

# Immigrants balance home, Canadian traditions

BY HANNELORE VOLPE  
Staff Writer

As 21-month-old Kyle Joshua Tam learns his nursery rhymes and children's songs, his mom, Karen Miu, makes sure he learns them from both the Chinese and Canadian traditions.

As she facilitates parenting classes at the Markham office of the Toronto Chinese Community Services Association, the Richmond Hill resident encourages parents, many of whom came to Canada from Hong Kong, to integrate their children "into the Canadian culture" while keeping their Chinese heritage.

Ms Miu and her husband, Simon Tam, are among the more than 100,000 Cantonese-speaking people of Hong Kong origin living in York Region.

In 1984, long before the main influx of Hong Kong residents came to this country in the 1990s, Karen Miu followed her sister to Canada to study at the University of Manitoba.

"I knew nothing about Canada," she said. "But after university, I fell in love with the country." She was forced to return to Hong Kong after completing her studies in human resources management because she was on a student visa.

Ms Miu asked her parents if she could emigrate after the

Canadian government began wooing well-educated professionals from Hong Kong.

In 1988, she arrived in Toronto, where she had some friends from her university days, and settled into her rented quarters.

Here, she reconnected with her future husband, with whom she had attended university.

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Finding a job in her chosen career was more difficult for Ms Miu, who after heading the personnel department at a hospital in Hong Kong, had to start with secretarial positions in Canada.

She eventually worked her way up to a management position in human resources.

After the couple settled into a home, Ms Miu sponsored her parents and her two sisters to come here.

They were part of the wave of immigrants who came to Canada before the 1997 return of Hong Kong from British rule to the mainland Chinese government. Attending a church

with a Chinese-speaking congregation helped to ease some of the upheaval.

Ms Miu uses her own experiences to help people coming to the Toronto Chinese Community Services Association office on Steeles Avenue in Markham.

As well as the new parenting classes, the association helps with filling out government forms, providing workshops and offering counselling services for education, housing, health care, immigration and other issues.

The Markham Chinese Cultural Centre, in Market Village beside Pacific Mall at Kennedy Road and Steeles Avenue in Milliken, is another organization offering a variety of programs, including Mandarin classes for those who speak English.

Miranda Mak has been the manager of the centre since 1997 and sees a mixture of newcomers and some students who have been here (in Canada) for 20 or 30 years.

More than 300 small business owners, doctors, lawyers, accountants and banks make up the Scarborough York Region Chinese Business Association. It offers monthly networking meetings, seminars and other activities and is related to the Markham Board of Trade.

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