

The Making of a Researcher

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I was born in a small city surrounded by red pines in Heilongjiang Province, in the northeastern part of China. The winters there are long, with snow covering the mountains and forests, and the world is always a vast expanse of white, as if people are destined to be accompanied by silence. My father was a teacher at the local teachers' college, teaching Chinese classical literature and conducting research. The place was remote, and its economy and education were far behind those of the bustling cities in the south. But in my memory, my father never looked down upon himself for being in a remote area. He was genuinely proud of his identity as a teacher. Besides teaching, he devoted almost all the spare time he could squeeze out - rest days, holidays, and nights - to the study of classical literature and poetry. During those years, he worked quietly and achieved quite a lot. The father I saw growing up was always a figure bent over a desk: either holding a book or a pen. His desk was always piled high with research manuscripts and ancient books, and the dense annotations were like traces of his dialogue with scholars from a thousand years ago. Apart from watching current affairs news, he devoted all his leisure time to academic research. Those days were poor and uneventful, and his research did not bring much material improvement to our lives. When I was young, I once asked him, "Isn't it boring to read and write all day long? Why don't you play cards or go fishing like others, but choose to be with those yellowed pages?" He turned his head, his eyes crinkling, and said with a smile, "This is my greatest joy." To a child who was not yet an adult, these words were truly hard to understand.

The path I took later was not smooth. I failed to get into a key university in the college entrance examination and felt wronged, thinking that the school had held me back. My father didn't say much, but often told me that the environment can influence a person, but it cannot determine one. He said that being a bit poor is not a bad thing; hardship is the best teacher for growth. These words still ring true in my ears today. When I graduated with a master's degree, my father was promoted to professor. His articles were all accepted by core journals, and even colleagues from other universities in the province said that he should have been promoted long ago. On that day, I saw a light on his face that I had never seen before - it was the comfort of being recognized and the pride unique to a researcher who has persisted. Many years later, I obtained a doctorate and became a researcher in the field of applied chemistry. One night, as I walked out of the laboratory, it was already dark, with cold and bright stars filling the sky. The wind blew on my face, cool and refreshing. At that

moment, I suddenly realized that I had embarked on the path of scientific research entirely because of my father's influence. That thirst for knowledge and pursuit of truth had long flowed in my veins like blood. It was not a grand inheritance but a subtle influence like the spring rain, shaping my academic personality without my realizing it. Just like the snow in the north, it silently covered the entire plain. My father's words and deeds made me accustomed to the life of a researcher; even without card games or fishing, I could still find profound joy and meaning in research.

My father always reminded me: Don't blindly believe in prestigious schools, don't fear authority, and dare to blaze a new trail in the desert. When I finally became a professor through my own efforts and called him to tell him, although I couldn't see his face, I could hear the tremor in his voice. His joy was not because his son had become a professor, but because the "struggle" he believed in had not only taken root in my life but also shone with new brilliance. After retirement, my father still did not stop researching. He finished two more books. In the last few days of his illness, when he was already very weak, he still asked me to bring his books to the bedside. I sat by his side, watching his lifelong persistence until the very end. Suddenly, I understood what "struggle" meant - it was not a slogan, but a way for an ordinary person to live, love, and persist.

It has been more than three years since my father passed away. Now in my middle age, my research journey is marked by both storms and sunny days. I can no longer hear his words of advice or see his smile. However, every time I stand on the podium or enter the laboratory, I feel that he is still there - his smile, and his words: "The meaning of life lies in striving." Even now, when the night is quiet, I still habitually make a cup of tea, sit down, and continue my research. The academic path may not always be thrilling, but it has long become the most fundamental part of my life - just like my father did back then, making his own sound in the silence. This is a kind of happy destiny, and also a cultural inheritance. On this path, I have not only found myself, but also an eternal spiritual connection with my father.

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