

# When In Australia, Do As The Aussies Do

*Learn the social etiquette and be a real Australian*

It has been suggested that a community organisation like CASS could arrange a course for new migrants to teach them the customs and manners of Australia. This is a good idea, since Australian community workers and volunteers sometimes find the behaviour of the Chinese community difficult to understand. Timely advice could prevent misunderstandings based on ignorance or cultural differences. Other unacceptable behaviours may be the result of bad habits accumulated over time which could be changed through better understanding of social etiquette in the new country.

When CASS originally collaborated with Australian community organisations, they would often offer tea and refreshments to all participants. The expectation was that everyone would share what was on offer. Now Chinese organisations often decline to provide English tea during activities, saying that Chinese prefer Chinese tea. The truth is more embarrassing. When milk was provided for adding to English tea, some Chinese would instead pour themselves whole cups, leaving others with none. To avoid this situation, CASS has stopped providing milk.

On occasions when refreshments were served, those at the front of the queue would pile their plates. By the time the end of the queue was

## INTEGRATING INTO SOCIETY



It is common practice for Aussies to have refreshments at the end of a function to facilitate networking among participants

reached, there was no food left. In Australia, light refreshments are considered a form of morning or afternoon tea, not providing for a full meal. However, some participants were not only eating as a meal – they were resorting to “takeaway” as well.

Many years ago, we witnessed the unfortunate scene of a group of seniors fighting over food. After a community safety talk organised by a Council, refreshments were provided. Instead of queueing to get food, participants pushed and shoved, overturning plates and spilling food everywhere. Organisers were helpless. The Council had to call in their cleaning staff with vacuum cleaners and other equipment to tidy up the venue. After that incident, food is now distributed to individuals by volunteers whenever an activity group organises parties or functions.

Another problem faced by community organisations is getting audiences to pay attention during official ceremonies. No matter who the VIPs are, people continue talking when the guests are speaking. Many people who have attended activities organised by Chinese

organisations describe this is a continuing problem which does not fit well with normal practice here. During official ceremonies, it is important to show respect for honoured guests by listening to what they have to say.

As migrants, we know that in most Chinese cities, homes are small, making it difficult to invite family and friends in groups. People generally gather at restaurants to network, and have a habit of talking loudly and freely in public places as the surroundings are noisy. People in Australia, however, value privacy, and believe that it is important to minimise disturbance to others while at public venues.

A CASS worker remembers how, at a consultation aimed at improving community life, an Australian attendant expressed her displeasure in seeing people spitting in public places, and some elderly people letting their small grandchildren urinate in the street. Both are unhygienic practices. The worker felt so embarrassed she wished there was somewhere to hide.

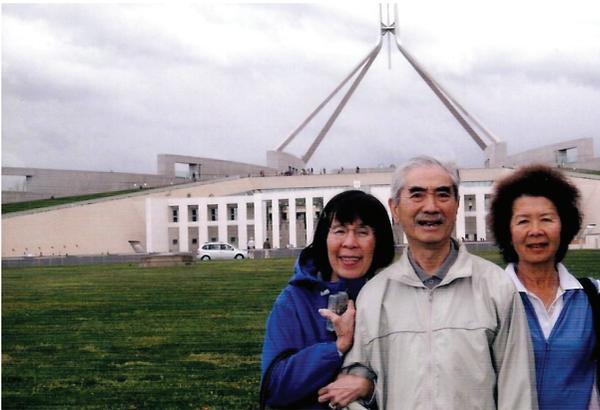
Migrants need to learn “when in Australia, do as the Aussies do”. They are now on a new land where people have different attitudes and codes of behaviour.

We all need to understand that behaviour is caused by past experience, habits and other social factors. It will take a long time to change deeply-rooted ways. But through awareness, education and timely reminders, increased awareness of local customs and expectations will develop, for the benefit of all. Little by little, migrants of whatever background will fit in.

*Originally published in May 2011*

# The Reunion

*Two siblings reunited after six decades of separation*



Master Leong and his youngest sister (right) were finally reunited with their second sister (left)

In 1941, when Mr Fat Leong was just 13, he left his parents and three younger sisters in the Solomon Islands to study in Hong Kong. A week after his arrival, he witnessed the fall of Hong Kong and was left devastated and helpless. His family could not have foreseen the traumatic changes to come.

In 1942, the Japanese Army occupied the Solomon Islands. Mr Leong's father was captured and made to work on a Japanese warship. Unfortunately, he was killed when the ship was attacked. Meanwhile there was turmoil in the Solomon Islands, and his mother and eldest sister were killed in the wartime chaos. His second sister, who was

only three at the time, severely injured with machete wounds to her head, was sent to a French missionary hospital. Later she was taken to the United States by an American priest. She lost contact with her family. Only the youngest sister, who was still a baby, escaped the wartime upheavals, cared for by relatives.

During the War, Mr Leong escaped to his ancestral home in Guangdong. After the War, he became an officer in the local police force. In 1950 when things had settled, he took his wife back to the Solomon Islands to begin a new life. Only his youngest sister was left from the family. He rebuilt his life in the Solomon Islands, working hard at his business and becoming the Chairperson of the local Chinese Business Association. After he retired in 1974, he migrated to Australia.

At a CASS Hua An Activity Group gathering in 2010, 80-year-old Mr Leong was excitedly introducing a lady who was with him. “This is my second sister, with whom I lost contact for over 60 years!” he said. Every one of the 50 Activity Group members who were there could see the joy on his face. It was like a movie or a story in a newspaper. Everyone was touched.

They were also curious. People asked Mr Leong about his life, and he shared with them his heartbreaking twists and turns.

Although as a successful businessman, he always regretted not being able to reunite with his beloved second sister. He had visited the United States four times to search for her, starting with the address

left by the American priest all those years before. But the trips had been in vain. As the years passed, his hopes for a reunion vanished.

His youngest sister and his daughter both knew what the reunion would mean to Mr Leong. In 2008, he made up his mind to make yet another trip. His persistence paid off with a miracle: he finally found her!

That same year the younger sister decided to make a trip to Australia to meet her brother. The three siblings met after a separation of six decades. The joy, the excitement, the emotion – these are not easy to describe.

Mr Leong has been actively involved in voluntary work since he migrated to Australia. From 1987, he has been teaching Tai Chi free of charge at a Park in Hurstville, rain or shine. At the invitation of CASS in 1996, he started teaching Tai Chi to members of the Hua Kang Activity Group in Hurstville, and this was extended to the Hua An Activity Group in Campsie.

Mr Leong's active volunteering has been recognised by different levels of government and he has been presented with numerous awards. In 2009 he became one of the Alternate Directors of CASS, and later an Elder in its Council of Elders.

*Originally published in January 2011*

# Seeking Love Across The Miles

## *Issues about cross-cultural marriages*



Careful planning is needed to make a cross-cultural marriage work

Getting married has always been viewed as a happy development in a couple's lives. Now that people move easily around the world, marriages between those from different countries and cultural backgrounds have become common. But they raise issues beyond ones encountered within traditional marriages.

In recent years, many Chinese have travelled across the world to be united with partners in Australia. What are some of the factors

bringing this about? How do these marriages work out?

Settlement Services workers at CASS have much to say: “People seek residency through partner visas for different reasons: love, permanent residency, welfare benefits in Australia or a better future for their children. In the many cases I have handled, even though both partners began with high hopes and glorious aspirations for their future together, challenges often arise due to lack of understanding.”

“Some holders of temporary visas, after living for a while with their partners, discover that he or she turns out to be a very different person from the one they expected. They discover how little they really know about one another. Others are disappointed with the high cost of living in Australia and the inconvenience of public transport. For those Chinese who have married someone from a different background, there are additional problems related to cultural differences and language barriers, creating friction day by day.”

“In addition, people holding a Temporary Partner Visa (TPV) are not entitled to welfare support and have to wait for two years to get permanent residency. This adds to the pressure on some couples. Many of the TPV holders who come to us for help have limited English and no income, making them dependent on their partners. When faced with problems, it is difficult for them to approach authorities for help. Very often they have to bend to the wishes of their partners in order to secure their permanent residency.”

“When problems seem insurmountable, it is the partner from overseas who often suffers most.”

Is there any way to negotiate these difficulties? Our CASS worker suggests: “Before embarking on a cross-cultural marriage, people should plan carefully. It is advisable for them to make a few trips to Australia for short stays before making a long-term commitment. Then they can take the opportunity to see if the way Australians live suits them. At the same time, they can gain better understanding of their partner and see if they can work through issues arising from cultural differences or lifestyle preferences.”

“Partners need to think through consequences and be prepared for the worst before they give up their career, assets, family and friends in their home country. If the marriage does not work out, do they have the funds to return home or to continue living on their own in Australia? Before or soon after moving to Australia, they should equip themselves with useful skills, such as learning English or training in order to get a good job.”

“‘Hope for the best but prepare for the worst’ is probably a good attitude to apply to all life’s big decisions. Having thought through the possible consequences and prepared beforehand will give migrants the capacity to build greater confidence within cross-cultural marriages. It is good to remember that there are many successful ones.”

*Originally published in May 2015*

# Young Migrants

*Helping the young ones to settle in the new country*



Migrant children need the care and guidance of their parents to help them adapt to their new lives in Australia

CASS Settlement Services workers know that in many migrant families from China, conflicts arise between children and their parents or step-parents. This can be particularly serious with teenagers.

One worker said, “We often have parents approaching us for help, describing misunderstanding and estrangement between them and their children. They ask for solutions to bridge the widening gap.”

Most migrants from China are granted visas under the skilled migration category, partner visa or as a dependent aged relative. Many bring their children with them to Australia. But the decision to migrate is made by the adults, the children having little or no

say in the process. Parents seldom foresee that children might have problems fitting in. Most believe that migrating with their sons and daughters must be a good thing, and are certain that they will be thankful for a decision meaning a better future for them.

Mr and Mrs Chen came to Australia many years ago as skilled migrants. In order to build their careers and increase their income, they decided to leave their son in China with his grandparents. When he came to Australia at the age of 14, the couple thought everyone would be happy with the reunion.

Unfortunately, because they had lived apart for so many years, the parents knew little about their child's personality. Neither could they understand the pressure a teenager faces in a totally new environment. While both continued to work, they neglected their son's needs. He was desperate for their support and care, both emotionally and academically. Having left a familiar environment and close friends in whom he could confide, the teenager lost interest in his studies. With his inadequate English, he constantly lagged behind, so that his self-confidence was eroded and it was difficult for him to integrate into the school environment. Lonely and depressed, he immersed himself in the world of computer games. His situation had already become serious when Mr and Mrs Chen discovered his plight.

Another story is Mr Zheng's. Two years after his son arrived in Australia, he and his wife divorced. He continued to live with his son, by then 17. Since Mr Zheng had to work hard for a living, he spent little time with his son, not knowing how the teenager was coping with his studies or adapting to the new country. But they often quarrelled. Then he discovered that his son often skipped school and had even contemplated running away from home.

The two families were at a loss how to handle the situations. Desperate for help, they approached our CASS Settlement Services workers, who advised them the importance of listening and communicating with their children regularly to build up mutual understanding. The parents and children were encouraged to seek counselling to help improving communication with each other. Rebuilding a loving relationship is an important foundation as they seek practical solutions.

Says our worker, “These cases are only the tip of the iceberg. New migrant teenagers and children desperately need the care and guidance of their parents to help them adjust to life in Australia. Many young people experience culture shock in the initial stages of migration. The loving care of parents is vital for the healthy development of children. When planning migration, parents need to understand that children have a lot to adjust to in a strange new environment. They need to realise that very often their parents are the only people they know here. And Australian schools have a very different philosophy of education.”

“It is very important for parents to communicate with teachers and schools if they find their children having problems adjusting to the new learning environment. Parents can also approach professional institutions which focus on working with young people, or seek psychological counselling for their children.”

We are often pushed into roles in life without rehearsals. Migration is like this. May all families enjoy a pleasant experience on their migration journey!

*Originally published in February 2015*

# The Three Musketeers

## *Volunteer English teachers*

*– David Lo, Robert Pak and Ringo Siette*

The Three Musketeers refer to the volunteer English teachers of CASS. They work as a team. When one of them cannot make it to a lesson, he informs the other two and they will step in, making sure the program is not affected. David Lo, Robert Pak and Ringo Siette are all retired from jobs unrelated to language learning, but they have found joy and satisfaction in teaching at CASS Activity Groups. All three possess the cultivated manners and admirable characters of respected scholars. A Chinese scholar once said, “A teacher is one who instils wisdom, imparts knowledge and resolves doubts.” That is just what the Three Musketeers do.

Every week they prepare and lead lessons, which are made funny and meaningful. They are related to real-life challenges such as going to the doctor or shopping, to cater for the needs of students who have limited English. Through the lessons, the three also share their own experiences of living in Australia. They guide Activity Group members in respecting and understanding Australian law and culture. They discuss current affairs and encourage people to develop their interests. They help in whatever way they can: reading letters,

The three volunteer English teachers of the CASS Activity Groups



filling out forms and making phone calls. Their ultimate goal is to improve people's quality of life in their senior years.

Before his retirement, David Lo worked in a well-known American chemical engineering company as a senior management executive. He is highly proficient in both English and Chinese. With the encouragement of his wife Phebe, in 2010 he became the English teacher at CASS Burwood Activity Group, Campsie Activity Group and St George Activity Group. He is very serious and conscientious in planning his lessons, taking into consideration the different levels of knowledge, and the needs of different groups.

At the 2013 CASS AGM, he was elected as an Alternate Director of the Board. Since then, his involvement in CASS and the community has broadened. Apart from teaching, he often takes the lead in encouraging Group members to become involved in charity events.

Seeing the huge need for volunteer English teachers in the community, he persuaded his mate Robert Pak to join him in teaching at the

Burwood Activity Group. Many people in the Chinese community have long been familiar with Robert, since he had worked in the government sector before his retirement. His connection with CASS goes back to those days.

Robert gladly took up the role of English teacher for the Burwood Activity Group. Though he comes from Hong Kong and his first language is Cantonese, he teaches in Mandarin, since the majority of students speak that language. With his sense of humour, he mixes well with them. David's and Robert's dedication has helped the Burwood Activity Group to expand, with membership increasing from the original 20 to 60.

Ringo Siette is the English teacher of the CASS Ashfield Activity Group. He also worked in the government sector. He has a fund of knowledge on Australian politics, culture and economics. Because of his work, he had already been in regular contact with new migrants, especially those from China. Through his involvement over the last few years as a teacher, he has built strong friendships with his students. When he was in hospital undergoing heart surgery in 2014, they were all worried and sent their good wishes to him for a speedy recovery.

The Three Musketeers spread positive energy to those around them. It is fortunate that we have such dedicated people in our community.

*Originally published in May 2015*

# Advice From A Friend

## *Story of a new migrant*

Li had been doing well in Australia. He had a PhD in Architectural Studies from a prominent Chinese university. Soon after his arrival here, he managed to find a junior position in an architectural firm. After working in the field, he realised that to further advance in his career, he also needed Australian qualifications. He enrolled in a Master's degree in Architecture.

After two years of hard work, he obtained his Master's degree and found a job with good prospects. His small family of three began to enjoy life in Australia.

It was not long, however, before a series of misfortunes threw them off balance. First, Li had not noticed that the lease of the house in which his family was living had expired. Because he had not negotiated an extension with the landlord, they had to move out fast. Then one night when he returned home, he found his new place had been ransacked

New migrants often have no one to turn to when they face problems in a new environment



by burglars. Two days later his car rolled down a hill. His only luck was to escape injury.

But worse was to come. His wife was diagnosed with a serious illness from which she would take a long time to recover.

This string of unfortunate events plunged him into hopelessness and despair. He lost the feeling of confidence that he could succeed in Australia.

Li is a gentle person who always greets people with a warm smile. He had worked hard at his company in his profession. However, because of his dedication to his work, his social circle in Australia was small. He did not have many friends, and none who spoke Chinese, with whom he could share his troubles. So he had no one to turn to when he faced personal problems. He felt lonely and miserable.

Then by chance he read about CASS in a newspaper. He brought his son along to seek help from our Settlement Services worker. During the meeting, he felt the worker's sincerity and concern and began to open up. His long-suppressed emotions swelled and he burst into tears in front of his ten-year-old son. This reminded the worker of the Chinese saying "a man does not cry until he has reached the stage of utter despair".

"Give me some advice," said Li. "Should I leave Australia?" Our worker advised him not to make any rash decisions when he was emotional. Li then said he was planning to buy a property. The worker again asked him to calm down, suggesting it was unwise to make big decisions out of desperation. Li was guided to analyse his situation objectively. He was later advised to seek psychological and financial guidance from

professionals so that he could set a clearer direction for the future for himself and his family.

A month later, Li again met the Settlement Services worker. He was excited, and his attitude and outlook had vastly changed since the first meeting.

He explained how he had solved his problems. After seeking financial help, he had decided not to purchase a property for the time being.

Being socially isolated, as Li was, made his life miserable, despite his high academic qualifications and good job. When he ran into problems, he had no one to share them with or offer useful advice. This is a common problem for new migrants in a country where the language and culture are hugely different from their home countries. Without help and support, they can easily fall into despair.

Li explained that he was lucky he had become aware of CASS through the newspaper, met our Settlement Services worker, found his direction and regained his confidence. Many migrants have gone through similar periods of stress. Friends can help through these difficult times. As a philosopher once said, “True friendship multiplies the good in life and divides its evils. Strive to have friends, for life without friends is like life on a desert island.” This is especially true for migrants who have moved to a country far away from their families. They need to widen their social circle and make new friends. A good way to do this is to become involved in volunteering. Through it, besides meeting new people, they can then also contribute to the community.

*Originally published in February 2013*

# Turn Your Face To The Sun

## *On in-law relationships*

Migrants are regularly faced with difficult challenges: conflict, pain, shock, despair or desolation. Since their lives are often confined to their own small families, problems which arrive from within can seem insurmountable, and negative feelings will have no way to escape. Such emotions will eventually affect the person's work and daily life.

It is important for migrants to seek external help and learn to let go. By highlighting what is positive, they will feel more cheerful and enjoy life in a new country.

CASS has been providing Settlement Services for over 17 years. It provides a space for migrants to air their concerns and seek advice. One of the problems most often encountered is relationships between in-laws.

Mrs Wong is a new migrant from mainland China. She and her husband had waited for 13 long years before they were granted permanent residency in Australia. At the same time, she received the good news that their only son was getting married in Australia. The old couple were elated and began preparing for their journey. Unfortunately, their happiness was short-lived. Mrs Wong's husband was killed in a car accident in China. She arrived in Australia on her own, looking forward to being with her son's family.

Sadly, misfortune often comes in threes. Her son died of a heart attack a month after she arrived in Australia.



Bilateral communication helps an in-law relationship flourish

Mrs Wong lived with her daughter-in-law after her son's death. While she could not find any fault with her, she made things difficult for her. She came to believe that her daughter-in-law had brought all the bad luck on the family, and that both her husband and son had died because of her.

But her rational thoughts told her the daughter-in-law was a wonderful person, and she sincerely wanted to improve their relationship. But this was hard. Whenever she thought of her husband and her son, she became sad, and would pick on her daughter-in-law. She would feel a sense of satisfaction when she saw her quaking with fear – yet deep down, she felt miserable. She wished they could get on better.

Mrs Wong needed to let go of the tragedies and move on. She did not realise that by carrying around past hurts and holding on to resentments, the person she was hurting the most was herself.

Our CASS worker told her the following story: An older monk and a younger monk were travelling together and came to a river with a strong current. As they were preparing to cross, they saw a young and beautiful woman also attempting to reach the other side. The older

monk offered to help her. Carrying the woman on his shoulders, he moved across the river and let her down on the opposite bank. The younger monk, although upset by what had happened, said nothing. Hours passed, and finally the younger monk could contain himself no longer. He blurted out, “As monks, we are not permitted to mingle with women. How could you carry that beautiful woman on your shoulders?” The older monk replied, “Brother, I set her down on the other side of the river. Why are you still carrying her?”

The worker continued, “Your husband and son would not want to see such a tense relationship between you and your daughter-in-law. If you choose to indulge in your grief, you will only become more and more miserable. Turn away from the shadows and face the sun. Your heart will be filled with sunshine. Concentrate on what is good about your daughter-in-law and reconcile with her.”

The worker also gave helpful hints on practical means to improve the in-law relationship, and suggested Mrs Wong try mediation and counselling services.

When they met again a month later, the worker was excited to see the positive change in her. Not only was she in high spirits, but her daughter-in-law, who accompanied her to the session, was jubilant. Having accepted that she could not change what had happened, Mrs Wong adopted a more positive attitude to what lay ahead.

She managed to build a better relationship with her daughter-in-law and they now enjoy a happier life together. She has finally learnt to turn her face to the sun and let the shadows fall behind her.

*Originally published in March 2012*

# Walk A Mile In Her Shoes

## *Another story on in-law relationships*



CASS Settlement Services workers help migrants on a wide range of issues

Many daughters see their mother-in-law as an outsider in their families, and relationships between them can become very tense and strained. If they could imagine stepping into one another's shoes, they would be able to look at the situation from a different perspective, and conflict could be avoided.

In her first session with our CASS Settlement Services worker, Mrs Lau, who had three young daughters and was pregnant with the fourth, was full of complaints about her mother-in-law. She had come to live with them to help look after the children, since her husband was often away because of work. With a baby on the way, Mrs Lau already felt stressed, but said that her mother-in-law, instead of helping out,

was creating extra burdens. She felt that she was purposely making things difficult for her, and disliked her more and more.

“Because I’m pregnant, I need more rest. But whenever I lie down, my mother-in-law makes noises so I can’t sleep. She either talks loudly on the phone or clatters bowls and plates in the kitchen. I need a light diet now, but she is constantly making greasy dishes including lots of fish and meat.”

She was full of anger. “I know my mother-in-law doesn’t like me because I am carrying another baby girl. She would rather have a boy.” In Chinese culture, of course, a boy is seen as more valuable than a girl. Mrs Lau felt her mother-in-law was taking revenge on her.

Our CASS worker calmed her down and tried to help her look at the situation in a different way. She told her the story of Su Tungpo, a Chinese writer, poet and statesman of the Song dynasty, and his good friend, Monk Fuyin. One day, Su visited the Buddhist temple and joined the monk at meditation. After a while, Su asked him, “What do I look like as I sit here meditating?” Monk Fuyin examined Su closely for a while and then said, “You are very solemn, healthy and gentle. You look like a statue of the Buddha.”

Su was pleased with this answer. After a while, the monk asked him how he himself appeared. Su thought: “This monk always defeats me when we debate anything. Now is my chance to win.” So he said, “You look like a pile of cow dung.”

The monk just smiled. He made no attempt to argue. Thinking that

he had won the debate, Su went home and smugly told his sister of his success. But she informed him that he had lost. “My dear brother, the monk’s heart was filled with the love of Buddha, so he saw you as Buddha. But your heart was filled with cow dung – so that’s how you saw him.”

The worker made use of this story to remind Mrs Lau that how she responds to a situation reflects what is in her heart. She told her: “There may be other ways of looking at what you described to me. Rattling and breaking a plate could be an accident. Your mother-in-law may be speaking loudly on the phone because her hearing is deteriorating, or because she doesn’t know you are asleep. As for the food, it may be the old lady is ensuring that the family eats well.”

She paused. “Sometimes things are not what we think. If you could step into the old lady’s shoes for a while and understand her side of the story, may be your problems could be solved. For example, you could tell your mother-in-law when you are going to take a nap and ask her to keep her voice down. As for the meals, discuss these with her and see if she can prepare something light for you.” Again she paused. “It’s important that you communicate your needs while at the same time listening to your mother-in-law’s views. If you can put yourself into one another’s shoes, your relationship will not be so tense.”

Understanding this good advice, Mrs Lau felt a surge of hope. She told our worker: “I’ve never thought about it in this way. When I go home, I’ll have a good talk with my mother-in-law.”

*Originally published in August 2012*

# Realising Their Dreams On A New Land

*Stories of overseas students becoming Australian citizens*



Different generations of overseas Chinese students at CASS who have all chosen to settle in Australia

Since the 1970s and 80s, there has been a stream of Chinese and other overseas students coming to Australia to study. Many later settle here and become citizens.

Mr Leung, an engineer working in an Australian electronics company, came to Sydney to study in the 1970s. After finishing his studies, he was accepted as a skilled migrant. He says, “I came on my own and tried to settle first before my wife and daughter came to join me. Life was difficult, especially with the comparatively high cost of living here. I had to have a job to pay for my studies. When my wife arrived, she had to work on two jobs. Fortunately, we managed to overcome these challenges and things improved. Owing to the political situation

in China and Hong Kong, and because we found Australia a tolerant place, we decided to settle in Sydney.”

With Australia’s rapid economic growth through the 1990s, tertiary education has become an important export. In the financial year 2013-14, tertiary education ranked fourth as an Australian export. There are over 40 universities in Australia, and they are constantly evolving to meet changing needs. They offer courses not available in other countries, such as aviation and veterinary studies. In 2012, Australia also became the first Western country to legally recognise and regulate the study and practice of traditional Chinese medicine.

Beng came to Australia to study business. He says, “Australia has a well-developed market in tertiary education. Most institutions recognise academic qualifications gained in China, and there are many options to choose from. Apart from universities, there are also VTC and TAFE. As the medium of teaching is English, there are also special English courses for students with English as their second language and other foundation courses as well.”

After Beng finished his university studies and found a job, he applied for permanent residency in Australia. He is now very successful in his career. With the opportunities opened up by the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement, he is contemplating starting his own business.

Before migrating, Jia Jia worked in China for many years and managed to save enough money to come to Australia to study. After completing a Diploma of Cooking, she applied for permanent residency. She says, “Students need to be aware that academic terms in Australia are different from those in China. Institutes and

universities begin their year in late January or early February, so overseas students need to apply early. Those contemplating permanent residency after completing their studies also need to follow the changing requirements regarding skilled migrants. The list of eligible skilled occupations changes from time to time to reflect the needs of Australia. Some people may begin studying for a profession that meets the skilled migrant criteria but find this is not favoured by the time they finish the course.”

Have things changed for the youngest generation of overseas students? Tom is in his second year studying physiotherapy at university. He says, “People with a student visa can normally work 20 hours a week outside their studies and they can work full-time during term breaks to earn some money and gain work experience. With changing market conditions, it is important for us to prepare ourselves early to face future challenges.”

CASS Board members, like Dr Leng Tan and Mr Henry Pan, are both overseas students who, after finishing their university study, decided to settle in Australia. Together with other ex-students, in 1981, they established CASS. The youngest member of the current CASS Board, Mr Sean Zhang, is also an overseas student who completed his studies just a few years ago.

With changing social, economic and political circumstances in their respective countries of origin, overseas Chinese students have for decades played an important part in Australian life, and will continue to do so.

*Originally published in July 2015*

# A Big Happy Family

## *CASS Indonesian Activity Group*



CASS Indonesian Activity Group

Many Chinese migrating from Indonesia had experienced racial discrimination in the country in which they were born. They felt they were treated like second-class citizens. Those who could find a way left the country, and many settled in Australia. “Living in this multicultural country down under gives us freedom we had never enjoyed before. We feel respected and supported,” a member of the CASS Indonesian Activity Group said.

The Group was formed in Ashfield in 2003, supported by government

funding. Says a member, “When I first came to Australia on my own a few decades ago, I felt helpless and lonely. I learnt of CASS from the newspaper and I immediately made contact with it. When I walked through the door, I had an immediate sense of being at home.” Home is a safe haven and a sanctuary where one can find comfort.

The Indonesian Activity Group members travel from different parts of Sydney to gather at CASS. Some even come from the Blue Mountains. They sing, they dance, they exercise and they socialise. Volunteers prepare delicious lunches, and once a month there are birthday parties.

There is a very strong team spirit in the Group. Shunniang Chan, a retired music teacher, helped to set up the Group in 2003. She felt it was a great opportunity for her to do something for her fellow Indonesians. She was very enthusiastic in gathering many Indonesians and Indonesian Chinese living in Sydney to join. She plays accordion, piano and electronic keyboard, and is also talented in dancing. She teaches Group members singing and dancing with utmost patience and has earned the love and respect from others.

CASS has provided the Group with access to free activities, and has a staff member to assist in managing it. In return, grateful members often perform at CASS events. For example, one talented member teaches others to dance and makes all the costumes for the performances. The Group was also generous in its support for building the CASS Residential Aged Care Facility. On learning that CASS was

planning to build a second residential facility, the Group immediately donated its savings of \$5,000.

Excursions are organised every two or three months. On a recent sunny afternoon, 126 members gathered at the Seven Hills RSL Club. Some members brought along their relatives visiting from overseas. It was like a huge family gathering, with members busy taking photos and sharing laughter. When CASS organised a cooking competition, a number of members participated. They practised at home, bringing in dishes to share with the Group members and seeking feedback to perfect them.

The warmth of this family has melted the heart of a cancer patient who insists on attending the Group activities every week in spite of his frail health. The loving care of this extended family has given him the strength to fight his illness and he has outlived the time predicted by his doctor. There are also a few other members who are struggling with ill health but still insist on attending the Group every week.

What a great feeling it is to come home! The Indonesian Activity Group is not a temporary shelter, but a permanent home for many Chinese from Indonesia.

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