



THE NEW CHINESE

HOW THEY ARE CHANGING AUSTRALIA

This is a true story. It is a story about me, a very ordinary Chinese man. I was never physically tortured or persecuted by the 'evil communist regime', but still I had to 'escape' from China for a better life. It also tells the story of what has happened inside China since the Cultural Revolution, especially during the past 30 years when it has grown from one of the poorest developing countries to the world's second largest economy. Finally, it tells the story of how a new-generation Chinese migrant finds his place in Australian society and works towards his Australian dream.

Let me begin with a few special moments in my life. In September 2011 my wife Zhen and I landed at Sydney's Kingsford Smith Airport after our 'exodus' from China. All we had with us that day were two suitcases of clothes — and a six-months-pregnant belly. We had nowhere to live, no relatives, no jobs and not much in savings. No one came to the airport to welcome us. We rented a small car from Budget and bought two mobile phone numbers with the cheapest plan from Vodafone. Then we drove to the Ibis Budget Hotel, where I had booked us a room online.

After dinner at McDonald's Zhen was quite tired. She had vomited many times during the 11-hour red-eye flight. I knew she had no appetite but was forcing herself to eat for the sake of the baby growing inside her. When I put our dirty clothes in the coin-operated washing machine in the laundry and returned to our small room, she was already asleep in the not-so-comfortable bed. She had to sleep on her side because her belly was so big. Looking at her back, I almost started to cry. I felt so bad that I had put her through this journey, and the worst part was I had no idea where I was heading. But I had no time to cry. I wiped my eyes and turned on my laptop. I needed to find somewhere for us to live, some place we could afford, yet I had no idea if anyone would even rent to a jobless couple like us.

One week later we bought a 12-year-old car and moved into a small apartment in Westmead. In a day I had assembled all the furniture from IKEA, including a baby cot and a nappy-change table. I was exhausted, but I felt overwhelmingly relieved that we finally had a place for the baby if it decided to come early. I could also cook nutritious and healthy homemade meals for Zhen. Most importantly, we were no longer homeless. When everything was assembled I was ready to drop. I fell asleep almost instantly.

The next day Zhen had her first check-up at the Westmead hospital. The baby was fine. I had yet to find a job, but Zhen didn't seem too worried. She had strong faith in me, or maybe she just didn't want to show her anxiety and put extra pressure on me. I told her if I couldn't find a job in accounting, I would take on any work to make sure she and the baby had everything they needed. I even started to apply for cleaning jobs advertised in the local newspaper.



I didn't find a job in accounting — it wasn't long after the global financial crisis, and very few businesses were hiring — but I found a commission-based sales job. It didn't offer much job security, but I finally started making money again. Zhen was so happy. After paying the rent and basic living expenses, we spent what was left on baby clothes, nappies and a pram.

One early December night Zhen's contractions started. I was so excited. We rushed to the hospital, and our 48-hour battle began. I could never truly feel her pain, but after a day of her screaming, I could see Zhen was exhausted. I too felt drained. When the doctor told me the baby was not going to come out naturally, that they needed to perform a caesarean section and there was a chance she could die, I almost collapsed. Zhen was in great pain and clutched my hands tightly. I was afraid I might lose her that night.

My son was born at midnight. In the operating theatre, when I held him for the first time, I finally started to cry. I just could not hold it in anymore. He was so small, so precious, so ugly and yet so beautiful. Zhen had lost a litre of blood during the birth, but she was okay. I felt blessed. Besides my son, a new man was born that night — me. For the first time in my life, I understood what it felt like to be a man and a father.

In the morning I sent a text message to my parents in Beijing, telling them their first grandson had been born and everyone was well. Although they were happy with the news, I knew they had still not forgiven me for leaving China as I had. I didn't care, because now I was a father too, and I knew I was doing the right thing for my wife and child. With or without my parents' blessings, I would ensure my son had the best life possible.

The next morning I received a phone call from an HR agent, who had a job offer for me. It was a full-time telemarketing role with an IT company. She wasn't at all sure I would be interested as it was just a 12-month contract and paid only \$50 000. I said yes, definitely yes! I was so happy to secure 12 months' income for my new family. It was definitely the most exciting job offer I had ever received.

Three months later Zhen found a contract job near home. We were lucky that her mother came from China to help look after our boy. Zhen went to work in the morning, came home at lunchtime to breastfeed, then went back to work again in the afternoon. With her income we started saving, because we hoped one day to buy our own property.

Six months later still my parents came to Australia to meet their grandson for the first time. I could see they loved him, although they were still very disappointed in me for deserting China and then taking on some 'embarrassing' cold-calling sales job when they had spent so much on my professional education in accounting.

When I completed the telemarketing contract, the company asked me to stay on in sales, but I knew it was time to move back into accounting, a career that offered me a better future given my educational background. After a long search I finally found an entry-level auditor job with PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), the world's largest accounting firm. It was a dream job for any accounting graduate. I was some 10 years older than my peers, who had just graduated from university, but I knew it was never too late to start something great.

Another year passed and Zhen found a better job. We finally had enough savings to put down a deposit on our first home. It was a very old unit (older than we were ourselves) in the northern suburbs of Sydney, but we felt so happy when we moved into the first home we had owned. A few months after we moved, Zhen was pregnant again. About the time my second child was born, I was promoted at work.



Last year I moved to Audit Office of New South Wales as an experienced financial auditor. Zhen landed a job as a financial analyst. We finally had the jobs and the life every new migrant dreamed of. When we returned to Beijing with two lovely children over Christmas, although they did not say as much, I knew my parents had finally accepted that I had made the right decision in leaving China five years ago.

So why did I have to escape from China in the first place? To answer that question, I need to fill in some of the background to my own story, which is my aim in this book.

In chapter 1, I introduce some more stories of the new Chinese, in particular from my own life and that of my father, whose life journey had a significant impact on my own, and explain what I mean when I talk about the ‘new Chinese.’ In chapter 2, I define the different generations of Chinese migrants who have arrived in Australia since the nineteenth century. In chapter 3, I describe the four generations of Chinese since the establishment of Communist China and introduce more real stories of life since the end of the Cultural Revolution, when China was transformed from a poor and politically rigid country to what it is today. In chapter 4, I try to draw an outline of politics in China — without getting my book banned in my home country. In chapter 5, I talk about traditional Chinese culture and how it continues to shape the mindset of the Chinese today.

In the second half of the book, I touch on some more practical issues relating to the new Chinese. In chapter 6, I look at how the Chinese came to be so rich in just a few decades, and in chapter 7 I discuss how the Chinese spend their money and also offer some pointers on how to sell to the Chinese. In chapter 8, I talk about the Chinese working in Australia and illustrate how different life would have been for them had they been working in China. Here I talk about why I felt I had to ‘escape’ from China when I did. In the final chapter I offer my views on China’s future.

I hope you enjoy reading my story and the story of the new China.



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