

# What? Rice again?

**ZHOU JING JING** is from northern China, where climate and diet differ greatly from the south, from which generations of Malaysian Chinese originated

**FIRST** arrived in Malaysia on October 26, 1998, a date that marks a turning point in my life. From that day onwards, I matured from a high school student into a college student living and studying in another country.

I knew that there were many things for me to learn and I looked forward to the new and interesting experiences. I could not help smiling when the aircraft landed.

Only a few hours before that I had been at home and now I was thousands of miles away from my hometown. I told myself it was time to prove my ability. Having already experienced high school, I believe that I can face any form of hardship.

Tired after the long journey, I fell asleep as soon as I got on the INTI bus.

After getting off the bus, I took a deep breath of the intoxicating warm, humid air and savoured the peace and quiet.

I soon found out that I would be living with a group of Indonesian students. Their actions, words and hairstyles were very different from mine, and the only language I could use in order to be able to communicate with them was English.

I suddenly felt lonely. I had no relatives and no friends in this new place. But I now realise that my spoken English has improved because I have had to live with foreign students.

Later, I realised things were not what I had imagined them to be like.

Having grown up in the north of China, we always had food made from flour; steamed buns, noodles. Now breakfast, rice;

lunch, rice; dinner – more rice.

I can't find any tasty food. It is ironic that at home, I was the person who liked rice and chicken the most in my family! However, now I'm not sure I like either.

In class, I found out that almost all the students were from China. Before the lecturer came into classroom we excitedly exchanged our experiences of this new place. After the lecturer started teaching in English, however, we soon realised that we could hardly even say 'boo' to a goose.

Time flies. Almost two years have passed since I first arrived in Malaysia and I am now used to living and studying here and have discovered many new things about this country. I have got used to the hot weather here, but I can no longer say the same about the cold winter weather in China!

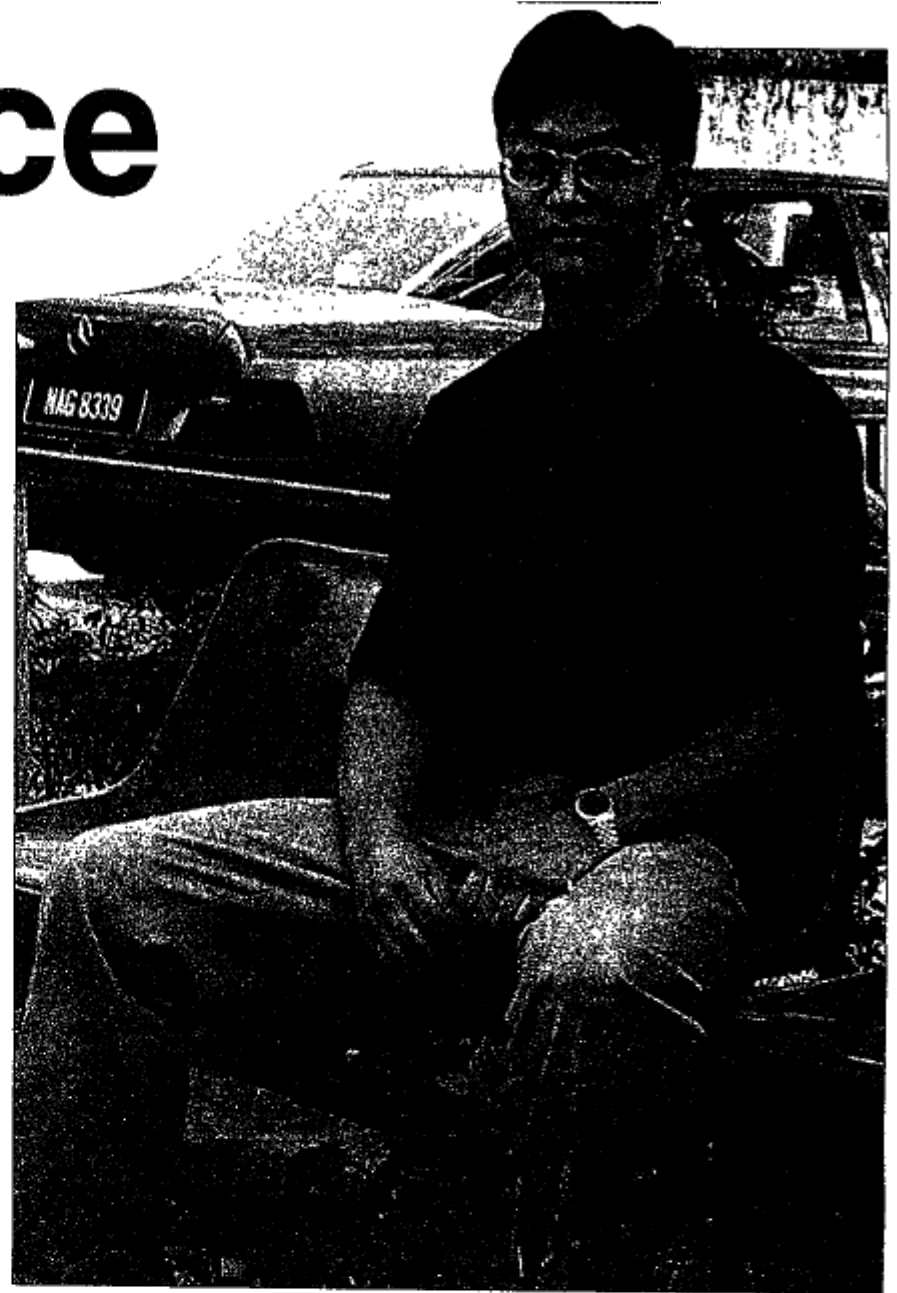
I cannot help talking to others in both English and Chinese. Moreover, I have formed the Malaysian habit of eating whenever I am hungry because classes are held at all times of the day. Some classes can go on from 8am to 4pm and this really tests your stomach.

Anyway, there are still two things that I have not changed, my manner of dress and the way I study.

I always wore collared shirts before I came to Malaysia. However, this surprised my classmates here – it seemed like I was an alien from Mars.

"Did you wear such formal clothes at school in China. Are you dating a girl? Do you have a presentation today?"

Just so that I would not be questioned any



**ZHOU:** Getting used to the dietary differences and making many new friends along the way

more, I seldom wear shirts now.

Living with local students, I realise how they study. They have the time of their lives during the semester and begin worrying about their exams just two weeks before

their finals. I would never do that. I finish the task in hand the same day, I never put it off, it's a habit I formed in high school.

Learning doesn't just take one or two days. You have to steadily accumulate knowledge to improve yourself.

Perhaps you can obtain good results with only two weeks of preparation before exams. Nevertheless, I am sure that you will forget it as fast as you learn it. We should ask ourselves for whom and for what we are studying.

Sometimes, I feel bored and upset. During such times, I talk to my friends. Some of them are from China and we have known each other for a long time. Others are local students or INTI staff.

I am taking the University Foundation Programme at INTI College; which means I don't have enough time to go home during the semester breaks. If I was back in China, I would go and spend my leisure time with my friends. Here I normally go to the International Office and work as a student helper.

One day, when we had finished our work, one of them asked me, "Will you be coming in tomorrow?"

"Yes," I answered.

"This is your second home, right?" she asked.

"Right, right," I was glad to hear that. They encourage me and help me a lot when I need help.

I feel I am very lucky to know them and my other friends.

Though I do not have relatives in Malaysia, I am not alone because of all these friends.