



## Chinese Cinderella: The True Story of an Unwanted Daughter

*Adeline Yen Mah*

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## **Chinese Cinderella: The True Story of an Unwanted Daughter** Adeline Yen Mah

A riveting memoir of a girl's painful coming-of-age in a wealthy Chinese family during the 1940s.

A Chinese proverb says, "Falling leaves return to their roots." In Chinese Cinderella, Adeline Yen Mah returns to her roots to tell the story of her painful childhood and her ultimate triumph and courage in the face of despair. Adeline's affluent, powerful family considers her bad luck after her mother dies giving birth to her. Life does not get any easier when her father remarries. She and her siblings are subjected to the disdain of her stepmother, while her stepbrother and stepsister are spoiled. Although Adeline wins prizes at school, they are not enough to compensate for what she really yearns for -- the love and understanding of her family.

Following the success of the critically acclaimed adult bestseller *Falling Leaves*, this memoir is a moving telling of the classic Cinderella story, with Adeline Yen Mah providing her own courageous voice.

## **Chinese Cinderella: The True Story of an Unwanted Daughter Details**

Date : Published (first published August 2nd 1999)

ISBN :

Author : Adeline Yen Mah

Format : Kindle Edition

Genre : Nonfiction, Autobiography, Memoir, Biography, Cultural, China

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**Adeline Yen Mah**

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# From Reader Review Chinese Cinderella: The True Story of an Unwanted Daughter for online ebook

## Abby says

What a whiny book!

At that time in china or hong kong or whatever she was lucky to be able to

1. Go to school
2. Have food daily
3. Have a proper home. My, even a big house!
4. Have a bed
5. Have a fucking DRIVER?!
6. have clothes
7. Knew English (?)

My mother never had that yet she is living like any other who suffered from lack of necessities. Never in my life had she complained to me even once about her past. Well she have, but only ever about her stepfather beating her until she bled. She and her other 7 sisters and brothers worked in a factory before they even became teenagers, fought daily for food (if there were any, and even if there were, it usually consisted of bread crusts), hardly went to school (never attended university) and never had enough clothes and blankets to make it through winter. The same applies to many other Chinese families.

I am not racist but western people fail to understand the nature of chinese parents back in the day, especially the fathers. Nearly all worse than Yen

Mah's. It was like... Yelling synonymous to speaking and beating synonymous to teaching. I hope that made sense. I am not good at writing.

What I'm saying is if many Chinese people around Yen Mah's age knew English well, there would certainly be hundreds of books like this. Maybe even crueler. They would all be able to have the attention and sympathy which they longed for, just like Yen Mah. (and make lots of money...)

Sorry if I offended in any way but everyone is entitled to their own opinion.

I very very very dislike this book.

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## Kendra says

Kendra Guo 904

12/22/08

### Chinese Cinderella

The true story of an unwanted daughter

By Adeline Yen Mah

205pp. New York, New York

Dell Laurel-Leaf. \$6.50 US

ISBN 00-440-22865-4

Adeline Yen Mah's novel, Chinese Cinderella, tells a story about her as a young girl, Adeline struggles for the attention and affection from her father and family. The Chinese Cinderella was a really touching and interesting story. If you could relate you might cry. And this story is said to be a true story. Read this if you like touching and interesting autobiography.

In a way Adeline is like Cinderella is when she is a child she has a evil stepmother and siblings. he faces many challenges like when Cinderella gets her dress ripped up right before the ball. Adeline is like Cinderella at home when Adeline goes to school. When Adeline is with her stepmother it is like Cinderella with her stepmother. It is kind of like Cinderella so if you don't mind a good story read this book.

I felt that the betrayal that Adeline felt coming from her family wasn't right, when her stepmother, Niang came to live with them, she changed them all. One by one her family betrayed her over time. First it was her oldest sister who wanted Niang's appreciation by listening to her to get a better life. She couldn't resist getting a better life and had to obey and betray the rest of the family that was not yet following Niang's orders. Niang would spoil her own kids and yet unless you listened to her you would have a very horrible life. The rest of the family eventually the whole family listened to the step mother and betrayed Adeline.

She had many more test to face on the path of learning. You get to know Adeline and you learn how she thinks/feels which makes you think what you would do if you were her. If you don't like emotional stories this is not the book for you nut if you do this book is good.

Later through out the story Adeline tries to gain her father's love especially at the beginning of the story. I felt that it was so unfair that her father only paid attention when Adeline got a award, I imagined what would have been going through my head if I was her. The story draws you in and gets you thinking. It makes you think of what I would do in her shoes. And to see what happens to her life which makes Chinese Cinderella a real page turner. Also it talks about the jealousy of the other siblings and it makes you feel like one of the family.

You would get a feeling that you would have had such a hard time and not have grown up to be such a successful person. I might have become a mean person by the time I grew up. You also learn about what could have happened to a lot of kids during the time in the book. The whole family treated her unfairly all the time.

You'll get excitement, sadness, and angry feelings towards parts of the family while reading Chinese Cinderella. Adeline Yen Mah did a great job telling her life story. If you had questions during parts of the story, by the end, all would be answered so there is still mystery. But you can figure out the answer to questions you have during the story, in the end which is want any person would want. Chinese Cinderella has all the qualities of good writing so READ IT!!!!

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## **Mahima says**

Chinese Cinderella  
Adeline Yen Mah

I decided to read this book because it was lying on the shelf for ages and ages and also because i needed a book to read. I particularly liked this book because it was a true story about a young girl and it's very motivational.

This book fulfills the category of an autobiography on the bingo board. I choose this category because i quiet like true stories that have some time inspirational message. Chinese Cinderella shows how Adeline struggles to gain acceptance from her family and how she overcame the disparity and proves what she is worth.

My favorite quote from this book is “Please believe that one single positive dream is more important than a thousand negative realities.” I like this quote because i think its very deep and is very inspirational. This shows us how it is possible achieve our goals and dreams even if it seems impossible. Adeline was a very positive person and believed she could do anything despite the constant criticism by her step mother and siblings. I admire her strength and persistence to follow her dreams even though everyone told her she couldn't and that she wasn't worth anything.

Something i learn t from this book is persistence and believing in yourself. Adeline had been constantly told negative things but she still managed to look at the positive side of things and overcome her shyness and prove to her family that she could do anything. This ties into my favorite character question, which is Adeline. Adeline had a persistent attitude even though know one cared about her excellent progress, she had a goal to prove to her dad that she wasn't bad luck or worthless. Adeline was a very intelligent student and easily topped her class, but her very "busy" dad and her careless step mother failed to notice. Everyone in her family envied and hated her except Adeline's aunt Baba and Grandpa Yeye. They were the two people that encouraged her in all ways, without them she wouldn't have survived her tragic life. Her siblings negatively impacted on her decreasing her self esteem, but she still tried staying strong. The quote in the novel "I am nothing, less than nothing. A piece of garbage to be thrown out." This shows us how upset and depressed Adeline feels because of the lack of support from her family. Whenever Adeline had such thoughts aunt Baba always reminded of what a strong wonderful child she was. Adeline tried looking at the positive side of things and carried on.

While reading Chinese Cinderella i experienced Adeline's worlds,she lived a very tragic and unfair life. This made me think about the wonderful life i have, with the support of friends, family and teachers. I very much admire Adeline's strength.

I this a very nice book and would certainly recommend it to others.

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## **Catterson Patterson says**

Firstly, I have to say that I haven't read this book since I was fourteen or fifteen, so I may be altogether mistaken, though I doubt it since it left such a huge impression on me.

Secondly, I would say I am stupidly masochistic with my reading choices. I love depressing books, and I expected to love this one. This author, however, has done a fantastic job of taking a potentially interesting story and sucking any sense of perspective or dimension from it, along with any sort of maturity with which she could've handled such a delicate issue.

I loathed this book, every self-pitying, sympathy pandering, vilifying, passively ugly word. I understand that the story is from the naive viewpoint of a child, but it's hard to keep reading the novel through such a lens while characters are passively depicted as soul-sucking monsters whose life revolves around tormenting the most beatific child to ever grace this wretched earth.

Her experiences may have been dictated by the black-white morality that children adopt. I just would've

thought that child-abuse would get a more attentive approach, but I've already made myself clear enough on that so bleh. It does try very, very hard, so that I can appreciate. In terms of technique, the novel lends itself to a smooth reading well enough, and I think I can understand why people enjoyed it, but I won't go on because that would be condescending on my part and offensive from yours what is grammar ugh. But for me, personally, the treatment of its characters, both the main and supporting cast, even made me doubt the integrity of the book's purpose, which makes me unreasonably angry.

This was not gripping. This was not a talented, insightful work. This at its core is a memoir from one rigid, uninteresting viewpoint, and I learnt nothing, except that I would've loved to have seen the perspectives of the other characters to understand what kind of point the author was making. Since I feel such a demonstration of her responsible outlook on life is long coming, I have no interest in ever picking up this book or any book related to these characters ever again.

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## Thomas says

*Chinese Cinderella* proves that you don't need to write like Virginia Woolf or produce the next "Great American Novel" to create a work of art. In this simple yet beautifully-narrated memoir, Adeline Yen Mah shares how she grew up as an unwanted child in a cruel and wealthy family. Her story, while similar to ones we've all heard before, reveals the resilience of humankind in the face of tremendous struggle. Yen Mah crafts her tale in a way that makes it unique yet relatable all at once, maintaining her Chinese culture while connecting readers to her journey. Here's a paragraph that stuck out to me about her love for writing:

*To me, writing was pure pleasure. It thrilled me to be able to escape the horrors of my daily life in such a simple way. When I wrote, I forgot that I was an unwanted daughter who had caused her mother's death. Instead, I could be anybody I wished to be. In my narratives, I poured out everything that I dared not say out loud. I was friends with the beautiful princesses and dashing knights who lived in my imagination. I was no longer the lonely little girl bullied by her siblings.*

If you're reading this review, you've probably used reading and/or writing as an escape in some way in your life. Yen Mah's memoir is easy to identify with: not just for those who have suffered domestic abuse, but for those who love reading and writing, for those who have ever felt out of place, and for those who have grown up split between two cultures. There's a moving passage near the end of the book in which her grandfather tells her about the importance of learning Chinese, showing that *Chinese Cinderella* is more than just a see-through fairytale retelling.

I'll end this review with a passage from the preface of *Chinese Cinderella*, one that made me love the book right from the start:

*For those who were neglected and unloved as children, I have a particular message. In spite of what your abusers would have had you believe, please be convinced that each of you has within you something precious and unique. Chinese Cinderella is dedicated to you with the fervent wish that you will persist in trying to do your best in the face of hopelessness; to have faith in the end your spirit will prevail; to transcend your abuse and transform it into a source of courage, creativity and compassion.*

And that's exactly what Adeline Yen Mah has done.

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## **Laura says**

What is really shocking about this book is to read about the abuse of a child (the author) at the hands of her truly wicked stepmother and sadistic father (well, the stepmother is sadistic, too, so they're a perfect pair), and then to get to the middle of the book and actually see photos of these horrible people. It made my blood boil. Adeline Yen Mah's story, however, is about a child's attempts to navigate an abusive household situated in China during and after World War II. As she matures, we see some healing occurring within her and we are able to watch her make her own life for herself despite intense pain and neglect. Her grandfather (her Ye-Ye) and her Aunt Baba are the heroic adults who love Adeline unconditionally and have good hearts. This is an easy read for an adult, but it's a great book to use in school both for the story, the linguistic, and the historical aspects. There's a really beautiful passage towards the end where Adeline's grandfather realizes that she devalues her Chinese identity and he explains to her the depth of meaning beautifully held by the various Chinese characters.

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## **Hannah Rahman says**

Chinese Cinderella is an amazing novel that is a true story about a girl who was looked down upon and isolated from the rest of her family. As a child she was looked after by her aunt. After her mother died giving birth to her she was considered bad luck by the rest of her family and when her dad remarries she is completely ignored. Although she wins many prizes and excels at school her family still doesn't give her the love and respect she deserves. Adeline Yen Mah goes through many hardships and difficulties in her lifetime in order to be recognised as a member of their family.

This novel covers the category "book that teaches you about another culture other than your own" i think this is a good category to have on the board because it is good to acquire knowledge about other cultures. Here in NZ and in many other countries we have a variety of different cultures and there are many things we can experience and learn from each.

As i read this novel i was shocked by the mistreatment to Adeline. She was looked down upon by not only her step family but her own family as well. She tried very hard to please her father by excelling at school and winning many awards but this could still not earn the respect she was after. In one part of the novel Adeline was whipped because she had some friends over and because she was receiving gifts from each of them. No child should have to be exposed to this kind of unfairness.

My favourite character in this novel was Adelines aunt. She was the only family member who looked after her and treated her like any other human being. She looked after Adeline and she showed true kindness and affection to her. Aunt Baba was a courageous woman who stood up for Adeline in times of hardship and unfairness.

My favourite quote in this novel was "'Please believe that one single positive dream is more important than a thousand negative realities.'" This quote was very inspiring to me and it should be to others as well. If things arent going well in life then you shouldnt give up because having a dream can help you get through life and it can also help you to strive for what you are after.

I learnt many different aspects from this novel but one thing that really stood out for me was to stand up for yourself and believe that although others are putting you down you can still get many good things out of life

if you strive for the best and have a great sense of belief in yourself as well.

I would recommend this novel to anyone as it is definitely a heart gripping novel that can teach people many things as well.

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### **Dulce says**

Chinese Cinderella was a great book. It taught me many new things. I really liked this book because it wasn't like an ordinary Cinderella story. There is not a prince in this story there is no magic, but it's about someone who is unwanted. There were some parts in the story that I didn't like but there were only the parts where she got hit for doing nothing. Adeline was a girl who her father, brothers, and sister blamed her for her mother's death. Adeline was treated unfairly by her family. Her father remarried a year after her mother's death. Adeline's step mother was unfair with her and her brothers and sisters. She was separated from her aunt who was the only one who believed that she was special. Her life was not a happy life she was treated with hatred and unfairness. There would be times where she would win prizes but no one ever seemed to care. All she ever wanted was love and understanding of her family.

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### **Julia Orlando says**

I'm not sure if enjoy is the right word to describe this book, but I am glad I read it.

Because the author, Yen-Junling, is blamed for killing her mother during childbirth, her father and siblings neglect and ignore her unless it is to treat her as a servant. While Yen-Junling thinks of herself as worthless and strives for her father's attention and love, she gets positive attention and love from her Ye-Ye (grandfather) and her Aunt Baba and her school friends.

This book was on the one hand heart-breaking to read but also inspiring in the fact that the author was able to overcome her neglectful childhood. I do want to read Falling Leaves by the author, which goes deeper into her adult years.

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### **Nadin Adel says**

**Enchanting, heartbreaking, devastating tale of a little Chinese girl, Adeline.**

**It is a story through the Chinese history through a child's eye.**

**It is a story of the traditions that would change people's life and fate!**



**It is the story of Adeline Yen Mah ..**

*Adeline*

**An autobiography of the little Adeline growing up in her family whom are unwilling to raise her and unwelcoming her presence. I can't imagine the magnificent intensity of both rudeness and love enclosed in the lines of this masterpiece. Adeline was capable, with simple words, to describe her world through her eyes and how each and every action felt and sensed. Not to mention her ability to transmit all these emotions into the readers mindset leaving him/her with shattered heart and watery eyes.**

**I can say no more but, I am blessed, *AlhamdliAllah!***

**Can't wait to read the rest of her publications.**

**So proud I got to know you, Adeline. I really need to keep on this relationship/friendship with you/your books!**

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**Karen says**

I had a hard time being too sympathetic for Adeline because, although treated like an unwanted daughter, she still had it SO much better than the majority of the populace of China during that very turbulent time. She still received a 1st class education, she was not sold off as a slave or given away as a third or fourth wife to some old man, she never had to go hungry or without the basics of life. Her story could be that of a number of people from many different cultures. She comes off as whiney. I do have to admire that she took advantage of her education and made a good life for herself as an adult.

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**Adira says**

I remember it like it was yesterday when I picked up this book at my fourth grade book fair. I devoured this story all the way home and was finish with it by the time we pulled into the driveway with only the thought of how how hard Yen Mah's life must've been as a child.

Adeline Yen Mah's story was heartbreaking in the worst type of way. Upset that his wife died in childbirth, Yen Mah's father punishes her and places her into the custody of her Aunt to be looked after as a small child. As her memoir progresses, the readers see Yen Mah face trial after trial only to pull through showing the resilience of the human spirit.

I seriously loved this book so much that I bought the grown up version of the story, Falling Leaves. I'd definitely recommend this novel to anyone who wants to read a sentimental memoir that is also uplifting by the end.

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## June says

I also read *Falling Leaves* by the same author. It seems to be a retelling of the same story. The author recounts the cruelty she suffered as an outcast daughter who is blamed for her mother's death. She is treated like a second class citizen by her siblings, her father and her new step mother. I found the details about life during WWII interesting. While not quite as brutal as some other memoirs that come to mind, such as *Bastard out of Carolina*, it conveys what it feels like to be an unloved child.

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## Jeanette says

I'm not going to rate this because I just reached exactly half way through and I have no desire to finish it. It's not only the whining but the style of the writing. She's too preachy-teachy for me to listen to her "poor me" for that many more chapters. Family dysfunction and cultural clash happens to 100,000's every day who need to emigrate or for economic reasons. It's sad that she is so negative in response to the circumstances of her myriad misfortunes. But I have no desire to seep myself down in her well. It's pitiful that at 50 something she remembers every negative. My Mother-in-law's Mom died when she was born and she was given away to a neighbor and taken to work on a fruit truck every day while still in diapers. No one ever watched her beyond the age of 7 or 8 and then it was just one uncle who died of drink when she was 13. She worked for her own clothing for high school. I worked in a store from the time I was six or seven. A lot. Lots of immigrants have to grow themselves. That doesn't make this acceptable at all. Just that I'm not the audience for the blame and the "poor me" attitude that she has carried so late into her life. It's poison for her own soul.

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## Kwesi ??? says

Every country and every people that resides have different culture and have different story to tell. From the most depressing experience of their lives from most unforgettable moments they felt in their childhood. But how can they manage to express and treasure those experiences forever? Some people write them on their journals or diaries, some record it through tapes and CDs, some tell their past lives from their grandsons and few write and compile their stories into a book.

*Adeline Yen Mah's* short biography, exploring her childhood experiences, meant to be read and inspired other readers. She wrote this book for teens and young kids to express her desire and sadness in the past while living with her stepmother, living without desire, losing hopes and dreams and losing her rights as a child of his father.

She was born rich and born bad luck because of her mother's death, nobody desires to enter her life even her siblings except her aunt. *Adeline* struggles to grow when the days past. They are awfully sad and very painful for the readers. She was not welcome to the household as she carries bad luck, she find friends and a place where she belong, a place where only happiness can be found, the school.

Her lives possessed with desires to achieve the top just to be recognized by her father. Her father, who only believed to fiction stories that her 2nd wife told, not believing that he already forgotten her first wife's children. As *Adeline* struggle to the top and gaining freedom in the end, she manages to show her success by education and share her success through books.

She graduated in London Hospital Medical School in Europe with the help of a miracle, a winning piece that change her life forever. After a very long journey she practiced her course in California and become a teacher and author, and helping children in China to go to school and to make their wishes come true.

This thin book is very emotionally uncontrollable; she wrote most of her depressing stories from the first chapter until the end and few not-quite-happy memories. This biography is not suitable for those people who have heart and eye problems; I suggest that you have to skip reading this book not to mention that this had a serious problem to childhood experiences.

I live with a group of Chinese kids when I was young and agree that Chinese parents, teachers and other professionals are very strict with their children that I can't believe that *Adeline* have this gap and heart breaking experience with her parents. Although this is normal for a child, but this change my perspective towards other traditions and beliefs of Chinese people.

This book is not as good as any biography book I read, but this book is very inspiring and consider that she implement education as a tool to succeed in life and trying to emphasize that expectation is not only give negative results but also positive. One thing that I observe from the book is that, she needed more attention to her parents and siblings. I'm not a psychologist but I think a child must grow needed high attention of the parents. At least, she succeeds in the end.

I recommend this to all half Chinese kids, teens and adults who have the same experience with *Adeline* or readers that are curious to Chinese tradition. This black book is full of sad memories, so fragile that every reader wanted to keep it forever even the sadness keep on pouring inside the book. *Adeline*, you are a true beauty of success and you make Cinderella go gaga.

*most complicated fairy tail ever written was Cinderella, nobody had the idea who the hell first wrote it. Is it the Egyptians, Russians or Chinese? Anyway, at least the gore picture tells the other side of Cinderella, why she have small feet that only the glass slippers (originally a fur) fits to her.*

Review posted on **Old-Fashioned Reader** .

**Rating:** *Chinese Cinderella: The True Story of an Unwanted Daughter* by Adeline Yen Mah, **4 Sweets**

**Challenges:**

*Book #216 for 2011*

*Book #127 for Off the Shelf!*

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