

My Story ~ 6. From “Falling Leaves Settling On The Roots” To “Falling Leaves Growing From The Roots”



“I think we should change the traditional Chinese thought that ‘falling leaves will settle on the roots’. We can let falling leaves grow from the roots in Australia. Work hard and struggle to make a living—my major life decision.”

It was on the 5th June, 1990 that I arrived in Australia. At that time, the reform and opening-up policy was taking place in China. So I wanted to widen my knowledge and see a brilliant and colorful world outside China and experience the difference between capitalist countries and China. However, when I set foot in Australia for the first time, I did suffer a lot from being unfamiliar with a new country and the language barrier.

Nevertheless, Australians were friendly to me. After a lot of arduous effort, I accumulated some savings and I settled here in Australia.

When I first lived in Australia, I worked hard although I didn’t master many technical abilities. I took several part-time jobs, from cutting vegetables on a farm to picking fruits. Washing dishes occupied most of my working time. Now I can’t remember how many odd jobs I have done. I was always changing my jobs. Others work for eight hours a day while I had to work twelve hours, sixteen hours or even eighteen hours a day.

Later on, I took a part-time job in a restaurant. The boss was a kind man and now we have become close friends. He was an Austrian while the landlady was Dutch. In those days, my wife was still in China with our children so you can imagine my loneliness and hardship in a foreign country. Two years later, several companions who came with me couldn’t bear the suffering and loneliness anymore and intended to go back to China. The boss asked why. I answered: “We can’t get ID here, so we want to go back.” He asked again: “Do you like it here?” I answered:

“Of course, but we can’t get our ID here.” He told me seriously: “Australia belongs to everyone. As long as you step on this land, it must belong to you! You ought to stay here! If you like it here, you should keep trying for your ID .Then you are sure to settle in this country.” Many years later, when Australia News interviewed me, I told this story to the reporter .Those 457 workers were moved by my words. They say that if they had not known my story, they would have gone back to China.

Then I started to learn electro-welding and shipbuilding; later I started my own business, manufacturing ships. At first, there was not much profit. What’s worse, on account of switching to this business, an area that I had never been trained for, I had to keep on exploring and studying professional skills. Yet, generally speaking, if you make great efforts, you will be rewarded. Just as we do hourly manual work, the longer and the harder you work, the more the boss will like you, the more you will earn. Therefore, in my opinion, Australia, where we don’t have to follow hidden rules or depend on relationships, is a place for us to make a life; it’s a suitable country for industrious and diligent people to live here .

About “English”—my ironic past

Soon after I came to Australia, I made a lot of stupid mistakes because I didn’t understand English. Now when I recall those memories, I describe them as: “I have forgotten all my past difficulties, but I have kept my ironic English in mind.”

At that time, other workmates and I almost knew nothing about English. Fortunately we knew the word “tomorrow”. Our supervisor was an understanding person. Each Monday, when he was assigning working tasks, he always pulled his fingers and pronounced “the day after tomorrow” as “tomorrow and tomorrow”, thus “three days from now” as “tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow” and so forth.....So we were thinking to ourselves: “Thanks to the seven days in a week because he can count them with his fingers; otherwise all of us will have problems.”

One of my fellow workers, who knew only several English letters, once lost his way in Fremantle. He rang up his friend anxiously. As there was no Global Positioning System then, we would take a map with us when we went out. But that day he happened to forget it. A friend comforted him: “Don’t worry! You only need to read out one of the signs nearby and I will be aware of where you are.” So the friend read out one with great difficulty: S-T-O-P..... As a result, he was

guided back home by the police.

Another time, I went to a restaurant to have a job interview. The boss asked me to start work at twelve o'clock. But I couldn't understand the word "twelve" so I was confused when he asked me to start. Then he took out a sheet of paper and drew a clock on it, from one, two up to twelve. I said to myself: "My God! Since I have learned from one to eleven, why don't I keep 'twelve' in my mind? "

This restaurant was booming and often was crowded with customers. One day, the boss asked me anxiously: "Any more fish?" I knew the word fish but not "more fish?", so I mistook it as the name of a certain kind of fish and opened the fridge quickly. Seeing all the frozen fish in the fridge, I cried at the top of my voice: "No More fish!" The boss had to come to search for "more fish" in person. Seeing those frozen fish, he stared at me in desperation, looking odd and annoyed.

Although I made a lot of stupid mistakes, I was still young so I never gave up improving my English. I thought English was not that hard—it was just a language. Believing that I was bound to master it as long as I kept learning and practising, I marked all places which could be seen with English word notes, including my washroom, ceiling, kitchen, bedroom and so on in order to see them the moment I woke up; I would switch on the radio to train my ears while driving, whether I could understand or not. I would turn on TV the moment I got home. At the beginning, I listened to radio as if a book from heaven. But as one of the old Chinese proverbs goes: "With patience and time, the mulberry-leaf becomes a silk gown", by keeping practising while doing my work, gradually, I became more and more skilful at English.

Eight years of lovesickness—like a war

In those years, I came to wander and make a living in Australia alone. It was eight years since I had parted from her, during which time I never went back. There it was more than I could bear describing the hardship and lovesickness we had experienced during those years. My wife and I jokingly called the eight years "an eight-year war". We were classmates from primary school to senior middle school and were considered to be childhood sweethearts. My wife is a lady of great intelligence and virtue. Originally, my family was totally against it when I planned to go abroad to enrich my experience and seek development. She was the only one who supported me. As a result, I secretly came to Australia, leaving her to carry a heavy burden on her shoulders.

In those days, in Australia, telephone fees charged more than three Australian dollars per minute, later the fee was reduced to one dollar per minute. It was hard to earn money then but I would try to set aside 50 dollars to make phone calls to my wife. On getting through, my wife would weep at the other end. People around her all urged her: "Speak quickly, otherwise the telephone fee will run out!" But nothing could be done about that as each time she couldn't stop crying. Eight years had passed, when I finally got a visa for her, the immigration officer asked me in surprise: "You have been apart for so long, how can you demonstrate to me that she is your wife?" (It was because we had been moving our houses and changed our telephone numbers many times. Our telephone numbers had been changed frequently. Neither had we kept our telephone bills. As a result, when the Immigration Office asked for those bills as evidence, we couldn't provide them.) Afterwards, someone came up with one way ---going to the telephone company and to put out all the numbers labeled with name through spending over 100 dollars. As a result, we found out that our telephone fees were enough to buy a house. Sometimes, my wife played a joke on me: "Hey! Did no woman want you while you lived and worked in Australia?" I replied with a smile: "It wasn't like that. Working women ran into my room, but I escaped each time. That's because I am a determined man."

"A drop of water & Sunshine" ---Joined in the association

For so many years, we experienced a lot of sufferings and hardships before we settled down here. Australia has relatively loose policies nowadays. Quite a few 457 skilled workers have come to work here. They were not used to the language and culture when they first arrived. Some of them are my fellow-townsmen of Fujian Province. As an old Chinese saying goes: "When townsmen see townsmen, tears well up in their eyes." Each time this happened, I would do my best to help them to apply for loans and then we decided to form an association, called the Fujian Association. The association has played a very positive role in Australia. It was after the association formed that the overseas Chinese in Australia began to unite. When someone meets with difficulties, others will lend him or her hand.

It is more than ten years since I formally joined the association. In 2008, I founded the Fujian Association. At that time, I thought that I was so weak and my economic situation was not good. Therefore, it occurred to me to set up an association. There was no doubt that I had to become the first chairman. When

the association constituted its regulations, I stipulated that the chairman of this association shall not serve for another term, because I am a little introverted and not an eloquent speaker. So new members should be offered chances to give play to their talents. It is thought to be a wise decision at present. I retired from the position three years later. But I am still participating in major association work. I think it is where my duties lie.

There are also some people asking me: "Is Taiwan a part of the PRC?" Each time I am asked, I always answer resolutely: "Yes, of course it is." This question totally differs from so-called general democracy issues. The territorial integrity of China is a topic of principle. At the establishing conference of the Western Australian Branch of the world association of Guangdong province, I spoke out: "We Fujianese and Taiwanese are originally of the same blood, we are brothers, we share the same ancestors and there aren't too many discrepancies or cultural barriers between us. So I hold the belief that in terms of major issues of principle most Taiwanese must have the same unwavering stand as mine." It was in 2010 that I joined the Western Australian Peaceful unification Promotion Agency aiming to associate with Taiwanese compatriots. As Chinese, we do hope that we will enjoy a peacefully reunified China.

Our Peaceful Unification Promotion Agency has carried on a charitable educational foundation, which is called "Waterdrop & Sunshine Charitable Educational foundation of the Chinese in Australia". Waterdrop & Sunshine means that even a drop of water can reflect the brilliance of sunshine. Although China is becoming more powerful, it is still a country with a large population and the remote areas are still underdeveloped. We have designed a plan to help the children living in poverty-stricken areas to return to their schools—each person saves one dollar each day in order to help those children return to school. I believe that everyone is glad to change those children's destiny by giving away one dollar each day. Up to now, we have been able to give financial aid to 100 children.

Consequently, I choose several places—Guizhou, Yunnan and Ningxia. We have contacted with government institutes. We don't operate on a large scale, but I believe that on this basis, more and more people will be encouraged, moved and inspired to join us. This will reflect splendid sunshine and aid more students, who without this assistance would drop out of school.

Currently, I am making a one-to-one self-service project to popularize programs

for public good. In my opinion, public welfare should not only be carried out when we possess money. As Chinese, we are content and proud that we have gained acknowledgment from the local community of Australia. It is because we have inherited many cultural essences of our country. I am willing to offer help with a grateful heart to people in need.

From “falling leaves settling on the roots” to “falling leaves growing from the roots”

With further Sino-Australian communication, Australian people have learnt more about China. Some Australian friends once told me that they had originally imagined China to be poor and backward with carriages running along the roads and no buildings at all. These years, many Australian friends have even gone to China and had their impressions of China changed. There is no doubt that the economic and trade ties between the two countries have brought great level of understand to Australian people.

A number of Chinese have been puzzled with the fact that it is hard for them to integrate into Australian society. Personally speaking, whether in China or in Australia, one needs to contribute his sincerity and effort if he wants to integrate. Only in this way will he be respected by society and obtain others' friendship. I believe that the Australian government is of great intelligence. They can accept and acknowledge other cultures including Chinese culture. Sometimes I feel depressed that even Australians regard me as an Australian. I still feel I am different from them, because I am still a Chinese in my heart. Nevertheless, when I return to China, I feel that I don't belong in China any more. Therefore, in my opinion, since I am living in Australia, I should not only learn more western thinking modes but also their values and try to blend into Australian society as much as possible. I think that Chinese people should change their traditional thought of “falling leaves settling on the earth” to “falling leaves growing from the roots”, to take root and sprout in Australia. Meanwhile, we should remember the essence of excellent Chinese culture, making our due contribution to carry forward our national culture.

I can remember what an old overseas Chinese once said to me: “Our shoulders are designed to be stepped on by you.” I always intend to inform those young men: our shoulders are also ready for their steps. I have been supporting young Chinese people to participate in government and political affairs -either in spirit

or in finance and enter the upper class of Australia entirely. The reason is that only if our next generation goes into government circles are they likely to maintain a foothold in the society of western countries. China will blend into the mainstream society.

I do hope that all Chinese in Australia will unite to pass on Chinese culture, to teach our next generation to inherit and carry Chinese culture forward together.