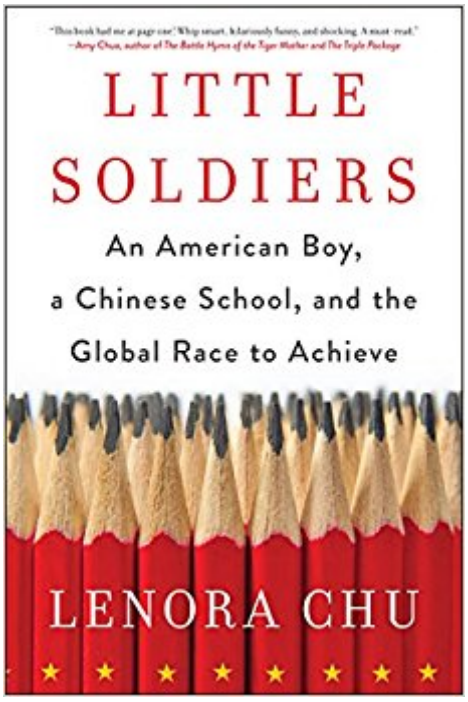
Little Soldiers: An American Boy, A Chinese School, And The Global Race To Achieve



Synopsis

In the spirit of Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother, Bringing up BÃ©bÃ©, and The Smartest Kids in the World, a hard-hitting exploration of Chinaâ ™s widely acclaimed yet insular education systemâ ”held up as a model of academic and behavioral excellenceâ ”that raises important questions for the future of American parenting and education.When students in Shanghai rose to the top of international rankings in 2009, Americans feared that they were being "out-educated" by the rising super power. An American journalist of Chinese descent raising a young family in Shanghai, Lenora Chu noticed how well-behaved Chinese children were compared to her boisterous toddler. How did the Chinese create their academic super-achievers? Would their little boy benefit from Chinese school? Chu and her husband decided to enroll three-year-old Rainer in Chinaâ ™s state-run public school system. The results were positiveâ ”her son quickly settled down, became fluent in Mandarin, and enjoyed his friendsâ ”but she also began to notice troubling new behaviors. Wondering what was happening behind closed classroom doors, she embarked on an exploratory journey, interviewing Chinese parents, teachers and education professors, and following students at all stages of their education. What she discovered is a military-like education system driven by high-stakes testing, with teachers posting rankings in public, using bribes to reward students who comply, and shaming to isolate those who do not. At the same time, she uncovered a years-long desire by government to alleviate its studentsâ ™ crushing academic burden and make education friendlier for all. The more she learns, the more she wonders: Are Chinese childrenâ ”and her sonâ ”paying too high a price for their obedience and the promise of future academic prowess? Is there a way to appropriate the excellence of the system but dispense with the bad? What, if anything, could Westerners learn from Chinaâ ™s education journey? Chuâ ™s eye-opening investigation challenges our assumptions and asks us to consider the true value and purpose of education.

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Customer Reviews

â œThrough [the] combination of personal stories and investigative reporting, Chu opens a window on to the complex world of communist China and its competitive methodology, which helps raise highly efficient, obedient, intelligent children but also squelches individualism and spontaneous creativity from the beginning. Itâ ™s a sometimes-chilling portrait of how hundreds of millions of children are being taught to obey as well as an interesting glimpse into the mindset of one couple who let their child stay in the system despite their misgivings. An informative, personal view of the Chinese and their educational system that will have many American readers cringing at the techniques used by the Chinese to create perfect students.â • (Kirkus Reviews)â œThe lively anecdotes, scenes, and conversations that Chu relates while describing her encounters with the Chinese education system will amuse or appall Western readersâ |. By the end, the successes of Chuâ ™s sonâ | persuade her that, going forward, the global ideal is a blend of Chinese rigor and Western individuality, whatever that might look like.â • (Publishers Weekly)â œThis engaging narrative is personalized by Chuâ ™s often humorous recollections of attending American schools as the daughter of immigrants. Little Soldiers offers fascinating peeks inside the worldâ ™s largest educational system and at the future intellectual â œsoldiersâ • American kids will be facing.â • (Booklist)â œLittle Soldiers asks us to think deeply about what we value and what we want for our children â “ academic success, workplace success, group achievement, individual achievement, creativity, love of learning.Â I couldnâ ™t put this book down. Itâ ™s a game changer that challenges our tendency to see education practices in black and white.â • (Madeline Levine, Ph.D., Author of New York Times bestsellers, The Prince of Privilege and Teach Your Children Well)â œThe American and Chinese ways of educating children are approaching a head-on collision begging the question â ˆwhich system best prepares kids for success?â ™ In Little Soldiers, Lenora Chu deploys her journalistic inquiry and her motherly heart to investigate the attributes that underlie this urgent question. Chuâ ™s fascinating storytelling urges the reader to ask questions like, â ˆDo the ends justify the means?â ™ â ˆIs a childâ ™s life for a parent or government to dictate, or is it their own?â ™ These questions and more lie at the heart of Chuâ ™s

important book,Â which is necessary reading for educators, parents, and anyone interested in shaping the character and capabilities of the next generation of Americans.â • (Julie Lythcott-Haims, former Stanford dean of freshmen, and New York Times-bestselling author of How to Raise an Adult)â œLittle SoldiersÂ is the best book Iâ ™ve read about education in China.Â Lenora Chuâ ™s perspective is unique:Â as the daughter of Chinese immigrants, she was educated in the American system, and then she returned to China and enrolled her own son in a Shanghai public school.Â She tells this personal story with great insight and humor, and itâ ™s combined with first-rate research into the current state of education in China.â • (Peter Hessler, New Yorker staff writer and author of River Town, Oracle Bones and Country Driving)â œLittle Soldiers is a book that will endure. With honesty and a terrific sense of humor, Lenora Chu has produced not only an intimate portrait of raising a family far from home but also the most lucid and grounded account of modern Chinese education that Iâ ™ve ever seen. She brilliantly tests our notions of success and creativity, grit and talent, and never shrinks from her conclusions.â • (Evan Osnos, New Yorker staff writer, National Book Award-winning author of Age of Ambition)â œWhat if you had a child in one of those Shanghai super-schools? Would the child love it? Hate it? Become a math whiz? A robot? Both? As Lenora ChuÂ takes us along on her own adventure in parenting, she affordsÂ us, not only an insiderâ ™s view of China,Â butÂ an exploration of people-Â and society-making at its most foundational. Â Riveting, provocative and unflinchinglyÂ candid,Â Little Soldiers is a must-read for parents, educators, and global citizens alike.â • (Gish Jen, author of The Girl at the Baggage Claim)â œGripping, perceptive, honest, revealing, but, above all, deeply thoughtful. When a Chinese-American woman raised in a thoroughly Chinese home in the United States, rebelling against her parents every step of the way, settles in Shanghai and puts her son in a Chinese school, everything she thought she knew about her values and her views on education is up for review. The reader gets a priceless view of both education systems through this prism.â • (Marc Tucker, National Center On Education and the Economy)â œThis is a rare look inside the gates of Chinese schools that helps demystify many traits and behaviors of the Chinese people.â • (Deborah Fallows, contributing writer for The Atlantic and author of Dreaming in Chinese)â œLenora Chu, a gifted journalist, has written a fascinating comparison of the US and Shanghai education systems. Little Soldiers offers important insights into the strengths and weaknesses of each. There is much to be learned here about the elements of a better education system for the 21st century.â • (Tony Wagner, Expert in Residence, Harvard University Innovation Lab and author of The Global Achievement GapÂ and Creating Innovators)Â â œThis book had me at page one! Whip smart, hilariously funny, and shocking. A must-read.â • (Amy Chua, author of The Battle Hymn of the Tiger

Mother and The Triple Package)

When American journalist Lenora Chu moved to Shanghai with her little boy, Rainey, just down the street from the state-run schoolâ ”the best, as far as elite Chinese were concernedâ ”she faced an important decision: Should she entrust her rambunctious young son to the Chinese public schools?It seemed like a good idea at the time, and so began Raineyâ ™s immersion in one of the most radical school systems on the planet. Almost immediately, the three-year-old began to develop surprising powers of concentration and became proficient in early math. Yet Chu also noticed disturbing new behaviors: Whereas he used to scribble and explore, Rainey was now obsessed with staying inside the lines. He became fearful of authority figures. â œIf you want me to do it, Iâ ™ll do it,â • he told a stranger who had asked whether he liked to sing.Driven by parental concern, Chu embarked on an investigative mission: What price do the Chinese pay to produce their â œsmartâ • kids, and what lessons might Western parents and educators learn from this system?Â In her search for answers, Chu followed Chinese students, teachers, and experts, pulling back the curtain on a military-style education system in which even the youngest kids submit to high-stakes tests and parents are crippled by the pressure to compete. Yet as Chu delved deeper, she discovered surprising upsides, such as the benefits of memorization, competition as a motivator, and the Chinese cultural belief in hard work over innate talent.Lively and intimate, beautifully written and reported, Little Soldiers asks us to reconsider the true value and purpose of education, as China and the West compete for the political and economic dominance of a new generation.

This book begins, "When my little boy was three years old, I enrolled him in an elite public school in Shanghai, China’s largest city of twenty-six million people." It continues with the story of a family’s struggle to accept the consequences of that action, like feeling the discomfort of watching your child yield to teacher-forced conformity, in order to benefit from a school system that produces high-achievers. My biggest takeaway from this book is that the Chinese value hard work over the common-in-America belief, that innate intelligence trumps effort (p 271), "Americans emphasize achievement over hard work. They believe in the concept of genius. This is a problem. The Chinese--they know hard work." Having followed education in America and elsewhere for the past 18 years (my eldest just graduated from high school) and read a number of books on the subject, including: Amanda Ripley’s The Smartest Kids in the World and How They Got That Way, Diane Ravitch’s The Life and Death of the Great American School System and Teach Like Your Hair’s On Fire by Rafe Esquith, and Amy Chua’s Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother, I was interested to learn

how the Chinese education system works (and doesn't). Author Lenora Chu, fluent in Mandarin, had been a (p 4) "daily reporter in New York, Minnesota, and California," before moving to China with her husband, also fluent, and 18-month-old son in 2010. Choosing to learn and write about the education system there was a no brainer. In the prologue, she explains how she went about it, "For several years, I trailed young Chinese and talked to teachers, principals and education experts...dropped in on schools in the United States and China, and traveled deep into the Chinese countryside to look into reports of devastating poverty and inequality."Four months after the family arrived in China (p 4), PISA score news was released. Students from Shanghai crushed the international competition in all three subjects (math, reading, and science). I believe we should Question Everything...especially data. In the case of PISA scores in Shanghai, itÃ¢Â Â™s justified. Readers learn that students with learning challenges in China would not be mainstreamed (p 254) as they often are in America, so those scores would not be included and that their scores did not include students from rural schools, who tend to perform poorly. In fact (p 168), "Nearly half of children outside of China's largest cities are high school dropouts."In the first chapter, Force-Fed Eggs, Chu explains one of many ways the Chinese and American education systems are different. In China, kids are expected to eat what is given them (ahem...just as we used to be in America back in the day), even at school. When Mom balks at her son Rainey being force fed eggs at school, the teacher suggests that she show support for the teachers in front him. What a concept! That (supporting the teacher) is also how things used to be back in the day in America. In successive chapters, she compares things like teacher quality and instruction, including the fact that there is a tendency towards obligatory gift-giving to teachers in China, whose salaries are low even though respect for teachers is high (p 287), "China affords teachers more status than any other country...," while (p 304), "The quality and status of American teachers have declined alongside levels of content mastery," and that (p 306), "[Chinese] teachers specialize in subject areas from day one of first grade." In China, teachers threaten students (telling them, for example that if they don't behave their mother won't show up to pick them up from school) in order to achieve compliance with their wishes and conspicuously and publicly rank them based on accomplishments, subject and test scores (p 138), "Tests in China are actually used to assess teachers and schools." One of the biggest surprises for me was that in China there's a sort of caste system when it comes to test taking (p 199), "the entrance exams for college vary in content depending on where you take it, and universities allocate more admissions to some provinces." Less surprising, test pressures sometimes lead to cheating and (p 232) "The Chinese classroom encourages conformity and discourages experimentation, which can mean death for the creative process."My favorite chapter

was LetÃ¢Â Â™s Do Math! because I feel strongly that there is room for improvement in AmericaÃ¢Â Â™s K-12 math education techniques. Adoption of Common Core State Standards has led our school district and many others to move towards discovery-style teaching methods for subjects like math, even though studies have shown that this is not the way to go (Pp 267-268), "An education professor at East China Normal University" having visited "eighteen schools in the United States" tells the author, "Too little focus on directly teaching math." Ã¢Â Âˆ In fact, the "direct instruction" favored by the Chinese is better for early learning in many disciplines, especially those with "multi-step procedures that students are unlikely to discover on their own," such as geometry, algebra, and computer programming,Ã¢Â Â™ according to an article in Psychological Science. Hear, hear!The book contains a lot of interesting information about the Chinese education system, but it was not without flaws. I didnÃ¢Â Â™t love that the author ended several chapters and/or sections with a separated, contrived-sounding single sentence, for example, at the end of Obey the Teacher, she writes, "Little Pumpkin stood alone, still waiting to be called," in Let's Do Math, itÃ¢Â Â™s (p 258), "Not a single student had imprinted in my memory," and when a teacher offers extra help to Rainey (which would involve his parents reimbursing her in kind with gifts), Ms. Chu extracts herself from the awkward conversation and leaves (p 194), "Once I rounded the hallway corner and was safely out of sight, I ran." Really? Additionally, Chu provides plenty of information about the Chinese system and comparisons between it and AmericaÃ¢Â Â™s, but says little about how one might improve education here. I would have loved to have read what she had to say.In conclusion, I think that Liu Jian says it best (p 305), "Maybe the hybrid of American and Chinese systems is perfect."

I'm an US school teacher, very much the type leaning toward that dreaded child-centered learning. Of course by virtue of being an educator I've been bashed over the head with the impressive math and science scores of Chinese students as well as the dark side reports of such an education system--not that I had ever gone very far in learning about it myself. Cue "Little Soldiers", a mom's first-hand account of actually sending her child through the primary system as well as her interviews with students and educators elsewhere in the system.I must say that anyone ever curious about just what it's like read this book. First and foremost, Ms. Chu is extremely readable, a friendly, personable and yet still polished view that perfectly balances the perspective between mommy and neutral reporter. The results she gives? Nuanced, presenting a system that isn't as good as some make it out to be, yet not as bad as others say, and ultimately a system that would take thousands of years of culture to truly comprehend.Ms. Chu as mommy chooses to expose her American child

to the Chinese culture of her youth (since the family is presently living in China) though finds so much at fault with her American ways and values. Truly, a woman of two worlds is the ideal writer for this. Is the Chinese system too harsh? Is it a product of Chinese culture? And what is happening as the government fights that culture and tradition in an effort to westernize the system?I personally found the account fascination, both as an American examination and the saga of a family and their preschooler--would they pull their son out for a more western school or not? Here is a fair examination of Chinese schools, the good, the bad, the ugly, and not so ugly.

As an American, I think that over the years I have developed an idea in my head of what schools in China (and Japan, among others) must be like based on various news blurbs, portrayals in entertainment media, and books like "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother". These students were envisioned to be studious, hard working, driven to succeed because they wanted more, wanted to be the best. While the students are indeed driven and hard working, I wasn't expecting the behind-the-scenes reasons to sometimes be so harsh.Lenora Chu chose to enroll her son in the Chinese school system, and the differences between what our schools to do here versus what is done there was eye-opening. Public humiliation, threats, constant pressure - I can only imagine the field day the ACLU would have if suddenly this became the norm for US schools. Chu not only enrolls her son, but also speaks with other students, teachers, and school officials. I think for me one of the most standout differences in educational culture is how teachers and the profession are perceived. Here, we have the saying "those who can't, teach". Teachers are mocked for having summers, holidays, and weekends off. Some cry that teachers are paid too much, have too many benefits. Others says that teachers nowadays aren't really teachers at all, since all they seem to do is prep students on how to get the best scores on standardized tests and let actual teaching and learning fall by the wayside. Parents often don't provide much moral support to teachers, and sometimes their attitude is little more than "Well, Junior barely passed with D's this year, maybe next year he'll do better". In China, Chu describes how teachers aren't mocked like they are in the US. Teaching is seen as a noble profession, and parents reward teachers with gifts when their child performs well. Teachers specialize in the subject they choose to teach rather than being expected to have a general knowledge and ability to fill in for any teacher of any subject when the need arises. Teachers are teachers - not counselors, not sports coaches. Children go to school for the sole purpose of getting an education, not for playing or socialization, or to be taught things like manners or how to share. Parents expect high standards from their children and the teachers, and do what they can to support achieving those standards.While Chu does an excellent job of

highlighting the myriad of differences between our two educational cultures, I was disappointed that she didn't spend more time (and pages) examining a way to combine these two cultures in order to increase the quality of primary school education in America and maybe bring down the staggering pressure on students in China. At this point I would hazard a guess that we've all seen, heard, or been told about how America's educational standings among first world countries has been declining for years. Or how poorly our students do when compared to those from China or Japan. What parts of the Chinese educational system would she like to see become a part of the American educational system and why? How hard would such an assimilation be? Would it even be accepted, or would it be seen as a type of plot to indoctrinate American school children into the Chinese culture? Would separating education from sports and other extracurricular activities bring the focus in American schools back to education and learning where it belongs, or are intramural sports and activities an integral part of learning that schools in China should expand? "Little Soldiers" was an engrossing read that has lead to so many, many more questions and thoughts. Looking back on my own primary school experience, I can see how my education could have benefited from some of the Chinese ways children are taught. I also have experiences I treasure because of how the American way allows schools to enrich students through means other than rote learning. Mrs. Chu's book is an excellent start to an often touchy debate and discussion that needs to be held - what is the best way to help the American education system become the best that it can be?

Bedtime Collection) (Chinese Edition) I Love to Tell the Truth (chinese kids books, mandarin childrens books): mandarin kids books, kids books in chinese, chinese children's books (Chinese Bedtime Collection) (Chinese Edition) Welcome to Chinese Food World: Unlock EVERY Secret of Cooking Through 500 AMAZING Chinese Recipes (Chinese Cookbook, Chinese Food Made Easy, Healthy Chinese Recipes) (Unlock Cooking, Cookbook [#13]) They Fight Like Soldiers, They Die Like Children: The Global Quest to Eradicate the Use of Child Soldiers Chinese Cookbook - 25 Delicious Chinese Recipes to Chinese Food Made Easy: Recipes from Chinese Restaurants Integrated Chinese: Level 2 Part 2 Character Workbook (Traditional & Simplified Chinese Character, 3rd Edition) (Cheng & Tsui Chinese Language Series) (Chinese Edition) Little Bear Audio CD Collection: Little Bear, Father Bear Comes Home, Little Bear's Friend, Little Bear's Visit, and A Kiss for Little Bear 49 Awesome Chinese Recipes (The Ultimate Chinese Cookbook That Brings an Entire American Chinese Buffet to Your Dinner Table) Wayside School Boxed Set: Wayside School Gets a Little Stranger, Wayside School is Falling Down, Sideway Stories from Wayside School Horse Soldiers: The Extraordinary Story of a Band of US Soldiers Who Rode to Victory in Afghanistan Hard As Steel (The Soldiers of Wrath, 3) (The Soldiers of Wrath MC Series) Positive Intelligence: Why Only 20% of Teams and Individuals Achieve Their True Potential AND HOW YOU CAN ACHIEVE YOURS Bad Boy Rebels: Meeting the Bad Boy Rebels (Bad Boy Rebels Series Book 1)