

Beautiful and Dangerous: The Delicate Flowers

Domesticated flowers, delicate, beautiful but vulnerable, can only survive in the greenhouse with highly thoughtful care: growers need to feed them chemical fertilizers, water them to keep them vibrant, and sometimes release CO₂ deliberately, which the flowers breathe greedily, allowing the tender and pretty growing blossoms enough air to grow. Unlike people, flowers, breathing the CO₂ they desire, burst into bloom gorgeously; however, CO₂ stifles people—we cannot live with an excess of CO₂. A Chinese saying—do not let your children become the tender flowers in the greenhouse—could be interpreted as if love were the CO₂, suffocating the children to death. Indeed the children who grow up in the highly attentive and protective environment of their parents and grandparents do everything by depending on others. Is this kind of life—no need to worry and consider about anything – good for the young people? It is true that parents should take good care of their children to allow them to achieve physical and psychological health in a happy and pure environment; however, too much unnecessary care brings nothing except a spoiled kid.

With the increasingly accumulative wealth of families and the ideas of raising children changing in modern China, parents, especially grandparents, spoil their children, giving them everything, from the expensive toys to unlimited concern. They put all the love and care on their treasures, children, or the only kid in the family, offering the young generation a joyful life without any anxiety or worries. While a life without worry is enjoyable, it unfortunately causes the young people to rely more on their parents. How will this affect the kids in future?

Since this phenomenon of excessive parenting has become the norm, a saying—do not let your children become the tender flowers in the greenhouse, 别让你的孩子变成温室里的花朵 *bie rang ni de hai zi bian cheng wen shi li de hua duo*—has appeared. Tender flowers in the

greenhouse need growers to take good care of them every day and once treated incautiously, the flowers would wither and even die. Similarly, the children, regarded as delicate flowers in parents' eyes, would undergo huge damage without hyper-care. People cannot imagine how crazy the growers, the parents, could be for their beautiful and frail flowers, the children.

A local newspaper in China, Shenyang Night Newspaper, reported that a mother begged a guard to permit her to go into the school to give her daughter, who was taking military training before college, a bottle of sunscreen and she even kneeled down after begging for a few minutes (Shenyang Newspaper). Another mom brought two bottles of banana milk which were imported from South Korea and wanted the guard to give it to his son because her son drank nothing except this kind of beverage when he was in the home (Shenyang Night Newspaper). Were those things necessary for the two mothers to take more than an hour ride and even one of the mothers sacrificed her self-respect—in China, it is a big deal to kneel down and beg someone—only for a bottle of sunscreen? The girl could borrow the sunscreen from her classmate, so why did the mother even kneel down to beg the guard to let her in to give her girl sunscreen? The boy could drink water and other beverages and the only reason he did not drink those except that special one was that he was not thirsty enough. Parents do not even consider whether it is good to give their children everything they want and everything they think is important. Why do the stubborn parents persist in paying unneeded attention to their children? One of the most important reasons is that, from their perspective, due to poverty and having many siblings, they grew up in the environment without that much care—not only one kid as now—and they try to make-up for what they lacked by giving everything they could not have to their children.

Take my uncle for example. When he was young, precisely before 18, the age he left the family for university, he shared everything with his three siblings including the pencil, food,

clothes, room, even the love. His parents, my grandparents, were not able to give all their kids even a few “luxuries”—maybe the meat or a new shirt—because of the poverty: the three little rooms which they were living in, too simple and crude to prevent the wind and rain from coming inside the room through the rough roof which was made by the hay, were totally about 30 square meters with six family members and a black wolf. As my uncle remembered, the only school supply he had was handed down from his three siblings because my grandparents did not have money to “waste” for a new backpack: they would rather buy a bag of rice to feed the whole family. Besides, my grandparents were too busy to find way to earn more money to support the family, ignoring the spiritual needs of their kids including my uncle; even though my grandparents had the chance to notice their children, they needed to split their attention into four parts and gave only one fourth love to each child, leading every child of my grandparents, especially my uncle, to feel a sense of being ignored and not being loved.

Therefore, after my uncle earned comparatively more money, he bought everything my cousin wanted including the thousands RMB car models and shoes; besides, my uncle does everything for my cousin (his son), Yuan: checks his homework, packs his bag before school, and sometimes even ties his shoes. He is already 13 years old, an age at which he should shoulder some tasks like washing the dishes or cleaning his room to reduce the pressure on parents. I remember when he was only four years-old, he demanded to sleep by himself and my uncle disagreed with that because he thought Yuan was too young to sleep alone. Nine years past, Yuan not only does not sleep by himself, but also needs my uncle to read Grimm’s Fairy Tales before he sleeps and asks my uncle to stay until he falls asleep, which is not normal in China for a junior high boy. Due to the excessive attention and care from my uncle, Yuan’s nature of independence has disappeared, and he relies on my uncle no matter what he does.

Besides the spoiling by his parents, Yuan's grandparents have spoiled him even more. Yuan is the only child of my uncle, who is the only boy of his grandparents, so as a boy, he is destined to enjoy all the love of the family. Yuan's grandparents think he should eat more meat even though their grandson needs to lose weight; they feed him a lot of meat in every meal because they think meat is a luxury, ignoring the fact that Yuan is 173 pounds but shorter than 5 feet, almost considered obese.

One day, I visited his place with my mom and saw a young boy wearing a bright yellow V-neck T-shirt, black shorts and cartoon brown lion flip-flops, walking as slowly as a turtle towards us. I could not believe that he was the adorable four-year-old baby in my memory. "Come here, I bought you a huge watermelon." I waived to him and put the huge bags on the ground to wait for him (assuming he would come) to help me lift some bags to carry to his place. Yuan glanced at me with excited eyes, stopped and said hi at about three meters distance from me, waving his plump hand to me and yelling: "I love the watermelon! Yeah! Follow me!" He turned around quickly, instead of walking towards me, leaving me alone to deal with the seven huge bags of all kinds of fruits and beverage. "Where is Yuan?" My mom came to find me after parking the car; she was also surprised that Yuan did not help me—he did not even bring his favorite watermelon to his home. "Your uncle spoiled him too much. Doesn't he know not to let children become tender flowers in a greenhouse? Yuan, come here to help us!" Hearing my mom yelling at him in an unhappy tone, Yuan turned around with an indispensed face, pursing his mouth and frowning, both hands shoved into the pockets of his black shorts, still standing where he was, not making a forward gesture. "It's too heavy. I can't lift them." Talking to Yuan, I felt he acted like a delicate woman with a girly tone which seemed like he was the traditional Chinese delicate girl that everyone should pay special attention to. At this time, his grandfather came and lifted three bags,

and then told Yuan that, “Just go in the house. I’ll help them.” His grandfather, 72 years old, with an injured leg which he hurt several years ago, lifted three huge bags, following Yuan and walking a little bit unsteadily at a slow speed. Yuan behaved so happily and ran back to the house to continue playing his games.

His grandfather was already 72 years old and it was not convenient for him to walk. In that situation, 13-year-old Yuan ignored it. Astonished, I stared at him watching cartoons while eating the watermelon carried by his aged grandfather. He left the juicy drips on the floor and sofa, and he even did not cast a side-look. Helping the others is the traditional Chinese moral, but he had become “a little emperor” who did not care about others anymore, due to the too few boundaries and too much attention. He is a part of the “xiao huang di” generation; as Jeffrey Kluger, a reporter and writer who published his article “China’s one Child Policy” in Times emphasized that this generation is “xiao huang di ...a generation of pampered and entitled children who believe they sit at the center of the social universe because that’s exactly how they’ve been treated.”(Kluger) Being from China and part of the one-child generation, I have seen a great number of only children in the family have more and less this kind of emperor-like treatment. Because Yuan is treated like the center of the universe, it leads him to expect the help and attention from others instead of offering help to people who are in need. Too much attention has obliterated his nature of caring and thinking for others. Helping the others is the traditional Chinese moral, but Yuan’s consciousness was deprived by regarding himself as the “little emperor” by receiving the unlimited care from his parents and grandparents, leading him to become oblivious to others’ needs. He has come to not think he should help others because nobody has encouraged him to do so.

Actually, as Kluger notes, this phenomenon has suddenly become common within one or two generations, and presents the increasing trend. Since China enacted the only child policy, more families only have the right to raise one child, making it possible to focus all the energy and attention on their cute treasures; even though parents already realize that they should not spoil their kids anymore, they cannot stop because of the power of habit. When my cousin became 15 years old, an age when he cannot be considered as little child anymore, my uncle began to regret his over-indulgent behavior towards Yuan. He became the boy who skipped the classes and fought with others everyday; he did not do the homework, but instead, spent all the night at Internet Bar playing the computer games. However, it was too late for him to realize that tragedy occurs partly because of their unlimited and unprincipled love—spoiling the kids is like killing them—as another Chinese saying says. Children get used to accepting and enjoying the unprincipled love, and parents get used to offering and contributing the unlimited love. Of course, every kid is perfect in their parents' eyes, but the reality is no one is perfect. The unprincipled love and their own childhood deprivation blind the parents and they cultivate a spoiled child. Yuan knows clearly that his parents would not stop loving him no matter what he does, so he does everything he wants; my uncle does not blame Yuan, alternatively, he thinks that is his fault that Yuan behaves like this. Of course, the indulgent care pushes children to become spoiled and self-entitled.

What does raising spoiled children have to do with the future of the nation? There have been studies that have interviewed teachers and employers who complain about children from the “little emperor” generation lacking the ability to “...cope with disappointment and frustrations in ways that would better prepare them for life” (Kluger). Everyone will meet the upsetting situations and need to cope with the negative emotion. Learning how to deal with

negative emotions is important in school, work, relationships, and life in general. Think about how your professors, managers and friends behave when they meet frustrating situation: do you feel comfortable around them if they yell at you when they are really upset? Of course not. However, what if all the spoiled children grow up and take charge of the vital position of an office, a department, a company, even a country? They would always yell and blame at the colleague and maybe the colleague who was also the “little emperor” would yell back: probably the Third World War would begin in the office.

We cannot deny the truth that children are the flower: vibrant and active, beautiful and delicate—they are the hope of the nation and the world. However, the indoor flowers are too weak to grow by themselves: lack of thoughtful care might kill them. I remember once I asked my uncle why he did not treat Yuan the unsheltered way he grew up, because although my uncle had nothing when he was young, the characteristics like eating bitterness, having a strong will and persisting to better himself in order to get the attention of others which he developed in his poor childhood period helped him to get success, as defined by the principle of modern Chinese: having an undergraduate degree certificate, a car, a house and the ability to support the family. Regarding Yuan as a wild flower as my uncle was raised would maybe push Yuan to have the similar positive characteristics, instead of being a spoiled and impolite child. “I was unhappy everyday and I want to my son to be happy.” Love is greatest thing in the world, so comparing the unhappy mood to dependence on the parents, my uncle chooses to try his best to make his son happy. Through his own experience, being a strong wild flower means living in the environment where no growers water it, no one deliberately releases CO₂ and no one pays attention to its health: all it has is itself and the rule of “Nature selects, the fittest survive” (Darwin). Luckily, my uncle survived. I do not know how many people “died”—still struggling

in the poverty without any kind of resources to better their lives—in that time and their children have to get through the same situation as their parents. So I can understand why my uncle protects Yuan so carefully. Conversely, we have to admire that wild flowers do have more power to resist the nature disaster, which is necessary to survive in the world. Then how about being an appreciator but not a suffocator of the wild flowers: let each one blossom and grow freely by itself, and do it a favor by removing the harmful pest which is clawing close to it to let the flower survive when you visit; let it experience the rain, and when the pouring rain would ruin its life, give it an umbrella, allowing it experience the difficulties of surviving but be thankful for the help from others; let it see the beauty of rainbow after the rain, to comprehend the euphoria of the life. Why not treat them as wild flowers? Wild flowers are beautiful as well, but they are also strong. They can survive in the complex environment and bloom fully and beautifully. Let them experience the sun and rain, and then we will see the rainbow.

Works Cited

- Kluger, Jeffery. “China’s One-Child Policy: Curse of the ‘Little Emperors’”.
TIMES.Com. Jan 10, 2013. Web
- Tang Kuiyang. *Shenyang Night Newspaper*. Aug.25, 2005. Web

Wenjia Shi, 2014