

My Story ~ 26. Keep Your Nose To The Grindstone, You Will Be Successful In The End



“Take it easy, young people, you have so many opportunities ahead of you; keep trying and seize the chance—I am sure you will succeed once in your life time.”

A young man born post 1990s came to Australia after graduating from high school. In the five years after he arrived in Perth, he went through education, work, transferred from one school to another, and changed majors a few times; he got to know life better because of his own experience. One can sense the vitality, knowledge and drive of the younger generation after talking with him. He quickly adjusted to the life here, or to be more precise, it’s not that he has been fitted into the Australian society; it is the Australian life style that has become part of his heart and soul.

I was born in 1991 and was called the “post-90s generation” in China. My hometown is in Jianhu County, Yancheng, Jiangsu Province. I attended high school in China. I still clearly remember those days when I and my schoolmates worked so hard for the university entrance examination. Well, during those days, I went to sleep at 3 a.m. and got up at 5 a.m. in the morning, only 2 hours sleep at night. Because of my families’ pressure I was under a great deal of stress. After that experience, all other hardships I faced later in life were not difficult to handle. With many relatives working in government positions, my parents actually hoped that I could work for the government too, just like them. So I decided to pursue politics and applied for law school. But I was not accepted by the university because some of my marks were a little low. Though there were other ways of getting into a law school by using the “Guanxi” of some relatives and paying some money, my parents gave up in the end because the cost would be the same as the costs of going abroad. So at the crucial point of university education, I ended up in this strange country.

Looking back, being unable to study at a Chinese Law School could be part of my

destiny. My English was good and people used to make jokes about me by saying: "You are destined to go abroad with long hair all over you just like a foreigner." My mom once went to a fortune-teller and was told that I would go overseas that year. Well, everything turned out to be true and I went abroad in 2009.

There were some incidents before we chose Australia. My father wanted me to go to Europe because my major was in literature which probably would help me to do economics or archaeology. But when it was time to make the final decision, a great recession had happened in Europe while Australia actually was unaffected by the global financial crisis. So we changed our destination from Europe to Australia. We didn't receive any feedback about my visa application, so we were afraid that I had been rejected by the Australian immigration department. Thinking that the second pathway was also blocked, we went back to the agency which suggested Russia. Well, to study petroleum at a famous oil school at a Russian university seemed a good choice, so we decided to apply for Russia. Just as we started to prepare the materials, I got my visa to Australia. Thus, after all those big and small incidents, I came to Perth on 3rd May, 2009.

My experience of schooling here is not that easy either. It seems that the bad luck from the university entrance exams was still with me, I failed the preparatory course at Taylor's College for engineering major of UWA, one mark too low, so I had to go to Curtin University. But I didn't want to go to Curtin and never gave up my hope of studying at UWA. Fortunately, I was eligible to apply for UWA after studying one whole year at Curtin. Finally I succeeded in transferring to UWA in the second year of my studies. Well, my choice of major had also gone through several setbacks. The first half year at Curtin I studied mining which was not available for the second semester and I had to study mechanics and engineering instead. After entering UWA, I majored in machining processing. Overall, my results at UWA turned out to be satisfactory.

Though there were small incidents at UWA, it was a rich and smooth life that included some pleasant surprises. I remember when I first come to WA, I was confused by all the strange things. Though I had registered a homestay when back in China but after I arrived, I was informed that it wasn't yet ready. So I ended up making contact with a brother from Nanjing and stayed with him for a week until I could move in with my homestay hosts, an Australian family, an elderly couple over 60 years old. Through conversation I found out that host was

almost 40 years older than me but we had the same birthday! It was lucky coincidence and he treated me as a gift from Jesus and cared for me as if I were his son. I still remember the first dinner we had together. He was afraid that I would not be able to eat the beef steak even though it was thoroughly cooked. They learnt about Chinese food culture which is quite different from Australian cuisine. I have heard a lot about discrimination but my host family were really nice to me and other Australians were nice too. At least I have never met anyone with such attitudes.

Homestay continued for about a year, during this time I lived alone in this strange city but there was family love and friendship. I gradually became used to communicating with Australians. Later I began to understand that this experience of fitting into a new country within one year was actually quite important for me. Compared to other classmates from China, who were unable to fit in and they felt increasingly lonely, ending up playing video games at home and becoming isolated and angry. It's such a pity to waste the opportunity of going abroad for further study.

In my spare time, I began to find part-time work which is uncommon for the domestic students. The first job was to help with planting trees in a park. They paid a petty salary so I resigned after one week. Then I was introduced to a Curry shop run by an Indian. It took me one hour by bus to get there. At first I was told to make hamburgers but my experience of cooking was limited so I had to start with French fries and gradually moved to other tasks of greater difficulty. I became quite familiar with all the different things to do in the shop within one year and helped the cashier and communicated with others. Well, my English improved but it was not an easy job at all. I was still studying at Curtin, at that time and I had to get up at 5:30 to catch the early bus for work at 7:00. Closing time was late, 11 p.m. at night and it was a hard job. But it was even harder to find a different job, so I could not leave. Such experience of working while you are still at school would not happen in China. I didn't do any cooking when I was at home with my parents but now I'm actually good at it after my work experience in Australia. I did various jobs those years which not only meant money in my pocket, but also helped me to learn about the skills of how to communicate with different people and to get to know myself. On the other hand, I earned money with my own hands which made me cherish everything. After hard work, I was actually not willing to go to class. But after calculation, class costs me about 140

dollars and with a salary of 20 dollars per hour, I had to work seven hours to earn it. I was supported by my parents' money back in China so I had no idea about costs and the sacrifice required. Now with no one teaching me, I got to know, through my own experience, about these things. Looking back, if I had gone to college in China, the life of an "ivory tower" will always end with "pretending sorrow with new poems". This was a great harvest, a significant result, of my being in Australia.

Another bonus was the exact position I have found for myself. Actually, it's not easy to underestimate the external gains and losses. For example, there're always people playing dirty tricks on you but on second thoughts, I didn't lose anything and no one gained at my expense. It's hard to persuade others, but it's even harder to persuade yourself. The most important thing is to find your place and get to know what is gained and lost in your heart. Probably it's related to my reading of YiKing and Buddhist Scriptures and I gradually became aware that part of life's experience. No matter if I'm in China or abroad, I'm working, studying or communicating with others. Gaining some benefit is what matters. Once you have realized this, the more you have experienced and observed, the calmer you will become in dealing with various issues, the more you can temper yourself with a pure heart. Once your inner world has been enriched, there will be no need to pursue external beliefs.

Having lived in Perth for such a long time, actually my life circle has changed a lot. When I first came here, I lived near school and I got to know many Chinese friends of Chinese in this way. We all lived near the school and had similar life experiences, values, language and knowledge, so we hung out together and gradually formed a small group. Gradually this part of my life faded away. One reason was that I bought a car and didn't have to live so close to school; the other reason was that I wanted to stay in Australia so I felt the need to communicate more with local Australians, observe more and think more about the core values which are different from our Chinese values. I had to make careful observations of what other people were doing, what they liked and what they were stressing about. I had to adjust myself through communication. As a result, I changed but that didn't mean I completely identified with my observation. The least I could do was to know more about the differences and diversities and also the reasons for such differences. I may not always identify with them but the least I can do is to get to know and understand them. This is a kind of "harmony in diversity".

I'm planning to stay in Australia. I am changing and adjusting to life here. My identity of being a Chinese is becoming clearer and clearer, stronger and stronger. Maybe someday in the future my nationality will change, but I'm born with yellow skin, black eyes and black hair and that will never change. The personal example and teaching of my grandfather in the spring will always be in my heart. If you think about it, it's rather strange. Chatting with friends in China we will inevitably make criticism of various social phenomenons around us, as if your dream will be shortened if you don't do so. But the more I stay abroad, the more I want to criticize those who say bad things about China. When I'm in a Chinese class in Australia, I hear some Chinese students say bad things about China as if they are planning to tell everyone. I can't help interrupting them, not to deny what they say, but from my position as a representative of China. There is already what they call a "Chinese Threat Theory", and if there is more negative criticism about China, people will definitely not want to go to China. What China is like needs personal experience and these people just have no idea that their few bad words about China will scare potential friends away, which will in turn isolate themselves. Besides criticism, I am also sensitive to some guiding thoughts, whether it's on purpose or unintentional. For example, sometimes the teacher will ask whether China will become the second America and some students say "Yes". But I dispute this answer and tell them that we Chinese are taught "benevolence, justice, courtesy, wisdom and faith" and insist on peace. We will only attack if we are threatened. Even in the Tang Dynasty when China was most powerful, there was no aggression by the Chinese, this was also demonstrated when we showed our strong sea power by Zhenghe's Voyage in the Ming Dynasty. Yes, there's no history of active violence and colonial invasion in Chinese history. While on the other hand, it took America just 300 years to become the boss while the Chinese have thousands of years of evidence to prove our peaceful characteristics. Though quite intense, it's only a classroom discussion. This identity and dependency on China is becoming deeper and deeper. Now I'm in a foreign land, but with money that I have earned through years of hard work, I have subsidized some domestic students, but I say to my classmates though I can't help my country in a big way, at least I can support those poor people to realize their dream.

I'm graduating in spring and as I have told my parents, air is good and life is fine in Australia. They can come to visit, but are just too busy to spare the time. They are actually unwilling to listen when I tell them I'm staying here, especially mom

and the older family members. The days that I have spent in China during my college years add up to only one month or so and seeing grandfather becoming older and older makes me sad but helpless. My parents are actually supportive of me and they are happy to leave me alone to make my own decision. The only thing that I'm waiting for is my parents to come and be present at my graduation ceremony, I hope they enjoy it. Well, the long term plan is to settle down here with my parents, which will be the biggest decision for the future. They were so worried about me and did everything possible to help out in the summer of 2008 but we never gave up. Finally we made it and even though faced with various difficulties and temporary failure along the way, the result was a rich and beautiful outcome, wasn't it?

What has impressed me most and attracted my attention is the charming cultural diversity in Australia. People understand and respect each other in this cultural melting pot and are nice to each other. I also have a blueprint for my future and are about to transfer to a graduate course to make a change. Maybe I will become involved in business in the future and promote cultural communication if possible to help more people.

While you can dream big, I say to myself: "Take it easy and slow down". After all, I'm still young and there are plenty of opportunities to try and succeed. Be confident in yourself because you know yourself the best and you are the only one that can't avoid yourself. I want to look around in my spare time and transfer external life experiences into inner-life experiences. After all the final fortune in my heart can never be taken away by others."