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By the way, where did you graduate from?

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MY former workplace had a high number of recruits who graduated from Australia. Is it a mere coincidence that the manager who hired them was an Aussie graduate himself?

Malay College Kuala Kangsar, Victoria Institution, St John's Institution and Royal Military College conjure up hallowed halls of learning which produce prodigious numbers of prominent movers and shakers in the boardroom, political arena and high society.

Cast the net wider and flash the old school ties of Oxford and Cambridge, Eton or Marlborough and you have what the Cantonese say, "Sic heong", meaning carry more weight, in name alone and by virtue of them being abroad. It almost always draws conclusions of a moneyed background.

The old-boy network may be self perpetuating. Former pupils of top schools would occupy many of the best jobs and recruit the next generation of workers from their own kind.

There is a snob appeal of old-school connections. Oxbridge is perceived to produce higher quality graduates.

Human resources personnel seek candidates from a recognised or long established institution rather than universities which have been upgraded from polytechnic status.

Some institutions are deemed to produce star students in certain fields and may be offered jobs, even with a lower-class degree.

Does the notion of products of elite schools getting jobs on the strength of their connections rather than their abilities still hold sway?

There may be reverse discrimination. Some may discriminate against people with premier school backgrounds. A prima donna with arrogant attitude may prove to be the spanner in the works. Who wants a toff from an ivory tower whiling away time before he inherits the estate?

Greater meritocracy may be achieved when the old school tie loses influence and recruiters are more open to so called second-tier tertiary institutions.

In his speech at the official opening of Universiti Tenaga Nasional last week, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad emphasised the importance of tie-ups between local and foreign universities. He said such a move would ensure the high standard of Malaysian education.

"Through tie-ups with well-known universities, the chances of recognition are better."

So, where did you say you graduated from?

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