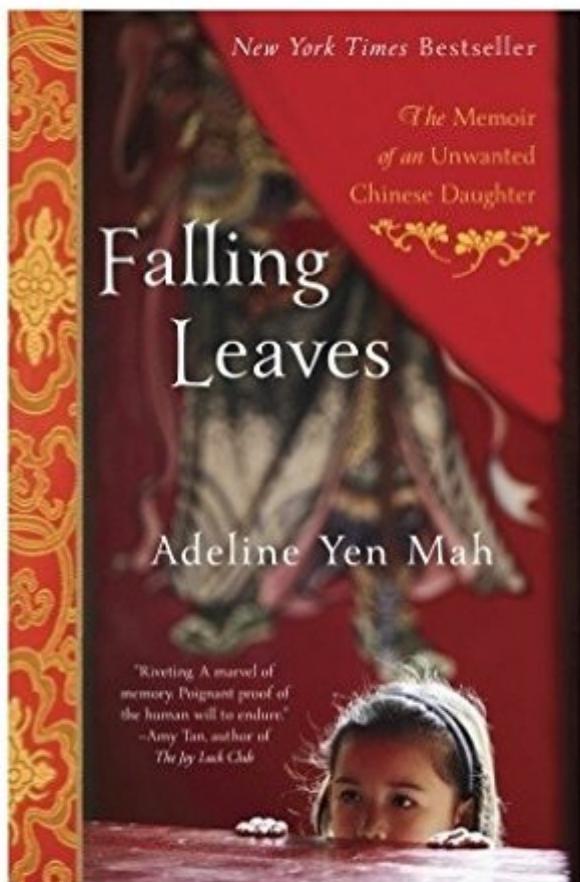


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# Falling Leaves: The Memoir Of An Unwanted Chinese Daughter



## **Synopsis**

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 Eurasian 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.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

In 1937, Adeline Yen Mah's mother died giving birth to her. Because of this, she was considered "bad luck", tormented by her siblings and shunned by her father. Her father soon remarried a beautiful, young Eurasian woman who was cruel and manipulative. She treated all five of her stepchildren badly, but saved her real hatred for Adeline. *Falling Leaves* is the powerful, riveting memoir of emotional abuse and isolation that Ms Yen Mah suffered at the hands of her stepmother. At this point, most would say, "Why would I want to torture myself by reading a book about child abuse?" The answer is simple...Adeline Yen Mah didn't just survive her childhood, she triumphed.

With great wisdom and insight, she tells a story not just about her life, but the life of China, before and after the cultural revolution and how both were changed forever. Despite her miserable childhood, she excelled, became a doctor, married and found freedom and a new life in America. This is an amazing, compelling story, told by an amazing woman who was not only able to put the past behind her, but was able to celebrate life and move forward.

Adeline Yen Mah's "Falling Leaves" is a searingly honest memoir of her unhappy childhood in China. In addition, she provides a colorful and lively portrayal of the customs, history and social upheaval of her native country from the late 1800's until the 1970's. Adeline was the daughter of a prosperous businessman, Joseph Yen, who was happily married to a woman he adored. He had five children, the youngest of whom was Adeline. Tragically, Adeline's mother died shortly after she was born. To compound the misery, Adeline's father soon married a woman so cruel that she fitted the stereotype of the wicked stepmother in Cinderella. Niang, as Jeanne Prosperi Yen was called by her stepchildren, was a control freak. She was a manipulative woman who verbally and physically abused the children who were out of favor with her. Adeline describes her efforts to grow up whole in spite of a loveless upbringing. She turned for solace most of all to her beloved Aunt Baba, who loved her unconditionally and was truly proud of her. Adeline took great delight in schoolwork, which brought her intellectual and emotional satisfaction. Mah eloquently recounts harrowing experiences that left lasting scars. In addition, she vividly describes the sights and sounds of such cities as Shanghai, Tianjin and Hong Kong. "Falling Leaves" is an intensely psychological and personal memoir in which Adeline Yeh Mah bares her soul and candidly conveys her difficult struggle to leave the past behind. The result is an unforgettable story of a courageous young woman who, in spite of the obstacles she faced, refused to give in to despair.

This was one of the most touching stories I have ever read; it is beautifully written and heartrenching, yet warms the spirit to hear of such a strong soul! I cried at the injustices Adeline suffered at the hands of her father and especially her step-mother. I was also moved to tears by the injustice endured by her family at the hands of the angry mobs in revolutionary China. I was overjoyed and excited for her in her triumphs. I came to feel love and care for this amazing young woman from China, a place so foreign to me. I came to better understand what compels others to do things not in their own best interests in order to gain the acceptance and affection of a loved one. I believe we should thank Ms. Adeline Yen Mah for her courage and strength and her gift to us, that of sharing her amazing spirit with her readers. I encountered great difficulty putting this book down,

and when not reading I found myself thinking of the story! A wonderful literary experience for anyone!

To kill time while i was having IV injections in a hospital bed, i picked up the book. To my surprise, i was compelled to reading it through for the next one day and one night, prompting plenty of complains from my doctor and nurses. However, i simply could not put down the book. The story, or Adeline's life experience was so disturbingly painful, but her description was so powerful. As a Chinese born also in Shanghai, i comprehend and appreciate fully the circumstances and historical evens surrounding the family, the city (Shanghai, Tianjin and Hong Kong) as well the country. Her life-time search for family acceptance and love in a loveless family was so painstakingly persistent that i found myself more than once crying. Human nature was distorted by greed, jealousy and ego-mania. In her case, human nature was further distorted by complications of a political movement in China. China's Culture Revolution, in particular, has twisted many people's consciousness, sharpening their knives against their own family members, friends and many other innocent people. In this case, i found Lydia is equally ugly as Niang. Even though Adeline's growing life was tough beyond imagination, Adeline didn't seem to stop smiling, caring for others, looking for the bright future and having wonderful sense of humor, for that, i admire her courage. The book is also beautifully versed with excellent insertions of Chinese proverbs, further evidence of her ability of winning a world writing award even as a young girl. If any improvement, i just wish the ending is not so abrupt. Life has not done her justice yet. I hope she will have a sequal. I also sincerely hope the Yen family ugliness will not pass on to the third generation as already shown in Lydia's family.

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