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JIYEON 'JANE' MIN: "We're in between."



PHOTO: SHARON MARRIS

ZHANYI 'JENNY' CHEN: A direct approach.



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YUZHEN 'MARLENE' LU: "We couldn't adjust in China."

'Generation 1.5'

Living in the cultural soup of New Zealand

For some foreign-born New Zealanders, adjusting to their new home takes decades. PATRICK CREWDSON investigates the cultural no-man's-land known as 'Generation 1.5'.

If you want to fit in, don't throw meat bones over your shoulder.

It's a rainy night and up at AUT's Four Seasons restaurant, overlooking Mayoral Drive, David Wang's hospitality class is hosting a group from the Chinese Students Association interested in becoming less conspicuously Chinese.

Enticed by a photoshopped flyer of a knife and fork in traditional Chinese wedding dress, the students have come to learn the fundamentals of Western style dining — things like recognising the salad fork and appreciating Norah Jones. In short, they've come to learn how to fit in.

Wang's class and the visitors circle each others like teenagers at a fourth form dance, each a little shaky on their feet. It's like the blind feeding the blind: the chefs, waiters and barmaids in Wang's 20-person class are all from China too.

How do I use a napkin?, one girl asks. Someone else snaps pictures with a digital camera. The tall, blonde woman leading the seminar — the only Pakeha in the room, front of house lecturer Debbie Newson-Brown — imparts a race relations lesson in the guise of dining etiquette: manners, she says, are a way of showing people that you respect them.

The motif of the night is cultural differences — some as subtle as the distance between plate and mouth or chair and table (Chinese people like them closer and further away, respectively, than Europeans do), some as fundamental as not burping to show appreciation.

Quietly, one adventurous girl leads by example — napkin on lap, knife and fork in hand. Main course: onion and feta quiche. Dessert: bread and butter pudding.

David (born Kun) Wang came to New Zealand from Shi Jia Zhuang, capital city of Hei Bei province in

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China, three years ago — just one of a plane-load of students winging their way here to learn the language. Like many, he chose New Zealand for

the simple reason that the school fees were cheaper than in other English-speaking countries. For his first year in the country, he lived at a homestay in Meadowbank. Now he's in the central city, closer to the karaoke bars and internet cafes and to school.

There must be something in the syllabus because, like all Asian students, Wang refers to the locals strictly in the vernacular: it's always "Kiwis", never "New Zealanders". But for one sector of the international student and immigrant population — a sector Wang could join if he stays long enough — the important choice isn't a linguistic one between sounding too formal or overly familiar, it's a matter of identity, where "Kiwi" runs up not against "New Zealander" but against "Korean" or "Chinese".

Of the 72 new lawyers admitted to the bar at the High Court in Auckland in May, 40% were born overseas. Two of those freshly minted solicitors — You Sun Lee and Jiyeon Min, both aged 24 — came to New Zealand from Korea in the mid-1990s, when they say permanent residency was easier to get than it is now.

Despite a decade in the country, the girls don't think of themselves as New Zealanders. Lee feels caught

between two standards of citizenship, neither a "real Korean" born and raised, nor a second generation immigrant.

"Koreans call us 1.5 generation," she says. "We're not really Korean, we're not really Kiwi — we're in between. I feel like a visitor when I go back."

Min, who goes by the English name Jane, agrees: "The way you think and see things is already different."

"When I meet a Korean person who's just come to New Zealand I can't find a common subject to talk about," she says. "They get really offended when I speak English."

"It's like we're showing off," Lee adds thoughtfully. "But it's just that our Korean is bad."

In America and Australia, the term Generation 1.5 is used for foreign-born, locally-educated students, those who take characteristics from two cultures but belong wholly to neither.

The students of Generation 1.5 occupy a kind of cultural no-man's-land. Min says that separates her from even her oldest Kiwi friend, who she met on her first day of high school in Hamilton.

"I always feel she can't under-

stand me fully because she can't understand my culture. I don't mean just Korean culture, I mean migrant culture."

For Lee, life in New Zealand has meant becoming less conservative than most Koreans.

"I don't have a perfect Korean or a

"It's really hard to assimilate to Kiwi culture if you're born in another country and have grown up there."

complete Kiwi mentality," she says. "I'm too open for Koreans but I still find it hard to accept how open Kiwis can be."

"I don't do things the way Asians do. And I don't do things the way Kiwis do."

For a while, when she was younger Lee dated a local boy. But she struggled, feeling she had to emulate his friends' girlfriends.

"I found it hard to join conversations when they were around because the way they talked about things was so different. It was okay when it was just me and him, but not when others