

# My Story ~ 25. Half Australian And Half Chinese



*"It's an advantage to have both quality and education of the East combined with an education and background of the West."*

I came to Australia in August, 2003.

I choose to study abroad after graduation from high school like many people who were born after 1980. Though I could enter a second-level college with my college entrance examination score, I made the conclusion that there would be no ideal work for me in China.

My presents chose Western Australia because a friend of my father worked there and thus could take care of me. I still remember clearly how depressed I was feeling when I left home. I'm the only son in my family and had never left my parents. After my 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, I came to this foreign land 10 thousand miles away from home. It was the first time for me to have this lonely feeling with no one to turn to. Though there was a friend of my father's, I had no sense of home.

At first, my school was in Fremantle and I studied preparatory courses there, while my home was in the northern part of Perth, which meant I had to transfer two buses, two trains and then walk to school. I had a hard life, but on the other hand, I made many friends, some on the train and others from school. Actually it's quite easy to make friends here and compared with other students of the same age in 2+2 class, my greatest advantage was that I knew a lot about Australian communication and working methods because of my year's study. I had more friends, not only had a good relationship with Chinese and Asian people but also the Australian world. They became my study and life companions and I did not feel unfamiliar after entering the college, the feeling totally disappeared.

I entered college one year later. Quite unexpectedly, another problem emerged: the major of computer science was too boring for me to go on with.

After discussing this problem with my parents, I transferred to commerce; accounting and finance which finally made me feel at ease. With more spare time, I found a part-time job just like other students. I like to try different things and I've been a waiter and a dishwasher; I repaired computers, prepared accounts, delivered newspapers, conducted surveys and sold things; later I did business accounts and financial accounting. I gained a lot during this time, not only extra money but a sense of independence and cherishment and appreciation, as well as my value to society and how to become part of society. I always made friends with my workmates after several weeks. We were responsible and we communicated a lot during rest breaks. We hung out together and had fun. Well, the only thing that made me sad was on my birthday. I worked late, until 11 o'clock in the evening and it was a Saturday. I got on the bus and found I was the only passenger. I called my mom and she started to wish me a happy birthday and asked me what I was doing, whether I was celebrating with friends? I said no and told her that I had just finished work and was sitting on a bus going home. It was really hard but you should take the responsibility as long as you are in charge. People here actually pay more attention to punctuality and responsibility. And of course I've learnt a lot during this process.

I have experienced a lot in the past several years' study and work and I experienced the most important thing in my life in 2010 when I started work in the finance section of a college in Perth — meeting my fiancée.

The first impression I made was not very good — I look like a Chinese and with a seemingly Chinese name, but I never speak Chinese, so she felt strange. I was a minor financial manager at that time but we were not in the same department. Later, we had a position vacant and she applied for it. After working for a time, we got to know more and more about each other and always had dinner together. She thought of me a mature man always wearing suits and doing things efficiently. Actually, everyone in my department is ten or even twenty years older than me. But I just handled it in a more mature way so they were quite cooperative and admired me. Well, I had to quit because of our relationship and my colleague always mentioned to her that I was the best and more responsible manager they've ever met.

I also knew her experience in Australia. She was born after 1980 and is two years younger than me. She studied in Tianjin Foreign Studies University before she came to Australia for the 2+2 articulation program — 2 years study in China and 2

years study in Australia, then graduate with 2 degrees. She encountered the same problem as I did and the most obvious one was that though she had a high enough score to enter a formal class, she just couldn't understand the teacher. Language again became a serious problem. So she went to the teacher after class and asked the native teacher who was over 50 years old: "What can I do so that I can understand you?" the teacher was quite embarrassed and even stuttered after seeing this crying and helpless girl: "What do you want? Do you want to continue or transfer to other class?" she said: "I want to continue but I can't understand. Please help me." The teacher was quite helpful and comforted her: "Calm down and don't be nervous. This problem is actually quite common when you first come here." Then he recommended her to a tutor who could instruct her English and assist her to eliminate her nervousness. So she began to talk and cry at the same time and the English teacher said to her: "See? You are fine and you can cry in English. So don't worry, your basic communication is all right. Maybe there are some difficult words in the first class but it's the same for all students. It's quite common." The teacher's encouragement gave her a lot of confidence and she finally found her direction.

She was actually quite nervous at the interview. There were two people conducting the interview — one was the manager of the financial department and the other was the business manager. Both of them native Australians, they spoke fast with an accent. She was very worried that she couldn't understand them, so she just smiled and asked them to speak slowly. They were nice and understood her. Every time she didn't know what to say, she just smiled to them and finally she got the job. Later she asked the manager why they chose her among so many excellent interviewees. The manager told her that it was because of her smile and because she asked them to speak slowly, which showed her responsibility and confidence.

I think maybe our meeting each other was destiny.

After one month of our contract, I resigned.

Maybe I had been affected by my family. I did not plan to find another job after I resigned; instead I decided to further my studies for a PhD. My girlfriend has opened a small jewellery shop since her internship. Having majored in International Trade in Tianjin and studied some courses about commerce, she thought it was a good opportunity to put the theory into practice. She went to

Yiwu during the summer holiday to stock her shop with goods. Her parents are quite supportive though they don't think it will succeed. She had to apply for stall. My girlfriend had been living under the protection of her parents and knows nothing, so it was a great experience for her. The greatest difficulty was that she didn't do a full survey, thinking that the basic step was just to stock goods and sell them, with no special skills at all. In the end, all her goods were held by Customs because there was no label of origin. It turned out that all the goods needed a label of "Made in China". She was shocked and called Customs at once. Customs allowed her one week to add a label to every item. Half of the storage area was full of the goods and she called all her classmates for help. They worked day and night and finally got it done within one week.

Both my girlfriend and I have gone through a lot since we came here and we've considered a lot about whether we should stay in Australia. After all, we are both single children. Our parents want us to stay with them and we can also be provided with better resources and advantages back in China, while staying here means we have to start on our own. So my parents want me to go back home after working for a short period. However, I like the life style, environment and work here and after a long and careful consideration, we finally decided to stay and live here.

All you have to be in Australia is actually to be useful. For example, in China, the more you study, the better people like you while after graduation with a PhD, the only thing you can do is mostly just teaching, the PhD has little use in other aspects of work.

Australia is a multi-cultural society with white people being the mainstream. There are maybe some white people who have doubts about Asians or non-whites but I've never struck that situation. Getting to know a new culture before I have total knowledge of the other can assist me to better adapt to the former one. We can see things with a new perspective. Taking the essence and discard the dregs. What's more, cultural recognition is closely related to the company where you work. If the company is multi-cultural, people working there are definitely from different backgrounds as well. They won't reject those from Asia or China. If you are working in a mono-cultural environment and a new face with different features arrives, it will take a long time for all members to readjust. Groups or organizations all seek to survive though through different paths. So it's understandable that there will be some conflicts when you are fitting into a new

environment.

Many Australians and Westerners are willing to communicate with Chinese people because China is becoming stronger and stronger and Chinese culture is more and more accepted by them, not only Chinese character and traditional culture, but also Wushu and handwriting. Many western friends actually envy me because I can speak two languages. Some even want their children to learn Chinese from me which satisfies me a lot. This is a sign that we are getting more and more powerful and they can totally accept us. My advantage is that I've received a western education and I can speak fluent English. But there are also disadvantages. I can communicate with westerners without difficulty but in technical terms beyond my major, including medicine, law or sports, I'm not that capable.

Having lived in Australia for so long, the biggest advantage for my girlfriend and me is that we retain eastern values or habits among westerners while we can also show our western attitudes when with easterners. We are in the middle. Besides, there's another strange thing: many friends are curious about which language we use at home. Well, it depends. We speak Chinese for life and emotion and English for study and work or something related to Australian society. This is not on purpose because we really don't know how to express such things in Chinese. We learnt these things like accounting and financing when we are in Australia and we don't know what it is called in Chinese. Well, it would be a disadvantage if we were back in China.

We are seeking a balance between western culture, or the English-speaking environment and the Chinese environment. To communicate in English means to express accurately either for communication or for work, but at the same time the cultural aspects are lost in this process. In our childhood we didn't understand why we should recite so many poems and texts off by heart and it really bothered us. But now we understand, Chinese conveys some meanings that can't be expressed in plain words. Well, maybe this is what confuses foreigners who learn Chinese. They can understand every word they read, but don't know the whole meaning when they are put together. Only when they know something about Chinese culture can they appreciate the language.

My friends and family will make jokes such as "Look, the foreigner has come back" when we are back in China but in Australia, people will know you are

Chinese once they see your face, so you don't have to pretend. I won't define myself as a Chinese or an Australian. I am myself and this is me. We have received traditional education including how to handle things and we think in Chinese ways. But we live in Australia. So we have both Chinese and Australian thoughts. And it depends if you ask me where I belong. If defined in terms of place and the time we spent in Australia, we are Australians; but if defined in terms of deep culture and how we want people see us, the answer is definitely Chinese.

We actually often ask people such questions. For example, we have a friend with an Asian face but he may be Singaporean or Malaysian or Vietnamese, so I will ask him: "Where are you from?" He says: "I am from Perth." Then I will go on to ask: "Where are you originally from?" With such an Asian face and an answer of "from Australia", I feel quite strange because I want to know his native home and what is his cultural background. His answer of "from Australia" can't satisfy my curiosity and I want to know where he is "originally from". Some people will say that they were born here but their parents are from somewhere else. Some will just get annoyed and reply: "from Perth, I was born here, so what is your question?"

In all, I feel fortunate here and I have received both western and eastern education during the formation of my values and I can select the best and drop the worst of both cultures. So we have the advantages of both eastern quality and education and western education and background.