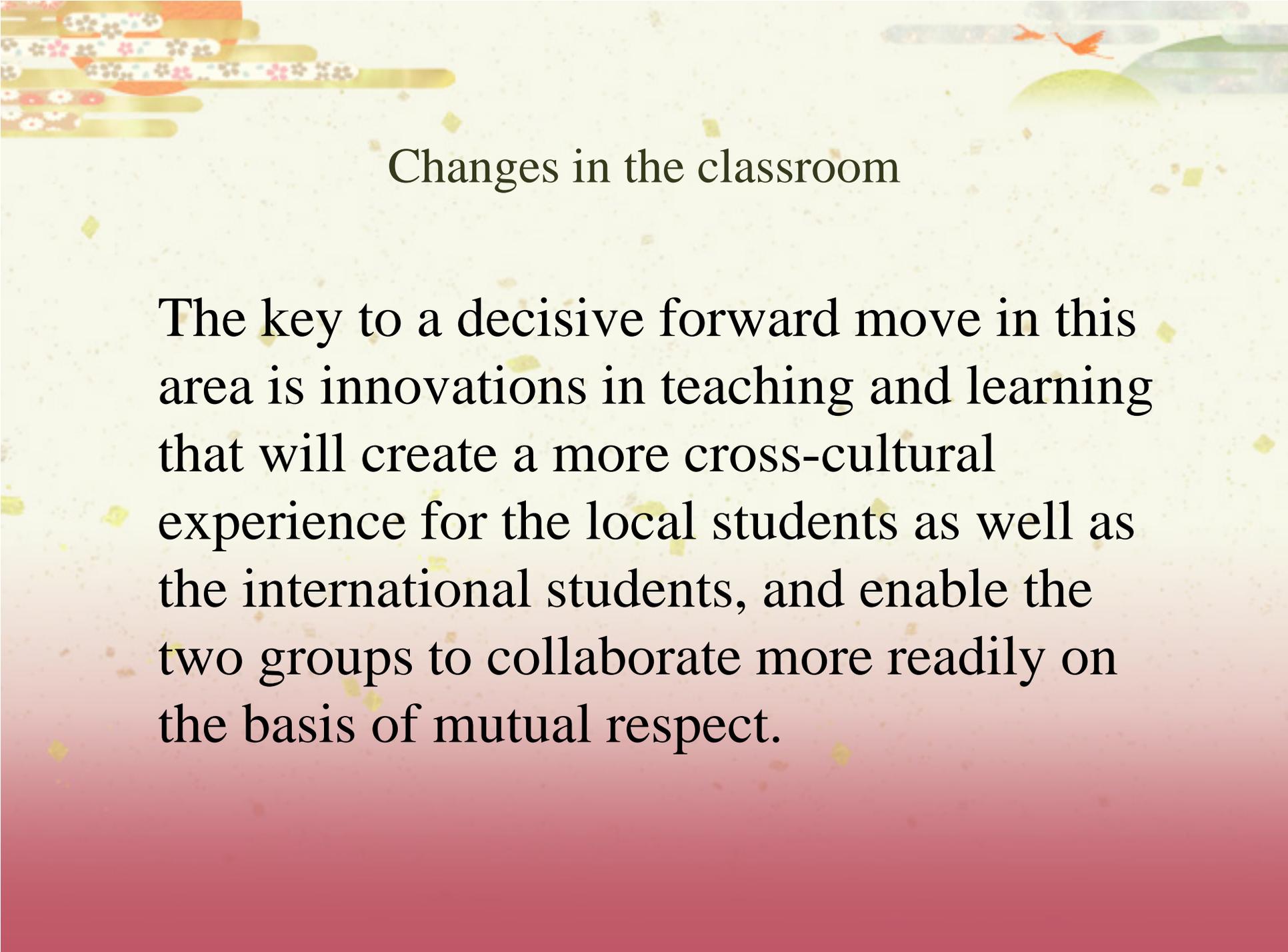
## Support and respect

- ◆ Staff need to show that they respect international students in their attempts to improve their language skills, be supportive and understanding.
- ◆ They need to state openly that they are completely opposed to any kind of prejudice or discrimination.



## Evaluation and monitoring

- ◆ Surveys and studies to evaluate existing (and new) programs
- ◆ Monitoring through the voice of international students themselves



## Changes in the classroom

The key to a decisive forward move in this area is innovations in teaching and learning that will create a more cross-cultural experience for the local students as well as the international students, and enable the two groups to collaborate more readily on the basis of mutual respect.