



## Chinese Cinderella (Puffin Modern Classics)

By Adeline Yen Mah

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Jung-ling's family considers her bad luck because her mother died giving birth to her. They discriminate against her and make her feel unwanted yet she yearns and continuously strives for her parents' love. Her stepmother is vindictive and cruel and her father dismissive. Jung-ling grows up to be an academic child, with a natural ability for writing. Only her aunt and grandfather offer her any love and kindness. The story is of survival in the light of the mental and physical cruelty of her stepmother and the disloyalty of her siblings. Jung-ling blossoms in spite of everything and the story ends as her father agrees to let her study in England. A Puffin Modern Classic edition of this bestselling autobiography, celebrating ten years of publication.

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## Chinese Cinderella (Puffin Modern Classics) By Adeline Yen Mah Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

### Amazon.com Review

*Chinese Cinderella* is the perfect title for Adeline Yen Mah's compelling autobiography in which, like the fairy-tale maiden, her childhood was ruled by a cruel stepmother. "Fifth Younger Sister" or "Wu Mei," as Yen Mah was called, is only an infant when her father remarries after her mother's death. As the youngest of her five siblings, Wu Mei suffers the worst at the hands of her stepmother Niang. She is denied carfare, frequently forgotten at school at the end of the day, and whipped for daring to attend a classmate's birthday party against Niang's wishes. Her father even forgets the spelling of her name when filling out her school enrollment record. In her loneliness, Wu Mei turns to books for company: "I was alone with my beloved books. What bliss! To be left in peace with Cordelia, Regan, Gonoril, and Lear himself--characters more real than my family... What happiness! What comfort!" Even though Wu Mei is repeatedly moved up to grades above those of her peers, it is only when she wins an international play-writing contest in high school that her father finally takes notice and grants her wish to attend college in England. Despite her parent's heartbreaking neglect, she eventually becomes a doctor and realizes her dream of being a writer.

Teens, with their passionate convictions and strong sense of fair play, will be immediately enveloped in the gross injustice of Adeline Yen Mah's story. A complete glossary, historical notes on the state of Chinese society and politics during Yen Mah's childhood, and the legend of the original Chinese Cinderella round out this stirring testimony to the strength of human character and the power of education. (Ages 10 to 15) --  
*Jennifer Hubert*

### From Publishers Weekly

Mah revisits the territory she covered in her adult bestseller, *Falling Leaves*, for this painful and poignant memoir aimed at younger readers. Blamed for the loss of her mother, who died shortly after giving birth to her, Mah is an outcast in her own family. When her father remarries and moves the family to Shanghai to evade the Japanese during WWII, Mah and her siblings are relegated to second-class status by their stepmother. They are given attic rooms in their big Shanghai home, they have nothing to wear but school uniforms, and they subsist on a bare-bones diet while their stepmother's children dine sumptuously. Mah finds escape from this emotionally barren landscape at school, but the academic awards she wins only enrage her jealous siblings and stepmother, and she is eventually torn from her aunt. Her one champion and shipped off to boarding school. That Mah eventually soars above her circumstances is proof of her strength of character. The author recreates moments of cruelty and victory so convincingly that readers will feel almost as if they're in the room with her. She never veers from a child's sensibility; the child in these pages rarely judges the actions of those around her, she's simply bent on surviving. Mah easily weaves details of her family's life alongside the traditions of China (e.g., her grandmother's bound feet) and the changes throughout the war years and subsequent Communist takeover. This memoir is hard to put down. Ages 12-up. (Sept.)

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### From School Library Journal

Grade 6 Up-This absorbing autobiography tells the story of an unwanted child in upper-class 1940s China. Because her mother died at her birth, Wu Mei (Fifth Younger Sister, renamed Adeline) was a "bad luck" daughter, never forgiven by her father or her four older siblings. When she was a year old, her father remarried. Her Eurasian stepmother produced two more children, who became the favored ones. Wu Mei's efforts to attract her father's attention by consistent top marks at school were ignored and ridiculed except by her Aunt Baba, who shared a similar outcast status in the family. Her aunt's constant affection and

encouragement provided the only relief to the girl's daily humiliation and emotional abuse. Determined to separate the two, her parents sent the 11-year-old to boarding school. This was 1948; the Communists were consolidating their power. Soon she was the only student left, abandoned and forgotten by her parents when they fled to Hong Kong. Luckily, an aunt rescued her and returned her to her unwelcoming family. There, enrolled in another Catholic school, she finally gained her father's permission to study in England. Mah has told this story before, in her best-selling autobiography, *Falling Leaves* (Wiley, 1998). This version for younger readers is more sharply focused, seen through the lens of the story of Ye Xian, a version of the "Cinderella" tale dating back to the ninth century. Fourteen pages of front matter and the slow beginning necessary to introduce the unfamiliar setting may deter some readers, but those who persevere will be rewarded by the rich depiction of a very different world.

*Kathleen Isaacs, Edmund Burke School, Washington, DC*

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**Joyce Williams:**

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