

# My Story ~ 2. The Country Behind The Forests



*“As time passed by, I gradually got to know Australia. It was different from what I saw at first glance from the plane—a land covered by the forests. I slowly started to see the friendliness and openness of Australian people.”*

Actually, my memory is not so good, but there is one day I will never forget. That day was August 22, 1988, when Perth, Western Australia came into my sight. As the plane was landing, I could see no houses, only forests. Hence, the first thing that had occurred to me after I came to Australia was that I would have to cut down trees for a living. Otherwise, what could I do in this place? Where could I find a job? This place was so underdeveloped, even worse than China. Could I earn money here? I doubted my brother’s recommendation to come to Australia.

In my hometown, my brother was a very successful entrepreneur with a wide range of social contacts and aware of all the latest information. Originally, I didn’t plan to come to Australia. My brother helped to arrange me to go to Japan. Lots of Japanese classes and English classes were set up for those going abroad. The reason why so many people wanted to go to Japan was that they said it’s easy to earn money in Japan, and the social type and skin color are similar. I studied Japanese in the evening. Afterwards, my brother heard Australia was a better place to go if you wanted to establish a new life. His friend’s sister happened to be married to the principal of a language school in Perth, Western Australia, so I registered with this school. I could not speak any English when I first came to Australia, let alone knew much about the country.

When I was at middle school, I only knew that Australia was a developed capitalist country with agriculture as the main industry. “Australia rides on sheep’s back”, I

heard that milk was from a tap and someone also said that the tap water was drinkable. Thinking of this today, they had their reasons for saying this. In fact, the milk here is very cheap; a large can of milk only costs two Australian Dollars. You can't say they were fooling us, or exaggerating.

After coming to Australia, I had to spend a lot of money renting a house. In China I lived in my own house. I found the price of daily necessities here were far higher than in China, however the wages were very high, so I wanted to find a job. Soon after we arrived, we had nothing to do. We just wandered about with friends who had come to Australia before us. On Sunday, we went to a weekend market in Fremantle, which we Chinese call a "flea market". It was fun to stroll around the market. There was lots of stuff for sale and you could buy some very good second-hand goods for fifty cents or one Australian dollar. I met a couple also strolling around the market. The husband was Australian and his wife Chinese. Because there were not so many Chinese there, I felt happy to meet them. We greeted each other and kept each other's phone number. Later on, I found out that her husband was Australian and had studied traditional Chinese medicine in China. After coming back, he opened a clinic of traditional Chinese medicine on London Street located in the center of Perth. He specialized in acupuncture and tuina and treating sport injuries for his clients. They were very friendly, so we sometimes went to chat with them at their clinic. Due to the language barrier and unfamiliarity with this new place, it was hard for us to find a job, so I hoped that my local friend could help us. At last, thanks to his introduction, I found my first job.

I worked for a company making Italian pastries. Some of its products were sold to airlines for guests travelling first-class and some were wholesaled to local coffee shops. I was a cleaner responsible for cleaning grinding tools and sweeping the floor after they finished work. Later on, the Immigration Bureau examined my payroll and found my working hours exceeded the specified amount. It was illegal, so they planned to repatriate me. The officers of the Bureau put me into the prison van to take me to the airport. I said I had to pick up my luggage, so they drove the van to my rented house. In order to prevent me from running away, they locked me inside the van and two officers took the walkie-talkie to help me pick up my luggage upstairs. After they walked away, I thought about how to escape, I broke off the steel bars on the window and then opened the window. But it was too small and my wallet was in the way, so I had to throw it away. I didn't

have a penny with me at that time, and I stayed at an abandoned warehouse, cold and hungry, I was not brave enough to leave. That period was the toughest in my life. A Chinese TV director once advised me to adapt this experience into a TV drama.

I couldn't stay in Perth anymore. One of my friends gave me the fare and I reached Melbourne by bus after three days and two nights. That was in 1989. There were so many Chinese students and they could find jobs soon after arrival. After finding work, usually, they would ask their bosses, "Do you need more people? We have some friends." Chinese are very popular for working in Australia. They follow the boss's every order, because their status is low. Australian locals are likely to quit if they are not happy, for they can enjoy the welfare benefits provided by the Australian government. But we have to do the job, either good or bad. Moreover, we are diligent and efficient, so we are popular among local bosses.

After arriving in Melbourne, my friend took me to a factory. My first job was to make plastic components for automobiles and do injection molding at the factory. Various accessories for the automobile manufacturer Toyota were made there. I worked there for approximately two years, then, I worked at a fabric printing factory as supervisor and foundry man.

Later, by a chance, a friend of mine who owned a restaurant invited me to join him as a partner. We opened three restaurants and the business was good. As time passed, we opened dozens of restaurants. This good condition lasted for several years and our business was booming, but I also felt very tired, because I traveled the whole day, visiting dozens of restaurants by airplane or car, and seldom stayed at home. It's more than 300 kilometers from Brisbane to Coffs Harbour and there was no major air service, so I had to drive more than 30 hours each trip, or take the uncomfortable small airplane. Nevertheless, thanks to this experience, I had the opportunity to travel all over Australia.

After staying and working in Australia for years, I became tired of the stressful life, my values changed to the simple things in life. I think fortune and money are not the whole of a person's life but just a part. The proportion varies with each individual. In Australia, you don't need a lot of money. Of course, you can't live without money, but you don't need too much. Bill Gates is very rich, but he strongly supports charity. If Bill Gates comes to China and invites the rich to donate, no one is willing to have dinner with him. Why? Because parents all want

to leave their fortune to their children! But they don't realize their children will lose more even though a comfortable life free of want is guaranteed. They are supposed to earn money themselves, but wealthy parents help them, so they lose the ability and incentive to make money. Therefore, we should educate our children well instead of giving them lots of money. Now, I consider money as not so important.

Thus, after returning to China, I thought my values were different from the people in China. I have a three-story villa in my hometown Fuzhou, but I just leave it there. In Australia, people are simple, equal and less materialistic, and they don't show off; whereas in China people tend to compare their lives and achievements with each other, and the projects people are talking about are of several hundred million yuan. No one knows if it's true or false. In this environment, people are likely to become restless, greedy and snobbish. I am used to the freedom, relaxed lifestyle and comfort here. After returning to China, I had so many social engagements. I didn't have any time to myself. I meant to go back to see my parents, in the end I spent very little time with them, having a complete dinner at most. I prefer the life in Australia. In my leisure time, I will drink tea, watch the computer, play some ball at the court and have dinner at home. It's unavoidable to go out for social engagements, but I really feel comfortable having dinner at home. The foods I eat at home are my favorites, such as rice and two or three dishes. If I have to go back to China again, I can't stand it for more than 20 days, I can only stand it for 10 days at most. However, I still appreciate our Chinese traditions, such as relations with parents and between brothers and some religious activities. Thus, spiritually, I am still Chinese, and I don't regard myself as Australian at any time, including issues like disputes between China and America or Japan. No doubt that I am a Chinese to the bottom of my heart.

In my opinion, the spiritual things come first wherever one goes, just like why we chose to go abroad. Of course, at the beginning we went abroad to make money. I believe many people have the same dream, including many successful business immigrants. At first, we just wanted to earn more Australian Dollars so that we could live better lives after returning to China. However, after living in a place for a long time, knowing this place deeply and establishing contacts, everyone also starts deciding his own thoughts in determining his destiny. Working mechanically, like a machine, will not change anything, the change mainly lies in our thoughts.

Time has allowed us to gradually get to know Australia. My first impression was nothing but forests seen from the airplane. Gradually, I saw Australian friendliness and integrity.

From: *Fan Hong & Liang Fen (Eds.) - My Story ~ A Study On Chinese Cultural Identity In Australia*

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