

Resistance, Growth, and Transcendence of Intellectual Women: Reflections on “How to Do It”

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[**Abstract**] The novel “How to Do It” narrates the story of female college student Xu Jingjing’s repeated setbacks and heartache in order to realize her career dream of taking root in the provincial capital, with the theme of the difficulty of college students’ employment. The novel describes the pressure of power and capital on the bottom, and constructs a thick barrier in front of ordinary students from the bottom. How to break through becomes a test and challenge, but also a pain point. Adhering to faith and not violating moral principles means enduring more difficult tests, having more outstanding talents, being able to withstand more complex temptations, and living a dignified and valuable life. The novel repeatedly asks the question of “How to Do It” at the intersection of good and evil, beauty and ugliness, and kindness and cruelty. On the one side, there are thorns everywhere. It is difficult to move forward, and may even draw blood, but it achieves a stronger self while surmounting difficulties; on the other side, it is a smooth road, but it may be increasingly far away from the true self. The protagonist chooses to fight, grow, inspire and surpass, which is highly enlightening. With a heart towards the sunshine, you can dilute the mist and realize the noble value of life.

[**Key words**] “How to Do It”; women; resistance; growth; transcendence

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Yan Zhen, a scholarly writer who focuses on writing about intellectuals, recently released another novel titled “How to Do It” with female intellectuals as the theme. After reading it in one breath, I was fascinated by the author’s brilliant language art and also reflected deeply on the series of question marks in the book. At the crossroads of righteousness and selfishness, righteousness and evil, ugliness and beauty, evil and good, how should one choose? If I were in their shoes, how would I choose? What are the consequences of such choices? What is the significance of such choices? Every choice made by the protagonist is a reflection on major life issues and a struggle against inner demons. The protagonist grows up, matures, and stands out by making one distinctive yet positive choice after another. She has dreams and perseverance. Despite repeated setbacks and reality shattering her expectations, she still does not rashly give up being a dignified person with spiritual pursuit, rather than succumbing to power and materialism, even in the face of survival difficulties. The heroine has been struggling all the way, constantly fighting against fate, and finally taking root in a big city with her outstanding industry skills, presenting readers with a kind, intelligent, positive, and inspirational female image who is always ready to fight for the sunshine.

1 Learning: from passive acceptance to active improvement

Xu Jingjing was born in a remote town. Her father had studied in high school and “graduated just as the college entrance examination was resumed, but he failed to pass the exam after two years of continuous attempts”. Although Xu Jingjing’s father has the qualities of a cultured person, he suffered from the lack of a diploma and faced many setbacks in order to make a living. After working as a substitute teacher for ten years, he was dismissed from the profession due to the need for regular replacement with college graduates. The hardships of finding a way out in middle age made Xu Jingjing’s father realize the importance of a diploma and a position. He used his

experience and humiliating experiences as a warning to his two children that only through studying can they find a way out. As the younger daughter Xu Yingying had poor academic performance, only the older daughter Xu Jingjing had potential, so he assigned the mission of changing the destiny through study to Xu Jingjing. Therefore, ensuring Xu Jingjing's peace of mind, dedication, and concentration in learning became the family's top priority, which was unconditionally supported by every family member.

"Don't let Jingjing do the housework in the future. She should spend every minute studying." Under the long-term strong influence of her father, Xu Jingjing has made studying for college and becoming a member of the city's establishment her goal. Studying to change her destiny and standing up straight have become her belief. However, the expectations of the whole family are like a heavy burden that makes Xu Jingjing, who is not gifted but weak, feel overwhelmed. The mission of changing her destiny lies entirely on her, which also means that "life" is hanging in the balance, and the pressure is so great that she feels sad and lost. "The hope of the whole family is on me, but I don't know where my own hope lies. For me, I'm forced to hold hope and be ambitious, because we have to live and change our destiny." It can be seen that such reading is not very enjoyable for Xu Jingjing. However, in the face of parents who work hard day and night just to support the family, she feels distressed and sheds tears, but she can't do anything but dry her tears and continue to study. The pressure is transformed into a driving force to urge her forward.

In view of her family and her father's wishes, she has no power or freedom to make her own choices. Whether she is happy or not is not her concern, and the only word is "endure". "High school days are like enduring in a frying pan." The tension in her heart makes her feel like living a year in a day, mechanically enduring day after day, "like an alarm clock ticking away". Finally, she was admitted to the School of Journalism at Lucheng Normal University, which is not a prestigious university with a high reputation. It does not meet her father's expectations or achieve her ideals. The only subject that could potentially improve her score was foreign language. However, her father clearly realized that "if a child from Erwei could pass the foreign language exam, it would be a big achievement!". In other words, this result is almost the limit of Xu Jingjing.

In order to succeed in "changing her fate", Xu Jingjing still worked hard during her college years and always ranked among the top in her class. She wanted to make up for her regret of not being admitted to a prestigious university in the college entrance examination and strived to advance to a better university for graduate studies, which would increase her bargaining power to work in a big city. However, no matter how hard she tried, she still failed to excel. She analyzed that her talent and endowment were not enough to match her ambition, but she could not resign herself to fate. Because resigning to fate means living a life of frustration. She had to struggle, but even after struggling, she still could not change, so she had to "let go of fate". Being able to be included in the list of recommended students was the best interpretation of Xu Jingjing's hard work. However, the sunshine that had been cast by the window was suddenly spoiled by a scheming classmate, which dealt a heavy blow to Xu Jingjing for the first time in her life. She felt a strange sense of the world and realized that all her previous knowledge about the world had to be overturned and re-learned. She had never thought that people could be so bad and would resort to any means to serve their own interests. For the first time, she realized that opportunities did not solely depend on hard work, and life did not only require hard work. Even if you work hard, there are many unexpected reefs and obstacles that will suddenly interrupt your future, leaving you resentful but powerless to change. Her native family is poor, but she never complains about it; her lover does not understand her, but she can accept it; however, being accused by classmates makes her feel resentful. Behind the perceived fairness and purity, there was a sudden appearance of dirt and deception. No one was there to defend her when she was hurt, and the relevant leaders only wanted to simply and quickly appease people, regardless of whether it affects a student's future.

There is no hope for postgraduate recommendation. Xu Jingjing, distressed by her parents' hardships, can only give up postgraduate studies due to economic constraints. After several failed job applications, Xu Jingjing wanted to make a final attempt for the civil service exam in order to fulfill her dream. Despite having read all the

necessary materials and memorized everything, she still had an accident on the day of the exam, which affected her performance. Although her written exam score was in the interview circle, it was not outstanding, and she did not perform well in the interview. Her efforts to take the civil service exam ended in vain.

What made Xu Jingjing truly feel the achievements of reading and learning was after she joined the real estate company Jinfan. This job saved her from a difficult situation and made her cherish it. In order to quickly integrate into her job, she did a lot of research and read a lot of relevant books, until she was able to apply what she learned. In this position, Xu Jingjing finally showed her potential and strength as a top student at Lucheng Normal University. She has always been hardworking, modest, and gentle, actively familiarizing herself with business knowledge, diligently studying, carefully observing, actively thinking, and combining the company's interests with her own. With a grateful heart, she loyally did an ordinary job into a career and became an industry leader. Although she has achieved proud results in her work, she insists on reading every day, stipulating that she reads two books every month, forming strict self-discipline. It is no longer for exams, but for constantly enriching herself and preparing for unexpected needs. Ultimately, it is learning, both inside and outside, that makes the protagonist Xu Jingjing find confidence and a platform, highlighting the value of being a knowledgeable woman.

2 Work: from being at a loss to being at ease

Xu Jingjing took her father's mission of "changing fate" on her shoulders. Over time, it became her belief. Going to a prestigious university for graduate study was her dream first way out. She had already qualified for the scholarship, but was reported by a classmate for a crime that did not exist. The first way out was ruined. However, the road to graduate study was broken, and life had to continue. Xu Jingjing quickly put aside her negative emotions and prepared for job hunting.

The grim employment situation of college graduates has once again refreshed Xu Jingjing's cognition. According to her father's beautiful vision, Xu Jingjing was admitted to a key university in the provincial capital and was also excellent during college. After graduating from college, she should find a job with a fixed position in the provincial capital and settle down to live a decent life without worries. However, with the expansion of enrollment, the internal struggle has already begun among college graduates. The era when a regular university undergraduate diploma can enter the system according to supply and demand wishes has long gone. The resumes that have been sent out have been like stones sinking into the sea with little response, making Xu Jingjing realize that she has fallen into a graduation dilemma.

Xu Jingjing knows that difficulties are only for students like her, while those with power and resources have already been given a predetermined path. They don't need to work hard, but just need to graduate and get a diploma. There has already been a suitable job waiting for them. For example, Xu Jingjing's college roommate and friend Qin Fang doesn't need to study hard for high scores or work part-time to earn money for tuition and living expenses. She can easily enjoy her carefree college life. Her life path has already been laid out, and work and marriage are the best choices. Another example is the wealthy second-generation Li Yiming who doesn't have to worry about work and can even find suitable jobs with a fixed salary for others if he wants to. But for students like Xu Jingjing who have no power or resources, although Lucheng is big, the space for them to display their abilities is extremely narrow. Even after graduating from graduate school, Zhang Wei can only retreat from Lucheng and search for resources in the remote Guyang County. The best way for Ye Neng, who is honest and responsible, to stay in Lucheng is to deliver food. What is the best way for Xu Jingjing to stay in Lucheng? It is easy because she is a woman, a young, educated, pure-looking unmarried woman, or a woman who can marry into a wealthy family or act as a lover. These are very attractive choices for Xu Jingjing. She can easily obtain houses, cars, money, and Lucheng identity by lying down. For Xu Jingjing, who is in trouble, these temptations are like a hungry and thirsty person standing under an apple tree, gently jumping to pick the red and attractive apples. As long as she gives up her dignity and ego and sells her body, she can ensure a comfortable life and achieve "life-changing". "Jump or not jump?" This is a choice between two different lives. Xu Jingjing has never been tempted, because she also

“doesn’t know what to do”. This is a severe test she faces and a fierce struggle she has to fight with herself.

On the one side, material predicament almost makes Xu Jingjing fall into despair, while on the other side, spiritual fall betrays morality and dignity. Is it better to step on the ladder set up by others to overcome difficulties or continue to move forward step by step on one’s own? These are two completely different paths in life. In the end, Xu Jingjing chose to stick to poverty and morality, and she preserved her pride and dignity as a knowledgeable woman. Even though she worries about the rent of an eight – square – meter house, feels embarrassed about distributing leaflets on the street, and feels aggrieved about cleaning and tidying up the classroom, she can accept all these things because she has protected her beliefs. For a job, Xu Jingjing has gone through hardships and even been scared, the training institution collapsed at a moment’s notice, and the fraud gang lost their conscience for money. However, no matter how difficult it is to survive, she always maintains the clearest conscience and social responsibility as a knowledgeable woman. Even though she is at the bottom of her life, she still has the kindness to think of others.

When she was like a headless chicken bumping around in job hunting, Jinfan Company gave her a timely shelter. With a grateful heart, she devoted herself to real estate sales work, bringing her diligence, kindness, honesty and loyalty into the work, achieving the goal of doing one job and loving it, and achieving the common prosperity and honor with the company. Her efforts quickly made her a leader in the industry. Her talents and character also finally gained the appreciation and recognition of the leaders. Through her own struggle, she rooted herself in Lucheng, had a career that could look forward to the future, had a house, a car, a family and children, and lived a life that was impressive and could share successful experiences. Xu Jingjing ushered in the spring of life through her own struggle.

3 Love: from the desire for perfection to the appreciation of understanding

Xu Jingjing longs for pure love, and like many young girls, she also has the desire to be appreciated by the opposite sex. At first, she was flirted by the male host of a tutoring class, who sent her messages of praise from time to time, making her feel “understood”. A helpless girl who relies on her own hard work to earn scholarships and part-time tutoring to support her college tuition and living expenses needs to know and be affirmed. She longs for “one more person in the world who cares about her and understands her”. The occasional messages from the male host of the tutoring class gave Xu Jingjing certain warmth. However, when the messages began to become ambiguous and even began to offer her money and work as bait, she felt a crisis. She believed in her father’s warning: “If a wallet drops in front of you, don’t bend down to pick it up. If you bend down, you will fall into a pit”. For Xu Jingjing, the generosity of the male host, whether it is money or work, is a “wallet that can be picked up by bending down”, but the price is not to provide better tutoring services, but to attach youthful body and dignity. This is the distortion and desecration of human nature by power and capital. Xu Jingjing decisively cut off the ambiguous development and straightened her back.

The valuable thing about Xu Jingjing is that she is always correcting her life direction and can prevent mistakes before they happen, except for her relationship with Zhang Wei. This relationship started off beautifully, but resulted in a failed and hurtful ending. Zhang Wei is tall and handsome, humorous and witty, and is a graduate student at a prestigious university. This is a typical dream boyfriend candidate with radiant charm on campus, and Xu Jingjing fell for him without any hesitation. Xu Jingjing accepted Zhang Wei without any utilitarian considerations, such as family background, economic strength, or assistance in staying in Lucheng. Xu Jingjing was very serious about this romantic relationship that transcends utilitarianism. She believed that “her love is beyond campus because it is pure”. She looked forward to staying in Lucheng with her lover and naturally pursuing employment, marriage, and having children. Zhang Wei also vowed to ensure that staying in Lucheng was a sure thing. However, when “things came along, this purity was compromised”. Zhang Wei’s employment difficulties cast a shadow over this innocent relationship. Zhang Wei did not have the courage or confidence to work hard in Lucheng, and without Xu Jingjing’s consent, he returned to his remote hometown of Guyang and relied on his

career benefactor, betraying Xu Jingjing who truly loved him. He left without saying goodbye, leaving her unprepared and helpless. Love just went away, and Xu Jingjing could only shed tears in her heart. After experiencing pain, she no longer enters into a relationship easily.

Love is sacred to Xu Jingjing, and mutual understanding should be the soul of the relationship. Whether there is a feeling is a strong signal for Xu Jingjing to judge whether she can approach the opposite sex. The pursuit of the rich second generation Li Yiming makes her feel suffocated, although the wealth and status of the Li family can solve the life dilemma Xu Jingjing faces and fulfill her mission of changing the fate of the family. However, Xu Jingjing retreated because she doesn't love Li Yiming, and she can't violate morality to accept the material and status that the Li family can provide because she has always adhered to the "boundaries set for herself" and never transgressed her conscience.

Although Xu Jingjing has been struggling on the poverty line of material, she has not been denied the opportunity to turn over. She is poor, but she does not trample on herself and knows how to respect others. The rich second generation Li Yiming did not love her, so she chose to stay away from him instead of taking advantage of him. The rich businessman Liu wanted to keep her and use her excellent genes to reproduce successors, but she did not accept it and was neither humble nor arrogant. The father of the student Xiao Peng is satisfactory for Xu Jingjing, but he had an unbreakable ex-wife. Boss Yu who blindly looks for money-making opportunities can never have the leisure to care about Xu Jingjing's spiritual needs, so it is impossible for him to enter Xu Jingjing's heart. The greasy section chief who owns a villa but is arrogant and full of himself makes Xu Jingjing even have no desire to share a meal with him. Her good friend Qin Fang introduced Shen from the city TV station who is kind of satisfactory, but he actually dislikes Xu Jingjing's unclear emotional history. Along the way, the opposite sex around her has been filtered out one by one because she does not want to humiliate herself. She can be poor, but not humiliated.

Zhang Ailing said "compassion is out of understanding", which is the most appropriate words to summarize Xu Jingjing's final marriage choice. Among many choices, "Xu Jingjing chose to follow her inner guidance, that is, to follow her inner persistence in love beliefs, as well as the guidance of traditional moral and ethical values that have accumulated deep in her heart and consciousness, and the principles of life beliefs and principles that she has accumulated". She eventually entered into marriage with Ye Neng, who was even poorer than her. There is a sense of compassion for people who are in the same situation. Ye Neng is poor and stingy, but he is clean, pure, and honest, and respects himself and others. He is a graduate student from a key university, but earns a living by delivering food in Lucheng. This is the best state he can achieve on his own. With the money he makes from running orders, Ye Neng knows the hardships and preciousness of every penny. Being stingy is a respect for his own labor. A person who can simplify materially to an astonishing degree, but his heart is full of love. He boldly pursues love because it is beautiful and attractive to him. He always maintains a sense of crisis in his embarrassment and wants to set aside a medical reserve fund for his elderly parents. He cannot bear to let his wife and children be in the same embarrassing situation as him, and actively expands their living space.

The marriage of Ye Neng and Xu Jingjing excludes utilitarianism and any calculation. In this marriage, Xu Jingjing is a light in Ye Neng's dim life and a redemption for Ye Neng; while Ye Neng is a mirror for Xu Jingjing to see her own soul. Mutual understanding and appreciation are the foundation of a harmonious relationship.

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