

# Ah-De and Da-Zi's story

## Interview and story written with Jessie Tang



Illustration by Xue Xu. @yumigou\_

*Ah-De and Da-Zi are frontline workers at a grocery store.*

In 2017, Ah-De and his wife, Da-Zi arrived in Canada on a visitor's visa to visit their son and grandchildren. Ah-De's son and daughter-in-law were often busy at work, so he and his wife offered to help raise the children. However, it wasn't long before differences in parenting style emerged between the young parents and the older generation, so Ah-De and his wife stopped spending as much time with the children.

Living in Toronto was also expensive; necessities such as housing, property tax, and car insurance cost much more than it did back in China. As visitors, Ah-De and Da-Zi were also unable to receive a pension, so they had decided to search for employment.

In China, Ah-De and Da-Zi worked as street cleaners, earning 10,000RMB a month. In Canada, the supermarket Ah-De has worked at for over four years pays \$2000 a month for six days of work a week.

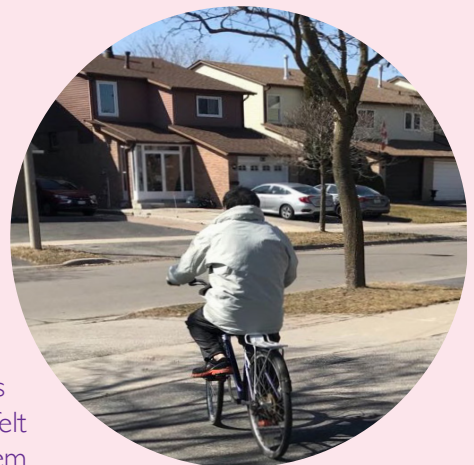
Without immigration status allowing the work in Canada and with their age, they could only find work as cleaners, earning less than \$100 a day for ten hours of work. Though the pay wasn't good, Ah-De and his wife liked working, since they felt it helped them stave off boredom and integrate into this new country. When asked about the biggest adjustment they had to make in Canada, Ah-De gestured to the deserted road and replied that there were never any people on the streets.

During the pandemic, Ah-De referred Da-Zi to a job at the supermarket because they were short-staffed. However, as the pandemic started easing, the manager started criticizing her work. After three months of hard work during the peak of the pandemic, Da-Zi was replaced by another employee. She felt taken advantage of, as the two of them had worked as hard as three people. Although she disputed her termination with the manager to the best of her

ability, nothing came from it. When I asked Ah-De about his thoughts on this, he said this wasn't a fight they could win. As newcomers without any other options, they had to take what jobs they could get.

Ah-De said that in China, things would be different. The manager has been satisfied with his work so far, he added, because he takes his work seriously, and is quite handy. Though Ah-De believes in the strength of his immune system, which he attributes to his military service, he is concerned about the people who refuse to wear masks inside the store.

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*Ah-De riding his bike outside of his home.*

He feels that China is taking the pandemic much more seriously than Canada is, and constantly locking down and opening up will only lead to an increase in cases. In China, regulations are strict and although people cannot move freely between neighbourhoods, things will return to normal sooner.

A few weeks ago, Ah-De was hit by a car while bicycling home from work in a hit-and-run accident, falling hard onto the ground. In a while, his son, the ambulance, and the police all arrived, and there was fortunately no serious injury. From that day onwards however, Da-Zi started walking twenty minutes to pick him up from the supermarket after work. She feels that a hit-and-run is less likely with a pair of people walking together.

In Toronto, Ah-De and Da-Zi often have little to do outside of work. After waking up on his day off, Ah-De spends time on his cell phone, eats a little food, and goes back to sleep. On Da-Zi's days off, she sometimes takes walks with neighbours. Both of them feel that seniors lead aimless lives in Canada, and though working in China was tiring, they had always been happy.

They will return to Canada to visit their son and grandchild in the future, but the trips might grow shorter as they grow older. When Ah-De does come back, he intends on continuing to work at the supermarket.

He feels that if he became a permanent resident in Canada, things would perhaps be easier. Ah-De hopes everyone will stay healthy and safe during the pandemic. Cherish your body.

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*Ah-De and Da-Zi walking together holding hands, with their backs towards the camera in a residential neighbourhood.*