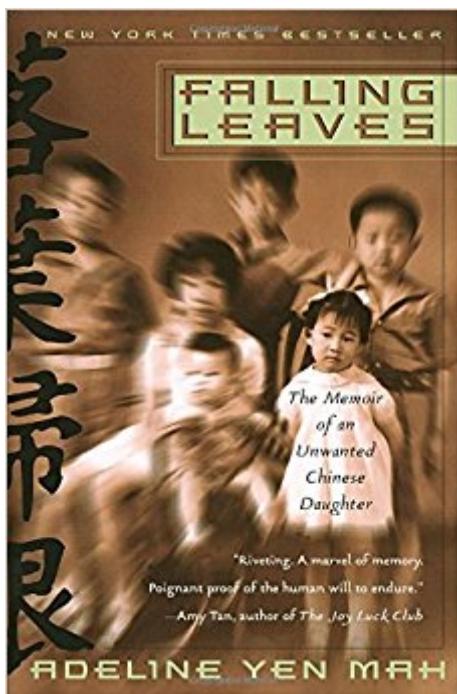


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# Falling Leaves: The Memoir Of An Unwanted Chinese Daughter



## Synopsis

The emotionally wrenching yet ultimately uplifting memoir of a Chinese woman struggling to win the love and acceptance of her family. Born in 1937 in a port city a thousand miles north of Shanghai, Adeline Yen Mah was the youngest child of an affluent Chinese family who enjoyed rare privileges during a time of political and cultural upheaval. But wealth and position could not shield Adeline from a childhood of appalling emotional abuse at the hands of a cruel and manipulative stepmother.

Determined to survive through her enduring faith in family unity, Adeline struggled for independence as she moved from Hong Kong to England and eventually to the United States to become a physician and writer. A compelling, painful, and ultimately triumphant story of a girl's journey into adulthood, Adeline's story is a testament to the most basic of human needs: acceptance, love, and understanding. With a powerful voice that speaks of the harsh realities of growing up female in a family and society that kept girls in emotional chains, *Falling Leaves* is a work of heartfelt intimacy and a rare authentic portrait of twentieth-century China. "Riveting. A marvel of memory. Poignant proof of the human will to endure." —Amy Tan

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Snow White's stepmother looks like a pussycat compared to the monster under which Adeline Yen Mah suffered. The author's memoir of life in mainland China and--after the 1949 revolution--Hong Kong is a gruesome chronicle of nonstop emotional abuse from her wealthy father and his beautiful, cruel second wife. Chinese proverbs scattered throughout the text pithily covey the traditional world view that prompted Adeline's subservience. Had she not escaped to America, where she

experienced a fulfilling medical career and a happy marriage, her story would be unbearable; instead, it's grimly fascinating: *Falling Leaves* is an Asian *Mommie Dearest*. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Although the focus of this memoir is the author's struggle to be loved by a family that treated her cruelly, it is more notable for its portrait of the domestic affairs of an immensely wealthy, Westernized Chinese family in Shanghai as the city evolved under the harsh strictures of Mao and Deng. Yen Mah's father knew how to make money and survive, regardless of the regime in power. In addition to an assortment of profitable enterprises, he stashed away two tons of gold in a Swiss bank, and eventually the family fled to Hong Kong. But he was indifferent to his seven children and in the thrall of a second wife who makes Cinderella's stepmother seem angelic. His first wife, Yen Mah's mother, died at her birth, and the child, considered an ill omen, was treated with crushing severity. But she was encouraged by the love of an aunt and eventually made her way to the U.S., where she became a doctor, married happily and, ironically, was the one her father and stepmother turned to in their old age. In recounting this painful tale, Yen Mah's unadorned prose is powerful, her insights keen and her portrait of her family devastating. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Kierkegaard writes of one imprisoned by a tyrant in a brazen bull and slowly tortured over a steady fire. The cries of the victim could not be heard so as to strike terror into the victim's heart. When the cries of the one imprisoned finally do reach the tyrant's ears, they sounded like sweet music. As men crowd around they say to the prisoner, "Sing for us soon again." This prisoner Kierkegaard calls the poet. The sweet music of *Falling Leaves* comes from such a tortured heart. Mah is a lyrical poet, singing of cruelty, bitterness, revenge, and finally the triumph of the heart's longing to belong. If you do not weep when you read this account of suffering, make an appointment with your mortician.

Although this book was difficult at times to read, the author did keep me fascinated with her story. She has an ease of writing that very much feels as if she is having a conversation with the reader, and the book just flows. The story is one that is ageless: a man marries a woman and they have several children (in this case 5). When the youngest is born, the woman dies from complications, and the man in his loneliness quickly finds another woman to marry. He concerns himself more with outward appearances than with character, and ends up with wife #2 who is controlling, domineering,

and wishes she had been wife #1 instead of wife #2. She really doesn't care for the fact that her husband has 5 children from wife #1, but no matter. Since her husband is weak and does as she wishes, she can treat them as she likes. Which isn't pleasant. Adeline is the youngest of the 5 siblings and therefore the recipient of not only her stepmother's wrath, but most often her 4 siblings as well. Unlike some children, Adeline never seems to truly stand up for herself, and that might be her personality or it might be cultural. Whatever it is, it defines her. Some reviewers here think Adeline is "whiny", especially after she reaches adulthood. Perhaps. However, if anyone knows somebody who was treated as though they were unwanted and/or unloved as a child - and my mother was such a one - then they might very well see the same behavior Adeline portrays as an adult. I thought this book was fascinating and a terrific tale of the healing power of the human spirit. At times I just wished I could have reached through the pages of this book and snatched Adeline away to a safe place where she could be nurtured and feel safe.

Oh, how I admire Adeline Yen Mah after having read FALLING LEAVES. I have always been in awe of the family loyalty trait of the Chinese, but I never knew just how far that loyalty could reach. Reading about Adeline's Niang and her cruelty, I have such a new appreciation for forgiveness. Adeline is my new heroine. My own suffering seems nothing compared to hers. I only wish this could be required reading for young people in America so they could truly understand the phrase, "God bless America!"

A memoir of a girl in China around the time of the revolution, and after, to current day. Thru no fault of her own, she was despised & mistreated by most of her family. The betrayals & wrongs just never stopped. But -- she prevailed, she made a great career & a happy marriage - & she kept her integrity. If the author ever reads this review, I want her to know that her story was a true epiphany for me - I realized that sometimes the cruelty of your family has very little to do with you. You gave me courage, & some freedom, madam - thank you. The best revenge is a happy life! To you!

There was an incredible account of a young Chinese girl in a time of turmoil in the middle of the century full of turmoil, cruelty, and glimpses of love. I felt so deeply for this writer, who eventually became a doctor in the US. The only thing I missed in this book, and it certainly may have to do with past cultural expectations in that time, is feeling the emotion that I know was there. I just couldn't feel it from the words. But she writes so well, it is easy to imagine this child, who was treated so cruelly in her youth and young adulthood, and what such sad, lonely, fearful child might have felt.

I found this book very interesting, but I also wanted to hit her up side the head for letting her Father & StepMother (after she was an established doctor) order her around so much. And I couldn't believe she cared that much into her later life. She needed to get psychological help to overcome needing her parents approval. She had a family of her own & she should have been putting her focus on on own family - not her crummy parents. But I know adults who were abused as children & the only way the got over it was through therapy. Abused children have a hard time overcoming that kind of treatment. It is sad.

Book was yellowed by age, but was in good shape.

A must-read book for anyone who is interested in China and family relations/human psychology. Mah's story does NOT represent a typical Chinese family but her vivid descriptions certainly offer you lots of insights. It's the book that many people can relate to: the cruelty of physical/emotional abuse that she endured as a child, the COURAGE that carried her to personal triumph. It's not all about whining, but rather a basic human instinct to survive, to prevail. I actually cried (1st time since 15) when I read that her rich parents refused to buy her a plane ticket to the States. What makes it more horrifying is that her family was so affluent but treated her like dirt and the same makes her success so much more special. What puzzled me in the end was the fact that she kept coming back to the family that most people would want to forget once for all. Her childhood trauma certainly caused her longing for love and acceptance. One of the questions is why she looks for love and acceptance from a devious stepmon and other not too nice siblings? What's her personal relations with her own family and friends? Was she actually a little admiring her stepmon deep in her mind? Was she also interested in a share in the family fortune? Despite these unanswered questions I give this book a rating of five. Mah is a remarkable woman! The Memoir is equally incredible!!

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