



PHOTOS: JONATHAN DOW

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were around. I used to get embarrassed when he showed affection in public. All his friends were doing it and I tried to look okay with it too but then I just felt it wasn't me."

Making the constant effort to fit in was a drain, Lee says.

"Can you imagine going to a royal party and trying to have a decent conversation with them? Or joining a group of surfers and trying a joint with them? ... One day it just came to me that I was feeling really stressed trying to be a Kiwi. It's really hard to assimilate to Kiwi culture if you're born in another country and have grown up there."

The table manners seminar hosted by David Wang and his classmates was organised by AUT's Chinese student advisor, Yuzhen Lu — or as she introduces herself, Marlene.

Lu describes her job as promoting understanding between New Zealanders and Chinese people — or in the worthy but earnest parlance of multiculturalism, "forging connections".

Before settling here with her family four years ago and gaining citizenship she majored in English at university in North China and studied in Belgium and at La Trobe in Melbourne. Her Chinese friends still outnumber her kiwi friends, but like the Koreans of Generation 1.5, Lu says Western life has ruined her family's chances of a successful homecoming.

"Our values, our concepts of life had changed. We could not adjust to life in China," she says, thinking of when, after her time studying abroad, she attempted to return to China, hoping to introduce Western teaching methods.

Some of the differences were small, like the taxi drivers being even worse in Lu's province, Shanxi. Some, like her problems with the values of the Communist state, were more significant. As Lu could attest, students or immigrants often don't realise how fully they've adapted to Western life until they return to Asia.

Living here, they feel distinctly

alien, and it's not until their first visit back to China, Japan or Korea that they start to feel like New Zealanders. Before coming to New Zealand, Zhanyi Chen would never have dared to tell her uncle he was being stupid.

But the 24-year-old, who uses the English name Jenny, says her two years here have taught her Kiwi ways of talking. When she returned to Shanghai for a visit she inadvertently demonstrated her acquired conversational style, blurting out

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"Nonsense!" in a disagreement with her uncle. She suffered the consequences: a harsh rebuke from her mother.

The Chinese edition of a guide to living in New Zealand produced by the Ministry of Education earlier this year warns international students to expect such cultural differences.

"Many New Zealanders have a quite direct and frank way of speaking," it says, before going on to counsel that the perception of brusque behavior cuts both ways: "Sometimes New Zealanders can be offended by personal comments such as 'you have put on weight', 'she is skinny' or 'his hair is very grey'."

Chen says as well as making her more direct, living in New Zealand has given her a fresh perspective on how Chinese society operates.

"They work more on relationships, not the truth," she says.

International students are included in the raw data for New Zealand's five-yearly census, but not in the most frequently cited statistics (which come from the "usually resident" population).

If they were, Asians would go from being about 7% of the population to closer to 9%.

The latest Ministry of Education figures say there were almost 120,000 international students in New Zealand last year, enough to fill a city the size of Hamilton. Most — around 106,000 — were Asian. Of those, more than half were at English language schools. Forty per cent hail from China. Japan and Korea send around twenty per cent each.

Dr Andrew Butcher, a researcher on international students, estimates the average stay for Asian students has shrunk down to 3-6 months. Indeed, many students vanish as soon as their language courses finish. But many choose to remain — some to get work experience before eventually returning home, others to live here permanently.

Signs of Asia's increasing influence on Auckland are everywhere, from the Taiwanese bubble tea stalls in every foodcourt, to the section of Cantopop CDs at the public library. In 1994, the Auckland Yellow Pages listed 88 restaurants that qualified as Chinese, Japanese, Korean or generic Asian. By the time this year's phone book was printed, the total had risen to 207, up 135% in a decade.

For a clear illustration, visit Yifans Entertainment Centre, a video game arcade downstairs off Queen St where a picture is worth a thousand kanji characters. At Lovegety Station, one of a bank of 16 photo sticker machines that greets visitors to the arcade, customers can have their photos taken in "graduation", "summer resort" or "cutie face" mode. On the counter, a TV set plays a Japanese cartoon subtitled in Chinese.

Like Auckland's many karaoke bars and noodle joints, the culture of video game parlours is an example of the city's "Asianisation". Andy Wong, who came over from Hong Kong more than a decade ago, has managed the large, 180-machine parlour for three years. He estimates that 60% of his customers are Asian.

Dependency on that pool of customers would be greater still at Lorne St comic book and video rental store City Video, where former language student Jennifer Shin sits down the back reading the latest edition of locally produced Korean newspaper *Goodday*. The print is in Hangul, the phonetic Korean alphabet, but much of the news is local (ripped from the *Herald*, Shin suspects). On the front page a banner headline over a picture of the Beehive asks "Monarchy or republic?". Don Brash is on page three, basking in resurgent National party poll results.

Shin says City Video is popular with students and immigrants who miss the pop culture of their homelands. The store receives weekly shipments of Japanese and Korean movies, novels and comics, which it rents out for between \$1 and \$4 for a couple of nights.

The 21-year-old came to Auckland two years ago from Seoul and is training to teach English as a second language.

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She admits some students will go wild when they first arrive in the country, but says they usually calm down after about a year.

"Korean culture is really conservative," she says. "I think they feel more free in New Zealand because they're alone."

You Sun Lee echoes Shin's frustration at the behaviour of some recently-arrived Asian students, the same behaviour — drinking, gambling, blowing money on flash cars, talking too loudly in public — that fuels the most commonly held stereotypes.

"Asians in their own country won't do that sort of thing. But there's no one here to restrict them."

Jane Min says she knows a Korean family in New Zealand who imported everything from their homeland — from toiletries like toothpaste, soap and shampoo, up to big-ticket items like furniture.

Stuck in the middle, Min says she understands how New Zealanders form stereotypes about Asians.

Sometimes the stereotypes attached to Asians here serve only to stymie their best efforts to fit in. Despite good grades, a sophisticated command of English, and two university degrees, MA student Can Qin is despondent about her ability to find work in New Zealand.

"I do my best but when I'm in the workplace I'm still nobody."

Qin says she's sent her CV in for literally hundreds of jobs, with a steady diet of rejection letters in return — like one from the Commerce Commission, received on the day we spoke. Why can't she catch a break? Maybe it's to do with how she automatically spells her first name out for me: it's "Charlie-April-November", pronounced more like "Tsan".

"I think I've got a very strange surname, a very foreign appearance," Qin explains, her bitterness tempered with resignation. "They ask for excellent English, but the criteria for excellent is a Kiwi accent."

Qin, who is in her early 30s, migrated to New Zealand with her husband from the city of Kunming, in the south-west Chinese province of Yun Nan, five years ago.

Her aim used to be to become a citizen. Now, battered by the system, she's not so sure.

When she first arrived here she followed the common practice and adopted an English moniker. Later, she chose to reclaim her original name: Can, meaning 'brilliant', and Qin, inherited from the first Chinese ruling dynasty. The move is symbolic of her time in this country.

"When I was in China I was very westernised," Qin says. "I dreamed of equality, democracy, all those beautiful concepts. But since I came to New Zealand I've become more Chinese."