**Overseas Accompanying Life Record: A Chinese Mother’s Trip to the United States**

Yan Wang walked out of a Chinese supermarket carrying two bags of ingredients; the cold air held her breath for two seconds. It was four o 'clock in the afternoon, Boston time. A drowning sun colored the whole sky reddish, and only a few people walked on the street. A Chinese sign across gave Wang the illusion that she was still at home. But the weak limbs and the fighting eyelids kept reminding her that the jet lag was beating against her body clock, and her daughter was coming home from school, and she had to hurry to prepare dinner. On the other side of the world, in an unfamiliar city, Wang was preparing for a new life, the life of an accompanying-study mother.

Wang's 18-year-old daughter, Yue, is a freshman at a private college in Boston. By the time Yue was born, Wang just started her own business. The busy work made her spend little time with her daughter. After high school graduation Yue received the offer from her dream college in the United States, got a chance to take an advanced study on media major that she'd been interested in while Mrs. and Mr. Wang began to loathe to part with their daughter.

"I've missed the crucial years that accompany a child's development, now I finally got some time for her, yet she is no longer with me. "Wang said regretfully. "For me, it's not a company, but more like compensation. When Yue gets older and goes further, I can no longer catch up with her."

Although Yue is already an adult and has experienced boarding life in high school, the Wang couple is still worried about their daughter's first time far away from home, "She used to study in our hometown and had no habit of traveling abroad. This is her first time leaving us so far for school. "

Like many Chinese parents, Wang is worried about her daughter's diet and clothing in the United States. The local gun problem especially makes her fearful of Yue's safety. Since Wong is self-employed, she doesn't need to struggle about asking for permission to leave her work. It happens to meet the slack season of her business, after having a short discussion with her husband, Wong decides to accompany her daughter to stay abroad for a while.

"It's assuring to have loved ones around. Although sometimes my mother has too much control over my life, having parents to rely on, I won't get so timid when I arrive in a foreign country for the first time." Yue agrees with her parents' decision of accompanying study. "They haven't traveled too far away either, so I can show them around when I go abroad."

In 2019, the number of Chinese studying abroad reached 369,548, rose 1.7 percent year-on-year, making Chinese students the largest group of overseas students. According to the statistics of China's Education Bureau published by Xinhuanet, among the numerous overseas education resources, American education with the strongest comprehensive strength is still the first choice for most students studying abroad. For parents, the decision to go abroad with their children is only the first step in a long journey. The accompanying visa and housing problems are still a great challenge.

As she is self-employed and can't get a business travel visa, Wang has to apply for a B2 tourist visa. This is also the choice taken by most parents. B2 tourist visa is generally for multiple trips a year, from the date of issuance of the visa, one is allowed to stay in the United States for up to 6 months. So parents can also take advantage of the opportunity to spend time with their children. Besides, wealthy families will consider applying for investment immigration, which would allow the entire family to obtain permanent U.S. residency, an option that requires at least $500,000 in investments in the United States. There is also a little-applied student visa, which requires parents to attend American language schools and maintain good grades. This is a big test for most parents who do not have a good command of English.

Wang's tourist visa does not allow her to stay in the United States for long, so she decides to shorten her stay with Yue and plans to leave after 4 months. Although well-planned, it is not as easy as expected for her to apply for a tourist visa. With tensions rising between the United States and China, the rate of U.S. visa rejections to China has also increased from previous years. China's ministry of education said that between January and March 2019, 13.5 percent of government-backed students had their visa applications rejected by the United States, up sharply from 3.2 percent in the same period last year. Even so, parents with more complex backgrounds are at greater risk of rejection.

"I have a friend who runs a business with his wife. He has found a house in America and plans to go with his little daughter studying abroad for high school together. The result is that the United States visa did not go down, and said the asset situation has a problem, they did not go." In order to avoid loopholes in the visa application process, Ms. Wang began to prepare all kinds of materials two months in advance, and to inquire friends around who are familiar with relevant businesses. "When the visa officer asked me a question, my hands shook. I was afraid that something wrong on my visa might negatively affect my daughter."

Before leaving for America, looking at the stamp on the visa page in the passport, Wang feels her heart finally back to the ground. With her daughter on the plane and through customs, she is not too worried about the language. "I looked up the strategy of traveling abroad on the Internet before, and said that even if the language is not the same, translating the sentence asking for help to write on the board in advance, or asking for help from fellow passengers, or using body language, are all feasible."

After a journey of more than 15 hours, the mother and her daughter finally landed in the United States with five suitcases of luggage. "If it's not my mom here helping me, I might have no idea how to hold the great number of luggage." Yue exclaims.

The first thing to do when Wang and Yue arrive in America is to find a place to settle down. With a week to go before school starts, Yue's dormitory is still closed. Knowing this, Mrs. Wang contacted the local rental agency before she took off from China. Renters are self-organized subletting groups of Chinese homeowners across Boston. There are dozens of such groups in Boston. Among them, the one that Wong contacted is "Boston non-commercial sublease group - the second". The manager of the group contacted Wang personally for business. "The number of daily rental transactions in our group ranges from 30 to 50, and can reach more than 50 or even nearly 100 during summer and winter holidays."

Administrators said it was "quite common" to see accompanying mother rent housing in Boston. "In previous years, the number of students studying abroad was small; parents who rented houses were accompanying their younger children or preparing to emigrate. "The number of students coming to the United States has risen dramatically in recent years, especially in places like Boston, where colleges are crowded. The phenomenon of college students' parents accompanying them has also increased.

In addition to Wang, the administrator has also received a six-month-accompanying mother. "Freshman year requires mandatory boarding so that the accommodation fees must be paid. Meanwhile, a lot of parents still rent a more comfortable house outside the campus for their children, resulting in quite an amount of expenditure for their accompanying study."

Rents of upscale neighborhoods in the heart of Boston range from $3,000 to $4,000 a month, equivalent to 1.5 times of Wang's monthly income in China. To save money, she compares multiple choices, deciding to share a two-bedroom apartment that is a half hour drive from school. "Including water and electricity, I need to pay about $1,500 for housing. My daughter and I live in the master bedroom together." Wang said.

After leaving luggage in the room, Wang and her daughter take a short rest and then prepare to go to the local market to buy beddings. Bedding is too bulky and inconvenient to carry from China, so they have to buy the whole set locally. After visiting two or three local shopping malls, Wang complains that "I really want to bring stuff from China. We don't know much about American brands, and the commodities here are nearly seven times as expensive as in China."

Yue has an allergic constitution, which makes her sensitive to beddings. After taking serious consideration, Wang eventually selects a light luxury brand. "For me personally, I'd rather choose a much cheaper one. But my mom is worried about my allergies and inflammation, saying that unlike China, the medical costs here in the United States are high," said Yue. "That's what mom always be like, frugal herself, but will never let me suffer."

In recent years, the contribution of Chinese students and their families to the U.S. economy has continued to grow. According to the International Association of Educators, the figure is $13 billion for 2017-18, with tuition and living expenses the main expenses. Eighty percent of the families with children studying abroad have already prepared the total cost of four years of college education before sending their children overseas. For some private colleges with a higher ranking in the United States, the cost can reach $286,000 to $429,000 yuan, around $71,500 per year, on average. According to the Chinese Household Wealth Survey, the annual income of China's 140 million middle-class families ranges from $42,950 to $71,435. If the children do not have scholarship assistance, the income of the whole family will be used to pay for their children's education studying abroad. That's a lot of pressure for most parents.

"We only have one child, so we must try our best to cultivate her. As long as we have the ability to send her abroad, we can definitely afford the educational cost until her graduation. Her dad and I won't spend too much." Wang said.

After Yue began to take courses at school, Wang participated in a college orientation for parents of international students, including visiting the campus, learning about the curriculum, talking to the person in charge of the school's international student organization association, and instructions about applying for international student financial aid. At the event, Wang met a number of Chinese parents who had also come along with their children to the United States. Among the 108 Chinese students of the freshman class, a third of their parents showed up. Most parents said that they would like to prepare everything well for their children so that their future overseas life will be much smoother. Wang felt at ease a little after the school tour, "The parent orientation program at the school is beneficial, and if I'm not personally involved in my daughter's school life, I might have some foolish thoughts on it."

With Yue's schoolwork gradually getting on the right track, her life becomes busier. Everyday before Yue goes to school in the morning, Wang will get up early to prepare breakfast for her. Young people are generally well adapted with the time difference, while Wang is still getting used to it for nearly two weeks. She often has insomnia at night and wakes up before dawn. It is cold in the northern latitudes of Boston, and even in summer, early morning temperatures often drop below 59 degrees. Wang soon gets familiar with the owner of a Chinese supermarket in the neighborhood, from where she always buys fresh and cheap ingredients. "American supermarkets don't have a complete range of ingredients, and I can't cook many of them. Chinese supermarkets are much more convenient for me."

The Boston area has more than a dozen Chinese supermarkets, large and small, as well as a sprawling downtown Chinatown that serves a wide variety of dishes. Walking through Chinatown, it is not uncommon to see older people staggering and middle-aged women in frugal clothes, many of them are the older generation of Chinese immigrants, and mothers looking after their offspring studying abroad. The Chinese supermarket that Wang patronized was run by an immigrant mother. As soon as her husband got his green card through skilled immigration, she and her children followed in his footsteps and settled in the United States to start a new life.

"There are some mothers who come to the United States with their children at the age of elementary school. They had a decent job at home with a good salary, but chose to quit their jobs for companionship. Having no proper working opportunity in a foreign country, most of them became housewives." Speaking of these, Wang feels empathetic. She is not sure whether the sacrifices parents made for their children were worth it or whether it really made sense for parents to take study-accompany. Being aware of her mother's confusion, Yue explains, "in fact, if I'm thrown into a strange environment and forced to feel out, I can handle this by myself. But since my mom is worried about me, why not let her come and have a look, and she'll be relieved to know."

Wang gradually adapted to the accompanying life, without the bother of work, she gets to enjoy a lot of her own time. Sometimes she will take the subway to travel around Harvard and MIT nearby. Or to watch a movie at home, learn some English, read a few books, prepare a big meal in the evening and wait for her daughter to come back home. The time of day passes quickly. Occasionally she still misses the busy old life, familiar faces, and lively environments at home in China. Seeing her daughter getting familiar with new places and new people and things, she is clear that it is time to let go.

4 months later, Wang, who had returned to China, resumed her routine life. Sitting in her spacious and bright office, reading over commercial files and documents, she still felt emotional when recalling the housewife days she spent in a narrow apartment in the United States. Nowadays, more and more Chinese parents go abroad for their children's education. However, glamorous on the surface, they have their own boredom and distress in a foreign country. Besides the cultural barrier, what they suffer from the most is the psychological gap brought by the huge difference in their social status and employment at home and abroad. For many mothers, accompanying their children is no longer a self-sacrifice, but a process of learning and growing together. In the face of their children, they behave strong and brave. In the process of accompanying them to study, they also learn to face difficulties and think independently, and how to survive and settle down in a completely strange environment.

"At an age like me, the chance to get out of my comfort might only be once in a lifetime." Recalling her accompanying life, Wang said. "Thanks to my daughter, I've seen a lot of the world on this trip."

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