

## My Good Son

**Yang Huang**

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About difficult and rewarding connections across generational and cultural divides, Yang Huang's novel *My Good Son* is a captivating masterpiece centered around a father and son in post-Tiananmen Square China.

Despite Mr. Cai's best intentions to give his son, Feng, an education and the opportunity for a more prestigious career than his own, Feng has his own plans. Mr. Cai responds to Feng's rebellion by meddling in his son's love life and career, only further aggravating him.

Then a neighbor girl, Jiao, returns home from college with tales from the thick of the democracy protests in Tiananmen Square. Mr. Cai is shocked that she, a woman, is so passionate about politics, unlike unambitious Feng. Thus, in a display of the striking food symbolism that runs throughout the book, he cannot stomach the cherry tomatoes Jiao offers him; he finds them, like Jiao herself, unpleasant and saccharine.

Enter Jude, a stylish, artistic American with a secret. In Jude, Mr. Cai sees an opportunity to get Feng a coveted sponsorship to study in the US. In Mr. Cai, Jude sees a father figure who's kind in comparison to his own Texan father, whom he cannot confide in. As Mr. Cai and Jude scheme for Feng's future, they forge an improbable friendship; the novel parallels parent/child relationships in compelling ways.

Mr. Cai is stubborn to the point of being dogmatic; he has an unwavering idea of what Feng's life must be. Yet, when the traumas of Mr. Cai's youth are revealed, the reasons for his incessant interference give him depth.

Earnest in its portrayal of complicated family bonds, *My Good Son* is a resonant novel set during a turbulent time in China, wherein families face the universal struggles of connection and commonality.

PAIGE VAN DE WINKLE (May / June 2021)

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