**Reflections of a Chinese mother in the West**

**一位西方华裔母亲的思考**

**1 A lot of people wonder how Chinese parents raise such successful kids. They are baffled that these parents produce so many children with an abundance of talent and whether they too could raise such a child.**

**很多人想了解中国父母是如何培养出如此成功的孩子的。他们想知道，为什么这些中国父母能养育出那么多天分极佳的孩子，他们是否也能培养出这样的孩子呢？**

**2 The fact is that Chinese parents do things that seem provocative, unimaginable, even illegal, to opinionated Westerners. Chinese mothers can dispense with formal courtesies and say to an obese child who gorges on food, "Hey fatty, lose some weight." By contrast, Western parents must be humane, tiptoe around the issue, talk in terms of "health", and never ever mention the f-word. And still their kids end up in therapy for eating disorders and a negative self-image. I've thought long and hard about how Chinese parents can get away with what they do, and I think there are three ideological differences between Chinese and Western parents.**

**事实是，中国父母的做法，对固执己见的西方人来说，令人愤慨，难以想象，甚至是违法的。中国母亲可以不客气地对正在狼吞虎咽的肥胖孩子说:“喂，小胖子，你要减肥了。”与此相反，西方父母必须体谅地、小心翼翼而拐弯抹角地谈及“健康”，而且永远都不会提及“胖”字。结果，孩子还是因为饮食紊乱和消极的自我评价得去求医问药。长期以来我一直苦思冥想，中国父母这样做是如何能够全身而退的，我认为中西方的父母之间存在三种意识形态上的差异。**

**3 First, I've noticed Western parents cradle their children's self-esteem to insulate them from criticism. They worry about how their children will feel if they fail, and constantly try to solve their children's worries, regardless of how badly they perform. The presumption is that the child is tender, not strong, and as a result Western parents behave very differently than Chinese parents.**

**首先，我注意到西方父母呵护子女的自尊，使他们免受一切批评。他们担心孩子失败后的感受，于是不断尽其所能解除子女的忧虑，而不管其表现如何糟糕。西方父母认为孩子是娇弱的，不够坚强，因此他们的行为也就与中国父母大相径庭了。**

**4 For example, if a child comes home with an A-minus on a test, a Western parent will most likely praise the child. For a Chinese mother an A-minus is no milestone; she will gasp in displeasure and ask what went wrong. If the child comes home with a B, some Western parents, though hesitant, will still praise the child. Other Western parents will express disapproval, but they won't question the child's intellect or risk insecurities calling the child "stupid", "worthless" or "gross". Privately, Western parents may worry about their child, but they will never tell the child.**

**举个例子，如果一个孩子考试得了个A–回家，西方父母很可能会表扬孩子。而对中国母亲来说，A–根本不算什么好成绩；她还会不快地叹气，问到底出了什么问题。如果孩子得了B回家，一些西方父母尽管十分不情愿，仍然会表扬孩子。其他西方父母会表达出不满，但不会质疑孩子的智力，或贸然说孩子“笨蛋”、“一文不值”或“太可恶了”。而私下里，西方父母可能会感到担心，但绝不会让孩子们知道。**

**5 If a Chinese child gets a B, irrespective of the subject, there would first be a screaming, hair-tearing explosion. The Chinese mother would intensify her efforts and get dozens, maybe hundreds of practice tests and use every tool at her disposal, to get her child's grade up to an A.**

**如果中国孩子得了B，不管什么科目，首先面临的就是一声尖叫和恼怒的爆发。中国母亲会更加不遗余力地找来几十也许几百套的测验题，不惜采取手头任何办法来让自己孩子的成绩提高到A。**

**6 Chinese parents demand perfect grades because they take it for granted that their child can get them, and grades are a more important measure of success than "self-esteem". If their child doesn't get all A's, the Chinese parents assume it's because the child didn't work hard enough. That's why the solution to substandard performance is always to punish and shame the child. Chinese parents believe that their child is hardy enough to take the shaming and to improve from it.**

**中国父母要求完美的成绩，因为他们理所当然地认为孩子完全可以做到，而且分数是比“自尊”更为重要的衡量成功的标准。如果孩子没拿到全A，中国父母就认为这是因为孩子不够努力。这就是为什么对表现欠佳的孩子，父母总是会施以惩罚和辱骂。中国家长相信孩子足够坚强，能够承受羞辱，并会由此进步。**

**7 Second, Chinese parents believe their kids owe them everything. The reason for this isn't clear, but it's probably a combination of the Confucian doctrine of loyalty and the fact that parents have sacrificed so much for their children; so, Chinese children must spend their lives repaying their parents by obeying them and making them proud.**

**其次，中国父母认为孩子欠他们一切。这种看法的原因尚不清楚，也许是儒家“忠”的信条，再加上父母为子女牺牲诸多这一事实。因此，中国孩子必须听从父母教导，使他们自豪，终其一生回报他们。**

**8 Another area where Chinese and Westerners clash is that most Westerners don't believe offspring must show permanent gratitude to parents. My Western husband actually has this opposite view. "Children don't choose their parents," he once said to me. "They don't even choose to be born. It's parents who force life on their kids, so it's the parents' responsibility to provide for them. Kids don't owe their parents anything. Their duty will be to their own kids." This strikes me as a terrible deal for the Western parents.**

**中西方理念碰撞的另一领域是，西方人大多认为子女无须永远感激父母。我丈夫是个西方人，实际上就持有这种相反观点。“孩子又不能选择自己的父母，”他曾对我说过。“他们连要不要出生都没法选择，是父母强行给了他们生命，所以父母有责任抚养他们。孩子一点都不欠父母的，他们只对自己的子女负责任。”这话让我觉得西方父母受到的待遇真差。**

**9 Third, Chinese parents believe they know what's best for their children and therefore have ultimate authority over their children's desires and preferences. Chinese children have no rights to infringe, which is why Chinese daughters can't have boyfriends in high school and there are no late curfews or trips to sleep-away camps. Also even the slightest defiance or indignation, anything less than unquestioning obedience, is extinguished, and punished into submission. Don't get me wrong — it's not that Chinese parents don't care about their children. In fact, just the opposite! Chinese parents give up anything and everything to help their children. They just have an entirely different parenting model.**

**第三，中国父母相信他们知道什么最适合自己的孩子，因此对子女的愿望和喜好有着至高无上的权威。中国孩子没有什么父母不能侵犯的权利，所以中国孩儿在高中不能交男朋友，孩子们不能晚回家，不能参加在外过夜的野营旅行。哪怕一丁点的反抗或愤慨，只要不是绝对地服从，都会被根除，直至压服。不要误会我——这并非中国父母不关心孩子，事实恰恰相反！中国父母放弃了他们一切的一切，来帮助自己的子女。这只是教育模式完全不同而已。**

**10 Western propaganda often paints a portrait of Asian mothers as scheming, indifferent, militant people unconcerned with their kids' true interests. For their part, many Chinese secretly believe they care more about their children and are willing to sacrifice more for them than Westerners, who seem perfectly content to let their children turn out badly and shame their tradition and heritage. I think this is a misunderstanding on both sides. Of course there is also some overlap — all decent parents want to do what's best for their children. It's the methodology that's different.**

**西方的宣传往往把亚洲母亲描绘为工于心计、冷漠无情，还喜欢动武，而对孩子的真正兴趣不管不顾。对许多中国人来说，他们私下里都认为自己比西方人更关心孩子，而且愿意为他们牺牲更多，而西方人似乎都乐见孩子变坏、有辱家风。我想双方都有误解。当然也有部分共同之处——普天下称职的父母都想为孩子做最好的安排，只是方式方法不同而已。**

**11 Westerners preach respecting the children's individuality, encouraging them to pursue their true passions, supporting their choices, and providing a positive and nurturing environment. But while Western children may have a high opinion of themselves and glowing self-esteem, how do they perform in the real world? Chinese parents protect their children by armoring them for the future, letting them see what they're capable of, and conferring upon them skills, work habits, and inner confidence that no one can ever take away. When the time comes to perform, Chinese children have a blueprint for success; they know how to compete with the best the world has to offer. The proof is in the pudding!**

**西方人宣扬尊重孩子的个性，鼓励他们去追求真正的激情，支持他们的选择，并提供积极有益的环境。但西方孩子在自视甚高、自尊极强的同时，在现实世界又会表现如何？中国父母如此磨砺子女为将来计，让其了解自己的所能，并赋予他们技能、工作习惯和内在信心这些没人能拿走的东西，这样来对孩子进行保护。到表现时机来临时，中国孩子已经成竹在胸；他们知道该如何利用自己在这个世界上所能学到的最好的本事去竞争。“布丁”好坏，一试便知！﻿**

**A Western mother's response**

**一位西方母亲的回应**

**1 In the days since the newspaper published the column by the Chinese mother, I have thought of what I would say to her if I met her. I might point out, as others have, that Asian-American girls aged 15 to 24 have above average rates of suicide and eating disorders. I might question the arrogance of ascribing her child's success to the Chinese child-rearing techniques of criticism and name-calling when it could just as likely have resulted from genetic or economic blessings. But I have a feeling that she knows that.**

**报纸上刊登出一位中国母亲的专栏之后的几天中，我曾经想过，要是能碰到她，我会对她说些什么。我也许会像其他人一样指出，15岁至24岁的亚裔美国女孩自杀和饮食失调的比例高于平均值。我也许会质疑她把自己孩子的成功归结于中国式批评和谩骂的养育技巧，这种想法实在傲慢，孩子的成功可能只是源于良好的遗传基因或经济条件。不过，我觉得这点她是知道的。**

**2 More importantly, if I did make such contentions, I'd risk being called a liar by my own children. Sophie, my oldest, would remind me of the recent evening when I stared in stony silence at her report card, sniffing in contempt at her father's happy congratulations.**

**更重要的是，如果我确实持此观点，就得冒着被自己孩子说成骗子的风险。索菲，我的长女，会提醒我就在不久前的一个晚上，我盯着她的成绩单一言不发，毫无表情，并对她父亲高兴的祝贺嗤之以鼻。**

**3 "What?" she said. "I got 5 solid As."**

**“怎么了？”她说。“我可是得了5个A啊。”**

**4 I shrugged.**

**我耸耸肩。**

**5 "Come on," my husband complained.**

**“别这样，”我丈夫抱怨道。**

**6 My daughter narrowed her eyes at me. She knew what was coming.**

**女儿眯起眼睛看我，她知道接下来会发生什么。**

**7 I pointed at the remaining three grades, sociology, biochemistry and intermediate aesthetics, none a solid A. I certainly didn't think it warranted the "screaming, hairtearing explosion" that the author informs us would have greeted the daughter of a Chinese mother. However, I articulated my displeasure clearly enough. The word "garbage" was not uttered. But, it was only because I feared my husband's reproach that I refrained from telling my own daughter, when she collapsed in tears, that she was acting like an idiot.**

**我指着余下的三门课的成绩，社会学、生物化学和中级美学，没有一个是A。我当然不认为对此应该“尖叫和恼怒地爆发”，就像作者说的中国妈妈对待女儿的那样。不过，我也足够清晰地表达了自己的不满，只是没说“垃圾”这个词。她痛哭失声，我忍住了没说她像个白痴，但那也只是因为我担心丈夫的责备而已。**

**8 The difference, I suppose, between proud Chinese mothers and Western ones is that I felt ashamed that I didn't subordinate my anger to my pride in what she did accomplish. Admittedly (and I am ashamed to say this too), I also did not then go out and get hundreds of practice tests and work through them with my daughter far into the night, doing whatever it took to get her the A. I would leave those tasks for a tutor to administer.**

**自负的中国母亲与西方母亲之间的差异，我觉得，在于我很羞愧自己并未对女儿取得的成绩感到自豪，而是任由自己的怒气发泄。诚然（对此我也很惭愧），我之后也并没有去找数百套的测验题，然后与女儿一起做题到深夜，千方百计让她拿到A。我会把那些工作留给家教来做。**

**9 I am, actually, grateful to the author, and for the insights she gave me. Reading her essay definitely put some Chinese iron into my Western spine, and though I eventually apologized to my daughter for failing to acknowledge, right off the bat, all those tough classes last semester in which she had done phenomenally well, and for expressing my disappointment at the others too vigorously, I have also vowed that she will clamp down on those three subjects in which she is "underperforming". Her father and I are unanimous in this.**

**其实，我很感谢作者，感谢她让我增长了见识。读她的文章确实让我这西方的头脑融入了一些中国元素，尽管我最终向女儿道了歉，因为我没有一开始就认可上学期她在那些很难的课程上所取得的异常优秀的成绩，并对其他课程表示了过于强烈的失望，但我也立誓要帮她攻克成绩不够好的三门课。 对此她父亲和我看法是一致的。**

**10 But Chinese methods, I think, do still need some scrutiny. My daughter Rosie is mildly dyslexic, a learning difficulty that means she automatically reads words backward. By the time the psychiatrist diagnosed her, in second grade, she was lagging far behind her classmates. For years I forced her to spell words in the bathtub with foam letters, to do worksheets, to subdivide words into sounds and take practice tests. My criticism and forced rehearsing was redundant, it turns out — inside, she was all ready to punish herself, and I was only prolonging her misery and shattering her confidence. Eventually, and totally out of character, she even stopped loving school. She lost her sparkle. She started to suffer from constant stomachaches and broke down in tears almost every day. At last we heard about a reading program where students spent four hours every day in a small room under a supervisor with a specialization in dyslexia, drilling in letters and sight words. It sounded awful, but Rosie insisted on it. She loved books and stories. She wanted to read.**

**但中国的方法，我认为，确实仍然需要推敲。我女儿罗西有轻度阅读障碍，她会不由自主地逆读，这是她读二年级时精神科医生诊断出来的，那时她已经远远落后于她的同学。多年来，我强迫她在浴缸里用泡沫塑料字母拼写单词，做活页练习，把单词细分为读音，做各种练习测试。我批评她以及强迫她不断练习是多余的，原来——在她内心，她早已准备好惩罚自己，我只不过是在延长她的痛苦，粉碎她的信心。最后，她甚至不再爱上学了，这与她的性格全不相符。她失去了活力，开始不断地肚子难受，几乎每天都会流泪痛哭。后来，我们听说有一个阅读课程，学生在专攻阅读困难的专家的引导下，每天在小房间里花四个小时进行字母和常见单词练习。这听起来很可怕，但罗西执意要去。她喜欢书籍和小说，她想要阅读。**

**11 Every day when we picked her up, her face would be red with tears, her eyes hollow and exhausted. Every day we asked her if she wanted to quit. Neither her father nor I wanted to make a unilateral decision when she was the one who suffered, so we asked her. But every day she returned to the trenches, her little shoulders bent under the weight of her struggle. Rosie has a process she follows when she's scared — "Overcome your fears," she whispers to herself. I don't know where she learned it. Maybe from one of those television shows I shouldn't let her watch.**

**每天我们去接她时，她的脸总是红红的，满是泪水，两眼无神，疲惫不堪。我们每天都问她，要不要退出。无论是她父亲还是我都不想单方面替她作出决定，因为她才是遭受痛苦的人，所以我们问她的意见。而每天，她都回到课程训练现场，挣扎于重压之下，她的小肩膀都弯了。每当害怕的时候，罗西有一套自己的办法——她会对自己轻声说“要战胜恐惧”。我不知道她是从哪里学来的，也许是某个我不该让她看的电视节目。**

**12 At the end of a grim and brutal month, Rosie learned to read. Not because we sat like watchdogs and forced her to drill and practice and repeat, not because we dragged her kicking and screaming, or denied her food, or kept her from using the bathroom, but because she forced herself. Because of this, she emerged with a conception of herself as a powerful, versatile person.**

**在一个月严厉苛刻的学习结束时，罗西掌握了阅读。这不是因为我们像看守似地盯着她，强迫她练习、实践和重复，也不是因为我们拽着她又踢又叫，或者不给她饭吃，不让她上厕所，而是因为她自己逼着自己学。正因为如此，她开始意识到自己是一个意志坚强、多才多艺的人。**

**13 I have a feeling when Chinese children are underdeveloped or suffer from learning disabilities like Rosie's, their parents channel their admirable passion into finding a solution that works. They are just as dogged and determined, but in an entirely different way. In some scenarios roaring like a tiger turns children into pianists who debut at Carnegie Hall, but in others it only limits, constricts, and reins them in. Positive enthusiasm gives some the excuse to fail and others the chance to succeed. Wherever we reside on our big green, blue planet, Chinese mothers and I both understand that our job as mothers is to be the type of tigress that each of our different children needs.**

**我觉得中国孩子如果发育存在问题或者像罗西这样有学习障碍时，他们的父母会投入令人钦佩的热情去寻找可行的解决方案。他们同样是不屈不挠，无比坚定，只不过用的是完全不同的方式。某些情形下，咆哮如虎能让孩子成为在卡内基音乐厅首演的钢琴家，但其他情况下这只会限制、压迫、束缚他们。热切的关注会成为一些孩子失败的原因，也会给其他孩子成功的机会。这碧绿而又蔚蓝的广袤星球上，无论我们居于何处，中国母亲和我都明白，我们作为母亲的职责是成为每个孩子各自所需要的母老虎类型。**